

CONTEXT

Five years after the conclusion of large-scale military operations against ISIL, the humanitarian situation in Iraq has improved considerably. The number of Iraqis requiring humanitarian assistance has declined from a high of 11 million people in 2017 to 2.5 million in 2022. Meanwhile, humanitarian funding in Iraq is reducing dramatically at a time Iraq is regaining financial independence through increasing oil revenues. As of 3 August 2022, the Iraq Humanitarian Response Plan has received approximately USD 106 million, or 26.5 per cent of the USD 400 million requested in 2022, making it one of the least funded HRP.

At the beginning of 2022, the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) in Iraq decided that the clusters should be deactivated as of December 2022 as development interventions were assessed as more appropriate to address the current situation for both IDPs/returnees and the wider Iraqi population.

The humanitarian community in Iraq has taken several steps to support the transition and scale down the collective international humanitarian architecture, and accordingly strengthen its development interventions, including at field level, under the UN Strategic Development Cooperation Framework and its Durable Solution pillar co-led by IOM and UNDP. Since late 2021, the Humanitarian Coordinator has met regularly with counterparts in the Government of Iraq and the Kurdistan Regional Government to formally notify them of plans for transition and seek their collaboration in moving towards government-led service provision support, when required, by the international community and the UN in particular.

REMAINING NEEDS

While clusters are transitioning, the need for assistance remains high amongst a significant number of Iraqis covered by the HRP. However, many other Iraqis, not directly affected by the ISIL insurgency and therefore not captured under the HRP, are similarly facing a deficit in the realization of their human rights. Displacement or return situations seem not to be necessarily anymore the driver of poverty and deprivation of rights in Iraq. The UN and its partners estimate that some 2.5 million people will remain in need of humanitarian and other forms of assistance related to durable solutions in 2022. Many extremely vulnerable individuals are at a high risk of marginalization due to their inability to secure civil documentation and, thus, access to public life-saving services, compensation schemes, social safety nets and freedom of movements (in relation to checkpoints). According to the 2021 Multi-Cluster Needs Assessment (MCNA), civil documentation remains a critical need, with an estimated over one million Iraqis - out of 2.5 million people remaining in need of humanitarian assistance, lacking at least one core legal document, 500,000 lacking at least two core documents and 250,000 lacking at least three core documents. These statistics only refer to the baseline in the HRP of 2.5 million Iraqis previously affected by ISIL violence. A more comprehensive baseline about the situation of other Iraqis who may have similarly difficulties accessing their civil documentation is not available. Future efforts by the UN and protection partners will seek to provide the means to the relevant public authorities to address the needs of these populations as well.

TRANSITION OF THE NATIONAL PROTECTION CLUSTER

In 2022, UNHCR, as the Cluster Lead Agency, has been working to support a responsible transition from humanitarian protection services under the direction set by the Protection Cluster towards government-led sustainable protection services for Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), IDP returnees, refugees and migrants, host communities, stateless persons as well as vulnerable communities in Iraq – supported, when warranted, by development actors.

The transition map for the Protection Cluster will see the creation of a Strategic Forum – *the Protection Platform* - co-led by UNHCR and OHCHR. with the participation of UN entities as well as one INGO and one NNGO representatives. Focal points from each UN Agency and entity contributing to support the strategic priorities under the UNSDCF will be members of the core group of the Protection Platform. For non-members of the platform a quarterly meetings/needs basis with key, I/NGOs/CSO and donors working on protection and on rule of law and human rights issues in Iraq will be established. The Platform will cover all populations residing in Iraq including IDPs, IDP returnees, refugees, migrants and vulnerable and minority groups, and

will maintain a strategic advisory role at the national level, including regarding advocacy and technical guidance/support. At the operational level, in areas where the Area Based Coordination group (ABCs) exist, created under the IOM and UNDP co-led Durable Solution Task Force (DSTF) to work at the localized level to help affected communities achieve durable solutions, the Platform will support ABC members to ensure protection related strategic guidance/advice/objectives are followed and taken into consideration.

In consideration of the Protection Cluster's transition, the following two core humanitarian activities will require continuous engagement with development and government counterparts, namely (a) provision of legal assistance to vulnerable Iraqis especially in relation to their access to civil documentation and (b) community-based protection interventions to strengthen community capacity for self-protection and to advance access to durable solutions in communities. The Platform will maintain flexibility in terms of topics to be addressed, based on emerging protection issues identified by its members.

The Protection Cluster transition plan has been agreed on by Strategic Advisory Group (SAG) and NPC members, including mapping of capacity building needs of relevant actors, engagement with DSTWG co-chairs, and several consultations of the ToR of the Protection Platform. On the operational transition, further discussions are planned regarding the ABCs' capacity building needs, clarification of coordination roles for protection and inclusion of protection actors into ABCs and ensuring protection mainstreaming into the ABCs. Ongoing efforts from UNHCR on engaging with relevant governmental counterparts on policy changes for vulnerable individuals are to be continued. Meanwhile, capacity-building efforts are continuing by the NPC through a collaboration between the Human Rights Engagement Task Team (HRE TT), the Advocacy Task Team (Advocacy TT) under the Global Protection Cluster (GPC) to reinforce the capacity of protection actors regarding different human rights-related topics to identify opportunities for stronger engagement with human rights mechanisms and develop protection advocacy interventions to amplify the voice of individuals in vulnerable situations.

TRANSITION OF NPC'S AREAS OF RESPONSIBILITIES

The Child Protection Sub-cluster, with the support of UNICEF is supporting a gradual transition from the humanitarian Child Protection Sub-cluster to a government-led coordination mechanism to address the protection needs of children at risk in IDP and refugee camps, urban locations, host communities, as well as vulnerable communities in Iraq. Recognizing that the government of Iraq bears the primary responsibility for the protection of children in Iraq, the transition aims to handover to a Child Protection Sector led by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MoLSA), and Child Welfare Commission (CWC) with the support of UNICEF, and civil society organizations to ensure a harmonized and coordinated response. The transition plan has also focused on strengthening government capacity to integrate CP services and coordination; establishing CP referral pathways between humanitarian and durable solutions programmes and developing guidelines on safe programming for a smooth transition of actors who may be downsizing CP programmes to minimize harm.

The CPIMS+ provides intuitive digital forms for child protection workers to assist with documenting case management processes, from identification and registration, to assessment, case planning, referrals transfers, and case closure. As part of the transition plan, more than 36 partners both in KRI and Federal Iraq, consisting of UN agencies and local NGOs, MoLSA, have signed the data protection and information sharing protocol and a total of 381 social/case workers from MoLSA/DoLSA and NGO partners have been trained on the use of CPIMS+. After several discussions with government line ministries (CWC and MoLSA) took place in Federal Iraq the ToR for the CP Sector Coordination was developed in collaboration with Child Protection Sub-Cluster Strategic Advisory Group members and has been shared with CWC and MoLSA for their review and approval. In KRI, the discussion has been undertaken with MoLSA and the process of finalizing the ToR for CP Sector Coordination at the KRI level is also ongoing. It should be noted that although the CP transition is progressing, transferring responsibility to government agencies and finding sustainable solutions for IDPs remains a challenge. As of now there is no budget allocation for direct Child Protection Service or coordination by the government.

The Gender-Based Violence Sub-Cluster plans to hand over the GBV specialized activities to the government-led GBV sector, and hence is in discussion with Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MoLSA), Department of Combating Violence Against Women (DCVAW) at the KRI level and Women Empowerment Department at the Federal level. The provision of legal response, income generation and job placement related activities will be integrated in the revised UNSCDF. MoLSA has a special Gender Unit, which the GBV SC hopes will further reinforce our efforts and commitment towards a smooth transition at the KRI level. The GBV SC is progressing smoothly with its capacity building initiative targeting national stakeholders, including government counterparts and Women Led Organisations, having successfully organized training on the recently developed and contextualized GBV M&E Toolkit, GBVIMS+, CVA & GBV integration and risk management workshop, GBV Case Management ToT.

The Mine Action Sub-Cluster aims to hand over the full coordination of explosive ordnance risk education (EORE), clearance and survey, victim assistance and capacity building to the national mine action authorities (NMAAs) and the UNSDCF by December 2022. Humanitarian partners will continue to deliver above activities subject to funding availability. The MASC plans to transition the coordination to a government-led mine action sector supported by UNMAS and the various implementing partners and operators. The MASC will promote coordination with the ABCs.