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Distributing hygiene kits and PPE to displaced households in camps in Al-Anbar. [Photo Credit: Mercy Corps]



World Humanitarian Day

On 19 August 2020, humanitarian workers observed [World Humanitarian Day](#). Commemorated annually, World Humanitarian Day has special resonance in Iraq, as it was designated by the United Nations General Assembly in memory of the attack on the Canal Hotel in Baghdad, on 19 August 2003. It was formally observed for the first time in 2009.

For 2020, World Humanitarian Day sought to pay tribute to the everyday experiences of aid workers who have committed their lives to serving vulnerable people around the world. In Iraq, as elsewhere, COVID-19 has presented yet another challenge to address and overcome, and the context of lockdowns and movement restrictions, operations have relied more than ever on national staff and local Iraqi partners. Humanitarians in Iraq are working to prevent, contain

and treat COVID-19; providing safe spaces for women and girls; ensuring children still have access to education; and delivering critical water, sanitation and hygiene supplies to IDPs and refugees throughout the country. Aid workers are helping to rebuild homes for the displaced, providing vital legal documentation to those trying to rebuild their lives, and overcoming access constraints by establishing new transport routes and logistics hubs.

As the humanitarian workers adjust to the “new normal” of operating in the context of COVID-19, it will require ever more creativity and resilience to get the job done. World Humanitarian Day provides an annual opportunity to draw attention to this innovation and the hard work of partners in Iraq and around the world.

Humanitarian Coordinator Visits Duhok

On 24 August 2020, the newly-arrived United Nations Humanitarian Coordinator, Irena Vojáčková-Sollorano, visited Duhok, accompanied by the OCHA Head of Office and the UNHCR Assistant Representative for Protection. Duhok Governorate hosts the largest number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), more than 360,000 people. There are 16 camps hosting 155,000 IDPs throughout Duhok’s four districts and the northern Ninewa districts of Aqra and Al-Shikhan; however, the majority of Duhok’s IDPs live outside of formal camps in informal settlements or within host communities. Most were displaced following the ISIL occupation of Iraqi territories in 2014; over 90 per cent of IDPs are of



DSRSG/RC/HC Irena Vojackova-Sollorano visiting Domiz Syrian refugee camp in Duhok Governorate. [Photo Credit: OCHA]

Yazidi ethnicity, originating from the Sinjar District in Ninewa Governorate. Duhok also hosts approximately 85,000 Syrian refugees in both camp and non-camp settings.

The HC met with the Governor of Duhok to discuss the humanitarian situation across the governorate, and noted the need for increased efforts to identify suitable durable solutions to displacement. The delegation visited Kabarto 1 IDP camp where they met camp management and community leaders, discussing living conditions in the camp and the difficulties faced during the COVID-19 pandemic. The delegation also visited Domiz 2 refugee camp.

Challenges for IDPs in Duhok include protracted displacement and a decrease in the number of services and support available due to funding limitations. IDPs living in informal settlements may live in sub-standard shelters, such as unfinished buildings. Livelihood opportunities have always been limited for IDPs both in- and out-of-camps, circumstances which have been aggravated by the onset of COVID-19. In parallel, IDP children have faced educational gaps due to a shortage of teachers in Arabic curriculum, which is primarily taught by volunteer teachers who do not receive any salary from the Ministry of Education.

Despite this, many IDPs express an intention to remain in displacement due to political and security instability in areas of origin, destruction of houses, the presence of different militias, lack of basic services and limited opportunities to generate income. Families displaced from south of Sinjar are also worried about the potential hazards from landmines and UXOs. Approximately 2600 families have returned from Duhok to Sinjar over the summer, the biggest return movement in recent years. Anecdotally, returnees have cited the improved security situation, the clearing of mines/IEDs, and the rehabilitation of public infrastructure as reasons for return, as well as the push factor of COVID-19 movement restrictions, which were keeping some families separated. However, some areas were unprepared for large-scale returns, as there are reports of individuals having returned to areas with limited basic services such as healthcare, markets, water, and electricity.



Destroyed property in Muqtadiyah District, Diyala
[Photo Credit: OCHA]

Returns to Diyala

On 11 August 2020, authorities in Diyala announced that five return movements, consisting of up to more than 1,400 households (HHs) would take place in the governorate between 11-20 August 2020. Families who had been granted security clearance by the Diyala Operations Command would be returning to locations in Muqtadiyah, Saadiyah, Jbara, Jalawlaa and Bani Zain Buhruz. This was noteworthy as returns from both in-camp and out-of-camp locations had been relatively stagnant during the first half of the year, with only 30 individuals returning between April 2020 and June 2020. Diyala hosts approximately 50,000 IDPs dating from ISIL-related displacement in 2014-2015; the majority of IDPs in Diyala are from locations within the governorate that have not witnessed

any returns since 2015; according to the Returns Working Group, this is due to a lack of security, lack of basic services, tribal tensions, lack of job opportunities and blocked returns.

Despite the initial announcement of 1,400 households returning, the International Organization for Migration's Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) has thus far reported the return of only 399 HHs (328 HHs to Muqtadiyah and 71 HHs to Saadiyah). Beyond these two locations, IDPs were not yet able to return for a variety of reasons which are emblematic of some of the larger challenges with transition to durable solutions in Iraq, including the unavailability of compensation and financial assistance from the government, and the presence of armed actors who sometimes do not permit returns to proceed. In general, conditions in areas of return are highly challenging, with significant destruction to public infrastructure and private shelters. Returns that have taken place to date have done so without significant material support from authorities or humanitarian organizations, who have a limited presence in the governorate. In some specific locations, planned returns created significant tensions within the receiving communities. Local authorities face challenges in resuming public services due to funding constraints and have sought support from international actors to provide assistance to families intending to return and those that have already returned.

