



**WHERE THE HEART IS: FIVE YEARS OF
SHELTER INTERVENTIONS IN IRAQ**

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Some names have been changed to protect the privacy of beneficiaries.

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Table of contents

Foreword	4
IOM Iraq Chief of Mission	4
US Ambassador	5
About	6
Housing rehabilitation and reconstruction: An integral part of the Durable Solutions architecture	8
Debris removal and recycling: Sustainability in reconstruction	12
Housing, land and property: Documentation toward Durable Solutions	20
Shelter in informal sites: Interventions for the most vulnerable	22
Shelter assistance breakdown	25
Stories, testimonies and photos	26

FOREWORD

IOM IRAQ CHIEF OF MISSION

There is a commonly uttered proverb that tells us “Home is where the heart is”. Adequate housing can be the basis of stability for individuals and families; in the best of circumstances, homes should be sanctuaries where one can find safety and comfort, including access to basic services. Although increasingly viewed as a commodity in many contexts, access to adequate housing is a fundamental right – inscribed in international law.

During the conflict with the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), it is estimated that six million people were displaced internally. As part of the group’s reign of terror in Iraq, ISIL carried out widespread destruction of infrastructure and, crucially, housing.

Housing destruction remains one of the biggest obstacles to return faced by Iraq’s internally displaced persons (IDPs). Lack of safe, dignified housing can make sustainable returns extremely difficult, also posing challenges in terms of protection, putting women and girls in particular at risk of gender-based abuse; it also causes additional hardship for households including elderly relatives and persons with disabilities.

Since 2016, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) has been carrying out housing repair, rehabilitation and reconstruction activities in conflict-affected areas across Iraq. These are part of broader humanitarian efforts to support people to have access to adequate shelter during periods of displacement, and to contribute to durable returns, so that highly vulnerable families can seek solace in adequate shelter conditions, while they grapple with post-conflict realities and re-establish their lives.

As of November 2022, with generous funding assistance from the United States Government and in collaboration with local partners, IOM Iraq has supported over 15,000 families to access adequate housing through repair, rehabilitation and reconstruction assistance. We are grateful for these collaborations that allow us to continue supporting access to durable solutions for those still in displacement, as Iraq focuses on its post-conflict recovery.

In cooperation with the Government of Iraq and local communities, IOM will continue to implement innovative, comprehensive projects in areas of return and relocation to assist the sustainable reintegration of IDPs, through shelter rehabilitation, livelihood support, improved access to basic social services and peacebuilding initiatives.

Giorgi Gigauri
Chief of Mission
IOM Iraq

FOREWORD

U.S. CONSUL GENERAL

The U.S. Mission in Iraq is dedicated to our enduring strategic partnership with the Government of Iraq and the Iraqi people. The United States government is fully engaged with our Iraqi partners, including the Kurdistan Regional Government, in our efforts to support a stable, prosperous, democratic, and unified Iraq.

U.S. bilateral assistance to Iraq focuses on economic reform, assistance to vulnerable groups, human rights, and democracy and governance. U.S. assistance aims to preserve the strategic, political, and economic importance of the U.S.-Iraq partnership in a changing Middle East region. Since 2014, the United States has contributed significant humanitarian, demining, and stabilization aid to conflict-affected areas and displaced populations, including support to communities recovering from genocide.

Adequate shelter, particularly in a humanitarian crisis, is essential for survival, providing safety, protection, and resistance to ill health and disease. More importantly, appropriate shelter reduces vulnerability, builds community resilience, and restores self-sufficiency and dignity.

The United States supports durable solutions for the 1.2 million remaining internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Iraq, which includes voluntary, safe, dignified, and well-informed returns. The damage and destruction of homes during the conflict with ISIS remains one of the main obstacles to a safe and dignified return for these families.

The United States is proud to work with Iraqis, civil society, local communities, government, and dedicated expert partners such as the International Organization for Migration to improve infrastructure; provide emergency shelter; and repair, rehabilitate, and reconstruct damaged housing to ease the hardship of those who face persecution and remain uprooted by the conflict.

Irvin Hicks, Jr.
Consul General
U.S. Consulate General Erbil

ABOUT

IOM

IOM is the leading intergovernmental organization in the field of migration and works closely with governmental, intergovernmental and non-governmental partners to support orderly and humane migration management, promote international cooperation on migration issues and respond to the humanitarian and development needs of mobile populations, including refugees and internally displaced persons.

IOM Iraq

With 1,500 staff members and major offices in Baghdad, Erbil, Basra and Mosul, IOM Iraq works in cooperation with the Government of Iraq, the Kurdistan Regional Government, civil society organizations and international partners to provide support across the country's 18 governorates, operating a multi-sectoral response covering camp management and camp coordination, shelter and infrastructure rehabilitation, health care, mental health and psycho-social support services, livelihood assistance, protection, support for national migration policy development and more.

USAID

USAID is the world's premier international development agency and a catalytic actor driving development results. USAID's work advances U.S. national security and economic prosperity, demonstrates American generosity, and promotes a path to recipient self-reliance and resilience.

USAID, alongside other U.S. Government agencies, works closely with Iraqi national, provincial, and local governments, international institutions, and a network of local partners. Over the past two decades, USAID has implemented activities designed to strengthen Iraq's infrastructure, stabilize communities, foster economic and agricultural growth, and help the various levels of government better represent and respond to the needs of the Iraqi people.

USAID remains committed to the mutual goals supporting the partnership between the U.S. and Iraq: a secure and stable Iraq with more inclusive, capable and accountable governance; humanitarian and development support to conflict-affected communities; and, implementation of targeted economic reforms.



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE



 **IOM**
UN MIGRATION

U.S. Department of State: PRM

The U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) is the humanitarian bureau of the State Department. PRM is dedicated to providing protection, easing suffering, and resolving the plight of persecuted and forcibly displaced people around the world. We do this by coordinating humanitarian policy and diplomacy, providing life-sustaining assistance, working with multilateral organizations to build global partnerships, and promoting best practices in humanitarian response. PRM supports assistance programs for Iraqi IDPs, returnees, and refugees. Our programs are designed to provide protection, including legal aid, basic humanitarian assistance, education, and support to rebuild livelihoods. PRM assistance also helps to build the capacity of the Government of Iraq and local authorities to respond to emergent crises, provide civil documentation to IDPs and returnees, and to reintegrate returning Iraqis successfully.



HOUSING REHABILITATION AND RECONSTRUCTION: AN INTEGRAL PART OF THE DURABLE SOLUTIONS ARCHITECTURE

Between 2014 and 2017, devastating conflict with ISIL displaced millions of people from their homes and left Iraq with massive material, economic and social damage. Public infrastructure – including for the provision of health care, clean water, electricity, education and other critical services – suffered grave destruction, and private housing was particularly hard hit, with an estimated 140,000 residential buildings damaged or destroyed – accounting for nearly 20 per cent (USD 17.5 billion) of required reconstruction and recovery investments.

Though returnees came to outnumber IDPs in Iraq at the end of 2018, the rate of return had begun to slow, revealing a significant caseload of households in protracted displacement. Information coming directly from displacement-affected communities has consistently revealed that housing destruction remains not only one of the biggest obstacles to return faced by IDPs, but also one of the largest challenges to reintegrating and achieving durable solutions for those who have already returned. Indeed, access to adequate housing and tenure security is one of the eight criteria used to determine the extent to which a durable solution has been achieved.

A lack of basic services, food insecurity and insufficient access to livelihoods in areas of origin are all commonly cited reasons that families remain in displacement. Such material barriers to return are compounded by complex social and administrative factors, including tribal dynamics and limited access to property documentation and compensation for damaged or destroyed housing. Although rebuilding homes and restoring tenure security are not sufficient to resolve all of these issues alone, the achievement of durable solutions in Iraq cannot take place without addressing the central problem of destroyed housing.

Assessments in areas of return underscore the link between destroyed housing and the achievement of durable solutions among returnees – indeed, IOM's Return Index (RI) found that locations with high levels of housing destruction were associated with low rates of return. The Inter-Agency Durable Solutions Strategic and Operational Framework highlights that:





While many UN agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are working to rehabilitate war-damaged houses, these rehabilitation efforts primarily target houses that are partially damaged (categories 2 and 3) and leave the majority of returnees and IDPs whose houses are fully destroyed (category 4) without support. A limited number of organizations provide support to returnees and IDPs whose houses are fully destroyed, either through provision of new housing or reconstruction of their houses in-situ.

In return communities, partial damage is a major issue; and for households in protracted displacement, destroyed housing is a top concern. To account for the different levels of damage, individualized plans are developed for homes that can be rehabilitated to ensure that all rehabilitated homes meet minimum standards of habitability. For homes with too much damage to be rehabilitated, incremental core housing designs are shared with households, and these are adapted by the households according to their needs and preferences. Addressing all levels of damage – from partial to full – allows IOM to respond to a range of needs found within durable solutions programming.







DEBRIS REMOVAL AND RECYCLING: SUSTAINABILITY IN RECONSTRUCTION

Alongside widespread housing and infrastructure destruction, the ISIL conflict left behind an estimated 55 million tonnes of debris, and its safe and sustainable removal is a fundamental pre-condition for the return of persons affected by conflict-related displacement. As an integral part of reconstruction efforts, a sustainable debris removal management process supports increased access among affected populations to land and basic services, thereby helping to enable safe returns to the targeted areas.

Immediately following the ISIL conflict, debris removal and disposal was carried out in a highly fragmented and uncoordinated manner. As a result, much of the collected debris was dumped on city outskirts and in seasonal watercourses. Not only unsafe and inefficient, this approach also effectively transferred the problem of debris congestion from one place to another without resolving the underlying challenge of how to properly collect debris — and what to do with it.

In fact, debris has high recycling potential, especially in reconstruction efforts following a conflict. Disposing of debris rather than recycling it requires that a nearly equivalent volume of construction aggregate (such as gravel and sand) be procured for use in reconstruction efforts. This can lead to an upsurge in quarrying activities and negative, long-lasting environmental impacts upon landscapes, potentially aggravating tensions amongst local communities.

Recognizing the need for proper debris removal management and the opportunity to reuse and recycle debris in Iraq, IOM works to establish more safe, sustainable systems for collecting, transporting and processing this material — while providing emergency livelihoods assistance in the process.

In Hamdaniya and Sinjar in particular – districts that sustained especially high degrees of destruction and where, in response, IOM Iraq has established two debris recycling operations – IOM coordinates to provide emergency livelihood opportunities via Cash-for-Work (CfW) to IDPs, returnees and members of the host community, engaging them in the sorting and processing of conflict-related debris. Through their work, concrete rubble is crushed and screened into different size fractions of concrete aggregate, including coarse, medium and fine.

This approach advances an environmentally sustainable approach for managing huge volumes of conflict debris in these districts, drawing from circular economy principles and finding ways to use the recycled aggregate in reconstruction efforts. Furthermore, engaging returnees in removing the physical remnants of the conflict supports them as actors in their own recovery, in turn helping to enhance their social capital and solidarity in the area more broadly.

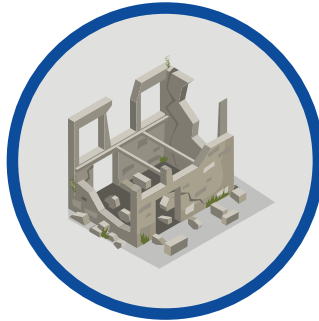


1

DEBRIS REMOVAL AND SORTING



Debris removal



Large debris



2

DEBRIS TRANSPORTATION TO RECYCLING SITE



Debris



Debris site



3

DEBRIS CRUSHING AND AGGREGATE COLLECTION IN PILES BY SIZE



Large debris

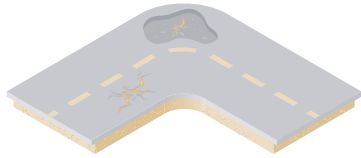


Gravel

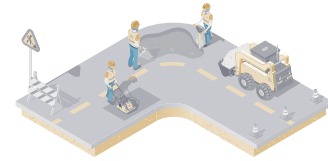
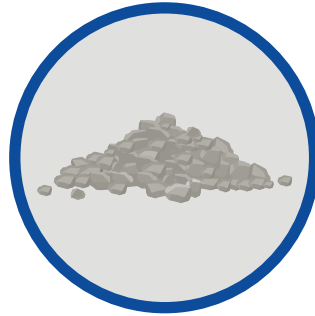


4

AGGREGATE REUSED IN RECONSTRUCTION



Damaged road

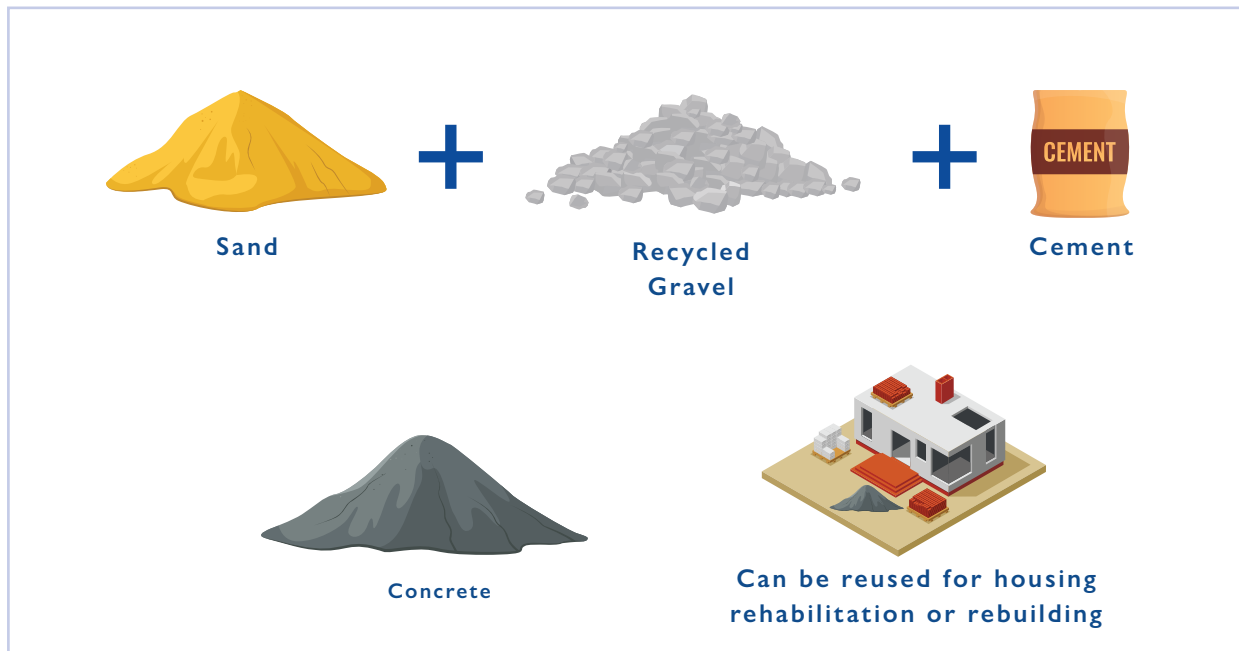


Fixed road



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HOUSING, LAND AND PROPERTY: DOCUMENTATION TOWARD DURABLE SOLUTIONS

The ISIL conflict saw many families lose not only their homes but also their home ownership and occupancy documents. When displaced populations have lost crucial documents that support their right to return to their lands and homes in their AoOs, they are less likely and less able to return home. Moreover, upon return, individuals might find their property occupied by others. The full enjoyment of housing, land and property (HLP) rights is essential to the voluntary and sustainable return of displaced populations and key for their access to durable solutions.

HLP issues are particularly complicated in locations such as Sinjar, which with its ethnoreligious and linguistic diversity was subject to the “Arabization” policy of Saddam Hussein – a key component of which was the denial of property documents to Sinjar’s Yezidi population. Indeed, most Yezidis living in Sinjar lack land titles, with many plots registered under Arab names.

IOM Iraq works to strengthen community-based HLP dispute resolution mechanisms, while also conducting national- and governorate-level policy-related programming, such as activities to support the Government of Iraq to improve and revise existing legal frameworks and mechanisms, as well as trainings and workshops for government partners, local authorities and community-based groups on HLP restitution and compensation. Interventions build on the regulations of Iraqi Compensation Law No 20 of 2009.

IOM also supports communities with legal counselling and representation to access and protect their HLP rights. This assistance includes securing supporting documentation for land ownership – without which a beneficiary cannot qualify for shelter interventions. This requirement serves to protect the rights of the concerned beneficiaries, their families and their heirs, while also assuring IOM and its partners that the beneficiary is the legitimate owner of the land before any construction or rehabilitation work begins. Additionally, accessing HLP documentation enables individuals to request financial compensation for damaged property under the Iraqi compensation scheme, as proof of ownership is an eligibility requirement for any claimant.







SHELTER IN INFORMAL SITES: INTERVENTIONS FOR THE MOST VULNERABLE

Due to factors such as proximity to area of origin, access to livelihoods and the limited capacity of IDP camps, some IDPs settled in informal sites – defined as locations outside of formal IDP camps that are typically unintegrated with surrounding communities and excluded from public services.

Since then, many IDPs who have returned home to find their houses destroyed and their resources insufficient to rebuild have also moved to such locations. The sweeping closure of IDP camps spanning from 2019 to 2021, further increased the numbers moving to informal sites. Today, it is estimated that over 104,000 IDPs across Iraq live in critical conditions in informal sites.

Residents use whatever is available – trees, stones, rubbish and debris – to construct their dwellings, which are unequipped to protect them from harsh weather conditions and safety risks, nor to allow them the dignity of privacy. Water leakage in the winter, overheating in the summer, reptile and insect bites, dangerous makeshift electrical wiring and a lack of door locks are among the issues faced by displacement-affected populations in informal sites.

IOM Iraq has intervened to address shelter needs in targeted informal sites in Baghdad, Ninewa, Salah al-Din, Anbar, Diyala, Kirkuk, Najaf and Karbala Governorates through different modalities, including through the provision of vouchers and cash for owner-driven construction; critical shelter upgrades in-kind distributions of household items; upgrades to or installation of water and electricity networks, rehabilitation of sewage stations and more.

IDP families in informal sites are some of the most vulnerable populations, living in precarious social and physical conditions with limited livelihood opportunities, unable or unwilling to return to their AoOs.

Informal site interventions are a crucial part of IOM Iraq's larger shelter support programming.







Shelter assistance breakdown

Over the past seven years, with support from the U.S. Government, IOM Iraq has responded to the shelter and housing needs of over 15,000 households. The assistance provided has included:



Collective centre upgrades — to improve living conditions in buildings being used by IDPs as communal shelters



Shelter/housing rehabilitation —

- Sealing off-kits for displacement-affected persons to seal and upgrade short-term shelters, implemented through the provision of vouchers or in-kind assistance
- War-damaged shelter rehabilitation for households whose homes sustained partial or massive damage, implemented through provision of cash or in-kind support



Core house construction — for households with fully damaged houses in AoOs.

Type of Intervention	Number of Families supported
Collective Centers Upgrades	2553
Shelter/housing rehabilitation	12,850
Core house construction	934







ADOUL, 20 YEARS OLD, SINJAR

“We returned to Sinjar after it was liberated in 2017. We missed the feeling of living in a house, after spending four years in a tent. We came back with big hopes and a longing for Sinjar, but the city was destroyed – the city that used to be teeming with life became the city of ghosts.

Our home, which was full of our childhood memories, was destroyed, and nothing was left of it. We spent a few days homeless. The process of finding shelter in Sinjar was not easy because most of the houses in Sinjar were either destroyed or burned down. After searching for days, we found this house. It was an abandoned house without windows or doors. We cleaned it with the help of our relatives, and we used blankets to block off the windows and doors. It was not a good place to live, but it was better than staying in a tent.

Our situation was awful: we didn’t have a breadwinner or any source of income, my father was killed by ISIL during our displacement, my mother is elderly with chronic

diseases, my older brother has a physical disability and cannot work, and the rest of my six brothers are children.

On top of all these challenges, our situation was getting worse in this house. It was unbearable in the winter; we had only one stove, and the house was getting too cold, so we all had to sleep in one room. During the rainy days, water leaked inside from all the windows. In the summer, the situation was much worse due to dust storms.

Sometimes we thought of leaving the house and going back to live in a camp, but when the International Organization for Migration came and helped us, our situation improved a lot. We are happy now; they provided us with what we needed – they installed all the doors and windows and provided us with mattresses, a stove, fan, boiler and tank of drinking water. Having hot water from the tap was a like a dream come true for us. The house is warm, now we don’t have to sleep all in one room anymore.”





HUSSAIN, 50 YEARS OLD, AL-HAMDANIYA

“We fled to Sulaymaniyah when ISIL took control of our village in 2014. We lived there for four years of exile and hardship. Being a family of 18 members, it was difficult for us to adapt and bring in adequate income to meet our daily needs. I was working as a vehicle driver transporting goods between cities, but in 2016, my health deteriorated – I got a blockage in my coronary arteries and had to quit work and stay at home.

We came to depend entirely on my eldest son. He was working as labourer in a cement factory with a monthly salary of 400,000 IQD [around 300 USD]. That was all the income we had to pay the rent and electricity fees, buy food and meet our daily needs.

We could not bear this situation anymore, so we decided to return to our village after it was liberated in 2018. I cannot describe the feelings I had when I saw my village for the first time [since being displaced] – the amount of destruction and devastation that ISIL left behind was indescribable. Nothing was as it was before; the house that I spent half of my life working day and night to build, it had gone with the wind.

I had to start over and rebuild everything from scratch. Imagine that you are a 50-year-old, displaced person trying to rebuild your life from scratch, how do you expect your mental health would be?

Despite the difficulty of the situation, we did not stand idly by. With the help of my children and relatives, we built a shelter from the remains of my house, and in it we all lived. The house was too small to fit all of us, but it was better than nothing.

We stayed in this situation for two years until the International Organization for Migration visited us and saw our situation. They built this house for us. We were incredibly happy with this assistance, as it alleviated a heavy burden of ours. It saved us from the tough situation we were living in. My son will get married soon and he will be able to live with us in this house. This will save him the trouble of looking for a house to rent.”





FATIMA AND HANAA, 54 AND 20 YEARS OLD, HAWIJA

“Privacy, warmth and clean water were luxuries that we could not enjoy after leaving our town, which had fallen under ISIL control,” Fatima says, recalling her family’s displacement from Hawija, southern Kirkuk Governorate, in 2016.

A widow in her fifties and mother of two, Fatima sits beside her daughter Hanaa and relays their story of searching for a home after displacement:

“The camps in Kirkuk were the only destination for those fleeing ISIL. We went there, but it was terrible. Two years of heat, cold, hunger and suffering prompted me to leave the camp in search of better shelter, but without work or a monthly income, this was almost impossible to find.

“After a long search, we found a room in a random deserted neighbourhood on the outskirts of the city, and it became our house at that time. We cooked, ate and slept in there, and in the corner we used to hang a piece of cloth to block those who wanted to shower from view.” Fatima falls silent, a sullen look on her face.

20-year-old Hanaa interjects: “That room, which was everything to us, was demolished. The government had decided to demolish the entire neighbourhood, which consisted of seven separate structures – it was an informal site – without us receiving an alternative or any support

whatsoever to start a life somewhere else. We had enough bad memories of the camp to never go back to it.”

Now, Fatima picks up the story again: “After the room was demolished, we rented an abandoned shop and lived there temporarily. We used to pay the rent with money my son earned from his work on construction sites.”

She contemplates the ceiling for a moment before continuing, “Building this room with the resources of a displaced family was a huge task that required great effort. It was difficult, but we succeeded. We were able to build the structure and erect the ceiling with iron sheets that we obtained from scrap sites. We used to put pieces of cloth and plastic on the windows to protect us from the wind and cold in the winter, and the heat and sun in the summer.

“This situation lasted for a year, until the IOM team came to us. They constructed a new roof, established a water network, brought in a clean water tank, built a floor and performed maintenance on the doors and windows. Now, we have a bathroom with comfort and privacy and a kitchen separate from the sleeping area. This is not better than returning to our town and our normal life in Hawija, but it relieves a lot of our suffering and helps us to continue.”





GAWRE, 58 YEARS OLD, SINJAR

“I remember the day when we first returned to Sinjar, and I saw our destroyed house; I did not stop crying that day. We built that house with everything we had at the time. We only lived in that house for a couple of years before ISIL took control of Sinjar. Since the day we left our home, we lost comfort, safety and stability.

We rented a house for a while, but we could not afford the rent. My son works as a daily labourer – his income is limited, so we could hardly pay the rental fees and provide for our daily needs. We decided to leave the house in search of a shelter.

With assistance from our relatives, we found this house. It was abandoned with nothing in it except the walls and the ceiling. We cleaned it up and closed off the windows and the doors with sacks.

The house was very dark, but we endured the darkness just to protect us from the cold of winter and the heat of summer.

We stayed like this for five years until the International Organization for Migration visited us and saved us from this situation. They installed new doors and windows for us, now light comes through the windows. We will not be worried about the weather anymore. They also provided us with fans, a tank of drinking water, a boiler and more.

I know this is not like our original home, but I am in Sinjar – I consider every house in Sinjar to be like my home.”

SHAKER, 36 YEARS OLD, KABERLY VILLAGE, AL-HAMDANIYA

“We fled to Bardarash camp in Duhok Governorate when ISIL took control of our village in 2014. We lived in displacement for three years and suffered a lot living inside a small tent that could not protect us from cold and heat.

We decided to return to our village after it was liberated from ISIL in 2017. It was a tremendous shock when we found our house completely demolished; nothing remained of it, as though it had never existed.

We were lost and did not know what to do or where to go, all I could think about was finding a shelter for my family and keeping them safe. After searching for few days, we finally found a room in a poultry farm

– it was small, far away and there were no services. I could not send my children to school because the school was too far from us, and I did not have a car to take them by myself. Sometimes I felt ashamed of raising my children inside a poultry farm, but I didn’t have any other options.

We lived there for five years until we heard that IOM would construct a new house for us. That was the happiest moment in my life; we could not believe that our challenging situation would be over. Finally, we have a place that we can call home, and my children can go to school now.”







OM
Sultanate of Oman



WASSILA, 55 YEARS OLD, SINJAR

“It was two hours after midnight on the 3rd of August 2014; we were asleep until suddenly we were woken up by intense gunfire, which turned out to be people warning others that ISIL gangs were approaching the city.

ISIL was too close. We left our house immediately and fled to Mount Sinjar. We could not take anything with us – we ran away barefoot, we didn’t even have time to put our shoes on. We stayed on the mountain for eight days without water and food.

Our psychological states got worse after the death of my husband on that mountain. I had to be strong to take care of my four children, so I decided to go to the city of Duhok. There, we were able to find shelter inside a school, but because we did not receive needed assistance from NGOs there, we left the school and went to live in Shariya camp.

Life was very harsh inside the camp; the tents were not strong enough to protect us from the winter cold and summer heat, the services were limited, and we got only enough to survive. Still, we were thanking God all the time for being safe.

After three years in the camp, we could not stand living in a tent anymore. We decided to return to Sinjar once

it was liberated from ISIL in 2017, but when we returned, we were shocked to see the amount of destruction left by ISIL in our city. We couldn’t even make out our house because the whole neighbourhood was destroyed.

We tried to find a shelter, and after a long search, we found an abandoned one without doors and windows, close to our area. We discovered that it had been used by the army – the place was full of sandbags. We got rid of the military remnants and used the sandbags to block off the windows and doors. We lived there.

Our situation was getting worse by the day, with the approaching summer season and the sandstorms that come with it. The house filled with dust during the sandstorm days, and we could not breathe well. Insects and snakes also started entering the house. Even in the winter, we were scared to sleep because of the rain – the water was leaking in from everywhere.

We did not feel comfortable at all until the International Organization for Migration came and rescued us from this situation. They installed windows and doors and provided for our basic needs with fans, a heater and a water boiler. We can now live comfortably, without fear of storms and insects.”

DAHAM, 30 YEARS OLD, HARMAT

“When my young son was diagnosed with leukaemia towards the end of 2018, I decided to return to Mosul to obtain the necessary medical care for him,” said thirty-year-old Daham, who returned home to Mosul’s Harmat area from Hassan Sham IDP camp after two years in displacement.

“I began working hard to be able to provide him with medicine. I rented a house with the money I had, but since then our financial situation began to crumble. I have six children, and I wasn’t able to provide them with even the basics. My young son’s medicines were another story – those cost about 200 to 250 US dollars per month.”

Doctors at Mosul Hospital extended a helping hand to Daham and collected donations toward his son’s treatment fees – though this eased the family’s financial burden some, their situation continued to deteriorate.

“With all the costs in our lives and my son’s need for filtered water and other things, I was unable to provide for my family’s needs. I felt helpless, so I decided in mid-2020 to leave the rented house when my brother gave us this house,” Daham said, gesturing around him, “which was a structure that had only walls – there was no roof or floor, no doors or windows.”

He continued: “I used to put pieces of tent fabric over the house to cover it and form a roof. These covers were filled with holes, the rain was falling inside the house. We put a basin inside the room to contain the water, but it kept falling here and there, and the earth turned into mud. Because of this, my children were sick most of the time. Our neighbours here helped us, and we were able to put a ceiling on one of the rooms after a few months. This room was our only shelter during winter.” Already frightening, this situation becomes even scarier for the parent of a child with cancer.

With a large population of returnees, Mosul’s Harmat neighbourhood demonstrates among the greatest need in the district.

“IOM connected us to electricity; they put in a water filter and a sink with a water heater, too; they installed doors for all rooms; they also added a ceiling for the bathroom and the toilet; and as you can see, the walls have been renovated as well,” Daham told us, motioning behind him. “Now I feel like a king. Everything is complete, my life is now much better than before. I feel like I am living in luxury, and now I can focus on raising my children.”





HANA, MID-TWENTIES, MOSUL

“My husband works as a delivery person for a restaurant, despite his poor eyesight. He sometimes comes to us and falls off his bike or hits the sidewalk. Our financial situation after displacement was in a deplorable state. We were displaced from a village near Sinjar to Salamiyah camp, and from there we came here to the Harmat district of Mosul, two years ago.

The situation here was very bad. We lived, three families, in one small house that we rented. Then we moved to this house, which the owner left without doors or windows. He didn't pour a floor, so the ground was just dirt. We used plastic pieces – nylon – to cover the windows and cleaned the house of dirt. And we lived in it.

We also dug a well two meters deep to get water for the bathroom. As for the electricity, we used to get it from the neighbours – we could only use it to power one light bulb and sometimes the TV for the children.

When IOM came, they installed for us an electricity network and sanitation facilities including a bathroom and toilets, in addition to windows and doors. Before the organization came, we ate, drank, showered and slept here in this kitchen for two years. We are now enjoying comfort; our situation has improved greatly.”

SATTAR, 25 YEARS OLD, KIRKUK

“We built our houses from scratch after we fled to Kirkuk from Salah al-Din when ISIL entered the governorate in 2014. We lived in rented houses for about five years before deciding to build this house. It accommodates five families – we are four brothers, all married, who live together with our parents.

We worked hard to put together this house; We used bricks to build the walls and iron sheets for the ceilings, but our resources were limited. We could not build ceilings or windows as they should be. It was dangerous for us [before]. It was very cold in the winter, and my children often got sick. Rainwater would enter through the ceiling from several places, and we fought cold and rain until the end of winter.

When IOM came in December 2021, they registered our names and started working to upgrade our houses.

IOM installed a roof for us and brought us two water tanks. They also took care of establishing water pipes and bathrooms – they installed an outdoor sink and a shower, in addition to a kitchen sink. The organization’s team worked very well, and their work was organized. Thanks to them, we will not suffer this winter.

The exceptional thing about this project was that the workers were people from the area. The organization was providing job opportunities for the people of the area to support the local workforce.”



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Where the Heart is: Five Years of Shelter Interventions in Iraq

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