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Out-of-camp IDPs living in an informal settlement in Khanke
[Photo Credit: OCHA]

Humanitarian Partners Mobilize to Provide Civil Documentation



Iraqi citizen receiving civil documentation through a UNHCR-managed project
[Photo Credit: UNHCR Iraq]

Missing civil documentation has been highlighted as one of the key barriers in the transition to durable solutions for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Iraq. The loss or destruction of civil documentation is one of the main protection issues resulting from the years of Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) activity in Iraq. There are numerous causes: loss or destruction during fighting, confiscation at checkpoints or during security screenings, and deliberate misplacement due to fear of arrest. A lack of civil documentation may render many IDPs and returnees unable to access basic services such as education and health care. It can increase the risk of arrest and detention, prevent the formal registration of

significant events such as births, marriages and deaths not possible and lead to exclusion from recovery and reconstruction programmes.

Slightly more than half of Iraqi households affected by displacement are missing at least one key individual or household document.¹ Female-headed households and children are particularly vulnerable. As of 2019, an estimated 45,000 children displaced in IDP camps² in Iraq did not have Iraqi-state issued birth certificates or other civil documents proving their legal identity. Children without these documents may be barred from attending school, denied access to state social welfare programs, and eventually prevented from owning or renting property or engaging in formal employment.

Humanitarian organizations, in cooperation with government and civil society, have implemented and supported a number of projects to enable IDPs and returnees to learn about the legal requirements and procedures to obtain or renew civil documentation.³ They have also provided material and technical support to government counterparts where necessary. Ensuring that all IDPs and returnees have access to the necessary documentation to resume their lives is a critical step to obtaining sustainable solutions to displacement and facilitating an end to the need for humanitarian assistance.

¹ 55 per cent of in-camp IDP households; 43 per cent of out-of-camp IDP households; 57 per cent of returnee households (SOURCE: Presentation on Multi-Cluster Needs Assessment (MCNA) VIII CROSS-CUTTING FINDINGS, October 2020, available [here](#))

² Figures are reflective of the IDP population living in camps in 2019. (SOURCE: [Barriers from Birth](#), NRC, 2019.)

³ <https://reliefweb.int/report/iraq/iraq-unhcr-civil-documentation-idps-july-september-2020>

Interference in Humanitarian Programming

Scenario: situation whereby authorities ask humanitarians to share IDP or returnee individual data, including data of people with perceived affiliation to extremist groups.

Suggested response: note that humanitarian actors are bound by neutrality and independence of humanitarian organizations, as well as principles governing data protection, and that the denial of data requests is the result of their legal obligation not to share data.

Example from NPC Guidance on Humanitarian Engagement

In the latter part of 2020, reports of attempted interference in the provision of humanitarian assistance increased. Reports indicate that some authorities, including civil and security actors, sought to exclude families that they perceived to have affiliation with ISIL from the provision of humanitarian assistance. Security authorities reportedly visited offices, healthcare centers, and community centers operated by nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and requested documentation regarding their programming, including information regarding their staff, access letters, and operating permissions. In several of these instances, the authorities demanded to view beneficiary lists and directly asked whether the NGOs provided assistance to individuals with perceived affiliations to ISIL.

Such requests contradict the principles that guide the provision of humanitarian assistance, as outlined in two United Nations General Assembly resolutions.⁴ These principles require that humanitarian assistance be provided on the basis of need alone, without distinction on the basis of demographic or similar characteristics, and that humanitarian action must be allowed to operate without interference, particularly when that interference may be to advance political, military or other non-humanitarian objectives. The notion of “affiliation” in Iraq is also troubling as it is a label that can be

applied broadly to individuals or even entire groups of Iraqis who have otherwise not been charged nor convicted of any crime related to ISIL and its activities.

The National Protection Cluster has drafted and disseminated guidance⁵ for humanitarian actors on how to engage with such incidents, providing suggested responses for various scenarios. These include situations where authorities ask humanitarians to share IDP or returnee personal data; situations where authorities seek to influence the design and implementation of humanitarian interventions; and situations where authorities request humanitarians engage in violations of human rights.⁶

Some incidents have been successfully resolved, through the support of Governors, sub-district mayors, and other local authorities, however, the trend continues. For each known incident, OCHA engages with the relevant governorate authorities to resolve the issue and try to prevent future occurrences. In order to differentiate between normal and legitimate security screenings and instances of interference in humanitarian programming, OCHA has requested authorities to provide formal documentation detailing the security procedures and related requirements.

Continued Access Challenges in 2020

In 2020, humanitarian organizations operating in Iraq continued to face a range of obstacles regarding the access of personnel and materials. These challenges, which hamper the ability of humanitarian organizations to provide assistance to conflict-affected populations, include restrictions of movement of organizations, personnel, or goods within Iraq and military operations and ongoing hostilities, among others. Access impediments can also include violence against humanitarian personnel, assets and facilities; interference in the implementation of humanitarian activities; presence of mines and unexploded ordinances; difficult physical environment; or obstruction of conflict affected people’s access to services and assistance. OCHA continues to engage with the relevant authorities at all levels to alleviate these obstacles.



A checkpoint in Tikrit, September 2020 [Photo Credit: OCHA]

⁴ GA resolutions 46/182 (1991) and 58/114 (2004).

⁵ <https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/operations/iraq/document/qa-doc-humanitarian-engagement-final>

⁶ For example, the deprivation of liberty

Per an [Access Severity monitoring exercise](#) carried out by OCHA in November 2020,⁷ humanitarian partners reported various types of access constraints in 85 percent of districts in the central and northern governorates of Iraq. The severity of each type of constraint varied, both by actor and location, but administrative restrictions on humanitarian movement was the most commonly cited access challenge. NGOs were impacted most acutely by this constraint, primarily due to the suspension of national-level authorizations for NGOs in December 2019 and subsequent difficulty in establishing an alternative mechanism. This was further compounded by movement difficulties related to the implementation of COVID-19 containment measures implemented by the Government of Iraq and the Kurdistan Regional Government.

As of December 2020, some improvements in access were reported following the establishment of a new national access authorization mechanism for NGOs via an online platform managed by the Directorate of NGOs (DNGO). Many NGOs reported that they had successfully been able to obtain access approval letters through the new system. In spite of these positive measures, access challenges were still reported in certain areas in Iraq, such as Kirkuk, where security forces at checkpoints are not recognizing valid movement authorization letters issued by the National Operations Center. Efforts to resolve this and other challenges are ongoing.

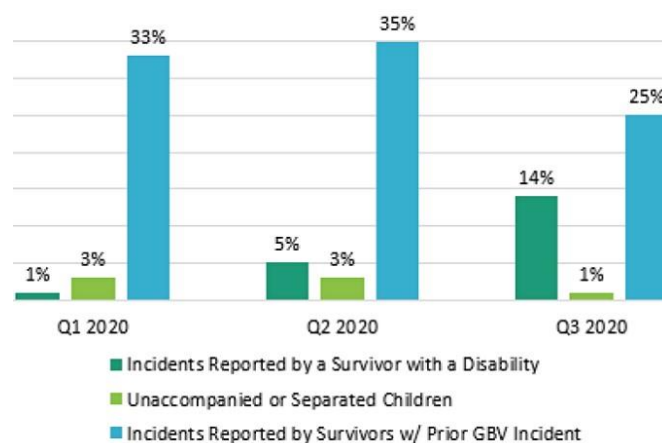
Humanitarian Efforts to Combat a Rise in Gender-Based Violence

Gender-based violence (GBV) is an ongoing protection concern in Iraq, and movement restrictions imposed as a result of COVID-19 have further exacerbated Iraqi women and children's vulnerabilities in conflict-affected areas across the country. According to data [released in December 2020 by the GBV sub-cluster](#),⁸ GBV-related incidents continued to increase in the third quarter of 2020, an increase of 42 per cent since the second quarter. The majority of the incidents was reported by female survivors. The data collected suggests that married women, people with disabilities (PwDs) and female-headed households are among the most at risk of GBV in Iraq.

The majority of incidents reported in the third quarter were psychosocial or emotional abuse by an intimate partner or close relative (40 per cent), followed by forced marriage (26 per cent), denial of resources and opportunities (21 per cent), physical assault (6 per cent), sexual assault (4 per cent), and rape (1 per cent). Collected data suggests that violence by intimate partners disproportionately affects females and was the most commonly reported GBV incident (74 per cent) during the reporting period. The pandemic has further exacerbated gender-specific risks and vulnerabilities. The COVID-19 related restrictions on movement and lockdown, alongside the stress and uncertainty due to lack of access to services and loss of source of income and livelihoods, have heightened household tensions.

Female-headed households are at heightened risk of GBV. Sixty-three per cent of female-headed households reported not being able to afford basic needs and resorting to negative coping mechanisms,⁹ including child marriage and transactional sex. Prevalence of child marriage was reported in 44 per cent of returnee locations and 21 per cent of IDP locations.¹⁰ Women have also reported limited /restricted access to protection, cash, livelihoods, shelter, specialized mental health and legal assistance.¹¹ The lack of, or hindrances to, these essential services increase their exposure to certain types of GBV risks, as well as negatively impacting GBV survivors' recovery and reintegration efforts.

The GBV sub-cluster tracked an increasing trend of incidents reported by the survivors living with a disability, which accounted for one per cent of reported cases in the first quarter of 2020, but 14 per cent of reported cases in the third quarter of 2020. This is thought to be attributable in part to more comprehensive efforts at awareness raising on available services for PwD as well as enhanced collaboration for multi-sectoral services. However, it can be attributed also to some



⁷ The exercise consisted of focus groups discussions with UN agencies and international and national non-government organizations (NGOs) to determine humanitarian actors' perceptions of access constraints in all districts in central and northern Iraq.

⁸ Tracked by the Gender-Based Violence Information Management System (GBVIMS), GBVIMS consists of 19 Data Gathering Organizations (DGOs) in 12 Governorates who are collecting and sharing the GBVIMS data.

⁹ MCNA VIII, 2020

¹⁰ DTM-ILA V, 2020

¹¹ [UN Women Rapid Assessment: The Effects of COVID-19 on Violence Against Women and Gendered Social Norms - A Snapshot from Nine Countries in the Arab States](#) (released December 2020)

extent due to a reoccurrence of GBV incidents against PwD, as survivors have indicated they are more likely to report if they have prior experience with intimate partner violence.

To address the immediate and long-term impact of GBV, service providers manage referral pathways to connect GBV survivors to appropriate, timely, confidential and safe multi-sectoral services, in line with the GBV guiding principles and based on the specific needs of the survivors. These services are crucial to combating the long-term effects of abuse, such as low self-esteem, self-isolation, self-blaming, depression, anxiety and the feeling of helplessness. However, data shows that survivors often declined referrals to safety and security services, which might be attributed to a lack of trust in the services provided by law enforcement actors. Safe shelter services and livelihood interventions were not generally available during 2020, largely due to COVID-19 distancing restrictions.

Efforts to combat GBV continue through humanitarian programming to provide services, including safety, security and access to justice for GBV survivors in various conflicted-affected areas, including both in-camp and out-of-camp settings. In 2020, the Iraq Humanitarian Fund (IHF) has allocated US\$2 million towards protection projects focusing on GBV prevention and response. These are consortium projects between international NGOs and national partners to primarily support out-of-camp IDPs and returnees in the underserved locations of Anbar, Diyala, Kirkuk, Ninewa and Salah Al-din governorates, through GBV case management and referrals, awareness raising, dignity kit distribution, psychosocial support, and cash for protection.

Gaps in Assisting Out-of-Camp IDPs: Spotlight on Duhok

The Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) continues to host and support a large number of people displaced by ISIL attacks and the military operations to defeat them from 2014 to 2017. Approximately 180,000 IDPs currently live in 25 camps and 535,000 IDPs live in out-of-camp settings under the administration of the Kurdistan Regional Government. In Duhok,¹² an estimated 27,300 IDPs live in informal settlements, making it a significant outlier compared to the other two governorates in KRI.¹³ Informal sites often have limited and inconsistent access to services and assistance provided by either the government or humanitarian actors.

While some of the gap could be attributed to interrupted operations due to COVID-19 movement restrictions, it is incontrovertible that in recent years the humanitarian response in Iraq has been geared towards meeting the needs of IDPs in camps. As of December 2020, humanitarian organizations succeeded in assisting 35 per cent of the targeted out-of-camp IDPs in Duhok; this compares to 54 per cent of targeted out-of-camp IDPs reached throughout federal Iraq and KRI as a whole and to 100 per cent of targeted IDPs inside camps. The recent closure of most IDP camps in the areas under federal Iraqi administration offers a renewed opportunity to increase efforts to meet the needs of acutely vulnerable IDPs living outside camps, including in Duhok.

To mobilize greater amounts of assistance to out-of-camp IDPs, and to monitor the humanitarian needs of families, OCHA field offices regularly meet with IDPs who live in informal settlements and in out-of-camp locations. In Duhok, the majority of out-of-camp IDP families are from the Sinjar region, which they fled in August 2014 when it was overrun by ISIL. Their living conditions are quite harsh and have shown no real improvement in six years. Without greater effort towards reconstruction or rehabilitation in areas of origin or a more concentrated push to integrate them more fully into their areas of displacement and improve their living conditions, they will continue to live at the margins of society and continue to require humanitarian assistance. Below are profiles of four families who have consented to have their stories told.

Sleman is originally from Sinjar; he was displaced in August 2014. He eventually settled in Khanke, where he bought a tent and erected it on private land in agreement with the landlord. He lives with his wife and his four children, and averages one week of work per month as a day labourer. He has access to water and electricity and his children can go to the local school. He has access also to the local health center, but that the cost of medicine is often outside of his financial means. He highlighted that his immediate needs are food, winter clothes and kerosene for heating.



¹² Per IOM's [Displacement Tracking Matrix](#), there are very few informal settlements recorded in Erbil or Sulaymaniyah

¹³ According to ongoing mapping of informal sites by the CCCM Cluster, Duhok has approximately 200 informal sites hosting 27,300 people; Erbil has five informal settlements hosting 1,250 people, and Sulaymaniyah has three sites hosting 230 people.



Kajeen is originally from the Sinuni sub-district of Sinjar. She escaped in August 2014 and went first to Sinjar Mountain, before making her way to Zakho, where she lived with her husband and two children in an unfinished building. After two years in displacement, the owner of the building asked Kajeen's family for rent to continue living at the site, which they were unable to afford. Kajeen's husband subsequently built a makeshift shelter for the family to live in, which is covered by plastic sheeting which must be replaced annually. Kajeen doesn't work at all and she relies on her husband's work as a daily labourer for the main source of income for her family. She reports that she has not received any humanitarian assistance during the last three years. When asked about the family's return intentions, Kajeen noted that she is not ready to return to Sinjar anytime soon, as her house is destroyed, and it has limited basic services. Even given the deprivations, she prefers to live in her current shelter and access the services available in Zakho. She highlighted that the family's immediate needs are kerosene, food and cash.

Marwan is originally from the village of Telazer south of Sinjar. He escaped Sinjar in August 2014 and went to Shariya, where he has constructed a makeshift shelter with his wife and five children. He works as a construction day labourer for his primary source of income, which was interrupted during the COVID-19 lockdowns. According to Marwan, only one organization continued to provide assistance during the period of COVID-19 shutdown. He cited the need for kerosene, food and clothing for his family. Marwan indicated that he is not ready to return to Sinjar any time soon as his village is destroyed and has no basic services. Approximately 75 families live in similar conditions to Marwan in Shariya.



Naiema is a divorced woman from the Alshuhada'a suburb of Sinjar, which she fled in August 2014, eventually settling in Zakho. She reports that her living situation is miserable as she has no income and must rely on charity and help from neighbors. Her monthly rent is IQD 60,000 which she often cannot meet and is heavily in debt. Despite this, Naiema noted that she is not ready to return to Sinjar in the near future as her home was destroyed by an airstrike and she has no alternative place to live. She added that humanitarian partners has supported them previously, but not during the last three years. The three main needs raised by Naiema were food, cash assistance and kerosene.