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Photo of the Mosul Dam, May 2019 (OCHA File Photo)
The manager of the dam has confirmed it has adequate water supplies to meet needs for the summer.

Government of Iraq National Plan to End Displacement



In April 2021, the Government of Iraq (GoI) published its National Plan to End Displacement under the auspices of the Ministry of Migration and Displacement and the Ministry of Planning.

The Plan notes that tackling the issue of protracted displacement in Iraq is one of the priorities of the current government, acknowledging that camp closures are a major objective, so long as the appropriate conditions are created for the return of IDPs to their areas of origin (AoO). The document states that GoI seeks to avoid situations where IDPs leave camps too soon and end up in secondary displacement, and that the GoI also seeks to ensure the long-term sustainability of any returns. The Plan also states that while many IDPs seek to return to their AoO, not all are currently able or willing to return, and that in these instances, alternatives to return—such as integration in the areas of displacement or relocation to another place within Iraq—may be necessary or preferable by affected persons. These tenets largely mirror the [Framework on Durable Solutions for Internally Displaced Persons](#), endorsed by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee in April 2010.

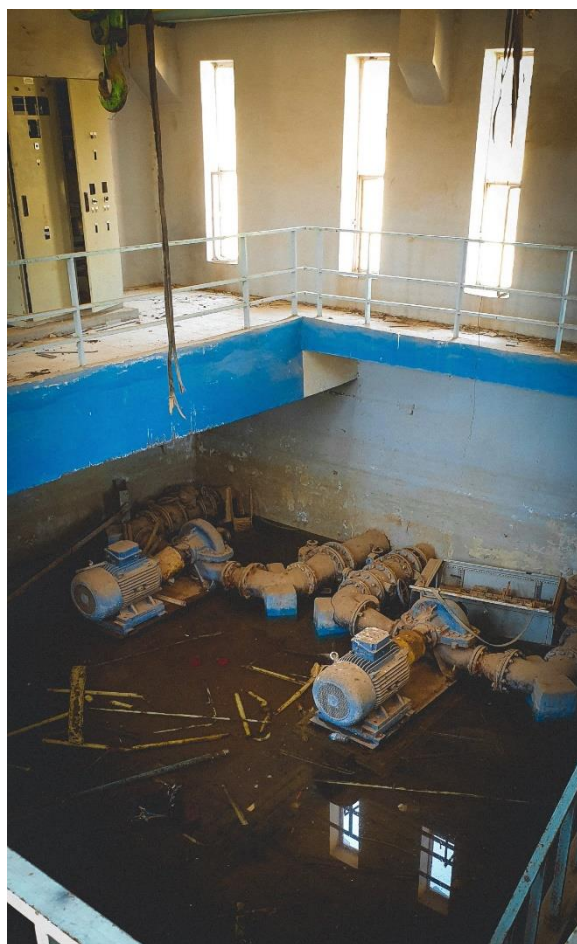
The publication of the National Plan is a significant step that can help the GoI, humanitarian actors and the durable solutions partners work towards the common goal of ending protracted displacement in Iraq. In 2021, the humanitarian community will organize its programming for IDPs and returnees under the strategic objectives of the [Humanitarian Response Plan for Iraq \(HRP\)](#). The establishment of the Durable Solutions architecture in Iraq is still in its initial stages, but durable solutions are expected to feature as one of the strategic priorities in the forthcoming United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework for Iraq, which will guide the activities of development actors in Iraq until 2024. Under these three frameworks, the Government and the international community can maximize humanitarian-development collaboration to reduce the vulnerabilities of internally displaced persons and help them return home.

Early Warning Signs of Potential Drought in Iraq

On 9 May, the Iraqi Ministry of Water Resources announced at a press conference that over the last year, the water supply of both the Tigris and Euphrates rivers—the two primary water sources in Iraq—had decreased by 50 per cent. Water scarcity is a periodic problem in Iraq due to climactic conditions and the fact that both the Tigris and Euphrates (as well as other major rivers) are vulnerable to upstream water use and damming in other countries. Iraq faces pressures on its water resources following years of conflict and under-investment in infrastructure. In many locations, basic services are in a state of decline and there is a growing imbalance between water supply and demand. OCHA field offices have been liaising with local actors to track potential water shortages and determine the possible humanitarian impact.

In **Kirkuk**, land disputes and competing claims on water are not adequately addressed and often result in reduced water quantity and quality available to the general public. The institutional arrangements for managing water resources in Kirkuk governorate are complex and impacted by political changes and armed conflict. There is a noted lack of coordination in the way that water resources are used and allocated, with tensions between population growth and increased water demands for agricultural and industrial uses. Shortages in upstream water resources could affect the wheat and barley production in the governorate. The largest impact is on irrigated agricultural land along the Lesser Zab River in Dibis and Al Hawiga districts. Humanitarian actors are watching for potential impacts in food security and livelihoods; Al Hawiga district has the largest number of returnees in Kirkuk governorate. Low agricultural production could affect both their livelihoods and the availability of food at market.

Diyala is another governorate at risk of drought and water shortage, due to its reliance in Lake Hamrin, fed by the Diyala River, which originates as the Sirwan River in Iran. The water levels in Lake Hamrin have dropped significantly over the past year, with the surface area covered with water shrinking by half, affecting irrigation and agriculture, and impacting potential returns. In inter-agency missions undertaken by the Diyala sub-office, IDPs from Saadiya sub-district mentioned the dried-out irrigation channel from the Diyala River as one obstacle to return. Host communities in villages in Markaz Khanaqin and Jalawla also mentioned dried-out irrigation channels would require water pumping to continue agricultural activities. The Ministry of Water Resources prevented most farmers in Diyala from planting summer crops due to concerns about diminishing water levels, which will negatively affect their income and may cause food insecurity. Areas potentially affected by water scarcity and drought in coming months include return areas in North Muqadiya, Jalawla and Saadiya in Khanaqin, as well as Jbara and Qaratapa in Kifri, and Mandaly and Qazanya in Baladruz.



A damaged water treatment plant in Salah Al-Din (2019)
[Photo Credit: OCHA/Y. Crafti]

In **Salah Al-Din**, damaged water infrastructure continues to hamper the return and reintegration of IDPs. Some areas of the governorate witnessed high levels of fighting during the successive periods of armed conflict over the past 20 years and have never been rebuilt. Water treatment plants in many return areas are destroyed and access to safe drinking water continues to be irregular, something that will be exacerbated by lower overall water levels this summer. Intermittent electricity supply further prevents returnees and host communities from using water pumps to alleviate any shortages. In addition, land disputes in the southern part of the governorate are reportedly increasing near water sources, leading to further instability. Humanitarian actors are closely observing the impact the drought may have on IDPs, especially those in informal sites. According to the CCCM cluster, Salah al-Din governorate has 82 IDP informal sites with 2,572 IDP households. Over 1,300 of these families are located in Samarra, a district heavily impacted by water shortages. IDPs and returnees in the area depend largely on wells for access to safe drinking water, but receding ground water levels may impact supply. This could require water trucking, which is costly and not sustainable in the long term.

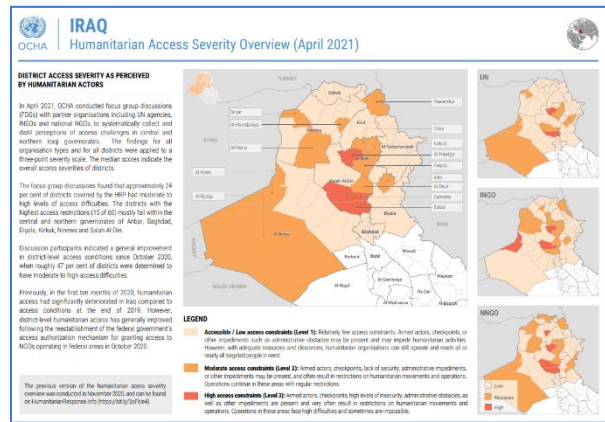
Within the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT), relevant agencies are monitoring signs of potential drought in Iraq and evaluating the need for further interventions. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) noted that lower rainfall and reduced water levels from upstream dams were having a potentially large impact on agriculture and livestock, which could contribute to food insecurity, although more research was needed to determine the extent in tandem, the devaluation of the dinar in December 2020 had led to rising food prices, which could also have negative implications. At present, however, the World Food Programme has not recorded any increases in food insecurity.¹

The FAO concluded that potential drought could impact populations targeted for assistance by the 2021 Humanitarian Response Plan, which could lead to an increase in humanitarian needs. In order to mitigate this risk, the FAO suggested that HCT members and donors engage where possible in assisting farmers with agricultural inputs for the 2021/22 crop season under emergency aid programs via vouchers; work with the government to introduce more drought tolerant varieties of crops and focus on alternative commodities; rehabilitate irrigation infrastructure; and provide technical and financial support to farmers to upgrade their skills set and equipment.

¹ World Food Program Hunger Snapshot noting that as of 28 May, 1.6 million people were recorded to have insufficient food consumption, down from 1.8 million people at the end of April 2021, and that the number of households using crisis or above crisis-level food-based coping has decreased by 19,700 week on week in the last week of May 2021. www.hungermap.org

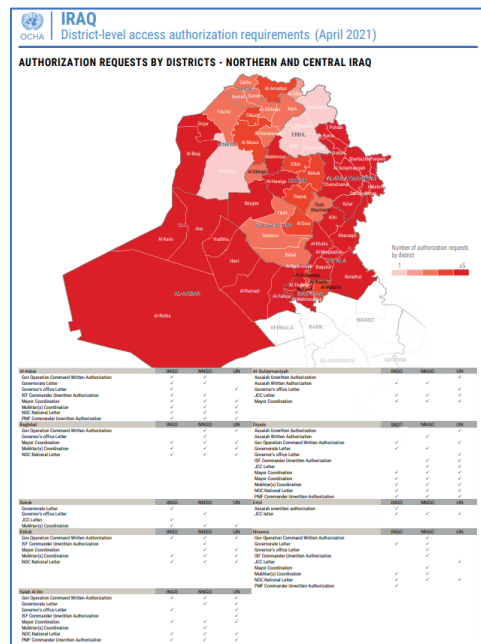
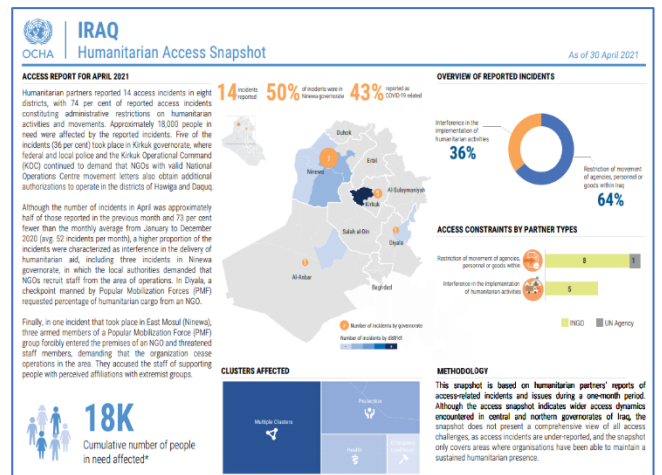
Continuing Positive Trends in Access; Some Challenges Persist

In May 2021, OCHA published three access infoproducts: the [Access Severity Overview](#), the [Access Snapshot](#) and the [District-Level Access Authorization Map](#). Overall, there were continuing positive trends in access, but also increasing reports of interference from civil and security actors in the delivery of humanitarian assistance.



The Access Severity Overview found that approximately 24 per cent of districts covered by the HRP had moderate to high levels of access difficulties. The districts with the highest access restrictions mostly fall within the central and northern governorates of Anbar, Baghdad, Diyala, Kirkuk, Ninewa and Salah Al-Din. Focus group discussions indicated a general improvement in district-level access conditions since October 2020, when roughly 47 per cent of districts were determined to have moderate to high access difficulties. Previously, during the first ten months of 2020, humanitarian access had significantly deteriorated in Iraq compared to access conditions at the end of 2019. However, district-level humanitarian access has generally improved following the reestablishment of the federal government's access authorization mechanism for granting access to NGOs operating in federal areas in October 2020.

The Access Snapshot recorded 14 access incidents in eight districts, 74 per cent of which were administrative challenges. Five of the incidents took place in Kirkuk, where local actors continue to demand that NGOs with valid national movement letters also obtain additional authorizations to operate in Hawiga and Daquq. Although the number of incidents in April was significantly lower than those recorded in the previous month, a higher proportion of the incidents were characterized as interference in the delivery of humanitarian aid. In Ninewa, local authorities reportedly sought influence over the staff recruitment of NGOs. In Diyala, security actors at a checkpoint allegedly requested a portion of an NGO's humanitarian cargo in order to secure passage. And in East Mosul, members of a militia group purportedly forcibly entered the premises of an NGO and demanded that the organization cease operations in the area, accusing the group of supporting persons with perceived affiliations to extremists.



Campaign to Combat Child Labour Launched

On 12 May, the International Labour Organization in Iraq and partners [launched a nation-wide campaign](#) to tackle the worst forms of child labour in the country. The campaign will target 10,000 children, their families and guardians, teachers, employers, and the media through a series of activities which aim to raise awareness on the increasing dangers of child labour, mobilize efforts to reach the heart of communities most effected by the rise of child labour in the country; and encourage activities to amplify the voices of those effected. Child labour has been on the rise in Iraq in recent years due to a combination of factors including armed conflict, displacement and economic challenges, which have been further compounded by COVID-19, forcing a growing number of children into the workforce. The campaign aims to inform communities about the negative consequences of child labour and ultimately change behavior of society and institutions alike.

The [2021 Humanitarian Needs Overview](#) identified child labour as one of the negative coping strategies to which vulnerable IDP families resort to meet their needs. During 2020, an estimated 8 per cent of in-camp IDP families, 20 per cent of out-of-camp IDP families, and 8 per cent of returnee families resorted to crisis coping strategies including child labour. The continued disruption in structured education systems due to COVID-19 is likely to have a greater impact on conflict-affected children for whom school offers a protective environment against negative coping mechanisms, such as child labour and early marriages, and also provides children with routine and a community environment. As the economic situation deteriorates further, the use of negative coping mechanisms is expected to increase with some children less likely to return to schools as they re-open.



A child selling food at a checkpoint in Diyala (2020) [Photo Credit: OCHA]

The National Protection Cluster (NPC) in Iraq found that key informants surveyed as part of the first [Protection Monitoring System](#) assessed child labour as one of the primary concerns. The NPC and its partners interviewed almost 5600 people across all 18 governorates in IDP camps, informal sites, out-of-camp locations and return areas, seeking information on nine protection-related issues. Nearly 95 per cent of respondents identified “child labour” as a foremost protection issue affecting children, in terms of “safety, well-being and access to services and opportunities.”

The ILO campaign will be guided by existing ILO tools to combat child labour, such as [SCREAM](#), which is an education and social mobilization initiative, and the recently launched [inter-agency toolkit](#) to guide humanitarian actors and other agencies in the global community to effectively prevent and respond to child labour in humanitarian action. These tools will be translated and adapted to the Iraq context and used through various activities including social media campaigns and community-level outreach.

IHF 2021 First Standard Allocation Launched

In late April 2021, the [Iraq Humanitarian Fund \(IHF\)](#) announced the 2021 1st Standard Allocation, which will grant up to US\$13.5 million to address key response gaps in the 2021 Humanitarian Response Plan. The allocation window was opened in the Fund’s online Grant Management System to accept partner project proposals until 19 May, and the IHF team conducted training on the allocation for partners in early May. The allocation will specifically target out-of-camp IDPs in underserved locations and vulnerable returnees living in critical shelters, supporting these groups with targeted protection assistance, improved access to essential health and WASH services, and emergency livelihood support. Those projects which directly address gender (especially women & girls), the specific needs of persons with disabilities, and gender-based violence (GBV) will be prioritized.

In line with the IHF’s continued commitment to promoting localization since 2019, the Humanitarian Coordinator and the Advisory Board endorsed the consortium approach for the 1st Standard Allocation, whereby funds are allocated to multiple humanitarian actors through a single lead agency working in equal partnership with consortium members. The objectives of this approach are: (1) to channel funds to and build operational and institutional capacities of national NGOs; (2) to enhance the efficiency of allocation processes and ensure timely disbursement of funds to prioritized projects; and (3) to enhance coordination between partners and the response as a whole.

Funds will be disbursed to successful applicants in June 2021.