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# Humanitarian challenges in Iraq's displacement crisis





**Cover photo:**

ANBAR, IRAQ - MAY 30: Iraqi people sit on the cushions as they leave their home in Fallujah town due to conflicts between Daesh and security forces in Anbar, Iraq on May 30, 2016. Some of the families who left their home are placed in a school in Karma Town, west of Anbar city.

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# 1

## Introduction

Iraq is recognized as having one of the worst displacement crises in the world, with the number of internally displaced persons now totalling 4 million. Following years of conflict, many have suffered repeated displacement and return home appears a distant prospect. For a large number of Iraqi families, displacement has become a semi-permanent condition.

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Iraq's displacement crisis is the product of over ten years of conflict, most recently between the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF), allied Shi'a militias and Kurdish Peshmerga, on the one hand, and the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) and other armed opposition groups, on the other. Internally displaced persons (IDPs), living in insecure environments and reliant on access to aid, face almost insurmountable obstacles. More than ever, the challenge for IDPs and the conditions they face extends beyond the immediate security threats and the provision of relief to longer term considerations of safe return, reintegration and reconciliation. Yet even as 800,000 IDPs returned to their place of origin over the last year, new waves of displacement were taking place.

The total number of IDPs in Iraq is difficult to estimate precisely. In November 2016 the Displacement Tracking Matrix of the International Organization on Migration (IOM) recorded a figure of 3.1 million IDPs, down from a high of 3.4 million in March. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), however, points out that the DTM figures are collated from January 2014 and do not include a large number of IDPs still displaced from earlier phases of the Iraqi conflict, including

2006-7, and has estimated IDP totals at over 4 million. Netting off figures for returns against the displaced population may *understate* the total, since IDPs may have returned to their governorate or even town of origin but still be displaced from their homes, which may have been destroyed or occupied by others. Simply counting instances of displacement, on the other hand, may *overstate* the total, since many IDPs in Iraq have experienced multiple instances of displacement.

Since the start of the assault on Mosul on 17 October 2016, 83,000 IDPs have fled the city and surrounding areas in some seven weeks, according to UNHCR.<sup>1</sup> A range of UN sources have warned of the scale of the displacement from Mosul rising to over one million as the city is retaken in the coming months.

The aim of this report is to document the situation and conditions on the ground for IDPs as the humanitarian crisis in Iraq unfolds. The report draws on extensive interviews with IDPs in Baghdad, Kerbala and Najaf, as well as on figures and studies released by international organizations, government bodies, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

As the fight against ISIS continues, the Government of Iraq (GoI) and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) are facing deep financial difficulties, with resources overstretched. ISF and KRG forces are adding to the insecurity through their failure to prioritise protection and assistance to crisis-affected civilians, leaving many of those displaced still struggling for survival in areas under government control.

For returning IDPs, insecurity persists after the fighting has ended. Explosive remnants of war (ERW) – including unexploded ordnance and abandoned explosive ordnance – have a devastating impact on return and rehabilitation. While clearance operations are under way, little is being done to better educate civilians about the threat posed by ERW and how best to minimize the risk of death and injury in contaminated areas. More disturbingly, it has been reported that authorities are encouraging return, despite the very real danger that homes and land are booby trapped.

IDPs seeking to flee their homes are often prevented from reaching safety. Freedom of movement is not only a human right,<sup>2</sup> it is essential to the safety and security of IDPs. However, access to many governorates is blocked for those without local sponsors or the ability to pay for a local sponsor. As a result, safer areas are inaccessible to many. Additionally, certain groups of IDPs have had their movement restricted, and in some cases have been detained arbitrarily, depending on their ethnic or religious identity. There is also pervasive discrimination, and extensive practical obstacles, against minorities, women and persons with disabilities in access to state aid, to which many IDPs are entitled.

Due to the conflict, cases of lost or stolen civil documentation are frequent. IDPs without such documents cannot be registered and therefore are not able to access state aid; they also run a higher risk of arrest and detention. The bureaucratic procedures for application for reissue of identification documents, besides being complicated, non-standardized and fraught with allegations of corruption, also require some IDPs to go to offices in areas that are impossible to access. For female IDPs this is especially challenging.

Much of this report looks at the humanitarian conditions faced by IDPs, including shelter; water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH); income and food security; education; and access to health care for both physical and mental illnesses. Challenging conditions, including the constant struggle to raise enough income and buy food, were found to have secondary effects on IDP security and well-being, such as high rates of early marriages and child labour. Displaced women are at high risk of sexual violence, particularly in the absence of dedicated shelter facilities. Health care is increasingly hard to access, with some having to undertake perilous journeys across battle lines to reach medical assistance. The trauma which IDPs endure in fleeing conflict zones and in surviving in displacement has given rise to an urgent but largely unmet need for mental health services.

Education has been severely disrupted in many parts of the country, with as many as three million children not in school as a direct result of displacement and conflict. For displaced children not residing in formal camps, protracted gaps in learning are commonplace, with IDPs reporting intervals

of up to two years in their children's education. In addition to financial constraints and physical distance, poor weather conditions and insecurity have meant that many children are unable to access education in any form. Educational quality has also been undermined by a lack of resources and discrimination within host communities towards IDP children.

## Overview of the report

The core information for this report was gathered through field-based research using semi-structured interviews as well as surveys. Interviews were conducted with 56 IDPs originating from Anbar governorate (52 per cent of interviewees) and Ninewa governorate (48 per cent of interviewees), living in the central and southern governorates of Baghdad, Najaf and Kerbala in January-February 2016. Seventy-one per cent of interviews with IDPs were

conducted in Baghdad, 20 per cent in Kerbala and 9 per cent in Najaf. Thirty-seven per cent of IDP interviewees were female, while the age of interviewees ranged from 10 to over 60 years old. Due regard was given to ethical, safety and security considerations of interviewees.

Desk research from primary and secondary sources was also conducted, including human rights reports, news outlets, international agencies, Iraqi legislation and other sources.

The major cause of flight reported by IDPs was the invasion by ISIS of their areas. Fourteen per cent cited Iraqi military bombing and shelling as the cause of their displacement and 7 per cent of IDPs, all of whom were Turkmen, reported that Kurdish offensives against ISIS militants drove them out of their areas. Some 62 per cent of IDPs had suffered secondary and tertiary displacement, some within weeks or months of an earlier displacement.

# 2

## Vectors of vulnerability

The primary causes of displacement in Iraq are the advance of ISIS and the ensuing conflict with the Iraqi state, supported by the international coalition. However, Iraqi and Kurdish authorities and their allied militias have exacerbated the vulnerability of IDPs through extensive restrictions on freedom of movement and in some cases imposing additional security threats. With a humanitarian crisis and continued threats in both locations of displacement and areas of potential return, including the presence of explosive remnants of war, the position of Iraq's IDPs is unsustainable.

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### Freedom of movement

The Iraqi Constitution provides that '[e]ach Iraqi has [the right to] freedom of movement, travel, and residence inside and outside Iraq'.<sup>3</sup> Despite these provisions, the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of IDPs noted restrictions of movement and the denial of access to safety due to the ethnic and religious identity of IDPs or their location of origin.<sup>4</sup> Security concerns have driven decisions at both local and national level to deny transit or access to governorates. There have been widespread reports, regarding IDPs originating from Anbar, of the separation of men from their families at checkpoints, while only women and children have been permitted access,<sup>5</sup> including in regard to those having fled the formerly ISIS-held Fallujah. At the same time, those residing within ISIS-controlled territories have been prevented from leaving, with severe punishment administered to those caught attempting to do so.

*'Inside the camp, we are safe. Outside the camp, we are afraid of moving. If I want to take my daughter to the doctor, I will go by myself, without my husband [...] We are afraid that when we go out we might get caught by checkpoints which interrogate us about IDs, where we are from and where we are going. They do not trust us and they don't let us go until they phone the camp to check if what we said is true or not.'*

*(Anbar IDP in Baghdad)*

Incidents occurring at the Bzebez bridge, connecting Anbar and Baghdad, are prominent examples of IDP restrictions on movement between governorates. IDPs seeking entry into Baghdad are required to have a local sponsor in the governorate. After ISIS seized Ramadi, over 100,000 IDPs fleeing Anbar and attempting to cross into Baghdad were prevented from doing so by government forces, due to fail-

ure to meet this requirement.<sup>6</sup> IDPs confirmed the extensive criteria for sponsors, who must be local residents of Baghdad, possess official identification documents issued in the governorate and also own property in Baghdad. These requirements are unachievable for many IDPs. As a result, IDPs can be left in a limbo while awaiting entry, with sometimes fatal consequences:

*'Our journey was not easy at all. We spent 12 days on Bzebez. It was a miracle when we crossed. It was so crowded that people fell off in the river; people were killed; and there were bullets everywhere. [...] They would not have let us enter Baghdad without a sponsor.'*

(Anbar IDP in Baghdad)

The GoI asserts that camps were constructed to shelter IDPs when security concerns prevented immediate access to Baghdad.<sup>7</sup> In October 2015, UNHCR erected Markazi camp, strategically located near Bzebez bridge: it is the third UNHCR camp in Anbar to accommodate IDPs displaced within the governorate.<sup>8</sup> As of March 2016, UNHCR confirmed that access to Anbar, Kirkuk, Salahaddin and Ninewa was still contingent upon sponsorship.<sup>9</sup>

The conditions of displacement and restrictions on movement have resulted in serious economic and health implications for those seeking entry. One IDP from Anbar described the deterioration of his physical health as he suffered kidney issues and his wife contracted an eye disease while waiting for a week at the Bzebez bridge checkpoint.<sup>10</sup> Another IDP, residing in Scout Camp, Baghdad, experienced impediments in accessing his employment due to the checkpoint procedures:

*'My current duty station is in al Khalidiyah traffic police office. Every time I go there, I need to cross the Bzebez bridge. The authorities there ask me to register my personal and contact details and to submit all my family documents. This is a genuine obstacle for our daily activities including carrying out my police duties.'*

(Anbar IDP in Baghdad)

Other IDPs had more severe impediments to their livelihoods due to restrictions on movement:

*'We spent all our savings as my husband has been unemployed since our displacement. Due to the restrictions at checkpoints, my husband cannot search for a job outside the camp. He cannot move without his IDP identity card.'*

(Anbar IDP in Baghdad)

Those who do not have relatives or people known to them in Baghdad must endure further financial burdens. In these circumstances, IDPs either pay a qualifying resident of the governorate to act as their sponsor, continue to endure the conditions at the governorate border, or alternatively remain in ISIS occupied territory:<sup>11</sup>

*'I paid IQD [Iraqi dinars] 150,000 (US\$120) to my sponsor after tough negotiations [...] It is a very hard situation as we are in economic crisis. We could not afford paying such money. Due to these restrictions, those who have no money could not leave Ramadi, and remained there until the army [came].'*

(Anbar IDP in Baghdad)

Restrictions on movement are also experienced by those who are not fleeing their area of origin, but are travelling from their area of displacement to another region of Iraq. An IDP residing in Kerbala explained:

*'We only face problems when we go to Najaf because we are displaced. Once we had someone who we wanted to bury in Najaf. All of the 40 people who went with the coffin were not allowed to cross the checkpoint until midnight, when we made our communications and had an official permit from the military authorities. Even now, we are not allowed to go to Najaf for religious congregations or to visit the cemetery due to our displacement. The authorities say that IDPs in Kerbala should remain in Kerbala and those in Najaf should stay there.'*

(Ninewa IDP in Kerbala)

## Kurdish Regional Government restrictions

Sunni Arabs displaced from ISIS-controlled areas have frequently been denied access to Peshmerga- and GoI-controlled territories; accordingly, they have little choice but to return to their location of origin.<sup>12</sup> The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), in conjunction with the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), reported that on 11 July 2015, 55 families fleeing Anbar and Salahaddin were denied entry into Kirkuk by the local governor.<sup>13</sup> Similarly the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of IDPs notes that in late 2015, approximately 1,800 Sunni Arab IDPs displaced from villages in the Tal Afar district were stranded between Peshmerga forces and ISIS. They were not permitted to cross Peshmerga lines without KRG clearance following allegations of the community's support for ISIS.<sup>14</sup> Arab Iraqis seeking entry into Kirkuk are generally required by KRG authorities to have local Kurdish guarantors to enter the province, and for transit to Sulaymaniyah, Erbil or Dohuk. The KRG also required Arab Iraqis, in late 2014, to obtain temporary permits for travel between governorates in the Kurdish Region of Iraq (KR-I) and renewable residency permits to remain in the region.<sup>15</sup>

Turkmen IDPs also reported having restrictions on their freedom of movement. A Shi'a Turkmen IDP from Tal Afar, displaced to Najaf, explained the arbitrary checkpoint procedures:

*'We only faced difficulties at the Kurdish checkpoint in Kalak on our way. They did not request any document from us. They only meant to humiliate us. They gathered us in a big yard and kept some of us for three days and some of us spent seven days outdoors. If it weren't for aid sent to us by Sadrist office groups from Bartellah, we would have died of thirst and hunger.'*

*(Ninewa IDP in Najaf)*

An IDP had a similar experience during his transit to Kerbala:

*'It was not easy to travel from Sinjar to Kalak. The Peshmerga stopped us at the checkpoint for six*

*days. One night the Peshmerga even came and started kicking us and throwing stones at us and our children.'*

*(Ninewa IDP in Kerbala)*

Anecdotal evidence indicated that Kurdish authorities did not impose similar restrictions on Christians fleeing from Ninewa to the KR-I. A woman displaced from Ninewa confirmed that the Kurdish checkpoints only facilitated free and quick movement for Christians.<sup>16</sup> During field research, Christian IDPs did not report any restrictions on their movements entering, leaving and moving within the KR-I, while 80 per cent of Turkmen IDPs from Tal Afar who were interviewed experienced problems at Kurdish checkpoints, varying from restricted entry to lack of food, water and aid supplies.<sup>17</sup>

There is also indication of restricted movement within IDP settlements in the KR-I. Authorities at a temporary IDP settlement near Debaga, host to approximately 710 Sunni Arab families, reportedly exercise tight restrictions on freedom of movement, compelling residents to remain on site even in extreme conditions. However, Christian and Yezidi IDPs' movement is not restricted.<sup>18</sup>

## Civil documentation and risk of statelessness

IDPs across Iraq have experienced the loss of civil documentation, without which they are simply unable to access basic rights and services, including freedom of movement, registration and access to safety. According to UNHCR, IDPs lacking civil documents are placed at greater risk of arrest and detention.<sup>19</sup> Reportedly, at least one family member in up to 50 per cent of families lacked critical legal identity documents.<sup>20</sup> Accessing civil documentation remains a continuing and prominent challenge for IDPs in Iraq.

Over 60 per cent of IDP interviewees for this report confirmed that they have encountered some form of administrative challenge since being displaced in registering for identity cards, citizenship certificates, passports or food ration cards. A breakdown

of the research data indicated that IDPs originating from Anbar and displaced to Baghdad were more likely affected by obstacles to accessing documentation, as 78 per cent of interviewees reported having experienced difficulties. Sources suggest that these challenges may be due to the fact that Anbar is predominantly rural and the illiteracy levels are high, so those displaced from Anbar require more assistance than other IDPs.<sup>21</sup> This is only exacerbated by host community suspicions that Sunni Arab IDPs from Anbar include ISIS sympathizers.<sup>22</sup> Anbari IDPs have been actively denied entry into Baghdad<sup>23</sup> despite the fact that they must go to Baghdad to apply for the reissue of nationality certificates.<sup>24</sup>

Based on different experiences described by IDPs, there appears to be no standardized registration or document application requirements that public offices and government administrations adhere to. Issues can vary from complicated registration procedures and poor registration systems, to corruption within public institutions.

*'ISIS threatened and forced us to surrender all our documents, jewellery and belongings to them. They warned they will search us and kill us if they find anything on us which we haven't declared. I have nothing now except for my ID, in which my name is written incorrectly. When I want to use my Q Card and withdraw money, it shows that my name is unidentifiable.'*

*'I went to the directorate of citizenship in Baghdad five times to apply for a citizenship certificate and they keep saying that my name, registered in Erbil, is unidentifiable. We would go back to Erbil if we had any money. There was no positive response from the authorities. I went to the General Directorate of Retirement to complain and they told me there, with sarcasm, that our pensions and money are left with ISIS. They said that our problem will not be resolvable until we go back to Mosul. They can do nothing for us here in Baghdad.'*

(Ninewa IDP in Baghdad)

One IDP described the domino effect that errors or outdated information of one family member's documentation can have on the rest of the family:

*'I had problems registering my newly born baby and getting a civil ID issued for her because the office informed me that they do not have an update of my records on their system. Likewise, my newly married son could not get a new ID issued because they need to get my records updated first.'*

(Ninewa IDP in Najaf)

IDPs frequently reported facing corruption within public offices as well as incurring additional charges to obtain critical civil documentation: 'I had to pay IQD 1.72 million to get my family documents issued from three different places in Baghdad: Haswa, Abu Ghraib and Amiriyah.'<sup>25</sup> Another IDP, originating from Ramadi, Anbar, reported similar bureaucratic constraints:

*'I applied for the IDP smart card<sup>26</sup> in order to receive government monetary assistance. This card is issued by the government to receive the grant for IDP families. I took all my documents to the office in Harithiyah where they checked my name on their computer records and confirmed listing my name. When I went to collect the card, they told me that my name does not exist. I argued with the employee there that the document which is in his right hand stated my details in their records. He shouted at me and I had to go to their legal department. The legal department also checked their files and said that they could not find my name. I gave up and have not followed up since then.'*

(Anbar IDP in Baghdad)

Gendered restrictions present additional obstacles to female-headed households seeking to undergo registration procedures. IDPs highlighted the vulnerability they felt in trying to obtain civil documents: 'For me, it is so difficult. Being a woman, I cannot get things done by myself.'<sup>27</sup> Another IDP residing in Baghdad illustrated her concern:

*'My brother-in-law went to the citizenship department in Amiriyyat al Fallujah and renewed my ID a month ago. I had to renew it to change my marital status from "married" to "widowed". We cannot get any official documents issued in Baghdad. I would never have been able to do it without my brother's personal intervention.'*

(Anbar IDP in Baghdad)

Often, registration procedures are inherently discriminatory towards women, particularly where the documentation required is for a child. One IDP explained, ‘my daughter has no ID and I cannot get one issued as I am divorced. The rule requires me to submit her father’s ID in order to have one issued to her.’<sup>28</sup> Such gendered procedures present obvious challenges in conflict settings where there may be a high number of female-headed households. Coupled with the displacement crisis and loss of documentation, women may find registration procedures simply insurmountable.

*‘I applied for a citizenship certificate for my daughter but I was told the application couldn’t be processed without her father’s citizenship certificate. Her father has passed away and I do not have his documents.’*

*(Anbar IDP in Baghdad)*

It is evident that the acquisition of documents, including that of national identity, is heavily dependent on paternal documentation. Although Iraq has reportedly reformed its laws to allow women to confer nationality to their children at birth,<sup>29</sup> the inability of IDP women to do so without paternity documents is a major restriction that leaves many displaced children at risk of statelessness.

Adults are also struggling to register for documentation, as seemingly bureaucratic obstacles prevent IDPs from doing so, such as the requirement to replace documents in particular inaccessible locations, such as ISIS-held or unsafe territories. Along with long-term protection and rights concerns, if IDPs are unable to replace legal identity documentation, they too face a risk of statelessness.<sup>30</sup> Without the necessary civil documents, IDPs may find it challenging to register subsequent divorces, deaths, marriages and births, with restrictions on the latter impeding displaced children’s attainment of nationality.<sup>31</sup> An IDP from Anbar emphasized his frustration at registration procedures:

*‘I need to obtain two birth certificates for my newborn babies, but they [civil registration office staff] will not register them because I am told that I need to renew my own ID. When I renew my ID, I will have to apply for a new residence card in Baghdad. After that, I will be able to register my children. But, to apply for IDs for my newly born children, I*

*will have to go back to Ramadi in order to register. Look at my ID, the damage is so minor and it was issued after 2008. They insist that I need to get a new one issued.’*

*(Anbar IDP in Baghdad)*

Similarly, another IDP maintained:

*‘I have a baby who was born last August in Baghdad. I tried to register here in the citizenship department and get her an ID and citizenship certificate issued, but the authorities keep telling me that these documents can only be issued from my home town. I only have my daughter’s birth certificate.’*

*(Anbar IDP in Baghdad)*

An IDP from Ninewa, residing in Kerbala, highlighted the absence of adequate civil registration options for victims, and the families of victims, of the conflict. Administrative challenges arise not only in birth, but also after death:

*‘When my brother was killed in Tal Afar, we could not get a legal document from the court in Mosul before we left in order to divide his inheritance. When we applied here for such a legal document, the authorities told us that we cannot get it issued from Kerbala, and that we have to go back Mosul to do it.’*

*(Ninewa IDP in Kerbala)*

The restricted access to civil documentation that is faced by IDPs is prevalent despite previous efforts to tackle the issue. In 2014, the Iraqi Ministry of Migration and Displacement and Ministry of Interior established two new re-documentation centres in Baghdad and Najaf to replace civil status documents, passports and birth certificates for IDPs originating from Anbar, Diyala, Salahaddin, Mosul and Kirkuk.<sup>32</sup> However, as of 2016, civil documentation reportedly could still only be issued by the Ministry of the Interior in Baghdad, Najaf or Sheikhan.<sup>33</sup>

According to UNHCR, Iraq’s Nationality Directorate has begun issuing and replacing identity documents in several locations in Anbar, following the displacement from Fallujah in 2016.<sup>34</sup> IDPs con-

firmed that authorities have indeed attempted to address registration issues for IDPs from Anbar by opening alternative offices in accessible or safe areas of the Anbar province. However, many complained that accessing these offices remains a highly costly, risky and time-consuming exercise, particularly for IDPs that have been displaced to other governorates.<sup>35</sup> In the governorates of Kerbala and Najaf, there is reportedly only one office of Migration and Displacement in operation, which results in long waiting hours for IDPs, who are often ultimately refused service.<sup>36</sup>

There have been some international efforts to tackle these issues. In a bid to improve access to acquisition procedures for nationality, civil status documentation and national ID documents, UNHCR held 267 outreach sessions in 2015 for local authorities as well as persons who are stateless or at risk of statelessness.<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, in 2015 and the first half of 2016, legal counselling on the acquisition or confirmation of Iraqi citizenship was given to approximately 1,500 people, while 3,320 individuals received legal advice on nationality and documentation issues.<sup>38</sup> An IDP from Ninewa, displaced to Najaf, confirmed that the free legal service provided by non-government entities assisted him in sorting out his registration issues when his family's IDs were lost, and that with the assistance of a UN legal professional, his documents were issued.<sup>39</sup> Another interviewee confirmed the positive results of such intervention, 'I actually lost my ID and managed to get a replacement within one month.'<sup>40</sup>

Despite the various efforts of the UN, international and local NGOs and volunteers, bureaucratic challenges to the issuing of official civil documentation are still prevalent and are hindering the flow of welfare and public service provisions to IDPs. Thus, where support is intended, it is access that is often a barrier. For instance, the GoI has promised a one-time grant of IQD 1 million (approximately US\$850) to each IDP family. However, this is only dispensed once they are registered with the Ministry of Displacement and Migration (MoDM).<sup>41</sup> With many people having lost their documents, or had them confiscated, they cannot be registered. In addition, administrative delays, or even potential impediments faced due to religious or ethnic identity, mean that some IDPs struggle to access this payment.<sup>42</sup> One IDP said:

*I have many issues with official documents. Many organizations and even volunteer lawyers tried to assist us but nothing was resolved. My problem is that I have no food ration card and residence information card. I needed to register for a new one for my family (wife and children) by separating myself from my extended family since we are from Ninewa. I have no original official documents, but only copies. Moreover, I wanted to apply for a passport but because I have only copies of my documents, my application was rejected.'*

*(Ninewa IDP in Baghdad)*

It is clear that an official strategy is urgently required to rebuild the capacity and effectiveness of civil registries, to establish new civil registration offices and, finally, to review and amend existing civil registration systems.

## Safety and security of IDPs

The causes and patterns of recent displacement in Iraq have been described extensively in other Ceasefire reports.<sup>43</sup> Once displaced, IDPs face new and continued threats to their safety and security.

Over 75 per cent of displaced interviewees originating from Anbar expressed a lack of sense of security in displacement. Persistent security threats were highlighted by many.

*The security situation is bad. We do not feel secure because of what we hear of kidnapping and killing of Anbari IDPs.'*

*(Anbar IDP in Baghdad)*

IDPs originating from Anbar, in particular ISIS-controlled areas, are often treated with great suspicion by authorities and host communities who perceive them to be affiliated with, or supporters of, ISIS.<sup>44</sup> This has led to violations against Sunni IDPs by various actors, including Shi'a militias, ISF and Kurdish security forces. Human rights organizations report that in 2014 and 2015, Anbari IDPs were subjected to verbal abuse, destruction of property, kidnappings and killings.<sup>45</sup> In 2016, Sunni Iraqis still report a fear of being detained or

kidnapped as ISIS's presence is replaced by that of Shi'a militias, around recaptured areas in Salahaddin.<sup>46</sup> Of those who fled Fallujah on the orders of the GoI, prior to the military assault to recapture the district, many have suffered arrest, separation from family members or terrible camp conditions likened to those of a prison.<sup>47</sup>

*'No place is safe here. Unless we go back home, we cannot feel safe and secure. We are left to our unknown destiny. You may have heard, a few days ago, some kidnapping incidents of Anbari IDPs in Baghdad. As a result, we do not leave this camp except for urgent matters. We are very restricted.'*

*(Anbar IDP in Baghdad)*

IDPs from various other governorates have suffered similar persecution.<sup>48</sup> The Special Rapporteur on the human rights of IDPs expressed concern that IDPs in Iraq are living under the constant threat of violence and risk of further displacement.<sup>49</sup> For example, the conflict in Salahaddin between armed opposition groups and the ISF in the Tikrit and Baiji districts created a high degree of security risk for IDPs who could not return to the areas due to road closures.<sup>50</sup> In Ninewa, IDPs, largely from Mosul, hosted in Tilkaif were forcibly displaced a second time as ISIS seized control of the town.<sup>51</sup> In Kirkuk, Kurdish security forces reportedly conducted raids and arbitrary arrests as well as destroying shelters of IDPs perceived to be affiliated to ISIS.<sup>52</sup> IDPs remain vulnerable to arrest and detention, leaving families with little or no information as to their whereabouts. IDPs without documentation can spend many days in detention before they are vetted, and in some cases are subjected to torture and physical abuse.<sup>53</sup>

The sudden outpouring of IDPs from Fallujah in the final stages of the Iraqi government's assault on the city in summer 2015 was marked by gross human rights abuses and overwhelmed the capacity of humanitarian agencies. Shi'a militias involved in surrounding the city of Fallujah are reported to have separated 1,500 men and boys from their families, with hundreds feared tortured or killed.<sup>54</sup> As of July 2016, the UN claimed that as many as 900 young men were still missing following their abduction by Kataeb Hezbollah and the Badr Brigades, both pro-government militias.<sup>55</sup>

The secretary-general of the Norwegian Refugee Council described the scenes at displacement camps as 'apocalyptic'.<sup>56</sup> Aid agencies working on the banks of the Euphrates reported that 1,800 people were forced to share one latrine;<sup>57</sup> families were being forced to sleep outside in the 50°C heat and were only receiving ad hoc distributions of food.<sup>58</sup> With many reported deaths from exhaustion and exposure, the situation was recognised as a humanitarian disaster.<sup>59</sup>

As tens of thousands of civilians now flee ongoing hostilities in Mosul, the UN estimates that as many as one million people may be displaced as a result of the Mosul offensive.<sup>60</sup> If a strategy for safe passage, humanitarian relief, security and protection for Mosul's IDPs is not implemented, Iraq risks a catastrophic repetition of the Fallujah failures on a significantly larger scale.

## Women

IDP women and girls face a disproportionate vulnerability due to the breakdown in legal and community protections, increasing rates of gender-based violence and discrimination by both state and non-state actors. Most widely reported are the systematic forced marriages, sexual violence and sexual slavery perpetrated by ISIS against women and girls of minority groups including Yezidis, Christians and Turkmen, as well as women generally.<sup>61</sup>

Having met with Iraqi police in Kirkuk, in May 2015, UNAMI and the OHCHR raised concerns over the safety and security of women and girls due to early marriage, increased prostitution and the rising number of street children at risk of sexual exploitation.<sup>62</sup> While sexual violence is frequently attributed to ISIS abuses in the current conflict, the internal displacement of civilians has also reportedly exacerbated the incidence of honour crimes, sexual exploitation, harassment and early and forced marriage.<sup>63</sup>

The threat of sexual and gender-based violence for women and girls in displacement can be high, and necessitates preventative protection measures. Women who have been affected by violence are in critical need of specialized psycho-social services, with many female ISIS escapees reporting suicide

attempts and showing signs of trauma. However, the government response to women and girls that have escaped ISIS has been minimal. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working in IDP camps have reported that the KRG Ministry of Health professionals were largely unwilling to treat sexual assault survivors due to cultural norms; and in cases where they did, care was inadequate due to overstretched resources.<sup>64</sup> There is also cultural and religious stigmatization of sexual violence which makes women reluctant to report abuses or seek assistance in shelter, and in some instances unwilling to return to their families or communities.

As a result of the conflict, many women and girls have lost their male family protection structures and are more vulnerable to abuse. An IDP explained, 'being a woman living without a man, I feel insecure'.<sup>65</sup> Female-headed households are particularly exposed to risks to their safety and security, such as exploitation, trafficking, prostitution and other forms of sexual violence.<sup>66</sup>

## Exposure of IDPs to threats of ERW and IEDs

Iraq's ongoing conflict has exacerbated the country's long-standing problem of explosive hazardous contamination.<sup>67</sup> ISIS military operations, as well as shelling and air-strikes conducted by pro-government forces, have left many explosive remnants of war (ERW) in Iraq, presenting an extreme risk to civilian lives and impeding freedom of movement, delivery of humanitarian relief and stabilization efforts. In addition, Iraqi territory still contains ERW as a legacy of the 2003 US-led invasion and previous military operations. According to the Landmine Monitor, an affiliate of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines, as of 2013, up to 1,838 km<sup>2</sup> of Iraqi territory was already contaminated.<sup>68</sup>

ISIS and other Iraqi insurgent groups have made widespread use of improvised explosive devices (IEDs). According to Conflict Armament Research (CAR), ISIS's experimentation and refining of its weapon capabilities has resulted in the creation of multiple types of IEDs. Its use of suicide and car

bombs, booby-traps, landmines and improvised mortars has taken a heavy toll on Peshmerga, ISF, Shi'a militias, and other forces fighting to regain ISIS-held territory, as well as on civilians.<sup>69</sup>

Booby-traps often pervade terrain that has been recaptured from ISIS.<sup>70</sup> ERW – which include unexploded ordnance and abandoned explosive ordnance – and IEDs represent serious threats to the lives and properties of returning IDPs. Their presence hinders rehabilitation and development in areas of origin, just as it limits returnee movement, hence restricting access to education and employment. Many incidents of death or injury from ERW have been recorded, including eight people killed in Ramadi during February 2016 while attempting to disable explosive devices or surveying properties.<sup>71</sup>

According to a UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) report, the majority of such casualties occurring in the first six weeks of an emergency are usually attributable to returning refugees and IDPs.<sup>72</sup> While IDPs may to some extent be aware of a risk of explosives in their areas of origin, they are generally unfamiliar with the nature and extent of the threat.<sup>73</sup> Indeed, one IDP from Ninewa observed:

*'I know [about the danger], but we will need some organizations to come and educate us more thoroughly about how to deal with this problem.'*

*(Ninewa IDP in Baghdad)*

Research findings revealed that 75 per cent of IDPs expressed a lack of knowledge of methods of protection or techniques for minimizing the risks of living in areas with ERW and IEDs. Many IDPs only have a basic understanding of ERW and IED security. An IDP originating from Anbar reflected:

*'Nobody has educated us on ERW and their impact on us and how to stay safe. But from our own life experience, we avoid such threats.'*

*(Anbar IDP in Baghdad)*

Safety and security of IDPs is better achieved through preparation, rather than responsive action. Risk-awareness activities have been provided by some civil society organizations (CSOs)

such as Health and Social Care Organization in Iraq, but the provision is limited. Some ERW and IED risk education sessions and information leaflets were provided through the Danish Refugee Council (DRC), in the Baghdad IDP camp Mariam al-Athra' (Virgin Mary), which hosts Christian IDPs originating from Ninewa. However, no similar activities were noted in any other IDP settlement visited for the purpose of this report. The Mines Advisory Group (MAG) has nevertheless been providing risk education to IDPs in the KR-I.<sup>74</sup> In addition to this, the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) provides and coordinates emergency clearance operations, and strategic and technical support to the Iraqi Kurdish Mine Action Authority and Directorate of Mine Action. Through this support, six areas in Ramadi have been surveyed and cleared of ERW to aid the return of IDPs to the area.<sup>75</sup>

Many IDPs express severe concerns about the contamination of their home areas with ERW and IEDs, and confirmed that they will not return unless explosive devices are cleared. As an IDP from Anbar described the situation:

*'It is not safe for my family to return home because of the conditions there. We have heard that there are ERW in the area, homes have been blown up and the air has been polluted from the use of chemicals, such as phosphorus and sulphur.'*

*(Anbar IDP in Baghdad)*

Nevertheless, over 1.1 million IDPs were reported to have returned to their areas of origin by November 2016.<sup>76</sup> UN assessment teams have found areas recaptured from ISIS, such as Ramadi, to be riddled with explosive devices but many displaced residents have chosen not to wait for the land to be declared safe before journeying back, with dozens killed within mere weeks of their return.<sup>77</sup> In late April 2016, up to 17,000 families were reported to have returned to Ramadi, despite the high levels of IED and ERW contamination.<sup>78</sup>

While these are officially registered as voluntary returns, it is worth noting that, in many cases, IDPs feel compelled to return to areas of origin. The dire conditions of displacement settlements is a prominent push factor (only 15 per cent of the 2015–6 humanitarian aid response funding target had been met as of March 2016).<sup>79</sup> Other reports indicate that the GoI has pressured Iraqis to return to their place of origin, despite the destruction of their homes and security threats, including those posed by explosive ordnance.<sup>80</sup> The Special Rapporteur on the human rights of IDPs in Iraq reiterated reports of homes being wired with explosives by ISIS to prevent return and, despite this, the GoI was providing buses to transport IDPs to their places of origin, with payments to them being conditional upon their return.<sup>81</sup> In 2015, many Sunni IDPs from ISIS-held areas had no option but to return their homes as they were denied entry to areas controlled by the GoI and the KRG despite the overwhelming danger in areas of origin.<sup>82</sup>

# 3

## Humanitarian conditions

Both the Government of Iraq and Kurdish Regional Government are relying heavily on foreign aid in order to provide services to internally displaced persons. Nevertheless, it has not been enough to meet the growing scale of the humanitarian need in Iraq: for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees alone, the funding gap stood at 57 per cent by the end of November 2016.

The need to provide for millions of IDPs across Iraq comes at a time when both the GoI and the KRG are coming under significant financial strain. Falling oil prices and the cost of the war have pushed Iraq's debt up to US\$18 billion, and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) approved a three-year US\$5.34 billion loan to Iraq in July 2016 in order to support economic stability.<sup>83</sup> In comparison, this year's figures show that humanitarian aid in total has so far reached some US\$1.6 billion, most of it from the USA, Germany, the UN and the European Commission.<sup>84</sup>

### Shelter

IDPs in Iraq reside in both formal and informal settlements, as well as private accommodation. According to IOM's November 2016 figures, 3,113,958 IDPs (518,993 families) are spread across 106 districts and 3,771 locations. In Baghdad alone, 234,924 IDPs reside in rented housing, 155,172 with host families, 17,190 in camps, 7,980 in informal settlements, 8,292 in unfinished buildings, 2,100 in religious buildings, 2,190 in school buildings, 630 in hotels/motels, 186 in other types of accommodation and 78 IDPs in unknown shelter conditions.<sup>85</sup>

The displacement figures in Kerbala are lower compared to those in Baghdad, and the pattern of accommodation differs. IDPs in Kerbala live in privately rented properties or IDP building complexes (such as the 'City of Visitors'), as well as 'critical shelter', which includes displacement camps, religious buildings such as mosques or *hussainiyaat*, schools and unfinished buildings.<sup>86</sup> IDP families in Najaf are predominantly sheltered in religious buildings under the 'critical shelter' category. As many as 48,222 of the 78,390 IDPs recorded in the region are residing in religious buildings.<sup>87</sup>

The far-reaching role of religious organizations and national NGOs in providing assistance to IDPs, including in ISIS-controlled regions where international bodies cannot penetrate, has been essential to the safeguarding of those populations.<sup>88</sup> It is understood that these front-line organizations provide more than half of the assistance to IDPs.<sup>89</sup>

In the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, the KRG has established a Joint Crisis Coordination Committee, to try to better facilitate coordination between the different organizations. However, IDPs have not necessarily experienced an effec-

tive response. For instance, reports from the Ashti camps in Ainkawa, home to approximately 1,200 families, indicate that the KRG merely provided and approved land for the camp to be erected, but it was the Church that bore responsibility for providing the shelter within these camps.<sup>90</sup> Similarly, in Kerbala and Najaf, shelter and responsibility for most of the governorate's IDPs were assumed by the Imam Hussain Shrine, Kerbala, and the Imam Ali Mosque, Najaf, with both cities hosting thousands of displaced families in mosques and religious buildings (*hussainiyaat*).<sup>91</sup> In Najaf, the large majority of IDPs still reside in religious buildings, as of October 2016.<sup>9</sup>

## Conditions and overcrowding

IDPs interviewed for this bulletin reported providers of shelter to include tribes and local NGOs as well as the GoI, the UN, and religious entities or authorities such as the Church and *Al-marji'iyah*.<sup>93</sup> Shelter conditions vary from settlement to settlement, with those funded or managed by religious entities appearing notably more inhabitable than those which are not. Comparisons include better provision of water, electricity and, most significantly, the type of shelter, such as caravans as opposed to tents. However, this is not always the case.

*'My current place of residence is a big hall inside this hussainiya. It is not adequate. It has no services. We have neither hot water nor bathrooms.'*

*(Ninewa IDP in Najaf)*

IDPs residing in informal settlements, which are managed by neither a religious entity nor the state, bear the harshest conditions. IDPs in such settlements have often reported having to purchase and set up their own tents, and secure their own access to water, electricity and fuel.<sup>94</sup>

Of the IDPs interviewed, 84 per cent are either not satisfied with their shelter conditions or do not have a sense of security in their shelter. More specifically, in the governorates of Kerbala and Najaf, 70 per cent of IDPs felt their accommodation to be inadequate for long-term residence. Certainly, stability is also key, as some IDP families living in school buildings fear being 'ordered out of school any minute', as one interviewee confirmed.<sup>95</sup> Despite the efforts made on both a national and international level, shelter conditions remain largely inadequate.

Research findings indicate that tents, which are approximately 25 square metres, often shelter families of eight or more.<sup>96</sup> IDPs living in private settings also face similar challenges of overcrowding, with two or three families often sharing one small dwelling.<sup>97</sup> An IDP described these conditions: 'I live among four families in a privately rented house, composed of only two rooms. Each room accommodates two families.'<sup>98</sup> Another IDP reported living with 12 other people, from three different families, in a one-bedroom property.<sup>99</sup> Yet there are still more severe instances of overcrowding, with one IDP reporting that his family of 26 live in a small 40 square metre house.<sup>100</sup> There are clear psycho-social implications of overcrowding, particularly among children.

*'It is a very small place. We cannot play here. We are very restricted by our neighbours who shout at us when we play in the street or even at our small home. Even when we study in a loud voice, they tell us to be quiet.'*

*(Anbar IDP in Baghdad)*

## Weather and sanitation

Severe weather conditions in Iraq also have negative consequences on IDP accommodation. During heavy rainfall, camps become flooded and tents fall down, as recently experienced by an IDP with disabilities, 'when it rained, my tent collapsed and I had to evacuate my family to Latifiyah<sup>101</sup> for a few days. The sewage system is based on septic tanks.'<sup>102</sup>

Although caravans are, comparatively speaking, more durable and better equipped than tents, displaced families living in caravans are not necessarily in a considerably better situation. IDPs in caravans also complained that the small dwellings are extremely hot in summer and cold in winter.<sup>103</sup> The conditions of the camps themselves, such as gravel or mud surfaces, also adversely affect IDPs during periods of bad weather. A woman residing in Baghdad underlined these circumstances: 'I live in a caravan in a camp. It is catastrophic when it rains as we cannot even get out. The camp becomes flooded.'<sup>104</sup>

IDPs stressed the combined burden of unsuitable infrastructure, lack of privacy and bad weather conditions:

*'I live in a tent, in a camp. It is about 6 × 4 metres in size. We are a family of six, living in this tent. We made an extension by buying a steel structure. Bathrooms and toilets are shared with other tents. When it rained, the tent was flooded with water. We then had to buy a plastic cover for the tent.'*

*(Anbar IDP in Baghdad)*

IDPs report extremely unsanitary conditions in camps. There is a serious and evident lack of infrastructure, water, sanitation and hygiene services in IDP settlements. IDPs in camps such as Al-Ghazalayah in Baghdad have no clean area for laundry,

and water tanks are erected in some cases next to waste bin areas.<sup>105</sup> Toilets and washing facilities are commonly shared, and require appropriate sewage systems, while some camps lack bathing facilities altogether, compelling their residents to use makeshift curtains from rugs or sheets to wash behind, or bathe in a toilet cubicle, if available.<sup>106</sup> Not only is this lack of segregated or appropriate wash facilities a risk to health and hygiene, it could also increase female exposure to gender-based violence, with female-headed households particularly vulnerable.<sup>107</sup>

## Women in displacement

According to a report carried out by the REACH and other humanitarian organizations, eight per cent of families in camps across Iraq are female-headed, and 53 per cent of IDPs in camps are under the age of 18.<sup>108</sup> Single mothers, widows and female orphans are significantly more vulnerable in displacement. A young widow from Anbar described her living conditions:

*'I live in a small shop vacated by its owner. I live with my son, mother and younger brother. There is a vacant land behind the shop in which the good people volunteered to erect a bath and a water tank for us.'*

*(Anbar IDP in Baghdad)*

Another young widow described having to move frequently from one sister's house to another with her daughter:

*'I have no home; no private place. I am a widow with a child. I live temporarily with my sister. Her house is very small and damaged.'*

*(Anbar IDP in Baghdad)*

## Food aid and income security

Forty per cent of interviewees reported having income to support their families, mainly those employed in the public sector or in receipt of social security, but the remaining 60 per cent were exhausting their savings or were heavily dependent on aid provisions.

### Food and non-food items

According to IDPs interviewed, the top four providers of food and non-food items (NFI) were stated to be local NGOs, tribes, the GoI and the UN. With the number of those in need rising, there are many partnerships between national and international organizations, working to provide as much critical assistance as possible to displaced people. For example, the World Food Programme (WFP) has over ten partners, both national and international, with which it works in Iraq, and together with UNICEF coordinates a Rapid Response Mechanism (RRM) designed to reach newly-displaced people with life-saving support.<sup>109</sup>

Nevertheless, this does not automatically translate to those in dire need of aid readily receiving it. IDPs report severe shortages of basic food and NFIs, even where there are provisions supplied by camps, religious entities, international and local organizations or host communities.<sup>110</sup> Some have also experienced administrative and bureaucratic procedures which have blocked the distribution of food:

*'I do not receive my monthly food ration. I applied three times to the Ministry of Trade office where they gave me the distribution agency details to receive my rations. When I went there, the agency said that my name is not on his list. For the last three months, we did not receive any food aid in our camp. Only yesterday, we received 25 kg of wheat flour, 5 kg of sugar, a sack of lentils and a small sack of salt.'*

*(Anbar IDP in Baghdad)*

The situation in Sinjar in northern Iraq is of particular concern. Despite its recapture from ISIS in November 2015, Sinjar has been effectively blockaded in recent months. Local people and aid organizations have indicated that medicine, food and NFIs are being blocked at KRG checkpoints from Sinjar District to Dohuk, the nearest main city.<sup>111</sup> Of the Yezidi population which was forcibly displaced *en masse* when ISIS captured Sinjar in 2014, very few have been able to return.

Many international NGOs are reportedly aware of the restrictions, in place since April 2016, but do not intervene because of the risk of jeopardizing their wider operations in the KR-I, particularly as international humanitarian assistance is also overseen by Kurdish authorities who host these organizations, largely in Dohuk. In a communication in December 2016, a senior KRG official stated that restrictions on the movement of civilians into and out of newly-liberated areas were due to security precautions and 'the reason why some goods have not been allowed to enter the Sinjar district is due to the fear of it being transported to [ISIS] terrorists in southern Sinjar and other ISIS-held areas.'<sup>112</sup>

However, the restriction of aid to IDPs is also a product of territorial disputes over Sinjar after the removal of ISIS. Tightened security is being implemented by Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP)-affiliated Peshmerga troops on the Fish Khabour or 'Rabia' crossing, as relations between the KDP, Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and affiliates deteriorate.<sup>113</sup> Control of Sinjar is presently contested between Iraqi Kurdish Peshmerga, the Syrian Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG), the PKK and its allied Yezidi militia, the YPS. While the exact situation on the ground is confusing, it is clear that there is much distrust and even animosity between these groups of fighters, including Yezidi militias which played significant roles in the retaking of Sinjar. The complete lack of unity does little to reassure the community.<sup>114</sup>

Reportedly, humanitarian aid, including shelter (tents) and other supplies, is actively being diverted into the possession of residents who are loyal to the KDP.<sup>115</sup> In effect, despite the reported presence of the Barzani Charity Foundation, very little international aid is reaching Sinjar and there is an urgent need for food and basic supplies. Some three thousand Yezidis remaining on Mount Sinjar are yet to receive assistance.<sup>116</sup>

## Income and livelihood

Eighty-four per cent of IDPs interviewed for this report declared their income as insufficient to meet their basic living needs. Many IDPs living in rented accommodation find that the bulk of their incomes goes towards rental payments, hence families in these private settings may often suffer similar or greater financial challenges than IDPs in camps. A working IDP explained, 'I am a government employee and have a monthly salary. However, the salary is not enough to cover all my family needs. My salary barely covers the rent.'<sup>117</sup>

Frequent government delays in paying salaries also have an immediate adverse impact on the daily life of IDPs, particularly for single-income households:

*'There are always delays in paying our salaries and the income is not enough to cover my needs. I was in debt before ISIS and my debt has dramatically increased since my displacement as I had to spend a lot on moving from Ramadi. I was not paid my salary for eight months. I have six family members and I am responsible for covering all of our costs.'*

(Anbar IDP in Baghdad)

Half of the displaced women interviewed for this report claimed that they were dependent on their male family members to survive. There is heavy financial dependence among IDPs on their more financially secure family members, but IDPs with no immediate male familial support, such as female-headed households, can live in drastic conditions. A displaced woman residing in al-Ghazaliyah camp described the financial and emotional challenges of poverty in displacement:

*'Organizations come to donate sugar, tea, blankets and similar items but I have other needs and I have no financial resources. I had to sell a blanket for 5,000 IQD [approximately US\$4] to spend on my daughters. I have a lot of needs but I cannot ask people for all that I need. If a man comes to donate something to me, I cannot tell him that I need a mobile phone to speak with my relatives, for example. I have dignity. I have not even left this camp since I entered it as I have no decent clothes to wear. Look at my daughters; I have no money to buy them clothes. We sell mattresses or blankets to buy food. I sometimes feed them only*

*bread and tea, soup, or spaghetti distributed to us by donors. We never before experienced any kind of hunger and it is so hard to ask someone for help.'*

(Anbar IDP in Baghdad)

The financial challenge is also significant in cases where a male relative must bear the financial responsibility for both his family and that of the female-headed household:

*'My brother is covering our costs. However, his income is not enough. Yesterday my daughter asked him to buy her clothes and he told her to wait for now till he accumulates the rent money. The landlord has increased this month's rent.'*

(Anbar IDP in Baghdad)

IDP families with multiple breadwinners have greater income to cover their needs, but usually have larger families and consequently more dependants; hence the collective earnings are only just sufficient. A Ninewa IDP in Najaf reflected on this situation, 'I have four sons in the military. Their combined income is okay.'

Civil servants who have been displaced from ISIS-controlled regions to central or south Iraq report that they are still able to receive their monthly salaries.<sup>118</sup> However, casual labourers or tradesmen are highly dependent on the availability of work: 'If there is work to do, I will earn money. Otherwise, I have no source of income.'<sup>119</sup> One IDP reiterated this predicament:

*'I am a labourer. I have no stable work. Last week I only worked one day, while this week I have not worked at all. Like this, my income is not sufficient.'*

(Ninewa IDP in Baghdad)

The current economic crisis in Iraq has taken a heavy toll on IDPs' sources of income.

*'If there is work to do, my sons cover our costs. But now, the companies and state are bankrupt and there is no work. It is sometimes enough to cover our costs and sometimes not.'*

(Ninewa IDP in Najaf)

Additionally, IDPs seeking work must compete with host communities, whose employment opportunities have also been severely hindered by the significant population increase in areas of displacement. This has led to notable social tensions and frustrations, both among locals and IDPs.

Social security payments such as pensions, despite their small amounts, have also been affected by the poor economic situation as the government has cut, reduced or delayed the payments, leaving IDPs who are solely dependent on this income to survive on charitable donations of food and NFIs.<sup>120</sup> However, as the protracted displacement crisis enters its third year, humanitarian assistance and charitable giving by host communities have, as can be expected, declined, while the displacement figures and consequent needs have increased: 'People donate food including meat and chicken and we cook, but these days there is less of this compared to previous months. We have no income so we need these donations to live.'<sup>121</sup>

## Health care, physical and psychological well-being

The displacement of over 3.1 million people since January 2014 has imposed a severe strain on Iraq's health care services. The World Health Organization (WHO) recognizes the implications of conflict or most crises to include 'soaring mortality rates; evident suffering, especially of women, children, old people, and increased numbers with disabilities or chronic illnesses'.<sup>122</sup> While the conflict continues to have a growing impact on the need for health care among IDPs, the ensuing violence and precarious security environment has led to the destruction of medical infrastructure, shortages of medical equipment and supplies,<sup>123</sup> and a lack of health professionals,<sup>124</sup> resulting in additional restrictions to access to health care in both ISIS-controlled and recaptured areas of Iraq.

The WHO has supported the GoI to respond to IDPs' health care needs with the provision of mobile clinics, caravans, medicines, vaccines, medical supplies and technical support.<sup>125</sup> The Iraqi Ministry of Health has also confirmed that it provides registered IDPs with medication at no cost through

community health clinics in Baghdad, including medicines for chronic diseases.<sup>126</sup> Nonetheless, health services remain insufficient in quality and accessibility.

### Accessibility and affordability

Forty-three per cent of IDPs report that they still look to public health institutions, including hospitals and primary health care centres, for their treatments due to the free or cheaper services provided.<sup>127</sup> However, treatment is often incomplete, as IDPs without access to free medical aid are still required to purchase medication:

*'We go to public health centres or hospitals. We have no money to see specialists. I have not had my prescribed medication for four months now as I have no money to buy it.'*

(Anbar IDP in Baghdad)

Many IDPs even lack the financial means for public health care, so must depend on pharmacies for diagnosis and treatment, as well as the purchase of medications.<sup>128</sup> Alternatively, IDPs with extremely limited funds depend entirely on treatment from doctors who volunteer their services to displaced individuals:

*'We go to private volunteer doctors who do not charge us. My son has kidney issues and he is treated for free by a doctor in Najaf because we are IDPs, but I still have to buy all medication from pharmacies.'*

(Ninewa IDP in Kerbala)

The deteriorating quality of service and lack of resources is another barrier to treatment. An IDP expressed his concern:

*'Normally I go to this camp clinic which only provides syrup. Most medicine is expired and they recently threw away some medicine. I have to go to a private doctor but have no money to do that. One of my daughters has been sick with fever, diarrhoea and has been vomiting for seven days, but I cannot afford to take her to a doctor. I do not know what to do or where to go.'*

(Anbar IDP in Baghdad)

IDP camps house clinics equipped with very basic medical instruments, supplied with limited medicines, and are often managed by nurses as opposed to doctors. Due to the restricted services of these clinics, IDPs often seek other alternatives for medical care, particularly when seeking specialist treatment.<sup>129</sup>

*'I borrow money and go to private clinics outside the camp. The so-called clinic in this camp is just a caravan with some medicine, run by a doctor or a nurse who prescribe and supply basic medicine which is in some cases expired. In many other cases, the medicine we need is not available and we have to buy it from private pharmacies outside the camp. So if I have to buy medicines from outside, there is no point in even seeing the camp clinic at all.'*

(Anbar IDP in Baghdad)

Comparatively, some clinics are functioning better than others. The medical clinic of Mariam al-Athra camp, accommodating Christian IDPs from Ninewa, is highly praised for its services:

*'We have a caravan used as a clinic inside this camp. There is a female doctor and a nun from the church. If they do not have the capacity to treat sick people, they give appointments to take those sick to the church medical centre in Palestine Street. The medical centre has specialists and equipment. They also provide transportation for free.'*

(Ninewa IDP in Baghdad)

Some front line services are provided by NGOs. Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) is trying to expand its services across 11 governorates in order to better provide for those IDPs living in the most unstable conditions and often close to the front lines of the conflict. Still, IDPs needing medical care must often travel to reach services. However, those whose journeys cross militarized zones require permits. Meanwhile, hospitals situated within government-controlled zones are now imposing charges on patients for their services. As people are deprived of their livelihoods and work is increasingly scarce, many IDPs have exhausted their savings and, as a result, access to these crucial services is becoming increasingly unattainable.<sup>130</sup>

## IDP well-being

Forty-five per cent of IDPs interviewed for this report suffered from diseases or illnesses as a result of displacement, with those residing in camps indicating a greater vulnerability to health risks. According to the WHO, respiratory infections, acute diarrhoea and skin infestations, including scabies, are the leading causes of morbidity in IDP camps.<sup>131</sup> An IDP from Anbar living in a settlement in Baghdad described his family's medical conditions, 'I have diabetes. My wife has lost her eyesight and has spinal issues. My daughter has psychological trauma. We all have scabies and lice.'

Increased occurrences of skin diseases such as scabies and rashes are reported during the summer due to a combination of issues such as heat, 'lack of water, having no air cooler and the filth in the camp'.<sup>132</sup> Respiratory illnesses resulting from displacement were commonly reported among children, while IDP reports of psychological effects of displacement, such as trauma and anxiety, were prominent.<sup>133</sup>

*'My son has asthma. He did not have asthma before we were displaced. He is 12 years old. We were displaced on 17 February 2014. We moved from one place to another before we ended in this camp. We do not have enough money to take him to the doctor.'*

(Anbar IDP in Baghdad)

Health conditions occurring during flight from area of origin to area of displacement are commonly reported by IDPs, demonstrating the severity of transit conditions as well as highlighting the degree of inaccessibility to health care.

*'I was pregnant when we left Hadith to Baghdad. We spent a week walking in the desert to get to Baghdad and because of our suffering along the way I started bleeding. The hospital refused to admit me at first. Eventually, they finally agreed to treat me. I had to have emergency surgery and I delivered my daughter.'*

(Anbar IDP in Baghdad)

An IDP originating from Anbar stressed the conditions at Bzebez bridge checkpoint as they sought entry into Baghdad: 'My wife and I have started having eye and kidney issues since Bzebez. There

was a lack of drinking water, so we suffered. My wife has lost her eyesight since then.’ A father from Ninewa, displaced to Kerbala, further highlighted how severe the conditions of flight could be:

*‘My children had diarrhoea and they were dehydrated. When travelling to Kerbala from Tal Afar, they took us by buses. I had my daughter sleeping in my lap. I thought she was dead and I started moving her. After a while, she opened her eyes. She was one and a half years old.’*

*(Anbar IDP in Kerbala)*

More extreme cases of flight had resulted in the death of IDPs seeking refuge. One IDP recounted the death of his mother,<sup>134</sup> while another described his wife’s miscarriage of their child.<sup>135</sup>

## Mental health

The deterioration of socioeconomic and living conditions has had a great impact on the psychological well-being of many IDPs. The violence and fear, the incredibly tough conditions and uncertain future people are facing in Iraq, have left many traumatized.<sup>136</sup> While some organizational assistance is available, such as psycho-social education or counselling sessions offered by NGOs, the availability and reach of psycho-social services are minimal compared to the need.

IDPs living in camps expressed feeling humiliated, alienated and forgotten.<sup>137</sup> One Anbar IDP in Baghdad described his circumstances as being ‘like hell’, while another, reflecting on what she had lost in Ninewa, said ‘we left our homes, farms and belongings behind us. Being forced to leave your home is just like being a plant uprooted from the soil.’ The lack of services and facilities has also added to the psychological pressures of displacement.

*‘I am so concerned about meeting the needs of my disabled son. Yesterday, my other sick son said “I would rather die than let you suffer to look after me.” How would a mother feel when her son speaks like that?’*

*(Anbar IDP in Baghdad)*

The cramped living conditions and lack of privacy in displacement settings have meant that IDPs must also adapt to new social structures, which IDPs have reported to be psychologically challenging. One IDP described such living conditions as restrictive, lacking the sense of freedom and belonging which IDPs experienced in their locations of origin.

Thirty-two per cent of IDPs interviewed for this report have been separated from their families as a result of displacement, while some have also lost all contact with members of their family. Family relationships in Iraq can be especially strong and pivotal to the security, economic and emotional well-being of individuals. The separation from even extended family has in many cases had serious psychological implications for IDPs.

*‘When we were in Ramadi, I had my family around me. I felt very safe and secure there. I have not seen my father, brother and sisters since we left. Now, with my husband and daughters, I feel alienated in this camp. I feel like a stranger.’*

*(Anbar IDP in Baghdad)*

The absence of the protection of the family unit has a particularly strong impact on female-headed households, including widows and divorced or unmarried women. These women often endure multi-dimensional challenges of displacement, including a lack of economic and psychological support.

*‘Being a displaced widow, it is very harsh. I am economically impoverished and psychologically destroyed. When I go to the camp clinic, I ask them if they can provide me and my eldest daughter with some psychological treatment.’*

*(Anbar IDP in Baghdad)*

Once the family protection structure is removed, women become drastically more vulnerable to violations of their rights, and fear of this, as well as coping requirements, warrants psychological support.

## Access to education

It is estimated that more than three million school-aged children and adolescents in Iraq are not in education as a result of displacement and ongoing conflict.<sup>138</sup> Interviews with IDPs indicated that those residing in camps were more likely to attend school than those who are not. According to the Ministry of Education, Iraq Education Cluster Partner activities, only 32 per cent of displaced children had had access to any kind of formal education by the end of July 2015. There is a notable disparity in access to education, between those children residing within camps and those who do not, standing at 50 per cent and 30 per cent respectively.<sup>139</sup> UNICEF further estimates that 600,000 displaced children have missed a full scholastic year.<sup>140</sup>

Anbar IDPs in Baghdad reported having up to two-year gaps in their children's schooling while moving from one place to another, before settling in their current area of displacement. Others reported missing entire school terms due to extreme weather conditions such as floods, which forced camp evictions for the duration of the flooding.

IDP access to education is also commonly hindered by the distance of learning facilities from places of residence. IDPs living in remote areas tend to struggle to send their children to schools for reasons of security, money and practicality. IDP families have reported resorting to car-sharing to reduce the cost of long-distance travel, for example, while others have indicated that they cannot afford this at all, thus preventing them from enrolling their children into schools altogether. Children who are compelled to walk long distances to schools or education centres are also adversely affected by weather conditions, which make it difficult or impossible to attend during harsh winters. The unsafe environment in Iraq also makes it particularly challenging for children to reach schools that are not within their vicinity:

*'Due to the security situation, we cannot enrol our children in faraway schools. My children have been out of school for six months now. Before this, they also lost a year of education due to displacement.'*

(Anbar IDP in Baghdad)

Those who are absent from school for significant periods of time are not provided with alternative temporary education and must instead depend on teaching efforts by family members to maintain a basic level of learning. However, this is not always achievable for families given the conditions of displacement or within the ability of relatives. Children with illiterate parents, for example, are less likely to obtain such home tutoring.

*'I have two children in primary school, but I cannot afford to send my third child to school. She should be in Year 1 now. When I help my other two children with their studies, I sometimes teach my daughter too.'*

(Anbar IDP in Baghdad)

In some cases, insufficient income, or a complete lack of income, has compelled families to withdraw their children from education to undertake employment or even marry, often before the age of 15, as they are simply not able to afford the cost of living.<sup>141</sup> As of June 2016, it is estimated that as many as 575,000 children in Iraq are at work instead of in education, while as many as 975,000 marriages of under-age girls have been recorded. Both figures are double those in 1990.<sup>142</sup>

The quality of education is another challenge for IDPs. Teaching conditions within settings such as tents and caravans are not considered to be conducive to adequate standards of learning. Similarly, displaced children lack stability at home, preventing them from directing attention to studies.

*'My children attend a caravan school inside the camp. The teachers are IDPs and they are MoE [Ministry of Education] employees. However, they live in the same difficult conditions that we do. Therefore, they cannot deliver high quality education.'*

(Anbar IDP in Baghdad)

In host areas of Iraq, negative personal and institutional attitudes towards IDPs have been reported in the educational system. Tensions between host communities and IDPs have in some cases discouraged parents from enrolling their children in schools in areas of displacement:

*'When we moved to this camp, I enrolled my kids in a school nearby. The school head-teacher did not receive them well and she was so rude and discriminatory to the internally displaced children. She separated the pre-enrolled Baghdad pupils from the IDP students from Anbar. She told the Baghdad children not to mix with our children. She told the students that IDP children live in camps, have lice, are not clean and are impolite. As a result, some parents kept their children at home and some moved their children to other schools. I have not enrolled my children in any school since then.'*

*(Anbar IDP in Baghdad)*

Of course, the issues surrounding children's access to education are not limited to tensions between IDPs and host communities. The fact is that many schools have been rendered unusable for education purposes, as many schools are either occupied by displaced families as places of shelter, or by military personnel, or have suffered severe damage. Indeed, as many as 135 UN-verified attacks have been carried out on educational facilities and staff since 2014.<sup>143</sup> According to UNICEF figures, around one in five schools have been closed as a result of the conflict.<sup>144</sup> Ongoing issues with access and quality of learning prolongs children's vulnerability and exposes them to the risk of turning to negative coping mechanisms.

## People with disabilities

Article 32 of Iraq's Constitution states: 'The State shall care for the handicapped and those with special needs, and shall ensure their rehabilitation in order to reintegrate them into society and this shall be regulated by the law.' In 2013, Iraq took positive steps to secure the rights of people with disabilities (PWDs) through the ratification of the Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (CRPD). Earlier that year, the Iraqi parliament passed the Law for the Care of Persons with Disabilities and Special Needs, followed in February 2014 by the Social Protection Act. Both of these laws protect cash transfer benefits and specialized services entitlements of vulnerable Iraqis living below the poverty line – of which PWDs are a specific target group – from the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MOLSA).<sup>145</sup>

If PWDs are victims of terrorist attacks or military operations they may also be entitled to compensation, like other Iraqis. However, many PWDs are not fully aware of their rights or face many obstacles in accessing basic welfare payments, particularly if unaccompanied.<sup>146</sup> The bureaucratic processes that need to be surmounted in order to access this aid are many and varied. For example, procedures differ greatly depending on the type of disability. In addition to which, compared to those in the KR-I claiming through the KRG's MOLSA, those residing in central and southern Iraq who claim through the GoI have a much higher 'impairment eligibility ratio', lower pension rate and if they are in gainful employment are disqualified from receiving a pension. However, whether applying to the GoI or the KRG, it is necessary to have a national identity card, residency card, citizenship certificate and ration card.<sup>147</sup> Of course, this is particularly difficult to fulfil for internally displaced PWDs.

Furthermore, the applicant is required to undergo a medical examination, which they themselves must pay for if they do not already possess an appropriate medical report. If the case needs reparatory surgery, it must be carried out before being eligible for compensation.<sup>148</sup> IDPs who have been injured by the conflict or have developed a disability as a result of displacement may find such hurdles particularly challenging.

Even where application criteria can be met, the applicant must await the decision of MOLSA – which at times can take up to two months, post-submission of documents and medical reports – before they are required to go to the Social Security Office to validate the application as a method of fraud prevention, prior to a last meeting to finalize proceedings. Only once this process is completed will the beneficiary receive their Electronic Benefits Transfer card, which three months later begins to release funds.<sup>149</sup> Disabled women and girls are not entitled to social security payments if they are married or if their father is alive.<sup>150</sup>

In Iraq's internal displacement crisis, barriers to PWDs' access to socio-economic life have been exacerbated, and the minimal physical, social and economic support structures once available to them have now been disrupted or have collapsed altogether, exposing people with disabilities to ex-

treme vulnerabilities. The most obvious of these is the loss of adequate shelter for IDPs with severe mobility impediments:

*'A disabled person cannot live in a tent. I cannot move my wheelchair inside the tent because of the soil ground. I need two people to help me enter and exit the tent as there is no ramp. We need, at least, a caravan or places built to accommodate disabled people and their families.'*

*(Anbar IDP in Baghdad)*

The barriers to PWDs' well-being in displacement are not only administrative or physical, but also social, with heavy stigmas attached to disability. As a result, people with disabilities suffer job loss, restricted access to education, poorer health, fewer economic opportunities and increased poverty rates, as well as marginalization from social and political participation.<sup>151</sup>

*'I am a disabled person and have no work. I used to be an ironsmith and was self-sufficient. Since I arrived here I have had no job. I thank the good people who are helping us.'*

*(Anbar IDP in Baghdad)*

Despite legislation that theoretically protects the rights of PWDs,<sup>152</sup> they still face discrimination in accessing services and facilities to address medical or rehabilitative needs. Seventy-three per cent of IDPs with disabilities interviewed for this report have not been provided with any form of services since their displacement, while 83 per cent of those who had been provided with services believed them to be highly inadequate.

*'I was injured by a mortar shell when I served in Sayed Gharib in Balad. I had some treatment in hospital but since I was displaced, I have not received any medical care.'*

*(Ninewa IDP in Baghdad)*

Due to disabled women being subject to particularly strong stigmatization and marginalization in Iraq, female PWDs are socially excluded to a far greater extent. While – like their male counterparts – they have limited access to livelihood opportunities and education, they are also more vulnerable

to gender-based violence and exploitation compared to women without disabilities.<sup>153</sup> As a result, many internally displaced women with disabilities often confront several layers of discrimination or challenges that pertain to their identity, status and circumstance.

Among IDPs interviewed for this report, one in every five had a physical or mental disability. This large proportion points to the existence of a subgroup within the IDP community, prone to heightened vulnerability and multiple discrimination. This vulnerability is evidenced in the death rate among the disabled population, which is an alarming two to four times higher than that of the population without disabilities.<sup>154</sup>

## IDP public participation

The importance of civil and political participation as part of a sustainable peace-building process in Iraq is widely recognized by the European Union<sup>155</sup> and other organizations. Despite efforts by the EU and many NGOs to support public participation, research interviews with internally displaced people indicated that a mere 17 per cent of IDPs participate in civil society or political activities.<sup>156</sup> The low rates of civil and political participation may be, in part, attributed to lack of opportunities, but might also be a result of IDPs giving greater priority to their immediate security and socio-economic needs, or indeed to perceived or actual exclusion by host communities.

Trends in participation suggested that IDPs originating from Anbar undertook fewer participatory activities than those originating from Ninewa. Yet even so, only 30 per cent of the Ninewa IDPs interviewed reported participating in political or civil life, with IDPs displaced from the area to Kerbala being the most active.<sup>157</sup>

IDPs in Kerbala and Najaf reported volunteering during religious ceremonies and occasions to assist in distributing provisions to IDPs from other governorates.<sup>158</sup> Many IDPs also undertake voluntary or humanitarian work within displacement settlements:

*'This camp has four sections. I am volunteering to be responsible for this section C. I am one of the volunteers who do night patrols to secure the section. As a result of heavy rainfall that flooded the camp, people left their tents and the camp. I evacuated my family and came back to work with another volunteer for nine days to remove the water and maintain the tents.'*

*(Anbar IDP in Baghdad)*

Despite the low levels of reported public participation – and the multiple obstacles facing IDPs – it is clear that many displaced people in Iraq are seeking to take responsibility not only for the survival of their own families but also for the well-being of their fellow IDPs.



## Recommendations

### **To the Government of Iraq and the Kurdistan Regional Government**

- Cease any discriminatory measures hindering IDPs' freedom of movement and ensure that entry procedures at governorate borders are reasonable, non-discriminatory and enable IDPs at risk to enter.
- Allow, on an emergency basis, for identity documents and other credentials to be issued for displaced persons in their current governorate of residence. IDP documentation/registration procedures should not discriminate on ground of religion or ethnicity and should be realistically achievable for IDPs.
- Remove gender discrimination from IDP registration procedures, and recognize the right of women to register documents for their children on an equal basis with men.
- Intensify efforts and resources to meet the humanitarian needs of IDPs, including access to shelter, food and non-food aid, education and health care. This should include specific provision for displaced women and for persons with disabilities. Commit resources to supporting durable solutions for IDPs, including livelihood initiatives.
- Initiate gender-sensitive programmes to support female IDPs, including maternal health facilities, psycho-social and other specialized services to women and to victims of sexual violence.
- Ensure that education is an immediate priority for school-age children who have been internally displaced.
- Plan and coordinate education campaigns on the risk from ERW and IEDs with local and international NGOs before IDPs return to their places of origin.
- Develop a strategy for supporting sustainable returns and/or integration of IDPs, including infrastructure recovery and community-based reconciliation.
- Allow for the free movement of food and other assistance to populations in areas retaken from ISIS.
- Actively suppress revenge attacks and collective punishments inflicted by ISF and allied militias or the Kurdish Peshmerga on IDPs or communities perceived to have supported ISIS, and ensure that the perpetrators of any such attacks are held accountable.
- Cease arbitrary and discriminatory security procedures against those fleeing violence in recaptured areas, including arbitrary detention and mistreatment.
- Adhere at all times to obligations under international human rights law and international humanitarian law, including the duty to protect IDPs and other civilians, and those who are hors de combat.

## **To the international community**

- Provide urgent funding to UN and other international agencies working with the Iraqi authorities to meet the funding gap regarding the humanitarian needs of IDPs.
- Work with the Iraqi authorities to support and build the capacity of local structures in retaken areas to assist in resuming local services and rebuilding damaged infrastructure.
- Provide technical support for mine clearance and risk education campaigns to protect civilians from exposure to the threats of ERW and IEDs upon their return.
- In the context of any international military cooperation offered to the GoI or the KRG, ensure that both international and Iraqi forces adhere at all times to international humanitarian law and international human rights law.

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# Humanitarian challenges in Iraq's displacement crisis

## In brief

There are currently more than four million internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Iraq. Many remain in a state of profound insecurity, at risk of arbitrary detention or attack not only from the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) but also from Iraqi Security Forces, Shi'a militias, Kurdish forces and other actors. As significant numbers of IDPs try to return to their areas of origin, fresh waves of displacement from Mosul and elsewhere are taking place.

IDPs continue to face harsh and even life-threatening conditions as Iraq's conflict continues. Many are without access to adequate food, shelter and essential services such as health care, water and sanitation, particularly those trapped in remote or conflict-affected areas. Women, children and persons with disabilities are especially vulnerable. Education remains inaccessible or unaffordable for many, with an estimated three million children out of school as a result of conflict and displacement.

While authorities have struggled to provide adequate protection and assistance to a large number of IDPs, their vulnerability is further exacerbated by restrictions on freedom of movement imposed by Iraqi and Kurdish security forces. IDPs routinely suffer discrimination on the basis of their ethnic or religious identity. Sunni IDPs, for example, are frequently denied entry to Baghdad on the assumption that their numbers may include ISIS sympathizers.

Returnees face considerable risks as numerous homes and neighbourhoods have been booby trapped by retreating ISIS fighters or still contain explosive remnants of war (ERW). Despite these dangerous conditions, authorities are encouraging IDPs to return without raising adequate awareness about the potential threats or ways to minimize them. As a result, deaths and injuries have already been reported among returning IDPs.

## This report recommends:

- The Government of Iraq (GoI) and the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) should remove barriers to IDPs accessing services including by allowing, on an emergency basis, for identity documents to be issued to IDPs in their current governorate of residence and ensuring that documentation and registration procedures do not discriminate on grounds of religion, ethnicity or gender.
- Iraqi authorities and international donors should prioritise resources to meet the humanitarian needs of IDPs, including access to shelter, food and non-food aid, and health care. This should include specific provision for displaced women and for persons with disabilities. Education should be an immediate priority for school-age children who have been internally displaced.
- International agencies should also work with the Iraqi authorities to support the rebuilding of damaged infrastructure and the resumption of local services in areas retaken from ISIS; and provide technical support for mine clearance and risk education campaigns to protect civilians from exposure to the threats of explosive remnants of war upon their return.

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