



RETURNS WORKING GROUP (RWG)

A faint, light blue outline map of Iraq is visible in the background of the lower half of the page, showing the country's borders and internal regional divisions.

Annual Progress Report:
January- December 2018

ABOUT RWG

The Returns Working Group (RWG) Iraq is an operational and multi- stakeholder platform on returns, which was established in line with Strategic Objective 3 of the 2016 Iraq HRP “to support voluntary, safe and dignified return” of IDPs; so as to monitor and report on conditions in return areas, and determine to what extent durable solutions have been achieved- or progress made- for returnees. The key objective of the group is to establish coherence of information, data and analysis, strengthen coordination and advocacy, give guidance on activities related to key areas, and enhance complementary action among its partners, with the overall goal of supporting and reinforcing the national response to Iraq’s coming reintegration challenge.

The Working Group is chaired by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and co-chaired by Danish Refugee Council (DRC). The stakeholders engaged include UN Agencies (working on humanitarian and recovery portfolios), Clusters, ICRC, INGOs and National NGOs. In addition, the Ministry of Migration and Displacement (MOMD), donors and multilateral institutions attend the RWG meetings. The RWG feeds into discussions of the Inter- Cluster Coordination Group (ICCG) and Humanitarian Country Team (HCT), and ad hoc forums like Governorate Return Committees (GRCs) at governorate level.

RWG has established a strong partnership with Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) and REACH for more in depth assessment and analysis of areas of return and no-return; and collaborates with Recovery, Resilience and Reconstruction platform led by UN Habitat and Ministry of Planning for advocacy on priority areas. From the government side, the RWG liaises and coordinates directly with Ministry of Migration and Displacement (MOMD) as well as key ministries working on returns.

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SUMMARY OF ACHIEVEMENTS

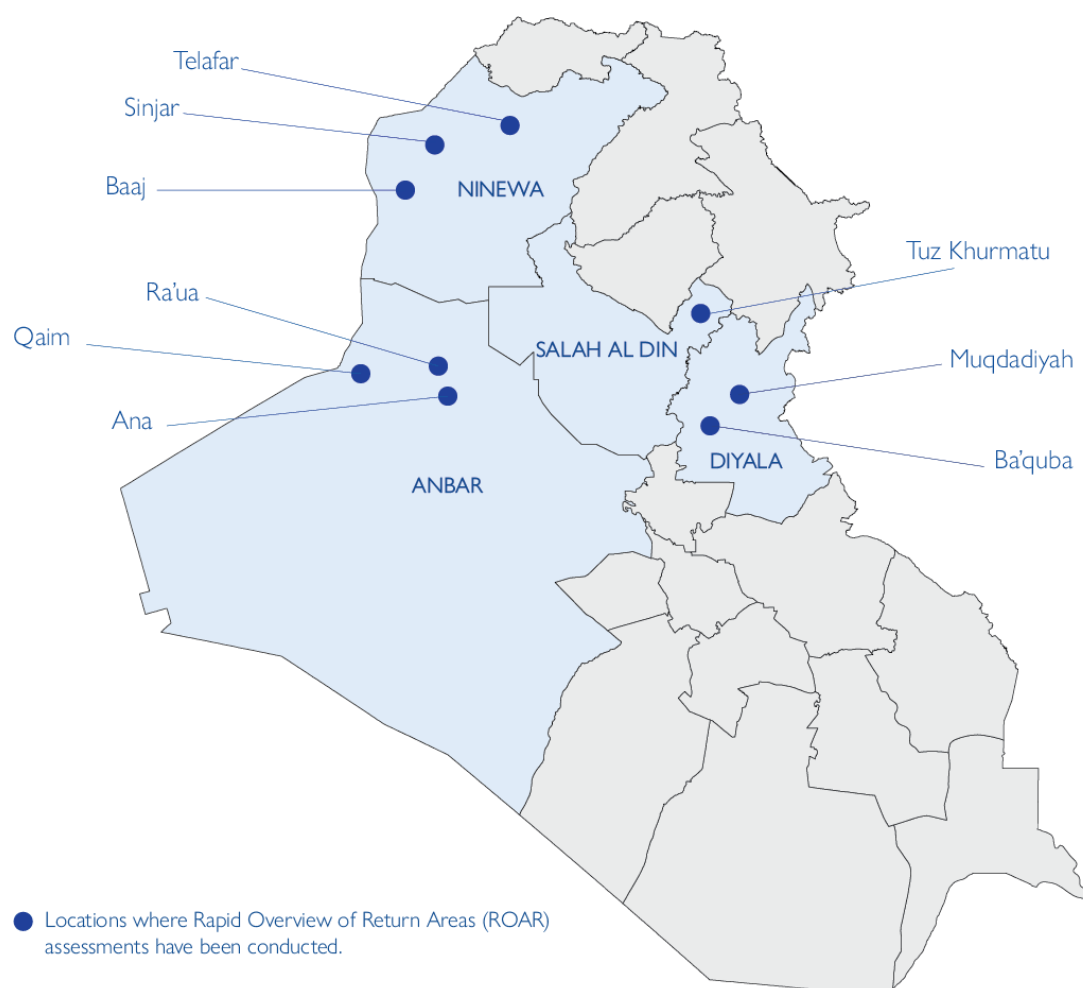
- **Return assessments:** Conducted a total of 8 Rapid Overviews of Areas of Return (ROARs) in conjunction with REACH, focusing on Ninewa, Anbar, Diyala and Salah al Din, as well as a comparative report for Ninewa. In addition, RWG together with REACH conducted a mass communication assessment across Northern Iraq (Erbil, Dahuk, Sulaymaniyah, Ninewa) to better understand how IDP households inform their decision to move and how they are informed about the situation in their areas of origin.
- **Support to Government:** RWG- Ministry of Migration and Displacement (MOMD) partnership: Established relationship with MOMD in March 2018 as the main government counterpart to RWG, which included: the appointment of a focal point from MOMD to RWG and secondment of a staff member from RWG to MOMD. RWG also established a long- term partnership agreement with MOMD in August 2018 and conducted a workshop in September 2018 in Baghdad, that included IOM, RWG and MOMD officers and officials.
- **Support to Governorate Return Committees (GRCs):** RWG's contribution to the GRC process included: 1) Participation in GRC preparatory meetings, 2) Providing input prior to GRC meetings on conditions in areas of return/ origin, 3) Conducted a session on durable solutions at the national GRC workshop held in Baghdad in May 2018, which was organized by OCHA and attended by humanitarian organizations and clusters.
- **Research:** IOM DTM Iraq, RWG, and Social Inquiry commissioned a joint study, "Reasons to Remain: Categorizing Protracted Displacement in Iraq." The study aimed to better understand the reasons that may lead to protracted displacement.
- **Communicating with Communities (CwC):** Developed together with the CwC taskforce of the protection cluster, the "Know Before you go (KBYG) "campaign, to inform IDPs on the various factors they should consider before returning.
- **Advocacy:** RWG, IOM and OCHA commissioned a study focusing on areas of no return to find out the reasons for non- return in specific locations. Two field missions were conducted to Babylon (Jurf al Sakhr) and Diyala (Muqdadiyah) to get in- depth information for reasons of non- return. In addition, Key Return Issues were developed as part of advocacy to donors and key partners in the international community, focusing on major return issues being faced across the country- that have a direct or indirect impact on the return process.
- **Return index:** IOM DTM, the Returns Working Group (RWG) and Social Inquiry developed the Return Index, which is a tool designed to measure the quality of conditions in the more than 1,400 return areas across Iraq. The first return index report was released in October 2018. In addition, DTM, RWG and Social Inquiry conducted a workshop in August 2018 for key partners working in return areas- to further elaborate on the methodology of the return index.; and presented governorate level presentations of the return index at various governorates at the request of OCHA.
- **Return trends:** RWG developed a comparative return trends analysis in March 2018 – covering the period April 2015 to February 2018, which provided an overview of the main analysis and trends since returns were first recorded at national and governorate level (main governorates of returns)- covering the period April 2015 to February 2018.
- **Returns dashboard:** RWG together with DTM developed a returns dashboard in August 2018, which is an interactive dashboard that provides up to date information on the return numbers and return rate, from governorate, district, sub- district and location level.
- **Monthly Coordination Meetings:** Conducted 12 monthly coordination meetings in 2018 which were widely attended by humanitarian, development, Government and Donor representatives.
- **Development of Secondary Displacement Definition:** At the request of the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT), RWG together with OCHA/ Inter- Cluster Coordination Group (ICCG), IOM DTM, CCCM and Protection Cluster, were tasked to develop the definition of secondary displacement in the Iraqi context, and came up with 4 different scenarios that can be considered as secondary displacement- which was shared with the wider international community for data collection and recording purposes.
- **Donor liaison and meetings:** A number of meetings were held with donors (DFID, PRM, OFDA, etc.) to brief them on various return issues and current return status.
- **Partnerships and coordination with UN, NGOs and Clusters:** Established relationships with UNAMI Joint Analysis Unit (JAU), Advocacy Working Group, Anbar Access Working Group, OCHA, DTM, REACH, Assessment Working Group (AWG), NGO Early Recovery Forum (NERF), clusters etc., to discuss modalities of information sharing and further advocacy measures at national and field level.
- **Field missions:** RWG further participated and provided input to the Inter- Action Protection mission to Iraq in July 2018., whose main purpose was to research the underlying causes and main protection risks facing the Iraqi population.

A. STRATEGIC AND OPERATIONAL

1. Return Assessments

i) Rapid overview of areas of return (ROAR)

RWG in collaboration with REACH launched a Rapid Overview of Areas of Return (ROAR) assessments in return areas to inform recovery interventions. The ROAR assessment looks at the motivations behind return, along with the current situation related to protection issues, livelihoods and the provision of services to identify priority areas of return based on needs. A total of **8 ROARs were completed in 2018** focusing on Ninewa (Telafar, Baaj and Sinjar), Anbar (Ana, Qaim, Ra'ua and surrounding areas), Diyala (Muqdadiyah and Ba'quba) and Salah al Din (Tuz Khurmatu), as well as a comparative report for Ninewa.



Furthermore, given the sensitivities in some areas, especially with regards to blocked returns, tribal affiliations and presence of extremist groups as well as lack of governance, limited editions of the ROARs were made separately for Sinjar, Muqdadiyah and Tuz Khurmatu, which highlighted the key safety and security concerns in these areas that impede/ affect return.

ii) Mass communication assessments

RWG in conjunction with REACH conducted a mass communication assessment in May 2018, to better understand how IDP households inform their decision to move and how they are aware/ informed about the situation in their areas of origin. These assessments were conducted for both in-camp and out-of-camp IDPs across four governorates of Northern Iraq (Erbil, Dahuk, Sulaymaniyah, Ninewa), and the findings were based on 2,003 household surveys.

The key findings from the assessments showed that:

- IDP households mostly communicate with friends and family in the AoO, over the phone or face to face, as their main means of getting information about the area of origin.
- The main returns-related topics discussed were safety and security, livelihoods opportunities, and status of housing in the areas of origin (AoO).
- The large majority in all four governorates had not received returns-related information from humanitarian actors, and most frequently cited the national authority as their least trusted source of information.

2. Support to Government

i) RWG- MOMD partnership

- Established relationship with Ministry of Migration and Displacement (MOMD) in March 2018 as the main government counterpart to RWG, which included:
 - a) The **appointment of a focal point from MOMD to RWG**- the Head of the Returns Department, to enhance collaboration and engagement with RWG, as well as attend RWG meetings on a monthly basis;
 - b) **Seconded a staff member from RWG to MOMD** to work on return related issues as well as liaison and coordination, and MOMD allocated an office in MOMD HQ in Baghdad to the seconded staff in this regard.
- **Established a long- term partnership agreement** with MOMD in August 2018 through a memorandum, which set to affirm the collaboration between IOM and MOMD in working towards addressing the needs of IDPs and returnees.



RWG-IOM-MOMD workshop in Baghdad, September 2018.

- **Conducted a 2- day workshop** in September 2018 in Baghdad, that included IOM, RWG and MOMD officers from the branches department covering both officials from the MOMD HQ, as well as MOMD branches in the main return governorates. The workshop aimed to expand on the memorandum between IOM and MOMD, and provided a platform for exchange of information and plans regarding protracted displacement, challenges in return areas, and reconciliation of MOMD and DTM numbers.
- **Contributed to the protracted displacement study** and supported to define categories of protracted displacement, as well as how to advance the durable solutions agenda.

ii) Governorate Return Committees (GRCs)

The Governorate Return Committees (GRCs) were created in 2018 under the auspices of the Government of Iraq's Crisis Cell and convened by the Deputy Governor, to develop and oversee implementation of a plan for camp closures and consolidation in the governorates, and subsequently the impact on the return process. The GRCs include at least four representatives from humanitarian organizations including two representatives from UN agencies and two from NGOs, and coordinated by JCMC- to publicize the schedule of all camps closures from each Governorate to ensure return movements are synchronized across governorates.

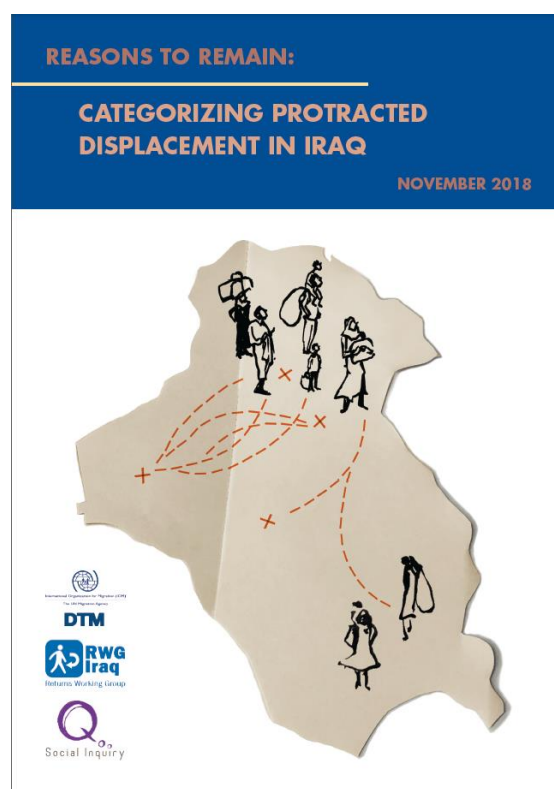
RWG's contribution to the GRC process included:

- Participation in GRC preparatory meetings, along with representatives of the GRCs humanitarian organizations, CCCM and Protection cluster.
- Providing input prior to GRC meetings on conditions in areas of return/ origin, to help with the decision making process of the GRCs prior to considering the closure/ consolidation of certain camps.
- Conducted a session on durable solutions at the national GRC workshop held in Baghdad in May 2018, which was organized by OCHA and attended by humanitarian organizations and clusters. The purpose of the national workshop was: 1) to ensure that the NGO and UN members of the GRCs proceed with a common understanding and voice, representing the whole humanitarian community, 2) to ensure that members have clear understanding of the guidance materials approved by the HCT and that should be used, among others, for decision making and 3) to ensure a common understanding that the humanitarian actors and government counterparts need to move from a discussion of camp consolidation and closure to returns in general, without prompting premature returns. RWG further provided inputs on durable solutions to provide a roadmap to the GRC process.

3. Research

i) Reasons to remain: Categorizing protracted displacement in Iraq

With the reduced rate of returns towards the end of 2018 and with nearly 1.8 million people remaining in displacement, IOM DTM Iraq, RWG, and Social Inquiry commissioned a joint study, "Reasons to Remain: Categorizing Protracted Displacement in Iraq." This study aimed to better understand the reasons that may lead to protracted displacement. The report was the first step in a process to provide a comprehensive, geography-based analysis of remaining IDPs and obstacles to return, and explored in more detail the factors and main categories that may lead to prolonged periods of displacement. These categories include obstacles related to housing, livelihoods and basic services, social cohesion, security and mental health issues, with destruction of houses in areas of origin being the most prevalent self-reported reason for displacement.



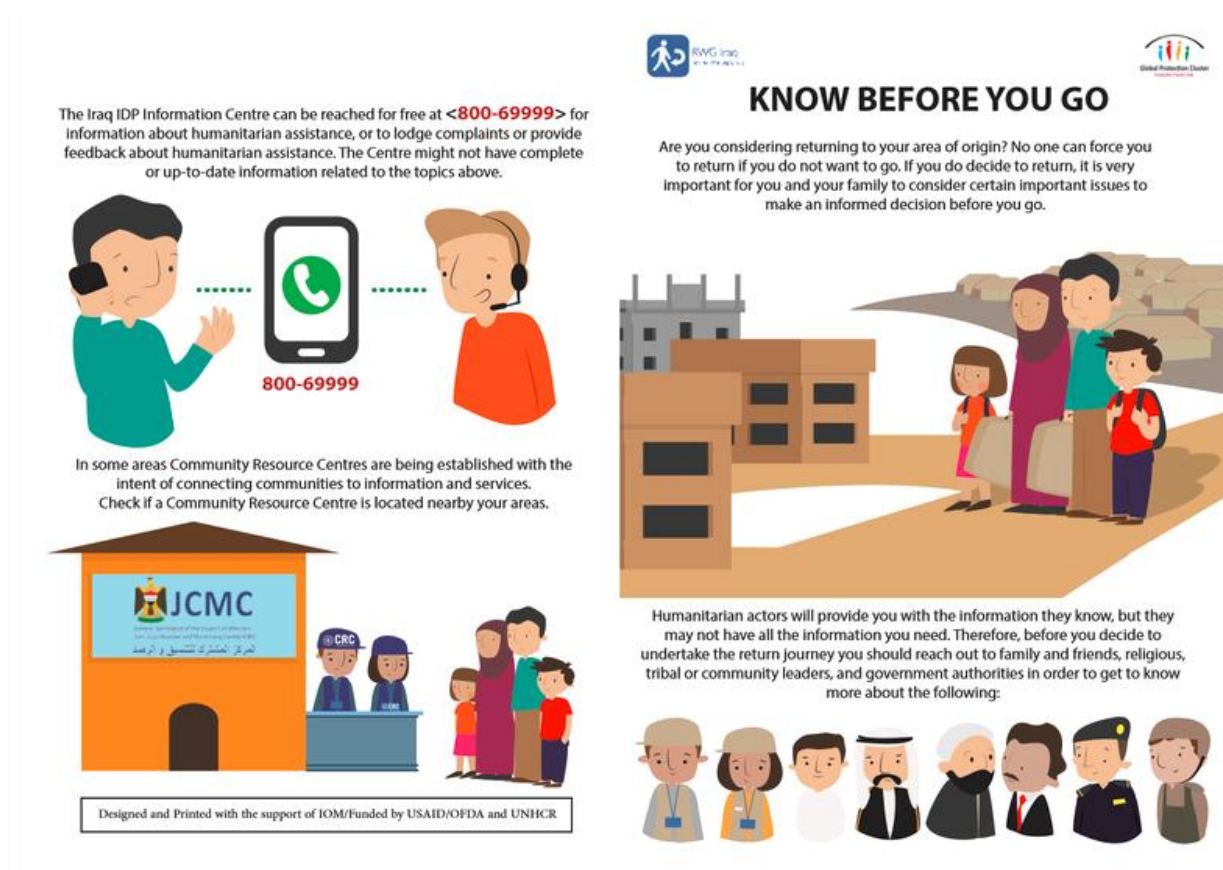
B. TECHNICAL GUIDANCE

1. Communication with Communities Materials: 'Know Before You Go' Campaign

The Know Before you go (KBYG) campaign was a joint initiative between the Returns Working Group (RWG) and Communication with Communities (CwC) Task Force of the National Protection Cluster (NPC), and based on the principle that IDPs have and will continue to use their existing social networks to gather information on conditions in their areas of origin. In addition, humanitarian partners do not always possess accurate and up-to-date information on conditions in areas of origin, as such information is constantly changing. Disseminating inaccurate and outdated information – that can influence IDPs' decision-making on when and whether to return – has the potential to do more harm than good.

As a result, the KBYG was developed to encourage partners working in camps or informal settlements, to use the messaging materials as points of engagement with IDP communities, and to inform them on the various factors they should consider before returning. The KBYG messages included graphic flyers designed in both English and Arabic, as well as a guidance note developed to guide partners on how to use and disseminate the KBYG materials.

The content of the KBYG messages was tested in the camps among IDPs, and the feedback received from the beneficiaries was incorporated in the final version of the messages. CwC taskforce rolled out a number of training of trainers (ToTs) for Protection, CCCM and RWG partners in the main governorates of return. The KBYG was designed to be used across Iraq and are thus not governorate-specific.



The Iraq IDP Information Centre can be reached for free at 800-69999 for information about humanitarian assistance, or to lodge complaints or provide feedback about humanitarian assistance. The Centre might not have complete or up-to-date information related to the topics above.

In some areas Community Resource Centres are being established with the intent of connecting communities to information and services. Check if a Community Resource Centre is located nearby your areas.

Humanitarian actors will provide you with the information they know, but they may not have all the information you need. Therefore, before you decide to undertake the return journey you should reach out to family and friends, religious, tribal or community leaders, and government authorities in order to get to know more about the following:

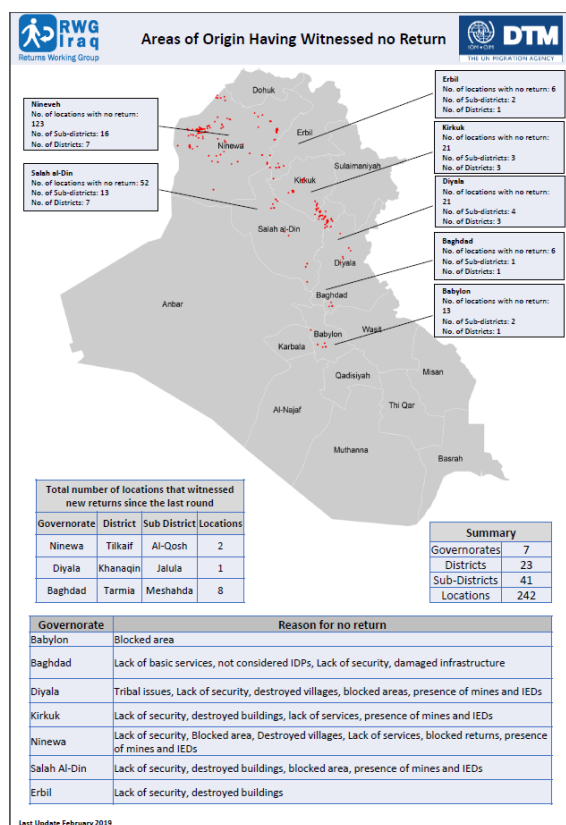
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2. Advocacy Notes

i) Areas of no Return

RWG, IOM and OCHA commissioned a study focusing on areas of no return to find out the reasons for non- return in specific locations, more than a year after full liberation was declared across Iraq in December 2017. As of December 2018, **there were 242 locations which had not witnessed any returns, across 23 districts in 7 governorates.** The main objective of the study was to raise advocacy on specific locations that have witnessed zero returns, as well as to determine where these populations are still displaced, and whether they choose to integrate where they are currently, or intend to return in the long- term. The studies further provide key recommendations to tailor assistance and propose relevant durable solutions to the affected populations.

By the end of December 2018, 2 studies were conducted to Babylon- which is the only governorate to have witnessed no returns, and Muqdadiah district in Diyala. Data was collected through primary data collection through field visits, which included face to face interviews with IDPs, focus group discussions and interviews with key informants, as well as secondary data collection building on existing data in these areas.



The main reasons for non- return in Babylon (Jurf al Sakhr and Iskandria) are related to blocked returns- mainly political reasons. The perception among the Sunni community from the area is that blocked returns are related to a will to change the ethno-religious demographics of the district, to suit the provincial Shiite majority. There have been numerous attempts by Sunni politicians to intervene for Sunni residents to return, as well as mediation efforts with community members to no avail.

In Muqdadiah (Toakel and Al Khaylania villages)- Diyala Governorate, the key factors contributing to lack of returns is the lack of basic services and adequately functioning governance structures, destroyed houses, tribal disputes, perceived affiliation with extremist groups, presence of improvised explosive devices in private properties as well as lack of farming land. There have been cases of secondary displacement attributed to house damage, insecurity and lack of services (schools, health centers) in some locations, as well as insecurity.

The Babylon and Muqdadiah reports have been finalized and disseminated to RWG partners, advocacy working group as well as the Inter Cluster Coordination Group (ICCG) and OCHA for wider advocacy. In addition, a map with infographic was produced to provide a snapshot of the areas which have witnessed no returns.

ii) Key return issues

As part of advocacy to donors and key partners in the international community, key messages were developed on return issues being faced across the country- that have a direct or indirect impact on the return process. The key messages note developed focused on issues related to lack of transportation for returnee belongings/ household effects, secondary displacement and unsustainability of returns, camp consolidation and phase out process, protracted displacement, reconciliation and tribal issues, minority groups, security actors in the areas of return, and restitution and compensation processes. These key messages help to advocate to relevant partners the existing gaps and measures that need to be put in place, in order to facilitate returns.

3. Return Index

i) [Return index report round 1](#)

IOM DTM, the Returns Working Group (RWG) and Social Inquiry developed the Return Index, which is a tool designed to measure the quality of conditions in the more than 1,400 return areas across Iraq. The tool uses two sets of questions that assess: a) livelihoods, basic needs and access to services and b) social cohesion and perception of safety, to generate an overall score on the quality of returns at location level (i.e. an individual village, town, neighbourhood, etc). Using this score, locations are classified into four categories that estimate the severity of conditions: 'Very high', 'High', 'Medium' and 'Low'. This operationally-relevant data can be used by humanitarian, recovery and stabilization actors to support data-driven programming and prioritizing vulnerable areas.

The first return index report was released in October 2018, and identified 52 locations, home to more than 7,800 returnee families, as having 'very high' severity conditions while another 238 locations with 'high' severity conditions host an estimated 65,906 returnee families.

ii) [Presentation of return index at governorate level](#)

Following the development of the return index, OCHA requested RWG to present and provide an overview of the tool at the governorate level. The presentations were made in Anbar, Ninewa and Salah al Din, whereby feedback on the tool was received, and incorporated into the subsequent rounds of data collection. In addition, governorate analysis findings of the return index were developed for the specific governorates, to demonstrate the conditions of the areas of return in respective districts based on severity level.

iii) [Methodology session of the return index](#)

To enable partners understand the internal calculations (regressions, weights and scores) that define how the return index is collected and computed, DTM, RWG and Social Inquiry conducted a workshop in August 2018 for key partners working in return areas- to further elaborate on the methodology of the return index. The methodology session further aimed to provide a deeper understanding on the designing and functioning of the return index, and how the severity categories are determined.



C. INFORMATION

1. Return Trends Analysis

RWG developed a comparative return trends analysis in March 2018, which provided an overview of the main analysis and trends since returns were first recorded at national and governorate level (main governorates of returns)- covering the period April 2015 to February 2018. The trends analysis mainly highlighted, at national level- the governorates with the highest returnees and IDPs; governorates with the highest rate of return compared to initial displacement at the beginning of the crisis; governorates which have witnessed no returns as well as those with full/ 100% returns; total return rate since the beginning of the crisis and when the number of returnees surpassed the number of IDPs; no. of districts and locations where IDPs and returnees were spread across Iraq; as well as as returnees in critical shelter and the intentions to return. This further included governorate level analysis for 7 return governorates, i.e. Anbar, Ninewa, Salah al Din, Kirkuk, Diyala, Erbil and Dohuk, including when returns started in the respective governorates- as well as the return trends per each governorate.

2. Return Dashboard

DTM together with the RWG developed a returns dashboard in August 2018, which is basically an interactive dashboard that provides up to date information on the return numbers and return rate, from governorate, district, sub- district and location level. The return dashboard further enlists the locations which have not witnessed returns, as well as the return flows, return timeline, return trends and different shelter categories for returnees. The dashboard is available both on the DTM and RWG websites.



3. Information Management Framework

An information management (IM) Framework was developed to provide information to support partners to deliver principled, timely and comprehensive assistance in areas associated with IDP return. The IM framework encourages regular and systematic collection of data relevant to returns and establishes a common approach of sharing information among RWG members and humanitarian and development partners working on returns. The three main products (Strategic and Operational, Technical Guidance, Information/Coordination) have been addressed and outlined throughout this report.

D. COORDINATION AND LIAISON

1. Monthly Coordination Meetings

Conducted 12 monthly coordination meetings in 2018 which were widely attended by humanitarian, development, Government and Donor representatives. Key topics discussed and covered during the meetings included; the overall returnee status from the returns dashboard, sequenced camp life cycle process and return packages, updates from the IDP call centre, Community Resource Centres (CRCs), assessments (rapid return area assessments, DTM Integrated location assessments (ILA), Multi- Cluster Needs assessment (MCNA), areas of no return, mass communication assessments) intention surveys, updates on the Governorate returns committees (GRCs), Government response and assistance to IDPs and returnees by MOMD, Return Index updates, stabilization projects by recovery and resilience actors, secondary displacement, Humanitarian Needs Overview (HNO) and Humanitarian Response Plans (HRP) 2019, protracted displacement, Iraq Innovation Lab, reconciliation challenges for returnees and returns monitoring.

2. Development of Secondary Displacement Definition

Given the increasing rate of unsustainable returns and secondary displacement witnessed across Iraq, the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) requested IOM/ RWG to provide an overview of the secondary displacement caseload, and RWG gave a presentation at the HCT in May 2018. Following this meeting, the Humanitarian Coordinator (HC) tasked the Inter- Cluster Coordination Group (ICCG) work on a definition and harmonized data collection methodology for secondary displacement, and it was agreed to form a small group of interested ICCG members to work on the definition and data collection tools. The group composed of OCHA, IOM DTM, RWG and Protection Cluster, and came up with 4 different scenarios that can be considered as secondary displacement- with feedback from other clusters, and this was shared with the wider international community for data collection and recording purposes.

3. Partnerships and Liaison

i) Donor Liaison and meetings

A number of meetings were held with donors to brief on various return issues and current return status. Three meetings were held with US (OFDA and PRM) in January, February and May 2018 to discuss existing data on returns, return package status and caseload targeted- as well as the challenges raised by the clusters for the implementation of the return package, Governorate return committees (GRCs), cash and food assistance for returnees and lack of financial means to access basic services, most vulnerable populations, secondary displacement and return intentions. Likewise, two meetings were held with DFID in February and June 2018, to brief on the main return challenges linked to elections and camp consolidation and closure, obstacles to return for minority groups, general return trends, as well as RWG priorities for 2018.

ii) Partnerships and coordination with UN, NGOs and Clusters

RWG established relationships with various partners such as with the UNAMI Joint Analysis Unit (JAU), as well as the Advocacy Working Group and Anbar Access working group, to discuss modalities of information sharing and further advocacy measures at national and field level. Similarly, RWG had meetings with DTM, REACH and Assessment working group (AWG) led by OCHA to discuss existing tools and data harmonization, and how to integrate and compliment existing data rather than to reinvent the wheel.

Furthermore, RWG was invited by the Emergency Livelihoods cluster during their monthly cluster meetings in February and May 2018, to give a presentation on the relationship between returns and livelihoods. The issues presented and discussed include on the rate of unemployment for returnees, lack of livelihoods as an obstacle to return, intentions to return based on availability of livelihood opportunities in the areas of origin, main source of income for returnees as well as compensation and the basic return package. In addition, RWG was also invited to present at the NGO Early Recovery Forum (NERF), on the opportunities and engagement between the RWG and the NERF, as well as to provide an overview of ongoing recovery activities for returnees.

Upon request, RWG supported also NGOs to develop specific tools to assess the needs of affected communities in areas of returns. For example, in 2017 DRC developed the Rapid Village assessment tool to monitor the return movement from camp and informal sites to area of origin in Anbar and SAD, which followed the outline of the multi-sectoral returns framework developed by the RWG in 2017. The outcome of the assessment was used for setting up specific programs in the areas of origin.

iii) Support to field missions

RWG further participated and provided input to the Inter- Action Protection mission to Iraq in July 2018. The purpose of the mission was to research the underlying causes and main protection risks facing the Iraqi population and looking at the role of collective and coordinated protection strategies to address these risks; how NGOs contribute to the development and implementation of such strategies and how a range of humanitarian and other actors are addressing protection issues through their activities; and examining the role of humanitarian leadership and broader humanitarian coordination in pursuit of collective protection strategies as envisaged in the IASC statement on the Centrality of Protection and the IASC Protection Policy.

