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In early March 2020, Pope Francis visited Iraq, the first-ever papal visit to the country, which has a vibrant Christian minority  
[Photo Credit: UN News via Vatican Media]

## Publication of 2021 HNO/HRP



In early March, the 2021 [Humanitarian Needs Overview \(HNO\)](#) and [Humanitarian Response Plan \(HRP\)](#) for Iraq were published. The Humanitarian Coordinator marked the occasion with a [joint press release](#) issued with the Minister of Planning.

The 2021 HNO focuses on the continued humanitarian needs of the people displaced by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and the military operations to defeat them. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the broader Iraqi population was assessed and analyzed in the process of developing the HNO; humanitarian organizations will continue to monitor the consequences of COVID-19 in 2021.

Of the 6 million people displaced during the conflict, 4.7 million have returned to areas of origin, while 1.3 million people remain displaced. Across the country, 4.1 million IDPs and returnees continue to have humanitarian needs related to their physical and mental well-being, living standards and coping capacities, of whom 28 per cent are women, 44 per cent are children, and 15 per cent are persons with disabilities – groups which require both targeted and mainstreamed support.

Humanitarian needs were assessed to be acute for 257,000 people in the 29 remaining IDP camps<sup>1</sup>, along with 470,000 out-of-camp IDPs and 1.8 million vulnerable returnees. While the overall number of people in need remains similar to 2020, the number of IDPs and returnees in acute need in 2021 has increased by 600,000, a rise attributable to the socio-economic impact of COVID-19. The increase in the severity of humanitarian needs has been particularly stark for returnees and IDPs living outside camps.

To respond to the most urgent needs, the 2021 HRP targets 1.5 million people in acute need of assistance, including all camp-based IDPs, along with 470,000 out-of-camp IDPs and 966,000 returnees in areas with high severity of needs, at a cost of US\$607.2 million. This will be achieved through three Strategic Objectives (SOs): SO1 will support targeted beneficiaries in meeting their basic needs; SO2 will support targeted beneficiaries in accessing essential services; and SO3 will support targeted beneficiaries in the establishment of safe and dignified lives. In 2021, the humanitarian community will also 'lean forward' into the nexus between these humanitarian, stabilization and development sectors, in order to provide maximum support towards achieving durable solutions. Inter-connected strategic-level coordination will be facilitated through the office of the Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General/Resident Coordinator/Humanitarian Coordinator.



<sup>1</sup> Figure accurate at the time of assessment; see HNO for fuller explanation of the effects of camp closures on response planning for 2021.

## Humanitarian Coordinator Visits Diyala in Support of Durable Solutions

On 18 March, Humanitarian Coordinator (HC) Irena Vojáčková-Sollorano led an inter-agency visit to Diyala aimed at advancing issues related to durable solutions and stabilization in the governorate. The mission included representatives of OCHA, IOM, and UNDP, as well as several NGOs in Muqdadia district who are providing assistance to IDPs and returnees in the area. Muqdadia had 155,000 inhabitants in 2014, almost half of whom were displaced during the conflict with ISIL. According to the IOM-DTM Return Index, as of December 2020, almost 60,000 individuals had returned to the district, while around 20,000 remain displaced in other districts of Diyala and Sulaymaniyah. Over half of those who have returned live in locations lacking basic services, livelihoods or security, and approximately 9,000 live in critical shelter.

In addition to meeting the Governor of Diyala, the HC met with returnees living in Hembes village in Muqdadia. About 250 households have returned to Hembes since 2015. Several households arrived from Al-Wand and Qaratoo IDP camps after camp closures took place at the end of 2020.

The HC met with Samahir Muhammed Attiya and her three sons, who had lived in Qaratoo IDP camp for six years, before returning to Hembes in August 2020. There they live with Samahir's parents, in a house that was severely damaged and partially burnt during the conflict with ISIL. The family received 370,000 IQD (USD\$250) per month from the Government's social security programme, but this is not sufficient to meet their needs, and they sometimes receive additional help from the community. Samahir used to support her family by sewing, but she had to sell her sewing machine to pay for the medical treatment of her young son, who has limited vision and cannot attend school. Samahir would like to find a way to become financially independent again, and contends that if she could just resume her sewing business, she would be able to sustain herself and her family and repair the damaged home.



Essa Dhahir Muhammed, a returnee to Diyala  
[Photo Credit: UNAMI/J. Kempny]

The HC also met with Essa Dhahir Muhammed, a formerly successful fruit farmer. In 2014, he was displaced from Hembes by the conflict, leaving his house and farm behind. He lived in Al-Wand IDP camp with his wife and five daughters, the youngest of whom were born in the camp. In August 2020, when the camp closed, they returned to Hembes, where they found their home demolished. His lemon trees and date palms had died because of the drought and lack of irrigation. Essa's brother accommodated the family in his home, but this has led to a crowded living situation which is not sustainable in the long term. He hopes to restore his farm and rebuild his house.

Since September 2020, approximately 1,000 new families have returned to the villages north of Muqdadia. Humanitarian partners have distributed urgently needed core relief items for winterization, hygiene kits, and cash for food and basic needs. Initial rehabilitation of water plants and networks by UNHCR and Oxfam have improved access to drinking water. However, humanitarian needs remain, and families require additional support if they are going to reach durable solutions.

## UN Network on Migration Launched in Iraq

On 17 March, the [United Nations Network on Migration](#) was launched in Iraq. The Network supports the international community's efforts towards the implementation of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM), which is the first inter-governmentally negotiated agreement covering all dimensions of international migration in a holistic and comprehensive manner. Coordinated by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the Network comprises 13 UN agencies that support the Government of Iraq on migration matters and its commitments under the GCM, including those relating to forced migration and displacement triggered by humanitarian crises.

In recent years the Government of Iraq has improved its migration policy framework, notably through the development of a National Migration Strategy, which sets out recommendations to improve areas of migration policy and governance, including policies dealing with displacement impacts of crises, and engaging with civil society.

During the conflict with ISIL, the government's capacity to provide services and co-ordinate critical functions of migration management and security at the central and local levels was severely diminished. IOM notes that it is expected that Iraq will continue to experience complex migratory flows, including both internally and return migration of Iraqis from Europe, Syria, and Turkey, which will increase pressure on the government to effectively manage migration. The Network can help provide an additional framework to ensure that all returns are safe, dignified, voluntary and sustainable.

## Urban Displacement in Federal Iraq and the KRI

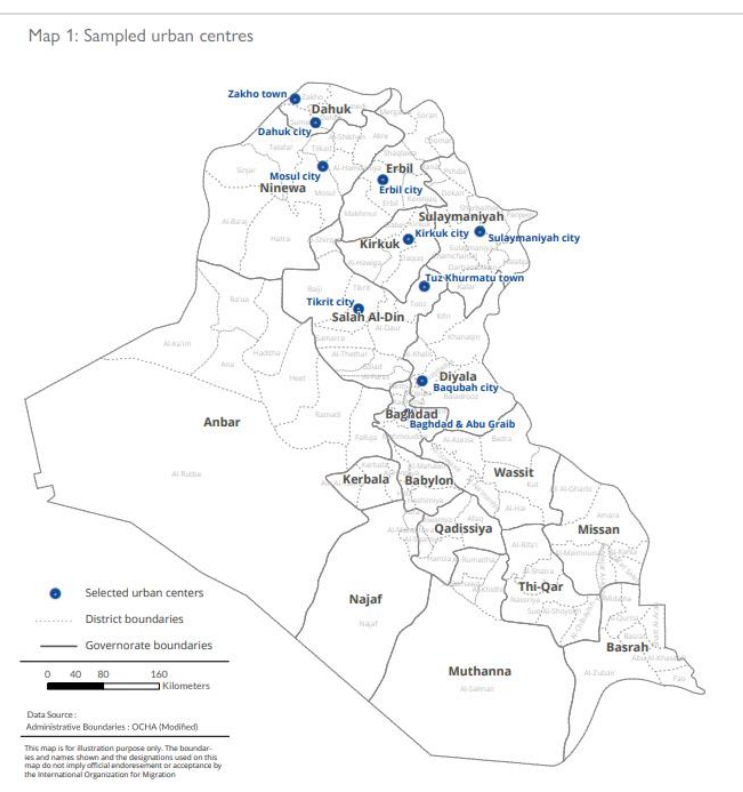
In March 2021, IOM published two reports detailing the outcomes of the first large scale household-level survey on urban displacement in Iraq. The survey covered a wide range of issues, looking at drivers of urban displacement, progress towards self-reliance and willingness to return. As displacement within Iraq becomes increasingly protracted for internally displaced persons (IDPs), further research is needed to understand its causes and put forward potential durable solutions.

In the report reviewing [Urban Displacement in Federal Iraq](#), data was collected from six urban centers: Baghdad/Abu Ghraib, Baquba, Mosul, Kirkuk, Tikrit and Tuz Khurmatu. Findings varied significantly between different locations: the density of IDPs diverged greatly between the cities, ranging from less than one displaced household for 100 host households in Baghdad/Abu Ghraib to 17 IDP for every 100 host households in Tuz Khurmatu. Informal or daily wage labour is a prominent source of income among the displaced population in Baghdad/Abu Ghraib, Kirkuk and Tuz Khurmatu, which also have commensurately low rates of private sector employment (ranging from 2-6% of displaced households). Over one third of

households in Baquba, Tuz Khurmatu and Baghdad/Abu Ghraib reported the need for a new shelter as a priority, whereas nearly half of respondents in Kirkuk and Tikrit reported food as primary need.

In the report reviewing [Urban Displacement in Kurdistan Region of Iraq \(KRI\)](#), data was collected from four cities: Duhok, Erbil, Sulaymaniyah and Zakho. Assessed findings in KRI were relatively more uniform than in federal Iraq. IDPs in the KRI reported that across all four cities, they lived in relative safety, and did not experience discrimination from authorities or their neighbors. However, some disparities emerged: 72 per cent of households in Duhok reported they are able to rely on the income of the head of the household to meet their needs, compared to only 45 per cent of households in Erbil. More than half of IDPs across all four cities reported an intention to stay in their area of displacement in the long term, although the majority continue to self-identify as IDPs.

Across all assessed cities, those households that reported having previously attempted to return (once or more than once) are more likely to report that their future



intention is to return to their area of origin. The reports' authors state that this indicates that failed returns do not discourage households from wanting to return in future, and potentially even make them more determined to do so. Additionally, the findings indicate that households who attempted return have greater economic resources than those who state their intention to remain in displacement, indicating that lack of financial means is a key barrier to enacting durable solutions.

## Impact of the Iraqi Dinar Devaluation on Food Prices in Iraq

In March, WFP published a report evaluating how the recent currency devaluation in Iraq has impacted food prices. The report, "[Iraqi Dinar Devaluation and the Price of the Food Basket](#)," outlines how the Government of Iraq's decision to devalue the dinar by 20 per cent in December 2020 (from IQD1181/USD\$1.00 to IQD1450/USD\$1.00) drove up import prices for essential commodities and raw materials, and increased the price of a key WFP food tracking metric (the Cash Based Transfer basket) by 14 percent. Though the prices are stabilizing, they are expected to remain high, and will directly impact the food security of at-risk populations in Iraq, especially IDPs, returnees, and refugees. As of January 2021, 9.1 million people in Iraq suffer from chronic hunger and 2.8 million people have insufficient food consumption.

The report notes that in order to help reduce the impact of the devaluation on the purchasing power of vulnerable Iraqis, it will be key to introduce import subsidies on essential food items. The report also recommends reliance on evidence-based data for future policy decisions, and advocates for national level food security monitoring and early warning systems to allow Iraq to respond proactively to food security crises.



## IDPs Seek Re-Admission to Camps in Duhok

Beginning in June 2020, tens of thousands of IDPs undertook seemingly spontaneous large-scale return movements from Duhok and Ninewa governorates to Sinjar and Al Ba'aj districts in far western Iraq. According to the [Emergency Tracking feature of IOM's Displacement Tracking Matrix \(DTM\)](#), between 8 June and 3 January 2021, 45,268 people (8,488 families) left the Zakho and Sumel districts in Duhok and the Al-Shikan district in Ninewa to return to Sinjar (91 per cent) and Al Ba'aj (9 per cent). The majority of those returning (76 per cent) came from IDP camps, while the remainder came from out-of-camp settings. The returnees were largely Yazidi families, and according to DTM, anecdotal reasons for return included an emotional desire to go home, the improved security situation, the reported availability of services in their areas of origin, and encouragement from Mukhtars, and local NGOs. (See the [September 2020 Humanitarian Bulletin](#) for more information).

Partners in Duhok have recently begun monitoring the movement of families who have come back from Sinjar and are seeking to re-enter the IDP camps where they previously lived. While the numbers are relatively modest, the return rate is steady. The Directorate of Migration and Crisis Response (the local government agency which oversees IDP affairs) tracked approximately 100 families by the end of March 2021, of which 45 had been re-admitted to camps following an interview and evaluation process. During March, the OCHA Duhok field office undertook interviews with several of the families who had returned from Sinjar in order to better understand their motivations and anticipate future coordination which may be necessary if there are larger scale returns. Two of their stories are detailed here.

In Essian Camp, OCHA met with Ameena Gerdo Rasho, who had returned to Tal-Banat village in Sinjar with her husband and nine-year old child. The family expected to find better living conditions than in the camp. Ameena noted that they regretted the choice immediately after returning to the village, saying “[w]e love our village, but we were saddened because what we found was completely different from the village that we knew. We were surprised by the lack of basic services like drinking water, electricity, livelihood opportunities, schools and health services.” In addition, her friends and neighbors no longer lived there, so they lacked a sense of community. Ameena and her husband decided to return to the camp where there are better opportunities for her husband to find daily labor, but noted they were eager to return to Tal-Banat if circumstances improved.



In Shariya Camp, OCHA met with Sino Beshar Qasim, who just returned to the camp with his wife and six children. Originally from Sebaia Shikh-Khedir village located south of Mount Sinjar, the family had been living in Dohuk since displacement from Sinjar in 2014. In July 2020, due to COVID-19 movement restrictions he decided to return to Sinjar. He could not return to his village since his house was destroyed during the conflict, so the family lived in an unfinished building in Hay-Alaskary suburb of Sinjar. Sino explained that the living conditions were very dire. The neighborhood was almost empty of its people, his family suffered the lack of basic services, such as water, electricity and schools, in addition to the lack of livelihood opportunities. He was also apprehensive about the security situation, especially the presence of various armed groups in the area. Due to these concerns, Sino decided to return to Shariya and requested to be re-admitted to the camp.