

RETURNS WORKING GROUP- IRAQ

- **Meeting Date:** 27 February 2024
- **Meeting Time:** 11:00 am-13:00 pm
- **Location:** IOM Conference Room, Erbil & Remote connection via Teams

Attendance: UNWFP, Drocas Aid International, Cesvi org, INTERSOS, Première Urgence Internationale (PUI), Solidarites International, CRS, SEDO, Tdh-Swiss, USAID/OTI, Mercy Hands for Humanitarian Aid, GIZ, Acted, IMPACT Initiatives, Catholic Relief Services (CRS), USAID – Iraq, UNOCHA, Consulate General of Germany, IOM Protection, DG ECHO, International Medical Corps, IOM-TRD, DRC, PRM, U.S. Consulate, UNHCR, TDH-Italy, Save the Children, UNAMI, UN-Habitat, IVY-Japan, DS Coordination

Agenda:

1. **Introduction and adoption of minutes:** Review of February and March Ad Hoc Meeting with MoMD Minutes and Action Points
2. **Context Update:** DTM Update: Master List, Return Index, Camp Closure ET, and RWG Field Update: Centre South
3. **IOM TRD Presentation:** Facilitated Voluntary Movement Update.
4. **IOM Presentation:** Women Navigating Durable Solutions to Displacement: Experiences From Ninewa Governorate
5. **DSTWG Update:** DS updates
6. **AOB**

1. Introduction and adoption of minutes: Review of previous minutes; Follow up on action points from the previous meeting

- Endorsement of the previous meeting minutes.
- **Action Point:** Following up on the recent notification from the Ministry of Education regarding the potential closure of representative offices, particularly impacting IDP schools, RWG will engage with UNICEF to seek clarification and gather further information on the implications of this decision. This includes understanding whether the directive extends to all schools, both in and out of camp locations. Additionally, RWG will monitor updates regarding the formation of the committee responsible for camp closure decisions, which includes representatives from the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Health. Updates and findings will be shared at the next meeting.

Update: UNICEF reported on there was a meeting between the Ministry of Education in Baghdad, and the Ministry of Education in the KRG on Sunday. UNICEF is awaiting further details about the outcomes of these meetings. UNICEF will update on advocacy next steps for affected families based on the outcomes of all the various meetings. This action point will remain open until UNICEF provides further feedback.

- **Action Point:** IOM requested to consider working with MoMD to implement a process similar to FVM's to enhance informed decision-making for IDPs, including informing IDPs and providing help desks in camps for better choices regarding return, relocation or local integration.

Update: IOM has had extensive discussions with a key MoMD stakeholder who is highly knowledgeable about IOM-FVM process, particularly in meetings and coordination efforts. These interactions occur regularly, typically monthly or biweekly. While the government has its own plans and deadlines, MoMD perceives our process as lengthy, and costly. Therefore, IOM takes measures to ensure families are well-informed to make decisions about staying in camps, returning, relocating, or locally integrating. While some aspects are not aligned with the MoMD's plans. Despite this, IOM remains committed to advocating for voluntary departures through established channels. This advocacy remains a steadfast priority.

2. Context Update: DTM Update: Emergency Tracking: Camp closure**Emergency Tracking Data: Camp Departures**

(Please refer to the full presentation link for further details)

- DTM recorded the departure of 816 households (3,493 individuals) from camps between the 1 and 25 of April 2024 following the recent closure of some camps.
- Most departures have taken place in Sulaymaniyah (422 households), Ninewa (252) and Dohuk (106) governorates.

Discussion

- Question: What factors contributed to the decrease in the number of IDPs compared to the previous reporting period, especially considering the high proportion of individuals in protracted displacement?
 - DTM: The decrease in the number of IDPs can be attributed to various factors. Firstly, it reflects the number of returns from displacement areas. This decline may result from poor living conditions, security concerns, or limited livelihood opportunities in

displacement areas. Conversely, it could also indicate improvements in the areas of origin, prompting IDPs to return. The exact reasons vary and are influenced by the dynamic situation on the ground.

- Question: Does DTM have an estimated total number of people to be returned to Mosul from IDP camps?
 - DTM: At this time, DTM does not have the estimated total number of people to be returned to Mosul from IDP camps. While DTM has data for in-camp populations in terms of population figures, area of origin data is available at the governorate level but this does not necessarily determine intentions to return to a particular location.

RWG Field Update: Centre South

(Please refer to the full presentation link for further details)

MoMD minister meets SAD governor

- There was a meeting between the MoMD Minister and the SAD governor, it was attended by deputy chairman of SAD Provincial Council, head of SAD Education Directorate
- The aim of the meeting was to discuss local government support to IDPs based on the Council of Minister, MoMD plan, mainly the 2% appointment opportunities at the Education Directorate.
- Other assistance and services have been discussed, compensation, basic services, and infrastructure.

Discussion

- **IOM:** Conditions for families in the SAD visited location are dire, lacking access to water and sanitation facilities, use of water from polluted sources like the agricultural canals. There are reports of family separation with women and children left behind due to schooling. There is a real perception of forced returns rather than voluntary. Additionally, some families face stigma as being associated with ISIL. Access to healthcare is limited, with the nearest clinic a 30-minute journey away, presenting challenges, especially for pregnant women.
- **UNHCR:** Agreed with IOM regarding the voluntariness of returns and emphasized the importance of advocating for all three durable solutions in the implementation of the COM decision. For example, while the majority of individuals from Tazade have returned to Salahaddin, some have chosen local integration. There are instances where IDPs desiring local integration face hurdles with required clearance. There are also concerns for families, including for Yazidi families in the Ashty Camp, who may feel compelled to return to less-than-ideal conditions in areas of origin. Discussions are ongoing on how to contribute to the emergency tracking being conducted by DTM to ensure all movements are captured, including returns and local integration, leveraging available data and bilateral collaboration with IOM.
- **DRC:** One significant concern highlighted is the situation of individuals returning to Salahaddin, particularly those living in tents despite receiving electronic assets. This raises doubts about the practicality of these assets and the living conditions of returnees, especially with the approaching summer season. There seems to have been a lack of adequate information available to IDPs and to address this, there's a call for enhanced support in disseminating information within the camps to empower individuals to advocate for their entitlements and make informed decisions before leaving the camps. DRC is interested in analyzing trends between individuals' areas of origin and their destinations to better understand migration patterns and factors influencing return decisions, which could inform future advocacy efforts and support initiatives.

3. IOM FVM Presentation: Facilitated Voluntary Movement Update.

(Please refer to the full presentation link for further details)

Registration with FVM

FVM colleagues provided an overview of the current registration of families on the program:

- Duhok: 4,498 households registered with the FVM programme.
- East Mosul Camps: 616 households registered.
- Many of the program activities have been delayed by concerns around the security clearance provided by MoMD for the East Mosul Camps and also the challenges that MoMD has been having to access the camps in order to process the departure letters.

Discussion

- Question: Are the 130 families who have been cleared for return mostly heading to areas of origin in Mosul or other villages around Hassansham?
 - FVM: All families cleared from M1 (130 households' caseload) will return or relocate to areas within Ninewa. However, we need to verify whether IDPs from the 13 villages, including Hasan Sham, are being registered by Asayish.

- **UNHCR:** Reported that to their understanding JCC has granted approval for re-entry of MoMD into the camps, with MoMD duly informed of this decision. Some activities, such as distribution, have resumed, indicating a gradual return to normalcy. It is anticipated that all activities will be fully operational again by next week.

4. IOM: Women Navigating Durable Solutions To Displacement: Experiences From Ninewa Governorate

(Please refer to the full presentation link for further details)

IOM presented on a recent report that focused on women and their experiences with displacement and reintegration. The report notes the following:

Decision to return

- Women make the decision to return after consultations with their family (FHH) or husbands (non-FHH), but the final decision often rests with adult men if they are present in the family.
- Children play a significant role in decision-making – mainly seeking to ensure their education, opportunities and security.
- Family considerations, including basic needs and family ties, strongly influence the decision to return.

Discussion

- Question: Can DTM please elaborate or clarify in the presentation it is mentioned that women who live in shared households and their exposure to violence, is that correct or they are more prone for violence?
 - DTM: In multi-generational households, conflicts often stem from interactions among children, siblings-in-law, and their families. For example, when children play together, disputes can escalate, creating tension. This dynamic, where decision-making isn't solely the woman's, intensifies household anger and tension due to the lack of privacy and increased family interactions.
- Question: What challenges do divorced or women-headed households face in earning income outside their communities, and how do they cope?
 - DTM: Women in such households often encounter stigma when seeking employment outside their communities. Despite this, they rely on various support systems, including financial assistance from family members, in-laws, or neighbors, to survive. Additionally, they express a preference for income-generating activities closer to home, such as bakery work or agricultural tasks, enabling them to balance work with childcare responsibilities.
- Question: Is there any indication that some women are not fully comfortable with the decision to return, especially given the crisis they experienced and the fact that there are still females or girls held hostage by ISIS?
 - DTM: Yes, there have been instances where women express discomfort about returning, particularly in areas like Sinjar where the situation remains complex. Some feel pressured to return due to decisions made by husbands or families, despite feeling more comfortable in their current displacement locations.

5. DSTWG Update: DS updates

(Please refer to the full presentation link for further details)

- JCF Meetings
 - Ninewa, Kirkuk, Diyala, Anbar all had their inaugural meetings and monthly meetings.
 - KRI and SAD inaugural meetings pending and planned for May.
- ABC Meetings
 - Sinjar ABC ongoing
- UNAMI: The Kurdistan Region of Iraq JCF launch has been rescheduled to May 16th, pending confirmation from relevant authorities. Once confirmed, preparations for the agenda will proceed.

AOB

- Next RWG meeting is scheduled for **May 28, 2024**. Partners are invited to please share any presentations they wish to make a week before the meeting.