

Returns Working Group: Advocacy Strategy

Background:

The returns working group is an operational and multi- stakeholder platform on returns, and 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.

As part of its work on advocacy and in order to influence the government's policies, programme implementers' approaches and donors' strategies, the RWG has developed an advocacy strategy that aims to provide modalities to advocate for the needs of affected communities in the face of the current displacement, return and reintegration situation in Iraq.

Objectives of the strategy:

The advocacy strategy will guide RWG's advocacy activities, and will aim to:

- **Raise awareness** of the conditions faced by displaced population as well as highlight displacement complexities such as protracted displacement, secondary displacement, durable solutions among others.
- Bring the **voice of the affected population** on the forefront based on demonstrated evidence, so to obtain humanitarian and long- term assistance to facilitate reintegration and durable solutions.
- **Influence the policies** and actions of local, national and international actors, so that they better address the challenges of displacement.
- **Communicate the right messages** to the right people at the right time.

Underlying principles and considerations:

The advocacy plan will adhere to the following principles:

- **Do no harm:** Messages to be disseminated as part of advocacy efforts will seek to put measures in place that will not negatively affect access to or protection of persons of concern.
- **Humanity, impartiality, neutrality and respect for international law:** The advocacy strategy will aim to preserve the values of humanitarian actions, both at local and national level in order to foster dialogue, access and open channels of cooperation to influence policy.
- **Data protection:** Personal information revealed by the affected population will remain confidential and will not be used for advocacy purposes, but may be shared with third parties only for specific purposes- based on prior consent of the person concerned.
- **Build on evidence base:** Given the complex context of Iraq, advocacy messages will be backed up with sufficient, well informed and evidence- based analysis, otherwise incomplete or

- inappropriately framed messages may stir up prejudice against vulnerable groups or individuals.
- **Confidentiality** will be upheld at all times to ensure safety of the persons of concern, otherwise individuals may be endangered if advocacy messages reveal personal information.

Accountability to affected population:

Advocacy also helps to enhance accountability to affected population (AAP), which is further stressed in the **Grand Bargain commitment 6** on participation revolution on the need to include the affected population in decisions, so as to ensure that the humanitarian response is relevant, timely, effective and efficient. This calls on the need to provide accessible information, ensure that an effective process for participation and feedback is in place and that design and management decisions are responsive to the views of affected communities and people.

AAP is further enforced in principle 22 of the **Guiding principles of Internal Displacement** and the **IASC framework on durable solutions**, which advocates for participation of IDPs and affected population in public affairs. One of the four priorities of change in the **GP20 Plan of action** underscores that IDPs more often report lack of information provided to them during all phases of displacement, and decision-making processes often fail to take their views due to inadequate consultation. Thus, the advocacy strategy will aim to place emphasis on developing key messages that stem from the voices of the affected population to adequately capture and reflect the needs on the ground, as well as allow IDPs and returnees to participate in the decisions that affect them.

The **Iraq National Policy on Displacement (2008)** further elucidates participation of IDPs under article 6.1 on 'Right to participate in Decision making and implementation', and further highlights the inclusion of vulnerable groups. The advocacy strategy also builds on the **RWG Protracted Displacement Framework** (see annex), which underlines high level advocacy as a means to address obstacles to return as identified in 'category 3' of the framework on security and access challenges.

Priorities and thematic areas:

i) Protracted displacement:

As of October 2019, 70% of the total remaining IDP population have been displaced for more than three years (IOM DTM). Majority of the remaining IDPs cite damaged housing and lack of livelihoods as the main reasons to not return to their areas of origin. Furthermore, a number of IDPs will not be able to return due to security or tribal related issues. Advocacy on the needs of this caseload of IDPs will help to unlock certain obstacles to facilitate return, as well as mobilize the necessary resources to enable this programming.

ii) Alternative options for durable solutions:

Up until recently, the GOI's preferred durable solution was return. However, recent developments have seen the GOI acknowledge that certain categories of IDPs may not be able to return. For instance in Ninewa, the Governorate authorities have identified 3 categories of people who may not be able to return in the near future; i) Minority groups, ii) People originating from disputed areas and iii) Persons perceived

to be affiliated with ISIL. Thus, there is need to build more evidence on the population who will not be able to return, so as to change the narrative of 'return' as the only option for durable solutions, and to initiate efforts to facilitate local integration and relocation in part of the government.

iii) **Blocked returns:**

As of October 2019, over 60 locations of return remain blocked to return either due to political reasons, or presence of security actors. With the increased momentum to have all camps closed by 2020 as stated by the GOI, IDPs originating from such areas will be unable to return and thus are in need of further intervention. Public and private advocacy with the government, as well as security actors will be necessary to facilitate access to allow the displaced population to return.

iv) **Prioritization of interventions:**

Most of the intervention in areas of return have been concentrated in certain areas, mostly urban areas, while rural and far to reach areas where most IDPs originate from remain uncovered. More advocacy will be raised based on the return index to identify areas of high severity with few partner presence, to advocate for interventions necessary to ensure sustainable returns.

v) **Secondary displacement:**

According to IOM DTM, nearly 200,000 individuals were re- displaced in 2018 alone. The presence of secondary displacement is an indicator that conditions in areas of return are not conducive to allow sustainable returns, thus in turn affecting durable solutions. Recently, more than 3,600 IDPs who were repatriated from Ninewa camps re- displaced in out of camp settings, thus bringing in a new wave of displacement. It is paramount to bring such issues to the forefront, so as to prevent reoccurrence of displacement as well as continued vulnerabilities.

Advocacy levels and target audience:

In order to ensure that key advocacy messages are addressed, key messages will be sent to various partners at various levels which include:

- i) **High level advocacy:** This will mainly involve issues related to security, blocked returns or housing occupation by militia groups and perceived affiliation to extremist groups, as identified under category 3 of the RWG protracted displacement framework. Key messages will be targeted and addressed to authorities who affect policies, such as the Humanitarian coordinator, the Government through the COMSEC and/ or NOC, law enforcement, donor working group on durable solutions etc.
- ii) **Humanitarian and development partners:** Key messages affecting implementation of activities, access, vulnerable groups, obstacles to return, secondary displacement among others, will be shared with the international community so as to enable risk informed programming and prioritization of timely interventions.
- iii) **Decentralized government:** Given most of the return operations are now facilitated at the governorate level, regular contact will be made and key messages will be shared with the Governorate Return Committees (GRCs) and local authorities, prior to camp closure to

highlight any issues, as well as suggest recommendations in line with the Principled Returns Framework. This will also include suggestions on interventions in areas of return through engagement with the decentralized government.

iv) **Grassroots level:** This will mainly involve advocacy initiatives targeting category 2 of the RWG protracted displacement framework on social cohesion and tribal issues, to facilitate return through appropriate dialogue and reconciliation. In addition, in order to build on evidence-based information and ensuring accountability to affected population, the affected communities, as well as religious and tribal leaders will be regularly and continuously consulted to inform advocacy messages through case studies, advocacy briefs etc.

Simplified pathway of change for communication



Advocacy approaches/ tactics:

This section focuses on how the advocacy messages will be disseminated, and the approaches to be used to reach the target audience to affect policies and the required change. Various approaches will be considered as follows:

i) **Coalition with partners:** As the RWG is a multi- stakeholder platform comprising of various partners, messages will be developed either by the RWG secretariat itself, and/ or work with existing coordination structures such as clusters, the advocacy working group, peace and reconciliation working group, among others to identify key problems that require advocacy. This will help to make the advocacy more effective when a variety of partners reinforce the message.

- ii) **Information and monitoring:** Information will be collected and validated continuously, and will build on data mainly from IOM DTM, REACH, OCHA, clusters and working groups as well as the communities themselves. Necessary steps will also be taken to fill gaps in evidence and to monitor the situation to report on change.
- iii) **Advocacy products:** This will include products to reinforce and support key messages, such as insight briefs, case studies, maps, testimonials, infographics etc. (see annex on advocacy messages to be developed).
- iv) **Public and private advocacy:** In order to target the required audience with the right messages depending on the nature and severity of the messages and to observe the do no harm approach, both public and private advocacy approaches will be employed to disseminate information. These include:

Simplified pathway for advocacy:

