



**CONSULTATION ON ADDRESSING
DURABLE SOLUTIONS IN NINEWA:
GOVERNMENT STRATEGIES
AMIDST PARTNER REDUCTION**

MARCH 2025

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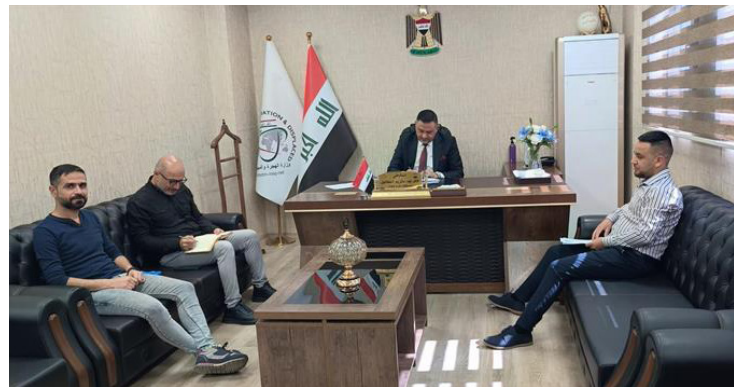


Figure 1 Meeting with MOMD Ninewa office



Figure 3 Meeting with Sinjar municipalities

1. Consultation with Mr. Ali Omar, Deputy Governor for NGO Affairs

At the outset, Mr. Ali Omar emphasized that the decline in donor support will significantly affect all areas of return across Ninewa, with Sinjar being particularly vulnerable, as many families from the district remain in displacement camps due to the lack of adequate services and enabling conditions in areas of origin. He stressed that without sustained support and investment in return areas, sustainable returns are unlikely.

The Deputy governor reported on a recent meeting in Baghdad, which focused on U.S. support and its impact on Ninewa Governorate. The discussion particularly highlighted the Al Amal Centre and the effects of the U.S. funding review. While U.S. funding reductions have negatively impacted the Centre's operations and services, it was noted that Al Amal Centre continues to receive support from multiple other donors.

It was reported that the Iraqi government intends to allocate a budget to expand Al Amal Centre in response to these challenges and in light of increasing returns. He emphasized that the reduction in international support—is already impacting the center, making it harder to maintain services for displaced populations.

2. Ministry of Migration and Displacement (MoMD): Return Grant Effectiveness and Financial Constraints Amidst Reduced Donor Support

As part of the broader discussions on durable solutions in Ninewa, the Ministry of Migration and Displacement (MoMD) shared key updates on the return grant mechanism during the coordination meetings facilitated by Ninewa Governorate and the Returns Working Group. The return grant, which is fully funded by the Government of Iraq, has long been a cornerstone in supporting voluntary return and stabilizing internally displaced populations. While the grant itself remains unaffected by declining donor support, concerns are rising over the sustainability of complementary programs implemented by humanitarian partners. As humanitarian actors scale down or phase out these additional activities, there is growing uncertainty about the overall support ecosystem available to returnees.

THE FOLLOWING POINTS SUMMARIZE THE MINISTRY'S KEY MESSAGES:

- **Effectiveness of the Grant in Encouraging Voluntary Return**

MoMD reported that the increase in the grant amount to 4 million IQD, as approved by the Council of Ministers, initially had a positive impact on return trends. The enhanced amount, coupled with additional benefits, encouraged many displaced families to apply for a return, with dozens of requests being submitted daily at first. Families are still applying; however, the department acknowledges that not all applicants have received the grant. Some delays are due to missing documentation, while others, despite having complete files, are still waiting for the Ministry of Finance to release the allocated budget. This funding delay is not limited to MoMD but affects all ministries.

- **Delays in Disbursement: Financial Challenges**

While the ministry is administratively ready to process and distribute the grants, financial delays remain the key obstacle. Funds are currently pending transfer from the Ministry of Finance, and the return grant cannot be disbursed until this process is completed.

- **Impact of Reduced Donor Support on Return Sustainability**

MoMD expressed concerns that the downsizing of international donor support could significantly undermine the sustainability of returns. Organizations such as IOM have historically played a vital role in providing complementary support to returnees—such as financial assistance, reintegration packages, and community-based projects. With many of these programs now downsized or discontinued, essential services and support mechanisms are no longer available to all returnees. Combined with the delays in MoMD's financial disbursements, this situation may deter returns or lead to secondary displacement, especially in areas with poor infrastructure or limited livelihood opportunities.

- **Relocation and Conditions in Return Areas**

While the grant is not tied to specific housing or infrastructure conditions, it is expected that returnees will settle in their original locations. However, some families move again shortly after returning due to inadequate services or lack of employment, though they often stay within or near their area of origin.

- **Alternative Options for Families Unable to Return**

For those who cannot return due to damage or lack of services, MoMD clarified that families may choose alternative locations within the same governorate or area of displacement and still qualify for the grant.

- **Measures to Prevent Secondary Displacement**

To address risks of secondary displacement, MoMD is focusing on:

- Promoting voluntary returns based on informed decisions,
- Resolving legal and social barriers to return,
- Accelerating the disbursement of the return grant, and
- Providing accurate information to camp residents about conditions in their areas of origin.

3. Update from Sinjar Officials: Impact of Reduced Donor Funding on Stabilization and Return

Key representatives from Sinjar district shared updates highlighting the critical role of donor-supported projects in enabling sustainable returns and stabilization in the area. With Sinjar facing significant infrastructure damage and socio-economic vulnerability, local officials expressed concern over the implications of reduced donor engagement and outlined current efforts and future plans aimed at restoring basic services.

- **Consultation with Mr. Kamal – Director of Sinjar Municipality**

The Director of the Sinjar Municipality emphasized that the reduction in donor funding is having a direct negative impact on the return process and stabilization in Sinjar. He noted that a large portion of the population consists of impoverished households who heavily rely on humanitarian assistance, whether in the form of cash or in-kind support. Many areas in Sinjar continue to lack the most basic necessities for daily life, making returns more challenging and less sustainable.

He expressed concerns about the lack of viable alternatives to international NGO support at this stage. While the government does implement projects, these are often focused on large-scale infrastructure, such as roads, schools, and public facilities, whereas NGOs address more immediate, community-level needs, directly impacting residents' lives.

- **Ongoing Projects in Sinjar:**

- Construction of a 100-bed public hospital (Government-funded).
- Paving and rehabilitation of two main roads in Sinjar district center (Government-funded).
- Construction of a new school in Al-Nasr neighborhood (Government-funded).
- Construction of a community center (NGO-supported).
- Establishment of local markets to support livelihoods (NGO-supported).
- Rehabilitation of a sports field in Al-Shohada neighborhood (NGO supported).

These examples highlight that NGOs remain actively engaged in supporting returns through targeted, community-based projects that contribute directly to improving daily living conditions, thereby encouraging displaced families to return and stay.

- **Consultation with Mr. Nayef Sido – Mayor (Qa'im Maqam) of Sinjar**

The mayor also acknowledged that reduced donor funding has impacted on infrastructure projects and return efforts in Sinjar. While the effect has been moderate, he noted that donor contributions have played a crucial role in alleviating urgent humanitarian needs. He emphasized that the scale of destruction in Sinjar's infrastructure following ISIS occupation requires significant financial investment, which has not yet been met at the expected levels.

He expressed gratitude to countries and organizations that have contributed so far but admitted that expectations were higher, especially in terms of rebuilding what was lost during the conflict.

LAUNCH OF THE SINJAR AND NINEWA PLAINS RECONSTRUCTION FUND – FIRST PACKAGE OF PROJECTS

The Sinjar and Ninewa Plains Reconstruction Fund has officially launched its first package of reconstruction initiatives, aiming to revitalize key areas affected by conflict and neglect. With a total allocated budget of 18 billion Iraqi Dinars (IQD), this initial package includes 14 critical infrastructure projects focused primarily on improving transportation networks.

Several notable projects are already underway: street paving activities are being carried out in Tel Kaif, while Adnaniya, Qahtaniyah, Nimrud, and Zummar are all benefiting from major road paving works. In Bartella, efforts are focused on constructing a durable concrete road to enhance connectivity within the town. Additionally, in the Sinuni District, comprehensive road rehabilitation projects are being implemented to restore access and mobility for residents.

These infrastructure improvements are a vital step toward supporting the return of displaced populations, boosting local economies, and fostering greater stability across Sinjar and the Ninewa Plains. By restoring essential services and facilitating easier movement, the Reconstruction Fund plays a crucial role in the broader recovery and durable solutions process for the region.

PROPOSED ALTERNATIVE PLANS:

To address funding gaps, Mr. Sido called on both the Ninewa local government and the Federal Government to increase the financial allocations for Sinjar and its sub-districts, using criteria based on the severity of destruction and poverty levels in the area.

Additionally, he shared that several new projects are planned for implementation in Sinjar, covering key sectors such as:

- Electricity
- Health
- Education
- Water services
- Other critical areas funded under the Provincial Development Budget (PDB).

These initiatives aim to compensate for the reduction in external funding and demonstrate the local authorities' commitment to restoring normalcy and supporting the long-term return of displaced families.

4. Consultation with the Reconstruction Fund for Areas Affected by Terrorist Operations: Project Progress, Prioritization, and the Challenge of Diminishing External Support

A representative from the Reconstruction Fund for Areas Affected by Terrorist Operations (REFAATO) provided an in-depth overview of the Fund's current and planned interventions across key sectors and return areas—particularly in Sinjar, Ba'aj, Tal Afar, Rabia, Hamdaniyah, and others.

KEY PROJECTS IMPLEMENTED OVER THE PAST THREE YEARS

The Fund highlighted a range of critical infrastructure and service projects completed in recent years to support return and recovery. Among the most notable:

- Road Rehabilitation Projects in Sinjar District Center, including rural roads in north and south Sinjar Mountain.
- Rehabilitation of Salamiyah Water Project, which supplies water to much of the Ninewa Plain considered one of the most significant interventions.
- Road works in Tal Afar and the reconstruction of three schools across different locations, including Sinjar, Rabia, and a village in the North subdistrict.
- Ongoing work on the road connecting Sinjar and Ba'aj, currently 40% complete.
- A major project underway is the rehabilitation of the road linking Ba'aj and Abu Khashab Junction, with an allocated budget of 5 billion IQD.

Most of these projects have reached full completion, while a few remain under implementation. These efforts underscore the Fund's role in supporting durable solutions through infrastructure restoration, particularly in heavily affected return areas.

SECTORAL SCOPE AND PLANNING MECHANISM

The Fund has implemented projects across multiple sectors, including:

- Health
- Education (general and higher education)
- Roads and transportation
- Public services
- Agriculture and trade

The prioritization and allocation of projects are determined by the Ministry of Planning, which uses a needs-based formula—mainly the level of deprivation and the extent of damage suffered by each area.

PERCEIVED MARGINALIZATION OF CERTAIN AREAS

Addressing concerns about certain areas being left behind, the representative clarified that there is no intentional marginalization. In some cases, delays in project initiation are due to:

- Security conditions, particularly in parts of Sinjar.
- Lack of proactive engagement from local administrations.
- Delays in submitting technical assessments and project proposals, which are prerequisites for approvals.

He emphasized that any area that submits proper documentation and meets the criteria is eligible for funding, and administrative or security limitations are often the real obstacles.

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT IN NEEDS IDENTIFICATION

The representative confirmed that the Fund receives input from sectoral directorates and local beneficiaries. Communities play an indirect but important role by pressuring their local administrations to submit service requests, and active community engagement leads to better advocacy and prioritization. Ultimately, project plans are consolidated through the Ministry of Planning at the provincial or national level.

FUTURE BUDGETS AND GAPS

Looking ahead, the Fund's 2024 plan includes a promising allocation of over 170 billion IQD, distributed across sectors and locations in Ninewa. However, the representative acknowledged that this amount may not fully cover the existing recovery gap, given the scale of destruction. He noted that the budget must be ratified through federal procedures, and delays in approvals and fund transfers remain a challenge. Still, the allocation is considered a strong foundation for continued recovery.

COORDINATION WITH LOCAL AUTHORITIES

The Fund maintains ongoing coordination with local and federal governments to secure sufficient resources and expand project coverage. The primary goal remains supporting infrastructure in return areas to facilitate the return of as many displaced families as possible, especially in locations that still lack basic services.

CHALLENGES WITH ALTERNATIVE FINANCING AND DONOR SUPPORT

The representative expressed concern over the lack of alternative financing mechanisms. The Fund currently does not operate under decentralized funding models, nor does it maintain structured partnerships with donors or financial institutions. While the Fund has a dedicated department for grants and concessional loans, the recent period has seen a sharp decline in international contributions, including donor grants and soft loan agreements.

Across all consulted government offices, there was a clear consensus that the reduction in donor funding and the potential withdrawal of humanitarian organizations pose significant challenges to sustaining durable solutions for displaced populations in Ninewa, particularly in vulnerable areas like Sinjar. While the government is committed to stepping up through budget allocations and ongoing infrastructure projects, the scale of needs far exceeds current capacities. Officials emphasized that complementary support from the aid community remains vital for addressing immediate humanitarian needs and community-level stabilization activities that the government alone cannot fully cover at this stage. A recurring concern raised by multiple stakeholders was the urgent need to elevate these funding challenges to the national level. This would enable government representatives to engage more effectively with international donors, advocate for sustained or increased support, and explore innovative financing mechanisms to fill emerging gaps. Looking ahead, participants recommended organizing a multi-stakeholder forum where government entities, donors, NGOs, and community representatives can come together to collectively brainstorm sustainable strategies for durable solutions, enhance coordination, and ensure a more resilient support system for returnees and displaced families. This collaborative approach will be critical to mitigate the impact of partner reductions and securing long-term stability for Ninewa's affected populations.

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Foreign, Commonwealth
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