

## **Danish Refugee Council Middle East – Submission on thematic priorities of Special Rapporteur on Internal Displacement, covering Iraq and Yemen**

*June 2023*

The Danish Refugee Council works in six countries in the Middle East, including three countries with significant IDP caseload: Iraq, Syria, and Yemen. This submission is primarily drawn from operations in Iraq and Yemen, with a focus on the effects of generalized violence and the (re)integration of IDPs into society.

### Impacts of generalized violence

Conflicts in the Middle East have resulted in significant examples of generalized violence that have affected internally displaced populations. Across contexts this has included examples of ongoing and recent occurrences of IDP movements instigated by authorities rather than voluntary decisions. For example, in Yemen, this month (June 2023), an IDP population in Al-Tahayta in Hodeida was involuntarily moved by authorities. Meanwhile, authorities have been requesting support to move IDP households from Al-Hayma, Hodeida, for several months, despite a March 2023 Protection Cluster intentions survey showing that 98% of households wished to stay in Al-Hayma and felt safe to do so. In Iraq, DRC has identified that IDPs in informal sites often are evicted at short notice to enable development projects to take place, and similar has happened in Syria as the government seeks to reopen buildings hosting IDPs, for example schools. These evictions usually take place without a coherent plan of where IDPs should go, resulting in further displacement and sometimes an increased marginalization from society.

Lack of civil documentation, lost by many IDPs during the course of their displacement, restricts freedom of movement, compromises legal protections and identity, and undermines access to areas of origin and areas for potential relocation – required to achieve two of the three options for durable solutions to displacement. This is a particular challenge for women who disproportionately lack recognized civil documentation. Lack of civil documentation is also impeding IDP access to some forms of services and/or humanitarian assistance, which can vary per context.

Explosive ordnance clearance capacity does not meet clearance needs. Based on current capacity, DRC estimates it will take 24 years to clear prioritised areas in International Recognised Government in territory in Yemen alone. This is due to challenges importing mine clearance equipment, limitations to national mine action authority capacities, challenges clearing areas held by De Facto Authorities (subject to a Memorandum of Understanding between HMA NGOs and DFA mine action authorities currently pending signature), funding shortfalls (recognising and appreciating increases in HMA funding from some donors), and the continued conflict, meaning continued use of explosive ordnance. Decades of cyclical conflict in Iraq have left contamination across the country, impeding return and access to services; while in government-controlled areas of Syria international mine action actors have had no clearance activities approved, leaving only the national authorities (primarily the Syrian Arab Army) to clear mines and a dire lack of information on contamination levels to inform the aid response.

IDPs lack access to adequate housing conditions. Across contexts, IDPs commonly face high rent and a lack of livelihoods in areas of displacement, which in some cases – in particular in Yemen - has essentially forced unsafe returns to damaged and even contaminated home areas and housing. The economic crisis in Syria made living in internal displacement less viable, with IDP families less able to pay rent many returned to damaged and destroyed homes simply to avoid paying extra money. Meanwhile, a lack of security of tenure in IDP sites due to lack of land ownership agreements and lack of adherence to agreements in place leads to frequent eviction threats and incidents for IDPs.

### (Re)Integration of Internally Displaced Persons

Protracted conflicts across the Middle East region have led to families being displaced for long periods, and often on multiple occasions, with circumstances changing to compound barriers to integration either on return to area of origin, in the community of displacement, or in a third location. The short length of

humanitarian funding cycles means that even when long-term thinking occurs in the aid response, available resources do not provide the flexibility or certainty to effectively programme through a durable solutions lens.

Today's Iraq is faced with a number of important priorities – including tackling climate change, economic reform, and improved service delivery. Significant progress has been made since the height of the conflict with the so-called Islamic State – indeed, in some areas displacement-affected families have largely re-integrated in their communities. Still, in many areas, distinctions in needs and unequal access to services between displacement affected households and host community continue. Some 1.2 million IDPs remain displaced, and many returnees continue to face challenges in re-integration, [including the nearly 600,000](#) in areas of return classified as “of high severity”.

In Iraq, focus continues to be placed on physical return as the primary solution, with support for local integration remaining limited. While the Government of Iraq has introduced an integration grant for IDPs who do not wish to/are unable to return, distribution of these grants remains extremely limited. These challenges are particularly acute for IDPs from one over 200 areas of no return – including many areas where return is often impossible due to restrictions by security actors. While political engagement surrounding these areas continues, it is unlikely that most will become accessible in the short to medium term.

Damaged and destroyed housing and housing land and property (HLP) disputes continue to be a challenge to the reintegration of returnees. While significant reconstruction has taken place in the years since the conflict has ended, the sheer scale of destruction means much is left undone – with a lot of the remaining damage the most acute. Lack of financial capacity means that reconstruction is not possible for most without support. This – and other HLP disputes, including occupation of homes – can mean returnees find themselves living in sub-standard homes or renting alternative housing, in some cases having to sacrifice spending on other basic necessities like health and education to make payments. Indeed, [shelter and housing was the second top reported need for IDPs and returnees](#) in 2022. There is a compensation scheme for damaged and destroyed housing from the government, but the level of distribution remains slow and limited.

Hundreds of thousands of IDPs and returnees continue to lack civil documentation, which contributes to unequal legal protection and restricts access to many services and can limit their freedom of movement. For example, access to education is particularly challenged, and this leaves displacement affected populations unable to access social welfare schemes – increasingly important forms of support as the humanitarian response winds down and other forms of assistance become unavailable. IDPs and returnees also continue to link this to feelings of safety and security, with documentation required to pass freely by checkpoints, and the lack of documentation increasing risks of arbitrary detention – especially for boys and young men. Access to legal assistance remains a barrier – including due to transportation costs and limited capacity and functionality of key offices – and broader bureaucratic policy barriers requiring security clearance and multiple supporting documents further complication access.

The economic resilience of IDPs and returnees in Iraq has decreased compared to last year, with access to livelihoods the top reported need among displacement affected populations. This contributes to a lack of resources to restart after return, or integrate into a new community. Some 68% of IDP and returnee households with an income from employment or pension [reported earning less than](#) the value of the 2023 Minimum Expenditure Basket (485,000 IQD), and around half reported earning less than the Survival Minimum Expenditure Basket (325,000 IQD). This equally contributes to key protection risks – including school drop-out and child labour – with economic vulnerability having also been linked to rising rates of GBV, including for example in gender assessments conducted by DRC in Ninewa Governorate.

In Yemen, explosive ordnance clearance capacity does not meet clearance needs. Based on current capacity, DRC estimates it will take 24 years to clear prioritised areas in IRG territory alone. This is due to challenges importing mine clearance equipment, limitations to national mine action authority capacities,

challenges clearing areas held by De-Facto Authorities (although discussions continue to take place on agreeing MoUs to move forward with clearance by international actors, funding shortfalls (recognising and appreciating increases in HMA funding from some donors), and the continued conflict, meaning continued use of explosive ordnance. Across the region, contamination also provides a challenge for returnees to resume livelihoods activities, for example due to the heavy contamination of agricultural lands.

The last few months have seen several pushes from authorities in specific locations to move IDPs – either to their areas of origin or to new displacement sites. For example, IDPs displaced to parts of Hodeidah from Al-Durahimi have been encouraged to return there with the promise (from authorities) of aid assistance (from the aid community). Al-Durahimi is currently unsafe for returns as it has not been decontaminated from explosive remnants of war. Meanwhile, the increased demand on public services in areas of displacement can cause community tensions, especially where service provision was already insufficient prior to the conflict.

Across Iraq, many of the approximately 100,000 IDPs in informal are physically and socially marginalized from broader communities and are from areas where it is almost impossible to achieve a return. Protection monitoring by DRC also demonstrates they face heightened levels of economic vulnerability, as well as key protection risks including exploitation, GBV, and restrictions on movement. Additionally, due to their informal and – in some cases – remote nature, they often face challenges accessing services, including due to distance, economic barriers, and disconnection from municipal services, like water, solid waste management and electricity. As Iraq continues its post-conflict reconstruction, access to these services can also remain a challenge for the host community.

Female-headed households continue to face heightened barriers to (re)integration across the region. Female-headed households [face additional challenges](#) in terms of securing paid work and having an adequate income, and more often report relying on negative coping mechanisms. Gender norms can also restrict their freedom of movement, and make it challenges for them to access key government services and institutions. For example, female-headed households have reported risks and instances of harassment and exploitation in the process of seeking to (re)issue their civil documentation.

Households In Iraq with perceived affiliation – which include a disproportionate proportion of female-headed households and families in informal sites – also face disproportionate challenges. When seeking to (re)issue civil documentation, this includes additional extra-legal requirements, such as DNA testing and processes of disavowal of relatives perceived to be affiliated with so-called ISIS. They can also face denial of services, and are at increased risk of community rejection, which can contribute to re-displacement and barriers to integration.

As part of programming to deliver sustainable returns, DRC's conflict analysis in Diyala and Ninewa has shown that in addition to being a challenge to (re)integration, lack of access to livelihoods is also a driver of conflict – particularly when inequalities persist. On the flip side, supporting access to livelihoods – particularly shared spaces and livelihood services – can also promote social cohesion.

As noted above, premature returns to areas of origin where social tensions between different groups are high tends to put IDPs in vulnerable positions of marginalization and exclusion, including driving re-displacement to informal sites. For example, following evictions from informal sites, DRC has recorded instances of re-displacement of IDP households as a result of failed returns in Anbar. Across Iraq and Yemen competing access to dwindling resources between host communities and those attempting integration can lead to increase social tensions.

DRC in the Middle East would recommend that the Special Rapporteur focus on:

- Monitoring and responding to forced population movements and supporting the implementation of existing global guidance on this, including links to evictions from camps and informal sites.
- Support and guidance on state-led support systems for support return, resettlement and (re)integration, including compensation and grants to facilitate voluntary movements. This should

- include engagement with local service providers (e.g. local government, private sector, and civil society) to explore inclusive access to services.
- Continue to advocate for the right to documentation, encourage states to streamline processes for renewal and provide to IDPs and returnees without discrimination.

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