

# Returns Working Group – Factsheet 2016

## **RWG mandate**

In line with the 2016 Strategic Objective 3 of the Iraq Humanitarian Response Plan “to support voluntary, safe and dignified return” by monitoring and reporting on conditions in return areas and providing targeted assistance to highly vulnerable returnees, the Deputy Special Representative to the Secretary General/Resident Coordinator/Humanitarian Coordinator DSRSG/RC/HC established a Returns Working Group (RWG) to be Chaired by IOM to achieve the following:

- *Develop guidance, policies and operational recommendations for Iraqi governorates affected by returns*, based on the international frameworks and principles for humanitarian action (including those adopted/promoted by IASC, ICRC, IOM, UNHCR, etc.).
- *Provide technical advice* to government, at national and local levels, as well as Iraqi civil society (NGOs, private sector, media, academia, etc.) to support the implementation of IDP returns according to applicable international standards.
- *Determine to what extent durable solutions have been achieved for ‘returnees’<sup>1</sup>* or progress made, based on the definition of durable solutions in the Iraqi context.

## **RWG role**

The Returns Working Group (RWG) is an operational platform, which develops overarching principle documents to guide all returnee response. Its standard operating procedures (SoPs) are the basis for cluster specific guidelines, especially in the event that humanitarian actors are to provide life-saving assistance to IDPs expelled from their area of displacement, forcibly returned to their place of origin, or any other form of returns that are not voluntary, based on free and informed choice. The key objective of the group is to provide a multi-stakeholder platform to establish coherence of information, data and analysis, strengthen coordination and advocacy, give guidance on activities related to the 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.

## **Internally displaced persons (IDPs)**

Military conflict in Iraq, beginning in 2014, has induced the internal displacement of over 3.4 million people. As military operations continue along the Mosul Corridor, with the ultimate objective of retaking ISIS-controlled Mosul, large-scale displacement is anticipated to take place. The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) estimates that up to one million people could be displaced, with an estimated 700,000 people needing humanitarian assistance. As currently seen in other, recently newly accessible areas of Iraq, the majority of internally displaced persons (IDPs) seem keen to return home. Indeed many people, motivated by a desire to return to normality, the need to control and safeguard their properties, and seek livelihood opportunities are going back as soon as they feel the security situation allows. The scale and speed of returns can pose a particular challenge, especially to communities already made politically and economically fragile as a result of the recent occupation by ISIS and military operations.

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<sup>1</sup> For the purposes of this factsheet, a ‘returnee’ is defined as someone displaced from their area of origin who is returning to their original home or neighbourhood in their area of origin. If they cannot settle in their original home or neighbourhood, they are considered as secondarily displaced and therefore the term ‘returnee’ should not be applied to those instances where individuals cannot return to their homes or neighbourhoods. Even after displaced populations have returned, they may still have urgent humanitarian priorities.

## Overview of returns

Despite ongoing conflict and further displacement in many parts of the country, families have begun returning to places of origin. As of November 2016, over a million individuals have returned to their areas of origin, overwhelmingly to Salah al Din, Diyala, Ninewah and Anbar since the beginning of the conflict in Iraq in 2014.<sup>2</sup> This, in addition to reported high levels of intention to return on the part of IDPs,<sup>3</sup> is a clear indicator that support to returning populations will become a major component of the 2017 response. A majority of returnees currently live under precarious conditions, with insufficient support required to ensure progress towards durable solutions. Many seek to rebuild their homes, restart livelihoods and recover from the trauma of conflict. The conditions and circumstances in areas of displacement and return vary by governorate. Many seek to rebuild their homes, restart livelihoods and recover from the trauma of conflict. The conditions and circumstances in areas of displacement and return vary by governorate. The magnitude of return is yet to be established, considering that more than 80 per cent of the IDPs are living in host communities, often without proper and systematic registration.

*Durable solutions in the Iraqi context acknowledge the multi-faceted dimensions of returns* and aim at ensuring long term safety and security; non-discrimination; adequate standard of living; access to livelihoods and essential services; access to documentation; family reunification; participation in public affairs; as well as access to justice and effective remedies, including restoration of housing, land and property rights, at the same level as those in the return community who were not displaced. Durable solutions are achieved when IDPs no longer require specific assistance and can enjoy their human rights without discrimination as a result of their displacement.

## RWG activities



**Coordination of activities in areas of return:** Due to a high number of returns in several governorates, the National RWG set up a Roving RWG Field Coordinator to decentralise data collection and coordination processes, and ensure timely support to partners' need for coordinated humanitarian planning, response and engagement with authorities at the field level. Decentralisation will support an area-based approach, recognising the unique characteristics of each return movement and taking account of the different dynamics that will feature in each return movement. Thereto, the National RWG has developed a Rapid Vulnerability Needs (RVN) Assessment tool to guide partners and the clusters in their response.

<sup>2</sup> See IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM). Last accessed on 17 November 2016. Available online at: <<http://iraqdtm.iom.int/ReturneeML.aspx>>

<sup>3</sup> See IOM DTM Returnee Dataset

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**Information management regarding return, needs and opportunities:** The Roving RWG Field Coordinator will work under the supervision of and in coordination with the National Platform of the RWG, to provide leadership and facilitate the processes that will ensure a well-coordinated, strategic, adequate, and effective coherence of information, data, analysis and activities in key return areas (areas experiencing high concentration of return movement).

**Capacity-building activities and facilitate policy guidance:** The National RWG serves as a network and coordination platform and is responsible for coordinating analysis on return and potentially reintegration data, trends and needs using a multi-sectorial approach. The Roving RWG Field Coordinator enhances complementary action among partners at field level with the overall goal of supporting and reinforcing the national response to Iraq's return and reintegration challenge. In stances where forced returns are unavoidable, the Field Coordination, under the established National RWG framework, provides agencies with operational guidance on response in line with humanitarian principles. All activities will be carried out within the overarching Durable Solutions framework; training needs on the Durable Solutions framework can be met accordingly by the National RWG.

**Support to the process of developing a Durable Solutions Strategy:** The RWG's strategy aims for relevant stakeholders to identify and address specific, locality based, short-term needs, while at the same time planning for longer-term support and generating local and national ownership of activities undertaken. The subsequent response plan will consist of three interlinked and overlapping phases that would cover immediate needs as well as mid and longer-term elements necessary to allow people to permanently return to their place of origin in a safe, dignified and voluntary manner. The coordination of these multi-sectorial return and potentially reintegration intervention will be ensured in complementarity with efforts of the government.

## Achievements and future plans

- ✓ Expand on multi-sectorial area-based approach in return areas
- ✓ Respond to Critical Return Movement with a joint protocol of engagement on principled action
- ✓ Bringing together humanitarian & development efforts to support sustainable return
- ✓ People centered approach
- ✓ Technical expertise (Clusters) and Coordination (ICCG/RWG)
- ✓ Urgent needs addressed while sustainable programing factored in intervention
- ✓ Commitment from other actors (USIP, UNDP, OCHCHR)
- ✓ Initial discussions with line ministries at State level and Provincial Council
- ✓ Advocacy for resource mobilization and policy development
- ✓ Contribute to overarching Durable Solutions approach/strategy for Iraq
- ✓ Fundraising for longer term interventions to ensure sustainability