



FIVE FINDINGS ON HOW IDPs IN IRAQ ARE COPING WITH THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

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Access to Durable Solutions Among IDPs in Iraq is a groundbreaking study that, over the course of six years, has tracked the experiences of non-camp IDP households displaced between January 2014 and December 2015 by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) to Baghdad, Basrah, Kirkuk, and Sulaymaniyah governorates. Between February and July 2021, the joint study between Georgetown University and the International Organization for Migration completed its sixth round of data collection. The study specifically asked IDP households about how the COVID-19 pandemic has altered their lives and paths toward reaching durable solutions to their displacement. The following five facts are just some of what the study revealed among those IDPs who have remained in their same displacement location since 2014. The full study findings from the latest round of data collection are forthcoming in a report that will be available in late 2021 on the study's website, where more information on and findings from the study can be found: <http://iraqrecovery.org/durablesolutions/>.

FACT 1

More than 81% of IDP households are very or somewhat concerned about the spread of COVID-19. And while more than a quarter (26%) of households say the spread of the virus is the greatest challenge facing the country, 46% of households believe the economic condition in the country is the more pressing issue.

Father of an IDP family who fled from Baghdad governorate to Kirkuk: "The virus definitely has affected us and our daily routines, especially on a financial level. We do not have enough money for our family's living situation because the number of job opportunities has decreased a lot. We struggle to earn enough income because limiting our ability to move and closing some services due to the lockdown have affected market activity significantly and affected people who have limited incomes or those who work for a daily wage as I do. I work only on some days. I cannot make any money on the days of the lockdown."

FACT 2

IDP households are evenly divided on what constitutes the largest challenge posed by the pandemic: 33% say it is the loss of household income and 33% say that the psychological effects of COVID-19 have been hardest to bear.

Mother of an IDP family, internally displaced within the governorate of Baghdad: "I am going to be honest with you. This pandemic has caused constant stress for my family and me because we do not know when we will get infected with it and when will we recover. The reason is that until now there are not any vaccines in Iraq for this pandemic and we do not know when the vaccine will arrive. This is one aspect, the other aspect is the stress generally caused by the curfews and lack of work and the effect that has had on our living situation, whether for my family and me, or citizens generally, which generates a kind of nervousness. The situation is not stable for my children. My voice is always raised and I cannot handle any talking back. I do not know if this is because of staying at home for a long time because of the curfew or if it is me. As for my sons and daughters, they are in a difficult mood and they cannot bear each other. Their voices raise for the simplest of daily things. And so I hope that the pandemic will go away as soon as possible and that we will return to normal life again."

FACT 3

Disruption of children's education has been problematic for households with children in primary, middle, and secondary school, and a big part of the problem is infrastructural: 50% of households with school-aged children report that not having an internet connection is the biggest impediment to their children's education. An additional 14% say it's not having a laptop, tablet, or smartphone.

Father of an IDP family from Salah al-Din, living in Sulaymaniyah: “The school situation was very difficult last year. I have five children that go to school and internet expenses are very high. We cannot afford to buy electronics and internet. I have five children in school and only had one cell phone and I bought another used device so my children can use it in turns. For example, one child uses it for one hour and then the next child uses it the next hour. It was very difficult. I can say that distance learning for IDP students was a difficult experience, and it continues to be difficult and costly. Children probably only obtain 30% of what they were taught.”

Mother of an IDP family from Anbar, living in Basra: “The online study experience in light of the COVID-19 period was and still is difficult, largely failing and unsuccessful due to several factors. The first of which is a weakness of the internet in general in the region, as the educational video lessons sent to them by the educational staff take two days to download in the apps. Also, the lack of suitable school supplies such as iPads and computers. I bought for my daughters one iPad shared between them, and because of the high cost of the new iPad, I bought a used device but it is not sufficient for the purpose of studying because of the device’s low memory. Also, other problems that do not help the success of the online study experience is the children’s and parents’ weakness in understanding and their capacity to follow lessons electronically. I follow continuously with my children their daily lessons that the educational staff publishes through the social networking apps, Telegram and WhatsApp, which do not achieve sufficient scientific benefit for them. In addition, the teachers work in schools for one day per week, but I am afraid to send my daughters to enroll in school, because even one day is enough to transmit the virus and the pandemic, due to the weak health services and the lack of means of prevention in schools.”

FACT 4

One in five IDP households (21%) report that a household member has gotten sick or died from COVID-19. While the vast majority (72%) of these households report that getting tested for COVID-19 was somewhat or very easy, equally large shares (74%) report it was somewhat or very difficult to afford medications to alleviate symptoms.

The widowed mother of an IDP family living in Baghdad, originally from Anbar: “My son and I got infected with COVID-19. We received medical care at home from our close neighbors. They worked on providing medications for treatment as well as food and disinfectants, and they stayed up serving us during the entire period of treatment. In the beginning, I had a disease in the throat and I could not get the treatment because it was expensive and it was also unavailable in public hospitals. It is available in private pharmacies. I am scared of going to medical centers or hospitals because I don’t want to get sick with COVID-19 again. Another issue is the constant lockdown and curfews which have caused a terrible mental state for my son and me. Hence, my son is looking for a job to help us with living but there are no job opportunities because of the constant closures. The other challenge is the constant cleaning process of the house and the bathrooms with sterilizers. It has caused me a problem with breathing because of inhaling the chemicals used to clean.”

FACT 5

A majority of Iraqi IDP households (58%) want their household members to receive the vaccine if it were to become available, though a relatively large share—38%—would not and 3% are unsure. Regardless of the desire to get the vaccine, there is less agreement on whether or not they would be able to access it. Nearly 43% believe it would be somewhat or very difficult to access it; 41% believe it would be somewhat or very easy.

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