

NAVIGATING THE EFFECTS OF DISPLACEMENT: IRAQ

*Insights From Internally Displaced, Host Community and
Returnee Populations*

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**PROGRESS
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Periodic Global Report on the State of
Solutions to Internal Displacement



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Effects of Displacement on Internally Displaced, Host Communities and Returnee Populations

The 2014 - 2017 conflict against the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) displaced nearly 6 million Iraqis, with the Government of Iraq formally announcing the end of the conflict in December 2017. As of April 2024, 4,871,916 individuals returned from displacement to their areas of origin. However, 1,098,913 people still remain internally displaced more than six years after the end of the conflict. This report presents a deeper country-specific dive into the findings of the qualitative analysis of six focus group discussions conducted between 1 and 15 August 2023 in Kirkuk and Hawija districts (Kirkuk Governorate) and Makhmur district (Erbil Governorate) with 43 representatives of IDPs, host community and returnees from displacement linked to the 2014 - 2017 conflict. Just under half (47%) of the respondents were female. Nearly three quarters (72%) of respondents were between the age of 18 and 59, a further quarter (23%) were older than 60 years and 5 per cent were under the age of 17.

IDPs

Women who were displaced for years in Kirkuk discussed the effects of displacement on their housing and livelihood conditions. A main concern was that high living costs were forcing many IDPs to remain in poor and crowded housing conditions. On the other hand, some shared that among the benefits was the chance for women to be employed which was not common before displacement, with the exception of traditional roles in the home and agricultural work.

For individuals whose areas of origin were still unsafe from the aftermath of the 2014 - 2017 conflict, return was simply not a consideration. The safety of the city of displacement motivated women's desire to stay, despite the difficulties they described with finding housing and registering their children in school. Men were mixed in their intentions to stay or return to their places of origin. Their reasoning was similar to the women, though, as they too calculated the relative access to necessary services in displacement versus their areas of origin. Those who lost property or faced ongoing security concerns said they had nothing to return to. Meanwhile, female IDPs in Kirkuk shared fears over return related to their families and the security situation. Some had family members associated with ISIL and feared that community members back home or the police and security services would pose a threat to them.

Many people shared a sense of community support from the host community, as reflected in social integration, educational support and help with rent. Still, some women said they were labelled as displaced and 'othered' no matter where they went. The sense of community, sometimes based on the presence of family, and most of all economic and social opportunities in the city were strong reasons for IDPs to stay. Without exception, the women agreed that in order not to feel displaced, they needed the government to change their residence and ration cards to reflect their location in Kirkuk. They also expressed a need for support with documentation that they lost in displacement and aid to find and afford housing.

Losing funds, homes, land and family in conflict – sometimes due to family links with ISIL – led to poverty in displacement and difficulty finding a way to return. Female IDPs desired support in regaining lost assets and expressed a need for peace-building activities to bring the community to accept ISIL families. Men unanimously expressed a desire in the next 5 to 10 years to be able to gain education, income and support their families. One man wanted to be a doctor, another expressed an interest to work in government, and a third wanted to open his own business but each shared the desire to give back to his family and community.



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The community needs to view [us] with empathy...we should not be held responsible for the actions or affiliations of family members. In [our] society, women adapt to situations rather than make choices.'

Focus group discussion with female IDPs, Iraq,

August 2023.

HOST COMMUNITY

The host community in Kirkuk shared their perceptions on the arrival of IDPs. They noted overcrowding since the arrival of IDPs, which they consider to have led to an increase in rent prices and decrease in wages, and a perceived increase in the spread of disease and pollution. One community member mentioned that hosting IDP family members caused a burden for their household. Others described difficulties that their children faced in accessing education in newly crowded schools.

Changes in societal norms were also noted by host community members. One woman said customs and traditions changed because IDP women held less traditional roles such as working in cafés, which was perceived as an improvement of women's status in society. Another said she herself only had a job because NGOs needed workers to support the displaced, but she unfortunately lost the job when IDPs returned home. Others claimed that IDPs changed customs because they had 'no respect for privacy,' brought about changes in host household dynamics or allegedly committed petty crimes. One woman said her family moved to a different neighbourhood with fewer IDPs because her husband felt that it was unsafe to leave her alone during the day with too many displaced people nearby. These negative perceptions were not universal, but all participants agreed that there are two perceived categories of IDPs: a peaceful category who do not want to get involved in trouble and a trouble-making category who cause problems among community members. One woman shared her feeling that host community men preferred IDP women, causing divorce and fewer marriage opportunities; on the other hand men in a separate discussion viewed intermarriage as a positive sign of connections among community members.

Some men described friendships and good relationships with IDPs, but most noted that these relationships took time and effort and that there were strains because of lack of resources like housing. Community members said that the local government should specify certain areas for housing, oblige business owners to employ people equally from the displaced and the host community and legislate a law that forces the displaced families who received compensation to return to their areas of origin along with the provision of basic services in those areas. They said the government should provide support in places of origin, ensuring a secure place for IDPs to return to.

Most people in the host community said that the presence of IDPs did not affect their long-term goals to gain greater financial stability and in some circumstances were helpful as partners and customers.



“Displacement has led to a scarcity of job opportunities and reduced wages. Most displaced people needed work to earn money, leading to them accepting low wages, which in turn reduced job opportunities for the host community.”

Focus group discussion with mixed-sex host community, Iraq,

August 2023.

IDP RETURNEES

Female returnees in Hawija District (Kirkuk Governorate) described their experiences and motivations to return to their area of origin. They described a strong pull of emotional connections to their place of origin leading them to return and the equally strong push factor of high rent and overcrowding in displacement.

On return, they had the unique experience that everyone in the area was a returnee, since everyone left during conflict and there were no 'stayees.' After the occupation of Hawija by ISIL, businesses were damaged and many personal homes and belongings were destroyed, leaving returnees with repairs to carry out or in high-cost rental homes rather than their old properties. The decision to return was taken by families, swayed by the heads of household, in response to discrimination and high costs in displacement and in the hope of restoring their homes. The female returnees said that if there were support to reclaim homes and restart agricultural activities, return would be unanimous. They planned to work toward those goals in the next 5 to 10 years, but they also planned to continue education that they had to leave after displacement. They also planned to start their own businesses and networks with neighbours and relatives at home by using skills and degrees gained when they were displaced.

Men returnees in Rawala Village (Makhmur district, Erbil) came from a camp, where they said they had no basic services, but on return they found no hospital and no electricity. They needed to rebuild their homes and could not continue educational pursuits or find work. However, the men decided to return with their friends and families. One noted that the most important thing was to go back as a family.

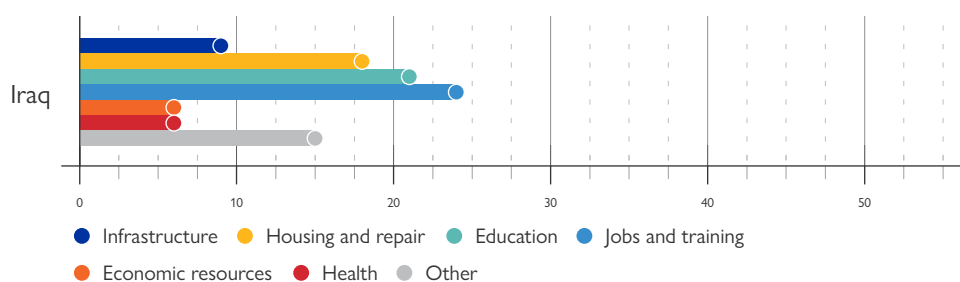


Returning has instilled a sense of beautiful stability and security within us. Being in our own homes has provided a feeling of comfort and familiarity, a stark contrast to the alienation we experienced during displacement.'

Focus group discussion with female returnees, Iraq,

August 2023.

MENTIONS OF SUPPORT NEEDED FOR SOLUTIONS IN IRAQ



The chart above shows the number of times each sector was mentioned by host communities, IDPs and returnees in each focus group discussion. In Iraq, the main themes that emerged were support with jobs and training, education, followed by housing and repair.

Periodic Global Report on the State of Solutions to Internal Displacement (PROGRESS 2023)

The IASC Framework on Durable Solutions acknowledges three accepted approaches for addressing internal displacement: the return and sustainable reintegration in the community of origin (referred to as “return”), integration in areas where internally displaced persons (IDPs) seek refuge (referred to as “local integration”) into local communities, or sustainable integration into another part of the country (referred to as “settlement elsewhere”). However, integration is also a fundamental part of all three solutions and overcoming displacement-related vulnerabilities; for returnees it entails becoming reintegrated in their communities, and for IDPs it signifies inclusion and access to livelihoods, jobs and basic services on par with the other members of the community.

As a contribution to addressing displacement challenges, the collaboration between the International Organization for Migration (IOM) Global Data Institute (GDI) and Georgetown University’s Institute for the Study of International Migration (ISIM) has produced the Periodic Global Report on the State of Solutions to Internal Displacement (PROGRESS). PROGRESS aims to be people-centered and operationally relevant, providing evidence-based analysis of factors facilitating internally displaced persons (IDPs) in moving towards and achieving durable solutions. It is designed for governments, development and humanitarian actors, and IDPs themselves, offering practical steps to enhance realistic opportunities for approaching solutions. Given the global focus on resolving internal displacement, there is a crucial need for the international community to unite efforts in supporting solutions for over 70 million IDPs, a number of whom have experienced prolonged displacement.

The report focuses on 15 countries, providing an analysis of operational quantitative data, mostly collected by the Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) on the challenges and opportunities faced by IDPs. It shows the importance of job creation, security and fostering a sense of belonging within communities for overcoming displacement-related vulnerabilities and, subsequently, reducing disparities between IDPs and their host communities. In addition, focus group discussions were carried out in 10 of these countries to include perspectives of people who were displaced, had returned or were part of communities that hosted IDPs. The published PROGRESS report highlights the commonalities across countries and regions – such as the strong focus on economic recovery and security as fundamental to durable reintegration. The conversations also exposed the range of experiences within families, communities and national contexts. Additionally, these discussions provided a platform to express perspectives typically overlooked by conventional data collection methods, such as affected communities’ views on the cultural and gender-related impacts of displacement in their countries.



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