

IOM IRAQ

IOM'S COMMUNITY STABILISATION PROGRAMMING IN IRAQ

2018 OVERVIEW



CONTEXT

Since the nineties, Iraq has been engulfed in a cycle of destruction and repair. Now, once again, Iraq is at a critical juncture, emerging from the worst of a brutal conflict with the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and a long history of internecine conflict, during which basic service provision and institutional capacity of the Government of Iraq has diminished.

While security and access has improved significantly since the military defeat of ISIL in 2017, a great number of factors continue to threaten peace and stability. ISIL was successfully cleared from urban areas in 2017, but insurgency-style attacks continue to take place in Iraq's north-central governorates. Iraq's hybridised security sector remains weak, and the array of armed groups mobilised to support the battle against ISIL now compete and coexist uneasily. Years of conflict and displacement have torn communities apart, and disputes over land and livelihoods in areas of displacement and return have the potential to boil over into renewed violence.

Alongside the battle against ISIL, the dramatic plunge in world oil prices in 2015-16 severely depleted government resources, including for critical functions such as migration management. Essential public infrastructure and services have been hard hit, and their restoration remains a major determinant of stability. According to the World Bank, unemployment, which was falling before the ISIL and oil crises, increased beyond the 2012 level of 8 percent to 13 percent in 2017/18, and the poverty rate has increased from 18.9 percent in 2012 to an estimated 22.5 percent in 2014. At 48.7 percent, Iraq has one of the lowest labour force participation rates in the world, especially for women and youth, at 12 and 26 percent respectively. Meanwhile, in southern Iraq, drought is worsening and putting greater pressure on communities, threatening agriculture and livelihoods, and a lack of maintenance and investment has left water infrastructure in a chronic state of disrepair.

Exposure to violence, abuse, and exploitation at the hands of ISIL and other armed groups, experiences during displacement (including, in particular, separation from family members), and challenges upon return have had a profound impact on the psychological wellbeing of Iraqis.

Fear, depression, and anxiety are widespread, and are, at times, reported to spill over into dysfunction and violence within households. Traumatic memories and poor physical, mental, and emotional wellbeing not only act as barriers to the return of IDPs to their areas of origin, but, unaddressed, stand in the way of efforts to rebuild relations between communities and heighten the risk of further conflict.

Notwithstanding the above, the crisis has created new windows of opportunity for positive change. Youth activism in different governorates indicates that the new generation is increasingly seeking to break away from the sectarian group thinking of the past and embrace a citizenship model that is not only more inclusive but allows for greater rights and responsibilities of citizens vis-à-vis the State. The crisis has also energised civil society representation of marginalised groups and, given the right support, it could constitute an important force for Iraq's future peace and stability. Finally, a culture of volunteerism has emerged, with many people eager to contribute to rebuilding their communities and preventing the recurrence of conflict and displacement. Volunteer groups in different parts of the country work together towards collective goals in order to re-establish trust and strengthen social cohesion, while fostering resilience at the individual and community levels.



WHAT IS THE IOM COMMUNITY STABILISATION PROGRAMME IN IRAQ?

In response to migration and displacement crises and fragility, IOM defines stabilisation as the process of creating the conditions for the establishment of normal social, economic and political life, by contributing to restoring basic rights and security; empowering marginalised individuals or groups; and by promoting social cohesion, functioning state governance, non-violent political processes, effective social policy, livelihoods and service delivery.

The principle of stabilisation is based on the premise that destabilising factors (such as land disputes, unaddressed conflicts, marginalisation, competition of resources), if left unaddressed, can result in populations backsliding into crisis situations or remaining trapped in a cycle of acute vulnerability.

In Iraq, IOM's Community Stabilisation Unit (CSU) aims to address the drivers of conflict and displacement through a community driven and led approach to promote resilience, social cohesion, and improved mental and emotional well-being in target areas.

Through five integrated pillars: social cohesion, MHPSS, livelihoods, community service projects, and support to the reintegration of ex-combatants (from the beginning of 2019), IOM's stabilisation programme supports IDPs and returnees to regain a sense of safety and security, increase self- and

community efficacy, and develop tools to deal with the past and regain hope and agency in the future. IOM recognizes that restoring economic opportunities is not a panacea to prevent future violence, and that broader bottom-up efforts should continue to strengthen relations between citizens and the state.

IOM's Community Stabilisation programme draws heavily upon IOM's Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) and Return Index, which generate a vast quantity of data related not only to population movements, but also to social cohesion and perceptions of safety in areas of displacement and return. In addition, IOM conducts conflict assessments and stakeholder mapping in areas of work to ensure a deep understanding of local needs, community perceptions, and dynamics. Reflection and learning is embedded in programme design and delivery, enabling IOM's CS team to build upon successes and correct the programme course if needed.



KEY ACHIEVEMENTS IN NUMBERS

IOM provided 123,502 services in IDP camps, informal settlements and urban settings in 9 governorates: Dahuk, Erbil, Baghdad, Karbala, Najaf, Ninewa, Kirkuk, Diyala and Babylon to 27,083 new beneficiaries (39,944 beneficiaries in total) including but not limited to:

- 717 beneficiaries engaged in memorialisation and storytelling activities
- 11,566 beneficiaries engaged through non-competitive sports
- 15,080 beneficiaries in IDP camps, informal settlements, and urban settings provided basic emotional and psychosocial support and individual and groups counselling
- 920 beneficiaries provided with specialised MHPSS consultations and 453 beneficiaries referred to specialised MHPSS services
- 1,838 beneficiaries provided with income generation services and livelihoods grants and 2,292 beneficiaries provided with vocational training services
- 1,626 community members provided with mediation and negotiation training, caregivers' courses, and leadership and personal development trainings

IOM also supported 45 grassroots Local Civil Society Organisation (CSOs) through training, small grants, and on-site coaching during project implementation and carried out 10 rapid conflict assessments and conducted 7 research projects in coordination with Iraqi Universities.



SOCIAL COHESION ACTIVITIES

Entrenched divisions within and between communities contribute to instability in IOM target areas. In 2018, IOM involved 104,111 people (54,106 males and 50,005 females) in the design and planning of community-based social cohesion activities.

All activities aim to bring people together and foster positive interaction based on the principle that restored trust and enhanced social cohesion will build community resilience in the face of (re-)emerging crises. While simply bringing people together may appear a very low starting point, IOM believes that the depth of mistrust which has arisen from the country's complex history makes it necessary to take a long-term, phased approach to increase levels of acceptance, cooperation, trust, and resilience:

- **Phase I:** Organisation of cultural events, social gatherings, and other community-led and driven activities in support of initial trust-building;
- **Phase II:** Organisation of awareness sessions, structured debates, dialogue groups and community initiatives to address topics of public concern; provision of support to local actors to enable them to organise themselves across sectarian and political divisions; organisation of peace-building and women's leadership courses; and
- **Phase III:** Provision of support to locally-driven mediation and (local) conflict mitigation initiatives.



PEOPLE LIVING WITH DISABILITIES STRENGTHEN THEIR SOCIAL CAPITAL



As 2018 drew to a close, the National Wheelchair Fencing Tournament was taking place at the Paralympic Committee's Training Centre in Baghdad. Amid fierce competition, Shayma'a Kadhim and Donya Adel, two talented women who participated in a recent IOM fencing course in Babylon, finished first and third in their categories.

The fencing course and other training activities sought to introduce participants to healthy coping mechanisms and strengthen their resilience. At the same time, activities gave people living with disabilities – including IDPs from Ninewa such as Donya – the opportunity to develop new friendships and expand their local support networks.

"Displacement was a difficult experience for us, as both my father and I were living with disabilities. IOM's Mental

Health and Psychosocial Support team provided me with counseling and the opportunity to participate in community-based activities such as knitting, drawing, and sports", said Donya Adel, 31, displaced from Ninawa to Babylon in 2014.

"I decided to volunteer with IOM to promote the inclusion of other people with disabilities in Babylon. Now, I feel like a totally different person - I am well connected to other people with disabilities in Babylon and coming together with non-disabled members of the community to participate in different IOM activities has changed the way that we are seen," she added.

A group of new friends, who Shayma'a and Donya met through IOM's MHPSS activities in Babylon, accompanied the two remarkable women to Baghdad to cheer them on at the tournament.

MENTAL HEALTH AND PSYCHOSOCIAL SERVICES

In 2018, in accordance with IASC guidelines and through its community centres and mobile teams, IOM provided MHPSS services in nine governorates, including specialised services, targeted non-specialised services, and measures to strengthen family and community support.

In total, IOM delivered MHPSS services reaching 16,453 beneficiaries.

SPECIALISED SERVICES

Psychiatric consultations and clinical psychological counselling are provided to adults and children with pre-existing and/or emerging forms of severe stress, behavioural and relational problems, or moderate to severe mental disorders. Throughout 2018, IOM provided beneficiaries with regular services through psychiatrists and clinical psychologists. The main issues reported in consultations were symptoms of psychosis, schizophrenia, anxiety disorder, bipolar disorder, posttraumatic stress disorder and major depressive disorders. To ensure a holistic response, IOM offered family psycho-education was offered to family members of those that are affected by mental health disorders, to increase their knowledge and facilitate support within existing social networks. In 2018, in total, IOM provided specialised mental health consultations for 920 beneficiaries and referrals to MHPSS specialised services to 453 beneficiaries.

FOCUSED NON-SPECIALISED SERVICES

While there was a lower incidence of new displacement in 2018, IOM provided psychological first aid to 133 beneficiaries to recently displaced families to reduce their stress and assist in healthy recovery. In order to strengthen the resilience of those choosing to return, IOM provided 500 families with self-care return kits containing journals, stationary, games, crafts kits, and five brochures on relevant MHPSS topics.



FAMILY AND COMMUNITY SUPPORT

Guided group discussions facilitated by trained IOM staff allowed people, sharing similar interests or facing similar challenges, to gather to discuss topics identified by the community members themselves. In 2018, these group discussions included a wide range of topics such as anger and stress management, anxiety, parenting, the importance of youth in society, peer pressure, addictions, peaceful co-existence, challenges of living in IDP camps, how to deal with unemployment, and early marriage. IOM involved 14,518 beneficiaries in guided group discussions throughout 2018.

LIVELIHOOD SUPPORT

Income generation services, livelihood grants and vocational training:

There is strong relationship between livelihoods, mental health and psychosocial wellbeing, and stability in Iraq.

In IOM's areas of work, one of the most frequently reported sources of stress and tension is un- and underemployment, and the associated strain to meet household needs. The World Bank and other actors recognise that livelihood programs delivered to fragile populations tend to be unsuccessful if they do not account for the effect stress has on functions like concentration, memory, self-esteem, emotional regulation, and capacity to withstand pressures. MHPSS activities are therefore necessary complements.

In 2018, under the Community Stabilisation Programme, IOM provided income generation services and livelihoods grants to 1,838 beneficiaries and vocational training services to 2,292 beneficiaries. Vocational training not only equipped participants with new skills but gave them an opportunity to connect with others and develop their confidence and feelings of self-worth -- many IDP women reported it was the first time in their lives they had the opportunity to take part in such a course. Upon completion of vocational training, some participants started their own businesses, while others found paid employment, improving their ability to support themselves and their families.



COMMUNITY SERVICE PROJECTS

In 2018, IOM's Community Stabilisation Unit organised 998 *public space improvement actions and campaigns* with targeted communities.

For example, IOM renovated a public park for the community in Qaraqosh in the Ninewa Plains and engaged volunteers in planting flowers and painting walls in public areas.

IOM also provided upgrades and equipment to 10 primary health centres (PHCs), placing a focus on restoring the full functionality of the PHCs to ensure greater access to health services, particularly for vulnerable groups.

Similarly, two training courses on the WHO Mental Health Gap Action Programme (mhGAP) were carried out for PHC staff in Mosul and Tel Afar to enhance their knowledge of mental health problems and to strengthen their capacity to support persons in need.



CAPACITY BUILDING: EMPOWERING LOCAL ACTORS

In 2018, in line with the shift from emergency response to stabilisation, IOM shifted the focus of its MHPSS and social cohesion activities from direct service provision to local actor capacity building.

. With the long-term goal of handing over services to local actors, IOM placed a particular focus on supporting Dohuk- and Ninewa-based CSOs with trainings, small grants, and on-site guidance and coaching, allowing them to provide MHPSS services to IDPs in the long term. Furthermore, to build resilience and empower people to cope with displacement and acts as agents of positive change within their communities, IOM organised courses on leadership, personal development, self-awareness, self-care,

negotiation, mediation, and peace building for community leaders, women, and youth. In 2018, IOM delivered:

- Training for over 300 staff of local organisations
- On-site supervision and coaching sessions for CSOs
- Training for 533 government service providers and technocrats
- Training for 67 community focal points (volunteers)



RESEARCH AND ASSESSMENTS: ENSURING A DATA AND ANALYSIS DRIVEN APPROACH

In 2018, alongside rapid conflict assessments in target areas, IOM conducted the following research projects:

- **Memorialisation in Iraq: An exploration of everyday sites imbued with memories of conflict and violence:** Everyday sites in post-conflict Iraq, where buildings, places of worship, prisons, or public squares, are often imbued with socially impactful memories of conflict and violence. Through this assessment, IOM explored the impact of memory in post-conflict Mosul and Tel Afar, identifying ways to enable communities to transform these into physical “archives of memories” to support active dialogue, peaceful co-existence and, ultimately, sustainable peace.
- **Perceptions of return and reintegration among west Mosul IDPs and returnees:** The process of return to west Mosul has the potential to fuel new rounds of intercommunal conflict due to mutual distrust and resentment between (1) “stayers” –west Moslawis who remained in Mosul for the duration of the ISIL’s three-year rule, (2) “leavers” – west Moslawis who left the city at a relatively early stage in ISIL rule and are still displaced in IDP camps, and (3) “returnees” – those who were previously displaced from west Mosul and have since returned to the city. Through this assessment, IOM looked at ways to ensure that the return of those who remain displaced is safe, dignified, and sustainable, and mitigate the risk of future violence.
- **Key considerations on leveraging the security-development nexus in Iraq:** In many of its key policy documents, the Government of Iraq recognises the mutually reinforcing nature of (in)security and (under)development and the need to carefully calibrate action under both rubrics, which may contribute to mitigating instability. IOM developed a research paper to provide international actors with guidance on how to partner with the Iraqi government and civil society to operationalise the security-development nexus in Iraq. This paper highlights development actions that can contribute to improved security in Iraq and programmatic areas that require close cooperation between security and development actors.



WAY FORWARD

In 2018, IOM's community stabilisation programme underwent significant growth and development and achieved many high-quality results. In 2019, IOM will focus on maintaining and continuing to improve the quality of service delivery in areas of displacement, while expanding programming to address the drivers of conflict in areas of return. Particular focus will be placed on addressing mutual distrust and resentment between different groups – described above as “leavers”, “stayers”, and “returnees” –


and on rebuilding the trust and confidence of Iraqi citizens in the Iraqi Government by addressing current and past grievances and building government capacity to fulfil its responsibilities to provide services and protection. A significant emphasis will be on supporting the reintegration of self-demobilised former combatants who, with the end of active combat against ISIL, now seek to re-establish their lives in their areas of origin.




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