

IOM – building Iraqi capacity and assisting IDPs

by Dana Graber Ladek

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) has been assessing IDPs in Iraq since 2003. IOM is a member of the UN Country Team for Iraq, and works closely with the UN Cluster system and the Iraqi authorities.

As the article on page 16 indicates, the Iraqi Ministry of Displacement and Migration (MoDM) is responsible for playing the lead role in addressing the consequences of mass displacement and eventually facilitating the

potential return of large numbers of displaced Iraqis. IOM's assessments of IDPs complement the registration work undertaken by MoDM. Templates used – as approved by Cluster F, the Cluster for Refugees,

IDPs and Durable Solutions, of which UNHCR is Coordinator and IOM Deputy Coordinator – address multiple issues and needs, including food, health care, water and sanitation, documentation and property, as well as the IDPs' future intentions. IOM monitors coordinate with MoDM, local government bodies, NGOs, tribal and community leaders and individual IDP families

to locate and gather information on displaced populations.

Building the capacity of MoDM is one of IOM's key activities in Iraq. In coordination with UNHCR, we provide active support to enable the Ministry to become a self-sufficient organisation, with an increased capacity to protect and assist IDPs, refugees and other populations of concern. This support includes clarifying departmental and individual responsibilities within the Ministry, establishing operating procedures and work plans and drafting legislation designed to clarify and strengthen the Ministry's mandate.

Among IOM's other activities are:

- providing emergency distributions and implementing community assistance projects (CAPs): In response to the needs identified by IOM's needs assessments, we distribute emergency food, non-food items and water. CAPs address the basic needs of IDP and host communities, such as water and sanitation, health care, and education. IOM also provides vocational training geared to income generation activities to reduce dependency and ensure the sustainability of project outcomes.
- providing technical assistance to government ministries with migration and border management responsibilities: IOM has assisted the Government of Iraq to review migration functions and structures, draft national migration policy and establish an immigration training centre that offers language, human rights, managerial development and IT skills. Stability cannot return to Iraq unless it builds a functional, effective and integrated system of border management with a common goal of creating open but controlled and safe borders.
- training for staff of the Iraq Commission for the Resolution of Real Property Disputes (CRRPD): Given the large number of property restitution claims – a result primarily of the forced relocation programmes implemented by the former regime but also a consequence of the current conflict – IOM trains Iraqi officials on relevant international best practices based on its experience with international and national claims programmes.
- providing Iraqi NGOs with training to enhance their capacity to assist IDPs, including emergency preparedness, disaster management and best practices for camp management. IOM believes that supporting local communities to accommodate IDPs is the best solution. However, camps may have to be a last resort and IOM works with UNHCR, the Iraqi Red Crescent and MoDM to ensure best practices in camp management.
- encouraging return of educated Iraqis: Skilled Iraqis are in desperately short supply now that some 40% of professionals have left the country. The Iraqis Rebuilding Iraq (IRI) Programme – jointly implemented with UNDP and the Ministry of Planning and Development Cooperation – is helping the government to recruit and place qualified nationals for the reconstruction and rehabilitation of the country. Over sixty Iraqi experts currently living abroad are undertaking short- to long-term deployments to enhance the institutional capacity of the Iraqi civil service and public sector institutions.
- helping third-country nationals (TCNs) stranded in Iraq: Since 2003 IOM has facilitated the evacuation of over 7,000 migrants from Iraq. IOM continues to receive frequent requests for assistance from TCNs, many of whom have been deceived into coming to Iraq and are exploited for little or no remuneration. IOM has resources to provide stranded migrants with voluntary return assistance to their

home country. However, the choice to do so remains a difficult one for individuals who have contracted significant debts at home and often have little to go home to.

Amen (not his real name), a graduate from Sulaymaniyah, taught art for five years. In 2002 he left Iraq and landed in the UK in search of a better life. While in the UK, he chose to improve his education and enrolled in English, IT and photography classes. In addition, he became an active participant in many art exhibitions. Most of his art focused on expressing the plight of migrants. After his asylum request was rejected, he requested IOM's assistance to return to Iraq. Soon after his return in December 2005, IOM assisted him to find a job with a local implementing partner. Amen is now able to support his family and pursue a promising art career.

In August 2003, following the bombing of the UN Headquarters, international IOM staff were transferred to Jordan. International consultants now support IOM's many qualified national staff to further strengthen our capacity on the ground. IOM, like other agencies, is forced by the security situation to function under a low profile to avoid endangering the lives of its staff and implementing partners. IOM has been able to widely share its experience of ways to minimise operational risks in humanitarian operations through the Security Awareness Induction Training course provided for all UN agencies and NGO staff prior to deployment to Iraq.

IOM has worked to publicise the scale of Iraq's displacement crisis, and we are pleased that the alarming increase in people fleeing their homes is finally reaching international attention. Much more needs to be done. With no cessation to the ongoing displacement, IOM Iraq is dedicated to continuing to inform the public of the conditions of IDPs and to advocate for increased assistance and funding.

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