IRAQ: THE IMPACT OF THE SYRIA CRISIS
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IOM is committed to the principle that humane and orderly migration benefits migrants and society. As an intergovernmental organization, IOM acts with its partners in the international community to: assist in meeting the operational challenges of migration; advance understanding of migration issues; encourage social and economic development through migration; and uphold the human dignity and well-being of migrants.

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Recent developments in the on-going Syria crisis have highlighted the painful truth behind humanity’s capacity for ill-treatment of those it should naturally seek to protect. Whilst international condemnation is mediated by institutional indecision over a suitable and acceptably responsive intervention, the IOM Iraq Mission has never wavered from its fundamental commitment to provide targeted humanitarian assistance to those forced, often violently, from their homes and their communities, displaced across borders created in their infancy to protect the very families now fleeing the violence ravaging their homeland.

The physical and psychological trauma experienced by Syrian refugees and Iraqi returnees, now being displaced for a second time from a country that once provided them with sanctuary from the violence pervading their own country, is only exacerbated by the conditions that often confront them on their arrival in Iraq. With this in mind, the Mission’s remit to provide safe, orderly and humane migration to those in need is particularly pertinent within a continually escalating crisis environment that shows no signs of abatement.

In order for the Mission to respond in an ever evolving manner that consistently and comprehensively addresses the most urgent and immediate of needs, regular on-the-ground assessment is required in order to tailor any humanitarian response strategy to the extreme conditions and challenges experienced by the growing number of incoming individuals and families, who often arrive at the border with nothing but the clothes in which they stand.

With the crisis entering its second year, the challenges faced by incoming populations will only increase in both diversity and scale over time. These challenges may include psychosocial problems related to the conflict from which individuals have fled and subsequently to the protracted nature of their displacement, a lack of access to basic services including water and sanitation infrastructure, limited access to education, and escalating levels of unemployment with the associated lack of regular income that naturally entails.

The assessment detailed in the pages following this foreword will draw conclusions and provide recommendations aimed at addressing challenges generated by the crisis at the community and individual level. This information will be used by the Mission in the development of its emergency response programming in Iraq.

On a final note, the Mission would like to reconfirm its commitment to the people of Syria now present in Iraq, to Iraqis returning to the country they were forced to leave, and to those waiting on the border for the assistance that they so urgently require. As long as there remains a need for assistance, IOM Iraq will continue to respond.

Sincerely yours,

Michael Pillinger
Chief of Mission, IOM Iraq

"THE WORLD IS NOT DANGEROUS BECAUSE OF THOSE WHO DO HARM BUT BECAUSE OF THOSE WHO LOOK AT IT WITHOUT DOING ANYTHING."

— Albert Einstein

In light of the necessity for continual assessment of the on-going Syria crisis in Iraq, and acknowledging the importance of informed and targeted assistance to those most affected, IOM Iraq would like to thank the US State Department’s Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration (PRM) for their continued support.
The impact of the protracted and escalating situation in Syria is being felt throughout the region, with the growing refugee crisis as one of its most pressing consequences. Amid the rapidly deteriorating situation in Syria, the international community and national actors are struggling to respond to massive population displacements across the region and to meet even the most urgent and immediate basic needs of this extremely vulnerable population group. In addition to recent displacement, the protracted displacement of thousands of refugees who fled Syria in the earlier phases of the conflict is posing new and diverse challenges to the authorities and humanitarian actors, including the growing social, economic and demographic long-term consequences currently facing receiving host communities.

Iraq has not been spared the effects of this regional dynamic. As a consequence of the continued mass influx of Syrian refugees since mid-August 2013, the overall refugee population in Iraq is estimated at over 220,000. The country continues to feel the effects of resultant pressures as the population of Syrian refugees continues to grow. Furthermore, the number of Iraqi returnees, who had previously been displaced to Syria as a result of conflict in Iraq, has reached over 50,000 since the start of the crisis and continues to rise, adding significantly to already challenging conditions.

This unparalleled population influx represents a significant burden for Iraq, as the country is still struggling with the consequences of its own protracted conflicts and internal population displacements. Although the number of Syrian refugees in Iraq remains lower than in other countries in the region, in the present context the crisis may have disproportionate and higher effects on Iraq’s stability and security, with subsequent and inestimable effects on the stability of the entire region.

The current report explores the immediate and longer term consequences of the Syria crisis in Iraq, and aims to provide a better understanding of the profile, background, composition and needs of the Syrian refugees and Iraqi returnees in Iraq. The report maps the movements and locations of vulnerable populations, explores their living conditions and access to vital services, assesses the relations between them and host communities and identifies their medium to long-term needs and intentions.

The resultant recommendations aim to inform the Iraqi authorities and the wider international community of ways and approaches in which the response to the Syria crisis can be strengthened in the future. Experience has shown that this is possible when assistance is implemented from the ground up, and in partnership with the people in need of assistance. Therefore, programs must be developed and configured within a framework of interlinked and mutually supportive, sustainable individual and community initiatives that focus on members of the concerned society. IOM believes that the most successful, durable initiatives are all-inclusive, community driven and community run.

The findings and conclusions discussed throughout this report are based on data and information gathered through field assessments carried out in June and July 2013, and on preliminary information and observations provided by the IOM Rapid Assessment and Response Teams (RARTs) related to the recent mass population influx following 15 August 2013.

The report was prepared by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in Iraq between April and September 2013, within the framework of the “Community Revitalization Program (CRP) – Phase II” funded by the US State Department’s Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration (PRM).

1 The current report follows on from IOM’s Rapid Urgent Needs Assessment, implemented in August 2012, which addressed the immediate needs of vulnerable populations upon their arrival in Iraq. IOM will continue to evaluate the situation, and provide assistance to those individuals affected by the Syrian crisis.

2 Available at: http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49e486426.html

3 The borders were officially closed in May 2013 and reopened on 15 August 2013. During that period of closure, only around 400 most serious medical cases were allowed to cross into KR, and all were transported immediately to the nearest hospitals.

4 Central and Southern Iraq covers all of Iraq except for the Kurdish Regional governorates of Erbil, Sulaymaniyah and Duhuk.
began. According to preliminary assessments conducted by IOM Iraq field teams, the incoming refugees include a mixed population, approximately 70% of which are families with children, including a number of female-headed families. Approximately 30% are individuals, 10% are elderly persons, and 3% are disabled. The vast majority are Kurdish. Most of them, on reaching the border, are exhausted and particularly vulnerable\(^5\) following the long walk to reach Iraq under intense heat and with little refreshment.

Newly arrived Syrian refugees have been accommodated in temporary reception camps and facilities such as schools, mosques and community centers in locations designated by the KRG.\(^6\) In the absence of adequate accommodation/improvised settlements are being erected throughout the region by incoming families themselves, using their personal household items and other available materials.

The living conditions of newly arrived populations are particularly bad. Families very often live in overcrowded make-shift homes and settlements, exposed to poor hygiene infrastructure and harsh weather conditions which can exacerbate the prevalence of dermatological and respiratory diseases. An initial needs assessment carried out by IOM field staff reveals that emergency relief equipment, including tents and non-food items such as hygiene-related and basic household items have been identified as immediate priority needs. It must be noted, however, that their needs are not limited to the above, and varied and responsive assistance is essential in the meeting of all of the needs of this vulnerable group.

The influx of tens of thousands of destitute men, women and children adds significant pressure to the lives of impoverished host communities, already dealing with the consequences of the protracted Syrian crisis and previous internal conflict. Relations between refugee and host communities have generally been good in the past, despite sporadic acts of discrimination and abuse. Nevertheless, due to detrimental and escalating socio-economic effects and anticipated migratory pressures associated with the crisis, there is a concern that relations may deteriorate in the months to come. A further issue adding to the complexity of an already challenging migration crisis is that of the reported ongoing cross-border movements between Syria and Iraq, mainly the Kurdistan Region (KR). It has been noted that some Syrian migrants enter Iraq temporarily, only to return to Syria soon after. The motives for their temporary stay in KR differ from a desire to visit relatives located in Kurdistan, a need for medical treatment, or to search for work in KR.

New pressures continue to exacerbate Iraq's already significant challenges, generated by its own protracted internal conflicts and associated mass population displacements. The country's extremely delicate political and security situation, its weak socio-economic infrastructure and overstretched emergency and humanitarian relief capacities all undermine efforts to respond to these growing challenges. The dramatic increase in numbers of Syrian refugees in Iraq, whilst lower than in other countries in the region, may have disproportionately higher effects on Iraq's stability and security, leading to consequences that could potentially spill over the Iraqi borders. These pressures are likely to continue destabilizing the country, pushing it towards greater sectarian violence and further fragmentation, with inestimable implications for the stability and security of the entire region. The stability and prosperity of Iraq, and the region as a whole, will ultimately be determined by future response to the current migration crisis.

Difficulties, as described above, have already been predicted by academics as early as February 2003, albeit in a different context, in the wake of the 1991 Gulf War that produced nearly three million refugees.\(^7\) The potential for mass forced migration into the semi-autonomous region of Iraqi Kurdistan was touched upon by some at that stage, become an easily accessible safe area for Iraqis fleeing Saddam Hussein's regime. It was suggested that, as local authorities did not have the adequate resources to cope with mass population influxes, humanitarian supplies should be pre-positioned inside Iraq's Kurdish region to cope with any sudden increase in population movements. Whilst infrastructure within the region is reasonably good, allowing for efficient and timely delivery, it was suggested that supplies should be stockpiled both in Kurdistan itself and in strategically positioned nearby locations.

With increasing numbers of new arrivals, predominantly into Iraqi Kurdistan, and the subsequent growth in a variety of needs, this is just as relevant today as it was in 2003. As national and international emergency response capacities become overstretched and available resources quickly become depleted, emergency relief partners face significant challenges in adequately responding to the needs of the continuing influx of an extremely vulnerable population, while also addressing the diversifying needs of those who arrived in the earlier stages of the crisis.

**IOM Iraq's Syria Crisis Response:**

**From Emergency Relief Assistance towards Safety, Security and Long-Term Wellbeing**

Since the onset of the crisis in March 2011, IOM Iraq has been working as part of the United Nations Country Team (UNCT), in coordination with Government of Iraq authorities and humanitarian actors, on the provision of emergency relief assistance designed to meet the needs of Syrian refugees and Iraqi returnees.

As a partner in the implementation of the Syria Regional Response Plan (RRP) in Iraq, IOM assists Syrian refugees located in camps and within host communities through the provision of basic services and non-food items (NFIs); self-reliance and livelihood support; water, sanitation and hygiene infrastructure; in addition to the facilitation of safe, humane and orderly migration through transportation from the borders to camp and non-camp locations. With an advanced prepositioning, logistics, and supply chain management system, and an extended operational network of partners across the KR, IOM has been able to quickly respond to the exponentially increasing needs of the growing refugee population.

IOM Iraq consists of approximately 330 experts and staff members working across all eighteen governorates of Iraq. The Mission's structure includes three operational hubs in Baghdad, Basrah and Erbil, in addition to 22 field satellite offices.

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\(^{5}\) Vulnerability is defined by IOM as the inability of individuals and communities to withstand the adverse consequences of socio-economic, political and demographic changes and pressures. Vulnerable implies that a population may be directly or indirectly affected by forced migration (IDP, refugees and residents of host communities), displaying a lack of any kind of income (under the poverty line), being unemployed and underemployed, and have no access to basic social services (health care, education, water/sanitation, housing, legal advice, etc.).

\(^{6}\) By 22 September 2013, 10 temporary reception facilities and accommodation locations were designated by KRG: Arke Citadel, Qosok, Zahko and Guelam in Dahuk; Baharka Camp, Basirma, Beihima Dam, Kawa Camp and Gawer Gosik in Erbil; and Aarbat in Sulaymaniyah.

\(^{7}\) Policy Brief “Refugees from War in Iraq”, Peter W. Galbraith, Professor of National Security Studies at the National War College and a former US Ambassador to Croatia, Migration Policy Institute (MPI), February 2003, no.2.

\(^{8}\) NFIs can include all internal household items.
The Kuehne Foundation, founded in Switzerland in 1976, has gained high esteem for its initiatives to promote training, education and research in the fields of logistics and transport. It also supports projects in the areas of culture and medicine. The Foundation is operationally active and initiates almost all of the projects it funds. The sole donor of this public trust is his social responsibility as an entrepreneur. Available at: http://www.knf-portal.com/fileadmin/user_upload/documents/about_us/investor_relations/documents/2011/en/19-kuehne-foundations.html.

IOM’s unique network of field-based Rapid Assessment and Response Teams (RARTs) are able to conduct swift nationwide needs assessments through beneficiary household surveys, key informant interviews and focus group discussions, ensuring delivery of aid tailored to the specific needs of IOM beneficiaries. Deployed and operational across all 18 governorates, the RARTs give IOM the capacity to serve vulnerable populations in the most remote areas of Iraq.

IOM operational methodology integrates beneficiary profiling and detailed needs identification, in response to which the Mission tailors assistance according to specific beneficiary needs. IOM promotes a holistic and future-centered approach, ensuring the provision of immediate life-saving services and basic infrastructural reinforcement, followed by initiatives addressing the longer-term wellbeing and safety of vulnerable populations. The social and economic impact of prolonged displacement is also addressed through individual and community assistance schemes, comprehensive livelihood support programs, and the rehabilitation of socio-economic infrastructure, all contributing to the building of bridges between refugees and their receiving host communities.

The Mission’s response to the Syrian crisis can be seen in the following map. Also shown are the population densities of Syrian refugees in Iraq, identified locations of Syrian families nationwide and the level of vulnerability of these families (as identified by RART field staff prior to NFI distributions to determine beneficiary eligibility and to inform as to the types of items required for a targeted and effective distribution).

Initiatives mapping population density and locating the most vulnerable of families have identified Diyala, Kirkuk, Baghdad, and Salah al-Din as those governorates hosting the most vulnerable of Syrian refugees. Due to IOM Iraq’s experienced and dedicated field staff located across Iraq, the Mission is able to reach and continue to assist those most in need, mitigating further suffering and alleviating the negative impacts experienced by receiving host communities.

As of the 9th of September IOM Iraq has provided:

- **54,062** individuals assisted through the provision of non-food item kits.
- **11,433** NFI kits distributed, approximately 300,000 individual items.
- **765** individual beneficiaries received direct livelihood assistance in Dahuk, Domiz Camp, and Erbil.
- **3** infrastructure projects completed (two WAT-SAN and one education).
- **270** tents erected in Erbil and Dahuk.
- **42,139** individuals assisted with transport to safe locations in Dahuk, Erbil, and Sulaymaniyyah.
- **9,034** individuals assessed for vulnerability and immediate needs to identify NFI assistance eligibility.
The assessment was conducted before borders in the KR opened on 15 August where over 50,000 Syrian refugees crossed. Thus, faced by Iraqis returning from Syria. The assessment will also explore conditions throughout the country within governorates of Iraq, specifically those refugees located outside of camps who are believed to be dispersed. These large population movements have created significant challenges for Iraq. The current assessment intends to establish the movements of Syrian refugees and Iraqi returnees outside of camps, mapping their temporary and final (at the point of assessment) locations in Iraq. The study will then establish the living conditions faced by targeted populations, their ability to access vital services, daily difficulties and coping mechanisms, priority needs, and an understanding of both short and long-term intentions. Furthermore, the assessment will look into the economic, social and political impact of recent large population influxes from Syria on Iraqi receiving communities, providing an insight into the relationship between refugees and their Iraqi hosts. This will inform decision-making and the development of a strategy of project implementation aimed at promoting community stability and livelihood support.

Key informants were selected based on their professional involvement with Syrian refugees and Iraqi returnees, in order that a deeper understanding of data gathered through household surveys might result. Key informants were drawn from local council, government and community representatives, and included both Syrian and Iraqi respondents. Focus group discussions involved between six and ten participants and were broken down into four main groups: male Syrian refugees living outside camps, female Syrian refugees living outside camps (where possible), members of affected host communities and Iraqi returnees.

The teams went to great lengths to ensure that as wide a range of communities as possible were identified and assessed through several complimentary methods. All groups of participants were selected to include those from multiple districts, rural and urban areas where applicable, female-headed households as well as various ethnic and religious groups.  

10 The assessment was conducted before borders in the KR opened on 15 August where over 50,000 Syrian refugees crossed. Thus, findings and conclusions do not directly reflect the new population, yet the assumption is made that parallels can be drawn.

11 Available at: http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/country.php?id=103

12 It is important to note that the focus of this report is to provide an overview of the situation to identify the vulnerabilities of target populations as impacted from the continuing influx of people due to the protracted crisis in Syria. The results presented are, thus, not representative of Iraqi society as a whole or of the Syrian population in Iraq, but of the most vulnerable individuals and circumstances in some of Iraq’s most vulnerable and marginalized communities. Nonetheless, the assessed population can help identify certain indicative vulnerability criteria, as those displaying the most pressing of challenges faced by Iraq’s vulnerable communities and, therefore, may be used as a general indicator of trends within and between governorates.

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While Iraq continues to struggle to respond to the ongoing mass influx of an extremely vulnerable Syrian population, it is, at the same time, facing the diversifying needs of those Syrian refugees and Iraqi returnees who arrived in the earlier stages of the crisis and affected host communities. With the protracted and potentially escalating situation in Syria, the return of Iraqis will continue and no end to the displacement of Syrians seems in sight. This will generate yet more complex and longer-term challenges regarding the temporary local integration of Syrian refugees, the durable reintegration of returnees, further negative impacts on host communities, as well as an increasing need for infrastructural adjustments. In addition, and from a longer-term perspective, the continued protraction of the crisis will result in increased migration to Iraq and further displacement within its borders and from Iraq to third countries.

The increasingly diverse consequences of the Syrian crisis in Iraq must be addressed in an integrated and holistic way, through a comprehensive set of immediate, mid- and longer-term measures responding to the various needs of refugees, returnees and host communities, ensuring at the same time the reinforcement and expansion of local capacities and infrastructure. As mentioned previously, all indications point to further significant mass influxes of Syrian refugees and Iraqi returnees into Iraqi Kurdistan. As this region represents, in comparison to other areas of central and southern Iraq, an easily accessible safe area with reasonably good infrastructure allowing for efficient and timely delivery of humanitarian assistance, IOM Iraq will continue utilizing its significant resources and infrastructure, in as comprehensive and efficient a manner as the Mission’s capabilities allow.

The following recommendations are therefore developed and configured within a framework of interlinked and mutually supportive individual and community initiatives that focus on all members of society and not just a selected few. Based on the information, observations and findings generated during this assessment, and in the preparation of the report, IOM Iraq has identified the following priority areas:

I. Emergency and Humanitarian Relief Assistance and Services: Responding to the Immediate Basic Needs of Incoming Syrian Refugees.

In response to current and potentially escalating conditions, it is of the utmost importance that uninterrupted emergency and humanitarian relief operations addressing the continuing influx of Syrian populations into Iraq is ensured. This is particularly crucial during the immediate, post-displacement phase when incoming individuals are at their most vulnerable. The following assistance services are key: reception, medical screening and referrals, transportation from borders to the reception facilities, provision of food and emergency non-food items (NFI) including hygiene and household items, provision of adequate shelter facilities (distribution of tents), as well as the development of sufficient water/sanitation and other infrastructural facilities. This will involve bringing to bear the full weight of IOM Iraq’s Supply Chain Management system, in order to implement the strategic pre-positioning of stocks in order to allow to hold critical material “in stock” at strategic locations in anticipation of required humanitarian response. Over and above the actual positioning of physical stocks in a particular location, the technique also embraces vendor agreements that make provision for access to stocks when needs arise at pre-negotiated prices, enabling the organization to buffer the excessively high costs that arise during emergencies.

II. Enhancing Immediate Integration: Self-Reliance and Socio-Economic Conditions.

In addition to the provision of basic humanitarian assistance, it is crucial to rapidly address the social and economic consequences of displacement. Forced migration often leads to dependency on aid and frustration associated with isolation from families and social networks. These difficulties can themselves lead to psychosocial problems and related antisocial behavior.

Psychosocial support through the organization of various trading, manufacturing and service provision activities can mitigate these problems and help to build and maintain the social networks of, and relations between, vulnerable groups. Individual and community-based micro-projects involving refugees, returnees and members of host communities aimed at strengthening local service infrastructure should be prioritized and promoted within vulnerable communities. Such initiatives help to improve access among refugees and returnees to basic services, improve their living conditions and contribute to the creation of a positive climate in the camps and within host communities.

The immediate and temporary integration and reintegration process should be supported by the provision of information, counseling and referral services. To that end, a counseling and referral mechanism should be established to ensure timely access to accurate information about registration procedures, rights, obligations and entitlements, access to basic services and work opportunities, as well as many other issues that could impede successful integration and reintegration.


Access to work and regular income are the main priorities for both Syrian refugees and Iraqi returnees. These primary needs strongly influence the future considerations and plans of both groups: access to work in order to obtain a sufficient, regular income is stated as the main determining factor in deciding whether to remain in the current location, to move elsewhere within Iraq or to migrate to third countries. Livelihood support programs should be developed to facilitate temporary integration in Iraq for Syrian refugees through employment generation, job matching and support for the creation of small and micro-businesses, as well as through various types of vocational and on-the-job training. At the same time, existing livelihood programs should be strengthened and expanded to support the sustainable reintegration of returnees into Iraq.

IV. Raising Awareness of the Realities of Migration: Prevention of Irregular Migration, Smuggling and Trafficking in Human Beings.

Harsh living conditions, a lack of work opportunities and regular income, and a lack of access to adequate services will inevitably lead to both Syrian refugees and Iraqi returnees contemplating the option of migration to third countries. Irregular migration through smuggling and trafficking networks has, for many years, been a common method for many Iraqis and third country nationals in Iraq to leave the country, predominantly to the European Union (EU). As long as these illegal networks remain active in Iraq, there is a significant risk that vulnerable Syrian refugees and recent returnees will be exploited. This issue should be addressed through comprehensive information and awareness raising campaigns, designed to increase understanding among vulnerable populations of the realities and risks associated with migration, particularly of irregular migration, and to inform on locally available alternatives.
V. Strengthening Iraqi Institutional Capacity to Address the Current Migration Crisis in Iraq.

With increasing numbers of new arrivals and a subsequent growth in a variety of needs, local and national capacities, resources and infrastructure have become too strained to adequately respond to the demands placed upon them. The recommended measures outlined above will require significant reinforcement of local infrastructure, primarily of shelter and housing, health and education facilities, as well as comprehensive capacity building programs for Iraqi authorities and organizations.

VI. Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) System.

The Syrian crisis in Iraq can be characterized by relatively high mobility of Syrian refugees and Iraqi returnees following their arrival to Iraq. The necessity for tracking their post-arrival migration within and from Iraq is posing significant challenges to Iraqi Government authorities and humanitarian actors, as they fail to accurately locate affected populations and ensure timely and focused assistance.

To address this challenge, IOM has developed the Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) which regularly captures, processes and disseminates complex information and data, providing a clear understanding of the locations, profile, vulnerabilities and needs of affected populations. Such a mechanism is designed to support the timely and accurate mapping of displacement locations and the rapid assessment of needs, facilitating the timely provision of assistance and services throughout the duration of the crisis.

From a longer-term perspective, this mechanism would allow for a more in-depth understanding of the longer-term needs and intentions of affected populations. It will also contribute to the development of assistance schemes tailored to future needs, including the return and reintegration of refugees to Syria once conditions allow and the long-term reintegration of Iraqi returnees in Iraq.

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**DEMOGRAPHICS**

During the course of the field assessment, staff collected data from 1,440 Syrian refugees and 1,126 Iraqi returnees. In terms of gender, the split for both groups is roughly 50% male and 50% female. The average family size amongst the Syrian refugee population is 4.9, whilst Iraqi returnee families have an average of 3.8 members.

Fifty percent (50%) of Syrian refugees are of working age (18 to 65) while this is true of 60% of Iraqi returnees. A large proportion of both groups are less than 18 years old, and therefore of school age. This is true of 49% of Syrian refugees (34% of whom are 5 years old or less) and 38% of Iraqi returnees (27% are 0-5 years old). Very small proportions of both groups are over the age of 65 and, therefore, over working age (1% of Syrian refugees and 2% of Iraqi returnees). Of the 296 Syrian refugee families assessed, 204 (69%) are located in an urban environment, while 92 (31%) are found to be living in camp, rural or semi-urban settings. The overwhelming majority (97%) of Iraqi returnees are located in urban areas.

One percent (1%) of Syrian refugee families and 2% of those of Iraqi returnees are coping with at least one physically or mentally disabled family member. Of greater concern, in terms of prevalence, are the 6% of Syrian refugees suffering from chronic illness. This is also true of 6% of Iraqi returnees. Also of interest, in terms of vulnerability, are the 2% of Syrian refugee households headed by a single individual and 3% of those of Iraqi returnees.
The overwhelming majority of Kurdish Sunnis settle in the KR of Iraq whilst Arab Sunni Muslims tend to settle in the north and west of Iraq. The remaining 10% of Syrian refugees were either Christian or Shia Muslim. Christian Syrians predominantly settle in Dahuk while Shia Muslim Syrians have primarily settled in the central and southern governorates.

IOM has identified two primary routes taken by incoming refugees and returnees. The indicated routes follow the main roads into Iraq, leading to Anbar and Dahuk. The routes taken by Iraqi returnees back into Iraq were generally far more direct, as they knew the country, were legally entitled to enter and had specific intended destinations.

Assessment data suggests that the religion and ethnicity of people displaced to Iraq are often influential in determining where they settle. IOM estimates that 89% of Syrian refugees in Iraq are Sunnis and, of this figure, 64% are Kurds and 25% are Arab.

The actual number of Syrians in Iraq and full details of where they are located is unknown. IOM assessments have confirmed that the number of individuals who have crossed into Iraq is higher than the current number of individuals who have registered. Nineteen percent (19%) of Syrians interviewed by IOM field staff have not registered with the authorities. The assessment also indicates that Syrian refugees often relocate several times within the KR and in southern and central Iraq. Over 50,000 Iraqis have re-entered Iraq from Syria since the start of the crisis. Syria still hosts thousands of Iraqis and the protracted crisis is likely to force many more to return to their country of origin. The number of Iraqis returning is also unclear as, again, 19% of returnees interviewed by IOM state that they have not registered with MoMD.

IOM Iraq has discovered that Syrian refugees entering Iraq have been displaced from a large number of locations within Syria. There is no clear correlation between place of origin and where people choose to settle. The assessment has revealed that Syrian refugees often stop at multiple locations in Syria and Iraq before reaching their final locations.

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IOM has identified additional pull factors influencing decision making as to settlement location.

Movements

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Movements
MIGRATION TRENDS OF SYRIAN REFUGEES FROM SYRIA TO IRAQ

Aleppo: 25.4% to Dahuk, Erbil, Sulaymaniyah, Kirkuk, and Nineveh
       3.4% to Dahuk, Erbil, Sulaymaniyah, Kirkuk, and Nineveh
       10.8% to Kirkuk, Nineveh, Sulaymaniyah

Al Hasaka: 17.3% to Dahuk, Erbil, Sulaymaniyah, Kirkuk, and Nineveh
         3.4% to Dahuk, Erbil, Sulaymaniyah, Kirkuk, and Nineveh

Dayr az Zawr: 15.9% to Anbar, Nineveh
               2.7% to Kirkuk, Nineveh, Sulaymaniyah

Damascus: 2.4% to Baghdad, Dahuk, Nineveh
          10.8% to Dahuk, Sulaymaniyah, Kirkuk, and Nineveh
          15.9% to Anbar, Nineveh, Sulaymaniyah

Migration trends indicate significant movement from Syrian regions to Iraq, particularly from Aleppo to Dahuk, Al Hasaka to Kirkuk, and Dayr az Zawr to Anbar. The map highlights the concentration and direction of these movements.
Iraqi returnees were also influenced by several factors when deciding where to settle upon return. It was found that the majority of Iraqi returnees maintained family ties and often still owned property in their places of origin. Seventy percent (70%) of these individuals chose to return to their original location. Amongst the remaining 30%, some have not been able to return to their governorate of origin due to poor security conditions and the fear of targeted violence. The threat of violence has also hindered some returnees from registering.

Approximately 50% of assessed Iraqi returnees are Shia Arabs whilst 43% are Sunni Arabs. Nearly all of the Shia returnees have settled in predominately Shia communities in central and southern governorates.16 Sunni Arabs, however, have often settled in governorates with mixed ethno-religious groups, as well as governorates that are predominantly Sunni. IOM identified that Christian Iraqi returnees are predominantly settled in Dahuk.

Pull factors influencing Sunni Arab returnees are not restricted to those associated with religion, as they do not always relocate to areas with a Sunni majority. It is clear, however, that religious affiliation is still somewhat influential. Family ties, property rights and security concerns are other factors that influence final decision making on return location.

A further issue adding to the complexity of an already challenging migration issue is that of property rights and security concerns. Assessment findings confirm that the vast majority of Syrians in the KR are registered and hold temporary residency status, which entitles them to access work and services and freedom of movement throughout KR. Currently, Syrian refugees who entered the KR after the 15 August border crossing opening are accommodated in closed temporary camps and their registration process is ongoing.

In contrast, entry and the securing of legal residency status for refugees in central and southern governorates has been subject to various restrictions. In summer 2012, Syrian refugees were entitled to temporary residency that allowed them access to the labor market and limited freedom of movement within some areas of Anbar, the governorate that hosts the majority of Syrians in this part of the country. As the crisis continued, and following the closure of the borders in October 2012, the GoI restricted legal entries to emergency cases and rare cases of family reunification, denying the right of legal residency to all other Syrian refugees. Al Obaidy camp in Anbar is currently the only Syrian refugee camp in southern and central Iraq. Residents commonly report that they cannot leave the environs of the camp to seek work.

The assessment has identified a perceived risk of arrest and even deportation as a major concern for refugees in central and southern Iraq. As a consequence, many Syrian families remain unregistered with GoI authorities and, therefore, unaccounted for and increasingly marginalized. During the implementation of IOM assistance distributions, it was observed that Syrian refugees often do not stay in one location for long. Since mid-2013, Syrian refugees have increasingly registered with UNHCR in central and southern governorates.

**Rights to Legal Residency**

Different policy approaches to the legal residency of Syrian refugees have been applied in the KR, in comparison to central and southern governorates.

The KRG has, since the early days of the crisis, exhibited a welcoming policy towards Syrian refugees, granting all registered refugees with wide-ranging rights and providing assistance during their stay in the KR. Assessed Syrian refugees generally indicated that registration and the obtaining of ID documents were simple procedures, although some refugees reported it to be a lengthy process. Assessment findings confirm that the vast majority of Syrians in the KR are registered and hold temporary residency status, which entitles them to access work and services and freedom of movement throughout KR. Currently, Syrian refugees who entered the KR after the 15th August border crossing opening are accommodated in closed temporary camps and their registration process is ongoing.

**Reasons for Not Registering**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Syrian Refugees in Central &amp; Southern Iraq</th>
<th>Syrian Refugees in the KR of Iraq</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fear of arrest</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear of deportation</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of document</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No answer</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know how</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Takes too long</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No barriers</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of document</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know how</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear of deportation</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

16 Najaf (26%), Basrah (26%), Kerbala (16%), Missan (5%)
Syrian refugees in Iraq are predominantly aid dependent. Assessment findings indicate that 32% of refugees primarily rely on financial support from relatives. Twenty nine percent (29%) report receiving income through employment. A much higher proportion of those living in the KR of Iraq, compared to those in central and southern Iraq, gain income through formal or informal employment. In the governorates of Erbil and Sulaymaniyah, 82% and 79% of refugees respectively claim that temporary or occasional employment is their main source of income. However, the vast majority of Syrian refugees throughout Iraq are still having to deal with insufficient levels of income and remain dependent on assistance provided by the humanitarian organizations.

An ability to secure sufficient income is often the root cause of many difficulties experienced by Syrian refugees. These include an inability to provide sufficient and adequate food, particularly outside of the camps. Families often indicate the eating of fewer and lower quality meals is their first coping mechanism, while some families also cut back on healthcare.

Iraqi returnees also frequently have to deal with the problems associated with insufficient income. Assessment data has revealed that 40% of Iraqi returnees cite family assistance as their main source of income. 30% receive their income through formal or informal employment and 16% indicate other sources of income. They also report eating fewer and lower quality meals as a result of insufficient income, and some seek support from relatives.

Adverse socio-economic conditions have a direct impact on relations between returnees, refugees and host community residents. Assessment findings suggest that, in communities with prospering economic conditions, relations between Syrians and their host community tend to be positive. However, in communities suffering from high levels of poverty, relations between the two groups are generally poor. The greater the vulnerability of host communities, the more common it is for tensions to emerge.

17 As reported in IOM Iraq’s 2012 Annual report, access to employment opportunities was identified as the main need amongst those living in Iraq’s vulnerable communities. In 2012, 79% of IOM assessed respondents claimed access to work was a main priority.
Assessment findings indicate that Syrian refugees generally receive a lower daily wage than Iraqi workers in the same sectors. In addition, cases of Syrians not receiving agreed levels of pay for the hours they have worked have also been reported. These issues are the result of various factors, including high demand for jobs, widespread occurrence of informal employment, and more generally, a weak legal framework and labor rights protection in Iraq which has led to labor exploitation and increased vulnerability among Syrian refugees. The various causes of the problem must be addressed if the consequences of this pay disparity are to be mitigated. Sufficient support must be provided to prevent labor exploitation and to ensure fair labor practices.

Cases have been reported of Syrian construction workers receiving approximately 10 USD per day, while Iraqi workers receive 18-20 USD per day for the same work. Such disparities represent a source of tension as Iraqi workers struggle to compete with lower paid Syrians, who themselves feel exploited by employers. This gap in pay levels may potentially have serious and long-term repercussions for local Iraqi-Syrian relations.

Lack of income due to unemployment or underemployment is a causative factor of a range of problems, including an inability to pay for accommodation and to support basic family needs. This issue was common across all assessed governorates and has resulted in the overcrowding of households as families pool their limited resources to pay rent. In extreme cases, a lack of income has led to homelessness. Other associated problems identified through the assessment are an inability to send children to school, and an inability to access more specialized healthcare services from private healthcare providers that are not provided by public health facilities.
More than half of Iraqi returnees report renting their accommodation, while significant numbers report living with family members and friends, and some own their property. When interviewed, Iraqi returnees commonly indicate that they are dealing with poor living conditions. Common problems include a lack of electricity, hygiene and sanitation facilities, non-food items and potable water. They also report a lack of living space and low quality building construction as factors exacerbating the poor nature of their conditions.

Assessment findings suggest that 52% of Iraqi returnees are renting their housing, 15% own their housing, and 28% are being hosted by friends or family and, therefore, not paying any rent.

Of those Syrian refugees living within host communities in Iraq, the majority rent accommodation. This is, however, often unsustainable in the long-term as refugees struggle to obtain sufficient income. IOM has identified a minority of Syrians living with relatives.

The majority of those assessed report that their current accommodation is in poor condition. When asked about facilities that are either unavailable or of poor quality in their current accommodation, Syrian refugees commonly cite poor sanitation, a lack of non-food items, a lack of potable water, and a lack of space.

As mentioned earlier, in central and southern governorates, 25% of Syrian refugees state that they fear either eviction or deportation. This has led them to actively avoid the attention of the authorities, hindering their ability to secure long-term housing. The fear of eviction is not seen to be an issue for Iraqi returnees.

Of those IOM-assessed Syrian refugees not living in camps, 81% are renting their accommodation, less than 3% own their housing and 9% are being hosted by friends or family. Shelter is a major concern for the Syrian population with many citing shelter amongst their top priority needs.

18 June 2013 saw the movement of 550 refugee families from the two previously existing camps in Al Qaim to Al Obaidy.

SYRIAN REFUGEES OUTSIDE OF CAMPS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Living Arrangement</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Renting houses</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being hosted</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Living in owned houses</td>
<td>&gt;3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Live in rented houses</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Live in durable houses</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Live in improvised houses</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

IRAI RETURNEES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Living Arrangement</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Renting houses</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owned houses</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being hosted</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Live in durable houses</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Live in improvised houses</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Syrian refugee family at home in a host community in Dahuk governorate.

18 June 2013 saw the movement of 550 refugee families from the two previously existing camps in Al Qaim to Al Obaidy.
Throughout Iraq, healthcare provision can generally be described as poor due to the low capacity and weak infrastructure of the healthcare system. Hospitals and clinics are generally ill-equipped and often unable to provide certain treatments, including psychosocial support. In addition, there is a general lack of female medical staff. Syrian refugees and Iraqi returnees commonly report unhindered access to the public healthcare system, but state that only limited services are available. Private medical care is often too expensive to represent a viable option.

In the KR of Iraq, where the majority of Syrian refugees are located, hospitals are overstretched as a result of the significant increase in population, and also have had to deal with the necessary prioritization of urgent Syrian arrival cases. This has, in some cases, meant that existing patients are superseded, creating a situation in which host community members no longer have access to the medicines and care available before the crisis. Syrians refugees living in central and southern governorates also report limited access to the public health system due to restrictions associated with their residency status.

IOM field staff have reported that health problems are more common amongst individuals located in camps than amongst those living within host communities. This is predominantly the result of close-quarter living conditions in the camps. Continual assessment and medical intervention is needed to prevent the spread of infectious diseases in more densely populated urban areas, an issue which could potentially be exacerbated by poor living conditions.
NEEDS AND NECESSARY ASSISTANCE

Current emergency response does not meet the needs of affected populations. As the crisis continues and numbers of incoming refugees and returnees increase, the gap between assistance available and that required is likely to increase. Livelihood development programs are therefore essential in order to address long-term needs.

A lack of access to work negatively impacts all other needs. The need for shelter and more frequent distributions of food and non-food items (NFIs) such as furniture, household supplies and hygiene items was regularly reported through the assessment. It was also suggested that NFIs should be specifically tailored to individual or household needs and that they should be of better quality.

The needs of Iraqi returnees broadly mirror those of Syrian refugees, with the most pressing priorities being access to employment and permanent or durable housing. Respondents have not regularly identified health care or education as priority needs. This may be due to the fact that other needs are currently more pressing; however, in the longer-term, these secondary needs are likely to become of greater concern.

Members of vulnerable receiving host communities regularly cite services and infrastructure as areas of concern. National and local service infrastructure, already lacking in capacity, is now heavily overburdened due to increasing numbers of Syrian refugees and Iraqi returnees. Future support will be essential in ensuring that Iraq’s infrastructural capacities are developed and expanded according to growing needs.

All assessed groups report receiving some form of assistance provided by authorities, international and local NGOs or from local groups and individuals within host communities. Despite this currently available assistance, Syrian refugees and Iraqi returnees report that it is insufficient, and that additional and more frequent support is required.

Fifty three percent (53%) of respondents, including both Syrian refugees and Iraqi returnees, cite that they receive some form of financial assistance, mainly from family and friends. While needs may differ between individual families, there is a clear requirement for additional, comprehensive and timely assistance, primarily supporting individual livelihoods and community infrastructural development.
RELATIONS BETWEEN REFUGEE, RETURNEE AND HOST COMMUNITIES

Host community residents have generally welcomed Syrian refugees, often providing support in the form of food and clothing. In some cases, Syrian refugees are hosted within their houses until alternative accommodation is located. Syrian refugees often mention feeling welcomed and having good relations with their host community. The residents of these host communities, however, may only be able to assist in the short-term. External assistance will be essential to prevent a potential deterioration in relations between refugees and their host communities in the future as their displacement becomes more protracted.

Host community members frequently demonstrate solidarity, speaking of an obligation to provide for the needs of Syrian refugees due to the past hospitality shown to Iraqi refugees in Syria displaced by previous conflicts in Iraq.

“...we will stay here and integrate with the current community until Syria is settled.”

A Syrian Refugee in Najaf

The vast majority of Iraqi returnees indicate firm intentions to stay in Iraq. While 48% had intended to integrate into Syrian society, now that they have returned to Iraq, the overwhelming majority intend to reintegrate. For the minority of undecided returnees, improvements in services and livelihoods in Iraq and the security situation in Syria are key factors in the determination of their future intentions.
Factors affecting community relations are not limited to demographics and population size. There is also a link between the economic conditions experienced by a community and the relationship between arriving and host populations. Generally, in communities where the economic situation is stable, the relationship between Syrians and their host communities is positive. However, in communities where poverty is widespread, and where populations are not ethno-religiously homogenous, such as Baghdad, Kirkuk and Salah al-Din, the relationship between the two groups is generally more strained. The greater a community’s vulnerability, the more likely it is that tensions will emerge.

INCINCREASING VULNERABILITIES AMONG SYRIAN REFUGEES

DUE TO THE FORCED NATURE OF THE DISPLACEMENT, MANY SYRIAN FAMILIES CROSSED INTO IRAQ WITH VERY LITTLE, IN TERMS OF PERSONAL POSSESSIONS AND MONETARY WEALTH, LEAVING THEM EXTREMELY VULNERABLE AND POTENTIALLY EXPOSED TO ABUSE AND EXPLOITATION. SPORADIC OCCURRENCES OF THIS TYPE OF TREATMENT HAVE BEEN REPORTED ACROSS IRAQ, INCLUDING INSTANCES OF LABOR EXPLOITATION, SEXUAL EXPLOITATION INCLUDING PROSTITUTION, CHILD ABUSE, FORCED BEGGING, EARLY MARRIAGES, HUMAN TRAFFICKING AND SMUGGLING. IN ADDITION, SOME SYRIAN WOMEN HAVE REPORTED RECEIVING VERBAL ABUSE AND HARASSMENT WHEN THEY ARE NOT DRESSED IN ACCORDANCE WITH LOCAL TRADITIONAL DRESS CODES.

"IN THE PAST FEW MONTHS IT HAS BECOME MORE COMMON TO SEE SYRIAN CHILDREN AND WOMEN IN THE STREETS AND MOSQUES BEGGING FOR MONEY. I THINK THESE ARE THE EARLY INDICATORS OF OCCURRENCES OF EXPLOITATION, HUMAN TRAFFICKING, CHILD ABUSE, AS WELL AS POTENTIAL PROSTITUTION."

IOM FIELD STAFF MEMBER

IN TERMS OF SECURITY, THE ASSESSMENT INDICATES THAT ASSESSED SYRIAN REFUGEES AND IRAQI RETURNEES FEEL SAFE AND NO LONGER IN DANGER OF PHYSICAL HARM, AT THE INDIVIDUAL AND FAMILIAL LEVEL, IN ALL GOVERNORATES EXCEPT KIRKUK, WHERE POLITICAL AND SECURITY CONDITIONS CONTINUE TO DETERIORATE.

20 Instances of abuse have been reported; however, this is not representative of the experiences of all Syrian refugees within Iraq. The extent and severity of cases of abuse vary by governorate and are likely to represent the worst cases of maltreatment.

IMPACT AT THE COMMUNITY LEVEL

As the crisis in Syria becomes more protracted, the socio-economic consequences affecting communities receiving incoming migrants from Syria, particularly in the northern governorates, become increasingly challenging. The growing demands of those individuals and families crossing the border into Iraq gradually increase the strain on resources, infrastructure and services, often influencing how host community residents relate to and view their Syrian neighbors.

As the emergency developed into a large-scale crisis, the Iraqi authorities and community members struggled to respond. This has had a detrimental effect on the living conditions of both those crossing the border and those receiving them.

The mass influx of vulnerable individuals has, in some cases, exacerbated existing problems such as overcrowding in schools, poor service provision by an already struggling health system, and the overcrowding of public transport. Where services are not currently compromised, concerns have been raised that, if the number of refugees and returnees crossing into Iraq continues to rise, services will be affected.

"I don’t think there is competition over the services because these families are very few and do not affect the society, but if there is more displacement of the Syrian families in large numbers, then surely there will be an effect and lack of services."

A host community resident of Najaf: a nurse

Host community members and key informants throughout Iraq have expressed concern over the seemingly inevitable consequences of the crisis on local economies and labor markets. Interviewees have, in general, pointed to a significant decline in job opportunities as demand rises, cheap labor becomes more readily available, competition increases and wage levels begin to fall. In addition, local market prices and rent levels have increased. In contrast, some positive accounts of the influx of Syrian refugees have been reported in Erbil, where host community members describe how the arrival of Syrians has bolstered the labor market by bringing in new skills and capacities (brain-gain).

These incoming individuals include educated professionals such as engineers and doctors, in addition to skilled construction and craft workers. Assessment findings suggest that the impact of the crisis varies depending on the size of the population received by a particular host community. The influx of large numbers of vulnerable families with poor access to poor quality services and weak markets exacerbates consequences which tend to be felt most keenly by those same vulnerable families.

As the crisis escalates, its impact will intensify leading to further significant damage to local economies and service infrastructure, and potentially leading to further tensions between host community residents and those seeking refuge within that community, inhibiting integration and the development of socio-economic conditions.

In is clear that, as numbers entering Iraq continue to increase, the growing impact will be keenly felt in everyday life through rising competition for employment, increasing
rent levels and market prices, growing overcrowding in schools, and a heightened demand for utilities and services. This has become increasingly the case following events commencing 15 August when the KR border crossings witnessed an influx of over 42,000 individuals in just over a week. Reported cases of begging, petty crime and prostitution have led to the development of negative perceptions among host community members regarding incoming refugee populations. It has also been reported that some Syrian refugees struggle to adapt to the more conservative nature of their host communities. Syrian refugees generally demonstrate an awareness of the impact that their presence has on a host community’s perception of them. Appropriate and targeted assistance to the most vulnerable of populations must be ensured if segregation and marginalization within host communities is to be avoided.

Syrian refugees in the central and southern governorates are likely to experience further marginalization as a result of their socio-economic exclusion and worsening living conditions that could increase their vulnerability and the risk of exposure to abuse and discrimination. As a result of this issue, Syrian refugees often express dissatisfaction with their level of integration within host communities, further fuelling tensions.

Syrian men interviewed by IOM field staff regularly state that the securing of employment opportunities in Iraq has helped them to develop their standing within the community. The availability of cheap labor within host communities has, however, raised mixed feelings. While some Syrian refugees welcome the opportunity to work, even at rates of pay that would have been unacceptable in Syria, others have described the situation as exploitative.

The lower wage levels being accepted by Syrian refugees continue to negatively affect the host communities. Host community members have reported a lack of motivation to seek work, as wages have fallen to a level that no longer enables employees to support their families. These conditions are exacerbated by the increasing cost of essential items such as fruit and vegetables, inflated as the market rises to meet the increasing demand. The recent prolonged closure of border crossings between Syria and Iraq, particularly in Anbar, has resulted in a decrease in trade between the populations living on either side of the border, affecting the availability and price of commodities. Thirty one percent (31%) of Syrian refugees and 27% of Iraqi returnees cited food prices as their primary concern. This is likely to contribute further to a rise in animosity between host community members and those seeking refuge.

The increasing severity of conditions and the length of displacement will affect how host communities perceive and relate to their new neighbors. This dynamic is extremely complex and must be approached with sensitivity in order to mitigate tensions within communities and to foster harmony and integration.

**THE SPORADIC BUT PROLONGED CLOSURE OF BORDERS BETWEEN SYRIA AND IRAQ HAS DISRUPTED TRADITIONAL CROSS BORDER EXCHANGE, INCLUDING TRADE, EXACERBATING THE ECONOMIC DIFFICULTIES FACED BY HOST COMMUNITY RESIDENTS, IRAQI RETURNEES AND SYRIAN REFUGEES.**

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Iraq will continue to be exposed to severe socio-economic and migratory pressures as a direct consequence of the Syria crisis.

“The increasing number of Syrian refugees will continue to impact negatively on the local economy and social landscape. If support is not given in the next six months, we will see quick erosion of the situation in Iraq.”

IOM Field Staff Member

The Syria crisis is likely to continue generating further immediate and longer-term impacts on the Iraqi socio-economic landscape, impacts which are hard to predict in terms of severity and scope. A common sentiment expressed by various interviewees is the likelihood that, under current conditions, the situation in Iraq will continue to deteriorate. In the short-term, incoming Syrian refugees and Iraqi returnees will continue to require comprehensive emergency assistance in the form of food, NFI’s and shelter. IOM Iraq, in coordination with UN Country Team counterparts, and local, governorate-level and GoI stakeholders, will continue to contribute to the provision of emergency supplies and infrastructure, including reception, medical screening and referrals, transportation from borders to the reception facilities, provision of food and emergency non-food items (NFI) including hygiene and households items, provision of adequate shelter facilities (distribution of tents), as well as the development of sufficient water/sanitation and other infrastructural facilities. In order to do this, the Mission will fully utilize its existing Supply Chain Management (SCM) system in order to implement the strategic pre-positioning of stocks. It will also continue to develop a comprehensive reception, transportation and tracking system designed to facilitate the safe, orderly and humane migration of incoming individuals and families from border crossings to final camp and non-camp destinations.

Medium to long-term challenges include the inability of incoming individuals to secure sufficient income to provide for their families. The mass influx of Syrian refugees and Iraqi returnees, who remain dependent on aid until such time as they can locate employment, increases the possibility of exploitation within the workplace, leading to an increasingly compromised local economy and rising living costs. Syrians employed on wages that are very often lower than the market rate represent competition to those Iraqis that are themselves struggling to secure an income or who remain unemployed, leading to instability within affected communities. It is clear that the level of difficulty faced by communities dealing with the arrival of increasing numbers of refugees and returnees is determined by that community’s existing characteristics. A strong economy and sufficient infrastructure provide a community with greater capacity to cope with demand and to provide support to incoming vulnerable families. The current report highlights a clear correlation between higher numbers of those seeking refuge in a community and greater economic consequences. In response to these challenges, the Mission will continue to implement livelihood support programs to facilitate integration through employment generation, job matching and support for the creation of small and micro-businesses, as well as through various types of vocational and on-the-job training. This individual assistance will only be effective if local markets and associated infrastructure are supported and assisted to expand in order that they may
cope with increasing demand. To this end, IOM will contribute to community-based development in the form of programming aimed at strengthening local service infrastructure. Such initiatives will not only help to improve access among refugees and returnees to basic services, improving their living conditions, but will also increase the capacity of the local economy to absorb increasing numbers of employees and the small and micro-businesses that will employ them.

In the longer-term, an inability to find employment is likely to force many Syrian families who are currently living in rented property out of their homes as they struggle to make rent payments. This has and will result in more refugees living in non-durable shelters, forced into dependency on aid. The provision of sufficient livelihood and community infrastructural assistance in support of a stable local economy, capable of supporting all members of a vulnerable community, whether incoming or receiving, is paramount. As the crisis continues and the priorities of refugees and returnees change, other issues will need to be addressed, such as the expansion of educational facilities, the development of sufficient healthcare infrastructure and the further provision of more durable housing. As Iraqi authorities continue to face significant challenges in responding to these growing and diversifying needs, hindered by fragile and ever changing security conditions, the international community must come together in support of the people of Iraq.

IOM Iraq will continue to implement a comprehensive package of mutually supporting measures, formulated and strengthened over the last ten years since its establishment in January 2003. Experience gained during this period has enabled the Mission to develop an extensive network of staff and infrastructure, facilitating the implementation of a range of livelihood, capacity-building and emergency assistance programs that will allow for the provision of support designed to address the various needs detailed above, and to contribute to the mitigation of consequences felt throughout Iraq as a result of the mass influx of both refugees and returnees fleeing from the violence and political turmoil that continues to pervade Syria.
IRAQ: THE IMPACT OF THE SYRIA CRISIS