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Iraq: a displacement crisis

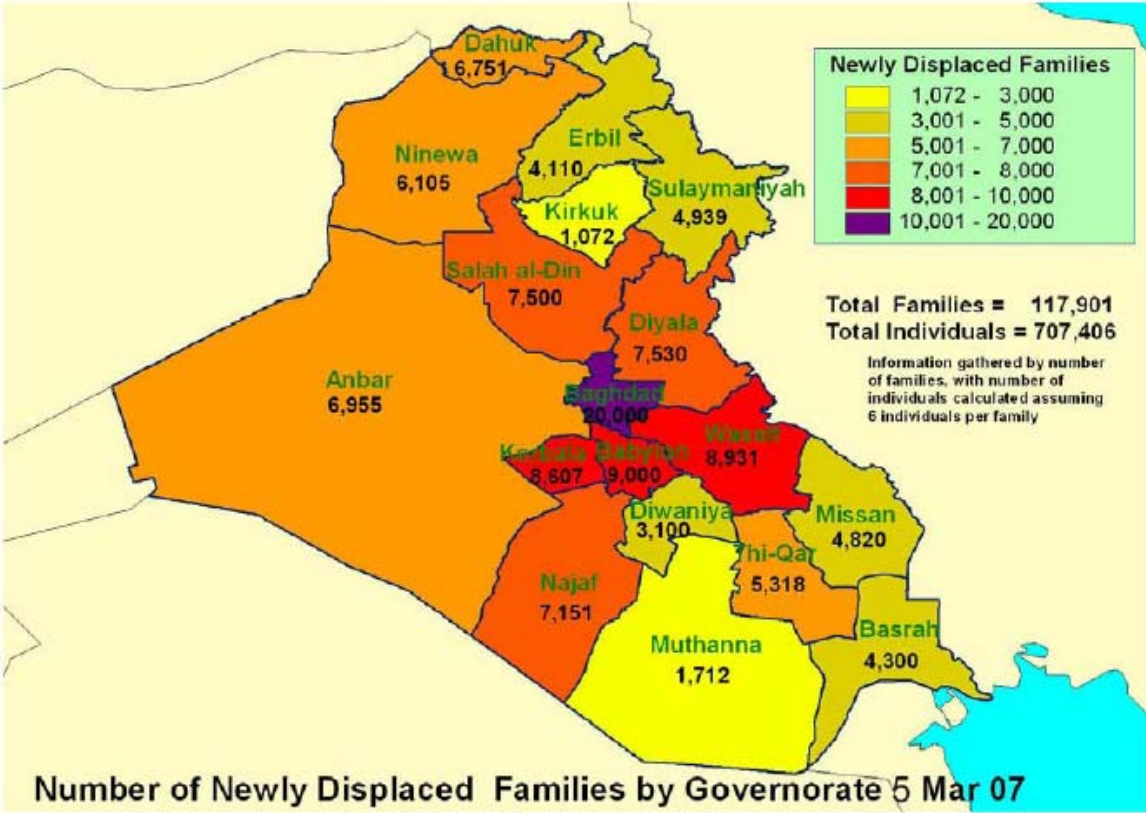
More than 727,000 people are estimated to have been internally displaced due to sectarian and generalised violence in Iraq between February 2006 and March 2007. Together with tens of thousands more displaced by ongoing military operations, and more than one million by the abuses of the former regime of Saddam Hussein, this leads to a total of nearly 1.9 million people currently estimated to be displaced within Iraq. In addition, some 2 million Iraqis fled to neighbouring countries as of March 2007.

Four years after the toppling of the former regime, a new wave of violence and human rights abuses has left large numbers of people dead and caused mass population displacement at an unprecedented scale. Sectarian and generalised violence has been acute in mixed areas, particularly in Baghdad and neighbouring Diyala but other provinces have also been affected. Military operations are causing repeated displacement in Anbar province in the west.

The UN has been extremely slow to recognise the humanitarian crisis inside Iraq, whose population has inadequate access to shelter, food, clean water and employment opportunities. The UN Secretary General officially recognised the humanitarian suffering of Iraqis only in March 2007. The complex and large-scale nature of Iraq's internal displacement situation has also drawn only belated international attention. Limited by a number of factors including insecurity, international efforts to assist the internally displaced have been negligible. Local NGOs, and increasingly political parties and militia, are providing protection and assistance to internally displaced people (IDPs).

The displacement situation inside Iraq and its impact on the region has gained importance on the international agenda in early 2007. A review of the current UN operations is taking place and a high-level inter-ministerial meeting is planned for mid-April. Donor interest has also taken off. One concern is that, in terms of donor support, creative efforts to address the situation inside Iraq may be neglected or under-supported since programmes for Iraq's refugees in the region will be easier for donors to access and monitor and for agencies to implement. However, only a relatively small number of people are expected to be able to flee the country, while the number of IDPs is likely to increase. Return for both internally displaced people and refugees is conditional on improvement of the humanitarian and security situation within the country.

Newly displaced people by governorate



Source: Cluster F – Refugees, Internally Displaced Persons and Durable Solutions, United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq, March 5, 2007

More maps are available on <http://www.internal-displacement.org/>

Background and main causes

Internal displacements in Iraq are commonly divided into three periods: those occurring before and those occurring after the United States-led invasion that overthrew Saddam Hussein's government in March 2003 and thirdly, those occurring after February 2006. It is increasingly common for the international community to use February 2006 as the date to distinguish between new displacement and "old" displacement (IOM, 24 March 2007). The majority of IDPs were displaced prior to the invasion. Displacement in Iraq up to 2003 has generally had distinctive regional patterns, outlined below. The causes of displacement under the former regime are no longer present, yet many of the people uprooted during that period remain in need of assistance to find durable solutions (UNCT, August 2004).

Central and northern Iraq

Displacement in and around Kirkuk has had particular political sensitivity as the area contains some of Iraq's biggest oil-fields and which ethnic group is in the majority there is a key factor in the political bargaining over the relationship between the primarily Kurdish north and the Arab majority of the rest of Iraq. Following the rise of the Ba'ath party in 1968, large-scale internal displacement took place in the centre and north of the country as part of the Iraqi authorities' campaign to neutralise Kurdish aspirations for independence and to strengthen control over some of the world's largest oil reserves. These campaigns involved widespread human rights violations, including the systematic alteration of the ethnic composition of the region.

Before the 1990s, the Iraqi authorities displaced tens of thousands of non-Arabs from Kirkuk and surrounding areas, resettling Arabs in their place under what is referred to as the "Arabisation" campaign. While the Kurds constitute the majority of those displaced, other non-ethnic-Arab Iraqis, including Turkmen and Assyrians, were also forced to flee or to sign a form "correcting their ethnicity" so as to be considered ethnic Arabs (HRW, August 2004). To increase the number of Arabs in the region, incentives, such as free land and houses, many belonging to the evicted Kurds, were offered by the former regime (RI, 21 November 2003; UNCHR, 26 February 1999).

The end of the Iran-Iraq war in 1988 saw an intensification of the atrocities committed against the Kurds. In the course of the "Al-Anfal" campaign, the Iraqi authorities committed mass executions, poisoned entire villages with gas and imposed economic blockades on others (AIJ, December 2002). The genocidal nature of the Anfal campaign differentiates it from the earlier and later Arabisation campaigns (HRW, August 2004). More than 100,000 Kurds are estimated to have been murdered with chemical weapons. During the Anfal campaign the government also deliberately destroyed up to 4,000 Kurdish villages, resulting in massive forced displacements of Kurds. Most were relocated into "collective settlements" within the three northern governorates and some were put into detention camps (USCR 2000, p.187; Dammers 1998, p.181; Fawcett and Tanner, October 2002, pp.8-10; HRW, July 1993).

Another cause of displacement within

northern Iraq as well as in areas south of the "green line" was factional Kurdish infighting.¹ Following the 1991 Gulf War, the United States imposed a no-fly zone in the north, which established a de facto autonomous Kurdish region in the northern provinces of Arbil, Sulaymaniyah and Dahuk. Fighting for control of these three governorates between the two main Kurdish parties, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) and the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP), caused the displacement of hundreds of thousands of people in the early 1990s (UNHCR, August 2004; UNCT, March 2005). Incursions and shelling from neighbouring Turkey and Iran, both countries opposed to the creation of a Kurdish state, also caused internal displacement in the north (UNHCR June 2000; USCR 2001).

The UN estimates around 805,500 individuals (141,200 families) were displaced in the north, the majority between 1974 and 1991 (UNHCR, August 2004; UN Habitat, January 2001). In total, more than 680,000 people forced from their homes by the former regime are thought to remain displaced in the central and northern provinces (Cluster F, 11 February 2007).

Southern Iraq

The Marsh Arabs constitute the main group of people forcibly displaced in the south during the 1990s owing mainly to the former regime's campaign to drain the marshland areas. A first stage of displacement occurred with the draining of

the central marshes to facilitate movement of military units during the Iran-Iraq war in the 1980s. The marshes underwent further drainage during the 1990s, as part of a campaign against Marsh Arabs who were accused by the authorities of supporting a Shi'a uprising in 1991. The military crushing of the 1991 revolt forced many Shi'ites to flee to the northern protected areas, into Iran, or deeper into the southern marshlands. The campaign included the use of chemical weapons, shelling and burning of villages, assassinations, contamination of water and police raids; large-scale dam projects also displaced many (Fawcett and Tanner, October 2002, p. 28-30; USCR, 2001). In 1992, the government moved some 4,000 Marsh Arabs to houses along the highway between Basra and Al-Qurna. In the early 1990s, it was believed that 250,000 people lived in the marshes, whereas today it is estimated that the population is less than 20,000 (UNCT, March 2005). Between 100,000 and 200,000 people were estimated to be displaced from the marshland areas (UNHCR, August 2004; UNOHCI, 30 June 2003).

Tens of thousands of people were also displaced from their homes on the border with Iran in the south as a result of the Iran-Iraq war in the 1980s. Today it is estimated that at least 80,000 people are still displaced within Basra province (UNCT, August 2004).

Political and religious persecution has been a further cause of displacement of Shi'a political dissidents in the south. Shi'a support for Iran in opposition to the former government was particularly pronounced in the south but also among some Shi'a in the centre (UNHCR, Au-

¹ Iraq was de facto divided after 1991 into two areas, northern Iraq (comprising the provinces of Dahuk, Arbil and Sulaymaniyah) under Kurdish administrative control, separated by the so-called "green line" from the rest of the country, under the control of the central government. This division is still relevant under the new constitution.

gust 2004; IRIN, 21 May 2004). At least 25,000 were displaced, people that the former government admitted to having expelled from Baghdad in 1998 (Fawcett and Tanner, October 2002, p. 33).

In total, it is estimated that more than 343,800 people were displaced as a result of policies of the former government in the southern provinces (Cluster F, 11 February 2007).

Massive displacement since 2003

Since the fall of the former regime, Iraqis have fled their homes because of sectarian and generalised violence as well as military operations by the US-led intervention forces and their Iraqi allies against insurgents. In the immediate aftermath of the fall of the former government, fighting and military operations were the main cause of displacements, but the balance has now shifted towards sectarian violence. In International Organisation for Migration (IOM) assessments among displaced Iraqis, a majority of those interviewed reported that they had fled their homes because of sectarian violence. The second reason most commonly cited was generalised fear, which included sectarian violence, inter-tribal fighting, fighting between the military and militias or insurgent groups, and military offensives. The third reason for displacement was armed conflict specifically due to military operations (IOM, 2 February 2007).

In addition to these primary causes of displacement, there are indications of prolonged and multiple displacements because of a lack of adequate housing, water, electricity, health services, em-

ployment opportunities and education. The widespread destruction of villages by the former government in the southern marshland areas and lack of public services and infrastructure, for example, has prevented return and reintegration in these areas (AMAR, March 2006). Some people also remain displaced because they have not yet been able to reclaim property and land wrongfully confiscated from them under the former government. Still other people remain displaced because they have had their homes destroyed in fighting and military operations after 2003. In addition, many refugees who returned after the invasion have returned to a situation of internal displacement because of the lack of shelter and employment opportunities and deteriorating security (UNHCR, January 2007).

Sectarian-induced displacement

Today, displacement in Iraq is increasingly caused by both targeted and indiscriminate acts of violence which are orchestrated along ethnic and religious lines. Violence is perpetrated by a number of actors, including radical groups, militias, supporters of the former regime, and groups resisting the presence of foreign troops inside Iraq. The tactics being employed by some militant groups may be viewed as part of a deliberate strategy to redraw the map of Iraq's communities, which is likened to "ethnic cleansing" in the former Yugoslavia. According to a report by Brookings, displaced people view extreme religious fronts – the Office of Muqtada al-Sadr and the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution (SCIRI) on the Shi'ite side and the Association of Muslim Scholars (AMS) and

the Islamic Party on the Sunni side – as the main drivers of the sectarian displacement (Brookings, 18 October 2006). The US State Department says that the term civil war “accurately describes key elements of the Iraqi conflict, including the hardening of ethno-sectarian identities, a sea change in the character of violence, ethno-sectarian mobilisation, and population displacements” (US DOS, 2 February 2006). These include attacks and reprisals on a daily basis, some with enormous death tolls, such as the Al-Sadr city bombing in November 2006 which killed more than 200 people and wounded more than 250 (RFE/RL, 29 November 2006).

In assessments conducted among displaced Iraqis, IDPs reported a range of triggers for displacement including abductions, assassinations of individuals close to them or family members, threats communicated by telephone or mobile text messages, graffiti on buildings, leaflets distributed in their communities, and rumours. Most people stated that they were forced to flee because attacks specifically targeted them on the basis of their belonging to a certain religion or sect (IOM, 2 February 2007; Brookings, 18 October 2006). In the last months, new tactics have emerged to deliberately intimidate people into fleeing, such as the burning of homes. The sectarian nature of displacements is most evident in the separation of mixed families in a country where intermarriage between Sunni-Shiite communities has traditionally been a common phenomenon (ICG, 27 February 2007).

Sectarian-induced violence and displacement is widely reported to have taken off with the bombing of the Al-

Askari shrine in Samarra at the end of February 2006 when the nature of the conflict in Iraq was deemed to have shifted from what was seen as essentially an insurgency against US-led occupation forces in Iraq to a struggle for political and economic power among Iraqis (RFE/RL, 29 November 2006). However, several decisive points have contributed to the polarisation of Iraq’s communities and the sectarian violence which has prompted displacement. These are outlined in a report by a think-tank, the International Crisis Group, and include the marginalisation of the Sunni community in the drafting of the constitution ratified in October 2005; the January 2005 elections which handed a victory to a Shi’ite-Kurdish block but led to the exclusion of the Sunni community; the creation by the United States in July 2003 of the Interim Governing Council, a body which was modelled along sectarian lines; and fourthly, the current violence may be viewed as following historical trends set by the nature of the previous regime which brutally suppressed the political movements of the Shi’ite and Kurdish communities. The Crisis Group notes that although “... [t]he potential for outbreak of ethnic and sectarian violence certainly existed in Iraq’s past ... nothing suggested it would be the inevitable result of the regime’s removal.” Rather, the occupation forces exacerbated and hardened ethnic and sectarian identities at the political level in the manner in which they went about creating the institutions of the new state (ICG, 27 February 2006).

There was evidence already during 2005 of growing numbers of Iraqis fleeing Baghdad’s neighbourhoods and suburbs, especially mixed areas, to move to places where their community predominated – a

pattern which intensified during 2006 and early 2007 (New York Times, 20 November 2005; IDMC, 23 May 2006). Eighty per cent of sectarian violence has occurred within a 55-km radius of Baghdad (UNSC, 11 December 2006). The most volatile of Baghdad neighbourhoods include Dora, Hurriyah, Al Adhamiyah, Khadimiyah, Ghazaliyah, Amariya and Qadisiyah (UNAMI, 16 January 2007). Baghdad and its surrounding towns, especially mixed areas, have witnessed the most severe violence and displacement, but other parts of the country, including Ba'quba in Diyala province; Samarra in Salah al Din provinces; Abu Ghraib in Anbar province, north Babil, Mosul and Basra in the south, have also been affected. In figures, Baghdad is estimated to host more than 120,000 newly displaced people and there are high concentration of displaced people (more than 50,000) in Kerbala, Babylon, and Wassit provinces (Cluster F, 5 March 2007). An increase in intracommunal violence has also prompted forced displacement, with clashes reported between some Sunni tribes and among predominately Shi'ite rival militia groups in south Iraq (UNSC, 5 December 2006).

Between February 2006 and March 2007, more than 727,000 people were estimated to have been displaced by sectarian violence. Women and children represent over 70 per cent of this population (Cluster F, 5 March 2007). Those at most risk of persecution are Sunnis and Shi'ites who reside in locations clearly dominated by the other group, as well as families in Sunni/Shi'ite mixed marriages (HRW, November 2006). The overwhelming majority of the displaced are from the central and southern governorates – originating mainly from the Shi'ite com-

munity followed by the Sunni community. The central and southern governorates also host the majority of the newly displaced. Minority groups have also faced persecution, including members of the Christian Chaldean and Assyrian sects, Yazidis, Shabak, Turkmen, Sabeen-Mandean, and Roma communities. Most Christians and other minorities have moved to areas under the Kurdish Regional Government. Armed groups and militia have threatened and forcibly evicted Palestinians from their homes. Professionals and intellectuals such as academics, teachers, judges and doctors, but also members of the security forces and Iraqis associated with the coalition forces, have been targeted (IRIN, 1 May 2006; UNAMI, 16 January 2007; Cluster F, 5 March 2007; MRI, February 2007).

Military operations

The conflict between the US-led Multi-National Force – Iraq and armed groups persisted in 2006 and early 2007. Yet, population displacements caused by multiple military operations across the country remain largely unreported by the media. Affected areas are often difficult to access and military operations have tended to cause temporary displacements. However, research suggests that people displaced by military operations have been much more likely to be displaced repeatedly. For instance, displaced people were encouraged by the government to return to Iskandariya (northern Babil) and Tal Afar (Nineveh) following military operations only to be displaced again (Brookings, 18 October 2006).

In 2006 and early 2007, military operations continued particularly in Baghdad

and in Diyala and Anbar provinces (in particular Ramadi, Fallujah and Heet) (IWPR, 15 June 2006; IRIN, 18 June). Displaced people in Anbar province reported armed clashes as a primary reason for their displacement, as did displaced people surveyed during 2006 in Diyala and Missan provinces (IOM, 2 February 2007). US-led multi-national forces are increasingly carrying out air strikes which lead to more displacement as houses are often destroyed (NCCI, 25 March 2007; IRIN, 16 January 2007).

As of March 2007, it was estimated that approximately 22,400 people remained displaced from military operations – the overwhelming majority in Anbar province (Cluster F, 11 February 2007). Military operations, often including aerial bombing, have been led by the US-led forces with the stated aim of quelling armed insurgency groups. Several hundred thousand people have been forced to flee their homes. Most were able to move back when fighting lessened. However, in many cases people were afraid to go back because of ongoing insecurity, or because they had not received the compensation or reconstruction assistance necessary to restart their lives.

Military operations have caused the most devastation and displacement in western Iraq, in predominantly Sunni areas, where multinational and Iraqi forces say the insurgent strongholds are concentrated. During 2005 and 2006, multinational and Iraqi forces launched regular military offensives in several cities and towns in Anbar province, including Husbaya, Hit, Rawa, Haditha, Fallujah, Ramadi and Al Qa'im. Most of these cities and towns already hosted displaced populations from previous military opera-

tions (IRIN, 24 February 2005; UNAMI, 27 February 2005; IRIN, 4 July 2006). During the same period, people were displaced because of military operations launched in other parts of the country including in Tal Afar, Karabala, Samarra, Mosul and Kirkuk as well as in areas of Salah al din, Nineveh, Babil and Diyala (UNAMI, 31 August 2005, 18 May 2005, 27 February 2005; IRIN, 28 June 2005, 31 May 2005; ICS, 13 May 2005; NCCI, 17 May 2006).

The displacements occurring in 2005-2006 followed a similar pattern to the previous year. In 2004, military operations and fighting between US-led military forces and Iraqi insurgents caused displacement in the cities of Fallujah, Al Najaf, Kufa, Ramadi, Karabala, Tal Afar and Samarra (UNSC, 3 September 2004; IRIN, 26 July 2004, 23 August 2004 and 4 January 2005; DPA, 20 August 2004; UNAMI, 25 April 2004; UNCT, August 2004). The largest displacement occurred in Fallujah, in November 2004, when almost the entire population of the city fled (an estimated 200,000 people), following fierce battles between coalition troops and insurgents (UNAMI, 13 November 2004; IRIN, 8 November 2004). The November offensive was the second siege of Fallujah, from where 70,000 people had already been forced to flee in April 2004. Three years later, the city of Fallujah has not been rebuilt and more than 300 families (2,000 people) remain displaced (IRIN, 15 January 2007).

During the first months of the US invasion, thousands of people were also displaced in Anbar, Thi'Qar, Basra and Baghdad by air strikes and urban warfare. Across the country, small numbers of people considered to be living in strategic

areas by the military were forcibly displaced by the Coalition Forces (UNCT, August 2004).

Figures

There are close to 1.9 million people displaced in Iraq today, according to estimates from IOM and the UN, and several million Iraqi refugees in neighbouring countries (Cluster F, 11 February 2007). The magnitude of the population displacements inside Iraq and in the region have prompted UNHCR to refer to the Iraqi displacement crisis as the “largest population movement since 1948 in the Middle East”.

Ongoing movement patterns coupled with difficulty in accessing parts of the country make the issue of numbers in Iraq problematic. Official figures come from the Ministry of Displacement and Migration (MoDM) which registers internally displaced people. UNHCR, the UN Office for Project Services and IOM undertake their own monitoring of population movements. Other organisations, including the International Federation of the Red Crescent (IFRC) and the International Medical Corps have put forth their own estimates. A wide range of numbers has also been floated by political parties and the media.

Tracking and identifying displacements is challenging in Iraq because of the absence of massive population movements and big camps; instead, people are fleeing on a daily basis, often family-per-family and taking refuge in relatives’ homes and within host communities (NCCI, 25 March 2007). The lack of security and ongoing fluctuation in the displacement

situation prevents access and regular monitoring and different political parties have vested interests in putting out their own estimates of internally displaced people to further their political agendas (Brookings, 18 October 2006). In addition, government figures may underestimate the extent of the internal displacement problem. The Ministry of Displacement and Migration relies in part on figures from the Ministry of Trade, which keeps track of displaced people when they register for food rations, however, many displaced people do not register for reasons including that they lack the necessary documentation required for registration. Multiple patterns of displacement also complicate the obtaining of figures. A report by Brookings for instance documents other patterns of displacement including night-time displacement (people who sleep in different places to avoid being targeted) (Brookings, 18 October 2006). A further lack of clarity in the figures relates to the causes of displacement. Official figures do not specify the cause of displacement: multi-national and Iraqi military operations, sectarian or generalised violence or other causes. Therefore, the causes of displacement are not always clear (Brookings, 18 October 2006).

Obtaining exact figures on the number of people who remain displaced by the former regime is also problematic as some observers suggest that the current UN figures do not reflect the reality and are based on an outdated 2001 survey by the Human Settlements Programme, UN-Habitat (IDMC report, 23 May 2006; Qandil, 17 May 2006). Monitoring by IOM has however provided an overview of displacement patterns since 2003. As noted above, significant numbers of peo-

ple who were able to return prior to or following the US invasion, may continue to be in a situation of internal displacement because of lack of housing and basic infrastructure, and destruction especially in areas which have suffered military operations and escalating violence.

A neglected humanitarian crisis

In the context of the International Compact Meeting on 16 March, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon said that “Beyond the political violence and sectarian strife, a humanitarian crisis is stretching the patience and ability of ordinary people to cope with everyday life” (UN News, 16 March 2007). A report by the Secretary-General states that Iraq is on the brink of turning into a full-scale humanitarian emergency if the existing climate of fear, impunity and disorder is not addressed in conjunction with efforts to meet basic needs (UNSC, 7 March 2007).

The UN’s acknowledgement that the situation in Iraq has turned into a humanitarian emergency is long overdue. Military operations, increasing levels of generalised violence in Iraq and escalation into a sectarian civil war following years of sanctions and war have led to a continuing deterioration of living conditions of Iraqis. Public health, water and sanitation infrastructure, services and supplies are depleted and do not meet the basic needs of the Iraqi population. According to a study by the World Food Programme, 4 million Iraqis are food insecure and an additional 8.3 million people are at risk of food insecurity if not provided with food rations distributed by the government (WFP, 11 May 2006).

School attendance fell by 50 per cent in 2006, according to the Ministry of Education (UNSC, 7 March 2007).

Escalating violence has prompted many Iraqis to live in siege conditions. A state of emergency was first declared in November 2004 and has been extended to different parts of Iraq (with the exception of Kurdistan) on a monthly basis (UNAMI, 16 January 2007). Fear of violence has stopped people from working, going to markets, schools, and clinics. Explicit movement restrictions are also imposed by multi-national and Iraqi troops in areas where military operations are ongoing which limit regular access to local services (UNAMI, 16 January 2007). US-led forces and Iraqi troops have also occupied hospitals and schools, in contravention of international humanitarian law, making access difficult for the civilian population in affected areas (IRIN, 13 February 2007; UNSC, 5 December 2006; UNAMI, 16 January 2007).

Protection concerns and gaps in assistance

The UN and human rights organisations document continuing human rights abuses against civilians, committed by armed groups, criminal gangs, religious extremists, and militias as well as by security and military forces (UNAMI, 16 January 2007). The UN reports a growing sense of impunity for ongoing human rights violations which leads people to take the law into their own hands and rely on action by militias and criminal gangs (UNAMI, 16 January 2007). Violence in Kirkuk and Mosul is not acute like the violence engulfing south, west and cen-

tral Iraq, but it is reported by the UN and NGOs to have intensified (UNAMI, 16 January 2007; UNSC, 7 March 2007). The violence has left thousands dead. The Lancet, an independent and authoritative periodical, estimates that 601,027 Iraqi civilians have been killed due to violence, since the invasion of the country in March 2003 (The Lancet, 11 October 2006). This estimate is disputed by the Iraqi and US governments. The Iraqi Ministry of Health reported 150,000 civilian deaths between March 2003 and November 2006 while Body Count reports more than 65,000 civilian deaths in Iraq to date (UNAMI, 22 November 2006; Body Count, March 2007 statistics).

The government has adopted a number of initiatives to curb the violence, including a national reconciliation plan, the Ramadan Declaration and the Mecca Declaration. More recently, a new measure, the Baghdad security plan (Operation Imposing Law) was adopted in February 2007 (UNSC, 7 March 2007). But these have so far had little impact on the violence. The new security plan has met with scepticism inside Iraq, and sectarian conflict is expected to continue in the absence of a political solution to back up security efforts (Al Ahram, 7 March 2007; The Guardian, 12 January 2007). For example, around thousand families (6,000 people) were reported to have returned to their homes in Baghdad in the days following the implementation of the new security plan but most were secondarily displaced because of new attacks on their neighbourhoods and occupation or destruction of their homes (Cluster F, 5 March 2007).

Force and fear have impelled hundreds of thousands of Iraqis to flee to areas where they feel safer, but their options to move freely between governorates are being increasingly circumscribed. Local authorities are deliberately restricting IDP movements by enforcing entry and residence restrictions or closing borders, including in at least eight provinces (Dahuk, Erbil, Sulaymaniyah, Kerbala, Najaf, Muthanna, Thi Qar and Basra). Such restrictions may force displaced people to move to unsafe areas or even if they are able to enter the province, it may lead to increased vulnerability as these families will be unable to access basic services because they are not registered. Local authorities say that restrictions are necessary to reduce the burden produced by the influx of displaced people on the housing and health sectors. They also claim that such measures are necessary for security reasons. In some provinces, entry restrictions are being made on the basis of political and demographic agendas of the authorities. In Erbil for instance, non-Kurds are required to have a Kurdish sponsor to enter and reside in the province. In Kerbala province, local authorities have closed the governorate borders to all IDPs except those originally from the province. IDP settlement has been restricted within certain provinces, as is reported to be the case in Najaf governorate (Ashraq Alawsat, 5 February 2007; Cluster F, 11 February 2007, 5 March 2007; IRIN 13 November 2006; IOM; 2 February 2007).

Many Iraqis have been forced to flee to areas where public services are limited, congested or non-existent. Host communities, extended family and tribes have generally taken in displaced people. But as displacement lengthens, host commu-

nities are increasingly finding it a burden to share limited resources with displaced populations – especially in districts with large displaced populations and in areas where military operations have taken place. Rents and real estate prices have risen markedly because of population influxes. As a consequence, local resentment toward IDP communities is on the rise (Cluster F, 11 February 2007; IOM, 2 February 2007). In the Kurdish areas, the absence of Arabic-language schools has presented a significant obstacle for displaced children to attend school (NCCI, 25 March 2007).

Displaced people report that a wide range of their needs are unmet, including shelter, food and employment followed by water, healthcare, legal assistance and education. One of the priority needs identified by displaced people across the country is housing – many displaced people live in temporary housing which makes them extremely vulnerable to homelessness and secondary displacement (Cluster F, 11 February 2007). The majority of displaced people are renting accommodation but with the increase in rents and a lack of regular income or savings face eviction. Significant numbers of displaced people also live in public buildings which are overcrowded and without electricity, water and sanitation. Smaller numbers of displaced live in transitional settlements or makeshift accommodation and approximately one per cent in camps (Cluster F, 11 February 2007; IOM, March 2007). Some displaced people also face discrimination in accessing housing in areas of displacement; for instance, non-Kurds are prohibited from purchasing property in Erbil province (UNHCR, January 2007).

A new security plan presented by Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki at the end of February 2007 may also result in evictions of internally displaced people. The plan is intended to evict people illegally occupying homes in Baghdad in order to encourage displaced people to return to their homes. It stipulates that people who are occupying the homes of displaced families will be given 15 days to return the properties to the owners or give evidence of permission to be there. But the plan includes no provision for alternative accommodation for illegal occupants, the majority of whom are also internally displaced and no measures to ensure their safety in their neighbourhoods of origin (IRIN, 15 February 2007).

Fears of expulsions among displaced people have also been heightened by a decision of the Iraqi Higher Committee for the Normalisation of Kirkuk in February 2007 which announced the start of a process to relocate Arab families moved to Kirkuk under the Arabisation campaign (IRIN, 7 February 2007). Demonstrations broke out in response to the announcement which is seen as a policy of forced displacement and discrimination. The Committee has however said that relocation and compensation will be voluntary (UNSC, 7 March 2007; IDMC News Alert, 8 February 2007).

In addition to housing, access to food rations is widely reported to be problematic for displaced people due to the slow procedures for transfers and registration with the public food distribution system. The administrative process for transferring a ration card normally requires a displaced person to complete paperwork in the original registration place which was unfeasible for displaced people who fled

their homes at short notice. Local authorities in a number of provinces have attempted to ease this requirement by implementing temporary transfer procedures. However, even if they are able to register, displaced people may have to wait two to three months until they start receiving food rations (UNHCR, January 2007). UNHCR found that only slightly more than half the displaced communities surveyed in Erbil and Sulaymaniyah had received food rations (UNHCR, January 2007). Displaced communities also report difficulties accessing food rations because of insecurity, especially in the wake of military operations or in areas under militia control, as well as because of food shortages and backlogs (Cluster F, 11 February 2007; NCCI, 17 May 2006).

Access to potable water and health services is also reported to be more difficult particularly in rural areas with concentrations of displaced communities, for reasons including distance, cost and shortages. In parts of Anbar province, it is reported that displaced families are drinking from rivers which makes them increasingly vulnerable to waterborne diseases (NCCI, 25 March 2007). There has been insufficient maintenance of water and sanitation systems – many of which are dilapidated following years of sanctions and conflict. Additionally, the new arrival of displaced people has created a burden on health centres which lack equipment, medicines and staff (Cluster F, 11 February 2007).

Displaced people have also lost their jobs as a result of flight and as the period of displacement extends, face destitution. Some displaced people report facing difficulties or delays in finding new gov-

ernment positions or obtaining retirement salaries in the province of displacement (Cluster F, 11 February 2007). Financial assistance has been provided by local authorities to displaced people in a number of areas; however, assistance is usually ad hoc and not distributed evenly among displaced communities. Some reports suggest that children are increasingly forced to work and are vulnerable to military recruitment (Brookings, 18 October 2006; Cluster F, 5 March 2007).

Urgent need for creative and flexible response

The Iraqi Ministry of Displacement and Migration bears the responsibility for providing protection and assistance to IDPs but a number of other ministries also do so, including the Ministries of Trade, the Interior and Education (CPA, 8 March 2004). Local authorities at the provincial and district level have also formed IDP committees and deal with registration, shelter and employment of displaced people (Brookings, 18 October 2006). But the government's efforts to provide for the welfare and support of its population have fallen short because of violence and increasingly politicised key line ministries, according to a country study by the Feinstein International Center (FIC).

Despite the worsening situation inside Iraq, the FIC report also found that little attention had been paid to the limited capacity of the international apparatus to respond proportionately to the needs of Iraq's population (FIC, January 2007). The UN's essentially political role in Iraq, its development focus and current structure impair its ability to effectively

address the humanitarian needs inside Iraq (FIC, January 2007; UNSC 1546). The ability of the UN mechanism to assist the IDP population has also been seriously impaired by mobility constraints which prompted an almost total reduction of international presence and programmes (FIC, January 2007). The UN Assistance Mission in Iraq (UNAMI) operates from Amman, and has maintained an extremely low profile inside Iraq since the August 2003 bombing of UN headquarters in Baghdad (UNSC, 7 June 2005; UNAMI, 4 April 2005). UNAMI is organised by inter-agency thematic sectors, of which “Cluster F” is responsible for all issues relating to IDPs. Key agencies of Cluster F, such as UNHCR rely on implementing partners – mainly local partners to monitor IDPs and provide assistance.

The international response has furthermore been circumscribed by insufficient funds allocated specifically for humanitarian preparedness and emergency response. The main funding mechanism, the International Reconstruction Trust Fund, lacks flexibility which has meant that despite the increasing humanitarian needs inside Iraq, the mechanism channels the bulk of funds – around \$1.12 billion – to development and reconstruction programmes. Mechanisms within UNAMI to respond to emergencies in Iraq, including an emergency working group and an IDP working group coordinated by the UN, have been constrained by the lack of flexible funding (NCCI, 18 May 2006). Donors are furthermore reluctant to fund projects that are not visible and that cannot be readily monitored (FIC, January 2007).

Local NGOs have been delivering assis-

tance to internally displaced people, often at considerable risk to Iraqi staff, but are unable to meet the overwhelming needs, and face ongoing challenges to access to IDP communities in a diminishing “humanitarian space” (NCCI workshop, February 2007 outlines obstacles and recommendations). NGOs have persistently advocated for the development of a more creative and adaptable operational response to the humanitarian situation in Iraq as well as more flexible funding structures which are a problem for NGOs as well (see eg Turlan and Mofarah, November 2006). For instance, the NGO Coordination Committee in Iraq (NCCI) has for some time urged donors to allocate funds for humanitarian preparedness in order for NGOs to respond more efficiently and called for the creation of an emergency fund to access funds on short notice, neutral funding and improved coordination (NCCI, 18 May 2006, February 2007; NRC/IDMC, 23 May 2006).

Gaps in assistance have meant that many Iraqis are turning to local groups or militias for protection and basic services (UNSC, 7 March 2007; FIC, January 2007). Mosques and Islamic charities, churches and informal community groups have also organised assistance for displaced families (Brookings, 18 October 2006). For example, an assessment by UNHCR in Erbil province found that among the surveyed displaced families, 66 per cent received assistance from religious institutions (UNHCR, 31 January 2007). Assistance to displaced people has also been provided by US-led multinational and Iraqi forces – sometimes in the aftermath of military operations which caused displacement – as well as by aid agencies accompanied or “embedded” with the multinational forces (See

eg MNF, 6 February 2007; US Government, 25 February 2007; UNAMI, 18 January 2005). This blurring of roles between military and humanitarian has had the consequence of creating an enormous challenge for the international community to establish impartiality and independence in any future humanitarian operations (FIC, January 2007). UNAMI's ability to undertake meaningful humanitarian work inside Iraq has also been impaired by a mandate defined under UN Security Council Resolution 1546 which entails full reliance on multinational forces for mobility and security – thereby limiting the UN's ability to gain the trust of local communities (FIC, January 2007). This reliance on multinational forces adds to a general lack of credibility for the UN in Iraq (RI, March 2007).

A revision of the international response to the displacement crisis inside Iraq is currently under way and has also been accompanied by greater media attention to the magnitude of the displacement problem. The UN has launched a number of initiatives in order to review, consult and improve operations in Iraq, including an inter-ministerial conference on the displacement situation inside Iraq and the region planned for April 2007. Donors have also started to respond by increasing funds, for example in response to UNHCR's Supplementary Appeal in January 2007.

The conflict inside Iraq is widely viewed as a regional problem – a situation which if left unaddressed could destabilise the region. The ramifications of the conflict for the region are particularly evident in the flow of Iraqi refugees. Donors and many international organisations have

turned their attention to the Iraqi refugee problem.

One concern is that efforts to creatively address the situation inside Iraq may be neglected or under-supported since programmes to assist Iraq's refugees in the region will be easier for donors to access and monitor. The European Commission's humanitarian aid department ECHO, for example, has committed €10 million (\$13m) – of which €6 million (\$8m) is for several million Iraqi refugees in the region and only €4 million (\$5m) for needs within the country – a population estimated in June 2006 to be around 26 million people with wide-ranging humanitarian needs including 1.9 internally displaced people. Return for both internally displaced people and refugees is conditional on improvement of the humanitarian and security situation within the country. Solutions to the displacement crisis will be largely dependent on addressing the roots of the conflict. As a report by the International Medical Corps underlines, a relatively small minority of those forced from their homes are expected to leave the country, evidence that places Iraq's growing crisis of displacement squarely within the country (IMC, January 2007).

Note: This is a summary of the IDMC's country profile of the situation of internal displacement in Iraq. The full country profile is available online [here](#).

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Note: All documents used in this overview are directly accessible on the Iraq [List of Sources](#) page of our website.

About the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre

The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, established in 1998 by the Norwegian Refugee Council, is the leading international body monitoring conflict-induced internal displacement worldwide.

Through its work, the Centre contributes to improving national and international capacities to protect and assist the millions of people around the globe who have been displaced within their own country as a result of conflicts or human rights violations.

At the request of the United Nations, the Geneva-based Centre runs an online database providing comprehensive information and analysis on internal displacement in some 50 countries.

Based on its monitoring and data collection activities, the Centre advocates for durable solutions to the plight of the internally displaced in line with international standards.

The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre also carries out training activities to enhance the capacity of local actors to respond to the needs of internally displaced people. In its work, the Centre cooperates with and provides support to local and national civil society initiatives.

For more information, visit the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre website and the database at www.internal-displacement.org

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