

OVERVIEW

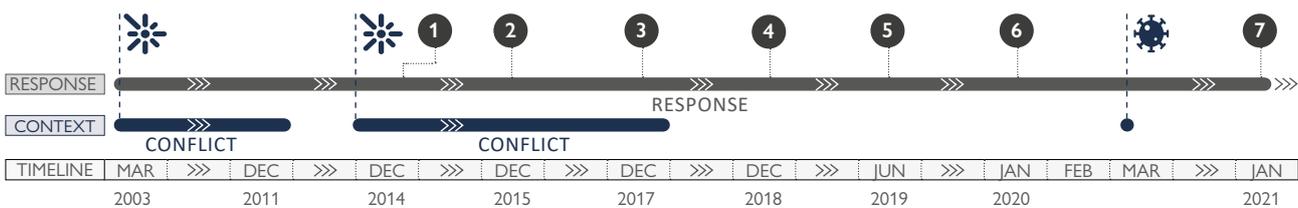
IRAQ 2019–2020 / CONFLICT

<b>CRISIS</b>	<b>Iraq conflict, 2014 onwards</b>
<b>PEOPLE AFFECTED</b>	<b>5.62 million</b> people affected* <b>4.1 million</b> people in need*
<b>PEOPLE WITH SHELTER NEEDS</b>	<b>2.6 million</b> individuals**
<b>LOCATION</b>	National
<b>PEOPLE SUPPORTED IN THE RESPONSE</b>	<b>294,426 people</b> reached with NFI support <b>186,564 people</b> reached with Shelter support***
<b>RESPONSE OUTPUTS</b>	<b>294,426 people</b> supported with NFI kits <b>94,893 people</b> supported with shelter upgrades in camps <b>46,123 people</b> living out of camps supported with emergency shelter interventions <b>33,541 returnees</b> assisted with emergency repairs to war-damaged houses or provided with Sealing-off Kits***
<p>* Source: Humanitarian Response Plan Iraq 2020                  ** Source: Humanitarian Response Plan Iraq 2021                  *** Source: Iraq Shelter Cluster Factsheet (Jan-Dec 2020)</p>	



SUMMARY OF THE RESPONSE

In post-emergency Iraq, there are both humanitarian and longer-term needs, often rooted in problems that existed before the 2014 conflict. The adoption of the Socio-Economic Vulnerability Assessment Tool (SEVAT) for targeting purposes has allowed partners to identify and prioritize people at highest risk of engaging in emergency coping mechanisms. The close collaboration between the Cluster and stabilization actors is assisting the transition toward a more durable, longer term shelter response where construction standards, needs analysis and advocacy messages toward Government involvement have been jointly developed and put in practice.



- ☀️ 2003-2011: Iraq war.
- ☀️ 2014-2017: Iraq conflict.
- 1 2014: Activation of Shelter/NFI Cluster in Iraq.
- 2 2015: Stabilization actors began to work in liberated areas.
- 3 Dec 2017: Retaking of last ISIL stronghold (Mosul). Iraqi Government declared the end of the conflict.
- 4 Late 2018: Shelter Cluster adapted strategy development and the use of SEVAT.
- 5 Mid 2019: Camp closures and forced returns.
- 6 2020: Shelter/NFI Cluster handover strategy documents and agreements.
- 🦠 11 Mar 2020: WHO declared the novel COVID-19 outbreak a global pandemic.
- 7 2021: Shelter Cluster collaboration on Durable Solutions Framework.



The response continues to support displaced populations in camps and other settings, while also supporting people to be able to return to their homes.

## CONTEXT

In 2021, seven years after the start of the conflict with the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and four years after it ended, social, ethnic, and sectarian tensions persist on multiple fronts. Due to weak central governance and limited progress towards recovery and development, the situation has become protracted and millions of people across Iraq remain in need of humanitarian assistance. Political uncertainty and recurring seasonal floods and droughts, and the recent COVID-19 pandemic, mean that humanitarian needs persisted or even intensified in some areas.

The most vulnerable people in Iraq and those in acute need of humanitarian assistance remain families directly affected by the 2014-2017 conflict against ISIL, particularly those who were displaced and whose lives and livelihoods were uprooted and destroyed. Since August 2019, the Iraqi government has proceeded to close, with little notice to humanitarian actors, 54 out of the established 83 IDP camps, reducing the in-camp population from 442,000 to 186,000 individuals. The move has led to premature returns to areas with access issues, destroyed infrastructure, livelihoods and property, secondary displacement to informal sites which offer precarious living conditions, eviction risks and substandard dwellings.

The 2020 Humanitarian Needs Overview (HNO) identified critical issues related to resilience and recovery but the humanitarian community has noted that they should be addressed by the state, as primarily responsible for the protection of its citizens, with the support of development and stabilization actors.

## SITUATION BEFORE THE CRISIS

Still recovering from the 2003-2011 Iraq War, prior to the eruption of the conflict with ISIL in 2014, Iraq had been in a state of 'transition' for a decade; politically, from dictatorship to democracy, and economically, from an oil-based economy to a more diversified one. Iraq is also hosting a significant number of Syrian refugees who had fled the armed conflict that began there in 2011. Thousands of people displaced during previous conflicts within Iraq lived in informal settlements without access to basic services such as clean water, electricity, and sanitation. Humanitarian presence and capacity to address displacement was minimal, with many actors having left at the end of 2010 during a period of relative stability.

## SITUATION DURING/AFTER THE CRISIS

The humanitarian situation in Iraq deteriorated rapidly after June 2014; the conflict with ISIL displaced over 6 million people and exacerbated pre-existing vulnerabilities throughout the country. On 12<sup>th</sup> August, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) issued a system-wide L3 emergency declaration, noting the linkages to the Syrian crisis, with an emphasis on "a whole of Iraq" approach.

The Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) identified the Protection of Civilians, support for IDPs, Food Security, Essential Services, and Conflict-Sensitive Programming as the highest priorities for the humanitarian response. In 2018 the World Bank estimated the overall reconstruction and recovery needs at USD 88.2 billion, with USD 22.9 billion needed for the short term, and USD 65.4 billion needed for the medium term. The housing sector, which experienced the highest damage level, would require USD 17.4 billion and decades of reconstruction programs – clearly beyond the capacity, resources and mandate of both humanitarian and development partners.



Significant damage was done to homes and infrastructure during the conflict. It is estimated that to recover the housing sector would require USD 17.4 billion and decades of construction programs.



Since the end of the conflict, damage and destruction of housing is one of the key barriers to displaced people being able to return.

### NATIONAL SHELTER (NFI) STRATEGY

In 2020, the Iraq Shelter and NFI Cluster targeted nearly 525,000 individuals in 33 districts most affected by the conflict through provision of shelter support and NFIs. The Cluster's interventions aim to address inadequate shelter conditions through a mix of in-kind distribution and cash programming, helping families overcome the additional vulnerability caused by substandard dwellings and incorporating COVID-19 risk reduction measures.

The Cluster's priorities for supporting the nearly 275,000 displaced people living in formal camps are to; attain or maintain minimum shelter standards, to mitigate flood risks, and to replenish missing or worn-out tents and non-food items. The Cluster targeted nearly 333,000 people living in out-of-camp situations who are socio-economically vulnerable after years of displacement and have critical shelter needs.

The Cluster provided Sealing-Off Kits, Critical Shelter Upgrades, and rental subsidies. The Cluster targeted approximately 21,000 people returning to their homes



Cluster priorities include supporting nearly 275,000 displaced people who are living in formal camps.

with repair support for damaged residences or low-cost transitional shelter solutions. Recovery support would need to be provided by government entities and development actors.

While the Shelter Cluster target population figures and budget have decreased from the previous year, shelter needs remain one of the primary barriers to return reported by IDPs. The Cluster consistently advocates with relevant Iraqi authorities and development actors to be involved in Cluster activities. The goal being for them to support and build capacity for the authorities to assume the primary coordination and implementation role for shelter response in the future.

### NATIONAL SHELTER (NFI) RESPONSE

The lack of affordable housing was an issue even before 2014, with a deficit in the sector estimated at around 760,000 units. Since the end of the conflict, IDPs are quoting the damages/destruction of their houses among the top three barriers to return (along with the lack of livelihood opportunities/financial resources, and a very challenging protection and security environment due to ethnic/tribal tensions).

Rather than a 'one size fits all' approach, existing Shelter Cluster technical guidance on Non-Food Items, Critical Shelter Upgrades, Sealing-Off Kits and war damaged housing rehabilitation provides options for shelter support which are customizable to the specific needs of families. The Cluster's tailored approach to addressing individual housing needs ensures that solutions are appropriate to the context and align with of other sectors' efforts towards durable solutions.

These efforts are also combined with advocacy towards relevant authorities and development actors to encourage more wide-scale housing reconstruction and rehabilitation programs, in conjunction with stronger governmental financial support through compensation schemes.



Shelter Cluster technical guidance provides options for shelter support that can be customized to the specific needs of families.

### ADAPTING THE RESPONSE IN FORMAL CAMPS

In order to adapt to decreasing funding and changing needs of the population, the Cluster is focusing on the repair or replacement of shelters as required and moving away from blanket NFI distributions in camps. Since most camps in Iraq are not suited to long-term habitation or for transition to durable solutions (e.g. transition from temporary camps to formal settlements), families living there will need to find more sustainable alternatives.

The government has proposed return grants to support returns, but these have not yet materialized. As a result, displaced people face major financial barriers for their return. Fearing that the camp closure policy by the end of 2021 will generate further forced return, partners have organized “Go and See visits” to help those most in need check the status of their home and support them with shelter repairs. Yet, the pace of these programs is insufficient to ensure everyone will be able to return.

The Shelter Cluster has also proposed to the Government to upgrade some camps with locally constructed temporary shelter using traditional construction techniques (earth blocks). Negotiations are ongoing to resolve potential Housing Land and Property issues on land ownership and host community acceptance to such settlement integration. Advocacy on this approach will be channeled through the Durable Solutions Framework, with support from the Shelter Cluster.



*In formal camps targeted repair and replacement of tents is carried out.*

### AVOIDING OVERLAP WITH DEVELOPMENT ACTORS

In close coordination with stabilization and development actors, the Cluster has focused its efforts on supporting returns to rural and peri-urban areas while development agencies are focused primarily in urban centers, like Mosul city in Ninawa, Falluja in Anbar. As the recovery and stabilization response continues to scale up and state actors are increasingly present in the main 5 governorates of return (Anbar, Diyala, Kirkuk, Ninawa and Salah al-Din), shelter partners will be able to gradually decrease their footprint in these locations.

The Shelter Cluster successfully advocated with development actors to continue utilizing the reporting tool and

interactive dashboard for war damaged housing rehabilitation and the adoption of common minimum shelter standards. The shared use of these tools not only ensures good coordination between the humanitarian and development shelter actors, but also facilitates reporting and gradual handover of responsibilities.

So far, the Shelter Cluster has collected a record of more than 71,000 houses collectively being repaired, of which 52% are the ones rehabilitated by the Fast Funding for Stabilization program. To ensure continuity of technical standards and building upon existing experience and capacity, in 2021 the Shelter Cluster is co-chairing a Shelter /HLP sub-group under the newly established Durable Solutions Framework in Iraq, to collect and update guidance through a durable solutions lenses, bringing together humanitarian and development actors.



*The Shelter Cluster is coordinating with stabilization and development actors on housing rehabilitation/reconstruction, with development actors focusing primarily on urban centers.*

### STANDARDIZED VULNERABILITY CRITERIA

Due to decreasing budget figures, the Shelter Cluster has targeted only the ‘most vulnerable’ for support in out-of-camp and return contexts. To do so the Cluster adopted the Socio-Economic Vulnerability Assessment Tool (SEVAT), developed by the Iraq Cash Working Group (CWG). The SEVAT supports the transition from a status-based to a needs-based approach and better aligns humanitarian response with the World Bank’s tool for estimating household welfare and the Government of Iraq’s social safety net programs.

Using a range of household characteristics and behavioral indicators that are related to household expenditures, the SEVAT estimates a value for per capita consumption as a proxy for household welfare. Living in an inadequate shelter is a strong proxy indicator for vulnerability, as proven by the regression analysis run to develop the SEVAT model.

The tool has been widely used by shelter actors over the last two years to assess needs and target customized shelter and NFI assistance to over 10,000 households. As the tool identifies an array of multi-cluster needs, it also provides an opportunity for shelter partners to engage with and refer cases to other sectors, mainly Multi-Purpose Cash Assistance, WASH and Protection actors, based on a common understanding of vulnerability, and the evidence base.

Using a commonly agreed and understood vulnerability scoring model allows partners to design interventions covering all vulnerable individuals within an assessed location, and support resource mobilization and sectoral trend analysis with solid data.

Community engagement has proven key to achieving successful shelter programs. The methodology for household selection (and exclusion) must be communicated to avoid generating tensions and resentment among those excluded. Additionally, explaining the scope of shelter repairs to households helps manage their expectations, as only a minimum space (5.5m<sup>2</sup>/person or 33m<sup>2</sup>/family of six, including kitchen and toilet spaces) would be rehabilitated with interventions that are considered to be “cosmetic” (e.g. no plastering, no painting) not included.

### MAIN CHALLENGES

Political division or paralysis among government counterparts means that there are no viable government counterparts available for shelter actors to engage with. Discussions and advocacy are conducted at multiple levels with varying degree of success. For example, governorate level authorities like the Joint Crisis Coordination (JCC) participate actively in Cluster coordination, information sharing and have a good understanding of Cluster functions, while other ministries and authorities remain detached from humanitarian coordination.

The current COVID-19 pandemic hit Iraq in February 2020 and led to the imposition of movement restrictions and

lockdowns which have in turn worsened existing humanitarian needs of the most vulnerable (loss of livelihoods, premature returns, etc.).

Sudden camp closures in 2019 and 2020, involving little coordination with the humanitarian community has caused a wave of movements across Iraq and has exposed the lack of a comprehensive government plan for ending displacement.

### WIDER IMPACTS

The Shelter Cluster started early on to adopt and adapt tools from and to coordinate with other sectors, in view of aligning with wider strategic approaches. Using a definition for vulnerability that deviates from the narrowly-defined one of most humanitarian actors – namely one that is developed by the World Bank with the government of Iraq and Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MoLSA) – allows for continuation when responding organizations move from purely emergency assistance to durable solutions and longer term recovery interventions.

Working closely with the Inter-Cluster Coordination Group members (particularly the HLP sub-cluster on security of tenure, and CCCM, Health and WASH Clusters on COVID-19 risk mitigation in camps) led to improved multi-sectoral results, while highlighting some of the challenges of inter-cluster coordination.

Lastly, the Shelter Cluster took the initiative to work with large development actors to present and hand-over an overview of the housing sector and response, to support the setting up of Durable Solutions strategic direction. Following engagement with The Durable Solutions Strategic Framework and building on data on needs accumulated by shelter actors, the Durable Solutions Strategic Framework in 2020 set out two main criteria for identifying people in need of durable solutions – those living in critical shelter and/or conflict affected persons who have no livelihoods opportunities to return to normalcy.



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*Political division and paralysis, the COVID-19 pandemic, and sudden camp closures in 2019 and 2020 are some of the main challenges currently facing the shelter response in Iraq.*