

CASE STUDY

IRAQ 2019–2021 / CONFLICT

KEYWORDS: Coordination and partnerships, Housing rehabilitation, Infrastructure upgrading, Local government engagement

CRISIS	Syrian crisis (2011 onwards) and Iraq conflict (2014-2017)
PEOPLE DISPLACED	1.2 million Iraqis remain internally displaced* 242,704 registered Syrian refugees in Iraq**
HOMES DAMAGED/ DESTROYED	Approx. 240,000 damaged and destroyed homes***
PROJECT LOCATION	Mosul and Sinjar (Ninewa Governorate), Dohuk, Sumel and Erbil (Kurdistan Region of Iraq).
PEOPLE SUPPORTED BY THE PROJECT	976 HHs (5,683 individuals) benefited from improved shelter, including: 2,658 IDPs, 198 Syrian refugees and 2,826 host community members.
PROJECT OUTPUTS	5 agreements signed with municipalities 976 houses rehabilitated 1,765 HHs provided with clean and regular water supply through rehabilitation of communal water networks. 25 municipal technical staff trained on the effective maintenance of water networks
SHELTER SIZE	Average of approx. 120m²
SHELTER DENSITY	Approx. 15m² per person
DIRECT COST	USD 3,000 per HH on average
PROJECT COST	USD 3,630 per HH on average



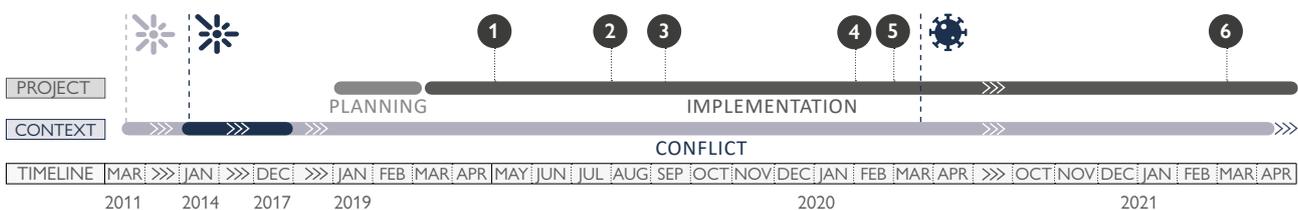
PROJECT SUMMARY

To strengthen the long term resilience of subnational authorities and their host, IDP, and refugee populations affected by the Syrian and Iraq conflicts, the project focused on institutional capacity building and supported urban recovery needs in five cities in northern Iraq through housing rehabilitation and implementing small-scale, community water and sanitation infrastructure.

* Source: IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix (Dec 2020)

** Source: UNHCR (30 Sep 2020) Syria Regional Refugee Response, Operational Portal

*** Source: Shelter Cluster and UN-Habitat in Iraq (Oct 2020) Abstract: The status of housing rehabilitation programs in Iraq in the post-ISIL conflict



- Mar 2011:** Syrian crisis began.
- 2014-2017:** Iraq conflict.
- 1** **Apr - May 2019:** Inception meetings held with subnational authorities and with technical counterparts.
- 2** **Jul - Aug 2019:** Socio-Economic Vulnerability Assessment Tool (SEVAT) surveys started.
- 3** **Aug - Oct 2019:** Agreements signed with subnational authorities.
- 4** **Feb 2020:** Rehabilitation of housing started.
- 5** **Aug 2020:** Rehabilitation of communal water networks started.
- 11 Mar 2020:** WHO declared the novel COVID-19 outbreak a global pandemic.
- 6** **Mar 2021:** Capacity building for municipal technical staff.



Housing rehabilitation took pace in five cities in northern Iraq.

CONTEXT

For more background information on the crisis and response in Iraq see [A.17](#).

Many families in Mosul and Sinjar (in Ninewa Governorate of Iraq) lost their homes in acts of destruction by ISIL or during the military operations to liberate the occupied areas. Unlawful seizures, secondary occupation, and systematic looting of property were common in these regions. As a result, many people were forced to flee and became internally displaced or continue to live in war-damaged houses.

Cities in the Kurdistan region, namely Duhok, Sumel, and Erbil, received many of these IDPs, as well as Syrian refugees fleeing neighboring regions. Many vulnerable IDPs and refugees came to live in unfinished houses or in over-crowded rented houses lacking basic safety, structural integrity, or sanitation, all of which compromised their dignity, privacy, and tenure security. While some of the IDPs were able to stay temporarily with their relatives or rent apartments, large numbers still required shelter rehabilitation and basic services.

The Kurdistan Region has hosted large displaced and refugee populations since the start of the respective crises. Accommodating high numbers of IDPs and refugees has posed challenges for these groups as well as for host communities.

In recent years, due to improved security, an increasing numbers of IDPs have returned to Ninewa Governorate, yet housing and basic infrastructure remained damaged and destroyed. In Sinjar, aside from widespread physical destruction, lack of proper documentation on housing, land and property rights prevented many displaced families from settling back in their former properties, some of which had been seized and occupied in their absence.

PROJECT APPROACH

The overall objective of the project was to strengthen the long-term resilience of targeted host, displaced and refugee populations and relevant subnational authorities affected by the Syrian and Iraqi crises. The project included two core activities in 5 locations (Erbil, Dohuk, Sumel, Mosul and Sinjar): 1) Rehabilitation of 976 housing units, selected based on the vulnerability of their occupants; and 2) Rehabilitation of five water networks in partnership with relevant service providers in each municipality. The project also included training of 25 technical staff on the effective maintenance of water community networks.

The project followed the methodology set forth by the Shelter/NFI Cluster, including: the use of the Socio-Economic Vulnerability Assessment Tool (SEVAT) developed by the Cash Working Group in Iraq to identify target households; the categorization of war-damaged structures and structural assessments by qualified engineers; the preparation of Bills of Quantity confirming scope of repairs; and the signing of agreements with local authorities, owners, and tenants.

To create employment opportunities and support livelihoods, rehabilitation of houses and water infrastructure projects were carried out through local contractors with oversight and monitoring by field engineers. A competitive process was launched inviting local contractors to submit bids. The lowest technically compliant bidder was selected to ensure best value for money for the shelter rehabilitations across the five locations. Field engineers, contractors, and laborers were hired from benefiting municipalities to enhance local capacities and support local economies. The project created almost 26,000 working days in total for skilled and unskilled workers.

TARGETING

The cities of Mosul and Sinjar were selected for the project due to the extensive damage to the housing and municipal infrastructure during ISIL occupation. Erbil, Dohuk and Sumel in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq were also selected, as they accommodated a very high number of refugees and IDPs following the crisis, many of whom remain in inadequate shelter. The project targeted houses within the boundaries of the municipal master plans, where owners hosting IDPs and refugees had deeds of ownerships. Alternative solutions were sought for those unable to prove property ownership.

In each of the 5 municipalities, mapping specialists reviewed satellite imagery of identified neighborhoods. Concurrently, field engineers collaborated with subnational counterparts and neighborhood Mukhtar teams to conduct preliminary structural assessments of up to 400 households per municipality and categorized each house based on the Shelter Cluster's five War Damage Categories: category 0 (no damage), category 1 (minimal damage), category 2 (major damage), category 3 (severe damage), and category 4 (destroyed). Based on this technical assessment, 1,835 households were prioritized for further analysis using SEVAT.

SEVAT is a standardized vulnerability assessment tool developed by the Cash Working Group of Iraq and adopted by the Shelter/NFI Cluster to ensure a uniform and systematic



Engaging women helped to ensure their voices were heard throughout the project implementation.

approach to identifying highly vulnerable households across all communities in Iraq. SEVAT was administered by a local NGO with mixed teams of three (one woman and two men) in each municipality, who conducted surveys of the identified households either in person or over the phone if the families had not yet returned to their homes. Maps with the location of houses were provided to the survey teams for assessment and the questionnaires administered using Kobo Toolbox on tablets. The scoring tool automatically calculated per capita consumption, a reliable metric of household vulnerability, and assigned vulnerability rankings based on the standard formula developed by the Cash Working Group for Iraq. Use of SEVAT ensured transparency and standardized assessment of target households.

Of the assessed households, 82% fell under the poverty line and 200 households were prioritized in each municipality. The selected households were distributed as follows: 50% host community members, 40% IDPs and 10% Syrian refugees. Approximately 23% of selected households were renters.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Neighborhood committees and community leaders were actively involved in the vulnerability assessment and planning phases of the project. Field engineers collaborated with subnational counterparts and neighborhood Mukhtar teams to conduct preliminary structural assessments of houses. For SEVAT administration, survey teams coordinated closely with local authorities and community leaders, which helped avoid tension between host communities and the targeted IDPs and refugees.

Once households were selected, different groups (host communities, IDPs, and refugees) and partner subnational authorities were engaged through focus groups. A local consultant conducted 16 focus groups (four focus groups in each target municipality), engaging a total of 276 people. Separate meetings were organized with municipal counterparts, adult men, adult women, and youth, to encourage different gender and age groups to participate in the discussions and to provide input related to their specific needs and challenges, which helped to inform the development of criteria against which the project could be evaluated.

TENURE SECURITY

In cases where IDPs and refugees were renting properties, to enhance security of tenure, formal agreements were signed with owners of rehabilitated houses stipulating no rent increase for the tenants (either Syrian refugees or IDPs) for a minimum period of 12 months following rehabilitation. Upon completion of housing rehabilitation, all property owners and tenants signed agreements detailing rights and responsibilities of each party, including the obligation of property owners not to increase rent during the first 12 months following the rehabilitation of their properties. Mukhtars, representatives of local communities, were also required to witness the signing of these agreements.

REHABILITATION OF COMMUNAL WATER NETWORKS

In addition to the rehabilitation of housing in targeted areas, the project also addressed recovery needs of local populations through the upgrading of communal water infrastructure to ensure regular supply of clean water to the wider community. As an example, in Eastern Al-Shuhada neighborhood in Sinjar City, Governorate of Ninewa, 323 houses were connected to the municipal water network, providing access to clean and regular water to 1,938 people. The water project in Sinjar included the extension of existing water infrastructure network with 3,000m of additional water pipes.

To facilitate the handover and longevity of water infrastructure surrounding the rehabilitated houses, the project offered training sessions on effective maintenance of water networks. In March 2021, two intensive training sessions were held in Erbil and Duhok for 25 technical staff and engineers from water directorates and municipalities on the effective maintenance and operation of water networks.

This capacity building component equipped the participants with up-to-date knowledge and advanced understanding on the most effective maintenance procedures for water networks and water pumping stations.



Upgrading of WASH infrastructure benefited the wider communities beyond only households receiving shelter support.

COORDINATION

The project team worked in close partnership and consultation with Governorates as well as municipal planning and technical counterparts to ensure that all activities adhered to and complemented subnational masterplans and planning processes. At the outset, Governors were briefed on the project's strategic objectives to gain political support. Municipalities were also engaged during the inception phase, which allowed for alignment of activities based on local development plans and minimized risk of duplication.

Local authorities were subsequently engaged in the assessment, prioritization, and selection of houses and in the identification of water infrastructure for rehabilitation. Formal letters were sent to each Governor updating them on the project's progress and indicating the precise location of houses for rehabilitation within their respective municipality. Governors provided written approvals to formally endorse the rehabilitation projects. Based on the letters of endorsement received from each Governor, subsequent meetings were held with each subnational authority in Erbil, Dohuk, Sumel, Mosul and Sinjar to agree on the project implementation plan of the activities in each local authority. Minutes of meetings capturing the agreements with each target municipality were signed detailing responsibilities of partners and the collaboration modalities for the implementation of all project activities.

MAIN CHALLENGES

Reluctance to return. The slow rate of return and the reluctance of some IDPs to return to their communities of origin after the Iraq conflict, specifically in areas with security risks such as Sinjar, inhibited uptake of project support. Of the houses initially identified in each municipality based on mapping and structural assessments, some were found to be unoccupied during the vulnerability assessment phase. Additional households therefore needed to be identified in some cities to meet project targets.

Fear of eviction. In the case of renters, some households did not wish to participate in the assessments for fear of being evicted if their house was rehabilitated. For future iterations of the project, more information sharing will be done with potential target households who are renters to better understand their fear of eviction as a result of the rehabilitation.

Project scope and severity of damage. The severity of damage and destruction to houses in areas such as Mosul was greater than what could be included within the scope of the project. In line with the project budget, only houses with category 2 (major damage) were selected for rehabilitation, meaning that houses that were category 3 (severe damage), and category 4 (destroyed), were not included in the project.

The COVID-19 pandemic. Government-imposed lockdowns, and movement restrictions severely impacted the progress of housing rehabilitation due to high risks of infection among targeted households and the staff of local contractors carrying out rehabilitation works, especially within inhabited premises.

WIDER IMPACTS

In addition to the direct rehabilitation of housing and communal water networks, the project had a strong focus on **institutional capacity building**. Agreements were signed with relevant municipalities outlining a collaboration framework and support to ensure effective implementation. Activities contributed to priorities identified by targeted municipalities. The ultimate outcomes of the project included the enhancement of relevant subnational authorities' capacities to engage in holistic, area-based planning and improved service delivery that responds to the needs of the host, refugee, and IDP populations.



Local authority engagement involved regular meetings with target municipalities and directorates of water.

STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES AND LESSONS LEARNED

STRENGTHS

- √ **Engagement with local authorities.** The project fully engaged the governorates, subnational authorities, joint crisis centers, municipalities and water directorates. Obtaining written approvals from Governors and senior level officials for targeting houses in their respective jurisdictions allowed for smooth implementation of the project.
- √ **Use of the SEVAT methodology,** developed by the Cash Working Group and officially endorsed for use by national Shelter/NFI Cluster, for assessing household vulnerability levels ensured an effective and transparent means of selecting target households.
- √ **Inclusion of host communities.** Host communities were severely impacted during the crises and including them among the target households, through the rehabilitation of their unfinished houses used for hosting some IDPs and Syrian refugees, helped in building peaceful coexistence among various groups.
- √ **Active participation of Mukhtars and local populations.** Close coordination with local authorities and Mukhtars/community leaders helped in avoiding tension between host communities and the targeted IDPs and refugees.
- √ **Rehabilitating dysfunctional communal water networks** in areas around rehabilitated housing allowed a more comprehensive response to support the wider community in each target location.

WEAKNESSES

- × **The project scope did not target houses with higher severity of damage.** This meant that in areas such as Mosul, where entire neighborhoods of the city were completely destroyed during ISIL occupation, a significant gap remained as few organizations were supporting reconstruction of homes that were severely damaged or totally destroyed.
- × **Gender mainstreaming.** Although the project undertook focus group discussions with women, the approach taken in shelter rehabilitation to adequately address specific constraints of female-headed households could have been improved.
- × **Phasing of technical and vulnerability assessments.** Conducting the technical assessment prior to the vulnerability assessment led to the assessment of some unoccupied houses to which families were reluctant to return, resulting in the need to re-identify further houses in some cities.
- × **Slow procurement process** due to the long period required to prepare detailed Bills of Quantities for the housing rehabilitation and delayed response from bidders.



The project supported a combination of host, refugee and IDP households.

LESSONS LEARNED

- **More focus needed on gender specific engagement.** This could have been approached through the differentiation of needs of both women and men in terms of housing rehabilitation, addressing constraints of female-headed households to ensure gender equality during implementation, and the inclusion of an appropriate capacity building component in the project, supporting livelihood opportunities for women.
- **Engaging the subnational technical and departmental authorities,** including municipalities, in the inception and implementation phases allowed for alignment of activities with the respective institutional and neighborhood development plans, thereby ensuring coherence and preventing duplication.
- **Briefing Governors during the inception phase** on the strategic objectives guaranteed the political support needed throughout implementation and facilitated the endorsements for the damaged houses to be rehabilitated by the respective governorates.
- **Trade-off in geographical scope of the project.** As a key outcome of the project was institutional capacity building, being spread across five cities in three governorates enabled broad engagement with local authorities. However, an alternative approach of focusing on a tighter geography could have helped in tailoring the project activities to the specific demographic needs of each target group in specific locations.