

COMMUNIQUÉ

Roundtable on Women, Displacement and Durable Solutions in Iraq

Baghdad, January 8th 2023 – Last month, the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) and Baghdad Women Association (BWA) hosted a roundtable discussion on the specific challenges women face in the achievement of durable solutions to displacement in Iraq, and how these could be better reflected in policy, programming and response.

The event brought together national women's rights organizations, the International Organization of Migration (IOM), and the Embassy of Sweden in Iraq, which funded the event and have been engaged in promoting gender equality in Iraq for many years. Representatives from the Ministry of Migration and Displacement were also in attendance, including Mr. Karim Al-Nouri, Iraqi Deputy Minister of Migration and Displacement (MoMD), who reiterated the Government's commitment to addressing protracted displacement in Iraq.

The discussion comes at a critical moment for Iraq. Five years after the government declared an end to the conflict with the so-called Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), nearly 1.2 million Iraqis remain internally displaced. In some areas, those who have already returned also continue to face challenges, including a lack of livelihoods and economic security, fragile relations between communities, damaged housing, and a lack of security of tenure. As 2022 draws to a close, Iraq will enter 2023 with a new government in place in Baghdad, which starts its term with a long list of critical priorities – including improving the quality of services and reforming the economy. At the same time, the UN-led humanitarian response architecture will also be deactivated at the end of the year, with a concurrent reduction in humanitarian interventions in favor of longer-term development and stabilization efforts.

In this context, the message from participants at the event was clear: **the achievement of durable solutions to displacement in Iraq will remain incomplete without taking into account the specific challenges women face.** In addition to reinforcing the need to continue to meet the underlying humanitarian needs of women and female-headed households in displacement and return, four key areas for action were put forward:

- 1. Women's access to livelihoods:** Promoting women's access to livelihoods emerged as an essential element of supporting durable solutions, with female-headed households particularly vulnerable to

poverty. The need to support women working in the agricultural sector, expand access to loans and business grants, and provide more comprehensive strategic support to women's access to livelihoods – through, for example, efforts to expand the sectors where women engage – were raised as key areas for further analysis and action.

2. **Access to compensation and social safety nets:** Women's economic security – and its links to (re-)integration go beyond access to livelihoods. The discussion explored how increasing the distribution of compensation – including for damaged property and housing – and expanding and facilitating procedures to access social welfare schemes were critical to women's economic security.
3. **Social re-integration and protection:** The challenges faced by women in the achievement of durable solutions are not only economic. The focus must also be placed on social reintegration, including strengthening social safety networks, social cohesion, and the provision of specialized protection services. Particular emphasis was placed on psychosocial and social support interventions, including for survivors of sexual violence. The need to strengthen services to prevent and respond to gender-based violence (GBV) was also highlighted, especially as GBV was perceived as having been exacerbated by the process of displacement and return.
4. **Women's participation in planning, governance, and peacebuilding:** Many processes linked to the achievement of durable solutions remain largely gender-blind because women do not have space to meaningfully influence these processes, reflecting the importance of deliberate strategies to engage women in all stages of recovery, peacebuilding and development. Particularly raised was the importance of strategies to engage community leaders at local levels to promote women's leadership. Effectively resourcing and engaging civil society organizations and national NGOs working on gender issues was also perceived as critical, given these agencies are already working in these spheres and are at the core of promoting new – and context-sensitive – ideas.

Participants highlighted the importance of ensuring **dedicated gender perspectives are meaningfully included in every step taken on the development of laws, policies, plans, and programs**. Multiple women's rights organizations pointed out that this should include dedicated budget allocation, capacity, and resources to support gender equality and gender mainstreaming. The importance of gender-sensitive data and data collection was also flagged. The discussion reflected the importance of considering both gender and displacement as cross-cutting, requiring coordination across ministries and – in addition to the effective resourcing and implementation of relevant policies, such as the Survivor's Bill – also linking key issues related to the achievement of durable solutions for women to the implementation of other plans and policies, such as the National Strategy to Combat Violence against Women; the National Action Plan for the Implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security; various economic development plans; as well as action on climate change.

This initiative is part of ongoing efforts to promote more gender analysis and mainstream policy, planning, and response surrounding durable solutions, including addressing the particular challenges faced by men and boys. This will include further analysis and recommendations for practical action to support the findings of the discussion.

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