

Minimum standards for Camp Closure/Consolidation

Draft 21 March 2019

In response to multiple threatened and actual forced returns of IDPs living in camp and out of camp settings (both informal settlements and collective centres) in Iraq, humanitarian partners wish to reiterate clear minimum requirements that should be adhered to by the Government of Iraq (GoI) civilian and military authorities to avoid unlawful return and facilitate safe and dignified relocation (including to non-camp areas in the area of displacement), and/or to ensure voluntary, safe, informed, dignified and sustainable return of IDPs to their areas of origin or dignified relocations. This note aims to provide guidance for governorate and federal-level advocacy being undertaken by humanitarian actors.

- The Governorate Return Committees (GRCs) are the primary forum to ensure consultative and principled processes related to both organized return and camps consolidation/closure. GRC must convene regular meetings, and committee members informed and consulted on all decisions related to the consolidation or closure of camps and complexes pursuant to Prime Ministerial instruction of 1 April 2018, ordering the establishment of the GRCs and endorsing the GRC Terms of Reference.
- The CCCM Cluster Framework for Camp Consolidation and the Principled Return Framework developed by the National Protection Cluster, as annexes to the current GRC Terms of Reference, must guide the operation of all GRCs.

Advocacy Points

1. All relocations – including during camp closures should be lawful and in line with international humanitarian principles. Ideally, evictions from informal sites should only be undertaken where a court order has been issued to restore possession of the property. In accordance with such a court order, IDPs in both formal and informal settings should be provided with reasonable notice of relocation (4 weeks), and alternative shelter options. Relocation to alternative shelter sites must be organized in a safe and dignified manner.
2. All returns should be voluntary, safe, dignified, informed and sustainable. Forced or coerced returns to areas of origin should be avoided under all circumstances. Providing IDPs with limited alternatives to returns, for example relocation to camps with inadequate services (electricity, WASH, health, education, shelter services), remote locations or with Freedom of Movement restrictions, can push IDPs toward premature, unsustainable returns. To avoid this, IDPs should be provided a range of options for relocation (including to non-camp settings), with their intentions and choice of location about where to move being collected and respected. At minimum, the following relocation options should be made available for IDPs in camps:
 - Organized voluntary returns to their area of origin;
 - Relocation to alternative camps or formal sites currently hosting IDPs;
 - Relocation to non-camp settings where they have families that are neither AoO or AoD;
 - Taking up at least temporary residency in the area of displacement.

3. Once decisions to lawfully close/consolidate camps are made in the GRC fora, GoI authorities, including relevant military and security actors enforcing closures/relocations, should clearly communicate the lawful and/or organized return/relocation plans to IDPs in a timely manner and ensure the following:
 - Sufficient Notice: GoI authorities must officially inform all IDPs and Camp Management agency directly in writing and verbally of the date of the lawful closure or organized return movement, providing sufficient notice to enable informed and dignified relocations or returns. Sharing of information with IDPs about lawful closure or organized return plans will enable them to make informed and voluntary decisions regarding relocation to alternative shelter sites or return to areas of origin, and to plan accordingly. Notice must be provided a minimum of four weeks prior to the lawful closure or organized return movement, and preferably earlier. No closures/evictions (camps/informal settlements) should take place during a school exam period, religious holidays, inclement weather, or during non-daylight hours. The humanitarian community is willing to support with informing IDPs of their options through the 'Know Before You Go' materials, only after IDPs have been informed about lawful closure or organized return plans by the GoI authorities. Under no circumstances will humanitarian partners communicate relocation plans directly to IDPs, though once authorities have formally notified affected families, could support IDPs in making informed decisions between options provided.
 - Alternative Relocation Options: GoI authorities must provide IDPs sufficient options for relocation. These options should include, at minimum, relocation to camps and formal sites currently hosting IDPs, non-camp settings where they have families that are neither AoO or AoD, or voluntary return to their areas of origin. This is to prevent situations where IDPs are forced into homelessness, or sub-standard living conditions or unsafe housing, which can lead to secondary displacement.
 - ID Confiscation: GoI authorities must under no circumstances confiscate documents from IDPs, including as a means of pressuring them to depart from a site. Any civil documents or documentation related to security or humanitarian services, already seized by authorities must be immediately returned to IDPs in their present locations and IDPs should never be required to pay a fee to reclaim their ID.
 - Security Clearances: Security clearances must be issued to IDPs prior to the camp closure, lawful eviction from informal settlements or organized, return/relocation to allow IDPs to safely cross checkpoints and travel to the chosen alternative location. IDPs should be informed ahead of time of any security clearance requirements for entry to and ongoing habitation in their chosen relocation site. The GoI must provide reasonable support to IDPs in obtaining necessary permissions and inform relevant local security agencies and local authorities of requirements to ensure smooth transit through checkpoints and to area of return/relocation.

- Departure Letter: IDPs must be provided with departure letters prior to the closure/relocation, to allow them to register with MoDM as returnees in their area of origin. The departure letters need to contain at minimum: Head of Household, family members, camp location, area returning/traveling to...IDPs should not, under any circumstances, be required to pay to obtain a departure letter or exit letter from a site they are leaving due to closure or eviction
- Transportation: GoI authorities should arrange transportation of IDPs and their belongings in coordination with MoDM and Ministry of Transportation. This coordination includes provisions that allow IDPs with furniture and vehicles to proceed through checkpoints, including relevant documents as required. Transportation arrangements need to be communicated to IDPs ahead of time.
- Use of Force: Neither civilian, military nor other security actors should use force or violence to evict or return IDPs from sites. The civilian and humanitarian nature of IDP sites must be respected and maintained at all times, in accordance with the Prime Ministerial Directive of April 2018. No weapons are permitted in camps and other IDP sites.
- Coercive Methods: Military or security actors should not be undertaking tent to tent registration for facilitated returns or relocations, or delivering the messaging to IDPs about their options, as their armed presence in camps contravenes the Prime Ministerial Directive of April 2017 on preserving the civilian character of camps, and contributes to a coercive environment where IDPs are compelled to make decisions under duress, including by pressurizing statements regarding an imminent camp closures.

All camp closures and organized return movements should respect the above minimum standards.