

Note on status of informal sites:

Identifying characteristics and risks relating to options for longer-term solutions

January 2022

This note utilizes the three broad characterizations of informal sites from the *HCT Note on Informal Sites* (February 2021), and draws out cross cutting issues for out-of-camp IDP families living in informal sites¹, related to their ability, or inability, to achieve a longer-term, more stable living situation. The living situation for many people in informal sites is often a result of other protection/status related issues.

As there is no single standard informal site, there is no single standard context. This note advocates that an analysis of the objective for people in informal sites needs to weigh:

Condition of site + protection issues + opportunities for people to return or integrate

The *HCT Note on Informal Sites* outlines the following broad characterization of informal sites:

Type	Description [updated]	% of informal sites pop. ²	Examples
Sites Re- Classified from Formal Camps	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Used to be formal IDP camps, but authorities changed designation - Temporary shelter (tents, caravans) - Reliance on humanitarian actors for basic services, sites were set up to be serviced by humanitarian assistance - Remaining families have high barriers to return, especially families from Jurf Al Sakhar (area of no-return) - Camps have had multiple past evictions, authorities unlikely to allow families to remain long-term 	11% of informal site residents live in re-classified former camps (c. 11,200 ind.)	HTC, AAF, Beizeibz
Large and High Visibility Informal Sites	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Some purposely designated to host IDPs (Kilo 7), some self-settled (Jebel Sinjar, Balad Train Station) - Reliance on humanitarian assistance for basic services. - Authorities perceive sites as temporary, unwilling to host IDPs in the long-term, unwilling to take over service provision. - Represent a small portion of overall displacement 	11% of informal site residents live in large sites (c. 11,400 ind.)	Kilo 7, Jebel Sinjar, Balad Train Station
All other ["Smaller"] Informal Sites	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Multiple families who chose to self-settle together collectively, or in sites designated by authorities - Wide diversity of family profile & site situation: in some sites families have achieved a level of temporary local integration. In others, situation is precarious, with no access to municipal services, threats of eviction, and inability to return or meaningfully integrate. - Often in abandoned/unfinished buildings or tents - Includes urban and rural locations - Includes families displaced from camp closures in 2020/21 as well as longer-term displaced (2014-16) - Humanitarian assistance now covers some sites only, and is generally light-touch. Targeted sites are those where IDPs have high needs and not integrated in local services, incl. 2020/21 camp closure displaced families 	78% of informal site residents live in self-settled sites (c. 82,000 ind.)	Vast majority of sites

¹ These commonalities and risk factors likely apply to all out-of-camp IDPs, but levels of vulnerabilities and risks are understood to be particularly acute for IDPs who resort to living in informal sites

² CCCM Cluster Informal Sites Masterlist, September 2021, with updated former camps & large site populations from CCCM Cluster monthly partner reporting, December 21

Some level of vulnerability can be assumed about any IDP family who is living in an informal site: **people resort to informal, inadequate, and sometimes unsafe, living conditions only when other options are not available to them.** This note provides context to support potential solutions and objectives for humanitarian response.

Some groups remain in as precarious situation as when they arrived: remaining in very poor conditions, denied access to local services and prohibited from integrating while also having no opportunity for return. Other families have achieved some level of local integration and can access services and documentation; these families could be integrated more fully, and/or supported to take decisions about return in the future if they wish to do so.

Categorizations of informal sites

Building on the HCT note referenced above, the informal sites can be very broadly categorized as:

1. Sites re-classified from formal camps + large informal sites

Despite the change of name, the reclassified camps **still function as camps**: constructed to be temporary sites, and serviced by external (humanitarian) service providers. Families in the largest informal sites (Kilo 7, Jebel Sinjar, Balad Train Station) are similarly reliant on service provision by humanitarian actors. Remaining families are those with the highest barriers to return – whether due to being from blocked areas, perceived affiliation, or lacking shelter options or income. There is a high protection concern at a community level, and in some sites a risk of future eviction, as well as household protection risks. Some restrictions on freedom of movement are still in place.

Specific site-by-site planning by humanitarian and durable solutions actors is needed to identify and move towards longer-planning for these families, while maintaining humanitarian service provision in the short-term.

2a. ‘Smaller’ informal sites with opportunities for local integration

In some – or many – informal sites, IDP families have managed to achieve some level of temporary local integration, even if still living in critical shelter. This integration requires local community acceptance and local authority permissions. While living conditions might still be sub-standard, such sites could be directly integrated into durable solutions planning to improve their integration. Examples below of some sites in Shariya, Tikrit, Latifya. There are positive examples of humanitarian engagement that has improved local integration.

2b. Smaller informal sites with limited opportunities for local integration or return

In other areas, IDPs still in informal sites continue to live in a precarious and unstable situation. These are families with overlapping individual vulnerabilities (e.g. lack of civil documentation, lack of access to income) and personal circumstances (e.g. perceived affiliation, tribal issues, blocked return). These **overlapping issues result in families’ inability to return and also – crucially – ability to access safe living conditions, meet basic needs, and integrate in local communities.** These issues also exclude families from the local community acceptance and local authority permissions that are needed to stabilize their situation in displacement. These populations are left in a continued vulnerable position, unable to access services, and in need of, or reliant on, humanitarian assistance. Examples below of some sites in Mosul, Tel Abta, Tel Afar.

Opportunities to find resolution for people in informal sites

There are a range of factors that affect the ability to find a suitable resolution for informal sites, assuming the options are:

- a. Return
- b. Integration
- c. Remaining in the status quo – where both return and integration are not possible

For people living in a status quo situation, their inability to find a resolution (or improve household level resilience), **dictates their continued reliance on humanitarian assistance to meet basic needs and results in people stuck in a cycle of critical need and reliance on temporary assistance, and at risk of more permanent exclusion.**

The following examples are used to illustrate the complexity for populations living in sites but also point to the way forward. *[NB: Examples and categorization are for illustrative and discussion purposes and require further analysis, they should not be taken as a final determination.]* See further information in case studies below.

	Low protection threat	Medium protection threat	High protection threat
Adequate shelter & site condition			
Medium-criticality shelter & site condition		Rural Baaj, Ninewa Telafar, Ninewa	Urban Mosul , Ninewa Urban Kirkuk, Kirkuk
Critical shelter	Shariya, Dohuk Latifiya, Baghdad		Beizeibz, Anbar

Holistic analysis to find opportunities for response

A full analysis of *which* areas or sites should be prioritized, and the opportunities for finding a durable solution requires input from wider stakeholders beyond CCCM. A basic analysis by site or by area could be possible based on the common attributes outlined.

A forthcoming assessment from REACH, which will provide sub-district level data on living conditions, needs, intentions, and barriers to durable solutions for IDPs living in informal sites, could inform such analysis.

Potential Analysis Framework	
Site context	Criticality of shelter & service access – and risks linked to shelter & WASH Level of dependence on aid assistance Likelihood of deterioration
Protection	Do people have access to documentation Do people have access to security clearance Do people have freedom of movement to access services, livelihoods Risk of eviction, and protection implications of eviction threat
Housing land and Property	Is the land ownership private or government Is the building on empty land – or a building that is very likely to be reclaimed e.g. schools, train station, private buildings under construction Are shelter upgrades, site engineering, and risk reduction works allowed or prohibited by local authorities

Engagement by authorities for integration	Are the authorities willing to allow families to remain and services to be extended (e.g. municipal water, electricity and waste management)
Social cohesion	Is there a willingness of local communities to accept families Are there perceived affiliation issues that affect potential integration Is there a willingness of IDP families to remain or locally integrate
Potential for return	Are people from an area of no return or disputed area: Jurf al-Sakhar (Babylon), border between Ninewa governorate and Syria, areas in southern Salah al Din Is there a desire of people to return If people are willing to return, what is the barrier: security/safety, access to services? Are barriers to return likely to be addressed in the medium term (e.g. next 24 months) that it is a more viable approach than supporting integration?

While these overlapping vulnerabilities are common to many out-of-camp IDPs, **for those who resort to living in an informal site, a second level of vulnerability is added**. Poor conditions in sites are compounded by low local acceptance and limited services access: e.g. critical shelter, lack of access to basic WASH services, eviction risk, and protection and GBV risks that result from informal accommodation – all vulnerabilities and risks prioritized in this year’s Humanitarian Response Plan for out-of-camp IDPs, regardless of the location they are in.

Many families still living in informal sites are experiencing these overlapping vulnerabilities of their own individual vulnerability, personal circumstances, and sub-standard living situation. **Unable to meaningfully integrate and unable to return**, families are thus ‘stuck’ in displacement with limited ability to improve their own living situation. Without further support to address underlying factors, families are **at risk of more permanent exclusion**.

Ongoing initiatives

There are localized examples of work under way to engage in finding more sustainable resolutions for families in informal sites. These are currently ad-hoc, but could inform a wider effort.

- Anbar ICCG assistance (AAF, HTC, Bzbz, Kilo 7) and advocacy on behalf of communities
- Balad Train Station discussions between UNHCR, IOM, OCHA, CCCM on activities to support families to return coupled with immediate humanitarian priorities within the site
- West Ninewa: engagement in specific sites of humanitarian actors (led by ACTED CCCM, with Protection Working Group, OCHA), referring families to reconciliation actors to facilitate return
- Mosul: site-level engagement with communities to identify their preferences & intentions, and bring in durable solutions actors (ACTED CCCM, IOM Returns Unit)
- The Facilitated Voluntary Returns Sub-Group of the DSTWG³ with CCCM partners is compiling an *Informal Sites and Durable Solutions Prioritization Matrix* - profiling informal sites using data from humanitarian actors, identifying families’ preferences for return/integration/relocation and barriers and requirements for these, to inform durable solutions programmatic response.

Questions moving forward:

1. **What are the opportunities to improve families’ protection situation in the short- and medium-term?**
2. **What are the opportunities to work towards durable solutions for families unable to return?**
3. **How to identify and better address critical short-term humanitarian need with available resources?**
What is the medium-term response for families living in former camps?

³ Membership: IOM Returns Unit, CCCM Cluster, Protection Cluster, plus ACTED as an invitee

Case studies of informal sites

Site	Summary
Tikrit, Salah al Din	Sites were designated by local authorities, for IDPs displaced from 2019 camp closures and/or returning to the area but unable to return to actual village of origin. Families wish to return but are unable to, but are tolerated by local authorities. Humanitarian actors were permitted to do physical works in the sites, improving shelter conditions, WASH, site access and safety. Families can access municipal services including water supply, electricity, education. Opportunities for local integration are high, while opportunities for return are low.
Latiyah, Baghdad	Families from areas blocked for return (Jurf al-Sakhar). Shelter conditions in the sites are poor: tents, disintegrating mud houses. Current small-scale humanitarian intervention aims to stabilize families then phase out, including advocacy on connection to municipal electricity and water supply. Families can access markets, and jobs when they are available. Local authorities tolerate families remaining, little arbitrary threat of eviction, acceptance by local communities. Opportunities for local integration are high, opportunities for return are low. Poor shelter.
Beizeibz, Anbar	Families are from areas blocked for return (Jurf al-Sakhar) with no prospect of return. Freedom of movement challenges and low level of documents for people from Babylon. Shelter condition in the sites is poor: tents, disintegrating mud houses. Aid reliant population. High protection risks, no opportunity for return or integration, critical shelter, and reliance on humanitarian services.
Some sites in urban Kirkuk	Families (primarily from Hawija) mostly unable to return, including due to perceived affiliation, areas of blocked return or with ongoing security issues. Lack of civil documentation a widespread problem. Living in handmade shelters from bricks & plastic sheeting, usually with illegal access to water and electricity networks Government tolerating presence but not encouraging sustainable assistance to families. Some partners / sites have been blocked from providing shelter rehabilitation. Recent reports of increasing GBV cases. High protection risks. Some limited access to services, poor quality shelter. Potential for improving local integration. High barriers to return, need for reconciliation.
Tel Abta, Baaj	Families were secondarily displaced from the 2019, 2020, and 2021 camp closures. Originally from blocked areas past the security perimeter on the Ninewa-Syria border. Local authorities and communities tolerate families' presence on the outskirts of communities only. Families mostly living in tents brought from the camps, on government land but are making upgrades to property. The municipality is specifically not allowing connection to municipal services, including electricity or humanitarian actors to provide upgrades. Reliant on humanitarian support No option for local integration, and little option for improvement of living conditions.
Some sites in Mosul city, Ninewa	Two different dynamics in Mosul informal sites: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Families unable to return (from blocked areas, perceived affiliation issues, or unable to support themselves on return). Many secondarily displaced from camp closures in 2019, 2020, 2021. Many sites are inherently temporary due to land ownership (HLP issues). • Families who do not wish to return, and wish to integrate Eviction threats and actual evictions are common. Some high protection concerns due to a lack of documentation and risk of permanent exclusion. Families largely unable to access basic services. Authorities tolerate presence only when it is temporary. Families and humanitarian actors are blocked from doing any improvement works in many sites, including sanitation installation. High protection risks, critical shelter, eviction risk, limited integration into local services.
Some sites in Telafar, Ninewa	Families unable to return (from disputed areas, tribal issues, destroyed shelter, or unable to support themselves). High proportion of families displaced within Telafar district. Critical shelter (unfinished buildings, mud houses, tents), although usually with illegal access to water and electricity networks. Local authorities tolerate presence, do not encourage sustainable assistance to families, appeal for support for durable solutions. Regular eviction risk in Zummar sub-district. High protection risks, critical shelter, desire for returns