

CASE STUDY

IRAQ 2018–2021 / CONFLICT

KEYWORDS: Housing reconstruction, Housing rehabilitation, Integrated programming, Returns

CRISIS	Iraq war, 2003-2011, Iraq conflict, 2014-2017
PEOPLE AFFECTED/ DISPLACED	1.2 million IDPs 4.8 million returnees*
HOMES DAMAGED/ DESTROYED	Approx. 240,000 damaged and destroyed homes**
PROJECT LOCATION	Kirkuk and Salah Al Din Governorates
PEOPLE SUPPORTED BY THE PROJECT	Full program 948 HHs Shelter support 457 HHs
PROJECT OUTPUTS	457 war damaged homes rehabilitated, retrofitted or rebuilt 900 HHs received unconditional multipurpose cash 406 livelihoods grants distributed 6 settlement level community projects
SHELTER SIZE	33m², 55m² or 72m² (dependent on household size)
SHELTER DENSITY	Minimum of 5.5m² of covered space per person
DIRECT COST	USD 3,500 – USD 8,500 per HH (dependent on household size and level of damage)
PROJECT COST	USD 4,900 – USD 11,900 per HH (dependent on household size and level of damage)

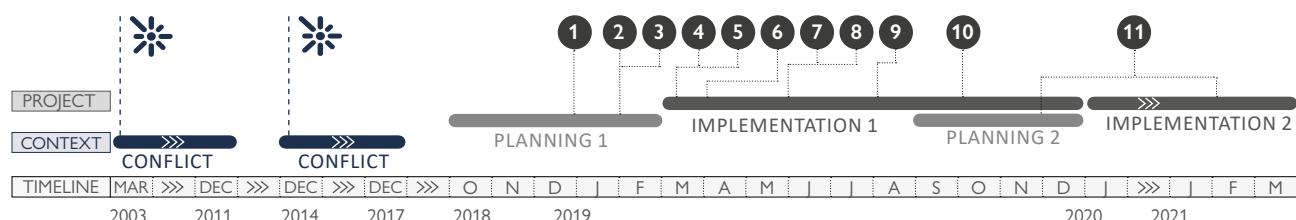


PROJECT SUMMARY

The objective of the Durable Returns Program was for families who had returned following displacement to be able to rebuild their lives in safe conditions, with access to essential services, and livelihood opportunities in a revitalized local market. To do so, the program addressed underlying protection concerns, repaired key public infrastructure and disbursed cash grants for shelter rehabilitation and reconstruction.

* Source: IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix (Dec 2020)

** Source: [The status of housing rehabilitation programs in Iraq in the post-ISIL conflict: an abstract by the Shelter Cluster and UN-Habitat in Iraq, Oct 2020](#).



★ 2003-2011: Iraq war.

★ 2014-2017: Iraq conflict.

1 Jan 2019: Selection of locations.

2 Feb 2019: Formation of Community Working Groups.

3 Feb 2019: Socio-economic vulnerability assessments.

4 Mar 2019: Identification and feasibility analysis of community projects.

5 Mar 2019: Shelter Validation assessment (technical).

6 Apr 2019: Selected households signing of construction related documents and agreements.

7 Jun 2019: Distribution of the shelter grant first installment.

8 Jun 2019: Implementation of community projects.

9 Aug 2019: Distribution of the shelter grant second installment.

10 Oct 2019: Distribution of the shelter grant third installment.

11 Dec 2019 - Jan 2021: Points 1 to 10 repeat in Implementation phase 2.

CONTEXT

For more background information on the crisis and response in Iraq see A.17.

Some of the main obstacles preventing displaced people from returning to their homes include: a lack of adequate shelter because of conflict-related damage or destruction, lack of services (water, electricity, health and education), insufficient livelihood opportunities, and insecurity and protection issues. Many of those who remained displaced following the end of the conflict had no homes to return to and were not able to carry out their previous livelihood activities, much less raise the financial means to begin reconstruction. The same applies for those who have returned and are forced to live with relatives, in part of their damaged house or in rented accommodation.

PROJECT APPROACH

The organization developed a Durable Returns Program – of which shelter support was one component – to enable households who had returned to their areas of origin to be able to rebuild their lives in safe conditions, with access to essential services and livelihood opportunities in a revitalized local market. This required buy-in and committed engagement from the local authorities and security forces.

The program took a holistic approach, focusing on six main pillars to facilitate durable returns: shelter, livelihoods, relief (through Multi-Purpose Cash Assistance), essential services and infrastructure, mine action and weapons decontamination, and Protection. The use of cash transfers were prioritized to stimulate market recovery. Through an interlinked series of interventions, the program's aim was to help communities to come back to life.

Cash-based Interventions were prioritized in order to create a multiplier effect of cash injected into the communities recirculating, and thereby stimulate local market recovery. Before cash grants were distributed to families to rebuild their homes, the organization invested in local construction-related craftspeople and businesses (electricians, welders, carpenters, masons, hardware shop-keepers

and ironmongers) to ensure that they had the necessary tools, equipment and materials to restart their work. Once the cash grants were distributed to families to repair their homes, they hired these skilled laborers and purchased items from their shops, creating a virtuous cycle of supply and demand, reviving the local economy.

Part of the organization's rationale for using a Cash-for-Shelter approach was that they believed it would increase the value-for-money of each grant due to the money going directly to households who could then engage contractors. Households also saved on labor costs by soliciting support from relatives and neighbors. Additionally, providing cash resulted in households having much greater choice and flexibility to address their priority shelter needs. The downsides were risks around the quality of construction or the misuse of cash, which needed to be carefully counter balanced thorough monitoring and the provision of continuous technical support.

TARGETING

Four main locations of operation were selected based on multidisciplinary criteria. All targeted locations were areas classified as rural or peri-urban, had a significant number of returnees, were safely accessible, and had sustained a very high level of damage to housing, infrastructure and main utilities and facilities. Furthermore, the locations were selected in areas where the organization had an ongoing dialogue with the local authorities and security forces, enabling the team to respond to protection concerns.

Families with a certain degree of socioeconomic vulnerability were confirmed to participate in shelter technical assessments that validated the level of damage of their home. Through household visits, team members classified the level of damage of the house based on the Iraq National Shelter Cluster Criteria, and verified the ownership of the house and land, either by checking the land deeds (common in urban and peri-urban areas), or by triangulating the information via trusted community members or the Community Working Groups whenever ownership documentation was unavailable (common in rural areas).



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Homes and businesses sustained significant damage during the conflict.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

A key theme that ran through the program was its community-based approach, with a focus on investing in people's capacities, supporting empowerment to capitalize on opportunities. The guiding question for the organization was: 'How can we enable people to be active participants in their own and their communities' recovery?' To do so, once a community was selected, analysis of market chains and availability of skilled labor was carried out, participatory decision-making processes were put in place and Community Working Groups (CWGs) were established. These CWGs were involved throughout the program design and implementation, including in consultation on targeting criteria, identifying program priorities, assisting in community mobilization and day-to-day follow-up. The approach aimed to enhance community engagement, communication with communities and feedback channels, to minimize tensions, identify issues early and mitigate them, and maximize ownership and acceptance of the program within the community. Where the inclusion of women proved challenging in more conservative locations, the program considered the establishment of women only working groups which had a similar role to the standard CWGs, particularly in program design and consultation.

CASH-FOR-SHELTER

Once these preparatory stages had been completed, the vulnerability and capacities of each household in the community was assessed. The organization developed a model similar to one used by the Cash Working Group. On the basis of the results, several types of cash-based support were available to households, depending on their degree of vulnerability and their specific priorities.

With Cash-for-Shelter grants for the reconstruction of damaged or destroyed houses, priority was given to households currently residing in sub-standard living conditions and with the lowest capacity to independently change their situation. To be eligible, households needed to have a certain vulnerability score, and their housing



Community Working Groups (CWGs) were formed and were engaged in all stages of the project.

damage needed to be classified either Category 2 (major), Category 3 (severe) or Category 4 (destroyed), based on the classification developed by the Iraq Shelter Cluster. The Cash-for-Shelter grant amount depended on the degree of destruction and size of family, and was paid in several installments as a conditional cash grant.

CASH FOR SHELTER GRANT PER HOUSEHOLD			
FAMILY SIZE / LEVEL OF DAMAGE	33m ² Family size 1 to 6	55m ² Family size 7 to 10	72m ² Family size 11+
CATEGORY 2 AND 3 (Rehab or retrofit)	USD 3,000 (+- 500)	USD 3,500 (+- 500)	USD 4,500 (+- 500)
CATEGORY 4 (Rebuild)	USD 5,000 (+- 500)	USD 6,500 (+- 500)	USD 8,000 (+- 500)

Cash-for-Shelter grant per household: Based on the classification developed in 'Shelter Cluster Iraq – Emergency repair of war-damaged shelter guidelines', Version 2.3 – 11.03.2019.

Following the identification of eligible households for a Cash-for-Shelter grant, a fully customized package of construction documents for each household was developed. This package served as a reference and a guiding document set for both the household and the project team. A typical construction documents package included:

- Agreement: stipulating the terms and conditions, responsibilities of both the organization and the household, grant value and tranches;
- Bill of Quantities: made simplified and comprehensible for households;
- Layout plan: to show which areas of the house were within scope of works and which were not;
- Ownership declaration form: used for data triangulation, usually signed by the household, Community Working Group members, and two community members; and
- A simplified scope of work.

With each household, once the agreement was explained and signed, the first tranche of the grant was distributed. For logistical and pragmatic reasons, the cash transfer modality was done via traditional hawala transfer networks.

The rehabilitation, retrofitting or construction was accompanied by technical assistance to the households. This was via weekly or biweekly field visits by the organization's engineers to each household to provide guidance and supervision on the quality of works, and in parallel, the team monitored and documented the progress for reporting and archiving.

Once a household substantially completed each construction phase, the subsequent installment of the grant was disbursed, and once substantial completion of the scope of works was reached the household received a very small amount that was retained from the overall grant (around 5% usually) and signed a final completion certificate.

COMMUNITY PROJECTS

The program also included community projects which aimed to enhance access to communal spaces, essential services and utilities through the rehabilitation of community spaces, preferably delivered through Cash-for-Work. Depending on the priorities in each specific location, this involved for example the rehabilitation of a pumping station to supply water for either domestic consumption or for irrigation; the repair of schools or primary health care centers; or the restoration of power supply.

SECURITY AND PROTECTION CONCERN

To support the continued return process, the organization monitored and addressed a wide range of Protection issues facing IDPs and returnees. Potential security and Protection concerns (restrictions of movement, discrimination and violence, presence of unexploded ordnance or human remains, etc.) faced by individuals or communities who had returned to their area of origin and who were part of the program, were identified through a Protection dialogue with the authorities, mine action partners, armed groups, security forces and community leaders before, during and after the implementation phase.

MAIN CHALLENGES

Perceptions of adequate living space. Traditionally, Iraqi communities have been accustomed to living in spacious houses. For financial feasibility reasons the program pursued the minimum covered living space standard recommended by the Iraq Shelter Cluster, 5.5m² per person, which is often perceived as cramped. Good communication helped in mitigating misunderstandings, yet dissatisfaction was sometimes expressed.

Going beyond the agreed upon scope of works. Linked with the previous point, households sometimes decided to expand the reconstruction or rehabilitation beyond the agreed scope of works at their own expense (usually by going into debt). This risked jeopardizing households' abilities to meet subsequent tranche thresholds or even finish the works due to inflating the construction budget. Several mitigation measures were put in place to avoid this, such as assisting households in designing the expansion and estimating its costs. However, in future programs the organization plans to limit the allowance of expansion that is supported i.e. by 30%.

Availability of construction workers. One of the preliminary activities of the program was conducting a rapid market assessment and a price monitoring exercise. Although the outputs indicated that the workforce (skilled and unskilled labor) were available and abundant, it was observed that sometimes the local workforce became overwhelmed during implementation, mainly because some households reached the same construction milestones simultaneously (i.e. concrete mixing and casting all needed to be done at the same time).

WIDER IMPACTS

In addition to the outcomes for households directly supported by the program, there were also indirect positive outcomes, with many people in the wider community reporting for example an **increase in work linked to the shelter and small business components**.

More broadly, the program presented an opportunity to engage with these communities and authorities in the longer term and delve into and jointly address some deeply entrenched protection concerns. While difficult to measure, **community-based projects and the sense that the village or neighborhood as a whole benefited** from the program appear to have **strengthened ties between neighbors**, even though the picture here remains mixed.



The scope of the project included the reconstruction for homes that were too severely damaged to be rehabilitated.

STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES AND LESSONS LEARNED

STRENGTHS

- ✓ **Multi sectoral integrated approach.** The shelter support was part of a broader integrated program, which included community projects, protection programming, and market-based approaches. Prioritizing support to construction-related small businesses and skilled laborers prior to shelter interventions supported the recovery effort.
- ✓ **Owner-driven reconstruction and Cash-for-Shelter approach.** This proved to be cost-efficient, safe and popular amongst affected communities. While close monitoring and technical follow-up was crucial, the owner-driven Cash-for-Shelter approach had multiple advantages in comparison to a traditional contractor-led approach, enabling households to drive the reconstruction process.
- ✓ **The development of community representation structures,** through Community Working Groups enhanced communication with communities significantly and facilitated community engagement and consultation, as communities were mobilized from the onset of the program and throughout.
- ✓ **Scope of project included all levels of damage and destruction.** The scope of the project included all levels of housing damage, including reconstruction for homes that had been totally destroyed, as well as repair and rehabilitation of damaged homes.

WEAKNESSES

- ✗ **Inclusion of households who have not yet returned in the program.** The program only included households who had already physically returned to their area of origin. However, a considerable proportion of such communities face challenges in returning prior to receiving support and remain displaced, yet within the program design, they were not mapped out as being possible target households. This was mainly due to complexity in understanding households' intent to return and the program's ability to determine their level of vulnerability in the location of displacement. However, this is being mitigated for future iterations of the program by registering returnees and possible target households on different cycles (or phases), enabling people to express their willingness to return, and enabling people to enter the program at later stages. Other methods are also being tested to resolve this challenge.
- ✗ **Gaps within the numerical quantification of socio-economic vulnerability of returnees remains a challenge.** The program came a long way in identifying vulnerable families within a community and adopted a very structured and comprehensive tool. However, the methodology is not perfect and some results had to be reconsidered later on in the project.

LESSONS LEARNED

- **Investing in early planning activities of the program** is pivotal for the alignment and smooth integration of the different project components and the efficiency and effectiveness of implementation. For example, a proper understanding of the community's context and environmental conditions sets a base of how to roll out the required assessments and data gathering exercises in an efficient manner that mitigates assessment fatigue.
- **Proactive and early involvement of community members in project design, methodology and execution** will enhance the general communication with communities, their overall understanding of the project, acceptance and buy-in while ensuring that the activities remain relevant to their needs and priorities.
- Being **part of a multi sectoral integrated program**, the shelter component has proven to be more relevant and impactful when interlinked and complemented by other household and settlement level interventions that also address the needs and priorities of returnees, comprehensively facilitating a durable return for families.
- In considering **timelines of construction activities** across multiple households in the same location, pinch-points where multiple households may be undertaking the same construction activities (i.e. concrete mixing) at the same time need to be considered and spaced out if possible, so as to not overwhelm the local construction workforce capacity.



Shelter interventions were part of a broader integrated program of support.

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