



**Ministry of Interior
Joint Crisis Coordination Center**

KRG's Humanitarian Leadership in Sheltering and Assisting Refugees and Internally Displaced People

1992-2017

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Table of Content:

	Content	Page
1.	Executive Summary:	2
2.	Displacement Waves from 1992 to 2017:	3
3.	Economic Impact of Displacement on the KRI:	5
4.	Impact of KRG's Policies and Humanitarian Leadership:	6
5.	Conclusion:	8

1. Executive Summary:

Since the establishment of the Kurdistan Regional Government in 1992, the Kurdistan Region has become a safe haven for displaced people from different ethnicities, races and religions in Iraq and neighbouring countries. The KRG has displayed committed leadership in welcoming and sheltering displaced people despite the economic and political crises that the region has faced first in the 1990s and later after 2014. When delivering on its humanitarian duties, the KRG has demonstrated an unwavering support for fundamental human rights and principles including individual rights and freedoms, peaceful coexistence, religious tolerance and respect for diversity. It has been the KRG's expressed policy to ensure that displaced populations enjoy human rights on equal terms with the local communities, including access to services and opportunities. Despite deepening political and sectarian divides in Iraq and the increasing hardships facing the local communities in the Kurdistan Region, local communities have opened their homes and received refugees from Syria and displaced families from across Iraq as their guests. Refugees and displaced populations across the globe are recognized as particularly vulnerable and at a higher risk of exclusion and marginalization. Yet, the KRG has proven that, with political will, it is possible to build cohesion and peaceful coexistence even under the most difficult circumstances.

Since the 1990s, there have been several waves of displacement inside Iraq and from the neighbouring countries into the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. However, since 2003 forced displacement has reached unprecedented levels due to the constant escalation of insecurity, violence and threats fuelled by sectarian conflicts, terrorism and the emergence of ISIS.

Since then, the Kurdistan Region of Iraq has successfully built up its mechanisms and capacities to manage large-scale humanitarian and displacement crises to protect and assist millions of vulnerable civilians. While succeeding to maintain security within its territory, the KRG has hosted more than two million internally displaced Iraqis and 300,000 Syrian refugees over the past decade alone. The KRG has taken all measures within its power to receive displaced populations with diverse ethnic, sectarian and religious backgrounds without discrimination. While there are many lessons learned and the KRG is committed to further enhance its humanitarian leadership in the future, its documented humanitarian track record demonstrates that the KRG has delivered beyond international humanitarian standards and stands out in comparison to national and regional governments in the Middle East and beyond.

2. Displacement from 1992 to 2017:

First Wave: Displacement in the 1990s

During different periods of the 1990s, people from Turkey, Iran, and Syria sought refuge in the Kurdistan Region. Moreover, during the same period, displaced Iraqis and political opposition (particularly Shia) members and leaders found refuge in the Kurdistan Region when fleeing persecution from the Baathist regime. Many of the refugees and IDPs returned to their places of origin or resettled in other locations around the world. However, today the Kurdistan Region is still hosting 40,000 refugees from this period.

Second Wave: Displacement During 2003- 2010

After the liberation of Iraq in 2003, escalation of insecurity, increasing violence, insurgency and terrorism in the central and southern provinces of Iraq forced millions of people to flee their homes. Despite an already heavy burden of hosting previous waves of IDPs, and within a context of extreme sectarian polarization and violence in other parts of Iraq, the Kurdistan Region willingly provided safety to displaced families from diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds. Between 2003 and 2010, more than eight hundred and ten thousand (810,000) displaced Iraqis fleeing violence arrived in the Kurdistan Region as the only safe haven in the area. Of these post-2003 IDPs, 24% were Arab Sunni, 36% Kurdish Sunni, 25% Christians and the remaining from other ethnic and/or religious backgrounds such as Yezidis and Turkmens. Following the re-establishment of relative security, the majority returned to their places of origin. However, 96,500 of the post-2003 IDPs opted to permanently settle in the Kurdistan Region of which 29% were Arab Sunnis, 41% Kurdish Sunni and 23% Christians. They are today equal members of the local communities where they have settled.

Third Wave: Refugee Displacement After 2011

After the break out of civil war in Syria in 2011, a large number of Syrian civilians fled to the neighbouring countries. Approximately 250,000 Syrian refugees fled to the Kurdistan Region and have remained under the KRG's protection ever since. Today, 40% reside in nine refugee camps in Erbil, Duhok and Slemani governorates of the Kurdistan Region and the rest are hosted within local communities. These refugee families had left everything behind, were extremely vulnerable and entirely dependent on humanitarian assistance when they arrived. The KRG introduced a unique rights-based policy that granted freedom of movement, residency and work permits and free access to the region's healthcare and education services. The local populations launched fund-raising campaigns and opened their homes to refugee families. As a result of this humane and responsible policy, 61% of the refugees are today financially self-reliant and social cohesion is safeguarded. Now, the number of Turkish, Iranian and Syrian as well as Palestinian who registered as refugee in the Kurdistan Region is (270.000) registered individuals.

Fourth Wave: Displacement After 2014

In the takeover of Ninewa and other Iraqi provinces in 2014, the Islamic State (IS) spread a brutal wave of violence including mass executions, indiscriminate killings, and other brutal crimes amounting to ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. Within months, over three million Iraqis were displaced of which approximately 1.8 million fled to the Kurdistan Region. Once again, the KRG and the people of Kurdistan welcomed the IDPs and did all within their power to provide basic assistance and services. In addition to providing safety and security, the KRG agreed on sharing the humanitarian responsibility with its international partners and thus allocated land for camp construction and connected all camps to public electricity grid. Moreover, KRG endorsed a policy granting all the IDPs access to the public health system at no cost, schools were informed to enrol IDP children and the KRG worked with the federal authorities for distribution of food items through the public distribution system. This large-scale displacement led to a sudden 30% increase of Kurdistan's population within a few months. The regional and local authorities as well as civil society and international partners faced immense challenges that placed increased pressure on the KRG's humanitarian response and leadership.

In the anticipation of the military operations to liberate Mosul city, the KRG drew lessons from its previous experiences and took measures to strengthen preparedness and leadership. The newly created Joint Crisis Coordination Centre (JCC) of the Ministry of Interior (MOI) was tasked with leading the KRG's efforts to prepare and coordinate the response jointly with civil society and the international humanitarian community. The JCC established a mechanism for joint contingency planning with the federal government and humanitarian partners. The resulting contingency plan was launched in June 2016 and called for urgent support and assistance to organize a large-scale humanitarian operation. As expected, over one million people were displaced during the military operations to liberate Mosul in October 2016, of which 250,000 fled to the Kurdistan Region. As of October 2017, 1.2 million IDPs remain in the Kurdistan Region of which 82% reside within host communities and 18% are hosted in 38 camps across the region.

Weakened by a lengthy and costly war against ISIS and a financial and political crisis, the coping capacity of the KRG and local communities is severely reduced. Yet, the KRG is committed to uphold its high humanitarian standards and continues to serve the displaced populations. The KRG has:

- Allocated land for construction of camps;
- Contributed to the construction of camps and connecting camps to power grids and local infrastructure;
- Introduced civil administration in the camps and provided security services;
- Reinforced technical and legal services to combat sexual and gender-based violence in and outside the camps;
- Opened additional shifts at local schools to make schooling in Arabic available to displaced children; currently 58% of refugees' children and 91% of IDPs children are enrolled in formal and informal education.
- Facilitated reunification of children with their families;
- Granted access for all IDPs and refugees to public health services, including mobilizing emergency mobile clinics and medical teams;
- Introduced simplified procedures for free movement of humanitarian personnel;
- Introduced exemption from customs duty and mechanisms to fast track customs clearance for humanitarian supplies;

- Publicly called on local communities and all sections of society to welcome and assist the IDPs as their guests;
- Introduced other necessary measures.

Fifth Wave: Displacement in 2017:

From October 16, 2017, the Iraqi Army and the People's Mobilized Forces (PMF) launched a series of military operations in Kirkuk, Khanaqin, Khurmatu, Alton Kopri, Makhmour, Sinjar, Rabea, Zummar and other areas. This triggered the outbreak of violence, abuse, torture, looting, burning and destruction of civilian homes and properties, targeting especially the Kurdish population. As a result, 160,000 civilians fled their homes and resorted to the Kurdistan Region for safety. The majority of the newly displaced families are hosted by relatives, friends and local families while some have settled in unfinished buildings, construction sites, public spaces and camps. The situation is particularly dire due to the absorption capacity of the KRG and local communities and limited international assistance.

3. Economic Impact of Displacement on the KRI

The sudden population increase of 32% has placed the KRG under a heavy strain. The yearly cost is estimated at two billion US dollars, of which only approximately 25% is today covered by the international community through UN agencies and international non-governmental organizations. The remaining 75% is shouldered by the KRG and host communities despite the deep financial crisis affecting the region since 2014. The economic pressure is heightened by the drastic fall in oil prices and the decision of the federal government to withhold the KRI's share of the national budget.

The estimated cost for meeting the social, education, economic and human needs of the displaced populations and preserving the full range of their rights in Kurdistan amounts to 1.9 billion USD per year. The daily cost to cover the very basic needs of each displaced person amounts to 3.7 USD including shelter, security and protection, water and sanitation, electricity, health and education, as well as administration and management of the camps. With 1.5 million IDPs and refugees in the Kurdistan Region, the breakdown presents the following figures:

- Daily expenditure: \$5,550,000
- Monthly expenditure: \$166,550,000
- Yearly expenditure: \$1,988,000,000

4. Impact of KRG's Policies and Humanitarian Leadership

Job Opportunities

For all the refugee and IDP groups, the KRG has adopted a rights-based policy by granting refugee and IDPs residency and work permits. This has produced highly encouraging employment statistics as 63.5% of IDPs and 87.9% of the Syrian refugees inside and outside camps capable to work are employed can generate some income. KRG is committed to reinforce its efforts to provide equal job opportunities for all people in the Kurdistan Region. KRG has opened vocational training centres to train the IDPs and refugees to enable them to find jobs in the market or establish their own businesses inside camps and within the host communities.

Freedom of Movement

IDPs and refugees residing in host communities have complete freedom of movement within the Kurdistan Region. Camp residents have freedom to travel to and from work, to access education, health care and other public services and visit friends and relatives. All IDPs and refugees have been granted residency permits and enjoy free movement across the Kurdistan Region and even refugees are allowed to visit their families inside Syria and return to Kurdistan Region without restriction. This KRG policy is in recognition of the complex nature of protracted displacement and the difficulties that displaced families face when trying to return home.

Access to Services

All IDPs and refugees in the Kurdistan Region benefit from access to public services and infrastructure (such as drinking water, electricity, education, health care, roads, irrigation system, etc.) on an equal basis with the local population. The KRG's policy in this regard reflects its commitment to safeguard fundamental human rights and human dignity even under pressing circumstances. Moreover, the KRG believes that this policy is paramount to social cohesion, trust and peaceful co-existence.

To increase access to education for displaced children, the KRG has provided land for construction of education spaces and increased the number of shifts in the existing schools by more than two. It has also contracted teachers and paid them to teach in these schools and educational centres inside and outside camps. Currently, 58% of the refugee children are enrolled in formal education and the corresponding figure for IDP children is 91%. Moreover, every year the KRG has allocated a number of seats in the public universities in Kurdistan to displaced students who want to pursue higher education.

In regards to health care, KRG has granted IDPs and refugees access to public hospitals and health centres free of charge and, recognizing their particular vulnerability, even exempted them from the registration fees that apply to local residents. It has deployed doctors and nurses and other medical personnel to the clinics and health centres inside camps to extend medical aid and health services to all those who live in the camps and cannot access the hospitals inside cities due to distance and transportation costs.

Additionally, all camps are either connected to public electricity grid and water network or generators are set up and water wells drilled to provide them with electricity and clean drinking water. Moreover,

roads are constructed to connect camps with the high ways and main roads to provide the residents with access to the cities and ease their transportation across the Kurdistan Region, these efforts were supported by international partners.

Protection and Access to Justice

The primary cause of displacement is persecution, fear and violence. The Kurdistan Region is therefore proud to be the chosen safe haven for Iraqi and Syrian civilians fleeing violence. The KRG has ensured security and peaceful coexistence for the IDPs, refugees and its own population. Rule of law and access to justice applies to all without discrimination. In addition to providing general safety and security, the KRG has reinforced its directorates and offices responsible for combatting sexual and gender-based violence by opening offices in most of the camps and establishing mobile teams. KRG has also dedicated resources and instructed its institutions to process residency and work permits and, where possible, facilitate issuance/renewal of identity and national documents for IDPs and refugees. All these services are provided to the IDPs and refugees free of charge.

Return Policy

KRG's Ministry of Interior holds a clear and consistent position that return must take place under safe, voluntary and dignified conditions for the displaced populations. KRG has worked hard to ensure a successful and transparent return process with the best interest of the civilian population in mind. In compliance with International Humanitarian Law and in order to guarantee the safe, voluntary and principled return of displaced populations, the KRG has not endorsed any position to close the camps or in other ways pressure refugees and IDPs to return. However, the KRG has and will continue to welcome the return of IDPs to their places of origin and continue to do everything in its power to support and facilitate their voluntary return. KRG's policy has been consistent throughout this humanitarian crisis as it is in line with the KRG's vision for the safe return of people to their homes.

Effectiveness of Humanitarian Aid:

To address coordination and effectiveness gaps, the KRG established the Joint Crisis Coordination Centre (JCC) as a permanent government body for leading humanitarian coordination and collaboration. The JCC network of offices includes the JCC head quarters based in Erbil and responsible for strategic coordination and the three JCC governorate offices in Erbil, Duhok and Slemani that are responsible for operational coordination. These network of offices have not only enhanced coordination within the government and with the international community, but have also played a key role in organising humanitarian operations and facilitating the work of the humanitarian community. Through harmonization, facilitation and coordination, the JCC network of offices have positively impacted the quality, timeliness and cost efficiency of humanitarian operations within the Region.

5. Conclusion:

This report presented an overview of the KRG's leadership over nearly three decades to provide protection, shelter and assistance to internally displaced Iraqis and refugees from the neighbouring countries. It has also highlighted the KRG's policies and procedures in managing displacement crisis during 1992 to 2017 and transforming the Kurdistan Region into safe haven within an otherwise turbulent and war-ridden Iraq and Middle East. It has sought to illustrate how, through its humanitarian leadership, the KRG has managed to create such a safe haven while facing three decades of war, conflict, economic embargo and financial crises.

This document has offered a brief overview of the Kurdistan Regions success in meeting the needs of nearly four million internally displaced Iraqis and refugees between 1992 and 2017 with very limited support from the international community and the federal government of Iraq. Since 2014, the Kurdistan Region has shouldered a particularly heavy humanitarian burden, resulting in severe consequences for the local population. The humanitarian pressure, financial crisis and particularly hostile policies from the federal government have jointly led to an alarming regress on development targets, despite impressive achievements in the previous years. Deteriorated access and quality of education services, housing and infrastructure, health care, electricity and clean water and other such services have significantly affected the quality of life, living standards and social development within the region. Another acute consequence is the delays in disbursement of salaries to public employees and cuts in benefits and pensions. Additionally, unemployment has tripled from 3% in 2013 to 14% in 2017.

The Kurdistan Region has undoubtedly exceeded its absorption capacity. Reception of more IDPs in large numbers would create a humanitarian disaster and place the region at the risk of total social, economic, political and security collapse. The Kurdistan Region cannot continue to operate as a safe haven without increased international support. Without an immediate change in international policy, the Kurdistan Region will not be able to uphold its exemplary humanitarian leadership while safeguarding the safety and welfare of its population and stability of the region. The pressure on the region has already produced irreversible consequences. Yet, a total collapse would have a far-reaching impact, not only on the region and the displaced that it is hosting but also the entire Iraq and the Middle East. Only long-term and direct strategic international partnership would allow the KRG to resist these devastating developments and maintain its humanitarian policies and leadership. In the absence of such international partnerships and support, the KRG would be compelled to take extra-ordinary measures, including restrictive access policies, to deliver on its constitutional¹ duty to maintain the security and stability of the Region.

Way forward; the strategy needs to be shifted from providing emergency and lifesaving assistance to long term focus on supporting critical service sectors by integrating humanitarian funding with the national resources to bridge the humanitarian emergency aids to building the resiliency and development such as First, funding small scale quick impact projects, Second, providing funds to critical projects to improve services such as upgrading existing infrastructure and unfinished projects and Third, ensure that the host communities benefit from the funds and loans given to Iraq for the purpose of both stabilization and development across the country including Kurdistan Region.

¹ As per the Constitution of Iraq, Article 121, the KRG is responsible for ensuring safety and security within the Region.

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