



**GROUND TRUTH
SOLUTIONS**

MIXED MIGRATION PLATFORM

SUMMARY OF FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS IN NORTHERN IRAQ

– QUALITATIVE ROUND 1 –

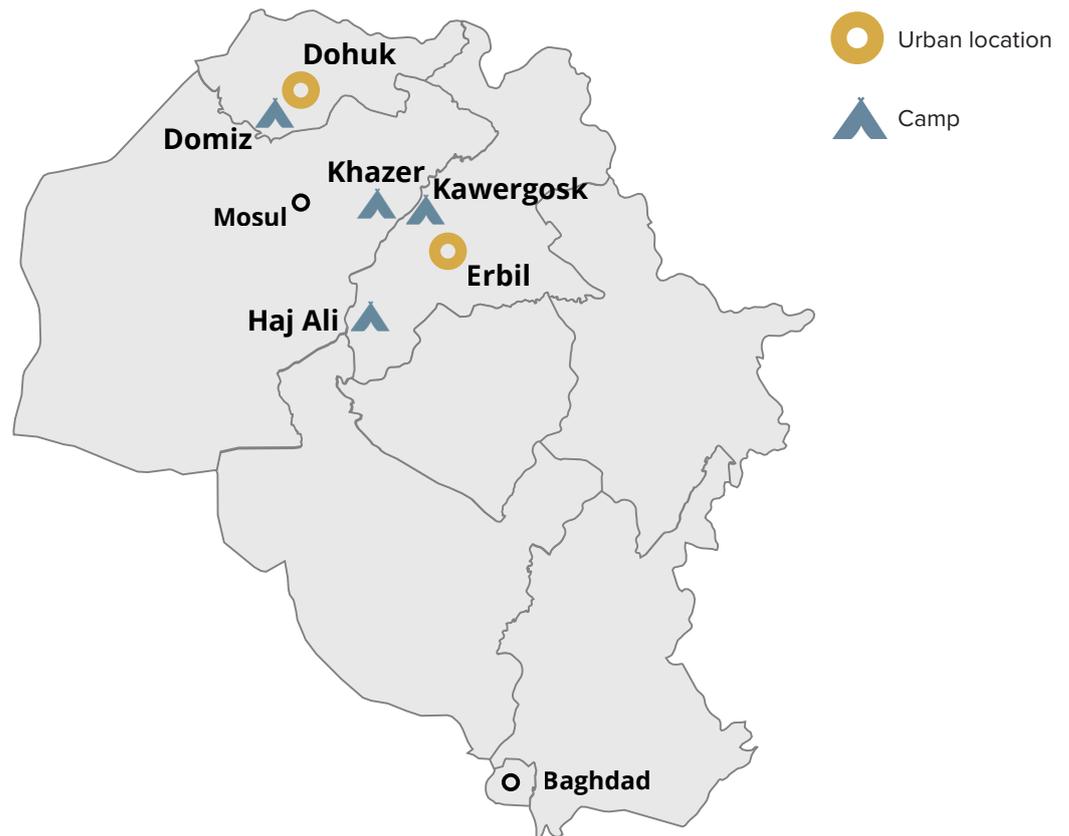
JULY 5, 2017

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INTRODUCTION

This report summarizes the findings of 10 focus group discussions conducted with internally displaced persons (IDPs) and Syrian refugees at six different sites – in camps and urban settings – in northern Iraq. This is the second in a series of data-collection rounds looking at IDP and refugee perceptions of humanitarian assistance in northern Iraq under the [Mixed Migration Platform](#) (MMP).

The discussion topics were designed by Ground Truth Solutions based on the findings of perceptual quantitative surveys conducted with [IDPs](#) and [refugees](#) at the same sites in March 2017. The aim is to delve deeper into the issues that surfaced in the survey. More background and information about the methodology can be found at the end of this report.



READING THIS REPORT

This report presents main findings from the focus group discussions with the main conclusions drawn from each discussion topic. Where relevant, we also include bar charts for several questions from the first round of quantitative data collection with responses quantified on a Likert scale from 1 to 5. The charts show the distribution (in %) of answer options chosen for each question – with colours ranging from dark red for negative answers to

dark green for positive ones. The mean or average score is also shown on a scale of 1 to 5.

This report covers four broad themes – changes over six months; the relevance and quality of assistance; access to information and complaints mechanisms; and fairness and discrimination. First, the report details key concerns that surfaced from the discussions.





OVERALL CONCERNS

When facilitators asked about their biggest concerns for the coming year, participants responded with a variety of worries. Many were afraid of the so-called Islamic State regaining power and instituting tribal retaliations including indiscriminate killings. Others explained that they face problems in the camps even though they fought *against* the so-called Islamic State, just by association.

Another common concern was about livelihood in the camps. Many worry about employment and salaries, as well as having enough food to properly feed themselves and their families. They fear that organisations will continue to decrease services or that there will be delays in distributions which could result in some people starving.

“WHEN WE WERE IN OUR HOMES WE HAD DIGNITY BUT HERE WE LIVE IN HUMILIATION AS WE ARE MARKED AS ‘REFUGEES’ AND WE FEEL THAT. THEY TAKE ADVANTAGE OF YOU BECAUSE YOU ARE A REFUGEE IN EVERYTHING. THE KURDS RECEIVE HIGHER SALARIES FOR THE SAME JOB A REFUGEE DOES. THERE IS DISCRIMINATION. WHEN I WAS IN MY HOME I WAS LIVING WITH DIGNITY”

Finally, many participants worry about their children’s future. They are concerned about their health and education, especially that their children must work instead of going to school. In Haj Ali and Khazer IDP camps, female participants mentioned the fear of their children being bitten by scorpions, snakes, and poisonous insects.

Participants gave advice on how organisations can more effectively meet their needs. They recommended that efforts be made to curb discrimination in aid distribution and that health services be improved. One refugee living in Dohuk explained: *“If we had money, we would be able to go to a specialised doctor for our unique cases. Sometimes if my knee hurts or my back hurts, they prescribe headache pills; my head is not in pain, my knee needs treatment. There are some healthcare facilities that are not available in the clinics established by the organisations, we might benefit more from money to visit cardiologists or other specialists.”* Participants across all locations said that medicine is scarce, and available treatment or healthcare is too expensive. They would like more cash and more food vouchers, suggesting the vouchers be brought to the tents or places of living, as well as special support during Ramadan and Eid. Additionally, participants requested that organisations help with employment and salaries, especially for women. Finally, and unsurprisingly, they want to see their feedback incorporated into aid agencies’ activities so that their needs can be better met.



CHANGES OVER SIX MONTHS

The participants at most of the sites all feel that there have been no changes in the type or frequency of services and aid distribution over the last six months. In Haj Ali refugee camp, male participants reported an increase in security after the so-called Islamic State was pushed out of the area. Participants of both genders at Kawergosk refugee camp described a situation that has

worsened over time due to a decrease in relief operations. Women in Domiz refugee camp and IDPs in Dohuk also noted that the level of services has decreased since November. On the other hand, IDPs in Erbil explained that their circumstances have improved due to a recent influx of displaced people and corresponding increase in private aid and services.





RELEVANCE & QUALITY OF SERVICES

Most of the focus group discussions revealed that refugees and IDPs, particularly those living in private accommodation, receive little-to-no services. Among the most important needs listed by participants was cash; this was also the most frequently cited need from data collection in March 2017. The issue of unmet needs is also supported by the survey data from March 2017 (Figure 1). Both IDP and refugee participants in Dohuk explained that cash was their principal concern because, *“If there is money, it will provide any other services needed.”* Contrary to participants at other sites, however, men in Khazer IDP camp discussed their preference for home-comforts such as fans and refrigerators over cash.

Are your most important needs met by the services you receive?

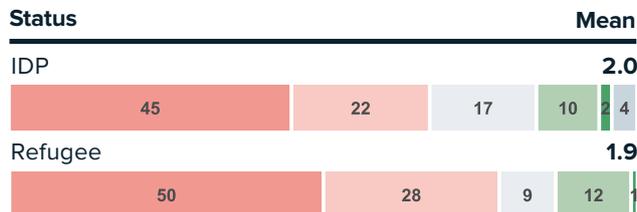


Figure 1: Priority needs

Nevertheless, employment and income generation are a constant struggle for participants across sites. In Kawergosk refugee camp, both men and women estimated that nearly 80% of people cannot earn a living. Women who have found employment typically work either in schools or as nurses. The lack of sufficient and steady salaries makes life particularly difficult for those in private accommodations with monthly rent payments. Moreover, the REACH needs assessment conducted in 2015 observes that while access to basic services in camps

is unsustainable, refugees living in camps have better chances of accessing livelihood opportunities or market systems than those living among the host communities in private accommodation.¹ Securing employment is also a challenge for women, who have few opportunities available to them. This was particularly evident among female IDPs in the quantitative survey, in which women were more pessimistic than men about opportunities to work in the local economy, with over three-quarters responding negatively (Figure 2). In some camps, the only option for women is to work as teachers or nurses, while others have no jobs available at all. While many would like to open businesses such as bakeries and beauty parlours, they explain that they do not have the training or funding to pursue such ventures.

Refugees in particular pointed out the barriers to employment due to favouritism and discrimination on the basis of their country of origin, saying that Syrians can hardly find work, unless they know an Iraqi person who can vouch for them. IDPs living in Erbil said that ideally, they would like to be able to work from home, while refugees in Erbil said that they need vocational training, such as sewing courses, to qualify for employment.

Are displaced families able to make a living by working in the local economy?

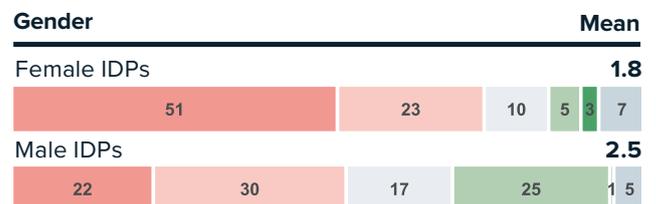
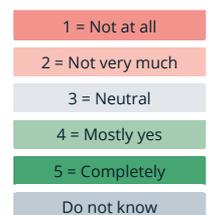


Figure 2: Perceptions of employment

¹ REACH, *Multi-Sector Needs Assessment of Syrian Refugees Residing in Camps, Kurdistan Region of Iraq* (March 2015) cited in Danish Refugee Council, *Syrian Refugee Camp Livelihoods Assessment Erbil Governorate, Kurdistan Region of Iraq* (2015), p.9



Another common concern was the need for food. Most participants mentioned that food distributions occur infrequently or not at all. Women in the Khazer IDP camp reported that they pay a local baker to be able to bake their own bread. They added that they need baby formula and fear the malnourishment of their infant children. Some participants noted their special food needs for the month of Ramadan and were worried they would not be fulfilled. Based on an assessment in late 2016, approximately 2.4 million IDPs and refugees are living in a state of food insecurity in Iraq.²

“WE WANT AID AGENCIES TO CARE ABOUT REFUGEES, ASSESS THEIR NEEDS, AND SEE THEIR REALITY. THEY HAVE THE CAPACITY TO HELP BUT THE AID IS MALDISTRIBUTED”

Dissatisfaction with healthcare was mentioned at every site, except for Khazer IDP camp, where both men and women noted satisfaction with available healthcare. This confirms findings from the quantitative round, where IDPs in Khazer camp were the most positive about their primary health needs being met. In the other camps, participants complained that there were not enough public healthcare centres, resulting in overcrowding and long lines. They also found the available health services unable to meet their needs. For those living in private accommodation, many cited difficulties paying for the often high cost of healthcare.

Several participants in the camps were frustrated with infrastructure issues. In Haj Ali, Dohuk, and Khazer IDP camp, participants said they lacked sufficient access to electricity. In Dohuk, IDP participants also described the difficulties of sharing latrines. Participants in Domiz refugee camp said that they do not receive water in the summer, while those in Haj Ali also cited issues retrieving water.



ACCESS TO INFORMATION & COMPLAINTS MECHANISMS

All focus group participants were in agreement with the data from the quantitative round which showed that refugees and IDPs generally do not know how to move within or between countries, how to access available aid and services (Figure 3), or how to file a complaint (Figure 4). One exception was in Khazer IDP camp, where male participants mentioned a “committee” that responds to people’s complaints, but that was not accessible to women or the elderly. In some camps and cities, participants explained that everyone has information about accessing basic aid, but few know about more advanced services, such as training. Refugees in Domiz camp said that organisations provide information that is already obvious to them, such as hygiene, but that “they don’t tell you how to build your life or your future.” IDPs living in Khazer camp say they do not know what kind of aid they will receive or when it will be distributed, explaining that IDPs between different camp sectors communicate with one another to determine what has

been distributed elsewhere in order to have an idea of what to expect in their area. Refugees in Erbil reported that most people can access information, but those who are illiterate often face difficulties.

Do you have the information you need to get help from relief agencies or local authorities?

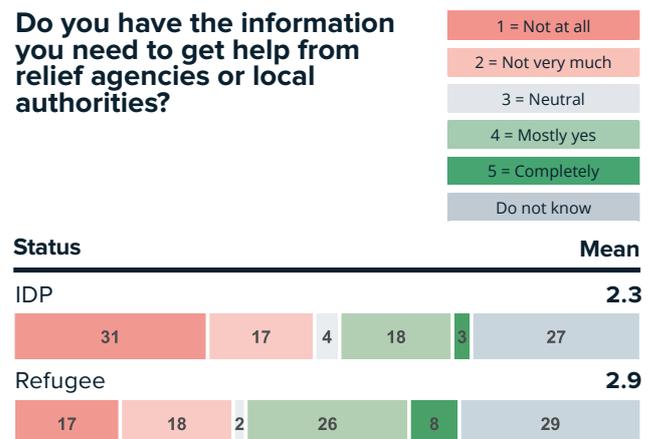


Figure 3: Information

² UNHCR, UNDP, 3RP Regional Refugee & Resilience Plan 2017-2018 in Response to the Syria Crisis – Iraq (December 2016), p.70



In Haj Ali IDP camp, female participants said that camp supervisors often tell them that aid is coming, but they suspect they are only told this to stop their complaints. Male participants explained that there is no complaint box or phone number to call for information. In Dohuk, one refugee participant told a story in which their sister was trying to submit a complaint, but was passed between different organisations only to be told at the end that complaints are not accepted. Also in Dohuk, an IDP participant said that some people are afraid to complain, for fear that agencies will decrease the aid to them. Stories such as these point to a perception among participants that organisations are ignoring their feedback.

A general consensus among participants was that information asymmetries exist between refugees and IDPs who work for aid organisations and those who do not. This suggests that aid agencies should do more to ensure that relevant information is disseminated to everyone, and not just to those in close contact with the organisations.

It would be beneficial for aid agencies to engage with refugees and IDPs to try and better relay information about when, where and what kind of aid is distributed. Moreover, previous work has shown that organisations who ask for the opinions of communities are trusted more when it comes to information dissemination.

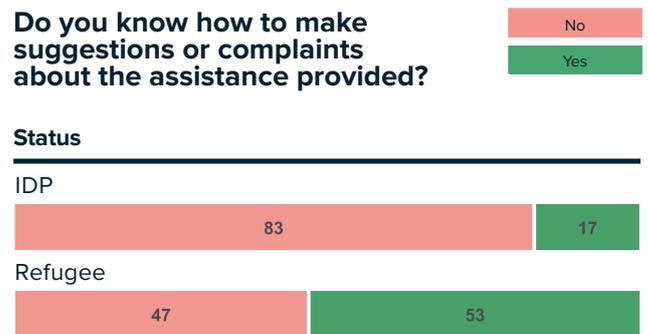


Figure 4: Awareness of complaints mechanisms



FAIRNESS & DISCRIMINATION

Most participants described favouritism and discrimination as common occurrences in both aid distribution and employment. The exception to this was in Khazer IDP camp, where male participants said that aid distribution is both fair and transparent, despite some delays. This is also consistent with findings from the quantitative round, in which residents in Khazer were far more positive about the fairness of aid distribution than others (Figure 5). Additionally, two participants in the IDP discussion in Dohuk said that there is no discrimination.

“IS THERE AN ORGANISATION THAT TRULY CARES FOR IDPS? THEY DELIVER SUPPORT, BUT NOT SUFFICIENTLY, BECAUSE OF FAVOURITISM”

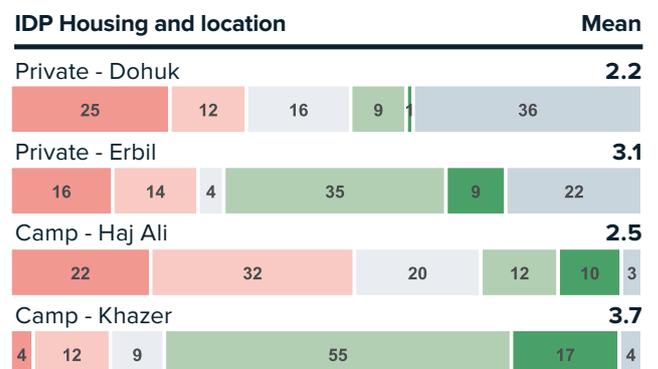
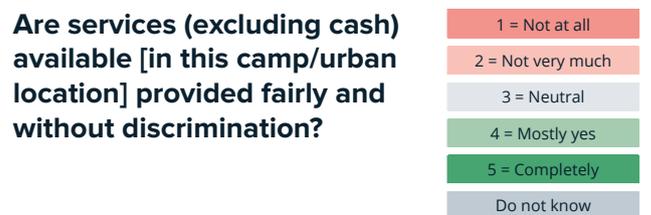


Figure 5: Fairness of services by location



Does the support reach the people who need it most?

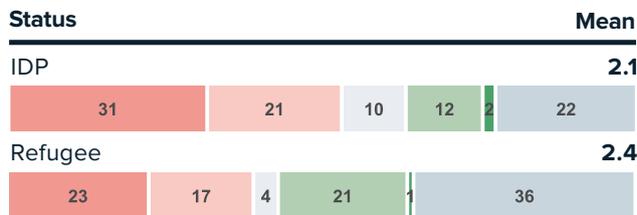


Figure 6: Support reaching those in need

Many participants described a phenomenon in which organisations appoint a single person to oversee distribution, often the Mukhtar, (a chosen head of the community) who proceeds to allocate services based on favouritism. The quantitative data revealed that 16% of surveyed refugees who believe support does not reach those in need think it is because the Mukhtars distribute aid as they please. Contrary to these findings, which suggest that the involvement of Mukhtars can be detrimental to fair aid distribution, during the focus group discussions refugees in Erbil mentioned that organisations should collaborate with the Mukhtars because they believe they know who is in need. In Domiz refugee camp, one person told a story in which he requested money for his son’s operation and was only given 10% of the funding he needed, while someone else in the camp was compensated a large amount of money to restock his shop. In Kawergosk, male participants spoke of their perception that new arrivals receive disproportionately more services, as organisations consider those who have been there longer to have already benefitted from aid. Male participants in Haj Ali IDP camp described a system in which support is distributed by name in alphabetical order, but that distribution ceases after only a fraction of the households have been reached – leaving those with names falling in the latter part of the alphabet without aid.

A finding in Dohuk and Domiz refugee camp suggests there is a perceived lack of ability among organisations to properly assess needs. One participant in Dohuk explained that distribution is based on the number of people in a household, rather than on their needs. In Domiz refugee camp, one participant described a situation in which organisations conducted needs assessments based on the value of household items and not on special circumstances, such as having children with disabilities.

Another trend across sites was that those who are most vulnerable do not receive the aid they need, with the exception again in Khazer IDP camp. This is consistent with findings from the quantitative round (Figure 6), in which those who do not believe support reaches those in need said that children, single people, the elderly, poor people, and persons with disabilities are left out. Most discussions revealed a lack of services for people with disabilities, as well as for children and single women. According to the 3RP Regional Refugee & Resilience Plan 2017-2018, improvements were made to assure access to latrines and showers for people living with disabilities in camps. Nevertheless, respondents in various locations agreed that there is a lack of targeted aid for those with disabilities, who are ignored and are not prioritised despite the more challenging circumstances they face.

“WE WANT FAIRNESS IN THE DISTRIBUTION OF SUPPORT. THE CURRENT DISTRIBUTION METHODS ARE RANDOM AND THERE IS FAVOURITISM AND A LOT OF PEOPLE GET MORE SHARES WHILE POOR PEOPLE DON’T GET ANYTHING. WE JUST WANT FAIRNESS, BUT THE PEOPLE WHO DISTRIBUTE ALWAYS DO IT THE WAY THEY WANT WITHOUT ANY ORDER, AND PEOPLE WHO ARE WAITING IN TURN GET IGNORED. THERE ARE POOR PEOPLE WITH DISABLED CHILDREN WHO GET IGNORED”



NOTES ON METHODOLOGY

Background

Ground Truth Solutions is one of seven partners that jointly provide analytical services as part of the [Mixed Migration Platform](#) (MMP). The other partners are [ACAPS](#), [Danish Refugee Council](#), [Internews](#), [INTERSOS](#), [REACH](#), and [Translators without Borders](#). The goal of MMP, which was launched in October 2016, is to provide information related to mixed migration for policy, programming, and advocacy work as well as providing information to people on the move in the Middle East and Europe. Ground Truth Solutions' contribution to the platform involves the collection and analysis of feedback on the perceptions of people in different stages of displacement – in the borderlands, transit countries, and countries of final destination.

Survey development

Ground Truth Solutions designed these focus group discussions to gather feedback from IDPs and refugees about the provision of humanitarian aid in the northern Iraq. The aim is to help guide international agencies in creating more effective and responsive aid programmes. Focus group discussions are designed to delve deeper into some of the issues that surfaced in the first perceptual survey conducted in March 2017.

Sample size

A total of 105 people participated in the focus group discussions across six locations in northern Iraq, including two refugee camps, two IDP camps, and two urban locations.

Sampling methodology

Focus group discussions were held at the same sites as in the first round of data collection in March 2017, covering four camps as well as two urban areas. Twelve focus group discussions were conducted; four discussions were held with only female participants, four with only male participants, and four were held among mixed groups. Individuals were selected to participate at random. Enumerators walked through camps and urban areas selecting individuals at random from every nth house.

Language of the survey

The focus group discussions were conducted in Arabic.

Data collection

FGDs were conducted until all issues had been discussed. There was no need to have uniform agreement on any one topic, and the enumerators encouraged each participant to voice their own thoughts. No incentives were given for participation. There were some challenges during data collection, mainly due to heat and Ramadan-related conditions that played a role in diminishing the willingness to participate among some of the people approached. Data was collected between 25 May and 3 June 2017 by SREO, an independent data collection company contracted by Ground Truth Solutions.

For more information about Ground Truth surveys in Iraq, please contact Rebecca Hetzer (rebecca@groundtruthsolutions.org) or info@groundtruthsolutions.org.

