Baseline Report - Iraq
Women’s Participation Pilot Project

Women’s Refugee Commission &
International Organization for Migration
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Acronyms and Abbreviations

CCCM ........................................... Camp Coordination and Camp Management
FGD ............................................. Focus group discussions
DTM ............................................. Displacement Tracking Matrix
GBV ............................................. Gender-based violence
GBVIMS ........................................ Gender-Based Violence Information Management System
GSIO ............................................ Gender Studies and Information Organization
KRI .............................................. Kurdistan Region of Iraq
KRG .............................................. Kurdistan Regional Government
IDP .............................................. Internally displaced person
IPV .............................................. Intimate partner violence
IO ................................................ International organization
IOM .............................................. International Organization for Migration
NFI .............................................. Non-food items
NRC ............................................. Norwegian Refugee Council
PWD ............................................. Persons with disabilities
UNHCR ........................................ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
WRC ............................................. Women’s Refugee Commission
BCF ............................................. Barzani Foundation Charity
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Introduction

As part of a global-level project aiming at reducing gender-based violence (GBV) risks in camps and camp-like settings, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the Camp Coordination and Camp Management (CCCM) Global Cluster sought to understand how women’s participation in governance structures could contribute to reducing risks of GBV in camps and camp-like settings. Ensuring meaningful participation of all groups of the population in decision-making and in camp governance structures is an essential pillar of good camp management.\(^1\) It is also essential to contribute to improved humanitarian response, disaster risk reduction, holistic community support, and ultimately, accountability toward affected populations. Finally, meaningful participation of different groups within the displaced community offers a basic step towards making sure that different needs, capacities and expectations of heterogeneous groups within the displaced community are reflected and addressed. Often making up half or more of the entire population in a displaced community, women’s representation in camp governance structures have traditionally been limited and restricted. As such, increasing women’s participation in camp governance structures could enable them to voice their safety concerns and support the identification of responses to mitigate identified GBV risks.

IOM, UNHCR, in coordination with the CCCM Global Cluster, and with technical support from the Women’s Refugee Commission (WRC), conducted baseline assessments in five country operations – Ecuador, Iraq, Nigeria, Philippines, and South Sudan – in order to establish the existing levels of women’s participation in each location and identify strategies to improve their participation. The identified strategies will inform pilot interventions that assess which approaches improve women’s participation and whether they have an additional benefit on perceptions around their risks to GBV.

This baseline report outlines key findings from the assessment conducted by IOM on July 18 – 26, 2016 in Al-Karma and Al-Amal informal internally displaced persons (IDP) sites in Ankawa District of Erbil, in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. The assessment set out to map existing governance structures in Al-Karma and Al-Amal informal sites and learn how displaced men, women, adolescent girls and other at-risk groups currently participate in camp life and camp decision-making processes. The assessment also examined the barriers and opportunities to increasing women’s participation in camp life and camp governance, and explored strategies that could facilitate this. Findings from this study which will be used in a learning document that will inform CCCM Global Cluster and the wider humanitarian system on how to improve women’s participation in camp governance structures and contribute to reduction in women and girls’ risks to GBV.

Background

Armed conflict in Iraq has caused multiple human displacements over the past three decades. In 2014, violence between extremists and government forces resulted in further deterioration of security and economic downturn. Islamic State’s large territorial gains in western and northern parts of Iraq, including the country’s second largest city, Mosul, led to a significant displacement crisis, at which point internal displacement reached 3.4 million people across the country.\(^2\)

The Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) has been deeply affected by both the recent waves of displacement caused by conflicts in Syria and the rest of Iraq, as well as the pervasive financial crisis affecting the public and private sectors across the country’s economy. Of the total internally displaced in the country, 1.5 million are now in the KRI, making up an increase of 30 percent in the population in only two years, and putting the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) under immense strain, especially in its provision of public services.\(^3\) Moreover, Kurdistan Region’s economy was already directly and negatively affected by budgetary disputes between KRG and the Federal Government arising out of decreasing global oil prices. Local economy in

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1. *Camp Management Toolkit, IOM, UNHCR, NRC, June 2015, Chapter 3.*
2. *Displacement as Challenge and Opportunity; Urban Profile: Refugees, Internally Displaced Persons and Host Community, Erbil Governorate, Kurdistan Region of Iraq, April 2016*
the KRI deteriorated, and while the public sector is unable to support its employees, the under-developed private sector is also too weak to provide alternative solutions to endure the economic constraints.

According to a recent report from over 1000 site assessments conducted by IOM Iraq across the country’s camps and camp-like settings, female IDPs face disproportionate restrictions to live their lives in safety, dignity and privacy, compared to males.\textsuperscript{4} IDPs are often hosted in substandard shelter arrangements and face extremely challenging living conditions, including multiple risks of GBV. As in other contexts of conflict and displacement, women and girls’ roles and freedom of movement in Iraq are severely restrained in order to protect them from sexual harassment and violence. These restrictions force women and girls to depend on others to access even the most basic services, including latrines and showers. As women and girls are unable to access services, GBV survivors are unable to receive appropriate care.

According to the Gender-Based Violence Information Management System (GBVIMS) data reported in the first semester of 2016, 53.67 percent of reported cases are survivors of intimate partner violence (IPV)\textsuperscript{5} which indicates that domestic violence is a prevalent form of GBV among the displaced population living in KRI. IDP men and boys are also far from being safe; they are often targeted in arbitrary arrests and detainment, and seen with suspicion by different parties to the conflict. Family separations are common, increasing exposure of risks and exploitation to female-heads of households. Financial insecurity is the most often cited driver for households to resort to child labor and to child marriage for their children. All these challenges demonstrate underlying stressors to all kinds of violence within the home, including IPV and parental abuse of children.

Against this backdrop, the pilot study was conducted by IOM and UNHCR in July, 2016 in Al-Karma and Al-Amal informal sites in Erbil, in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. The informal sites are set up in unfinished buildings managed by a local Christian church. Al-Karma and Al-Amal are unfinished buildings loaned by private individuals who, prior to the recent conflicts, had plans to turn them into hotels. Most of the displaced families come from the same Christian communities in Mosul with a minority of Yazidi families in Al-Amal. They have been displaced since August 2014. There are 51 households (240 individuals) residing at Al-Karma site, while at Al-Amal, there are 153 households (599 individuals). Each family lives in a small room separated by walls and partitions, with shared kitchen and sex-segregated latrines and showers on every floor in each site. Females make up 51 percent of the total population within the two sites. Most children are enrolled in school. There are at least four persons with disabilities; however, the study could not confirm how many additional IDPs live in either site with intellectual, or other forms of disability, as only physical disabilities were captured by rapid assessments. Vulnerable groups include children, adolescent girls, female heads of households, elderly heads of households, and persons with disabilities (PWD).

\textsuperscript{4} A Gendered Perspective: Safety, Dignity and Privacy of Camp and Camp-like Settings in Iraq, IOM Iraq, February 2016

\textsuperscript{5} The data shared is only from reported cases, and is in no way representative of the total incidence or prevalence of GBV in Iraq. These statistical trends are generated exclusively by GBV service providers who use the GBVIMS for data collection in the implementation of GBV response activities in a limited number of locations across Iraq and with the consent of survivors.
Methodology

The WRC and IOM developed a qualitative study methodology with the research question: Does women’s participation in camp governance contribute to reducing their perceptions of GBV risks in the displaced community?

Goal: To improve women's participation in governance structures in camps and camp-like settings to reduce women and girls' perceptions of risks to GBV.

Objectives:
   1. To map existing governance structures.
   2. To identify barriers and opportunities for women and girls to voice their safety concerns, ideas, and questions.
   3. To identify barriers and opportunities for women and girls to meaningfully contribute to decision-making processes in planning, programming, monitoring and evaluating service provision.
   4. To obtain a baseline among women and girls as to their perceptions of current GBV risk in their community.

In order to reach these objectives, interview tools, inclusive of a safety mapping exercise, were developed to facilitate focus group discussions and in-depth interviews among female and male IDP leaders; female and male IDP non-leaders; displaced adolescent girls; and displaced persons with disabilities. In total, fifteen (15) focus group discussions (FGD) were conducted with female and male IDP leaders and non-leaders (one group of female leaders; eight groups of female non-leaders; one group of adolescent girls; two groups of male leaders; and three groups of male non-leaders). One in-depth interview was conducted with a female community member. Safety mapping exercises were completed during FGDs with female respondents. The study team made efforts to speak with members of under-represented groups, including persons with disabilities, elderly and Yazidis. Finally, seven key informant interviews were conducted with the representatives from the Church, as well as several local and international service providers (UNFPA, Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), Al Massala, SOS Chrétiens d’Orient, and Gender Studies and Information Organization (GSIO)). In total, 110 individuals participated in the study.

Data collection took place in Al-Karma and Al-Amal informal sites from July 18 – 26, 2016. The assessment team consisted of five female and three male data collectors who were trained and supervised by staff from IOM and UNHCR. Interview tools were revised for cultural appropriateness and phrasing by the IOM Iraq Office, and further adjusted with the data collectors after pilot testing the tools among IDP community members. Facilitated transcription techniques were used to transcribe the data during daily debriefing sessions. The WRC analyzed the data on NVivo.6

Findings

Camp Governance Structure

Because Al-Karma and Al-Amal are informal IDP sites, there is no formal management structure that coordinates assistance and communication between those providing services and the IDPs. The Church, represented by the Church Leader is de facto managing the site. Two male Church representatives, selected by The Church Leader support the Church's work in response to the needs of IDPs at the informal sites. Within the site, two to five IDP representatives from each site coordinate information sharing between the IDPs and the two Church representatives and/or with the Church Leader7 (see Figure 1).

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6 NVivo is software that supports qualitative and mixed methods research.

7 Throughout the report, a reference is made to “Church Leader” as the key leader of the local church facilitating the assistance for Al-Karma and Al-Amal informal IDP sites. The name has been removed from the report in order to protect the privacy of the individual.
The study found evidence of a previous attempt to establish an IDP governance structure where each floor of the building had an IDP representative. However, those representatives “got bored and did not want to handle responsibilities”, according to the Church representatives. They also reported that placing IDPs in leadership position may have caused tension among some IDPs who could not “accept that there is one person that represents them.” Moreover, the study team noted the general lack of interest among the IDP men and women to take on a more active leadership role within the two sites. Women and men demonstrated limited involvement in collective tasks for their community, except for cleaning the floors.

Whenever issues arise within the sites, the IDP representatives call the Church representatives for assistance. For maintenance issues (i.e. repairs to the generator, plumbing issues), Church representatives often resolve the issues themselves. There seems to be very little community-based initiatives from the IDP population to solve their issues on their own, due to, in their opinion, the lack of resources. Larger, longer-term problems, such as lack of jobs, families requesting to move to larger rooms, not having enough space in the communal kitchens, and requests to build additional kitchens and bathrooms remain unresolved. For personal issues, such as resolving disputes between families or other interfamiliar problems, IDPs primarily seek solutions from the Church. One key informant from a local NGO explained that the Church often does not discuss IDP concerns with NGOs, that “most of the time they [the Church] would try to solve these problems on their own…. they don’t talk to any organizations at all, the problems are seen as being private.” When NGOs bring up issues to the Church, they have been told that the Church is aware and are addressing the issues themselves. The study team observed that the Church acts quite independently to solve the issues faced by the community, although they argue that not all problems can be resolved due to the lack of resources.

For delivery of other assistance to the IDPs (i.e. non-food items (NFI), trainings, and other activities), NGOs request the Church’s support; however, their interactions with the Church are limited to getting access to the IDPs through the various activities and distributions. According to one key informant, “everything is based on the Church Leader, all projects in the camp go through him.” The study team found, however, that there is very little coordination and
communication about IDP assistance between the Church and the humanitarian actors as well as among humanitarian actors.

The study team also noticed heavy involvement of French faith-based organizations in supporting the Christian IDP communities in Erbil and found that they are reluctant to coordinate with the UN and the wider humanitarian community. As one key informant shared, “we prefer not to get too involved with the UN system, otherwise they will force us to implement their way and we want to remain faith-based”. There is, therefore, a general lack of coordination across all external actors, including the Church with faith-based NGOs, the Church with the UN/humanitarian community, and the faith-based NGOs with the UN/humanitarian community.

**Participation and Decision-Making**

**Decision-Making Process**

The Church leads in all existing decision-making processes at Al-Karma and Al-Amal informal sites (See Figure 2). The study team noted that the IDP community fully supports the Church’s authority over decisions, as demonstrated across the study participants who express high levels of trust and respect for the Church Leader and his Church representatives in their work to respond to IDP needs and concerns. Common remarks from IDP women and men include: “we trust them... the Church Leader and the site manager,” “the Church Leader solves our problems,” and “the Church Leader is doing his best to help us.” In addition, study respondents expressed their support and approval of the current IDP representatives, who relay their concerns to the Church management, as illustrated by one male respondent’s remark that “the church management selected the best leaders to serve us”.

The Church thus responds to the concerns and needs expressed by the community members with limited leadership of the community. Meetings are called by the Church management to discuss specific issues with the community members, mostly men, on an ad hoc basis. During these meetings, decisions are taken among attendees by a show of hands and follows majority rule. In at least two female group discussions, respondents shared their trust in such a process since “all the important decisions are in their hands because they [men] know what’s best for us”. Church management also may call for bilateral meetings with IDP families to resolve disputes. Discussions with IDP women and men indicated very little desire from the community to increase their participation in decision-making and little understanding of benefits of participating in decision-making processes.

Outside the Church management, UN agencies and NGOs supporting various activities within Al-Karma and Al-Amal affect the quality of life of the IDP population. Because of the IDP community’s preference to defer most decision-making to the Church, these external stakeholders may at best influence decisions made by the Church; they have limited influence on collective actions taken by the IDP population.

![Figure 2 Balance of Power at Al-Karma and Al-Amal Informal Sites](image)
**Women’s Participation in Decision-Making**

IDP women lack representation and their role is limited when it comes to collective decision-making for the sites. The study team found common attitude among IDP women and girls that “we [women and girls] don't interfere in the decision-making” and that “we [women and girls] have freedom of opinion but we don't get involved.” While they may not represent the views of all women at the sites, many of the women shared with the study team that they are consulted on decisions and participate by voicing their opinions and preferences to their husbands, or if they do not have husbands, they are open to participate directly in site meetings as heads of families. The study team could not determine however, to what extent widows or female heads of households actually participate in decision-making for the sites.

Despite their limited participation in decisions taken in site meetings, women are responsible for collective cleaning by floors. Women residing on each floor take turns daily to clean the floors, including the communal kitchens, bathrooms, and other common space. At Al-Amal site, it is also noteworthy to mention that the women decided themselves to collect money from the building resident to buy cleaning products and select one person among them to clean the floors and remunerate her for her work. Female focal point person for each floor takes charge of the communal cleaning, although male leaders appear to “put a work schedule for cleaning in floor in order to divide the work between the families”. Some groups of women also seem quite empowered, as they share that “all decisions are in our [women’s] hands, we talk more than men.” The study determined that active participation of IDP women in decision-making is primarily at the household level: decisions related to cooking for her family, cleaning, washing, and ensuring their children’s education.

**Women’s Participation in Camp Life**

As mentioned, IDP women’s role is predominantly within the home, “cooking and taking care of the children.” Outside the home, women and girls also mention that they participate in various activities provided by local and international NGOs, including SOS, GSIO, NRC, Al Massala, and others, and cite these agencies as holding influence over the camp life. Respondents mentioned embroidery, psychosocial care, cooking, women’s health, awareness knowledge on women’s rights, as well as activities for youth and adolescents, including drawing, English/French languages, and computer skills. In fact, activities that are available within the sites focus almost exclusively on women and children, as female respondents shared, “there are no activities for men, it's all for women [laughing].”

Most of the women and girls the study team spoke to shared that they felt no barriers existed in participating in any site-based activities and speaking their minds with their husbands or within their homes, stating that “we [women] participate in everything,” and “we talk comfortably.... they [men] listen to our opinions.” Similarly, among the men the team spoke to, women had no barrier to participating at home or within the community, and showed full support of women sharing their opinions. The social norms and expectations within the IDP community are still centered on male leadership; however, as decision-making is deferred to males and as indicated by several female respondents who shared, “they [men] know what’s best for us.”

Although limited in scope, women organize in collective action to clean floors in the building as previously mentioned. Women also organize to buy food in the markets together and coordinate the kitchen use and freezer space, as the stoves and freezer space are insufficient for more than a few families on each floor to use at the same time. Furthermore, one group of adolescent girls also shared that they used to organize training activities, including music and dancing, for children in their building.

The study also demonstrated the significance of participating in religious practices among the Christian IDPs. IDP families participate in weekly mass, and some attend daily prayers held by the Chaplain, while others freely meet in informal prayer groups to support each other to
“feel at rest” according to one adolescent girl who shared with the study team. The Church Leader conducts regular bible readings with groups of IDPs and provides moral guidance and support for “spiritual encounters to help the communities to find a balance in daily life.” The Church has a unique role in providing both physical needs and spiritual care for the IDP population, including women and girls, who turn to the Church Leader to share their views and personal concerns. Female participants in the study also mentioned multiple times that the Church Leader avails himself, particularly after the mass on Sunday to listen to their problems. Religious studies and prayer meetings seem to be foundational to the daily life of the Christian IDPs in the two sites, as they were one of the reasons for which they fled their places of origin and are now protected to freely practice in displacement. Women shared that “praying makes us happy and calm.” In their religious practices, women and men seem equally involved in the collective camp life.

**Barriers to Women’s Participation**

**Poor Coordination and Follow up Among Humanitarian Actors**

NGOs consult the Church management in conducting various trainings, health education, social and recreational activities at Al-Karma and Al-Amal sites. However, it appears that once the NGOs are granted to operate and conduct activities with IDPs by the Church, they have autonomy to implement activities without much interference from the Church or as much or little coordination with other humanitarian actors. As one NGO key informant described, “it’s us who are responsible, not the [Church] management, so we take decisions.” Site-based activities tend not to be coordinated, as another key informant providing services shared “we don't know all NGOs [that are] active.” As a result, NGOs are perceived by some IDPs as inconsistent in their provision of services: “some of the training was not even finish[ed], the organization just left us,” as pointed out by one group of women. The study team heard only one mention of a coordinated activity between two NGOs – NRC and SOS Chrétiens d’Orient, as funding runs out with the latter organization for supporting of a children’s nursery, they coordinated with each other to continue the services. One key informant suggested that the lack of coordination among humanitarian actors working in the sites could be linked to the Church authorities' desire to retain control over the functioning of the site.

The study team also heard from several discussion groups (both female and male) that indicate assessment fatigue among the IDPs, as they explain, “organizations come… but they don’t do a thing about it” or that they “come to talk and ask questions, but don’t come back.” Another group of women shared that one agency came and “took our names and wrote down lots of things and promised to call us but they never did,” creating expectations of assistance among the community and then failing to deliver.

Moreover, as coordination mechanisms are lacking and the management structure is informal, there is no system to know which activities and programs are duplicated, redundant, need to be longer-term and/or repeated. Based on interviews with the IDP women, it appears that most have had some experience participating in cooking courses, first-aid education, and psycho-social assistance, but as one woman in a group discussion expressed, “we want education trainings, a lot of organizations come but don’t make interested activities, only cooking training was interesting [to] us, we’re chefs now,” indicating that the only option was to take cooking courses in the absence of other programming that may have been more useful. The study also found some evidence of organizations providing incentives for participation, which could lead to a negative impact of fostering dependence, or serving better-off /better-informed IDPs while neglecting those who may be especially hidden, who could benefit most from assistance or programming.

In efforts to address these challenges, IOM has recently initiated a project aiming at strengthening the coordination of assistance and protection services in informal sites. As Al-Amal and Al-Karma sites were both selected to be included in the project, strategies to strengthen coordination within these sites will be further explored.
Limited Access to Information Affecting Access to Activities

Because there is no formal mechanism to disseminate information and only a few IDP representatives to transfer knowledge to the wider community, some women may simply lack sufficient and timely notification to participate in activities. They also have very limited knowledge on services available in their community. The lack of a formal mechanism renders particularly vulnerable groups, such as PWD, widows, and Yazidis to be completely disregarded in being included in activities and programming that not only can benefit them, but may be life-saving. For example, across the study respondents, many of whom were caregivers of disabled children or family members, or themselves persons with disabilities, were found to be most excluded in activities, by both the IDP community as well as organizations providing services. PWD were found to be excluded from nearly all activities, including in assessments, and even if NGOs “register their names, they [PWD] don't come”, according to one group of women. Another group shared that “nobody asks about them, they don’t even inform them when there are training courses”. Activities are either physically inaccessible, or they do not provide an inclusive environment in which PWD feel welcome by other participants or by program facilitators. At times, PWD are left at home while a caregiver may participate on their behalf, as shared by one, who makes an effort to “come down to the meetings instead of my [disabled] daughter because I’m responsible for her”. Concerted outreach efforts and intentional targeting is necessary to reach some women and girls as well as the particularly hidden groups, who are often at the highest risk of experiencing GBV.

Restrictions on Movement Affecting Access to Services

IDP women and girls at Al-Karma and Al-Amal sites generally do not have the freedom to go outside independently, unless they have husbands or other family accompanying them. To conduct small errands closely located to the buildings (i.e. for buying food, going to the hairdressers), women and girls travel together to avoid harassment: “we go to the supermarket together”, a group of women shared. Most women and girls fear being outside, as groups similarly mentioned “strangers in the street... they [women and girls] are afraid to go out and be assaulted”. Women and girls spend most of their life inside the complex of Al-Karma and Al-Amal—social and recreational activities provided by NGOs are held within the common halls inside, as are religious activities (mass, bible studies, prayer meetings).

Women and girls' movements are monitored by their male family members, as one female leader lamented that women have little choice but to stay indoors because “they [men] don't let us go outside”, while one adolescent girl described a time when she was verbally harassed outside and that “if my brothers know that they will want to protect us and will forbid us to go out”. Women and girls' concerns about movement are directly related to their access to services if ever they experienced violence or face any other need that cannot be addressed inside the sites. This is particularly significant as explained by one key informant from UNFPA, that there are about 87 women's centers countrywide where women and girls can access services or can be referred to more specific services as needed. The informant further explained, if there
are no women's centers in a camp setting, CCCM and the GBV sub-cluster will at least try to deploy a mobile service team. In informal sites, women have even less access to life-saving GBV response services, let alone women centers.

**Women's Time Poverty**

Another challenge in participating in the camp life that IDP women shared with the study team was not having enough free time to participate in site-based activities. Many of the women shared that they simply “don't have enough time to go for every activity” because of household responsibilities, care-giving of children (particularly if they are special-needs children), cooking and cleaning for the family, and communal cleaning activities that keep them too busy to participate in other activities or programs. The study team observed, however, that while women and girls spent most of their time inside the sites, there are limited activities and limited options for activities beyond their household, communal cleaning, and other care-giving work. For mothers of young children, the team could not confirm whether the women knew they could use the site nursery to leave their children in order to participate in other activities. Efforts to further consider and address women and girls' time poverty may include sensitizing women on the benefits of participating in the wider camp life (while ensuring availability of nursery services for mothers) and working with organizations to explore alternative times (i.e. evenings and weekends) that may work better for women and girls to increase their participation in programs.

**Speculation of Unfair Preferential Treatment**

The study team could not determine what methods are used by NGOs to select participants for the programs and activities they provide, nor to what extent community members are involved in that selection. The lack of transparency in how assistance is targeted, coupled with the sites’ informal management structure, perceptions on fairness can turn into contentions affecting the entire community. One key informant explained, “when communities are much smaller [as opposed to camp-settings] and living close to each other, conflict is easily heightened in some ways”. Consequently, there are reported tension among some families in the sites according to the informant, and in one female group discussion, the study team had to diffuse the tension in the middle of a group discussion as a result of some of the participants' perception that more assistance is being channeled to the other site.

Furthermore, it is worth noting to highlight the stigmatization of Yazidi families due to their targeting by ISIS, as there may be some impact on how displaced Yazidis are perceived in the Al-Amal community where they are primarily housed. Although the scope of the study did not allow the study team to probe in detail about these community perceptions and dynamics, they may have an effect on the extent of Yazidi women's participation in collective activities as well as in decision-making processes within the site.

**Safety Concerns**

Physical safety concerns create limitations for women and girls to fully participate in the camp life. Women and girls mention they fear verbal and physical assault, car accidents, young men drinking in the park, darkness in the streets, strangers, taxi drivers, and ISIS—all reasons to avoid being outside. However, women and girls are not shielded from safety risks inside the sites either; they describe gas explosions due to intensive use of stoves, common bathrooms,
and lack of privacy that trigger concerns. Adolescent girls also raised being “afraid of older men”.

Common in displacement contexts, key informants mentioned concerns of early marriage among adolescent girls as a “financial strategy to alleviate burden”, explaining that families “reduce the risks of sexual harassment through early marriage”. Girls also most often face “limitation to go to school” for the sake of protection along the routes. In Al-Karma and Al-Amal sites, the study did not find evidence for the level of rights violation as explained by the key informants above, although the scope of the study did not allow the team to probe about marriage practices within these sites. One adolescent girl in a group discussion affirmed the Church’s stance on early marriage: “the Church in Erbil prevent girls under 18 year-old to get married” Despite this, families still may resort to marrying off their daughters, as the same girl shared, “[if] they want to get married under 18, they go to Amman or to Baghdad because there they agree to marry them.”

The study also noted the difference in living conditions between Al-Karma and Al-Amal sites, namely that Al-Karma residents tend to live in better conditions than those in Al-Amal. As one key informant explained about the latter site, that the “rooms are too small, there are several families in one room (parents, son, and daughter in law) and no partitions” and as a result, there are tensions, and “aggression is coming from that tension.” The lack of dignity and privacy concerns posed by intergenerational families living in cramped, one-room space create both mental stress for all members and safety risks, particularly of women and girls.

Linked to the safety and GBV risks of women and girls, it is noteworthy to reference some of the key data compiled by GBVIMS. Although the data only represent reported cases to GBV service providers operating in Erbil between January and June 2016, they indicate some notable information relevant for this study:

- 53.67 percent of reported cases are survivors of IPV, which conflicts with information from at least one group of adolescent girls in this study, who when asked about domestic violence, replied, “we don’t have this violence here.” The study could not determine if this was due to the lack of ability for women and girls to speak up or due to stigma attached to the topic.
- 2 percent of reported cases involved possible SEA; a particular concern in informal settings where formal feedback/complaints mechanisms are lacking and may indicate risk factors for IDPs and highlight a need for accountability structures.
- 19.8 percent of reported cases are cases of denial of resources, opportunities and/or services, providing a strong case for existing barriers to women’s participation in the study context.
- 57.2 percent of reported cases waiting at least one month or more to report their case to service providers. This reflects the study evidence on women and girls’ lack of access to information, thus also delaying access to services.

**Facilitators to Women’s Participation**

**Support from Males in the Community**

However limited IDP women and girls may participate in collective decisions and lack opportunities to organize at the site level at Al-Karma and Al-Amal, they enjoy respect, love and support from their male community members. Male respondents mentioned the importance of “understanding between wife and husband” and that “for sure we [men] should support her; husbands should encourage his wife” in participating in the community life. Moreover, men and boys are especially active in ensuring the safety of women and girls, as indicated by husbands

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8 The data shared is only from reported cases, and is in no way representative of the total incidence or prevalence of GBV in Iraq. These statistical trends are generated exclusively by GBV service providers who use the GBVIMS for data collection in the implementation of GBV response activities in a limited number of locations across Iraq and with the consent of survivors.
accompanying their wives and girls to activities, and brothers protecting their sisters from host community members who might harass them.

One woman in a group discussion shared that “there are young men who volunteer and help” to make women's work easier for them. Another woman from a different group also shared about how younger boys help send messages to the IDP representatives “when there are maintenance issues.” Commonly held perceptions among most women and girls were that men and boys provide them with much encouragement, respect and support. Women shared with the study team that “they [men and boys] encourage us and they don't prevent us from deciding” and “they respect our opinions,” while all men in one group discussion concurred that “all men should be proud when women take decisions.” One key informant from an NGO explained to the study team that within the Christian communities, women's opinions tend to be more respected (as compared to Muslim communities), “if they [women] speak they speak, men have to listen.” This statement seems to apply particularly to urban Christian communities whereas rural communities, such as those displaced from Mosul area, are more conservative and generally tend to be more patriarchal.

**Trust in Community Representatives**

Although IDP representatives are informally set up based on who volunteered, the study determined that they are highly trusted by the community, male, females, and young people alike. Women leaders shared with the study team how “more than [anyone else], we go to the representatives” to address any concerns; they have assurance that they are “aware of our situation because they live with us and they are IDPs, they are same with us.” Men in group discussions similarly shared that they “always listen to us about our issues” and are “trying to provide us with training courses” and advocate on their behalf, presenting their “thoughts and ideas to other NGOs in order we can all benefit.” Leadership can either facilitate or hinder women and girls’ participation in identifying problems and generating collective action; the positive dynamics within the Al-Karma and Al-Amal IDP community with the existing leadership can help to foster and support women and girls’ participation.

**Support from Key Community Leaders**

Another factor that promote greater participation of women and girls is that key community and church leaders of Al-Karma and Al-Amal sites are supportive of advancing women and girls’ needs, their protection, as a way to preserve community cohesion: “the woman is the link between society and the family,” acknowledged by the Church Leader. The Church management, comprising of the Church Leader and his two representatives are held in high regard by the IDP community. These leaders motivate and inspire displaced women, men and their families by providing for their physical needs and offering spiritual guidance “to go through daily life, to let go of stress and despair” as the Church Leader explained. Many respondents also shared with the study team how the Church Leader responded to their specific needs (i.e. solving issues of lack of transport to take children to school, paying money to get a relative released from detainment in a conflict zone).

IDP women and girls also benefit from support given by Dr. Sahar, who visits the sites weekly to organize trainings on women's health and psychosocial care. She also brings other healthcare providers to the sites to administer health checkups and provide medical consultations. Women and girls are also assisted with female hygiene products and other in-kind materials Dr. Sahar brings with her. The health sessions led by Dr. Sahar not only provide women and girls at the informal sites opportunities to learn and meet their sexual and reproductive health needs, they may also create safe spaces to report safety concerns and violations of rights.
Opportunities for Women and Girls to Take a More Active Role in the Community

IDP women and girls benefit from regular activities provided by the NGOs that operate in Al-Karma and Al-Amal sites. The study team identified some promising practices from how some of these activities are implemented that could serve to increase women's leadership capacities and amplify female voice within the IDP community. One international NGO providing recreational activities at the sites worked with the women from the community to elect women leaders, hired women from the IDP community as teachers for activities, and trained them to conduct safety audits. Such are opportunities that can enhance women's base within the community, create strong female role models for young women and girls, and help women assume a more active role in the community.

Recommendations to Foster Women’s Participation

Upon the strategies shared by the study respondents, the study team identified several recommendations to foster greater participation of women in camp life and camp governance:

- Establish a formalized site governance structure and set up an accountability mechanism between IDPs and the Church management as site manager to enhance two-way communication and information transfer
- Increase household livelihood opportunities through providing marketable skills training, such as sewing, cooking, mat-weaving, handicraft, etc. and train participants in entrepreneurship/business development
- Establish a youth group and youth representative (male and female) that could participate in community meetings and foster youth participation in community decision-making processes and influencing collective action
- Establish security rounds by peacekeepers and involve female peacekeepers to address women and girls' safety concerns
- Create a space for inclusive dialogue between IDPs and host community members to increase awareness and promote social cohesion

Conclusion

Women and girls living in Al-Karma and Al-Amal informal sites have few opportunities to participate in decisions on matters affecting them. Although women and girls are consulted on decisions and may be more engaged in site-level activities and programs than men, they hardly hold any decision-making power. The Church, as camp manager, holds the most decision-making power, along with other stakeholders, including NGOs who operate independently with little coordination, that influence the IDP quality of life. Minor maintenance issues within the site and social problems that may arise within IDP families are frequently resolved by the Church; however, larger issues of addressing women and girls' safety risks and lack of organized female voice that can lead to collective action, remain unresolved. The study identified several strategies that could ensure women, girls, and other hidden groups' voices are considered in community decision-making processes and enhance the participatory structure within Al-Karma and Al-Amal. The lack of a formal governance structure may be a key underlying factor that create barriers to IDP participation broadly and women's participation more specifically.

While considering effective strategies for setting up accountability structures between IDPs and camp manager and improving coordination mechanisms between humanitarian actors may be important for informal IDP sites such as Al-Karma and Al-Amal, some reflections about contextualizing women's participation may be worthwhile. The general lack of women's interest to take on a more active leadership roles may be deeply rooted in their cultural and religious
heritage, as demonstrated by the active religious practices and dedication equally displayed by women, men, and girls alike within the community. As women and girls are equally active in the religious aspects of the camp life, they may not necessarily view increased involvement in leadership structures as a necessary avenue for voicing their ideas, concerns and aspirations. In efforts to set up a governance structure in informal camp settings, these nuances, including how gender roles and gender equality may be perceived through the lens of the community’s faith, should be considered.

The study highlighted some key considerations on how perceptions on gender roles in Iraq contribute to community participation. Further research may provide increased understanding of how faith practices affect gender roles linked to community participation and what opportunities could be further investigated in the future to improve women’s participation in these contexts.

**Next Steps**

Following the study and upon reflecting on the initial findings, IOM field team met to review and reflect on all recommended ways to improve women’s participation proposed by the study participants, including the community members, IDP representatives, Church management, and other key informants. The team developed an action plan and a preliminary project design for a pilot approach to implement in consultation with communities of Al-Karma and Al-Amal IDP sites, in collaboration with the Church authorities.

Based on the initial analysis of the findings, the project team proposed the following activities:

**Outcome 1:** Health, safety and security concerns identified by women and girls are mitigated; both through maintenance work inside the site, and through awareness campaigns.

**Activities:**

- 1.1 Draw up risk-management-plan based on Safety Mapping Exercise and Rapid Assessment Site Priority (RASP)
- 1.2 Carry out maintenance works detailed in plan to reduce GBV risks in the sites
- 1.3 Identify topics of health and safety campaigns through community consultation (on topic such as fire safety and use of electricity)
- 1.4 Deliver 2 to 3 campaigns as necessary.

**Outcome 2:** A functioning governance structure is established where IDPs, including women and girls, receive and share information with the authorities that make decisions regarding the site.

**Activities:**

- 2.1 Hold initial meeting with IDP site leader and deputies, to introduce project, discuss and enhance understanding of female participation.
- 2.2 Formalize current leadership structure (site representative and two deputies), through creation of a terms of reference (TOR) and a code of conduct (COC).
- 2.3 Develop a TOR and a COC for Women’s Committee through workshop with Women and Site Representatives; agree on way committee will engage with leadership structure.
- 2.4 Establish Women Committee through agreed-on nomination process.
- 2.5 Build capacity of Leadership Structure and Women’s Committee to hold meetings, develop agenda, take minutes and regularly disseminate information to site population.
- 2.6 Include management staff and women committee in CCCM trainings
- 2.7 Establish feedback mechanisms within the site (including standard operating procedures; discuss how to use feedback mechanism).
Outcome 3: On the request of the community, improve the capacity of IDPs, especially women and girls, to engage with NGOs, by conducting English language lessons. This activity will also have psycho-social benefits, as IDPs will be engaged in learning and self-development.

Activities:

- 3.1 Hire English Teachers
- 3.2 Set up schedule for lessons in agreement with community
- 3.3 Carry out English lessons
- 3.4 Evaluate impact through PAM (Post Assistance Monitoring Tool)
Appendix

Interview tools