

Conceptualising crisis, refugees and IDPs

Insights from northern Iraq on vulnerabilities and needs caused by displacement

Markus Rudolf \ BICC

SUMMARY

This *Working Paper* assesses how humanitarian and development aid agencies address individuals whose human rights and human dignity have been affected by displacement. It proposes a fresh look at how to measure needs that arise in such situations. To this end, the *Paper* evaluates characteristic needs regarding livelihoods, rights and basic services for displaced persons in an empirical study of so-called protracted refugee situations (PRS). The needs are then contrasted with the international legal category of ‘refugee’ and the descriptive definition of internally displaced persons (IDPs) used by aid agencies to address situations of displacement. Following empirical observations and drawing from existing models, the study establishes an inter-subjectively comprehensible catalogue of needs, i.e. land, employment (livelihoods), housing, social inclusion, nutrition, health, community assets, social networks, education, legal aid, political rights, legal documents, human rights. It is argued that these indicators need to be evaluated in regard to the degree of access displaced persons have (from no access to full access). The weighted indicators establish different points of reference to measure the detrimental impact of displacement on human dignity. Assessment of aid for displaced persons thereby reaches beyond the pre-displacement situation as a central point of reference: This would enable humanitarian and development actors to evaluate their contribution to facilitating a dignified life of individuals more accurately, as a return to the status quo ante does not automatically mean that aid was successful—e.g. a return to misery.

Drawing on field research findings in northern Iraq, moreover, the *Paper* argues that any indicator-based-approach must be combined with an analysis of the socio-political and historical context of forced migration and also pay attention to impacts on the host society. In line with empirical examples, the *Working Paper* argues that humanitarian and development aid agencies need to start from a long-term, multi-sectoral, whole-of-society, and systematically indicator-based approach—even though it is inevitable to prioritise some issues (and disregard others) in situations of crisis.

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I would like to thank all people in northern Iraq who supported this project. The situation in Iraq remains volatile, and all respondents have been granted anonymity. All names are known to the author of this report. Besides using pseudonyms throughout the *Paper* to protect all respondents, as little information about time, place, and characteristics as possible is mentioned. The uprightness of the persons we talked to was extraordinary. Despite experiencing a fair amount of hardship, people showed a remarkable level of endurance and humour.

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Markus Rudolf

Main findings

Humanitarian aid is required in all situations where humanitarian principles are violated or where human dignity and rights are in danger.

In northern Iraq, many persons do not leave their place of living and endure hardships, violence and insecurity as long as they manage to care for their families. They move away from their places to seek assistance only when they have lost access to any means of providing for their families. This shows that in reality, it is impossible to make an accurate distinction between people who are displaced due to war and those displaced for economic reasons; they should all be eligible for humanitarian assistance.

The threshold for escaping from violence or migrating is usually related to a combination of factors that are specific to each situation, such as personal security or the lack of perspectives, regarding social, political and human rights issues.

A high level of resilience in the face of insecurity and violence is common before and after displacement. Due to concrete hardships, Yezidis, Christians, Shia, Sunni, etc. are sceptical about the possibility of future coexistence but still stay put.

Humanitarian agencies need to identify, measures and address the impacts of displacement comprehensively by dissecting and assessing effects that are potentially, and to various degrees, detrimental to a life in dignity.

Not only those who (have the chance to) reach out for help need humanitarian aid. On the contrary, many persons who would theoretically be eligible for aid do not attract the attention of humanitarian agencies.

Any assessment of needs has to start from a long-term, multi-sectoral, whole-of-society and systematically indicator-based approach.

Any indicator-based approach must be combined with an analysis of the socio-political and historical context of forced migration and also pay attention to impacts on the host society. Even though it is inevitable in a situation of crisis to prioritise some issues (and disregard others), there is still no alternative to a holistic approach.

Introduction

In the last years, the numbers of refugees, internally displaced persons (IDPs), illegal migrants (urban displaced), stateless persons, or “displaced-in-place”¹ populations have been growing (IDMC, 2019; UNHCR, 2019a) while a decreasing number of displaced persons has any perspective to return, resettle or to integrate locally. Instead, they remain in a state of protracted political, economic and legal crisis that opposes the objective of humanitarian and development aid to facilitate a humane and dignified life. This state of limbo² exceeds the period of time that short-term humanitarian measures are meant to cover and thereby becomes a situation in which displaced persons are at risk of being trapped in long-term aid dependence. This contradicts the intentions of the UNHCR’s durable solutions of return, resettlement and local integration.³

Protracted situations differ considerably between long and shorter periods of displacement. Long-term displacement implies that generations are born into situations of displacement rather than being displaced. Temporary situations are institutionalised and stabilised over time (e.g. in camps) so that they appear more stable than the situation of individuals who move on—and out of the camps. Individuals experience cyclical and multiple displacements, internal and international displacement and the oscillation between registered and unregistered situations, for example, when a regular refugee in a camp becomes an irregular urban refugee. It, therefore, makes more sense to speak about ‘displaced persons’ in a broader sense than referring to refugees or IDPs. Hence, the term displaced persons refers here to persons who regard themselves as displaced involuntarily—regardless of the status attributed to them afterwards and regardless of their final or temporary destination. They usually have been forced to leave a location (place of origin) due to violent conflicts, persecution, environmental disasters or relocation schemes.

To do justice to displaced persons’ experience, the research focus in this *Working Paper* is on ‘protracted displacement dynamics’ (PDD). Looking into the dynamics of displacement sheds light on the wider direct and indirect impacts of protracted displacement—e.g. effects on the economy, the job market or the provision of basic services of the regions receiving displaced people.⁴ Moreover, this process perspective can help to adapt refugee policies to the long-term outlook required to address protracted displacement adequately. Looking at PDDs holistically shows where humanitarian and development issues are interconnected. As protracted displacement also

1 \ The term ‘displaced in place’ circumscribes groups of forcibly immobilised persons, e.g. due to a war. Lubkemann coined this term in the academic debate: “This population ...were in effect ‘forcibly immobilized’ by the combined efforts of the government and the insurgency to control rural populations, military zones, and international borders. This population ... can perhaps best be described as having become ‘displaced in place’, not as a result of their own movement but rather because of the war’s immobilizing effects” (Lubkemann, 2008, p. 455). This *Paper*, in contrast to Lubkemann, uses the term to point out that this population’s needs and vulnerabilities resemble those of displaced persons. If humanitarian or development aid categorises forcibly immobilised persons as displaced (in place) it could, thus, resort to the same relief strategies.

2 \ ‘Limbo’ is usually defined as, “Uncertain period of awaiting a decision or resolution; an intermediate state or condition” (Oxford Dictionary). Hyndman and Giles (2016, 2018) argue in a recent study on Somali refugees in Dadaab that limbo means that the refugees are “living on the edge”. Depending on the perspective, analyses highlight this as an either exclusive or inclusive condition. The first position follows Foucault and highlights the biopolitical function of establishing and maintaining a legal, political, and social precarious status of refugeeness (see Agamben & Hiepko, 1998). The second position highlights that refugees manage to participate in the economic, political and social sphere to a certain degree—either despite their status (Turner, 2016) or by taking advantage of it (Jansen, 2016). The results of our research on protracted displacement indicate that both perspectives contribute to a better understanding of PRS, and that it is, furthermore, mandatory—to get the full picture of PRS—to approach this phenomenon as an independent social system rather than to portray protracted refugee situations as mere exceptions from everyday life.

3 \ According to the 1951 Geneva Convention, local integration demands full economic, social, legal and political integration (Hovil, 2014).

4 \ Camps come under a lot of criticism, which sometimes overlook the constraints that left no other solution feasible (Crisp & Jacobsen, 1998). The fact that political constraints have rather increased, and that there is little room for alternatives, does nevertheless not change the fundamental shortfall of the current policy of the refugee regime to live up to its original purpose as lamented by legal experts: “A regime which was actually established to guarantee refugees lives in dignity until and unless either the cause of their flight is firmly eradicated or the refugee himself or herself chooses to pursue some alternative solution to their disfranchisement has now become a regime which labours nearly single-mindedly to design and implement top-down solutions which ‘fix the refugee problem.’” (Hathaway, 2007b, p. 3).

impacts on parts of the host societies, it becomes necessary to relate, coordinate and interconnect development and humanitarian aid seamlessly.⁵ Awareness of this necessity has, in fact, been the foundation of the current humanitarian-development-peace nexus approach laid down, for example, in the European Consensus on Development (EU, 2017).⁶

Yet, despite all attempts to put a humanitarian-development-peace-nexus in place, humanitarian and development aid are, in practice, still very much limited by their mandates and the scale of the crises they are facing when dealing with protractedness of armed conflict, displacement and the resulting state of limbo. Both factors make it necessary to define and limit the field of operations concisely, to find an operable division of labour and to delegate tasks efficiently. One attempt by practitioners to address this necessity was the cluster approach that was established in 2005 to coordinate humanitarian missions. The cluster approach coordinates the assistance delivered in emergency situations by both UN- and non-UN humanitarian organisations. The approach was envisioned to be “... part of a wider reform process aimed at improving the effectiveness of humanitarian response by ensuring greater predictability and accountability” (Inter-Agency Standing Committee, 2006). Reforms nevertheless did not bear fruit as expected. Over a decade later, OCHA (2019) states, “there is a need to restate and return to the original purposes of clusters refocusing them on strategic and operational gaps analysis, planning, assessment and results”.⁷

This *Working Paper* argues that such strategic and operational gaps are exemplary for a general phenomenon that concerns most humanitarian and development aid agencies that respond to displacement: The partial conceptualisation of its target. The research question, thus, is whether the process of categorisation and designation of beneficiaries—e.g. along the lines of vulnerability (Jallow, Heinbecker & Malik, 2004; United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees & International Detention Coalition, 2016)—identifies the needs of displaced persons effectively or whether, on the contrary, it has inherent elements of exclusion and reification.

The term ‘inefficiencies’ needs to be contextualised. Humanitarian and development aid that address needs caused by displacement are dealing with situations whose causes are usually out of reach of their capacities and mandates. Unless the causes—namely war and violent conflict—are addressed on a political level, such aid is, by default, trapped in a never-ending repeat loop. This does not apply to aid only, as beneficiaries also become trapped in that state of limbo. When asking how aid can better meet the needs of persons affected by displacement, we need to stress that the answer, first of all, needs to be a political one: War, violent conflict and human rights violations are the root causes of displacement, and all suggestions discussed below of how to better adapt aid to needs are not only secondary but obsolete if the political issue is not addressed.

5 \ Against the backdrop of the humanitarian-development nexus (Krause, 2016; Nyberg-Sørensen, Hear, & Engberg-Pedersen, 2002; OCHA, 2016) the article deals with both humanitarian aid and development aid measures directed at complementing humanitarian measures.

6 \ The commission operationalised the nexus approach as follows: “The Council recognises the linkages between sustainable development, humanitarian action and conflict prevention and peacebuilding, as well as the importance of diplomatic and political solutions to support peace and security, in line with the EU Global Strategy and the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development” (General Secretariat of the Council, 2017)

7 \ The IASC specified that the aim of the cluster approach was “...to strengthen system-wide preparedness and technical capacity to respond to humanitarian emergencies, and provide clear leadership and accountability in the main areas of humanitarian response” (OCHA, 2019).

The *Paper* is divided into an empirical and a theoretical part. The first two empirical chapters examine the relation between aid and need in northern Iraq, while the third sets these observations in relation to the process of categorisation on a theoretical level.⁸

The first chapter is a socio-political analysis of the context in northern Iraq. It assesses the historical and political context of displacement in Iraq, differentiates the situation of refugees and IDPs, and finally examines the eligibility and categorisation of affected individuals. The second chapter investigates the needs of displaced persons in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI). It first addresses the need for security and perspective, then the need for jobs and income, before examining various other needs related to local integration such as access to rights, education, food or social inclusion. These needs are then contrasted in the third theoretical chapter with international legal categories used by aid agencies to address situations of displacement. It identifies shortfalls of ex-post categorisation, explores disparities between needs and norms, and finally sketches out an indicator-based-approach that allows measuring the level of impact, hence vulnerability, of displaced persons as the primary determinants of needs—regardless of their status. The conclusion examines the advantages of such a revised approach over continuing with ‘business as usual’.

8 \ At least in regard to Syria, this is a protracted refugee situation (PRS) context. According to UNHCR’s widely used definition (2015, p. 11), PRS are cases “in which 25,000 or more refugees from the same nationality have been in exile for five years or more in a given asylum country”. The case illustrates why the arbitrary distinction of PRS is not always useful on the ground. As the war in Syria is on-going, all Syrian refugees are by definition in PRS now. Yet when this research started, this was not the case.

Methodology

Empirical case studies are crucial for understanding how displaced persons navigate labelling options; respectively how those frameworks limited their trajectories. The *Paper* is based on extensive anthropological fieldwork, carried out in northern Iraq from 2015 to 2018. The study is part of the BICC project “Protected rather than protracted: Strengthening refugees and peace” funded by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ).

Taking a qualitative mixed-methods approach, the author and four local assistants conducted narrative interviews, combined with on-the-spot observations, focus group discussions and workshops with relevant stakeholders. This research addressed displaced persons, members of the receiving communities, experts, international humanitarian and development actors, local civil society organisations and political authorities. Expert interviews were conducted with practitioners from different levels working in intergovernmental organisations like UNHCR, UNDP, World Bank, IOM, governmental institutions, international and national NGOs and community-based organisations. Consultants, academics and policymakers working on the issue complemented these expert interviews by offering insights into processes that took place behind closed doors.

Diversity—gender, age, national and ethnic identities and locally important markers—was an important criterion for the samples of displaced persons and members of receiving communities. Locations and target groups were identified in a continuous dialogue with local experts. Following their suggestions, we accessed the field from different points of entry. Individual respondents were picked randomly from each of the identified segments of the identified target groups. The number of respondents was then enlarged by snowball or random sampling to fulfil the mentioned diversity quotas in each location. Most interviews and observations were conducted in refugee and IDP camps, villages, settlements and

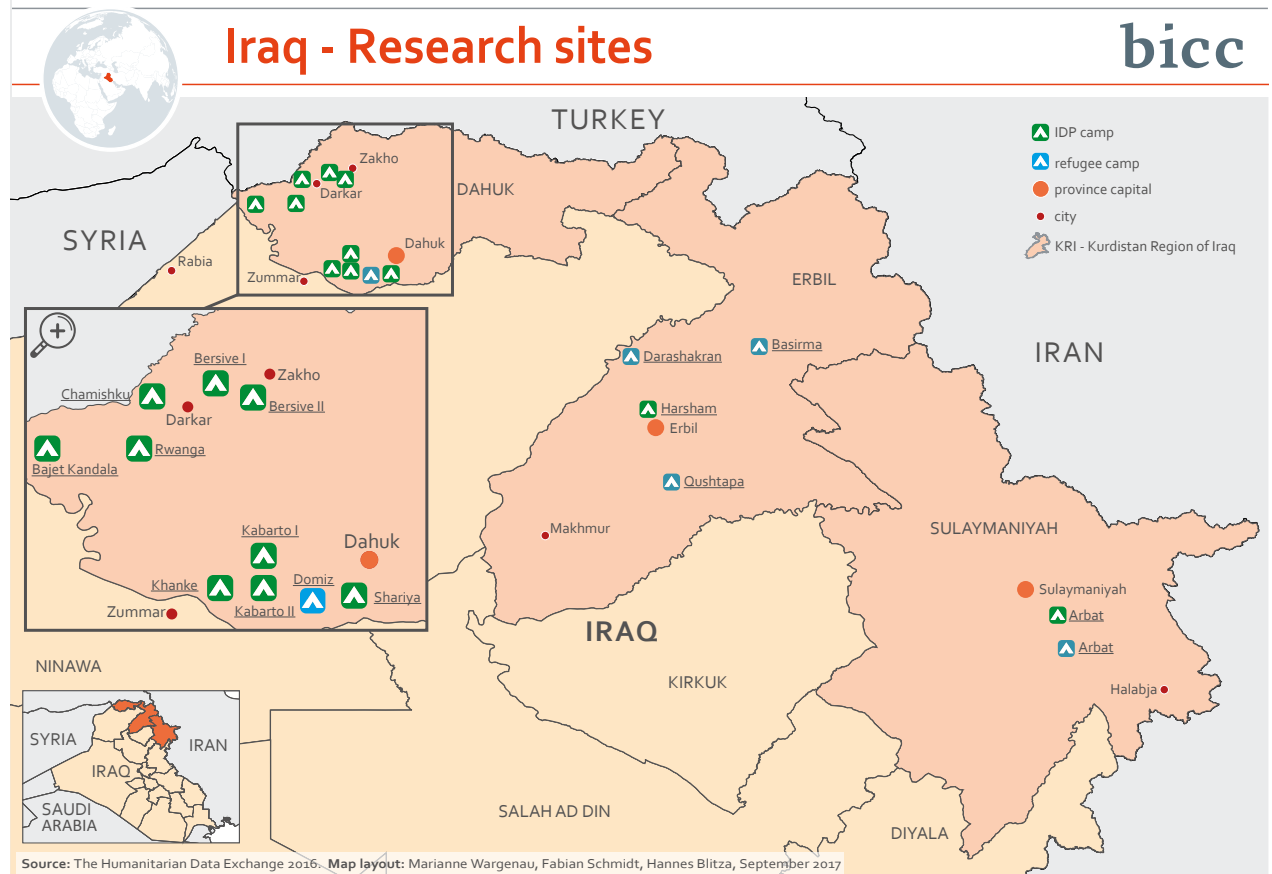
urban areas with displaced persons and hosts (see Map for specific sites). We conducted most of our research between January to February and March to May 2016. The longitudinal follow-up research ended in May 2018.

The in-depth and longitudinal research is based on social-anthropological methods. The team—composed of an urban refugee, a camp refugee, a host working in the NGO sector, a non-camp IDP and a senior researcher—spent extended time in the field and repeatedly visited the respective respondents in their environment. The personal background of the assistants was diverse regarding gender, education, nationality and age. They were trained in the field, constantly supervised, and their feedback was continuously used to refine the research approach. We also included a systematic serendipity routine⁹ to collect and process information outside of the box. The participative and dialogical research approach generated findings that allowed us to select representative ideal typical cases without having/ needing to claim statistical representativeness. This approach allowed us to take into consideration both the life stories of affected persons—such as displaced persons or hosts—and statements of decision-makers on the international and national level.

9 \ To systematically include serendipity into our research methods meant to allow for coincidences not only to happen but to routinely follow the opportunities opened by them. In contrast to random sample methods, this means that we talked to the neighbours who were present next to the house selected by random choice (flip-the-pen method, random number method) instead of the targeted house as the method would strictly demand. In a concrete case in the Zakho, for instance, the neighbour was a host, which helped us to learn about the rent arrangements and social relations between IDPs and hosts respectively. Systematic serendipity as a method thereby enabled the team to learn why somebody was not present and about the relation between host and newcomers. When a shepherd passed by, we asked him about livestock activities; when we encountered people washing their clothes we asked about sanitation, sewage, or we enquired about the property right of the land to dry clothes or the gender / age division of such work. In sum, serendipity was not evaded as usual but systematically sought after.

Box 1

Research sites in Iraq



Socio-political analysis of protracted displacement dynamics in northern Iraq

Identifying strategic and operational gaps theoretically is one thing, but practice might be another. The question, thus, is: In how far do these gaps play a role on a practical level? Are current categories sufficient to holistically identify, measure and address the needs and vulnerabilities of displaced persons regarding a dignified life, or not? This first chapter tries to answer this question by examining the specific differences and commonalities of refugees, migrants, and IDPs in northern Iraq. The case is well-suited for such a comparison as all these persons came to this area for similar reasons and encountered similar circumstances (Dodge, Kaya, Luchtenberg, Mathieu-Comtois, Saleh, van den Toorn ... & Watkins, 2018; Hagan, Kaiser, Hanson, & Parker, 2015). The first subchapter explains the historical and socio-cultural context of displacement in the region. The second subchapter lists the categories of persons affected by protracted displacement dynamics in northern Iraq. The third subchapter examines in how far the categories used by international actors match local concepts and where they diverge.

Historical background

The situation in Iraq and Syria has had major repercussion on the Middle East where the political situation had already been highly volatile. The scale of displacement caused by the war in Iraq and Syria is extraordinary—even in global comparison. Since 2014 Syria has overtaken Afghanistan as the country with the highest number of refugees worldwide and repeatedly held the global top position concerning IDPs (UNHCR, 2016a, p. 30). In the same year Turkey, too has taken the lead from Pakistan and has become the country hosting most refugees—most of whom came from Iraq and Syria. Lebanon features the highest number of refugees per capita (UNHCR, 2018a). Jordan has the “second highest share of refugees compared to its population in the world, 89 refugees per 1,000 inhabitants” (UNHCR, 2018a). Iraq was a battleground; a country refugees fled from and a host country for around 250,000 refugees in 2014. In comparison to Syria (2011), the war started later (2014) and ended earlier (2017).

According to our understanding and our reading of the literature, the following historical and socio-political factors have been crucial in shaping the course of armed conflict and displacement in Iraq:¹⁰

- \ Politics playing the tune of ethnoreligious division have prevailed in Iraq and led to displacement for centuries (Buchta, 2015; Chatty, 2010; Dulz & Eva, 2004);
- \ Colonial administrative order and boundary-drawing exercises exacerbated rising nationalistic dissection discourses in the region (Chatty, 2010; Gunter, 2011; Izady, 2015; Merten, 2014);
- \ The frontlines amongst the current factions reflect chasms that have been growing due to national political practices of divide-and-rule or discrimination since the times of post-colonial nation-building (Hagan et al., 2015; Lister, 2016);
- \ Recent explosion of ethnoreligious tensions cannot be separated from Gulf Wars, the US-led invasion and the course of the political project to rebuild Iraq (Abdulrazaq & Stansfield, 2016; Buchta, 2015; Dodge et al., 2018);
- \ The current regional geopolitical contest for a new order in the Middle East, reflected in the rise of proxy warfare in Syria and Iraq, plays into all these issues (Buchta, 2015; Cockburn, 2015; Paasche & Gunter, 2016; Stern & Berger, 2015).

The context of recent displacement within and into Iraq, also has to take the local causes of the war against the Islamic State (IS)¹¹ (Cockburn, 2015; Dodge et al., 2018), its course (Abdulrazaq & Stansfield, 2016) and future scenarios (Cafarella & Wallace, 2019; Schlüsing & Mielke, 2018) into account. Such a

¹⁰ \ For an in-depth analysis of the history of Iraq and the wider political context of the post-colonial period in the Middle East, the literature offers various studies and a varied range of possible interpretations. History in Iraq is nothing abstract: It was not unusual, for example to hear respondents relating recent attacks by IS with pogroms against Christians, Yezidis, Shia or Sunnis that had happened centuries ago, in an everyday discussion.

¹¹ \ Islamic State; in Arabic Daesh, the acronym for ISIS or ISIL, which translates into Islamic State of Iraq and Sham respectively Iraq and Levante.

context analysis reveals that displacement in Iraq should have been anything but a surprise. Yet, against the backdrop of a seemingly regional bushfire following the Arab Spring after 2010, the international community considered the situation of Iraq to be relatively stable. With the attacks by IS members in Europe in late 2015, this changed significantly: The threat that IS supposedly posed to European security came into the centre of attention of whom, unfortunately at the expense of interest for the drivers of violence inside Iraq. The local causes inside Iraq remained mostly in the background of debates (Dodge et al., 2018). In the wake of the attacks in Europe, both IS and the coalition against Daesh/IS stressed in unison the global scale of the conflict.¹²

The shifting focus to global developments has probably been the reason for the relative indifference of political actors and aid organisations towards any diachronic and socio-political analyses of the local context in Iraq. Besides, once a humanitarian emergency was a given in Iraq, there was no more time for disaggregating events in Syria and Iraq.¹³ As in any other moments of crisis, reliable routines of humanitarian and development aid agencies were set in motion: Here, the common routine facing mass displacement was to deliver aid in already existing or newly set up camps, and accordingly, the Kurdish government opened a dozen camps. Aid measures follow tested project designs (Zetter, 2018, p. 20ff.); the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) defined the eligibility of beneficiaries in KRI according to international,

mostly legal conventions.¹⁴ Due to its relative stability and security, KRI became the destination of choice for most displaced persons from the neighbouring areas most of whom integrated informally rather than going to camps.¹⁵

“Kurdistan for us has always been a showcase of democracy and development, so we wanted to come here”, an Arab from Anbar explained his choice and the preference of IDPs to come to a camp close to Sulaymaniya (Arbat camp, April 2016). KRI has been the region with the highest number of IDPs (cf. Table 1 below) and refugees.¹⁶ However, the majority of displaced persons has not settled into camps: Over 70 per cent live outside them.¹⁷ Most of the camps—as well as humanitarian and development actors—are found in the Dohuk region that borders Syria and the Iraqi province Ninewa. The refugee population is virtually completely made up of Syrian Kurds as they mostly share language, tradition and religion with the local host community. IDPs in this area, on the other hand, are made up of Sunni Arabs, Yezidis, Christians of different denominations and a few other, small ethno-religious minorities such as Turkmens or Shabak, many of whom have been displaced multiple times already. In sum, the government’s reactions observable in KRI at the moment of the crisis illustrate the crucial role international categories and routines for aid play: Camps were established, refugees and IDPs received different assistance. Yet, at the same time, the majority of displaced persons bypassed these structures and aid altogether as they preferred to settle in KRI informally.

12 \ Adversaries as well as supporters portrayed IS more and more as a movement of international combatants fighting for a universal cause. The PR battle deserves a detailed analysis that cannot be delivered here. To follow the main lines, consult the journal *Dabiq* (available in English and collected on the site <https://clarionproject.org/islamic-state-isis-islam-propaganda-magazine-dabiq-50/#>). On a more analytical level, see publications by the Institute for the Study of War (ISW), available at <http://www.understandingwar.org/publications>.

13 \ Actionism alone does not always suffice. Violent conflict has been demanding swift reactions by humanitarian agencies. It is in the nature of such swift reactions that they hardly ever allow enough time for in-depth conflict analyses. Yet, when the most basic needs are met and dust has settled, such analyses are a prerequisite to elaborating sustainable mid- and long-term perspectives (Rudolf, 2014).

14 \ Even though the Kurdish government officially chose to follow international conventions on refugees, the practice differed considerably: Rather than following a nation-state logic in which citizens are foremost defined by their nationality, the KRG differentiated displaced persons along ethnic lines—namely Kurds and Arabs (Kurdish-speaking versus Arabic-speaking).

15 \ The Shia population mostly migrated to southern Iraq.

16 \ According to latest UNHCR figures (2019b), the combined percentage of Syrian refugees in Iraq outside KRI hardly reaches one per cent—in other words, roughly 99 per cent of currently around 228,500 Syrian refugees in Iraq stay in KRI.

17 \ “Almost 2 million people remain displaced, of which over half have been displaced for more than three years. A significant majority of displaced people (71 per cent) reside outside of camps, mostly within the Kurdistan Region of Iraq and Ninewa governorate” (CCCM Cluster Iraq, 2018).

Refugees and IDPs in KRI

In which regard did displaced persons differ from the official categorisation of refugees and IDPs? At the time of research in northern Iraq, the crucial difference lay in the type of residence: A considerable amount of IDPs and Syrian refugees stayed inside camps, but a vast majority lived outside camps (>70% see above). The latter were either renting housing or squatting in urban and rural areas. Another important difference was ethnicity: The Syrian refugees who fled to Iraq were mostly Syrian Kurds. This has three reasons: First, the fact that the heart region of IS was stretching over the Syrian-Iraqi border from Raqqa to Mosul. This practically meant that Syrians had to cross much more distance (than to the official Syrian-Iraqi border) to become an international refugee. Second, that KRI became the only viable point of exit for Syrian Kurds who felt squeezed in between two hostile powers, with IS on the one side and Turkey on the other. Third, political, social and economic ties between northern Syria and northern Iraq are strong: A common language, shared social structures and cultural practices, shared political ambitions—and family or trade networks that stretch over the border. Fourth, a prevailing strong narrative about a culturally homogeneous and historically unified Kurdistan.¹⁸ Due to those commonalities and a vivid memory of having been victims of displacement themselves, many people in KRI initially welcomed the Kurdish Syrian refugees showing solidarity with their situation.

After wars like the intra-Kurdish (1994-1997) and the Second Gulf War (2003) had ended, hopes were high that Erbil would become a new Dubai—an economic hub and a haven of political stability. With the erosion of the central state of Iraq and the rising strength of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), such ideas seemed to come true. KRI established de facto control over Kirkuk and its ever important oil revenues. It sidelined Baghdad by trading oil and

18 \ This narrative is for example visible in popular culture such as in song lyrics and music clips (cf. Aras Koyi: *Kurdistan Min*, 2013 as a typical example of countless similar songs) or shared folklore; the image of a mother whose four sons—Turkey, Iraq, Iran, Syria—are separated by international borders.

other revenues directly with Turkey. KRI was expanding, and people from Nepal, Bangladesh, Pakistan and also Syria provided the manpower needed on construction sites, hotels, restaurants and in many other branches to sustain this growth. Due to the mentioned affinities, well-qualified (Kurdish) refugees from Syria were initially most welcome and easily integrated. In the summer of 2012, there were less than 10,000 Syrian refugees in Iraq; the following year, this number had increased ten times (UNHCR, 2016b).¹⁹

The high number of Syrian refugees in Iraq is topped by that of internally displaced persons. The recent conflict in Iraq fostered existing ethno-religious divisions. The major ethno-religious communities came together in the different corners of Iraq: Kurds in the north, Sunni (locally called Arabs) in the west, and Shia in the south. During the ethno-sectarian war in Iraq from 2004 to 2006, most members of the Christian and Yezidi minorities fled to KRI and the Nineveh region, historic home to diverse religious communities, to escape harassment and intimidation in Baghdad. After IS took control of the Nineveh Plains and the Shingal area, home to the Yezidis, KRI became the last resort for religious minorities. A priest summarised this feeling of relative safety: “This [Ainkawa district of Erbil] will be the last place in Iraq that Christians will leave” (Ainkawa, January 2016).

Minorities such as Kurds, Christians and Yezidis reported to have lost access to legal aid, political rights, legal documents, the right to own property and human rights. Though they had been affected to various degrees; They had been facing massacres, detainment, torture, abduction, intimidation, extortion, deportation and expropriation, no right to own property, no identification papers, in sum, being deprived of all citizens' rights. Virtually all displaced persons

19 \ In April 2016, at the height of the war against IS, 246,589 Syrian refugees were registered with UNHCR in 87,581 households, of which 39 per cent lived in camps and 61 per cent in urban, peri-urban or rural areas (UNHCR, 2016b). The vast majority lived in northern Iraq, where 58 per cent lived in the major Kurdish urban centres of Dohuk, Erbil, and Sulaymaniyah. The camp residents were dispersed over ten sites. Camp numbers showed an even distribution of men (51%) and women (49%). The 30,000 persons who were moving on to or back to Syria equalled the amount of new arrivals who continued to come to Iraq (UNHCR, 2016b).

Table 1
Movements per governorate of origin and governorate of displacement

GOVERNORATE OF DISPLACEMENT	GOVERNORATE OF ORIGIN									TOTAL
	ANBAR	BABYLON	BAGHDAD	DIYALA	ERBIL	DAHUK	KIRKUK	NINEWA	SALAH AL-DIN	
Anbar	41,130	7,404	60	0	0	0	0	492	0	49,086
Babylon	450	14,790	186	48	0	0	18	1,908	54	17,454
Baghdad	35,016	4,860	378	1,410	0	0	330	12,396	4,320	58,710
Basrah	1,380	126	180	210	0	0	678	2,268	2,322	7,164
Dahuk	336	0	66	0	0	0	66	325,272	366	326,106
Diyala	1,122	582	666	47,958	0	0	132	600	4,662	55,722
Erbil	69,306	0	4,494	402	9,954	0	11,976	93,216	20,436	209,784
Kerbala	594	1,308	36	156	0	0	258	19,272	120	21,744
Kirkuk	2,886	162	1,002	4,776	0	0	57,630	11,862	23,238	101,556
Missan	150	36	150	96	0	0	450	1,176	330	2,388
Muthanna	108	0	132	30	0	0	84	654	90	1,098
Najaf	18	0	0	42	0	0	6	12,180	36	12,282
Ninewa	594	0	6	12	9,774	0	4,590	442,698	20,964	478,638
Qadissiya	0	0	150	0	0	0	1,260	4,116	66	5,592
Salah al-Din	474	0	0	1,308	0	0	12,348	942	90,318	105,390
Sulaymaniyah	24,006	10,176	21,858	26,808	0	0	6,918	14,694	37,962	142,422
Thi-Qar	606	24	30	60	0	0	480	2,076	198	3,474
Wassit	402	0	60	462	0	0	750	6,384	480	8,538
Total	178,578	39,468	29,454	83,778	19,728	0	97,974	952,206	205,962	1,607,148

Source: IOM Iraq, 2019, p.5; Note: It should be taken into account that Kirkuk was a de facto part of KRI up to 2018

and most hosts unanimously reported that such incidents had occurred in their families. Yet most respondents were clinging to the notion of the “sweetness of their homes against all odds”.²⁰ The level of resilience in the face of insecurity and violence shown by respondents in general was remarkably high as illustrated by Case 1 (see below).

The number of IDPs increased from 500,000 in April 2014 to over three million shortly before the battle of Mosul in August 2016 (IOM, 2019). At that time, senior UN staff expected up to an additional three million IDPs due to the campaigns to liberate IS-held territory including Iraq’s second-biggest city of Mosul.²¹ In fact, this number was only met halfway

(UNHCR, 2017) as large parts of the population remained trapped inside Mosul during the battle (Nebhey & Markey, 2017). Many of the persons who fled the battle of Mosul headed to KRI (Reach, 2018). After IS had been driven out of all its Iraqi strongholds and had to retreat to Syria or go underground, the number of Iraqi returnees (2,844,618) exceeded the number of IDPs (2,780,406) for the first time according to updated statistics on 15 December 2017. According to the most recent IOM Data (2019), the current number of returnees of 4,305,138 more than doubles the number of IDPs of 1,607,148.

²⁰ \ Both hosts and displaced persons agreed that having lost their home distinguishes refugees and IDPs from host communities. “My home is sweeter than yours”, was the proverb used repeatedly in interviews to underline that nobody left voluntarily and that everybody wants to return eventually (KRI, January-May, 2016).

²¹ \ Interview with Deputy Special Representative for Iraq Lisa Grande, May 2016.

In general, the situation of IDPs and refugees in KRI is more complex than reflected in most statistics. The reasons to flee to KRI and the situations that displaced persons encountered upon arrival are diverse. After decades of re-emerging tensions, and civil wars, there are various generations of internally displaced persons and former refugees, who now often facilitate the integration of newcomers. Syrians finally are staying in and outside of camps or have successfully integrated locally. The diversity within both groups is considerable and makes any generalisation of needs difficult.

Eligibility and categorisation of displaced persons

The numbers of IDPs in KRI are probably even higher than officially stated, as many who had fled from the ethnoreligious war to KRI before 2014 (most between 2004 and 2006) did not register as IDPs and are not included in the figures mentioned earlier. Numerous rich Arabs who own houses in Kurdish mountain resorts or have invested in residential housing projects in KRI also did not register as they were able to change residence from IS-held territory to KRI. The same is true for a number of other Iraqi workers and entrepreneurs from non-KRI provinces who had already worked in KRI when IS occupied their homes. Finally, many Syrians did not register either. Despite being eligible theoretically, they did not feel that they were in need of aid as the following quote exemplifies:

I did not register as a refugee because I am married to an Iraqi. We are well off, thank God. The help should be given to the ones in need. Would I like to go back to Damascus? Yes, a thousand times, if I could (Syrian woman working for an NGO, Dohuk, May 2016).

This answer shows that beyond legal definitions, ‘refugee’ or ‘IDP’ as colloquial terms are often related to vulnerability and precarious living conditions. Like this woman, a number of other respondents stated that they had been forced to abandon their homes,

shops or areas of origin that they could not return to for the time being—yet, they refused to be labelled IDPs or refugees. According to our research, the experiences and needs of supported and unsupported people mostly overlap, but they differ in their self-assessments of being able to cope with displacement and their claims to be in need.

The question of self-assessment is crucial throughout the trajectories of displaced persons as Aziz’s case show. His story showcases a usually remarkably high degree of resilience in a context of war:²² The individual threshold for the decision to flee or migrate is not only related to concrete insecurity, political persecution, fear of life, economic reasons, desperation, hunger, or other single reasons but usually to a combination of factors. Insecurity, violence, and destruction are tolerated (in the sense of enduring not accepting), and displacement only occurs when there are no other alternatives. Just as the decision to flee is related to a combination of factors, so is the decision to request aid. Despite experiencing the recounted hardships, despite the burden of having to leave his family in an area affected by armed conflict, and despite his own traumatic experiences, Aziz did not request aid, but coped by re-establishing a livelihood abroad.

During field research, it became evident that the current humanitarian agencies’ practice of providing assistance encouraged displaced persons to adapt their stories to categories rather than to contribute with their stories to tailor-made needs assessments and programmes. Strategical compliance is rational from the perspective of beneficiaries: If a person fails to meet the conditions set up to receive aid, access to aid will be denied. We, for example, encountered a migrant worker who had to apply for refugee status to be able to join his family in a refugee camp (see Case 1 below). If he had stressed his success as migrant worker in the application process for a place in the

²² \ The term resilience has been criticised for the implicit political message that displaced persons can fend for themselves stressing the individual responsibility of actors (Chandler, 2014; Joseph & Juncos, 2019; Wagner & Anholt, 2016). In this *Paper*, resilience is used to describe the ability of individuals to come back and cope against all odds—acknowledging that this remarkable agency does not deny structural constraints or exempt other parties from their responsibilities.

camp, the camp manager would have asked the migrant worker's wife and children to leave the camp instead of allowing the husband into the camp. The rejection/expulsion would have been justified with the arguments that space was scarce, demand for a place in the camp is high, and the family's vulnerabilities low in comparison to others (camp manager, interview February 2016).

These two examples show, first, how categories cannot sufficiently accommodate the dynamics of displacement and the needs arising out of it, second how they exclude persons and third, how persons avoid such exclusion by making their story fit the requirements. In practice, most attention is given to the third fact: In Iraq as elsewhere, a lot of time and resources went into the vetting processes to identify

Case 1

War refugee or migrant worker?

Aziz, a man in his forties, stays with his family in the refugee camp Qusthapa, south of Erbil. He lives with his wife and children in one of the houses built by the United Arab Emirates. The house consists of a small courtyard that is used as kitchen, a terrace and storage facility, a living room and a bedroom. It has water, electricity and a toilet. The camp population is entirely made up of Syrian Kurdish refugees. It is rather crowded but offers all amenities typical to such camps: Meeting facilities for women and elders, sports grounds for young people, some shacks turned into shops and restaurants, child-friendly spaces, NGO and camp management offices. It is situated less than an hour's drive from the Kurdish capital. Many inhabitants had found work in nearby factories upon arrival, but most lost their jobs again after the onset of the economic crisis of 2014/15. Many of the workers complained about low salaries, and especially the women reported harassment at the working space.

Aziz used to be an electrician who fixed meters in the Kurdish part of Syria. As a Kurd, he had problems to be recognised as a national citizen in Syria. He recounts: "I could neither own land nor buy a house or a shop. I had been harassed and threatened repeatedly by the Syrian regime for being active in Kurdish cultural activities [such as theatre and dancing groups]". Even though he had obtained a degree, he explained: "I could not get permanent employment and had to live on daily jobs". As he did not have the necessary documentation, he could neither get proper employment nor buy a shop, so he rented a workshop to earn a basic income. "When the economic situation in Syria got unbearable, I went to Iraq to find a job there [to come back and pay the workshop's rent]. He did find a job in Sulaymaniyah. His family stayed behind in the Syrian war. "An explosion hit the vicinity of my family's home in Syria". As a result, he recounts, "my wife and children fled to Iraq. Finally, they ended up in a refugee camp close to Erbil."

Even though his boss offered to raise his salary [as a migrant worker] significantly, Aziz decided to join his family that lived in a refugee camp at the time. To live with them, he became a registered refugee himself. He asserted: "Before my family came, I was not a refugee". He considered himself a migrant worker. Despite all experiences of human rights violations, threats and war discrimination, despite leaving his family behind in a war zone, he does not consider these issues to be the cause of his migration. He insisted that he had moved for economic reasons: "I could no longer feed my children". In 2018, he managed to get a position in a Kurdish TV station, and one of his daughters won a scholarship by an international organisation.

Aziz, 45, married, three children, construction worker, northern Syria

We were given another example of someone who did not qualify as a beneficiary in Rwanga Camp: A man from a village in the Shingal area had lost his family twice. The first time, because all women were taken and all men were killed. He and a few others had been taken for dead lying in a pile of corpses. The second time that he lost his family was because aid measures that transferred survivors for treatment to Germany had only been aimed at female Yezidis, assuming that none of the male villagers survived (Rwanga Camp, February 2016).

those who are assumedly abusing the system—the system of excluding those who are not eligible that is. The categories as such were rarely criticised. The fact that some persons were excluded despite being eligible was deplored but seen as exceptions (various interviews with camp staff, 2016). Yet, because somewhere in the process, needs are adapted to categories rather than categories being adapted to needs, those mistakes are not singular but systematic.²³

²³ \ The *Paper* will, thus, focus on the concepts that frame the categorisation and administration of displaced persons rather than criticising the tools and indicators applied by them.

In summary, we encountered various cases during our research, where categories and needs did not necessarily match each other: We met Yazidis from the Sinjar area who had lost all their property, resources, large parts of their family and had escaped, suffering from serious physical and psychological shocks who lived in informal settlements and Sunni Arabs from Mosul who had apartments in a Kurdish mountain resort, were able to anticipate troubles and saved all assets and family members by moving to their summer residence permanently. In some cases, IDPs from IS-held territories who owned houses in KRI rented those houses out to other IDPs. Summing up, displacement had contradicting impacts on those categorised as IDPs. While some had lost everything, others improved their general economic situation in the process of dispossession and displacement.

Assessing needs of displaced persons across categories

Our research has shown that the current practice of assessing needs for aid systematically overlooks the relevance of certain issues for displaced persons regardless of categories: Economic, social, political impacts of displacement vary within the respective groups/categories in accordance with the duration of exile and individual factors. These needs are not directly related to the life-threatening issues such as access or perspectives regarding access to land, employment (livelihood), housing, social inclusion, nutrition, health, community assets, social networks or education. Taking these needs as a basis and comparing the impact(s) of displacement (incl. life and restrictions in camps, access to aid, impact on the labour market) across the mentioned groups/categories rather than focusing on one group alone, has shown that the needs are interrelated and defined by the wider context. The following first subchapter will, thus, work out the needs of security and perspective that displaced persons have in common across the categories they are put into ex-post. The second subchapter will then address the needs of jobs and income and illustrate how changes in the wider context of politics and economy have affected the situation of the displaced. The third subchapter finally examines the influence of these economic changes on access to nutrition, education, or documentation; and it shows how these changes had a detrimental impact on the need for social inclusion as the relation between the receiving community and displaced persons altered.

The need of security and perspectives

The differentiation between migrants and refugees is usually based on their assumedly different reasons to move: economic in the first case, security in the latter case. A refugee camp manager noted that IDPs and refugees,²⁴ inside and outside of camps, documented or undocumented were all hoping for a

better life abroad. He nevertheless distinguished migrants and refugees in regard to their status: “Syrians come as economic migrants” he explained. Qualifying this statement he continued: “This means they do not come because of war, but because of the consequences of war, which are no school, no water, no perspectives” (Camp Manager KRI, May 2017). In other words, the distinction between those who flee due to war and those who flee for economic reasons is ambiguous. According to our sample of randomly selected cases, economic problems were the straw that broke the camel’s back for most Syrians. They had mostly been displaced at least twice. The first displacement had occurred within Syria, and the second displacement to Iraq.

While respondents explained that they could endure hardships such as violence and insecurity, they stressed that they had to flee once they could no longer provide for their families. “I could not find food for my children anymore,” was the most commonly heard statement about the reasons to leave (various interviews, KRI, January-February 2016). Syrian parents virtually unanimously added that the search for better education was a connected motive for displacement. The Syrians saw no future for the children in both perspectives. In consequence, they were most worried about education in exile, too. Uncertainties about the future were also a principal reason to flee amongst young men. Many Syrian refugees left Syria to avoid young male family members being drafted. For the young men themselves, it was probably the single most important reason. To avoid being drafted by the Syrian forces or the Kurdish People’s Defense Units (Yekîneyên Parastina Gel-YPG) respectively the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), they had been among the first ones who went abroad. For this same reason, they were also the least likely to consider return. Political motives, discrimination, intimidation, and insecurity, however, were mentioned relatively seldom.²⁵

24 \ Displacement caused by IS illustrated the point of overlaps between the categories of refugees and IDPs neatly as the border between Syria and Iraq ceased to exist during its reign.

25 \ In contrast to assumptions held previously by the researchers that this is mostly related to a high level of trauma and a specific culture of silence on issues such as rape—we learnt during the research process that this was only partially the case. Rape and abuse were often discussed rather openly—especially in private settings.

IDPs, in contrast to refugees, mostly reported of direct attacks as the main cause of their displacement. Most had been experiencing armed conflict, insurgencies and shifting monopolies of violence before²⁶—and had, therefore, developed a high-risk tolerance or efficient strategies for living close to armed actors. They only left after the threats or violence or collateral damage affected them directly. The other tipping point for deciding to leave home was the lack of perspectives and trust (cf. Case 2). All Iraqi ethnoreligious groups in displacement—Yezidis, Christians, Shia and Sunni alike—were sceptical about the possibility of future coexistence (Costantini & Palani, 2017) and had already fled (IDPs) or were often considering it.

According to the members of the minorities, the discrimination by the respective ethnoreligious majority had reached a point of no return: “The first question I ask people nowadays before I let them in [my house] is about their religion. Before, I never did this, and I would have never done it—everybody was an Iraqi for me—it was simple as that”, a well-educated and well-off Yezidi father of a family who had not been displaced and was living near Dohuk told us (Shariya, February 2016). Another man, a Yezidi from Shingal, explained why he did not believe that it would be possible to reconcile ever again as follows: “They took our girls and killed our men, how can I trust my neighbours again?”, he asked (Khanke, February 2016). The following case also exemplifies how a lack of trust and perspective influence the trajectories of displaced persons. It also shows, in sum, that the issue of securing people’s livelihood is not confined to short-term perspectives only. Even in emergency situations, long-term projections count. In line with the case of Aziz and others, questions about available alternatives and prospects in the future are playing a crucial role regarding the needs and strategic decisions of displaced persons. These needs, in turn, are related to past experiences—and, in Iraq, to social memories of considerable historic depth, which need to be taken into account, too.

26 \ Shifting monopolies refers to the change of authority in a given territory, such as zones of civil wars as in eastern Congo (Larmer, Laudati, & Clark, 2013; Prunier, 2004; Verweijen, 2013).

Case 2

Persecuted minorities in Iraq

Dilsoz originally comes from an area, the Nineveh Plains, where different religious communities had lived side by side for centuries—although not always peacefully. She explains that she had already been displaced once before, as a student in Mosul: “[In 2007] 24 Yezidis were killed in Mosul. After that, no Christians and Yezidis were allowed to study there anymore. I had to leave and studied in Zakho [in KRI] to become an English teacher.

When IS conquered Mosul, all religious minorities were expelled, enslaved or killed, and Dilsoz had to flee with her family once again. They fled from Bashiqua, Nineveh Province, Iraq to KRI in 2016. She explains: “With the Kurdish degree [from Zakho] it was easy to find a job in Dohuk [Kurdish region] when we fled from Daesh”. The family was nevertheless far from living in peace: “My husband was a Peshmerga and was wounded. His position was often bombed. After that happened [while he was there] I told him, either you stop or you go to Germany. We have already lost everything, our house, everything. I don’t want to lose you, too”.

Dilsoz continues to explain that her sister-in-law, a brother and an uncle had all already arrived in Europe. “We’re all going to Germany. Everyone will go. There is no future for Yezidis here, after everything that has happened to us. My husband is already there [in Germany]. He’s fine, but he misses his family”, the teacher explains. “Coming to Germany costs about 4,000 US dollars. The smugglers know how to make money. There were four buses full of Yezidis [at her first, failed attempt to reach her husband]”, reports Dilsoz. She recounts how her brother made it all the way to Turkey. After fifteen days there, he made it to Greece. “There he was arrested and sent back [to Iraq] after two days. At least he did not have had to pay the 4,000 US dollars”. When Dilsoz tried to go to Turkey with her two children of six and eight in January 2017, she already had the necessary visa. Yet just as she was sitting on the bus waiting to leave, the border was closed. In March, at her second attempt, her salary did not arrive—throughout the KRI territory public employees had to wait for months for their wages. In consequence, she had to postpone the trip again. The situation of her family complicates things even more as Dilsoz points out: “My mother wants to stay here [in Iraq], but I just want to be reunited with my husband”. Her husband had a residence permit for five months at the time, which made long-term plans difficult. To join him quickly was no option, as Dilsoz was still missing all papers that were necessary to go to Germany. She explained that she would have to go to Baghdad to get the marriage certificate. But because the road to Baghdad still led through IS-held territory at the time, she commented, “that requires a lot of money and time”.

Dilsoz, 32 years, married, two children, English teacher from Bashiqua, Nineveh Province, Iraq

The need of livelihoods and income

Moving away from the causes and direct impacts to (de facto) local integration in the aftermath of displacement, a similar picture is revealed: Needs vary within the classical categories (refugees, IDPs, hosts, migrants) on the one hand and are cutting across them on the other. The only difference between the Syrians who arrived in the KRI during the economic boom period (from 2006 to 2014) as migrants and those who arrived afterwards as refugees was that the latter brought in additional (international) aid resources. In consequence, many well-qualified individuals from Syria found jobs in the humanitarian sector quickly—a fact that gave them a considerable leeway later when such jobs became highly desirable.

Securing their livelihood was unsurprisingly the number one problem mentioned by all affected groups when asked about the challenges they faced during displacement. During the economic boom before 2014, many Syrians found jobs in Turkish enterprises that exploited them. Some were paid extremely low salaries, others no salaries at all. Many Syrians but also Christian Iraqis recounted cases where their employers left the country without paying them. A Christian girl from the Nineveh Plains said: “My brother was so upset after he did not get any payment, after working for three months, that he went to Germany” (Erbil, May 2016). The family had lived in an apartment with three other Christian families in Erbil. They were 20 persons in four rooms and shared the rent among family members. Afterwards, the parents and daughters managed to move to a better and more spacious place while the sons moved on to Lebanon and Germany. Displaced persons attributed the reasons for their precarious position to missing networks and the volatile political situation.

With the continuous arrival of large numbers of mostly unqualified IDPs (displaced by IS) who were searching for jobs, the situation changed. A high-ranking civil servant in the town hall of Dohuk explained: “The Syrians are well qualified. They are no problem. The IDPs, on the contrary, are not qualified. For them it is much harder to find work” (Dohuk, February 2016). When the economic situation became increasingly unstable in 2016, the job market changed significantly. The host community largely remained in stable jobs, though often with long periods of not receiving any salary, while many Syrians lost their jobs. After salaries of most Kurdish Iraqis continued to be withheld, the host community joined the competition for already scarce jobs. A foreign journalist noted: “Before, everybody wanted to work in the oil industry. Now everybody wants to work in the aid sector” (Erbil, January, 2016).²⁷

Housing is an issue where the needs of receiving communities, most IDPs, and refugees differ: Most refugees lived in rented properties. The question of paying rents, therefore, became a top concern for Syrians and drove people to seek access to the camps. “People used to see the camps as a last resort. But now, we have waiting lists for the camps and not enough space. Some landlords unloaded refugee families in front of our camp gates because they could no longer pay the rent”, an NGO worker explained (Darashakaran, January 2016).²⁸ A clear indicator of how much the situation had deteriorated in 2016 was given in the refugee camp Darashakaran. The camp is fairly well built, but situated in the middle of nowhere, north-east of Erbil: Even though it is quite remote, the camp management was approached by members of the host community who wanted to move into the camp.

27 \ By 2018, even the refugees who had worked with international NGOs said that they lacked the connections necessary to get a job: “All jobs are given to the Iraqis nowadays—even if they do not speak English” (Syrian refugee, Erbil, August 2018).

28 \ Many displaced persons had preferred to stay in unfinished buildings in the urban areas to be able to find jobs and go to work without high costs for transportation.

In one of the cases, an Iraqi woman from the host population was allowed to move into the camp after she had married a Syrian refugee. Given the obligation of the husband to provide for his wife and the fact that he had no job, the request was reasonable because housing, water and electricity are free of cost inside the camp.

Looking at the impact of the changing economic context, in sum, shows the constraints of support programmes. While the economy was thriving, displaced persons could cover many needs themselves. Once the economy went down, the displaced were affected twofold: first because they often lost their income and second because the receiving community was not only assisting less but starting to compete with the displaced for livelihoods.

Conflicting needs

Initially, the solidarity of the host community was relatively high. It still is and even during the economic crisis in 2016, we observed how private persons were bringing donations to displaced non-Kurdish Sunni²⁹ in IDP camps. Yet our study also showed that the host community became more exasperated and hostile due to the economic crisis and decreasing work opportunities. Displaced persons were blamed for being partly responsible for the decrease in wages—especially for daily workers. The impact of state employees not being paid their salaries for nearly half a year in a region where a majority of people exist directly or indirectly thanks to these salaries has been devastating. The initial solidarity declined in consequence and (de facto) local integration in KRI became much harder for Syrians and IDPs.

Schooling was another point of conflict between hosts and displaced persons. Due to the increased number of students in class and the rising frequency of strikes amongst teachers, the quality of education was deteriorating. Tensions between the host and the newcomer communities were rising. Virtually all parents interviewed were unsatisfied with schooling. IDPs and refugees in KRI deplored the lack of a curriculum in Arabic or bilingual schools. Access to

29 \ The solidarity with these so-called Arabs was often lower than with Kurdish refugees or Kurdish IDPs.

education is relatively well organised for primary schools in KRI (Reach, 2016, p. 7). Yet attendance dropped in secondary schools. Girls were even less likely to go to secondary school if they attend them outside the camp. The key barriers were lack of funds for school uniforms and transport. The after-effects of missed higher education will probably pose a long-term challenge. At the time of the research, it was a major source of discontent voiced by the receiving community.

Increasing bureaucratic hurdles heightened vulnerabilities of Syrians and IDPs considerably and could, in fact, be seen as a measure of exclusion.³⁰ Most aid—even that provided by the World Food Programme—is linked to the public distribution system (PDS). Even refugees get such a card. To get a PDS card, identity cards, a marriage contract, a proof of residence card and other documents are needed. For IDPs, those can only be issued in the province of origin or Baghdad.³¹ Missing documents meant that civilians were not able to access basic services, find legal employment, and were at risk of being arrested any time ('DTM-IOM-Iraq Mission', 2019). This is accentuated by the loss of access to established networks: IDPs have lost their local patron-client and extended family connections with which such problems could have been evaded or at least would have been required to sort them out.³²

30 \ According to a UNHCR report, restrictions on movement for e.g. IDPs in and outside camps, and multiple problems associated with a loss of civil documentation were growing in 2016 (UNHCR, 2016c, p. 3f.).

31 \ The problems that arose when documents, either lost during displacement or not regarded as important—as in the case of many Yazidis that we met—were, therefore, considerable.

32 \ According to camp profiling studies, the top three priorities raised by IDPs were access to livelihoods, food, and health care. 83 per cent said food was their utmost important problem even though 94 to 100 per cent reportedly had acceptable food consumption scores (Reach, 2016). This apparent discrepancy might be explained by the fact that the vast majority of over 90 per cent had access to Iraq's public distribution system of food (PDS). These statistics need to be contextualised by differentiating the coping strategies to evaluate the long-term impact correctly. These strategies cover up current problems but will aggravate them probably in the long run: nearly half of the IDPs reported to cope by making more debts, a third said they were depending on charity, and a quarter of the interviewed were spending their savings; the acceptable food score might be due to tactics like eating cheaper food which is a potentially problematic reaction, too.

The economic crisis, in sum, had wide-ranging effects on the needs of displaced persons and the receiving community. Many of which, like a less supportive social climate or more red tape, do not seem to be directly related to needs at first glance. But displaced persons were again victimised twice: Their needs could no longer be absorbed by the receiving community, and they lost the established social networks necessary to compensate for this damage.

The practice of labelling needs and beneficiaries

This last chapter summarises the presented observations and contrasts them with the international legal-administrative practice of labelling needs and beneficiaries. The first subchapter scrutinises the shortfalls of the current categorisation process from a theoretical perspective. The second subchapter looks into the effects of these labels on the social reality they try to describe. It identifies a gap between the normative and descriptive level of categorising displacement. The cause of this gap is identified as a top-down approach which imposes normative categories on beneficiaries rather than assessing needs from the bottom up. The third subchapter proposes an indicator model that checks the impact of displacement on needs on a more descriptive level as a viable bottom-up alternative. This model allows humanitarian agencies to identify, measure and address the impacts of displacement quickly.

Shortfalls of ex-post categorisation

The application of the label of 'refugee' primarily depends on two variables: The political recognition of the category and the point in time when displaced people are categorised. First, countries from the Middle East, Pakistan to Southeast Asia that have been receiving refugees, have not signed the 1951 Geneva Refugee Convention and do, hence, officially not recognise refugees respectively their rights. For the refugees concerned, this means that the Refugee Convention is no sufficient condition to guarantee that "...the presence of refugees outside their own state brings them within the unconditional protective competence of the international community" (Hathaway, 2007a, p. 354). Second, the process of categorisation starts ex-post from the status the person attained at the time of registration and not from the initial point of displacement. Legal categories such as (international) refugee, internally displaced person (IDP), or person of concern therefore only apply to a sub-group and measure just certain effects³³ rather

33 \ UNHCR, for example is acknowledging these constraints and promoting awareness about them in its vulnerability screening tool: "While some people will be identified with several vulnerability factors, others will not be identified with pre-determined categories of vulnerability yet still be at serious risk of harm. Everyone's circumstances are multifaceted and dynamic. Hence the following framework [vulnerability

than displacement as a whole or its impacts as such.³⁴ Whenever (humanitarian) aid follows those self-referential loops instead of preventing them, there is the danger that they address status rather than needs (Linde, 2011).

One of the reasons why displaced persons are categorised ex-post is that the mandate of aid organisations usually only takes effect after the refugee situation has arisen. Besides, the place of origin from where a person is displaced is often inaccessible. Instead of being able to check the occurred damage in that place, the situation has to be reconstructed ex-post at the time and location where refugees come into contact with the mandated organisations. Often, events are also reconstructed from scratch as data such as civil records, registers or identity documents do not exist, have been lost or are not accessible. In sum, the characteristics that make a person a refugee, IDP, person of concern, or stateless person are not systematic or remain invisible (Polzer & Hammond, 2008).

Our research question was whether the categorisation of displaced persons was efficient in grasping the realities and needs of displaced persons, or whether elements of exclusion and reification lead to inefficiencies of aid. Looking into the Iraqi case, we saw that on the one hand exclusion refers to the fact that certain individuals and groups are eligible for humanitarian or development assistance while others are disqualified from aid. Reification, on the other hand, refers to the fact that the procedure of allotting persons a status that entails eligibility for assistance inevitably establishes new identities (of beneficiaries) and respective group boundaries. Due to the status given (refugee, IDP, documented migrant), these boundaries are consolidated.³⁵

screening tool] is offered as a guide and is not to be taken as a rigid or exhaustive measurement of vulnerability (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees & International Detention Coalition, 2016, p. 3)."

34 \ UNHCR lists refugees, IDPs, people of concern and stateless persons as belonging to their mandate (UNHCR, 2018b).

35 \ Social identity theory suggests that the identified as well as the identifiers consolidate (any) identity markers in the course of time (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Hence, (any) categorisation tends to be filled with meaning, become a social identity and be rejected or accepted as such. The category will develop a life beyond its merely descriptive value.

In Iraq, as elsewhere, consolidated labels are not adapted to accommodate alternative trajectories or alternative local categorisations of displaced persons (cf. migrant/refugee vs. Kurd/non-Kurd distinction in KRI). The consolidation of the status in combination with the dependency on aid inhibits political and social changes e.g. regarding the political status or rights attached to it. This relates to a much wider discussion on humanitarian governance in general (Agier, 2011; Meininghaus, 2016; Prinz & Schetter, forthcoming). One rather practical argument out of this debate is advanced by Zetter (2007). He argues that the dynamic between those who identify persons as refugees and those who are identified as refugees is a political issue, as the formation of the refugee label today mirrors the changed patterns and causes of globalised processes of (forced) migration that have occurred since the end of the Cold War. To manage those new and more complex processes, the “convenient label refugees” is transformed by an “institutional fractioning”—a process of dividing and fragmenting humanitarian aid (p. 7).

This fractioning historically went hand in hand with a shift of policy from classical refugee programmes towards modern migration management and a shift of responsibility from NGOs towards governments that today have become the most important actor in the field (Zetter, 2007, p. 172ff.). Zetter concludes that the refugee label has become politicised by both the reproduction of institutional fractioning and by a wider political discourse, which is characterised by growing resistance to migrants and refugees. According to him, both processes are mostly driven by the interests of governments in the Global North (Zetter, 2007).³⁶ In sum, a politicised framework leads to a self-referential and, thus, partial analysis of PDD

that meets the needs of policy rather than social reality.³⁷ As a result, humanitarian response does not effectively adjust its measures to changes such as the prevalence of protracted displacement over short-term emergencies.

Disparities between needs and norms

The categorisation of displaced persons into specific groups does not only blur the commonalities between them but also the fact that they interrelate. The measures humanitarian and development agencies take for each specific group influence the livelihood strategies of individuals accordingly. The counterproductive result of the process of institutional fractioning is that one loses track of simultaneous developments as well as sequential processes and circular cumulative causations (Massey, 1990; Massey et al., 1993; Myrdal, 1958). The concrete result for displaced people is that persons who would theoretically be eligible for aid do not get on the radar of humanitarian agencies—e.g. Syrians who stayed outside of camps before the crisis. In other words, not only those who (have the chance to) reach out for help need it.

The legal differences between labelled groups have consequences for pathways of re-establishing a life that crucially shape the experience of displaced persons (Adelman & McGrath, 2007; Hathaway, 2007a; Karatani, 2005). However, scholars also have shown that displaced persons do not necessarily comply with the label they are categorised into but use navigational skills, strategic behaviour and ‘forum shopping’ strategies. This indicates that displacement does not imply a complete loss of agency (Benda-Beckmann,

³⁶ \ A well-established body of literature is available, from a more theoretical perspective, on the wider debate on the refugee regime and humanitarian government (Agamben & Hiepko, 1998; Agier, 2010; Betts, 2010; Calhoun, 2010; Cantor, 2019; Chimni, 2001; Nyers, 2013; Schetter, 2012).

³⁷ \ Scalettaris (2007, p. 37) concludes in her analysis of the international refugee regime: “Empirical research has demonstrated that in practice it is not possible to apply these definitions [of categories of people (such as “refugees”, “migrants”, “internally displaced persons”, “environmental refugees”, etc.)] to separate discrete classes of migrants. They are policy related labels, designed to meet the needs of policy rather than of scientific enquiry. Moreover, as products of a specific system, they bear assumptions which reflect the principles underlying the system itself”.

1981; Berman, Quinn, & Paavola, 2014; Brees, 2008; Castagna & Jeyte, 2011; Smith, Boyce, & Mohammed, 2018; Vigh, 2010). Despite the fact that legal-administrative constraints—living e.g. in a camp—have a severe impact on the freedom of choice for individuals in such conditions, they have a certain level of agency. Hence, refugees are not passive victims (Bakewell, 2010; Turner, 2016a). The legal-normative and the empirical-descriptive dimensions must be understood to identify the needs of displaced persons and communities affected by displacement.

According to the presented empirical evidence collected from a grassroots perspective, many similar characteristics are found amongst displaced persons across the existing divides of different labels such as refugees, IDPs or migrants. They all have needs in common that, in turn, require similar measures of aid (Barutciski, 1998; Rushing, 2017).³⁸ Yet the process of categorisation often renders persons and their needs invisible (Polzer, 2008; Polzer & Hammond, 2008). Needs do not only cut across categories but also vary considerably within each category. The situation of displaced individuals within a category, as shown for Iraqi IDPs, is far from homogenous. There is a notable difference between the need of a resourceful IDP who foresaw displacement, for example, and an IDP who lost everything (Siddiqui, Guiu, & Shwan, 2019). The same applies to persons who crossed an international border and are eligible for refugee status: The presented cases show that some lost everything, and some did not. In sum, as the observed characteristics of persons labelled as refugee, IDPs or other have shown to vary considerably, it is necessary to take a step back and define explicitly which human rights violations, vulnerabilities or deprivations of access make the status of displaced persons one that requires humanitarian aid.

Modelling an indicator-based assessment

The cases presented above show that human dignity is the pivotal common denominator for assessing needs. Persons affected by displacement themselves referred to this point of reference for evaluating whether a person (including themselves) is in need of aid or not. “IDPs or refugees—call us whatever you want—but do not forget that we are all human beings who deserve to go home”, an Arab farmer from Anbar was eager to stress during an interview (Arbat camp, April 2016). A straightforward way to identify situations where humanitarian aid is required is, thus, to define them as situations where humanitarian principles are violated, or where human dignity and rights are in danger. To isolate causes and results, such a working definition then has to relate each specific violation of rights or dignity to the process of displacement. The question which legal status or administrative label an affected person holds only becomes significant later. This is specifically the case in situations where labels that are attributed by the refugee regime or national policies facilitate or obstruct access to regaining a dignified life.

The Impoverishment Risks, Risk Management and Reconstruction (IRR) model systematises losses and difficulties related to displacement and resettlement (Cernea, 2000). The model’s beauty lies in its common sense: Displaced persons lose certain assets they strive to regain—shelter, rights, livelihoods, etc. (cf. Box 1). The IRR approach, thus, deconstructs the multi-faceted displacement experience into identifiable components. The enlisted indicators of displacement dissect the potential impacts of displacement. The idea of the model is not to limit displacement to only those situations where all indicators are checked. It rather helps to differentiate impacts of displacement on human rights and human dignity. Displaced persons are neither necessarily affected by all indicators nor are they affected in the same way. The model is meant to be able to assess the level of impact for each

38 \ Implementing agencies have already been lumping both groups together in needs assessments (Iyerly et al., 2000).

indicator. Moreover, the model can inform action. The IRR model suggests that preventing or overcoming the pattern of impoverishment requires targeted risk reversal or mitigation (Cernea, 2004). Development actors can adapt the IRR model as a tool to understand the challenges faced in displacement and the conditions necessary for designing durable solutions (Kälin & Schrepfer, 2012). Concluding from the findings from empirical research in northern Iraq (see above) we suggest to complement the model by indicators j)-m).³⁹

Box 1

Measuring the levels of impact of displacement on access to a dignified life

a) Landlessness	↔	access to or restitution of land
b) Joblessness	↔	(re)employment
c) Homelessness	↔	permanent housing
d) Marginalisation	↔	social inclusion
e) Food insecurity	↔	food and nutrition security
f) Increased morbidity	↔	improved healthcare
g) Loss of common property	↔	Restoration of community assets and services
h) Social disarticulation	↔	(re)building of networks and communities, reconciliation
i) Loss of educational opportunities	↔	access to education
j) Outlawed	↔	access to legal representation and law enforcement
k) Voiceless	↔	access to political recognition and representation
l) Undocumented	↔	holding valid legal documents, property titles, certificates
m) Unaware	↔	awareness of (human) rights

39 \ The indicators represent three clusters: Access to housing/ land/ property; access to basic services through the provision of nutrition/ health/ education; and access to integration on a social/ economic/ political/ legal level. These indicators list the characteristics that define displacement without explicitly addressing human rights violation and life in dignity. Indirectly, however, the indicators circumscribe the latter: Being on the left side of the box equates massive human rights violations while the total of indicators on the right side of the table equates a life in dignity. Indicators for physical integrity or threats are hard to operationalise—especially in conflict areas. Therefore, we speak of awareness of human rights rather than access to human rights and access to law enforcement rather than access to security. It is crucial, nevertheless, to underline that our proposed model combines the list of indicators with context analyses and human rights/ human dignity as the ultimate point of reference.

We suggest that these indicators are used as a collection of factors—land, employment (livelihood), housing, social inclusion, nutrition, health, community assets, social networks, education, legal aid, political rights, legal documents, human rights—that can measure the impact of displacement on individuals in a systematic way without distinguishing whether they belong to the categories of refugees, IDPs or members of receiving communities. The intention is to make it possible to differentiate between impoverishment and heightened vulnerability in processes of reintegration or local integration on the economic, social, legal and political levels. The twist of our model is that indicators transcend the focus on persons who are legally recognised as refugees and avoid bias towards spatial forced migration as they do not stress movement. The model, thus, accommodates above-presented cases in which hosts and displaced persons (see education) faced the same needs. Rather than an ex-post attribution, the proposed indicators furthermore compile symptoms of displacement that help to identify the condition of individuals on the spot.

In contrast to the described difficulties in differentiating the diverging needs within and across the traditionally applied categories as in the case of northern Iraq, the indicator-based-approach is meant to work like a medical first aid kit to measure malnutrition.⁴⁰ In the same way that the medical kit precedes treatment and reaches out to persons who do not make it to hospitals, the indicators enable aid providers to identify needs proactively. We suggest to assess displacement foremost as a challenge to leading a dignified life—just like malnutrition constitutes

40 \ The list of indicators can, thus, be compared to the mid-upper arm circumference (MUAC) bracelet, which measures malnutrition. Regardless of the causes, the bracelet measures the level of malnutrition to react adequately in a simple and applicable way (Bliss et al., 2018; Ferro-Luzzi & James, 1996). Like any other tool, there are risks of fetishising the means, which run counter to its purpose to improve a people-centred approach (Scott-Smith, 2013).

a challenge to health (Ferro-Luzzi & James, 1996, p.7). Malnutrition is not cured by nutrition alone but by an accompanying coherent treatment; in the same way characteristics of displacement need to be addressed in a disaggregated yet holistic way aiming to secure human rights and protection.

In the case of northern Iraq, this means to take historical, political, socio-cultural and economic dynamics much more into account. The comprehensive list of indicators of displacement dynamics, derived from bottom-up observations of needs and vulnerabilities related to displacement,⁴¹ enable the analysis to dissect and assess effects that are potentially, and to various degrees, detrimental to a life in dignity. The idea is, in sum, to enable humanitarian agencies to identify, measure and address the impacts of displacement quickly.

41 \ For the sake of brevity, this *Paper* does not discuss all indicators in detail. Ideally though, each indicator and its bandwidth would need to be checked against local circumstances. The general idea is to demonstrate the advantages of starting with a needs assessment that is measured against the ideal of human dignity over starting from a category of people and then assess their needs irrespective of the wider context.

Conclusion

At the beginning of the *Paper*, we posed the question whether the process of categorisation and designation of beneficiaries efficiently identifies the needs of displaced persons or whether it carries elements of exclusion and reification in it, which lead to inefficiencies. The guideline for humanitarian aid is to focus on people and to alleviate their suffering as quickly, impartially, independently, neutrally and with respect for human dignity as possible (see EU, 2008, p.1). The "analysis of the needs ... [is] the cornerstone of the humanitarian programme in all cases" (EU, 2008, p. 12). Yet in practice, the presented cases have shown that not all persons with similar protection needs are guaranteed equal access to assistance. Those who have not sought assistance and are, therefore, not registered or those who are not eligible for aid dedicated to refugees (e.g. IDPs) or vice versa are excluded by default or at least should be excluded (see above).

According to the cases in Iraq, the decisive moment that defined the need for aid was neither correlating with the question whether regular or irregular migration routes were open to those affected nor whether they fled across or to the border (which might not have existed at the time) nor whether they received support or not, nor whether they carried documents with them. The discussed examples from northern Iraq show that persons categorised into different status might share the same needs while those in the same category might have different needs. The cases have also shown that needs are not entirely determined by the question whether a displaced person has to resort to regular or irregular migratory movements, whether a status is recognised or refused, and by the question which quality the legal status has in the transit or destination country—yet the cases also showed that there is a critical influence (cf. documentation, nutrition, rights).

The cases demonstrate that beneficiaries often move in and out of categories or move between them. Persons who would qualify for aid do not request it at a certain moment of time—but might request it at another one. The examples showed that migrants became refugees when the situation in the place of

origin changed or when the economic context changed, because their houses were destroyed and their families fled or because they lost their jobs and had to move to a camp to save costs.⁴² The economy and degree of social inclusion in northern Iraq mostly changed because the same conditions that led to the displacement of Syrians spread into KRI. This shows that needs cannot be assessed without looking at the wider context. The examples also disclosed that needs regarding land, employment (livelihood), housing, social inclusion, nutrition, health, community assets, social networks, education, legal aid, political rights, legal documents and human rights vary widely within and across the categories of migrant, refugee, IDP, and even receiving communities.

We, accordingly, propose to apply an indicator-based approach that allows measuring the level of impact, hence vulnerability, of displaced persons as the primary determinants of needs—regardless of their status. Using the indicator-based model enables aid agencies to measure needs against the level of impact in each case.⁴³ This means that symptoms are evaluated on a bandwidth from no access to full access—and not in relation to the state of affairs before displacement. The point of reference in the indicator model as in the everyday perception of displaced persons (cf. above) is access to a dignified life. As long as this is not fully given, e.g. in the case of a return to misery, access would only be partially restored.⁴⁴ The indicator model, thus, would establish an inter-subjectively comprehensible catalogue in a way that political and legal definitions of displacement and solutions cannot provide yet. The models would enable humanitarian and development actors to centre around dignified life as the main point of reference by evaluating outcomes of aid against an ideal state where human rights are respected and no well-founded fear for persecution is given.

42 \ Other cases show that such similarities are also found in displacement en situ, acute spatial displacement, post-displacement periods (e.g. in exile or transit), or return (Rudolf, forthcoming)

43 \ This means that e.g. not the fact of losing access to land as such defines the impact of displacement but the question of how much land, which quality of land, or which use it was dedicated to.

44 \ It can still be counted as a restoration of limited access as before, though. The difference is, just as with malnutrition, that a clearly defined ideal state is used as a fixed point of reference.

The *Working Paper*, in sum, proposes a fresh look on how to assess the impact of internal displacement and the major challenges related to refugee movements. The empirical findings suggest that any indicator-based-approach must be combined with an analysis of the socio-political and historical context of forced migration and also pay attention to impacts on the host society. Being aware of the fact that it is inevitable for humanitarian and development aid in a situation of crisis to prioritise some issues (and disregard others), the context and the cases presented here demonstrate that there is still no alternative for a holistic approach. This means that any assessment of needs has to start from a long-term, multi-sectoral, whole-of-society, and systematically indicator-based approach.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

BICC	<i>Bonn International Center for Conversion</i>	BICC
BMZ	<i>German Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development</i>	BMZ
DRC	<i>Danish Refugee Council</i>	DRC
EU	<i>European Union</i>	EU
GIZ	<i>German Corporation for International Cooperation</i>	GIZ
IASC	<i>Inter-Agency Standing Committee</i>	IASC
IDMC	<i>Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre</i>	IDMC
IDPs	<i>Internally displaced persons</i>	IDPs
IOM	<i>International Organization for Migration</i>	IOM
IRR	<i>Impoverishment Risks, Risk Management and Reconstruction</i>	IRR
IS	<i>Islamic State</i>	IS
ISIS / ISIL	<i>Islamic State of Iraq and Sham / and Levante</i>	ISIS/ISIL
KRG	<i>Kurdistan Regional Government</i>	KRG
KRI	<i>Kurdistan Region of Iraq</i>	KRI
NGO	<i>Non-governmental organisation</i>	NGO
OCHA	<i>United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs</i>	OCHA
PDD	<i>Protracted displacement dynamics</i>	PDD
PDS	<i>Public distribution system</i>	PDS
PRS	<i>Protracted refugee situations</i>	PRS
SDF	<i>Syrian Democratic Forces</i>	SDF
UN	<i>United Nations</i>	UN
UNDP	<i>United Nations Development Programme</i>	UNDP
UNHCR	<i>United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees</i>	UNHCR
WHH	<i>Welthungerhilfe</i>	WHH
YPG	<i>Kurdish People's Defense Unit</i>	YPG

bicc \
Internationales Konversionszentrum Bonn
Bonn International Center for Conversion GmbH

Pfarrer-Byns-Straße 1, 53121 Bonn, Germany
+49 (0)228 911 96-0, Fax -22, bicc@bicc.de

www.bicc.de
www.facebook.com/bicc.de

bicc Bonn
International Center
for Conversion \

Director for Research
Professor Dr Conrad Schetter

Director for Administration
Michael Dedek

AUTHOR

Dr Markus Rudolf is Senior Researcher at BICC

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