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A message from the Head of UN-Habitat Iraq



Each year, Urban October is an opportunity for everyone to participate in the conversation about the challenges and opportunities created by the fast rate of change in our cities and towns. The month begins with World Habitat Day on 5 October and ends with World Cities Day on 31 October. Never before has it been more important to talk about how our cities are designed, built and evolve to meet the needs of populations. The spread of COVID-19 has exacerbated a pre-existing housing shortage in Iraq - without adequate housing, it is impossible to carry out physical distancing, good hygiene practices and safely take care of those who must quarantine. This monthly update is intended not only to highlight the successes of the UN-Habitat Iraq Programme but also to focus attention on key issues. What we do today will change the cities and towns of tomorrow, to make them safe and inclusive, and resilient against future crises.

The Right to Adequate Housing

Starting on 1 June, UN-Habitat Iraq and its partner, Engineering Associate for Environment and Development (EADE) carefully navigated the Government-laid COVID restrictions and requirements in order to safely provide shelter upgrade kits to vulnerable people in Anbar governorate. 1,015 of the most vulnerable families were helped with items to repair and upgrade their shelters, including items to keep cool in the extreme summer weather that burdens Iraq.



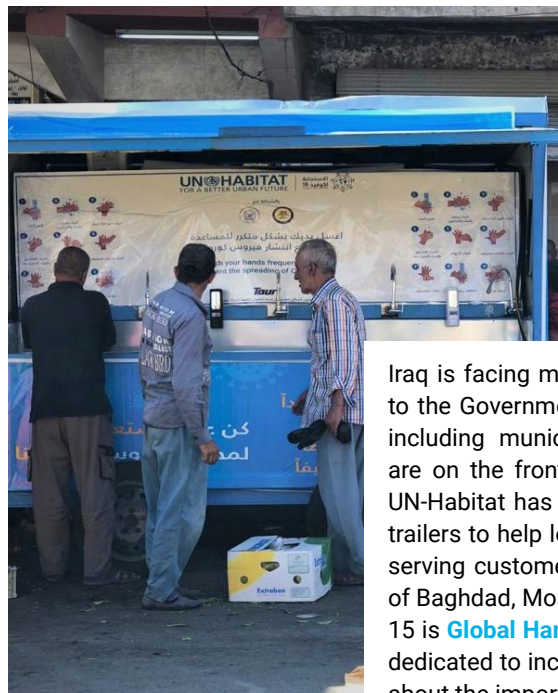
“Staying at home, physical distancing and handwashing are seen as key preventative measures. However nearly 1.8 billion people live in inadequate housing, overcrowding, slums and slum-like conditions, or some are even homeless, with lack of access to clean water, leaving them at a high risk of exposure to COVID-19.”

António Guterres, UN Secretary General at the launch of the [Policy Brief on COVID-19 in an Urban World](#).



Important dates coming up

5 October: This year, **Urban October** activities began with **World Habitat Day** on 5 October and will end with **World Cities Day** on 31 October. The theme of World Habitat Day 2020 is Housing For All: A better Urban Future. COVID-19 has reminded us that home is much more than just a roof. The pandemic has forced us to take a hard look at how we live in urban locations, utilize public spaces, provide safe public transportation, interact with others, as well as where and how we work and our relationship with the environment.



The Importance of Handwashing

Iraq is facing many challenges and providing support to the Government to act is critical. Local authorities, including municipality staff, mayors and governors are on the front lines of this pandemic. To support, UN-Habitat has deployed seven mobile hand-washing trailers to help local authorities fight the pandemic, by serving customers and vendors in busy market areas of Baghdad, Mosul, Ramadi, Heet and Yathrib. October 15 is **Global Handwashing Day**, a global advocacy day dedicated to increasing awareness and understanding about the importance of handwashing with soap as an effective and affordable way to prevent diseases and save lives.



Advocacy for Sustainable Solutions

The COVID-19 pandemic has reinforced the need to **tackle the inequalities and long-term development deficits** that have been exposed and made marginalized groups particularly vulnerable. UN-Habitat has been engaged several initiatives to support the Government of Iraq in this regard including:

1 Support the endorsement of the Parliament on the Informal Settlement Law to regularize and upgrade informal settlements.

The law has already passed the first reading and was going through the second reading when the demonstrations started in October 2019.

2 Support the process to endorse the Decree to recognise HLP tenure for the Yazidis by the Council of Minister. The legal decree is currently being reviewed by the Legal Office of the Prime Minister and it is in process of endorsement.



Mitigating Evictions during a pandemic



3 months of rental subsidies for 20 vulnerable IDP families in Sumel and Zakho districts in Dohuk Governorate.

Housing is a fundamental human right and the threat of eviction can have an immense detrimental effect on mental and physical health. UN-Habitat's Implementing Partner, Critical Needs Support Foundation (CNSF) distributed 3 months of rental subsidies for 20 vulnerable IDP families in Dohuk Governorate. Beneficiaries were selected on the basis of a Socio-Economic Vulnerability Assessment to ensure the most vulnerable out of camps IDPS living in informal and critical shelters are not evicted during the pandemic.

Irrigation Canal in Yathrib sub-district

UN-Habitat completed the rehabilitation of 4.3 km-long 'Irrigation Canal EC-9' in Yathrib sub-district in collaboration with the Manager of Yathrib Irrigation Directorate of the Ministry of Agriculture. The canal, which serves around 18,000 acres of agriculture land, was identified by the farming community as a priority project. Aside from the jobs created for youth of the area, the restoration of the waterway to its full capacity will benefit approximately 13,000 people, many of whom are recent returnees.



Mandate

UN-Habitat, the United Nations Human Settlements Programme, is the focal point for all urbanization and human settlement matters within the UN system and is mandated by the UN General Assembly (beginning in 1975) to promote socially and environmentally sustainable towns and cities. Its mandate is further derived from other internationally agreed upon development goals, including SDG11 of the Sustainable Development Goal, a goal dedicated for urban development, and the New Urban Agenda, an action-oriented document signed by member states which sets global standards of achieving SDG11. UN-Habitat has been active in Iraq since 1996.



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