

Integrating MRE Into Humanitarian Responses in Iraq

As a result of conflict in Iraq, the safety and well-being of millions of refugees and internally displaced persons is at stake due to explosive remnants of war (ERW). In order to mitigate that threat, the Danish Refugee Council enlisted the help of the Danish Demining Group to incorporate mine and ERW risk education into existing humanitarian efforts in Iraq.

by Tammy Hall [Danish Demining Group]

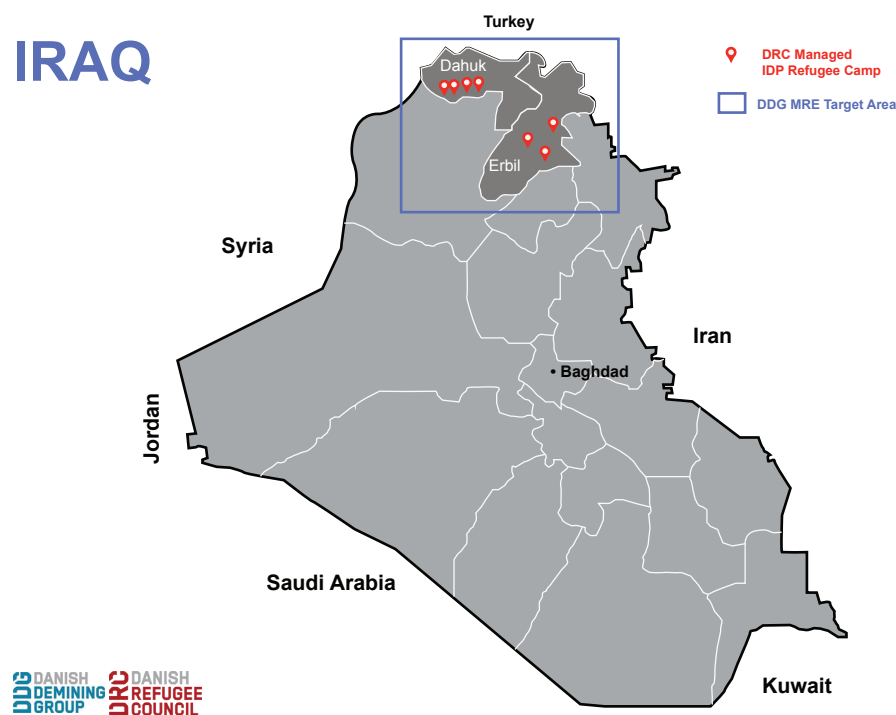


Figure 1. Area of operations for integrated MRE support.
All graphics courtesy of Noe Falk Nielsen.

The ongoing conflict in Iraq created a protracted humanitarian crisis throughout the country. According to the 2015 Iraq Humanitarian Response Plan, in excess of “8.2 million people in Iraq require immediate humanitarian support as a direct consequence of violence and conflict.”¹ The U.N. Refugee Agency estimates that approximately 50 percent are refugees who fled the conflict in Syria or are internally displaced persons (IDPs) from conflict-affected communities inside Iraq.² Among the basic human necessities within the context of this emergency is the vital need for safety due to the threat posed by explosive remnants of war

(ERW). Consequently, mine/ERW risk education (MRE) is recognized as an integral component of the humanitarian response to this violent conflict.

The traditional humanitarian response effort is far-reaching and comprehensive. However, a protection gap normally exists in situations where mines, ERW and even improvised explosive devices (IEDs) constitute a serious risk for refugees and IDPs. In Iraq, refugee and IDP camps are located in some of the areas most intensely contaminated by explosive ordnance (see Figure 1). The ‘protection’ umbrella ensures peoples’ safety and security and focuses



Danish Refugee Council (DRC) distributes essential equipment to Syrian refugees in Darashakran Camp in Iraqi Kurdistan, June 2015.



The distribution by DRC to the 10,000 Syrian refugees in Darashakran Camp in Iraqi Kurdistan involved cooling boxes and fans to help make the refugees more comfortable in the Iraqi summer where the heat regularly soars above 45 degrees Celsius (113 degrees Fahrenheit).

on preserving their dignity. This perspective explicitly recognizes the need for integrity (where both psychological and physical aspects must be considered), and it attempts to bring about the empowerment of vulnerable individuals. However, humanitarian organizations that focus on protection often lack expertise in technical areas related to explosive weapons. The safety and security needs of refugees and IDPs moving through dangerous areas may remain unaddressed as a result.

As a response to the current humanitarian emergency in Iraq, the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) established three community centers in Dohuk, Erbil and Zakho, and assists local governments with the management and administration of 12 camps in Dohuk and Erbil. In order to inform refugees

and IDPs about the dangers of mines and ERW when traveling through areas around the camps or upon return to their former homes, Danish Demining Group (DDG) will supply an MRE component to the overall humanitarian assistance effort. Working in close cooperation with the Iraqi Kurdistan Mine Action Agency (IKMAA), DDG intends to employ dedicated MRE teams already working inside the camps and community centers managed by DRC to provide MRE to refugees.

DDG identified three key challenges:

1. Understanding the needs on the ground and accessing relevant data.
2. Building trust and longer-term relationships with target groups that ensure constructive information exchange.
3. Meeting difficult logistical conditions with limited resources.

In order to better meet these challenges within humanitarian emergency environments such as Iraq, DDG developed an approach that integrates MRE into the humanitarian response. DDG's role as a specialized unit within DRC facilitated not only the provision of MRE into the broader protection framework, but also planning, administration and follow-up as part and parcel of the humanitarian effort.

Needs Analysis and Data Gathering

Within this modality, one joint-country strategy is developed for the integration of MRE as a **protection issue**. The combined efforts of DRC and DDG personnel carry out a joint-conflict analysis that considers future trends and developments, in particular the anticipated movements of conflict-affected populations. One of the key strengths of this approach is that a more sophisticated analysis of peoples' needs is integrated into the planning of an overall protection strategy and response. DDG brings specialized knowledge of weapons and armed-conflict dynamics to DRC's core protection work in addressing the needs of vulnerable populations, especially refugees and IDPs.

DRC has a long-established presence in Northern Iraq. It has tracked the movements of vulnerable populations and carried out needs assessments since 2003. However, with DRC's office about to close and programming in Iraq almost completely phased out by 2014, new violence erupted. DRC's humanitarian program in Iraq was reinforced to deal with the significant humanitarian needs related to the violence prompted by insurgent groups. In addition, the worsening conditions in Syria in 2014 and 2015 created an influx of refugees, who



As Kobane was destroyed in the fighting between the Syrian Kurdish army and Islamic State in late 2014, thousands of people fled to refugee camps in Syria and Iraq. This photo shows a Syrian refugee from Kobane in Darashakran Camp in Iraqi Kurdistan walking past the tents where upwards of a thousand refugees from Kobane seek shelter (June 2015).

were crossing the border into Iraq in search of better conditions despite the dangers in Iraq.

DRC initiated a targeted humanitarian response to the Syrian crisis in March 2013 and later to the Iraq crisis in late 2014. The continuing unrest and instability in Syria and Iraq has increasingly eroded civilian safety and living conditions. Within this insecure environment, reaching target populations with the greatest need safely is a considerable challenge. DRC has adopted a community-based methodology in Iraq, focusing on balancing the special protection needs of the most vulnerable with support for basic communal services. This work requires a high degree of attention for the safety of DRC staff, as well as communities, so that DRC's humanitarian assistance workers do not suffer attacks or get caught up in the on-going violence.

DRC is providing assistance to Syrian refugees and Iraqi IDPs in the form of non-food items distribution, and the provision of services such as water, sanitation and hygiene, shelter, livelihoods training, and financial assistance, as well as stand-alone protection activities (such as monitoring the safety and security of individuals, legal aid and documentation work).

Given the large number of Syrian refugees, the work DDG and DRC carry out inside Syria also serves to inform regional analysis and needs-assessments. This in-depth understanding of the overall assistance requirements of target populations helps during the initial steps of information gathering.

However, data gathering related to the potential threats faced by IDPs and refugees remains challenging. Therefore,

DDG will also initiate a structured data-gathering process that will later serve to refine the development of MRE curricula and material, and to monitor and assess the outcomes of the MRE program. Despite the tremendous past investment in Iraq's national mine action capacity, it remains difficult to obtain recent disaggregated casualty data that would inform the design of an effective MRE program, including:

- Who is being injured? (disaggregated by gender and age group);
- Where was the geographical location of the accident? (as precise as possible);
- What was the nature of the device? (i.e., anti-personnel or anti-vehicle mine, unexploded ordnance, IED);
- What was the victim doing at the time of the accident? (traveling, farming, collecting wood, etc.);
- What was the type of injury? (according to injury patterns assessed by the International Committee of the Red Cross).

While implementing the initial phase of the MRE program, DDG will also utilize MRE teams to gather information on the expected threat in the various areas of return, as well as information on the knowledge, attitudes and practices of those groups. This will help when designing targeted messages to fill existing gaps in available information.

Building Relationships and Trust

In the context of an ongoing conflict, it can also be challenging to collect information from vulnerable populations that may fear revealing sensitive information regarding explosive contamination. The integrated structure of DRC and DDG provides an opportunity to build trust and enhance the relationship between trainers providing MRE and target groups, since they are seen as an integral piece of the practical help and assistance provided to refugees and IDPs. In Iraq, DDG can use DRC's protection and community-service teams to gain access to the target beneficiaries, and receive initial advice and orientation on their basic needs. They can also understand more about the leaders and opinion-makers, which can greatly enhance the effectiveness of targeting key individuals and groups.

One particularly sensitive issue in the Iraqi context is the use of victim-activated IEDs in homes and in areas surrounding abandoned settlements. Because of relationships of confidence established with target groups, this issue is treated sensitively. In addition, as information changes or evolves, ongoing and longer-term access to the target groups



A Syrian refugee makes her way home with a cooling box, fans and blankets she received in the distribution of summer items by DRC in Darashakran Camp in Iraqi Kurdistan (June 2015).

can greatly improve the quality of information received from affected locations, where people may be returning from time to time to monitor their property and belongings. The delivery of an IED risk education package must be carefully monitored through camp-qualified MRE trainers, but this monitoring can be reinforced over time using the broader assistance frameworks operating in the camps.

Doing More with Less

Finally, this DRC-DDG integration allows MRE implementation to ensure a more cost-effective setup, taking advantage of economies of scale and existing security frameworks in high-risk areas such as Iraq. For example, elements like the costs involved in setting up secure office space can be shared by the various components of the program. In addition, where finance and logistics can be challenging in terms of finding appropriately trained personnel and in providing sufficient oversight for financial transactions and management for resources and assets, a shared setup can reduce basic infrastructure costs.

Further, key elements of programming, such as evaluation and beneficiary feedback structures, can be shared through joint implementation.

A Comprehensive Response

While integration does not solve all the problems of operating in a challenging emergency environment such as Iraq, this combined structure does allow for a stronger and more appropriate response to vulnerable groups. Alternatively, coordination and integration also have some costs. The need for enhanced information sharing, more complicated approval and accountability mechanisms, and the challenge of navigating through more complex information all impose additional burdens on busy staff members. However, mainstreaming MRE into support for the same vulnerable populations already being assisted appears worth the effort of these additional complexities. ©

See endnotes page 66



Tammy Hall joined the Danish Demining Group (DDG) in 2013 and became the Head of DDG in January 2015. She has worked in the field of mine action since 1998 with various organizations, including the United Nations Mine Action Service, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Organization of American States and the Canadian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. During that time she has acted as program manager and chief technical advisor in Afghanistan, Colombia, Guinea-Bissau, and Western Sahara. She has also worked as a consultant for the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining, the European Union, and UNDP. She holds a master's degree in international relations with a focus on development from Dalhousie University (Canada). She is based at DDG headquarters, inside the Danish Refugee Council in Copenhagen, Denmark.

Tammy Hall
Head of the Danish
Demining Group (DDG)
Division of Emergency,
Safety and Supply (DESS)
Danish Refugee Council
International Department
Borgergade, 3rd floor
CPH / Denmark
Tel: +4526110031