

Rapid Overview of Areas of Return (ROAR)

Qa'im and Surrounding Areas

Anbar Governorate, Iraq - July 2018

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Returns Working Group
RWG Iraq



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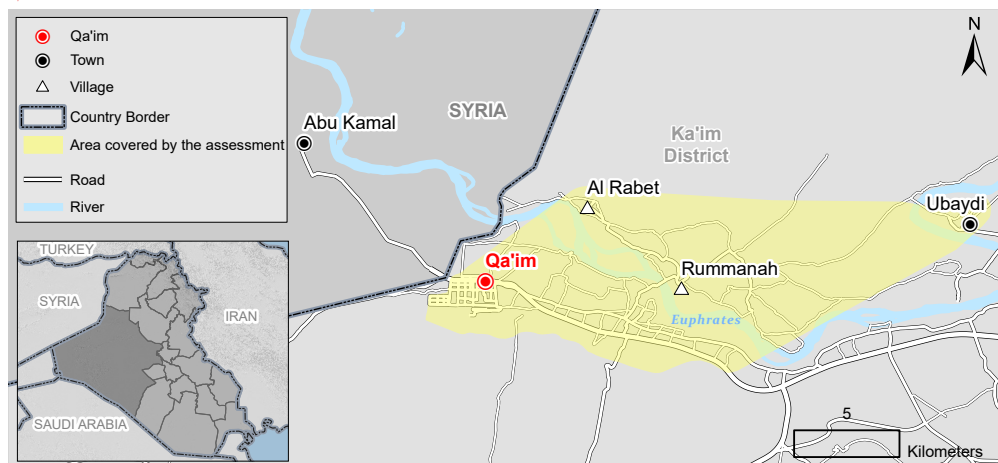
Overview

Qa'im is one of the major urban centres in western Anbar governorate, situated about 330 kilometres northwest of Baghdad and strategically located at the border between Syria and Iraq, opposite from the Syrian city Abu Kamal. Qa'im is the capital of the district of the same name, which largely consists of open desert. The city lies on the shores of the Euphrates river and is surrounded by fertile agricultural lands. Economic activity focuses on cross-border trade as well as the oil and cement industries.¹ Prior to 2014, the primarily Sunni Arab population of Qa'im city was estimated to be between 150,000 and 190,000 people.²

Qa'im came under control of the group known as the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) in June 2014.³ The Government of Iraq (GoI) re-established control over Qa'im in November 2017, making it one of the last urban centres to be retaken from ISIL in Iraq.⁴ The area saw two primary waves of displacement, first when around half of Qa'im district displaced as ISIL established control over the area, and again during military operations to return Qa'im to GoI control.⁵ The estimated population of the district during ISIL occupation was 60,000 people.⁶

Since the GoI re-established control over the area, an increasing number of displaced individuals have reportedly returned to Qa'im city, with an estimated 90,000 returnees at the time of data collection.⁷ Given the limited information available regarding the current situation in al Qa'im and surrounding areas, REACH - in partnership with the Returns Working Group (RWG) - launched a follow-up⁸ Rapid Overview of Areas of Return (ROAR) assessment in July 2018, which seeks to inform the recovery process in order to support durable and safe returns. The ROAR assessment looks at the motivations behind return, along with the current context related to protection issues, livelihoods and the provision of basic services in areas of Iraq that are experiencing returns.

Qa'im, Anbar Governorate



Key Findings

Displacement and Return, Protection Concerns

- The main reasons given by returnee key informants (KIs) for coming back to the area were a perceived improvement in security in Qa'im and inadequate living conditions in their areas of displacement. Among KIs remaining in displacement, **the main reasons given for not returning were a lack of basic services in the area of origin (AoO), a lack of safety in the AoO, and insufficient funds to return.**
- Most returnee KIs reported feeling safe in their current areas, though some raised concerns over possible attacks from ISIL. The city and agricultural lands were perceived to be largely cleared of explosive hazards.
- Displaced families with perceived affiliation to ISIL are reportedly not being allowed to return by local authorities.**

Livelihoods

- Livelihood opportunities were reportedly very limited in the area, with few people working in agriculture.** KIs indicated that those without a sufficient income relied on aid or were resorting to negative coping mechanisms, such as selling possessions.

Access to Basic Services

- Electricity from the public grid was reportedly not available in Qa'im and surrounding areas,** due to damage to the network. As a result, residents were relying on community generators, which not all residents could afford.
- The piped water network in Qa'im was reported to be functional. However, **the water from the network was said to be available for only a few hours per week and was not being treated.** KIs indicated that residents were getting sick from drinking the untreated water.
- Healthcare facilities were reportedly functional in Qa'im, but there was said to be a lack of doctors and specialised healthcare,** with limited capacity for surgeries and healthcare for pregnant women. Additionally, KIs indicated that there was limited availability of medicines.
- Most children in Qa'im were said to be able to access formal education. However, KIs indicated that **the number of functioning schools, teachers and materials was insufficient.** Furthermore, classrooms were said to be overcrowded.
- Waste disposal services were reportedly available. However, the municipality was said to have insufficient personnel, leading to infrequent house-to-house waste collection.

¹ INSO Iraq, Qa'im District Assessment, April 2018. ² Based on: WFP, "Inter-agency Rapid Assessment in Al Qaim", May 2014; Human Appeal, "Rapid Needs Assessment Western Anbar", Nov 2017; and an estimate by a community leader.

³ Business insider, "Sunni Militants Captured A Crucial Iraq-Syria Border Crossing", June 2014. ⁶ Ibidem.

⁴ Al Jazeera, "ISIL loses al-Qaim in Iraq and Deir Az Zor in Syria", November 2017.

⁵ IRC, "Multi-Sectoral Needs Assessment, Western Anbar, Qaim and Anah", January 2018.

⁷ Number based on estimates of a community leader KI.

⁸ REACH conducted a rapid assessment in Qa'im, Ana and Ru'ua in September 2017.

Methodology

REACH enumerators collected data from 22 male and 7 female KIs,⁹ including 7 returnee residents, 1 non-displaced resident, 9 KIs from Qa'im who remained displaced outside of Qa'im district and 12 KIs with specialist knowledge in one of the sectors covered by the assessment (see Table 1). Respondents were identified through partners and REACH KI networks. Data collection took place 10-12 July 2018 through remote telephone interviews.

Limitations

Findings should be interpreted as indicative rather than statistically generalisable to the assessed area. Furthermore, KIs often provided estimates rather than exact figures, which should also be taken into consideration when interpreting the findings.

Table 1: Number and profession of KIs with specialist knowledge

| Area | Number | Profession |
|----------------|--------|----------------------------------------------------------|
| Protection | 2 | Community leader, International Organisation (IO) worker |
| Livelihoods | 1 | Local government worker |
| Education | 2 | Education professionals |
| Healthcare | 3 | Non-governmental organisation (NGO) healthcare workers |
| Water | 2 | Local government worker and NGO water expert |
| Electricity | 1 | Local government worker |
| Waste Disposal | 1 | Local government worker |

Movement Intentions

Current Trends

At the time of data collection, a community leader estimated the population of Qa'im city to be 115,000. According to the same KI, 90,000 of these were returnees and 25,000 non-displaced people, while 70,000 were still living in displacement.¹⁰ In addition, another KI with specialist knowledge of protection (protection KI) estimated that there were approximately 300 refugee families from Syria living in Qa'im.

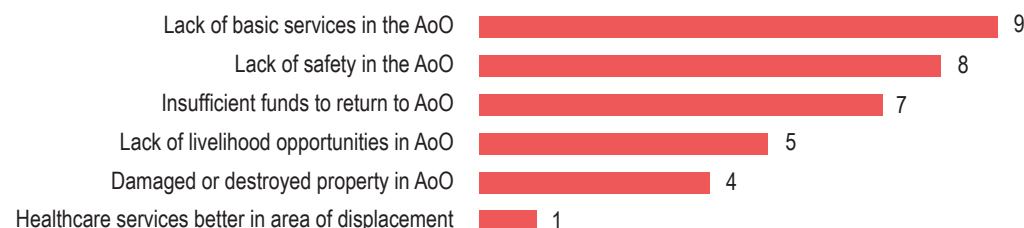
Instances of secondary displacement were highlighted by five out of seven returnee KIs and a community leader, with people said to be displacing again due to damaged shelters, limited availability of basic services, and a lack of livelihood opportunities. A community leader highlighted that around 150 families had displaced a second time after returning. These individuals were said to be either returning to IDP camps or to cities in which they had found livelihood opportunities, such as Erbil and Sulaymaniyah.

The KIs who had returned to Qa'im reportedly made use of rental cars or buses provided by the authorities to make the journey. Costs for car rental differed considerably, with KIs paying between 45,000 to 450,000 IQD (38 to 378 USD),¹¹ depending on the travel distance to Qa'im. One returnee KI reported that families needed to pay between 35,000 to 40,000 IQD (29 to 34 USD)¹² for buses provided by the authorities, while another returnee KI indicated that buses were free. All returnee KIs indicated that security clearance from local authorities was required, both in their areas of displacement and in Qa'im, before being allowed to return.

Why are IDPs not returning?

IDP KIs were asked what factors caused them to remain in displacement. The most frequently reported barrier to return was a lack of basic services in the AoO (reported by all IDP KIs), with KIs specifically mentioning insufficient availability of water and electricity. Furthermore, KIs highlighted a lack of security in their areas of origin (8 of 9 KIs) and insufficient funds to return (7 of 9 KIs) as reasons for not returning. The latter factor was also linked to the lack of services, with KIs highlighting that they did not have enough money for covering the costs needed for obtaining water and electricity in Qa'im. In addition, KIs stressed that there was a lack of livelihood opportunities (5 of 9 KIs) and that they could not return due to damaged or destroyed property (4 of 9 KIs). Lastly, one KI said that healthcare facilities in the area of displacement were better than in Qa'im.

Figure 1: Reasons reported by IDP KIs (9 in total) for not returning to their AoO¹³



Why are residents returning?

Returnee KIs were asked what factors had led them to return (see Figure 2). The most common responses were perceived improvements to safety (4 of 7 KIs) and a lack of adequate living conditions in their areas of displacement (3 of 7 KIs). Regarding the latter factor, KIs mentioned the hot weather in IDP camps in Falluja and Ramadi. Furthermore, out-of-camp IDP KIs reported high rents in the area of displacement. Other KIs returned because they had the opportunity to return to their former jobs in Qa'im (2 of 7 KIs), with one KI mentioning that he was told that he would lose his job in the public sector if he did not return to the city. Lastly, two KIs mentioned that they wanted to return to their homes and families.

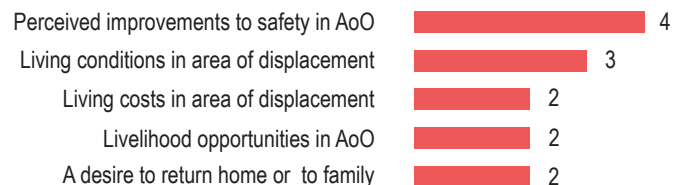
⁹ The assessment aimed to have an equal number of male and female KIs. however, given the context in Qa'im (and western Anbar generally), only seven female KIs could be identified by the assessment team.

¹⁰ Given the remote location of Qa'im, accurate population figures were difficult to obtain. These figures are based on an estimation by a community leader. However, this estimate differs from figures reported by the [IOM DTM](#). According to the DTM there were 26,928 returnees for Qa'im district, as of 15 July 2018.

¹¹ Price converted using [www.xe.com](#) 18 July 2018. ¹² Price converted using [www.xe.com](#) 18 July 2018. ¹³ KIs could provide more than one answer.



Figure 2: Reasons reported by returnee KIs (7 in total) for returning to their AoO¹⁴



How are residents getting information?

In terms of how displaced people were receiving information about their AoO, the most commonly cited source among both IDPs and returnees was telephone calls or social media contact with friends or family living in the AoO. Furthermore, KIs mentioned visiting their AoO or getting information through people in the area of displacement with knowledge on their AoO.

Damage to infrastructure and housing

During the recent crisis, Qa'im and its surrounding areas sustained significant damage. Government buildings, schools, and markets were destroyed, and two hospitals, the electricity network, and water infrastructure were severely damaged towards the end of the conflict.¹⁵ A community leader indicated that around 20% of houses in Qa'im were destroyed, and another 15% were damaged. In line with these estimates, four of seven IDP KIs reported that their houses in Qa'im were either damaged or destroyed.

Actors providing services

The GoI was said to be providing school materials, medicines and medical equipment for healthcare facilities. KIs also reported humanitarian and development actors to be active in Qa'im. The assistance reportedly being provided in the city included:

- Food and water distributions
- Repairs of damage to schools and the water network
- Legal counselling
- Primary healthcare
- Provision of materials and equipment for education, electricity and solid waste collection services
- Emergency livelihood projects
- Cleaning rubble from damaged and destroyed buildings and infrastructure

Protection Concerns

Perceptions of Safety and Social Cohesion

- Most returnee and non-displaced KIs reported feeling safe in their current areas due to the presence of security actors, such as the ISF and Popular Mobilisation Units (PMU). However, according to a protection KI, Qa'im residents still had concerns regarding attacks from ISIL in the city, which was also highlighted by one returnee and one non-displaced KI. Another returnee KI stressed that there was still military activity at the border between Iraq and Syria. According to recent news reports, artillery shelling and ISIL-related security incidents are still occurring in the vicinity of Qa'im city.¹⁶
- According to a community leader and a protection KI, the city and agricultural lands were perceived to be largely cleared of explosive hazards. However, the desert surrounding Qa'im city was said to remain contaminated.
- Throughout the assessment, KIs indicated that families with perceived affiliation to ISIL faced significant barriers to return, both due to fear of retaliation, as well as local authorities not providing them with clearance to return. According to a protection KI, people with perceived affiliation to ISIL had been sporadically attacked by other residents. In addition, a community leader reported that displaced families with perceived affiliation to ISIL were not being permitted to return. These findings are in line with a recent Human Rights Watch report, which found that authorities were preventing individuals with suspected affiliation with ISIL from returning to Anbar governorate.¹⁷

Freedom of Movement

- KIs from Qa'im and surrounding villages indicated that there was a curfew from sundown to sunrise, which was implemented by security actors in the area. Permission from the local police was reportedly required for any movements during the night.
- Most KIs reported that they did not avoid any areas within Qa'im city. However, one KI mentioned that residents do not go close to the border crossing with Syria, because residents consider it to be a military zone. Furthermore, a protection KI noted that the border with Syria was closed at the time of data collection.

Legal Concerns

- KIs reported that the court in Qa'im had recently resumed, though it was hosted in the former post office as the courthouse building was destroyed. According to a protection KI, there were two judges at the time of data collection. This KI further highlighted that the court was overwhelmed with requests from residents, leading to long waiting times. Residents reportedly needed approval from a judge before being allowed to replace or renew legal documentation.

¹⁴ KIs could provide more than one answer.

¹⁵ Al Bawaba, "At least 25% of Al-Qaim in Iraq 'Totally Destroyed' After ISIS", November 2017; Logistics Cluster, "Logistics Assessment Report Al Qaim, western Anbar", November 2017; Human Appeal, "Rapid Needs Assessment Western Anbar", November 2017.

¹⁶ Education for Peace in Iraq Center, "ISHM: June 51 – 21, 2018", June 2018; Al-Monitor, "Border calm precarious as Iraq's Anbar revives, slowly", July 2018.

¹⁷ Human Rights Watch, "Iraq: Displaced Families Blocked from Returning", June 2018.



- According to returnee KIs, many people from Qa'im and surrounding areas lost civil and property documentation as a result of the crisis. Respondents reported that there was a functional office in Qa'im where residents could request or renew civil documentation. However, for replacing or renewing passports, residents reportedly need to go to Ramadi.
- KIs reported damaged, destroyed, and looted property in the area. According to one KI, there was a local committee that was registering cases of damaged, destroyed and looted property. However, no compensation for issues related to property had reportedly been received by residents at the time of data collection.
- A protection KI said that families with perceived affiliation to ISIL were not allowed to renew or replace official documentation.

Improvements Suggested by KIs

A community leader highlighted that more judges were needed for dealing with the large caseload faced by the court.

Livelihoods

- According to returnee KIs, livelihood opportunities were limited in the area, although estimations of the number of households without a consistent income differed. According to one returnee KI, around 80% of the working-age population did not have a stable income. Another said that 20% of the working-age population did not have an income at all. Those working were said to be primarily employed in the public sector. Furthermore, residents were reported to be working in agriculture, shops, and as daily workers. In addition, a development actor reportedly implemented an emergency livelihoods project for clearing rubble.
- A KI with expert knowledge of the livelihoods context highlighted that the lack of electricity provision through the public grid was affecting the availability of livelihoods, such as car mechanics not being able to perform their jobs effectively. In addition, this KI said that factories in the vicinity of Qa'im were reportedly closed due to damage. Another KI indicated that trade between Syria and Iraq was limited, because the border was closed.
- The number of people working in agriculture had reportedly decreased compared to the pre-ISIL period. Several returnee KIs indicated that around 75% of the working-age population used to work in agriculture, while only 40% reportedly did so at the time of data collection. KIs mentioned that they were not able to water their lands because the cost of running generators was too high. One returnee KI reported that many people working in agriculture were only able to grow crops for their own consumption.

- Households without sufficient income were reportedly relying on support from relatives, the community or humanitarian organisations. In addition, returnee KIs reported that people were borrowing money or selling possessions as a coping mechanism. One KI also said that an organisation was providing cash assistance to female-headed households without an income.

Improvements Suggested by KIs

According to KIs, factories in the area need to be rebuilt in order to provide employment opportunities. In addition, returnee KIs highlighted that the agricultural sector needs support, especially with regards to electricity provision.

Basic Services

Main service gaps and needs

A community leader was asked which services need to be restored or rehabilitated most urgently. He highlighted that **repairing the public grid electricity network should be prioritized**. Other priorities highlighted by a community leader were **the need for improvements to the piped water network and the need for better healthcare facilities**.

Electricity

- Electricity from the public grid was reportedly not available in Qa'im and surrounding areas, due to damage to the electrical network. According to a KI with expert knowledge of electricity provision (electricity KI), the transformers outside of the city were damaged during the crisis. As a result, residents were said to rely entirely on community and private generators.
- Returnee KIs indicated that community generators cost 12,000 IQD (10 USD)¹⁸ per ampere¹⁹ for one month. Electricity from these generators was reportedly only available between 12PM to 4PM and from 7PM to 11PM every day.
- According to KIs, not all residents were able to afford electricity from the community generators. According to three returnee KIs, around 10-20% of residents were not able to afford electricity. Indeed, seven IDP KIs stressed that they had not returned because accessing electricity was believed to be too expensive in Qa'im. Those without access reportedly relied on alternatives, such as oil lamps and solar powered devices which they brought from IDP camps.
- According to an electricity KI, an organisation provided generators to mosques and residents. This KI said that at the time of data collection no actors were working on fixing the electricity network.

¹⁸ Price converted using www.xe.com 18 July 2018.

¹⁹ The number of amperes purchased determines how many appliances can be used at once. If that allotment is exceeded, a communal fusebox automatically cuts power to that house, requiring the switch to be thrown manually. On average households use 3-5 amperes per month.



Improvements Suggested by KIs

A community leader highlighted that electricity was the top priority need for Qa'im. According to an electricity KI, the public electricity network needs to be repaired by humanitarian or development organisations, because there was not enough money available from the GoI.

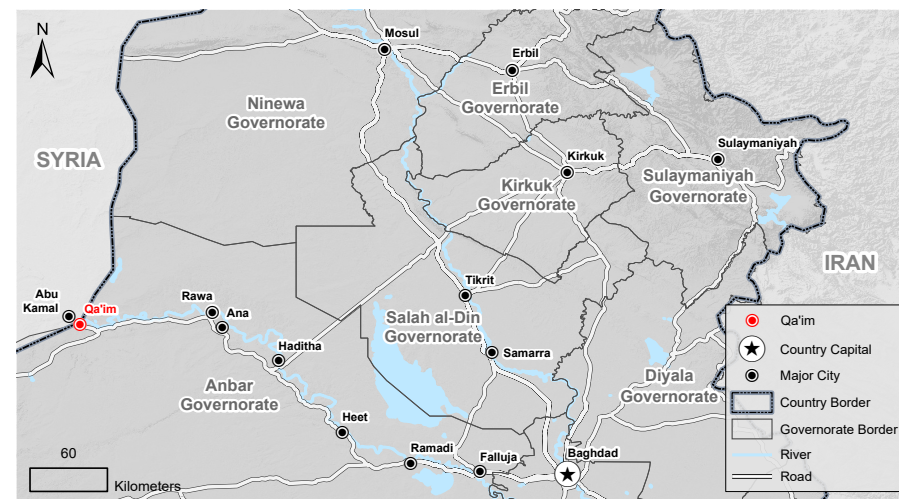
Water

- According to two KIs with specialist knowledge of water provision (water KIs), the piped water network in Qa'im was functional. Damage to the water pipes resulting from the recent crisis was said to have been repaired to a large extent. At the time of data collection, 20 water pump stations reportedly still needed to be repaired, while eight were said to be functional. Furthermore, equipment, such as generators, was reported to have been looted during the recent crisis. At the time of data collection there was reportedly no functioning water treatment plant, with water being sourced directly from the Euphrates river.
- Qa'im residents reportedly only had access to water from the piped water network for three to four hours every two to three days. Water KIs highlighted that the limited availability was caused by a lack of public electricity for running the pumps. As a result, the pumps were running on generators, for which there was reportedly limited fuel available. There was reportedly a need for 300,000 litres of fuel each month, but only 120,000 litres were being provided by the GoI. Around 10% of the population in the surrounding area of Qa'im was not connected to the piped water network, according to KIs.
- Residents reportedly had filtration systems at home, or were drinking water directly from the tap. In addition, two returnee KIs mentioned that trucked water could be purchased for 8,000 IQD (7 USD)²⁰ per 2,000 litres. Humanitarian organisations were also said to have distributed water bottles and chlorination tablets.
- According to one water KI, residents were suffering from diarrhoea, skin diseases and eye irritation from the water. A healthcare KI also reported that diarrhoea caused by drinking water was a frequent occurrence at the time of data collection.

Improvements Suggested by KIs

According to water KIs, new generators, fuel, water treatment materials and other equipment are needed to improve access to potable water.

Map 2: Qa'im in relation to Ana, Ramadi, Haditha, Baghdad or Erbil



Healthcare

- According to KIs with specialist knowledge of healthcare (healthcare KIs), most residents in Qa'im and surrounding villages had access to healthcare facilities, including two functional public hospitals and six private doctors. One of the public hospitals is located in the nearby town of al Ubaydi, whilst the other is located in Qa'im itself. Both hospitals were reportedly damaged during the recent conflict. However, damage was said to have been partially repaired by humanitarian organisations. Furthermore, a couple of organisations were providing basic healthcare, including support to the public hospitals.
- Healthcare KIs reported a shortage of doctors in the area, leading to long wait times. These KIs further mentioned a lack of specialised healthcare. The public hospital in al Ubaydi reportedly had no specialist doctors and no capacity for surgeries at the time of data collection, while the hospital in Qa'im was said to have five specialized doctors, including a surgeon, orthopaedist, internist, gynaecologist and paediatrician. However, one health KI mentioned that these specialists were only available at Qa'im hospital during half of the month, because they reside in other cities in Iraq. In addition, a humanitarian organisation was said to be providing psychosocial support services.
- Two healthcare KIs highlighted that there was not enough capacity for surgeries and healthcare for pregnant women. When specific healthcare services were not available in Qa'im, patients reportedly travelled to Ana, Ramadi, Haditha, Baghdad or Erbil (see Map 2).



- According to healthcare KIs, there was sufficient healthcare equipment available at the healthcare facilities. Furthermore, there were reportedly two ambulances available for emergency services.
- A consultation at the public hospital was said to cost 3,000 IQD (3 USD), while private clinics cost 10,000 IQD (8 USD).²¹
- There were reported to be pharmacies in the area, but they did not have sufficient supplies of medicines. Those medicines that were available were reportedly more expensive than during the pre-ISIL period. The GoI and humanitarian organisations were also reportedly distributing medicines.

Improvements Suggested by KIs

Healthcare KIs indicated that medicines, more doctors and other healthcare personnel were needed, including sufficient funds to cover salaries.

Education

- According to two KIs with specialist knowledge of education (education KIs), most children had access to formal education. However, both KIs also highlighted that the number of functional schools was not sufficient, with only 40% of schools operational. Those schools that were not operational had reportedly been destroyed, damaged or looted during the recent crisis. In addition, some schools were said to have been used by armed groups.
- Education KIs and returnee KIs indicated that classrooms were overcrowded – with more than 65 students per class at times – and that schools were operating in shifts.
- The number of available teachers was said to be insufficient to meet educational needs, with many teachers reportedly still displaced. In addition, education KIs indicated that school materials were also lacking, especially books, despite distributions of school materials by the GoI and humanitarian organisations.
- Most students reportedly walked to school, although some students live far away from schools. An education KI reported that some female students, who needed to be accompanied when travelling due to cultural norms, were not attending school due to the walking distance. Furthermore, a returnee and non-displaced KI reported that some families did not have sufficient funds for sending their children to school.

Improvements Suggested by KIs

Education KIs said that more education materials were needed, such as books. In addition, they highlighted that teachers need to return, schools need to be rebuilt, and buses should be provided for transportation of students.

Waste Disposal Services

- Municipal waste disposal services were reportedly available across all of Qa'im. According to a KI with specialist knowledge of waste disposal services (waste KI), solid waste was collected from house to house for free every one to two weeks. Waste was reportedly dumped by the municipality 3km south of Qa'im in the desert.
- There was reportedly a lack of sufficient personnel for waste collection. As a result, waste collection was said to be insufficient to meet the needs of the population. Three returnee KIs indicated that waste collection did not occur often enough, with one saying that solid waste was collected even less frequently in areas further away from Qa'im centre.
- A development organisation was said to be providing materials, such as trucks, to be used by the municipality for waste disposal services. This organisation also reportedly helped with cleaning rubble from damaged houses and other infrastructure.

Improvements Suggested by KIs

A waste KI said that around 250 workers were needed, but at the time of data collection only 45 people were working for the municipal waste disposal service. He expressed that trucks, tractors, bulldozers and other equipment were needed. In addition, more waste containers were needed for households in Qa'im.

About REACH

REACH facilitates the development of information tools and products that enhance the capacity of aid actors to make evidence-based decisions in emergency, recovery and development contexts. All REACH activities are conducted through inter-agency aid coordination mechanisms.

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About the Returns Working Group (RWG) Iraq

The Returns Working Group (RWG) is an operational and multi-stakeholder platform on returns, which was established in line with Strategic Objective 3 of the 2016 Iraq HRP “to support voluntary, safe and dignified return” of IDPs; to monitor and report on conditions in return areas, and determine to what extent durable solutions have been achieved- or progress made- for returnees.

The key objective of the group is to establish coherence of information, data and analysis, strengthen coordination and advocacy, give guidance on activities related to the key areas, and enhance complementary action among its partners with the overall goal of supporting and reinforcing the national response to Iraq's coming reintegration challenge.

