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**Swiss Agency for Development  
and Cooperation SDC**

**Protection**

# Swiss Cooperation Programme Middle East

Switzerland supports efforts  
to find Durable Solutions for  
the people of Iraq

## Swiss Cooperation Programme Middle East

Switzerland's work in the region focuses on four key themes:

- Protection & Migration
- Education & Income
- Conflict Prevention & Peace Promotion
- Water and Sanitation

Switzerland cooperates with partner organisations to implement projects; funds the United Nations (UN) to work on key themes and deploys Swiss experts to support the UN. These experts are strategically placed to increase the capacity of the UN in key cooperation areas and are part of the Swiss Humanitarian Aid Unit (SHA).

### What are Durable Solutions?

According to the UN a durable solution is "achieved when the displaced no longer have any specific assistance and protection needs that are linked to their displacement and can enjoy their human rights without discrimination on account of their displacement. It can be achieved through return, local integration and resettlement." It is the primary solution to achieve lasting protection for refugees or IDPs.

Swiss experts provide emergency aid to people in need across the globe, no matter whether they are affected by natural disaster or conflict. The specialists implement direct projects of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and support governments and United Nations agencies in alleviating suffering, wherever needed.

One such secondee is Marjolaine Greentree. She has been with the SHA since 2014 and supported the United Nations Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator in Iraq with her extensive experience in finding Durable Solutions for internally displaced persons (IDPs) from September 2019 to August 2020. "During my secondment, I was able to elaborate a plan for Durable Solutions for IDPs in Iraq," the senior advisor on Durable Solutions explains during a Skype interview from her current deployment in Amman. "I was pleased to see the plan being endorsed in spring 2020 and a Durable Solution Taskforce being launched," she says. "However, there are still some stumbling blocks that have hindered the process, but I am confident that the Government, the United Nations, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and the donors are committed to working together to find Durable Solutions for the IDPs."



### **What do 'Durable Solutions' for IDPs exactly look like? Returns seen as the main option**

In Iraq, where just under 1.4 million people remain displaced and over four million are in need of humanitarian aid, the most difficult predicament are families with perceived affiliations to extremist groups who face not only formal barriers to return, but also rejection by people at home. "Unfortunately in Iraq, the option of local integration or resettlement elsewhere is not so much considered and returns to the places of origin seem the main option," Marjolaine clarifies. However, such returns are often impossible as conditions do not allow the people to return to their homes. Houses are still destroyed or occupied, tribal feuds are ongoing, and people

are discriminated for their perceived affiliations to extremist groups such as the Islamic State (IS). "Most of the IDPs are women heading a household with children. Their alleged affiliation is sometimes just having a father, a husband or a brother who was with IS and is currently missing, dead or in prison. These families cannot go back to their communities for the obvious reasons," Marjolaine explains.

The optimal goal of finding Durable Solutions is not just to put the IDPs back into their communities of origin. "We have to work in a way that the affected people are at the core of our process. They should have the same rights as the citizens of their chosen location without any discrimination which is related to their

displacement stages.”

Marjolaine worked on the plan for almost one year and even though it was not all plain sailing, her inputs certainly bore fruit: her meticulously written report was endorsed and implemented across the country and was not only limited to pilot locations as previously envisaged. “Various UN agencies have adopted Durable Solutions as an end to protracted displacement as a common objective, and NGOs are now receiving funds allocated to it, which is a great step in the right direction.”

### **Testimonial of a 20-year-old woman named Eman:**

Eman has never heard a sound in her life as she was born with an incurable deafness. She lives with her family in a small town in East Iraq.

“My father used to isolate me from society due to the fact that I am a woman with disabilities. He used to say that norms and customs do not allow us to go out and socialise, so I lived completely alone. I relied on myself in order to develop my talents, especially in drawing and handicraft. Painting was my life; it helps me escape the reality I live in.”

Disabled people usually endure psychosocial suffering as well as economical difficulty. This is especially true for women, who face challenges in accessing education or finding a job. The Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) is able to provide a full range of protection services for vulnerable people like Eman. This includes case management,



psychosocial support, information sessions, legal service, tailored cash assistance to support individual protection needs and where needed, referral to medical partners.

“A staff member from DRC visited me at my home and found me in distress. He invited me to the DRC community center to attend the painting sessions. After some very long and hard conversations, finally my father allowed me to go to the community centre, on the condition that my mother accompanies me. I started to teach other children to paint and practice my favorite hobby with ease and freedom.”

For people like Eman, who have had to endure conflict and displacement as well as the added challenges that come with being a woman with disabilities in Iraq, such assistance represents a

vital lifeline to the outside world, a safe space and hope for the future.

"Having people and organisations care for those like me gives us hope. I am working now and have a dream of having my paintings see the light and others will see them too. I will be seen as an artist who overcame her disability.

## **Durable Solutions vs Nexus**

Durable Solutions is a reasonably new field and one of the founding fathers is the Swiss humanitarian and international human rights lawyer, Professor Walter Kälin. He has been concerned with the future of IDPs for over a decade and in 2010 developed the Framework for Durable Solutions for IDPs and the Operational Guidelines on Human Rights and Natural Disasters. "Protection for IDPs ultimately entails ensuring a durable solution to their plight. Yet, the difficulties it takes to achieve them cannot be underestimated. Durable Solutions are not simple solutions, because they are usually linked to larger struggles," Kälin writes in his foreword to the framework. "Professor Kälin's work is brilliant as he has redefined Durable Solutions. Thanks to his efforts, we are now at the forefront of installing them soundly into UN policies and joint programming," Marjolaine observes.

It is obvious that Marjolaine is passionate about her work and what she has done in the field of Durable Solutions, however, her secondment in Iraq was not always easy. "It was one of the most difficult missions of my life. I was not affiliated to a specific programme, which on one hand

gave me a lot of freedom, but on the other hand made me feel a bit lonely at times," she says remembering that she also felt slightly stressed as she was expected to come up with the goods and develop a sustainable plan. "It was a mix of anxiety and exhilaration, but in the end my plan was successful, and I could leave in a good way," she comments.

After a year in Iraq, Marjolaine now lives next door in the Jordanian capital Amman, where she is directly employed by the SDC working on the protection portfolio. "Of course, I am still emotionally involved in my work in Iraq as it was very intense and interesting," she says. However, she is also very excited to start her new position as Regional Protection Advisor at the Swiss Cooperation Office in Amman. "The protection file related to the Syria and Iraq crises is thick and complex, but the relation between Durable Solutions and Protection is becoming increasingly apparent, and I am really looking forward to taking on this task."

Marjolaine started working with IDPs in 1986 in Lebanon. Over the years, Marjolaine gained her experience while working with various UN agencies, ICRC and Food Security global cluster. Prior to working as a Regional Protection Advisor in Amman, Marjolaine did two secondments to the UN for SDC. Her biggest challenge is starting a regional position in times of COVID-19 especially that the situation in Iraq remains very difficult, especially for the IDPs.



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