

# Evaluation of the Funding Facility for Stabilization in Iraq

## Volume 1: Final Evaluation Report

<b>Name of the evaluation intervention</b>	<b>Funding Facility for Stabilization in Iraq</b>
<b>Time frame of the evaluation</b>	<b>2015-2019</b>
<b>Date of the report</b>	<b>12<sup>th</sup> July 2021</b>
<b>Country of evaluation intervention</b>	<b>Iraq</b>
<b>Names and organizations of evaluators</b>	<b>AARC Ltd in Association with Tana Copenhagen</b> Kimiko Hibri Pedersen, Team leader Khaldun Kobba, Monitoring and Evaluation Nadia Masri-Pedersen, Gender equality, human rights-based approach and social cohesion
<b>Name of the organization commissioning the evaluation</b>	<b>UNDP Iraq</b>

## PROJECT AND EVALUATION INFORMATION DETAILS

Project Information		
<b>Project title</b>	<b>Funding Facility for Stabilization (FFS)</b>	
<b>Atlas ID</b>	<b>00089459</b>	
<b>Corporate outcome and output</b>	<b>UNDP Strategic Plan 2018-2021 Output 1.1.2.</b> Marginalized groups, particularly the poor, women, and people with disabilities and displaced are empowered to gain universal access to basic services and financial and non-financial assets to build productive capacities and benefit from sustainable livelihoods and jobs.	
<b>Country</b>	<b>Iraq</b>	
<b>Region</b>	<b>Arab States</b>	
<b>Date project document signed</b>	<b>11 June 2015</b>	
<b>Project dates</b>	<b>Start</b>	<b>Planned end</b>
	<b>May 2015</b>	<b>31 December 2023</b>
<b>Project budget</b>	- Resources required: <b>US\$ 1,880,000,000</b> - Resources mobilized (as of 31 May 2021): <b>US\$ 1,405,308,512</b>	
<b>Project expenditure at the time of evaluation</b>	- May 2015- 31 Dec 2019: <b>US\$ 723,461,484</b> - May 2015- 31 May 2021: <b>US\$ 973,252,669</b>	
<b>Funding source</b>	<b>28 countries including Government of Iraq</b>	
<b>Implementing party</b>	<b>UNDP</b>	

## EVALUATION INFORMATION

Evaluation information		
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Final/midterm review/other	Mid-term review	
Period under evaluation	<b>Start</b>	<b>End</b>
	May 2015	31 Dec 2019
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## ABBREVIATIONS

BoQ	Bill of Quantities
CAP	Contract, Asset and Procurement
CAPI	Computer assisted personal interviewing
CBO	Community-Based Organisation
CfW	Cash for Work
COMSEC	Council of Ministers Secretariat
CPD	Country Programme Document
DTM	Displacement Tracking Matrix
EMT	Evaluation Management Team
EQ	Evaluation Question
FFS	Funding Facility for Stabilization
FFES	Funding Facility for Expanded Stabilization
FFIS	Funding Facility for Immediate Stabilization
FGD	Focus Group Discussions
HR	Human Resource
H&S	Health and Safety
HRBA	Human Rights Based Approach
IDP	Internally Displaced People
IDMC	Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre
IED	Improvised explosive devices
IOM	International Organization for Migration
ISIL	Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant
ISO	International Standards Organization
IT	Information technology
KRG	Kurdistan Regional Government
LTA	Long Term Agreements
MSA	Municipal Stabilization Advisors
NDP	National Development Plan
NRC	Norwegian Refugee Council
OECD/DAC	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development/Development Assistance Committee
PCC	Provincial Command Cells

PHC	Primary Health Care Center
PMC	Programme Management Costs
PRS	Poverty Reduction Strategy
PPS	Probability Proportional Sample
PSU	Primary Sampling Unit
PWD	Persons With Disabilities
REFAATO	Reconstruction Fund for Areas Affected by Terroristic Operations
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
SSC	Stabilization Steering Committee
ToR	Terms of Reference
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNDSS	United Nations Department for Safety and Security
UNHCR	United National Higher Commissioner for Refugee
UNMAS	United Nations Mine Action Service
USD	United States Dollars
WHH	Women Headed Households

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Objectives, scope and methods

This external evaluation of the Funding Facility for Stabilization (FFS) covers the period 2015-2019 and was commissioned by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Iraq as FFS was entering its fifth and foreseen last year of implementation. It took place between January and July 2021 in light of postponements linked to the COVID-19 pandemic. The purpose of the evaluation is to provide findings and recommendations that inform decision-making on project implementation in the next and last phase of stabilization support, which was extended to the end of 2023, following the approval of the Stabilization Steering Committee (SSC) in November 2020. The evaluation is outcome-focused. Its specific objectives are i) to assess the extent to which FFS achieved its intended outcome of improving conditions for the return of internally displaced persons (IDPs) to newly liberated areas in line with Outcome 3 of UNDP's Country Programme Document (CPD) 2016-2020, and ii) to provide lessons learned and recommendations. In view of its intention of assessing likely contribution to improved conditions for return, FFS is looked at as a holistic package without examining individual facilities and windows. The evaluation included ten sites across all five targeted governorates, namely, Anbar, Diyala, Kirkuk, Ninewah and Salahadin. It addressed four evaluation criteria (relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability) through six key evaluation questions, one of which is dedicated to the integration of gender equality in implementation. The evaluation relied on a theory-based approach and tested four key hypotheses of FFS in a reconstructed theory of change that differentiates results for three levels of desired change (returnee, community or origin and government/municipal level) and that articulates what is within the sphere of control of FFS (Outputs) and its sphere of influence (Outcomes). Four data collection streams were used covering 323 stakeholders in qualitative interviews and 1005 returnees in a survey as follows:

- A documentary review of UNDP and external sources
- 78 remote semi-structured interviews with internal and external stakeholders comprising UNDP staff, government stakeholders at national, governorate and local level, some implementing partners, donors and other agencies. 30% of consulted stakeholders were women.
- 23 face to face semi-structured interviews with heads of rehabilitated health and educational facilities and 26 in-country focus group discussions with returnees (8), community leaders (11) and female teachers in visited schools (7), with 34% female representation.
- A survey exclusively targeting returnees in locations of high density of return within the ten evaluation sites with 50% female representation.

### Key findings

**Relevance: To what extent does the project respond to the strategic priorities of the Government of Iraq and UNDP and to changes in the context?**

Conclusion 1. FFS has responded to the strategic priorities of the Government of Iraq in liberated areas and of UNDP priorities with increasing focus on gender equality considerations. It has shown agility in foreseeing and adapting to changes in the context of liberated areas.

**Finding 1.** FFS is aligned to national strategies and responds to the strategic priorities of GoI. It has structures and practices in place that encourage regular interaction with GoI stakeholders including involvement in decision-making.

**Finding 2.** FFS is aligned to UNDP strategic priorities with increasing attention to cross-cutting issues since 2017, particularly gender equality, and contributed to key indicators of the results framework of Country Programme Document 2016-2020.

**Finding 3.** FFS has been able to maintain its relevance to the context over time, expanding its scope rapidly to meet the needs of newly liberated areas while concurrently adapting its organizational capacity. FFS' evolution suggests that the different windows reflect a progression of stabilization work rather than a simultaneous package of interventions.

***Effectiveness: To what extent did the project achieve its intended outputs and outcomes?***

Conclusion 2. FFS delivered its key intended outputs but the implementation of social cohesion activities was not sufficiently targeted and at scale, and strategic communication efforts were not pursued from the onset to support the intention of FFS in expediting returns. Human rights-based approach (HRBA) considerations for ensuring access to people with disabilities were addressed in housing rehabilitation but not integrated systematically into other rehabilitation works. FFS contributed to improving the conditions for the return of IDPs in line with Outcome 3 of CPD 2016-2020 through the rehabilitation of priority infrastructure which was a factor in motivating many IDPs to return. Main reasons for return are however linked to other factors. Living conditions are difficult for many returnees compared to pre-ISIL levels, particularly those with no regular income, but this is closely linked to the dire economic situation in the country and lack of local job opportunities.

*Outputs: What did FFS deliver?*

**Finding 4.** FFS delivered small and larger rehabilitated infrastructure in seven crucial sectors and immediate livelihood opportunities to returnees primarily through Cash for Work (CfW). Apart from housing, rehabilitation design did not systematically integrate considerations for people with disabilities. Despite strengthened communication efforts since 2018, there was little communication on realized outputs to potential returnees to expediate returns.

**Finding 5.** FFS delivered various community level initiatives particularly since 2018 including a few that worked towards facilitating the return of IDPs.

**Finding 6.** FFS rehabilitated governorate and municipal facilities, replenished damaged assets that are vital for the work of municipalities, and deployed Municipal Stabilization Advisors (MSAs) to work with actors at municipal level involved in stabilization work.

*Outcomes: How did FFS contribute to improved conditions?*

**Finding 7.** Through the rehabilitation of priority infrastructure, FFS contributed to motivating the return of IDPs and to building the necessary conditions for the resumption of services. While a partial return to normal life is noted, many returnees experience a deterioration in their living conditions compared to pre-ISIL levels and are challenged by the lack of local job opportunities and inability to meet basic needs.

**Finding 8.** While FFS conducted a range of community initiatives, these were limited and not strongly guided by the overall intention of improving the environment in communities of origin in view of expediting returns. The most pertinent output that has contributed to returns is reconciliation agreements signed that facilitated the return of a modest number of IDPs.

**Finding 9.** In the context of immediate response to most urgent needs for the resumption of municipal services, FFS' replenishment of damaged assets built the basis for municipalities to resume their daily functions (e.g. garbage collection, road maintenance). Attention to building technical capacities (e.g. maintenance of supplied equipment) increased in recent years.

***Effectiveness: How does the project monitor progress on expected outputs and outcomes and generate learning to adjust implementation?***

Conclusion 3. The M&E framework and system were designed to serve the needs of stabilization work. The excel-based system has been effective in generating desired output data but was later challenged by the large and growing number of projects. More attention to outcome level results was introduced in 2017, but this has not yet matured to a level that gives an indication of key outcomes achieved. In addition to FFS learning initiatives, donor led third-party monitoring has been valuable in generating learning and adapting implementation.

**Finding 10.** FFS has a measured multi-layered M&E framework and system that has tracked and demonstrated output level results on speed and scale. However, as the number of projects grew to exceed 3,000, the excel-based system has fallen short in quickly providing needed data, although it continues to feed into FFS' results framework indicators. Attention to outcome-oriented results has increased since 2017 but this has not matured to give an indication of outcomes achieved.

**Finding 11.** M&E data has been used by FFS management to guide decision-making. This has been strongly complemented by donor led third-party monitoring data that played a role in shaping key considerations in the implementation of FFS.

### ***Effectiveness: To what extent did the project integrate and monitor gender equality considerations and instigate change for women?***

Conclusion 4. FFS has made significant progress in integrating gender equality considerations in implementation, monitoring and reporting. It adopted pertinent approaches to drive the gender equality agenda and contributed to larger outreach to women and improved conditions of access to better housing, health and education services and immediate livelihood opportunities.

**Finding 12.** Despite the relative absence of attention to gender equality in the two first years of implementation, significant progress was made from 2017 to 2019 to strategically integrate gender equality considerations through both larger infrastructure rehabilitation and specific projects, particularly livelihoods.

**Finding 13.** FFS has gradually strengthened its M&E system with regards to using gender-disaggregated data for performance indicators to monitor and measure the results of programme interventions on women and girls. However, this was primarily focused on outputs. FFS has good examples of how continuous learning and adaptation of gender mainstreaming activities is done.

**Finding 14.** FFS has contributed to improving the conditions for women and girls in accessing services such as health and education and provided short-term livelihood opportunities for women in selected project locations.

### ***Efficiency: To what extent did the project convert inputs into outputs in a timely manner?***

Conclusion 5. FFS has generally converted its inputs into outputs in a timely manner in the period 2015-2019 despite annual budget consumption not consistently being high and overspending on some budget allocations within the limits of the overall budget. The speed of delivery is satisfactory but does not always match the speed of the earlier phases of FFS.

**Finding 15.** FFS was able to disburse its budget in a satisfactory manner in the period of the evaluation despite average annual spending in some years and overspending on some budget lines without exceeding the overall budget of FFS.

**Finding 16.** FFS has delivered on its mandate of speed and scale, particularly in its earlier phases of implementation. The pace of the procurement process is reasonable and closely monitored but delays are reported by staff and counterparts in recent years.

### ***Sustainability: What is the likelihood that project outcomes will last?***

Conclusion 6. Service provision is likely to continue but the adequacy of service provision compared to pre-ISIL levels and the future functionality of rehabilitated infrastructures are jeopardized. In the complex political

dynamics of Iraq and the worsening economic and fiscal situation, national budget allocations for operation and maintenance are reported to be insufficient, and in some cases absent. At the individual returnee level, most returnees intend to stay, indicating that results are likely to be sustained assuming the security situation does not worsen. However, the likelihood that these results will be sustained is threatened by a risk of secondary displacement for those who are most economically vulnerable.

**Finding 17.** The handover plan of the final phase of FFS includes important considerations that were not addressed in previous iterations. However, the future functionality of rehabilitated infrastructure, as a key element for capitalizing on stabilization gains, is not touched upon. While the ongoing capacity needs assessment will shape the design of activities in the final phase, there is a need to confirm the relevance and utility of some standards and procedures proposed for handover to ensure they can be used within existing Gol systems and procedures.

**Finding 18.** The majority of returnees do not regret having returned and intend to stay. However the scenario of secondary displacement is a likely one, particularly affecting returnees who have no job and/or whose houses were destroyed. The scenario is starting to materialize with observed trends of returnees leaving again.

### Proposed recommendations

**With regard to rehabilitation projects** and in view of capitalizing on FFS' strengths to create positive spill-over effects to livelihood and cross-cutting issues:

**Recommendation 1.** Ensure a more systematic integration of disability considerations in Bill of Quantities (BoQ) development of public infrastructure, which can act as add-on guidance to Gol standards in current and future rehabilitation efforts, preferably with the inclusion of people with disabilities in design considerations.

**Recommendation 2.** Build on FFS' proven competence by pursuing the rehabilitation of economic infrastructures that are commercially viable and promising in their potential for local job creation (including for women) with reliance on green energy in line with UNDP priorities, linking and tailoring skills trainings to potential jobs in these infrastructures as informed by relevant studies.

**Recommendation 3.** Recognizing that the social cohesion pillar has a strategy that guides UNDP Iraq's broader social cohesion work, activities under FFS must be consolidated and re-focused on initiatives that contribute to facilitating the return of IDPs in line FFS' overall intention.

**Recommendation 4.** Maintain focus on housing rehabilitation, as damaged houses continue to be a factor influencing the decision of some returnees to return or leave.

#### **With regards to M&E and exit:**

**Recommendation 5.** Invest in developing an online database to replace the current excel-based system to be handed over to relevant government counterparts while ensuring that the design complements and is aligned to government systems to the extent possible, and that these primary end-users are involved in design and training, and commit to the future maintenance of the database.

#### **In terms of handing over to Gol stakeholders:**

**Recommendation 6.** Expand the number of MSAs or support staff to MSAs to ensure sufficient project capacities to accompany the capacity development needs of municipal actors in the handover phase.

**Recommendation 7.** Engage in dialogue with national government on commitment to operation and maintenance of rehabilitated infrastructures as part of the handover plan to "*reaffirm national ownership of the stabilization process and subsequent responsibility to maintain stabilization gains made under FFS*" (Project document 2020, p. 13) and confirm the future utility of envisaged handover procedures.

# 1. INTRODUCTION

This external evaluation of the Funding Facility for Stabilization (FFS) for the period 2015-2019 was commissioned by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Iraq as FFS was entering its fifth and foreseen last year of implementation. With the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the evaluation was postponed and its implementation (January-July 2021) overlapped with the extension of FFS to 2023. In this context, the purpose, objectives, scope, methodology and methods of the evaluation were discussed and finetuned with the UNDP Evaluation Management Team (EMT) during a series of kick-off and inception meetings held in the period November 2020 and February 2021. Key points affecting the direction of the evaluation compared to the initial Terms of Reference (ToR, Annex 1) include the following:

- The timeframe of the evaluation is unchanged and does not cover the extension of FFS.
- The purpose of the evaluation is to provide findings and recommendations that inform decision-making in view of improving project implementation. This does not include findings and recommendations that shape the transition phase of FFS, namely the FFS project document and the Country Programme Document (CPD) 2020-2024 as initially envisaged, since these were already approved in 2020.
- The eight objectives articulated in the ToR were prioritized in a manner that serves the learning purpose of the primary end-users of the evaluation, namely the UNDP Iraq FFS team. The specific objectives of the evaluation are twofold: i) to assess FFS against Outcome 3 of CPD 2016-2020 (“improved conditions for the safe return of IDPs to liberated areas”), and ii) to provide lessons learned and recommendations for the next phase of FFS (2021-2023). This project evaluation is therefore primarily formative and outcome-focused. The protection dimension of a safe return process is not considered to fall within the scope of FFS.
- The geographic scope of the evaluation covers all five governorates targeted by FFS comprising Anbar, Diyala, Kirkuk, Ninewah and Salahadin. The intention is to ensure that none of the targeted governorates are excluded from the evaluation and that they have the opportunity to contribute to findings.
- The programmatic scope treats FFS as holistic package. Contrary to expectations in the ToR, it does not aim at generating an in-depth analysis on activities and outputs delivered by each of FFS’s facilitates; the funding facility for immediate stabilization (FFIS) and its four windows, and the funding facility for expanded stabilization (FFES). A theory of change (ToC) was reconstructed to reflect this holistic approach.
- The evaluation addresses four out of five Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development/Development Assistance Committee (OECD/DAC) evaluation criteria noted in the ToR, with focus on relevance, effectiveness and sustainability. Coherence was not included in the ToR. Impact questions were reclassified under effectiveness. The scope of efficiency is limited to two specific dimensions.
- Cross-cutting issues prioritize gender equality considerations. Other aspects the evaluation touches upon in terms of the design of FFS include non-discrimination, do no harm and environmental sustainability.
- Data collection approach and tools prioritize the safety of facilitators, enumerators, participants and respondents. Therefore questions on government capacity and legitimacy were only covered to the extent feasible in interviews with government stakeholders.

This evaluation report starts by introducing the context of FFS, its core components and setup, as well as its vision for the remaining period of implementation as a basis for contextualizing recommendations (Chapter 2). It then summarizes key elements of the evaluation purpose and scope (Chapter 3) and approach and methods (Chapter 4), which are further elaborated in annexes. The report then moves on to present key findings by evaluation criteria, highlighting key findings for each evaluation question (Chapter 5). Finally, it concludes with key conclusions (Chapter 6), recommendations for the last phase (Chapter 7) and lessons learned (Chapter 8).

## 2. BACKGROUND

### 2.1 The context and design of FFS

In 2014, the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) captured territories in northern Iraq and started advancing further south. The situation led to one of the country’s main political, social and security crises including a massive displacement wave of over 4 million internally displaced people (IDPs)<sup>1</sup>. Plans to launch a government-led campaign, with support from the Global Coalition against ISIL, for the liberation of ISIL- occupied territories saw the light the same year. Concurrently, plans for the immediate stabilization of newly liberated areas were being drawn as the international community committed to providing rapid assistance to respond to immediate stabilization needs of the Government of Iraq (GoI) in these areas and allow IDPs to return home. The Funding Facility for Stabilization (FFS) was born in 2015 as the Funding Facility for Immediate Stabilization (FFIS). FFIS was the agreed upon mechanism by Coalition Member States, GoI and the UNDP Representative through which the international community could channel funds in support of the government’s immediate stabilization needs in liberated areas. FFIS comprises four windows:

- Window 1: Public works and light infrastructure rehabilitation.
- Window 2: Immediate livelihood support for returning IDPs.
- Window 3: Capacity support for local government to boost their immediate response capacity to cope with challenges arising during stabilization.
- Window 4: Community reconciliation, later renamed social cohesion among targeted communities<sup>2</sup>.

The combination of these four windows was assessed at the time by UNDP and GoI to be the most effective package to address short- and medium-term barriers for IDPs to return home as a key objective<sup>3</sup>.

The initial period of FFIS covered two years (2015-2017). The assumption was that FFIS would support GoI to address immediate stabilization needs and that GoI would take over once the project came to an end. However, given the drastic drop in oil revenues, this assumption did not materialize. FFIS was extended to 2018 and the Funding Facility for Expanded Stabilization (FFES) was put in place in 2016 to support medium scale rehabilitation projects that would generate local jobs and further incentivize IDPs to return, as returns started to pick up. In the revised project document of 2016, FFS became what it is today, the combination of FFIS and FFES.



In the meantime, military operations against ISIL continued and successful efforts led to the liberation of territories under ISIL control in 2017. With the liberation of Mosul in 2017, liberated areas started to experience a larger scale of returns. FFS experienced a hike in funding and portfolio of projects, including a significant

<sup>1</sup> According to the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of IDPs, Iraq has an estimated total of 6 million persons who left their homes in the period 2014-2017.

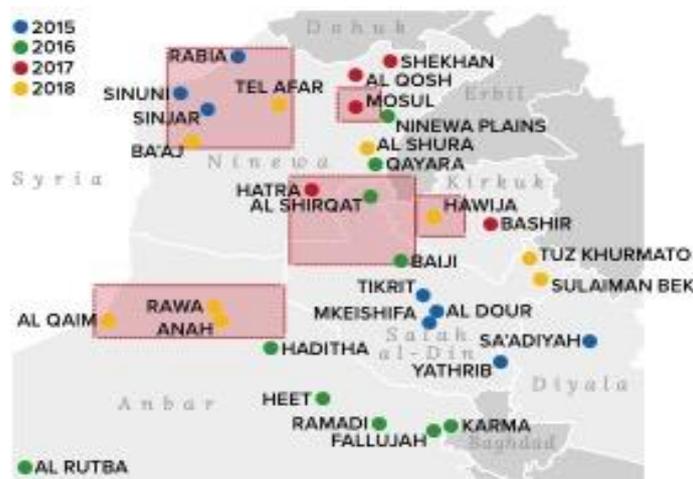
(<https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/Pages/NewsDetail.aspx?NewsID=25557&LangID=E>)

<sup>2</sup> Window 4 slowly started in 2015, was paused in 2017 and resumed in 2018.

<sup>3</sup> UNDP (2018) : FFS Project document, page 4.

expansion of its geographic coverage to meet the needs of newly liberated areas. This prompted a revision of the project document in 2018 with a second extension to 2020. Since 2018, FFS has been operating in 31 locations in five governorates namely Anbar, Diyala, Kirkuk, Ninewah and Salahadin. In light of the difficult context of the country and the need to continue stabilization efforts, FFS was further extended to 2023 by the Stabilization Steering Committee (SCC) when it intends to hand over the stabilization process to Gol.

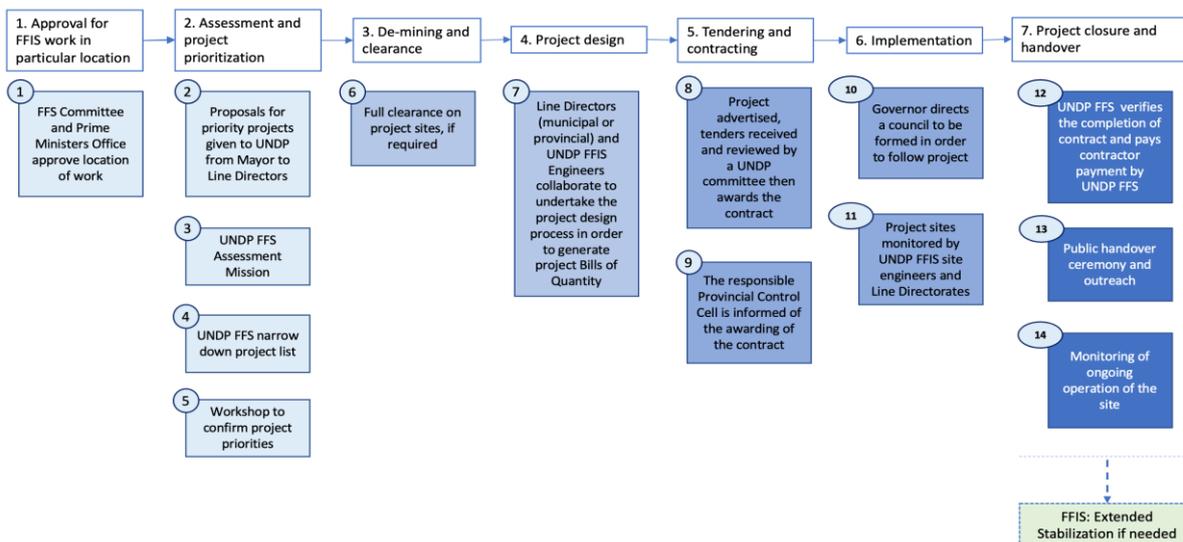
Figure 1: FFS areas of operation by date of liberation (red boxes indicating priority areas)



Source: FFS Quarterly report, 2020

In terms of setup, FFS has a steering committee co-chaired by Gol and UNDP, namely the Secretary General of the Council of Ministers Secretariat (COMSEC) and the Resident Representative of UNDP Iraq. This committee is the highest oversight body of FFS guiding its strategic direction, approving locations and monitoring progress. It includes all of FFS’ donors as members. The FFS team is headed by the Head of Stabilization and managed by a project management team. It has its own dedicated service center to accelerate the procurement process needed for quick stabilization work. The FFS team was initially based in Baghdad. In 2018, the office expanded to Erbil to manage the expanding portfolio of the northern area more closely (Kirkuk, Ninewah, northern Salahadin) while the Baghdad team oversees the portfolio of the central area (Anbar, Diyala, southern Salahadin). FFS liaises with Gol counterparts at the national, governorate and local levels and has a project cycle that works to include Gol stakeholders at the different stages of project identification, implementation and handover.

Figure 2: FFS project cycle



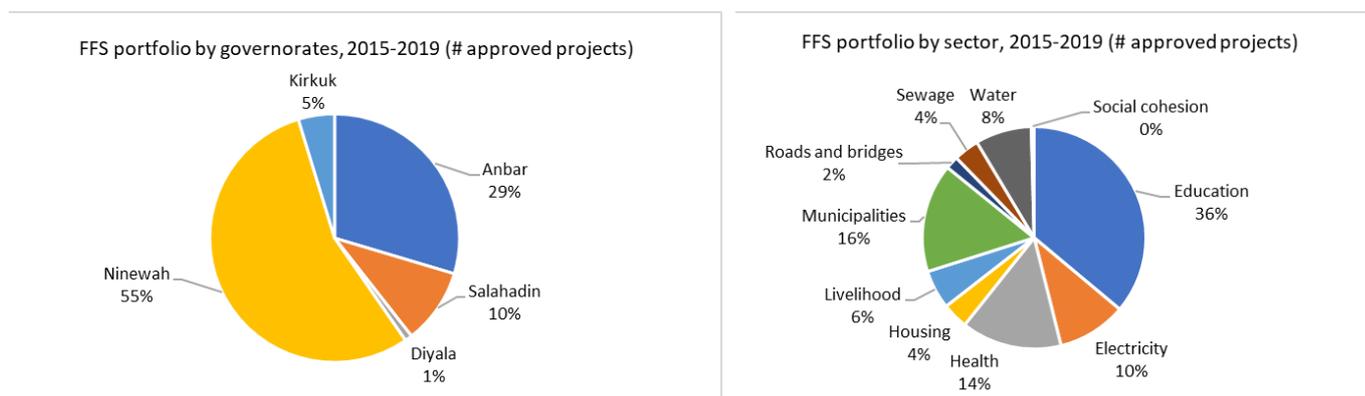
Source: FFS project document, 2018 (team reformatting)

FFS’ counterpart for strategic decision-making is national government through its steering committee. During implementation, FFS’ main counterpart is the governor’s office (with one exception) through provincial command cells (PCC) which selects and prioritizes projects needed for stabilization work. Apart from social cohesion work (implemented partly with Non-Governmental Organisations, NGOs) and livelihood (implemented via private contractors), FFS relies on stabilization priorities identified by the government including local government stakeholders. Within its mandate, it does not work on governance aspects of how government identifies the needs of its population.

## 2.2 FFS portfolio

In the period 2015-2019, the FFS portfolio had 3,580 approved projects with an estimated budget of USD 1,366,067,570<sup>4</sup> and committed donor funds of USD 1,277,355,566<sup>5</sup>. FFS has operated in the five liberated governorates and implemented projects for rehabilitation works in seven sectors as its core activity, supported immediate livelihood opportunities, and provided municipal support and a smaller number of projects under social cohesion, which effectively kicked off in 2018.

Figure 3: FFS overall portfolio, 2015-2019



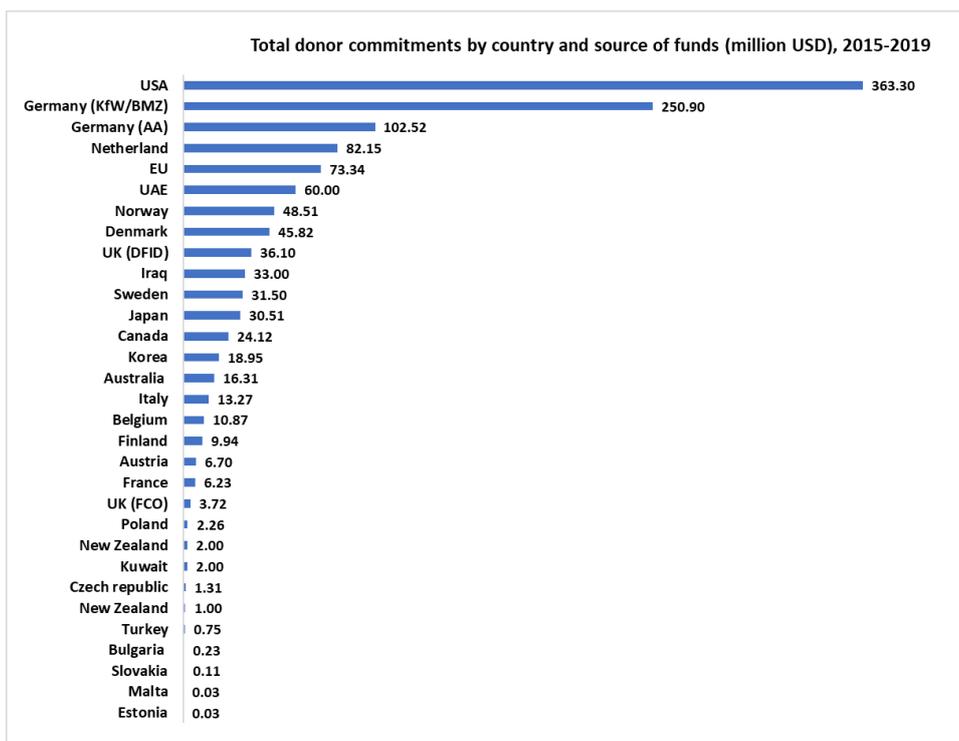
Source: FFS M&E data, 2015-2019

FFS was funded by 27 countries in the period 2015-2019 with some countries having more than one source of funds. In 2019, this included a commitment from Gol.

<sup>4</sup> FFS M&E data, 26 December 2019.

<sup>5</sup> FFS finance data, 2015-2019.

Figure 4: FFS donor portfolio, 2015-2019



Source: FFS finance data, 2015-2019

### 2.3 FFS moving forward in 2020-2023

2020 was initially foreseen to be the final year of implementation of FFS support to the post-ISIL stabilization process. However, Iraq’s political, economic and security situation as of late 2019 and early 2020 continued to put the government in a difficult position to respond to ongoing crises while fully taking over stabilization work in liberated areas, as well as responding to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Internal country assessments undertaken by UNDP in 2019 and 2020 point to the continued fragility of the current peace and stabilization gains in Iraq. Increasing instability and multiple crisis have imposed multi-dimensional vulnerabilities on Iraqis<sup>6</sup> including in liberated areas, where stabilization needs are still prevalent. Tribal, ethnic, political and security challenges are an everyday reality, also for minority groups<sup>7</sup>. The closure of 14 IDP camps in 2020 and 2021 further increased vulnerabilities, particularly for those with no documentation, housing or income sources, some of whom returned to their areas of origin<sup>8</sup>. The closure of camps led to the creation of the durable solution task force in April 2020 to address solutions for the displacement crisis in Iraq. This is meant to encompass durable solutions for IDPs and returnees as secondary displacement waves were being recorded.

The next and last phase of FFS, which was under implementation at the time of the evaluation, is guided by prevalent stabilization needs and a longer-term approach that links up to UNDP’s development-oriented work in line with priorities of the 2020-2024 Country Programme Document of UNDP Iraq (UNDP CPD 2020-2024) and in view of establishing conditions favorable for durable solutions. The period 2020-2023 is envisaged to prepare for handover to Gol. Accordingly, the project document revision of 2020 puts stronger emphasis on sustainability and durable solutions for returnees in liberated areas, including the development of local capacities of Gol stakeholders to take over stabilization work.

<sup>6</sup> World Bank (2020): Breaking out of fragility: A country economic memorandum for diversification and growth.

<sup>7</sup> USIP (2020): The current situation in Iraq, USIP factsheet.

<sup>8</sup> OCHA (2021): Humanitarian needs overview 2021, page 5.

### 3. EVALUATION SCOPE

This chapter summarizes key elements of the purpose, objectives, scope, and framework of the evaluation as defined by the evaluation criteria and questions. These core elements were discussed and agreed upon with the UNDP EMT during the inception phase. More details are found in Annexes 2 and 3 including the evaluation matrix.

#### 3.1 Purpose, scope and framework

**Purpose and objectives.** The purpose of the evaluation as agreed with end-users is to provide findings and recommendations that inform and improve decision-making relating to project implementation in the next and last phase of stabilization support. More specifically, the evaluation has two specific objectives, notably i) to assess the extent to which FFS achieved its intended outcome of improving conditions for the return of IDPs in newly liberated areas in line with Outcome 3 of CPD 2016-2020, and ii) to provide lessons learned and recommendations for the next and last phase of FFS. During the inception phase, it was agreed that the evaluation will be strongly outcome-focused, with the said Outcome 3 as the ultimate point of reference. While the evaluation is primarily formative, it is also summative looking at results achieved. Impact dimensions linked to restoring trust between government and people are not covered by the evaluation.

**Definition of key outcome.** In view of its focus on FFS' contribution to Outcome 3 of CPD 2016-2020, and as agreed during the inception phase, the evaluation defines "improved conditions" to mean the resumption of basic services to levels close to pre-ISIL levels following FFS' rehabilitation of crucial infrastructure, the adequacy of housing conditions, immediate livelihood opportunities upon return, and a more enabling community environment for returns.

**Timeframe.** In line with the ToR, the evaluation covers the period 2015-2019. It does not include 2020 and the extension phase 2021-2023.

**Geographic scope.** During the inception phase, it was agreed that the evaluation will include ten locations distributed across the five targeted governorates. The distribution of evaluation sites considered the geographic distribution of the FFS portfolio in number of projects and budget value. These proved to be generally aligned. For governorates representing less than 10% of the FFS portfolio, the number of sites was rounded up to one to ensure they are not excluded. The geographic scope of the evaluation is presented in the table below.

**Table 1: Distribution of evaluation sites**

Governorate	% FFS portfolio*	# of districts	Evaluation sites
Anbar	29%	3	Ramadi, Falluja, Anah
Salahadin	10%	1	Tikrit
Diyala	1%	1	Saadiyah
Ninewah	55%	4 (effectively 5) <sup>9</sup>	Mosul (East and West), Ninewah Plains (Hamdaniyah), Tel Afar and Sinuni
Kirkuk	5%	1	Hawija

Source: FFS M&E project data, 2015-2019; \*This percentage refers to the number of projects.

<sup>9</sup> This effectively covers five locations as East and West Mosul are considered as two different sites in FFS's M&E data but are represented as one district in the evaluation. To reach out to minority groups in the vicinity of Hamdaniyah, Bartella was included for some interviews.

The selection of evaluation sites/districts was done according to criteria set by the evaluation team in consultation with the EMT. These include i) date of liberation, ii) share of the district of the governorate portfolio, iii) concentration and diversity of FFS activities across windows and facilities, iv) level of completion of projects, v) return trends and vi) access potential, logistical and security considerations. A summary of background data used for the selection of districts is presented in Annex 2.

**Programmatic scope.** FFS will be looked at as a holistic package that integrates the different dimensions reflected in its windows as agreed during the inception phase. The evaluation does not look at FFIS and FFES separately, and the four windows of FFIS are not examined individually through an in-depth analysis. The ambition is to assess its contribution to improving conditions for return. Within the constraints of the evaluation, cross-cutting issues prioritize gender equality spanning design, implementation, monitoring and reporting. This is because gender equality was deemed to have higher evaluability compared to other dimensions. Non-discrimination, do no harm and environmental considerations are touched upon in relation to the design of FFS.

**Target group.** FFS' ultimate target group whose decision it wishes to influence is potential returnees, i.e., IDPs. However, FFS' strategy to encourage returns is to demonstrate to IDPs who returned (i.e., returnees) a sense of resumption of "normal life" through i) the rehabilitation of crucial infrastructure including government infrastructure and housing, ii) immediate cash liquidity for returnees to meet most critical needs and iii) an enabling community environment for returns in communities of origin. In the inception phase, the evaluation defined the primary target group of FFS to be the following:

- Returnees in liberated areas including women, through direct interventions (e.g. Cash for Work (CfW)) or indirectly through the rehabilitation of key infrastructures of which they are end-users;
- Local communities of origin of IDPs as represented by key actors who can facilitate an enabling social environment for return; and
- Local government, namely municipalities whose capacity to operate is essential for the return of service provision<sup>10</sup>.

**Stakeholders to be consulted.** The selection of stakeholders was based on a rapid stakeholder mapping done during the inception phase. Four categories of internal and external stakeholders that constitute the pool of stakeholders to be consulted were identified<sup>11</sup>:

- Internal stakeholders including i) UNDP management, program, support and field staff, ii) GoI at national, governorate and district levels, iii) non-government partners<sup>12</sup> and iv) the primary target group;
- External stakeholders comprising i) donors, ii) other UN agencies, iii) other initiatives, and iv) key informants. The latter included local leaders in communities of origin. As most were foreseen to be men, female teachers in visited schools were seen as an adequate alternative to capture perspectives of respected women in local communities.

**Evaluation criteria and questions.** The ToR refer to five OECD/DAC evaluation criteria, namely relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability and impact to which 28 evaluation questions (EQs) were assigned. Coherence was not addressed in the ToR and is not included in the evaluation. While impact is not covered, the

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<sup>10</sup> The initial evaluation design focused on municipalities as the main local government actor of interest. However, interviews revealed that the role of municipalities is limited and that key responsibilities at municipal level lie with line directorates, jointly with the local administration.

<sup>11</sup> Internal stakeholders include those involved in FFS decision-making, directly involved in implementation, or targeted by FFS. External stakeholders comprise those who are implementing similar initiatives, have knowledge of the context or are financing/liasing with FFS.

<sup>12</sup> The ability to mobilize private contractors implementing livelihood activities was deemed very low, as previous efforts to do so for other exercises had failed.

essence of evaluation questions raised in the ToR are dealt with under effectiveness. It was agreed that efficiency will be looked at in relation to two levels of inquiry; budget consumption and timely delivery of outputs. The 28 evaluation questions were grouped, reframed and reformulated into six key evaluation questions. A separate EQ under effectiveness is dedicated to explore how gender considerations were integrated during implementation, in monitoring, evaluation and reporting. Gender considerations in the design of FFS are dealt with under relevance.

<b>Relevance</b>	<b>EQ1.</b> To what extent does the project respond to the strategic priorities of the Government of Iraq and UNDP and to changes in the context?
<b>Effectiveness</b>	<b>EQ2.</b> To what extent did the project achieve its intended outputs and outcomes? <b>EQ3.</b> How does the project monitor progress on expected outputs and outcomes and generate learning to adjust implementation? <b>EQ4.</b> To what extent did the project integrate and monitor gender equality considerations and instigate change for women?
<b>Efficiency</b>	<b>EQ5.</b> To what extent did the project convert inputs into outputs in a timely manner?
<b>Sustainability</b>	<b>EQ6.</b> What is the likelihood that project outcomes will last?

**Evaluation framework.** Building on the above exercise, each evaluation question was unfolded into levels and areas of inquiry. These formed the basis for defining the elements of the evaluation matrix in Annex 3. When presenting the findings of the evaluation, levels of inquiry are presented upfront for each evaluation criteria and question.

## 4. EVALUATION APPROACH AND METHODS

This chapter outlines the evaluation approach and methods used as agreed upon in the inception phase with the UNDP EMT. It also highlights key methodological limitations. More details are found in Annexes 4-9.

### 4.1 Approach

**Theory-based approach.** The evaluation relies on a theory-based approach and strives to test key hypotheses. FFS has a ToC developed in 2017<sup>13</sup> (Annex 4). However, aspects relating to the promotion of enabling social conditions for return in communities of origins are not reflected as this window was paused the same year. For the purpose of the evaluation, the ToC was reconstructed in consultation with the UNDP EMT to articulate more clearly the levels of desired change and differentiate results. The reconstructed ToC distinguishes between three levels of desired change:

- The individuals and families who were displaced and returned (returnee level);
- The environment in the community of origin of returnees (community level); and
- Municipal authorities (government level).

The main hypotheses that the evaluation endeavours to examine include the following:

- Hypothesis 1: FFS (in the design of its four windows: crucial infrastructure, livelihood, municipal support and social cohesion) is *“the most effective package to address short to medium term impediments preventing and dissuading Iraqis from returning home.”*<sup>14</sup>
- Hypothesis 2: IDPs were aware of improved conditions at home as a factor that encouraged their decision to return.
- Hypothesis 3: Physical reconstruction of crucial infrastructure will lead to the return and provision of social and municipal services.
- Hypothesis 4: The availability of infrastructure, services and economic opportunities is a key condition for encouraging returnees to stay.

While support to GoI in expediting the return of IDPs following liberation is the desired change FFS wishes to achieve, the ultimate aspiration of FFS is to restore trust between the government and Iraqis<sup>15</sup>. A hypothesis from outcomes to impact is that the full return of IDPs will reduce the risk of instability and that the return of services will instill trust between citizens and government. This is reflected in the reconstructed ToC but not covered in the evaluation. The reconstructed ToC is enclosed in Annex 5. It forms the basis for data collection and findings on effectiveness (EQ2) and sustainability (EQ6) and differentiates results indicating what is within the sphere control of FFS and its sphere of influence. A compact version of the core elements of the reconstructed ToC is presented in Figure 8 in section 5.2.

**Utilization-focus approach.** To optimize the utility of evaluation findings and recommendations, the evaluation included end-users in discussions on the design of the scope and methodology of the evaluation, data collection methods and tools, criteria for site and stakeholder selection, and debriefing on findings and recommendations. While final decisions were made by the evaluation team, feedback from end-users was considered to the extent that it was pertinent and methodologically viable.

**Outwards-in and inwards-out approach.** The evaluation differentiated its data collection approach depending on the function of stakeholders in relation to FFS:

<sup>13</sup> FFS (2017): Annual progress report 2017, page 27.

<sup>14</sup> FFS Project document (2018), page 4.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, page 3.

- For stakeholders involved in financing, implementing FFS or sustaining the work of FFS to improve conditions for return, notably UNDP, GoI, implementing partners, rehabilitated infrastructures and donors, an inwards-out approach was used. Data collection took its point of departure in what FFS did and achieved.
- For those who are meant to be affected by FFS' interventions, namely returnees and representatives of communities of origin, an outwards-in approach was adopted. Given FFS' holistic approach, its scale with more than 3.500 projects and an outreach to around 8.5 million Iraqis<sup>16</sup>, the evaluation strived to capture what change happened in local communities in terms of improved conditions at the returnee and community levels. Recognizing attribution/contribution challenges, specific data and questions were integrated into profile sheets and survey questionnaires to try and trace back potential linkages to FFS<sup>17</sup>.

**Triangulation.** While the above approach contributes to triangulation of findings, the evaluation also relied on multiple data sources to triangulate findings. This included a documentary review of UNDP and external sources, and a systematization of key questions across data collection methods and tools (qualitative and quantitative) intended for the different types of stakeholders/data sources. Given the context in Iraq, and for reasons of safety and security of facilitators/enumerators and interviewees/respondents, questions linked to government (trust and capacities) were intentionally not asked other than to government stakeholders. This was agreed upon during the inception phase, aware of the limitations this will entail in terms of triangulation of findings.

## 4.2 Data collection methods and analysis

With the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the evaluation relied on a blended approach of remote and in-country data collection using a concurrent design of mixed methods. It had four streams of data collection:

- Documentary review undertaken by the international team.
- Remote qualitative data collection undertaken by the international team.
- In-country qualitative data collection undertaken by a local research team in the ten evaluation sites.
- In-country survey undertaken by a local survey team in the ten evaluation sites.

Data analysis was carried out by the international team. Survey data was collected using Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing (CAPI). Results were compiled by the local team in the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) and analyzed by the international team. In-country qualitative data was collected and reported upon by the local team but compiled and analyzed by the international using qualitative content analysis methods.

Overall, 323 stakeholders were consulted using qualitative methods (remotely and in-country), including 34% women. These included 222 persons in Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with 36% female representation. Around half of FGD participants were community leaders (45% of total FGD participants). Participants in returnee FGDs, who are FFS CfW beneficiaries, represented one third of total FGD participants. It should be noted that the vast majority of community leaders and teachers consulted were also returnees. Consulted government stakeholders were from all five governorates with one third representing governorate level and half representing district/municipal level stakeholders. An overview of stakeholders consulted via qualitative methods is provided in Annex 6. Further detailed are presented below for each data collection stream. The list of persons met is enclosed in Annex 7. Profiles of survey respondents and FGD participants are attached in Annexes 8 and 9 respectively.

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<sup>16</sup> FFS (2019): Annual report 2019, page 9.

<sup>17</sup> Profile sheets and survey questionnaires gathered information on what educational facilities children of respondents go to and what health care facilities they use. The compiled list of facilities was matched against the FFS project database of 26 December 2019 to identify those rehabilitated by FFS (see effectiveness).

**Documentary review.** The evaluation reviewed a wide range of internal UNDP documents and external sources provided by UNDP and mobilized independently by the evaluation team for its methodology development and analysis. The information from the documentary review was mapped for the purpose of addressing the evaluation questions and serves as a secondary data source for understanding and comparing with primary data collected by the team. The bibliography is enclosed in Annex 10.

**Remote data collection.** Remote data collection was carried out by the three evaluators constituting the international team and covered 78 stakeholders including 30% women in the period 17<sup>th</sup> March to 27<sup>th</sup> April 2021. Two data collection methods were used as depicted in the table below.

Remote data collection	Number	Data source	Contribution to evaluation criteria
Semi-structured interviews (SSIs)	45	FFS management, technical advisors, area coordinators, M&E, operations and field staff including MSAs facilitators, female engineers and social organizers	Relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability
	18	Gol (national, governorate, district and local levels)	Relevance and sustainability
	4	Implementing partners <sup>18</sup>	Effectiveness
Key informant interviews (KIIs)	4	Donors (Denmark; Germany <sup>19</sup> )	Effectiveness and sustainability
	2	United National Higher Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Reconstruction Fund for Areas Affected by Terroristic Operations (REFAATO) <sup>20</sup>	Effectiveness

**In-country qualitative data collection.** This stream of data collection was carried out in the period 30<sup>th</sup> March to 12<sup>th</sup> April 2021 by a team of thirteen local researchers including seven female researchers. The research team was managed by a local research company with experience in qualitative research methods. The data collection process was launched simultaneously in all five governorates. Two researchers were assigned per governorate in Diyala, Kirkuk and Salahadin. In Anbar and Ninawah, the team included three and four researchers respectively reflecting the larger geographic coverage in these sites. Three data collection methods were used to address evaluation questions. Annex 11 provides more details on the geographic distribution of in-country interviews.

In-country qualitative data collection	Number	Data source	Contribution to evaluation criteria
SSIs	23 SSIs	Heads of educational and health facilities	Effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability
Focus group discussions (FGD)	26 FGDs	Returnees (8 FGDs); Local community leaders (11) ; Female teachers (7) in visited schools	Effectiveness and sustainability
Observations in visited facilities	23 sites	Local researchers	Effectiveness and sustainability

<sup>18</sup> This includes a consultant delivering training for FFS.

<sup>19</sup> Three German institutions were covered representing two funding sources from Germany. A planned meeting with USAID did not take place due to time constraints.

<sup>20</sup> Meetings with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) did not take place due to time constraints.

In total, 245 persons were consulted in-country, including 34% women. Gender sensitivity was considered by ensuring i) female researchers met with female interviewees/participants separately and ii) appropriateness, proximity and convenience of access to venues. Data collection was guided by interview protocols and guides that are tailored to the different types of stakeholders (Annex 12 for interview guides). Implementation and reporting was subject to quality assurance. First, the local company's own quality management system through i) quality checks and follow-up during implementation, ii) regular review of progress on achievements of outputs and objectives, iii) in-house backstopping to ensure instructions, guidelines and tools were adhered to, and iv) quality control of the written outputs. Second, the international team assigned focal points during the design of data collection tools and planning phase and during the implementation and reporting phase.

**In-country survey.** This quantitative data stream was conducted by an ISO-certified local survey company in the period from 1<sup>st</sup> April to 3<sup>rd</sup> May 2021. The survey exclusively targeted the returnee population (1,005 respondents). It is neither a population survey nor a beneficiary survey. It targeted districts with high density of returnees in the ten evaluation sites across the five governorates regardless of whether returnees benefited from FFS activities or were in the catchment area of specific FFS rehabilitated facilities. A multi-stage hybrid sampling approach was followed:

**Stage 1:** The distribution of the number of interviews per governorate (Muhafaza) and the selected districts/sites was done according to FFS' regional portfolio distribution (see Table 1 in section 3.1).

**Stage 2:** The International Organization for Migration (IOM) returnee index (December 2020) was reviewed and used as a data source for sample selection to identify sub-districts with high density of returnees.

**Stage 3:** The selection of secondary sampling points notably sub-districts (urban Nahia) used probability proportional sample (PPS).

**Stage 4:** Primary sampling points (PSUs, Mahallah) were selected using PPS. Therefore, units with larger populations had a greater chance of selection. Some adjustments were made to ensure a minimum representation of 50 respondent in smaller locations<sup>21</sup>. This resulted in the final sample split as follows:

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<sup>21</sup> The initial allocation of number of interviews according to FFS' portfolio distribution showed a small sample size for Sinuni, Anah and Saadiyah (N=4,5,7 respectively). Therefore, an increase in the size of these sample was done so they can reach a minimum sample size of 50 returnees to ensure good sample representation. As a result, small deductions were made on each district across the sample to achieve this.

Governorate	District	Sub-District	Sample (1005)
<b>Ninewah</b>			<b>473</b>
Ninewah	Mosul	Mosul center (left coast and right coast)	264
Ninewah	Hamdaniyah	Hamdaniyah center	54
Ninewah	Tel Afar	Tel Afar center	105
Ninewah	Sinjar	Sinuni center	50
<b>Kirkuk</b>			<b>54</b>
Kirkuk	Hawija	Hawija center	54
<b>Salahadin</b>			<b>57</b>
Salahadin	Tikrit	Tikrit center	57
<b>Diyala</b>			<b>50</b>
Diyala	Khanqin	Saadiyah centre	50
<b>Anbar</b>			<b>366</b>
Anbar	Ramadi	Ramadi center	160
Anbar	Falluja	Falluja center	156
Anbar	Anah	Anah center	50

**Stage 5:** Blocks were selected using PPS with 10 interviews to be conducted in each block. After the block selection, four streets were selected within each selected block using simple random selection<sup>22</sup>.

**Stage 6:** The selection of households started by paying a visit to Al-Mokhtar in each PSU/village to identify the streets where returnees are located. The starting point was identified using a random number table. The survey supervisor divided the number of houses on the street by the number of interviews plus two potential substitutions (that is,  $5+2=7$ ) to calculate the skip pattern. Using this sampling interval, the interviewer randomly selected additional other houses on this street to interview. If there are multiple households within the selected dwelling, the interviewer used a household selection grid (a table of random numbers) to determine the specific household to interview.

**Stage 7:** The selection of respondents included the head of the household/decision-maker, whether the husband or the wife since the survey focused on decisions to return and views after returning to their cities. When this person of the selected household was not present, two additional visits were made. When this was not successful, another household was randomly selected according to the substitution rule.

### 4.3 Main limitations

The major limitation of the evaluation was time constraint given the large scope of FFS and multiple data collection streams within a very tight timeline. This meant the evaluation had to prioritize efforts to ensure remote interviews could be conducted for at least some representatives from each relevant stakeholder group. The prioritization was primarily made in consideration of the availability of stakeholders during the data collection period (April-May 2021). As a mitigation measure, the data collection phase was extended beyond the planned period to ensure follow up, but this did not always lead to meetings being held. An end date for data collection had to be put to ensure the timely kick-off of the data analysis and reporting phase. This meant that not all planned FFS stakeholders were consulted and therefore not all perspectives on FFS are reflected in the evaluation.

<sup>22</sup> Each zukak contains between 15 - 25 households. All streets are identified by specific numbers given by the census office. Accordingly, all streets in the selected block were listed and then streets were selected.

As noted in section 4.1, having prioritized the personal safety of persons conducting and participating in the evaluation, the ability of the evaluation team to triangulate findings on changes at the government level particularly of capacities was limited. Findings must be looked at within these limitations.

In terms of the survey, given its hybrid nature, it does not represent the returnee population in Iraq because the districts were pre-selected based on the FFS portfolio distribution and respondents were heads of households/decision-makers. The source of data was from the IOM returnee index and not official data, as these are not available. For the in-country interviews, there were cases where interviewees/participants did not allow for the meeting to be recorded. This was replaced with notetaking. Some managers of facilities were new to their positions. This was mitigated by meeting with previous managers. In Sinuni, the absence of female teachers in schools made it difficult to hold all FGDs with female teachers as planned. In this case, male teachers were interviewed. Overall, security and access challenges were faced in specific locations despite permits being issued. This was mitigated in collaboration with UNDP focal points assigned for the evaluation.

Despite these limitations, the evaluation has been able to generate an adequate informational basis to draw findings, conclusions and recommendations.

## 5. FINDINGS

This chapter presents key findings on the six evaluation questions. It is structured around the four evaluation criteria agreed for this evaluation, namely relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability. Each section starts by presenting the evaluation question and its key findings, outlining the key areas of inquiry that each evaluation question looks at in line with the evaluation framework. Findings for each level of inquiry are then unfolded in the subsequent sub-sections.

### 5.1 Relevance

Relevance is looked at in relation to three levels of inquiry namely i) national priorities, ii) priorities of UNDP including cross-cutting issues and iii) the context.

#### Evaluation Question 1

To what extent does the project respond to the strategic priorities of the Government of Iraq and UNDP and to changes in the context?

**Finding 1.** FFS is aligned to national strategies and responds to the strategic priorities of GoI. It has structures and practices in place that encourage regular interaction with GoI stakeholders including involvement in decision-making.

**Finding 2.** FFS is aligned to UNDP strategic priorities with increasing attention to cross-cutting issues since 2017 particularly gender equality, and contributed to key indicators of the results framework of CPD 2016-2020.

**Finding 3.** FFS has been able to maintain its relevance to the context overtime expanding its scope rapidly to meet the needs of newly liberated areas while concurrently adapting its organizational capacity. FFS' evolution suggest that the different windows reflect a progression of stabilization work rather than a simultaneous package of interventions.

**Finding 1. FFS is aligned to national strategies and responds to the strategic priorities of GoI. It has structures and practices in place that encourage regular interaction with GoI stakeholders including involvement in decision-making.**

Relevance to national priorities is examined in terms of two dimensions, namely i) alignment of FFS to national strategies and priorities and ii) mechanisms in place for the involvement of GoI in decision-making.

**Alignment to national strategies and priorities.** FFS is situated between two generations of GoI strategies and strategic priorities that address security and stability issues<sup>23</sup>. The first poverty reduction strategy (PRS) implemented in the period 2012-2016 focused on four pillars, notably i) security and stability, ii) good governance, iii) fair distribution and diversification of income and iv) mitigation of the negative effects of reform on the poor. It also addressed the reduction of inequalities between men and women through education and job opportunities. Its implementation was faced with economic, political and security challenges including ISIL's occupation of parts of northern Iraq, which excluded ISIL-occupied governorates from access to PRS projects since 2014<sup>24</sup>. The launch of FFS in 2015 with the liberation of the first towns from ISIL ensured the presence of a unified mechanism through which the international donor community could contribute in view of ensuring quick government response to immediate recovery and stabilization needs in liberated areas.

The current poverty reduction strategy 2018-2022, which is aligned to the Iraq Vision 2030 and the National Development Plan (NDP) 2018-2022, reiterates the continued relevance of the four pillars. Furthermore, it underscores the challenges imposed by ISIL's occupation, which resulted in the largest wave of displacement known in Iraq's history and a deepening of poverty particularly in ISIL occupied governorates<sup>25</sup>. The current

<sup>23</sup> It is the evaluation team's understanding that a national stabilization vision or plan was not yet formulated in the period of the evaluation.

<sup>24</sup> Republic of Iraq (2009): National strategy for poverty reduction, Summary, pages 5 and 20.

<sup>25</sup> Republic of Iraq (2018): Strategy for poverty reduction in Iraq 2018-2022, Executive summary.

strategy has six pillars. This includes traditional sectors like health and education, housing, in addition to one pillar on the responses to emergency focusing on the displaced population and returnees. This pillar is unfolded in the NDP under post conflict reconstruction and development. The government crisis management programme which is the main instrument of implementation builds on four key areas of work, one of which is the stabilization programme in liberated areas<sup>26</sup>. This programme is implemented with UN assistance and refers to the areas of work of FFS, namely:

- *"Repair essential public infrastructure (water, electricity and sewerage services, and recruit teams to open streets and remove rubble and mines);*
- *Support and operate business facilities;*
- *Rehabilitate schools, health centers and government buildings;*
- *Continue community reconciliation efforts."*<sup>27</sup>

According to interviews with government stakeholders at national, governorate and district levels, FFS is seen to have met government priorities and needs in liberated areas within its mandate, most significantly in relation to infrastructure rehabilitation and supply of crucial equipment that also upgraded the standards of rehabilitated facilities (e.g. hospitals, government buildings). This is primarily because FFS had the budget and competencies to engage in large scale and complex works that no other actor had the means to do, and to kickstart activities immediately after liberation in collaboration with government authorities. Consulted government stakeholders highlighted different sectors as the most important contribution of FFS. Education, electricity, water and health represent the top sectors where FFS was deemed to have the greatest contribution. Coordination at area level took place through direct contact between local government and FFS staff including MSAs, where they are present, and/or area-based coordination mechanisms gathering actors active on the ground<sup>28</sup>. There are examples of FFS re-directing its activities when informed by local government that funding was mobilized from other sources. Moreover, FFS is reported to have adapted to respond to some emerging needs by for instance expanding some works (e.g. electricity lines) or rehabilitating and equipping essential government buildings. There are also examples where FFS adapted its approach for instance on CfW.

Geographically, the governorates targeted by FFS are five out of the seven priority governorates including liberated and other affected governorates noted in the Framework for Reconstruction and Development<sup>29</sup>. The five pillars of this framework include three intervention areas FFS directly contributes to, namely i) infrastructure rehabilitation for critical services, roads and bridges, water and sanitation facilities, energy generation and housing, ii) reconciliation and peace building, and ii) human and social capital including investments for the rehabilitation of primary health care and education facilities as well as municipal services<sup>30</sup>.

The signing of a cost-sharing agreement with Gol in 2019 confirms the relevance of FFS as a mechanism for the implementation of national strategic priorities in liberated areas. This commitment was translated into the FFS contribution becoming part of the national budget's special programs<sup>31</sup>. The agreement includes three payment tranches, the first of which was released in 2020. Even though subsequent contributions have not yet been

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<sup>26</sup> The four axes include: i) Humanitarian relief and response – displacement phase (short term), ii) Stabilization programs - return phase (medium term), iii) Iraq Relief and Reconstruction Fund- across phases, and iv) Framework document for national plan for reconstruction and development 2017 -reconstruction and stabilization phase (long term).

<sup>27</sup> Republic of Iraq (2018): National Development Plan 2018-2022, pages 102 and 104.

<sup>28</sup> In one out of ten evaluation sites, coordination among different actors was noted to be a challenge.

<sup>29</sup> Republic of Iraq (2018): Reconstruction and Development Framework, page 2.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, pages 8-9.

<sup>31</sup> Council of Ministers (2019): Decision 276 of 2019.

received to date, FFS is considered to be a key instrument for GoI in the mobilization of donor funds for the implementation of its stabilization programme in liberated areas<sup>32</sup>.

**Mechanisms for involving GoI.** According to FFS' project document (2018), FFS works in partnership with GoI at the national, governorate and local levels<sup>33</sup>. Overall, this is done through committees put in place, regular interaction and dialogue between FFS management and staff, and GoI stakeholders. In addition to national level interface, the majority of consulted government stakeholders at governorate and district level (11 out of 14<sup>34</sup>) reported they have regular interaction with FFS staff in the form of bi-weekly, monthly or more regular meetings. Communication through WhatsApp groups was reported in more than half of interviews as a means of maintaining regular contact. Furthermore, coordination with directorates at governorate and district level during planning and implementation and/or participation in project specific committees were recurrently mentioned.

At the national level, FFS liaises with the Council of Ministers Secretariat with which UNDP co-chairs the FFS steering committee. The latter guides the direction of FFS, approves priority locations, tracks progress and ensures coordination with government priorities and ongoing responsiveness to priority needs. The steering committee is meant to meet at least twice a year and has generally done so during the period of the evaluation as depicted in the table below. This structure has ensured that GoI is involved in strategic decision-making about FFS.

**Table 2: Overview of FFS steering committee meetings and key decisions**

	# meetings	Key decisions taken
<b>2015</b>	1	Tikrit approved. Endorsement of new locations in Diyala, Ninewah and Salahadin and new pipelines.
<b>2016</b>	3	FFES endorsed. New locations endorsed in Anbar, Ninewah, Salahadin including areas not yet liberated like Mosul. Hawija and Tel Afar in pipeline.
<b>2017</b>	3	New locations including Ninewah plains and Kirkuk endorsed. Special programme for minority communities endorsed. Housing pilot endorsed in Ramadi and Falluja. Cash grant for female headed households endorsed in Karma. Window 4 activities moved to UNDP reconciliation programme.
<b>2018</b>	1	New locations not yet liberated endorsed. Total 31 locations. Scale up of housing and cash grant pilots. "Helping neighborhoods to rebuild themselves" solidarity model to be pursued.
<b>2019</b>	No steering committee meetings held due to contextual challenges linked to mass protests and changes in government counterpart, diplomatic corps and UNDP senior management <sup>35</sup> .	

Source: Minutes of Meetings from steering committee meetings held between 2015-2018 (team compilation)

At the governorate level, FFS works closely with the provincial command cells (PCC) of the governor's office, or their equivalent structures, as its main counterpart. In Ninewah, alternatives were sought for a closer collaboration with governorate level directorates to ensure timely implementation. Interviews suggest that

<sup>32</sup> Refaato (Reconstruction Fund for Areas Affected by Terroristic Operations) is presented as another instrument for channeling investments to areas affected by terrorism, not just liberated areas. It was established in 2015 but the draft law for its establishment is not yet approved. It is funded by the national budget and received foreign loans and some grants.

<sup>33</sup> FFS (2018): Project document, page 8.

<sup>34</sup> Two government stakeholders did not provide an answer.

<sup>35</sup> The Stabilization Working Group met in Baghdad in April 2019 where updates on FFS and remaining stabilization needs were shared.

government stakeholders contribute to decisions about project identification and prioritization through workshops or dialogue. All consulted governorate government stakeholders had attended workshops and the majority (five out of six) reported being in regular contact with FFS staff. While all consulted stakeholders said they contributed to the selection of projects, the final decision is done by FFS to ensure alignment to its mandate, budget and earmarked funds<sup>36</sup>. In some instances, this resulted in changes in the scope of proposed projects to ensure alignment. All consulted governorate stakeholders confirmed they contribute to the supervision of FFS projects. While the governor’s office is FFS’ main counterpart (to the exception of Ninewah), projects are handed over to governorate level directorates. The decentralization process in Iraq has so far devolved some administrative functions to governorates<sup>37</sup>. Line directorates in governorates have the primary responsibility for key sectors, jointly with local administrations. All consulted government stakeholders said directorates are always present at handover ceremonies<sup>38</sup> and in most cases representatives of the governor’s office.

At district/municipal level, stakeholders are involved in identification, prioritization, coordination and supervision. Six out of nine consulted stakeholders at district level were involved in the identification and supervision of projects including workshops, while eight out of nine were involved in project prioritization. Around half of consulted district level government stakeholders were in regular contact with FFS staff.

**Finding 2. FFS is aligned to UNDP strategic priorities with increasing attention to cross-cutting issues since 2017 particularly gender equality, and contributed to key indicators of the results framework of CPD 2016-2020.**

Relevance to UNDP priorities is assessed in relation to i) alignment to UNDP strategies and plans and ii) the integration of cross-cutting issues in the design of FFS.

**Alignment to UNDP strategies and plans.** The evaluation team recognizes that implementation in the period of the evaluation extends over two country program and strategic planning cycles, namely i) CPDs for the periods 2010-2015 and 2016-2020, and ii) strategic plans for the periods 2014- 2017 and 2018-2021. For the purpose of the evaluation, alignment to UNDP strategies and plans is looked at in relation to CPD 2016-2020 and the UNDP strategic plan 2018-2021 as agreed during the inception phase. The table below presents some elements of how FFS is framed in the said CPD and strategic plan.

**Table 3: Extract of FFS alignment to CPD 2016-2020 and UNDP strategic plan 2018-2021**

Level	CPD 2016-2020	UNDP Strategic Plan 2018-2021
<b>Outcome</b>	<b>Outcome 3:</b> Conditions improved for the safe return of internally displaced persons in newly liberated areas	<b>Outcome 3:</b> Strengthen resilience to shocks and crises
<b>Outcome indicators</b>	<b>3.1.</b> Public services available and functioning as measured by: <b>3.1.A.</b> Number of hours per day with electricity <sup>39</sup> <b>3.1.B.</b> Number of schools and health centers operational <b>3.4.</b> Increase in the percentage of internally displaced persons returning to newly liberated areas	-

<sup>36</sup> Around half of the FFS budget comes from two funding sources that are earmarked.

<sup>37</sup> In 2019, the provincial councils were dismantled and some roll-back of responsibilities to the central level took place.

<sup>38</sup> This excludes one person where the question was skipped due to time limitations.

<sup>39</sup> This is noted as an outcome indicator in the revised project document of 2016.

Level	CPD 2016-2020	UNDP Strategic Plan 2018-2021
<b>Outputs</b>	<p><b>Output 3.1.2.</b> Basic community infrastructure rehabilitated for water, electricity, health, education and administrative offices.</p> <p><b>Output 3.1.3.</b> Livelihoods opportunities created</p>	<p><b>Output 3.1.1:</b> Core government functions and inclusive basic services restored post crisis for stabilization, durable solutions to displacement and return to sustainable development pathways within the framework of national policies and priorities</p>
<b>Output indicators</b>	<p><b>3.1.2.A.</b> Number of schools rehabilitated</p> <p><b>3.1.2.B.</b> Number of power grids rehabilitated</p> <p><b>3.1.2.C.</b> Number of health facilities restored</p> <p><b>3.1.2.D.</b> Number water facilities restored and functioning.</p> <p><b>3.1.3.B.</b> Number of businesses provided cash grants (disaggregated by sex)</p> <p><b>3.1.3.C.</b> Number of female-headed households that accessed micro-credit grants for small and medium enterprise development.</p> <p><b>3.1.7.A.</b> Number of men and women benefitting from cash-for-work (% of women)</p> <p><b>3.1.4.A.</b> Number of efforts to build consensus and foster reconciliation that lead to specific agreements</p>	<p><b>3.1.1.2.</b> Displaced population benefitting from durable solutions, disaggregated by target group</p> <p><b>3.1.1.3.</b> Number of people benefitting from jobs and improved livelihoods in crisis or post-crisis settings, disaggregated by sex and other characteristics</p>

Source: CPD 2016-2020 and UNDP Strategic plan 2018-2021 (team compilation)

As indicated in the table above, FFS is well anchored in and aligned to UNDP strategic priorities and plans. First, it has contributed to output indicators of the results framework of CPD 2016-2020 which feeds into the strategic plan 2018-2021. This is documented by the indicators that FFS generates as part of its results framework (Annex 14)<sup>40</sup>. Second, the percentage return of IDPs returning to liberated areas (Outcome indicator 3.4) is the primary outcome indicator FFS monitors. The evaluation team finds Outcome indicator 3.1 on availability and resumption of services to be highly pertinent for tracking the link between rehabilitation and resumption of services. However, it recognizes this is an extensive monitoring exercise given the large number of projects and understands that aspects beyond the physical availability of rehabilitated facilities were not considered because FFS' role is defined in terms of setting the conditions for the resumption of services of previously existing facilities by rehabilitating them (see EQ4 on M&E). In that context, the availability of services and functionality of rehabilitated infrastructure are seen to fall under government responsibility following the handover to GoI.

**Integration of cross-cutting issues.** As agreed during the inception phase, the evaluation looks at how project design considered cross-cutting issues namely i) gender equality, ii) non-discrimination and participation as key human rights-based approach (HRBA) principles, iii) conflict sensitivity considerations and iv) environment sustainability. The CPD 2016-2020 states that '*Given the sensitive nature of stabilization and the fragile conditions prevailing in many newly liberated areas, concerns over human rights, protection, gender and inclusion will be considered in prioritizing and sequencing activities*'<sup>41</sup>. While not strongly integrated in the initial project design of FFS, attention to cross-cutting issues increased in subsequent iterations, particularly gender equality. A noticeable shift is evident in the 2018 iteration of the project document where FFS underscores its commitment to cross-cutting issues to be guided by a set of minimum principles including: i) Inclusiveness (gender, age,

<sup>40</sup> The indicator on the number water facilities restored (3.1.2.D) is included in the FFS results framework but the functioning of the facility is not.

<sup>41</sup> UNDP (2015) : Country Programme Document for Iraq (2016-2020), page 6.

ethnicity, religion, geography, disability), ii) Rights-based approach, conflict-sensitivity and do no harm, iii) Gender equality and women's empowerment, and iv) Environment sustainability considerations. The operationalization of these principles is not clearly articulated, except for gender equality as follows:

- **Gender equality:** The 2015 FFS project design considers gender equality to a very limited extent. Women were targeted under livelihood opportunities, cash grants and social cohesion activities with some output targets set in the results framework. In the 2018 revision, the project document states that *"stabilization activities, therefore, must necessarily seek to advance gender equality in itself but also recognize that gender mainstreaming – the process of assessing any planned action to ensure that the benefit to women and girls is equal to that experienced by men and boys – is a powerful strategy for the attainment of stabilization goals of all kinds."*<sup>42</sup> For the first time a clear commitment to ensuring gender equality is communicated. The project document outlines how FFS will operationalize greater attention to gender equality. This includes a dedicated team (Gender Specialist) and strategy (Gender Strategy) as well as investments in the capacity development of the project team to improve gender programming in designing and planning activities, monitoring and reporting, as well as the involvement of female staff in implementation through for example female field engineers and monitors. The way in which FFS integrated gender equality during implementation is elaborated under EQ4.
- **Non-discrimination and participation:** Project design does not give particular attention to non-discrimination. However, FFS' strong knowledge of the context ensured that such considerations were integrated in the choice of target groups. The strategy of relying on different work modalities (NGOs, Community-Based Organisation (CBOs), local authorities) considered responsiveness to the needs of poor and vulnerable groups including women, youth and minorities. Girls educational facilities (e.g. schools, universities, and dormitories) were prioritized, particularly due to the disproportionate harm done to women's education under ISIL occupation. Similarly, vulnerability as a selection criterion for housing projects used the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs' list of registered women classified according to their vulnerability<sup>43</sup>. In addition, disability considerations were integrated into the design of the housing assessment template. Particular attention was given to minority groups (e.g. ethnicity, religion, tribal affiliation), partly because of earmarked funding to the special programme that prioritized supporting equitable and balanced access for minority communities. Participation in the identification of stabilization needs involved local authorities as the counterparts of FFS. As Finding 1 indicates, participatory approaches were applied with local authorities in defining stabilization needs and prioritizing projects in targeted locations. The participation of affected populations in defining their needs falls beyond the direct scope of FFS as a mechanism supporting Gol to respond to urgent stabilization needs. Notwithstanding their importance, FFS' mandate does not include governance aspects of how Gol identifies its population needs. There are examples however where affected populations were consulted. For instance, women were consulted on the types of CfW programmes that may be appropriate and head of households, including women, were consulted ahead of housing rehabilitation.
- **Conflict sensitivity and do no harm:** Conflict assessments and training on conflict sensitivity were introduced as activities in 2016, but these are primarily linked to social cohesion work. An internal donor led lessons learnt review from 2018 highlighted that FFS has taken a positive approach to conflict sensitivity since its inception<sup>44</sup>. Early decisions to hire staff with conflict advisory functions and decisions to hire MSAs are seen

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<sup>42</sup> FFS (2018) : Project document, page 5.

<sup>43</sup> The government's vulnerability criteria include income level, poverty, disability and marital status (2018 FFS Annual Report, page 57). While FFS prioritized vulnerability, cases of community pushback for supporting ISIL affiliated families were encountered in practice.

<sup>44</sup> UK Stabilisation Unit (2018): Lessons learned review of FFS

to be consistent with the operationalization of this commitment. However, the extent to which conflict assessments were systematically used to guide the design of other windows is unclear. FFS raises this issue in its 2019 annual report, proposing to place additional focus on mainstreaming conflict sensitivity in all FFS windows<sup>45</sup>. While do no harm is referred to across project documentation, there is limited evidence of how it is integrated in the projects. Working with local authorities to ensure that outreach to different groups is consistent with a do no harm approach is the main strategy, well aware that this bears some risks as the government in some case is not seen to represent all groups in society.

- Environmental considerations: There are several references made in documents placing emphasis on ensuring that UNDP’s Social and Environmental Standards are met and on conducting environment impact assessments for large scale infrastructure works to identify potential risks. The evaluation team found limited evidence in reporting or interviews as to how systematic efforts were made to integrate considerations for mitigating adverse environmental impacts. Some examples of project choices and planned activities that were driven by environmental considerations since 2018 are presented in the table below. The extent to which these measures were operationalized is not assessed within the scope of the evaluation.

Project examples	Operationalization measures
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enhancing municipality’s capacity on forest management, rehabilitation of the Forest Management Building and Warehouse and a nursery plantation site in East Mosul</li> <li>• Dukan Valley project intended to convert a polluted stream into a healthy watercourse and provision of compacting trucks in Qayara</li> <li>• Sewerage projects in Ramadi to avoid the pollution of the Euphrates River</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Training engineers, monitoring and site management teams on environmental and social safeguarding and reporting on environmental and social measures as part of regular site monitoring practices</li> <li>• Requests for project contractors to develop an Environmental Mitigation Plan</li> <li>• Plan to incorporate specifications for more environmentally sustainable materials within rehabilitation related procurement processes</li> </ul>

**Finding 3. FFS has been able to maintain its relevance to the context over time, expanding its scope rapidly to meet the needs of newly liberated areas while concurrently adapting its organizational capacity. FFS’ evolution suggest that the different windows reflect a progression of stabilization work rather than a simultaneous package of interventions.**

The responsiveness of FFS to the context looks at the evolution of FFS in terms of geographic coverage, programmatic scope and organisational adaptations, all of which are closely linked to availability of funding.

**Geographic evolution.** FFS evolved over time in tandem with developments in the context ensuing from progress in liberation efforts of cities under ISIL control. As depicted in the figure below, the kick start and geographic scope of FFS (yellow boxes) closely followed the liberation timeline (liberated cities in a given year are shown in red font)<sup>46</sup>. Initially, FFS focused on Tikrit in Salahadin governorate as one of the first liberated cities closest to the capital<sup>47</sup>. It expanded to four governorates in 2016 with the liberation of major cities like Ramadi

<sup>45</sup> 2019 FFS Annual Report, page 63.

<sup>46</sup> The overview is based on M&E data which only includes projects that were approved for implementation. Therefore, the figure does not include assessments conducted prior to approval.

<sup>47</sup> According to quarterly reports of 2015, FFS was also active in four specific neighborhoods in the Sinjar area in Ninewah in 2015. These are however not reflected in the figure because M&E data based on which the overview is constructed, do not include Sinjar for 2015.

and Falluja in Anbar, and Ninewah plains. With the liberation of Mosul as the city where ISIL held its stronghold, FFS’ geographic scope reached more locations in the five liberated governorates in 2017. This continued into 2018 when the last of the 31 locations FFS operates in were liberated and Iraq was declared free from ISIL. Until then, focus was mainly on major urban hubs. With time, FFS started branching out to reach liberated areas in more rural settings like Qaim and Anah in West Anbar. This came in later due to the context of liberation efforts and the urgent need to consolidate focus on major centers with larger displaced populations and damage levels, as well as access possibilities at the time and funding priorities, especially those defined by donor earmarking. This means that within FFS’ geographic outreach, the picture is nuanced in terms of the needs of the different areas among those liberated and rehabilitated earlier and those which were more recently liberated, are remote and still face difficulty of access and security challenges including ISIL influence. Some locations in targeted governorates like Kirkuk are still not accessible due to ISIL influence.

Figure 5: FFS geographic evolution versus liberation timeline

Liberation timeline (liberated towns in red) versus start of implementation for FFS' 31 approved locations*					
	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Salahadin	Tikrit Mekeshifa Al Dour Yathrib	Tikrit Mekeshifa Al Dour Baji Shirqat	Tikrit Mekeshifa Al Dour Baji Shirqat	Tikrit Mekeshifa Al Dour Baji Shirqat Yathrib Tuz Kurmatu Suleiman Bek	Tikrit Mekeshifa Al Dour Baji Shirqat Yathrib Tuz Kurmatu Suleiman Bek
Ninewa	Sinuni Sinjar Rabia	Sinuni Sinjar Rabia Qayarah Ninewa plains Mosul West	Sinuni Sinjar Rabia Qayarah Ninewa plains Mosul West Mosul East Makhmur**	Sinuni Sinjar Rabia Qayarah Ninewa plains Mosul West Mosul East Makhmur Tel Afar Baaj	Sinuni Sinjar Rabia Qayarah Ninewa plains Mosul West Mosul East Tel Afar Baaj Makhmur
Anbar		Ramadi Falluja Karma Ruthba Haditha Heet	Ramadi Falluja Karma Ruthba Haditha Heet Rawa Qaim Anah	Ramadi Falluja Karma Ruthba Haditha Heet Rawa Qaim Anah	Ramadi Falluja Karma Ruthba Haditha Heet Rawa Qaim Anah
Kirkuk			Bashir Hawija	Bashir Hawija	Bashir Hawija
Diyala	Saadiyah Hamrin**	Saadiyah	Saadiyah Hamrin	Saadiyah Hamrin	Saadiyah Hamrin
June 2014- Fall of Mosul	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019

Source: FFS annual report 2019 for dates of liberation (Figure 2, page 19)<sup>48</sup>; FFS M&E data for start date of implementation; \* Implementation starts with the kick off of Bill of Quantities (BoQ) development, calls for tenders and procurement. It is preceded by assessments, project selection and approval which are not reflected in the M&E system and accordingly in this figure; \*\* Towns not in FFS annual report 2019 for dates of liberation (team compilation)

A key factor that facilitated the quick geographic expansion of FFS is that the implementation phase in some locations preceded actual liberation from ISIL (e.g. Hawija, Mosul). This is because FFS was able to pre-position itself to ensure an early kick off of tender preparations and procurement. The strategic decisions made by the

<sup>48</sup> The evaluation team recognizes there may be some differences compared to other sources regarding dates of liberation. However, for the sake of consistency, the years of liberation noted in FFS’ annual report 2019 were systematically used.

steering committee enabled FFS to think ahead in terms of contextual developments and endorse locations that were not yet liberated in view of ensuring readiness for speedy implementation upon liberation. A key inevitable contextual challenge was the prevalence of Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs). FFS addressed this challenge effectively. From the onset, and in discussion with international partners, a collaboration with UNMAS was foreseen to ensure clearance of sites. According to UNDP, the FFS and UNMAS teams worked hand in hand. However, as UNMAS' operations shifted with reduced funding and due to changes in the institutional context of mine clearance<sup>49</sup>, alternatives were sought including the Iraq Security Forces.

**Programmatic evolution.** FFS started out by focusing on the rehabilitation of four crucial types of public infrastructure in the sectors of education, health, electricity and water, as well as local government buildings. The intention was to build the basis for accelerating the resumption of most crucial social services and to signal the return of Government in liberated areas. From 2016, the scope of FFS' sectors started to expand to meet the needs on the ground. The sewerage sector was added. Livelihood activities kicked off as returns started to pick up following the liberation of key cities. The intention was to ensure that immediate urgent needs were met while at the same time facilitating the start of rehabilitation works through for instance rubble removal, which was accompanied by awareness raising on IEDs. The rehabilitation of housing and roads and bridges were introduced in 2017. The former was a response to damaged houses being an obstacle for the return of IDPs. The latter followed the approval of FFES in 2016 which covered larger infrastructure projects that were meant to reconnect cities and resume freedom of movement and what ensues of economic and social activities. While reconciliation was recognized to be an important aspect from the onset, the scale of destruction and attention needed for the rehabilitation of damaged infrastructure naturally shifted focus away from it during the initial phase of FFS (2015-2017). Other factors that contributed to this include the lack of funding to the window dedicated to reconciliation, and donor earmarking which also contributed to shaping the typology of the FFS portfolio.

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<sup>49</sup> According to UNDP, the context changed as the government authority banned international demining entities from doing clearance works without their permission and tasking order. The majority of clearance work on FFS sites was however done by UNMAS.

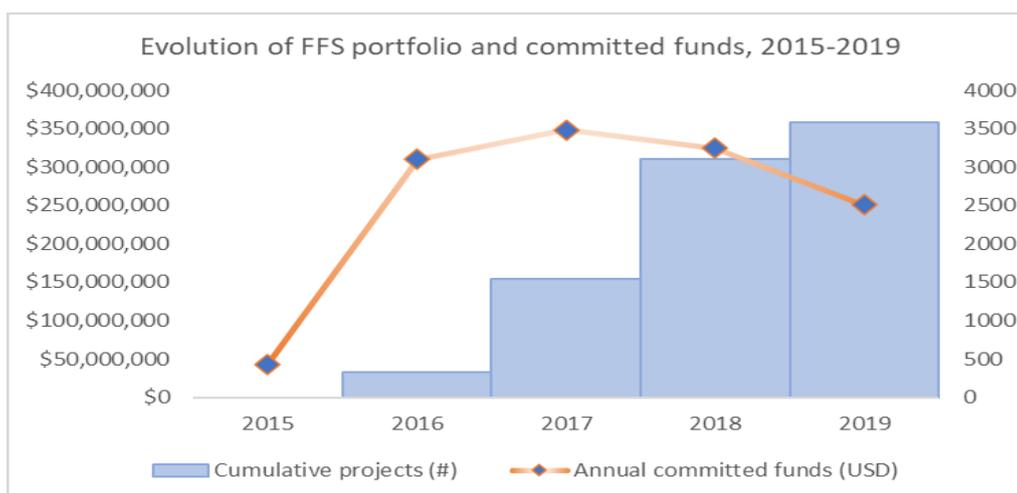
Figure 6: FFS programmatic evolution

FFS evolution of sectors (# of projects) with new sectors in red						
	2014-2015	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Salahadin	Education (4) Electricity (1) Health (2) Water (5) Municipality (1)	Education (8) Electricity (2) Health (12) Water (1) Livelihoods (4)	Education (8) Electricity (3) Health (24) Water (4) Municipality (7) Livelihoods (1) Sewerage (3)	Education (59) Electricity (5) Health (7) Water (2) Municipality (9) Livelihoods (3)	Education (4) Electricity (1) Health (3) Water (9) Municipality (4) Social Cohesion (1)	
Ninewa	Health (1)*	Health (3) Electricity (3) Education (8) Water (3) Municipality (10) Sewerage (3) Livelihoods (1)	Health (61) Electricity (44) Education (217) Water (26) Municipality (67) Sewerage (36) Livelihoods (30) Roads and Bridges (4) Housing (3)	Health (73) Electricity (104) Education (288) Water (40) Municipality (170) Sewerage (42) Livelihoods (28) Roads and Bridges (13) Housing (13)	Health (21) Electricity (22) Education (61) Water (22) Municipality (62) Sewerage (4) Livelihoods (29) Roads and Bridges (2) Housing (21) Social Cohesion (1)	
Anbar		Education (24) Electricity (7) Health (42) Water (22) Sewerage (9) Livelihoods (9)	Education (134) Electricity (10) Health (34) Water (18) Sewerage (1) Livelihoods (41) Municipality (26) Roads and Bridges (6) Housing (19)	Education (88) Electricity (15) Health (29) Water (19) Sewerage (6) Livelihoods (10) Municipality (13) Roads and Bridges (9) Housing (15) Social Cohesion (3)	Education (7) Health (2) Water (1) Sewerage (3) Livelihoods (11) Municipality (4) Roads and Bridges (1) Housing (9) Social Cohesion (3)	
Kirkuk			Electricity (3) Water (4) Municipality (3) Livelihoods (1)	Electricity (2) Water (2) Municipality (1) Livelihoods (1) Health (12) Education (15)	Electricity (1) Water (5) Municipality (4) Livelihoods (1) Health (6) Education (1)	
Diyala		Education (3) Electricity (2) Health (2) Water (2) Municipality (1)	Electricity (3) Health (1) Water (3) Municipality (1) Roads and Bridges (2)		Roads and Bridges (1)	Electricity (1)
	June 2014- Fall of Mosul	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019

Source: FFS M&E data; \* M&E data on sectors show that FFS was active in Ninewa in 2015.

FFS provided a holistic and flexible design from the onset so it could embrace evolving and shifting priorities across its windows (Hypothesis 1). In practice, the different windows represent a progression of stabilization work rather than a simultaneous package as initially assumed. Attention to social cohesion resumed with the reinstatement of Window 4 in 2018. In line with UNDP Iraq’s move towards a strategically coherent programming approach for social cohesion, activities picked up during the extension phase (2018-2020) when most IDPs had returned and major critical infrastructures were rehabilitated in key locations. It is worth noting however that some social cohesion aspects were addressed through other UNDP programmes and actors, some of which were funded by FFS donors.

**Portfolio expansion.** In line with the above, FFS’ portfolio experienced exponential growth, as donor funding increased with the ongoing liberation of ISIL-occupied governorates.

**Figure 7: FFS cumulative number of projects and annual donor commitments, 2015-2019**

Source: FFS M&E data including total project numbers in the project tracker (26 December 2019) and FFS budget data on donor commitments (team compilation)

At its inception, the number of projects approved for implementation was modest. FFS was focused on one location, specifically Tikrit. As of 2016, with the liberation of Ramadi and Falluja, donor funds picked up, and the number of projects increased and grew substantially in 2017 following the liberation of Mosul. Along with the slowdown of returns in 2019, funding dropped to a level lower than 2016. This translated into a deceleration in the rate of growth of activities the same year despite continued immediate stabilization needs in recently liberated and rural areas and extended stabilization needs in areas liberated earlier in view of durable solutions.

**Organisational adaptation.** In response to its rapid expansion, FFS has shown organisational preparedness and adaptability in the following manner:

- FFS assigned a dedicated independent team from the onset. The team reported directly to the UN Deputy Special Representative of Secretary General, Resident Coordinator and UNDP Resident Representative<sup>50</sup>. The intention was to ensure full dedication to speed and scale of delivery, not normally congruent with development work modalities and procedures. A reported trade-off of this setup was that FFS did not fully align to normal practices known to UNDP such as participation in coordination meetings in the initial phase of FFS.
- A service center was established as part of the dedicated FFS team to expediate the procurement process needed for immediate stabilization work. In this setup, the head of stabilization had both programmatic and operational oversight. The head of the service center had decision-making authorities that accelerated processing time, for instance on the recruitment of procurement officers in view of quickly adjusting the capacity of the service center to meet the caseload at hand. As the result of the re-alignment that took place following the UNDP headquarter-led management change process, which reviewed the UNDP Iraq country office structure in 2017, UNDP Iraq operations were streamlined and the service center began to handle both FFS and country office operations. Given its significance to the performance of FFS, the service center remained a separate unit that is placed within operations. In this setup, the center reports to the Deputy Resident Representative for operations and has "*delegated authority to fast-track implementation*"<sup>51</sup>.
- Waivers were obtained to give FFS the needed flexibility to deliver on speed and scale. First, a human resource (HR) waiver for critical UNDP positions was obtained in 2016. This allowed FFS to expediate the

<sup>50</sup> The two positions were represented by the same person at the time of FFS' inception.

<sup>51</sup> FFS (2018): Project document, page 11.

recruitment of staff and adjust according to its changing workload. For instance, the service center started out with four staff and grew to 62 staff in 2017 at the peak of activities. It also helped FFS to pre-position itself in terms of recruiting key staff, for instance prior to the expansion of the office to Erbil. According to UNDP, around 20-30 key positions were recruited under this waiver. Second, a procurement waiver was obtained in 2017 increasing the procurement ceiling that can be directly handled by the UNDP Iraq office in order to ensure speediness of implementation. In parallel, a dedicated Contract, Asset and Procurement (CAP) committee chairman was hired to concurrently ensure that speediness is not jeopardized—normally a position fulfilled by an existing UNDP staff that is not fully dedicated to the task.

- A dedicated security unit under UNDP was set up for FFS missions and operations. The unit is separate from the United Nations Department for Safety and Security (UNDSS) and was created in view of facilitating the speediness of delivery given the challenging security context.
- FFS scaled up its pool of dedicated staff with diverse profiles and increasing reliance on national staff to accompany portfolio growth and change in FFS implementation structure. With the imminent liberation of Mosul in 2017, the initial structure of FFS was revised from a one-country structure to a north and central structure. In the North, Ninewah was divided into three areas to ensure appropriate staffing, access and monitoring. FFS staffing grew from a team of four staff, including one national staff in 2015, to a team of 91 staff with 61 national staff in 2019, with the international team representation declining from 75% to 33%<sup>52</sup>. The bulk of FFS staff are based in Erbil.
- FFS heavily relied on third-party recruitments through existing long-term agreements (LTA). This ensured FFS had the ability to mobilize local field staff such as engineers, social organizers, MSAs and monitoring staff within an average of two weeks, and scale up and down depending on project workload within legally agreed terms and conditions. The main LTA provider supplied between 300-400 national staff at any given moment in the period of the evaluation. This arrangement also ensured quick and regular access to field sites as LTA staff are not subject to UNDP security protocols.
- FFS changed the modality for the implementation of CfW activities to deal with the scale of interventions needed in the different governorates. This entailed hiring private contractors through a competitive bidding processes since 2017, coupled with third-party monitoring of CfW projects hired through LTA.

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<sup>52</sup> FFS operations data.

## 5.2 Effectiveness

Effectiveness examines three evaluation questions as follows:

- Evaluation Question 2 on progress towards the achievement of results.
- Evaluation Question 3 on M&E, learning and adaptation.
- Evaluation Question 4 on gender equality and results for girls and women.

### Evaluation Question 2

To what extent did the project achieve its intended outputs and outcomes?

*(What did FFS deliver and how did it contribute to improved conditions?)*

**Finding 4.** FFS delivered small and larger rehabilitated infrastructure in seven crucial sectors and immediate livelihood opportunities to returnees primarily through CfW. Apart from housing, rehabilitation design did not systematically integrate considerations for people with disabilities. Despite strengthened communication efforts since 2018, there was little communication on realised outputs to potential returnees to expediate returns.

**Finding 5.** FFS delivered various community level initiatives particularly since 2018 including a few that worked towards facilitating the return of IDPs.

**Finding 6.** FFS rehabilitated governorate and municipal facilities, replenished damaged assets that are vital for the work of municipalities, and deployed MSAs to work with actors at municipal level involved in stabilization work.

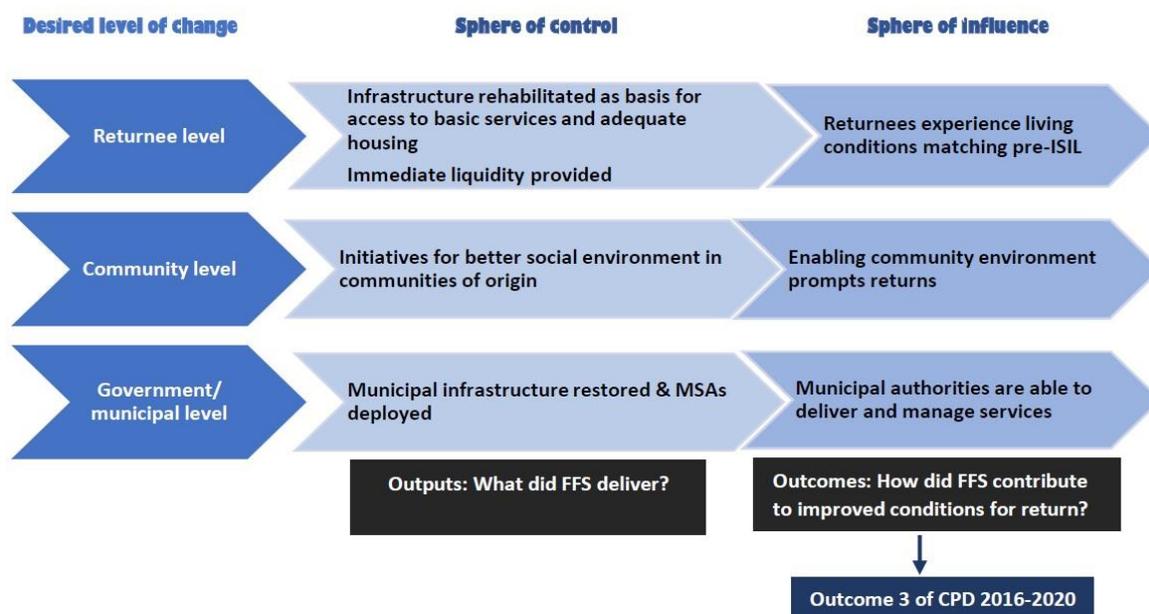
**Finding 7.** Through the rehabilitation of priority infrastructure, FFS contributed to motivating the return of IDPs and to building the necessary conditions for the resumption of services. While a partial return to normal life is noted, many returnees experience a deterioration in their living conditions compared to pre-ISIL levels and are challenged by the lack of local job opportunities and inability to meet basic needs.

**Finding 8.** While FFS conducted a range of community initiatives, these were limited and not strongly guided by the overall intention of improving the environment in communities of origin in view of expediting returns. The most pertinent output that has contributed to returns is reconciliation agreements signed that facilitated the return of a modest number of IDPs.

**Finding 9.** In the context of immediate response to most urgent needs for the resumption of municipal services, FFS' replenishment of damaged assets built the basis for municipalities to resume their daily functions (e.g. garbage collection, road maintenance). Attention to building technical capacities (e.g. maintenance of supplied equipment) increased in recent years.

Evaluation Question 2 is divided into two levels of inquiry. First, it looks at what FFS delivered (results at output level). Then, it explores the extent to which this acted as a basis for improving conditions for return to liberated areas (results at outcome level) in line with Outcome 3 of CPD 2016-2020. The reconstruction of the ToC, undertaken during the inception phase, differentiates between what is within the sphere of control of FFS (outputs) and what is within its sphere of influence (outcomes and contribution to the said Outcome 3), as well as results at three levels of desired change; returnees, communities of origin and government/municipal levels.

Figure 8: Core element of reconstructed theory of change



**Results at output level** examine key outputs delivered in view of contributing to the three desired levels of change. For each level of desired change, the sections below start by presenting the portfolio of approved projects then move on to examine actual delivery by looking at the rate of implementation. The latter refers to the percentage of implemented projects out of total approved projects for the period of the evaluation. Implemented projects include projects that are under implementation and completed<sup>53</sup>. Figures used are based on FFS M&E data from the project tracker of December 26, 2019, unless otherwise specified. Communication efforts are looked at to get insights about what information about realized outputs was disseminated to potential returnees, as a premise for demonstrating ongoing stabilization efforts and encouraging returns.

**Finding 4. FFS delivered small and larger rehabilitated infrastructure in seven crucial sectors and immediate livelihood opportunities to returnees primarily through CfW. Apart from housing, rehabilitation design did not systematically integrate considerations for people with disabilities. Despite strengthened communication efforts since 2018, there was little communication on realized outputs to potential returnees to expediate returns.**

**Rehabilitation of crucial infrastructure.** The rehabilitation of priority infrastructure represents FFS’ core stabilization activity that is meant to build the basis for the resumption of service provision and expediate returns to liberated areas. The FFS portfolio for the rehabilitation of infrastructure covers public infrastructure, including FFIS and FFES, and housing. In FFS terminology, this refers to Window 1<sup>54</sup>.

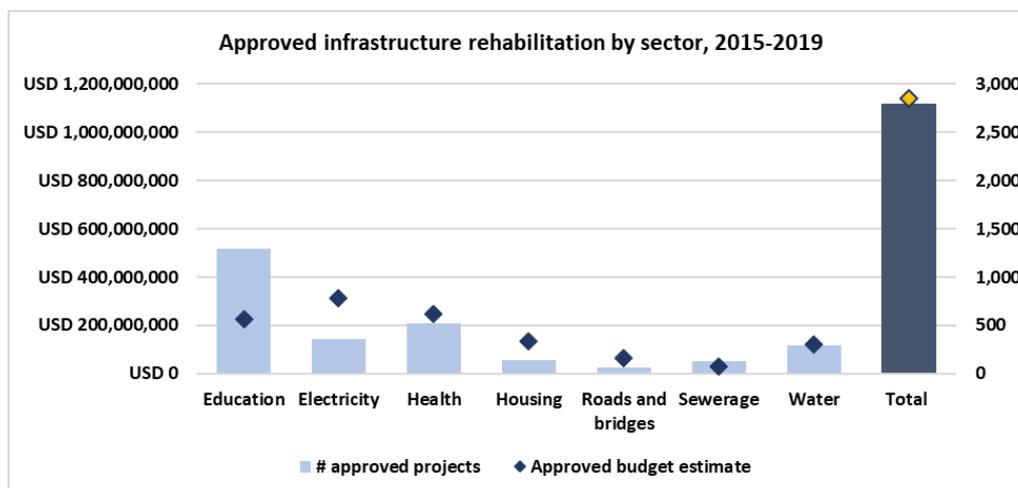
**Portfolio of approved projects.** Looking at the number of approved projects, FFS had a portfolio of 2,798 approved projects for the rehabilitation of smaller and larger infrastructure in the period 2015-2019. Excluding 2015, which mainly included assessments, this gives an average of around 700 projects per year. The budget of

<sup>53</sup> The M&E system records a project as active once it has been approved for BoQ development and completed once payment is finalized. This means that a completed project that is not yet paid out is classified as “under implementation” (see section 5.4 on efficiency and procedures).

<sup>54</sup> Window 1 in the M&E tracker includes FFIS and FFES. In addition to sector specific infrastructures, it covers i) the rehabilitation of government infrastructures that are sector specific (e.g. educational directorate) which include government buildings at municipal level, and ii) the provision of equipment for the future functioning of sector specific facilities (e.g. medical equipment and vehicles). The provision of equipment to municipalities is classified under Window 3 and looked at under the section on support to municipal capacities.

the infrastructure portfolio stood at USD 902,240,748 for the period of the evaluation<sup>55</sup>. Projects included the sectors of education, health, electricity, water, sewerage, roads and bridges, as well as government buildings and private housing. 4% of total approved projects were housing rehabilitation projects covering more than 23,000 housing units<sup>56</sup>.

Figure 9: Distribution by sector of approved infrastructure rehabilitation, 2015-2019



Source: FFS M&E data, 2015-2019<sup>57</sup>

In terms of typology, a selection of key types of rehabilitated infrastructure is presented in the table below:

Table 4: Main types and examples of infrastructure rehabilitation projects by sector in the period 2015-2019\*

<b>Education</b>	Kindergartens; Primary schools including mixed and girl schools; Secondary schools including mixed and girl schools; Technical and vocational schools (4 targeting women only); Universities (Anbar, Fallujah, Tikrit, Mosul, Ninewah and Northern Technical)
<b>Health</b>	Primary health care centers (PHCs); Hospitals rehabilitated (Tikrit teaching hospital, Shirqat general hospital, Sinuni hospital, Qayarah general hospital, Hamdaniyah hospital, Karma hospital) <sup>58</sup>
<b>Electricity</b>	Transmission lines and others to re-connect the grid; Critical structures to provide electricity (e.g., 33/11 substations, 132KV substations, mobile substations, transformers)
<b>Water</b>	Water treatment plants; Water Complexes; Water distribution and quality; Water Tanks
<b>Sewerage</b>	Pipelines and other parts to re-connect the grid; Critical structures to treat sewerage water
<b>Roads and bridges</b>	Key roads/bridges: <b>Ramadi</b> : Palestine Iron bridge, Almaamoon floating bridge, Anbar university bridge; <b>Falluja</b> : Japan Iron bridge, Fallujah Iron bridge; <b>Qaim</b> : Al Obaidi floating bridge, Al Khood floating bridge, Al Hawejat-AL Karablah bridge; <b>Mosul</b> : Al Sukr bridge, Saidati Al Jamila Bridge, Sanhareeb Bridge, Sueiss Bridge, Al Athbah Hospital Access Road, Athba Road; <b>Others</b> : Garmah river bridge in Karma, five road in Saadiyah-Diyala, Box Culvert in Al Kmrik, Al-Aalwa and Hay Al Khdhraa in Tel Afar.

Source: FFS M&E data (December 26, 2019); \*This typology does not include ongoing projects and the supply of equipment.

<sup>55</sup> FFS budget data 2015-2019.

<sup>56</sup> A housing project corresponds to a block of housing units whose number varies depending on the housing block and exceeds the number of housing projects.

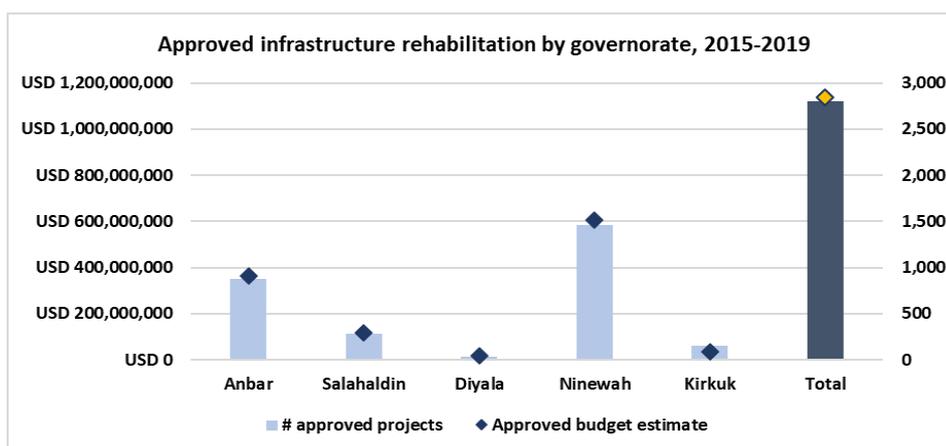
<sup>57</sup> M&E data reports a budget estimate of USD 1,137,383,033.

<sup>58</sup> In addition, Al Khansa Teaching hospital, Al Athbah hospital, Hawija hospital received equipment along with the PHCs and other hospitals that received equipment to resume their services.

According to UNDP, the rehabilitation of public facilities was done in line with the standards for design set by GoI. These resulted in upgrades as rehabilitation works matched current standards compared to the design that existed pre-ISIL. However, given that Iraqi standards do not integrate guidance on accessibility to persons with disabilities (PWDs), the rehabilitation of public infrastructure did not consider these aspects during the period of the evaluation<sup>59</sup>. Survey results indicate that 18% of respondents had a family member living with a disability, which highlights the relevance of addressing this dimension of HRBA. Interviews and field observations in visited educational and health facilities suggest that accessibility considerations were generally not part of rehabilitation work. However, the rehabilitation of private housing accounted for such considerations in the vulnerability assessments, and according to UNDP, some BoQ templates. Examples of disability friendly housing rehabilitation were reported in interviews, although they are not systematically documented<sup>60</sup>.

The geographic distribution of FFS' infrastructure rehabilitation portfolio covers the five targeted governorates. Around half of the rehabilitation portfolio of approved projects are in Ninewah. East Mosul (484), West Mosul (295) and Ninewah plains (404) constitute the majority of approved rehabilitation projects in this governorate (82%). Anbar is the second largest governorate where a good majority of approved rehabilitation projects (69%) are in Ramadi (324) Falluja (178) and Karma (101). These are followed by Qaim (98) and Anah (65) in West Anbar. According to UNDP, the variation in geographic coverage of FFS is due to a combination of three main factors. First, the level of damage in targeted locations which varied across governorates. Second, return flows which were different across governorates. Third, not all governorates were fully occupied by ISIL. The geographic portfolio was also shaped by donor earmarking even though not all of FFS' budget is earmarked. Consulted government counterparts were not all fully clear about these considerations that affected the distribution of FFS' portfolio across governorates, raising questions as to why some regions were favored over others.

**Figure 10: Geographic distribution of approved infrastructure rehabilitation, 2015-2019**



Source: FFS M&E data, 2015-2019<sup>61</sup>

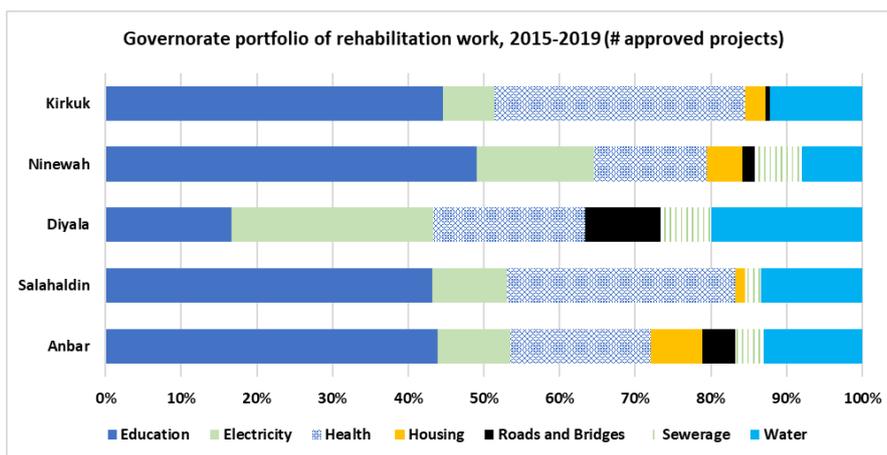
Zooming in into the portfolio of each governorate, the number of approved rehabilitation work is predominantly within education and health. The diversity of the portfolio of each governorate reflects the different prioritized needs for rehabilitation in each area. According to UNDP, there is no set annual budget per governorate and the selection is done based on needs, relevance to the FFS mandate, budget availability and donor earmarking. While consulted government stakeholders were involved in proposing and/or prioritizing projects, they were not all clear about how budget allocations for each governorate were set.

<sup>59</sup> UNDP informed the evaluation team that recently, some BoQs have integrated this consideration.

<sup>60</sup> The evaluation team does not have information whether PWD were involved in determining the disability friendliness of items used.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

Figure 11: Governorate portfolio of approved infrastructure rehabilitation projects, 2015-2019

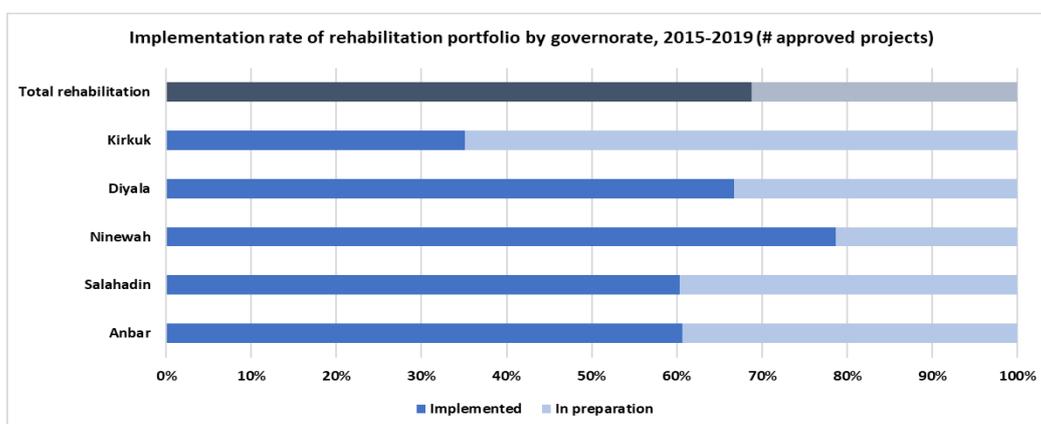


Source: FFS M&E data, 2015-2019

**Implemented projects.** In terms of delivery of infrastructure that visibly demonstrates to Iraqis ongoing rehabilitation efforts, 1,923 projects representing 69% of approved rehabilitation projects were implemented in the period 2015-2019; with 93% of these projects being completed. The remaining projects were in the preparation stage, namely BoQ development (26% of total rehabilitation projects) or under procurement (6%)<sup>62</sup>. According to UNDP, the value of disbursed contracts of USD 560,858,772<sup>63</sup> went primarily to local contractors<sup>64</sup>. A few consulted stakeholders pointed out that some contractors were not based in the area. UNDP informed the evaluation team that a challenge has been to find qualified bidders and the assessment of tenders does not favor specific bidders from a given area in line with international procurement standards. To enhance the opportunities of locally based contractors to bid, UNDP offered e-procurement training workshops. The evaluation team does not have information as to whether this resulted in an increase in the number of local contractors bidding but was informed that the number of bidders has generally increased overtime.

The rates of implementation of infrastructure rehabilitation works differ across governorates. Ninewah has the highest implementation rate (79%) well above the average for all governorates. While Anbar, Salahadin and Diyala have a rate between 60-67%, Kirkuk lags behind (35%) despite its small portfolio. According to UNDP, the pull-down factors are closely linked to security, access and political challenges that have affected the process of BoQ development and implementation of works.

Figure 12: Implementation rate of governorate infrastructure rehabilitation portfolio, 2015-2019



Source: FFS M&E data, 2015-2019; Implemented projects include those that are under implementation and completed.

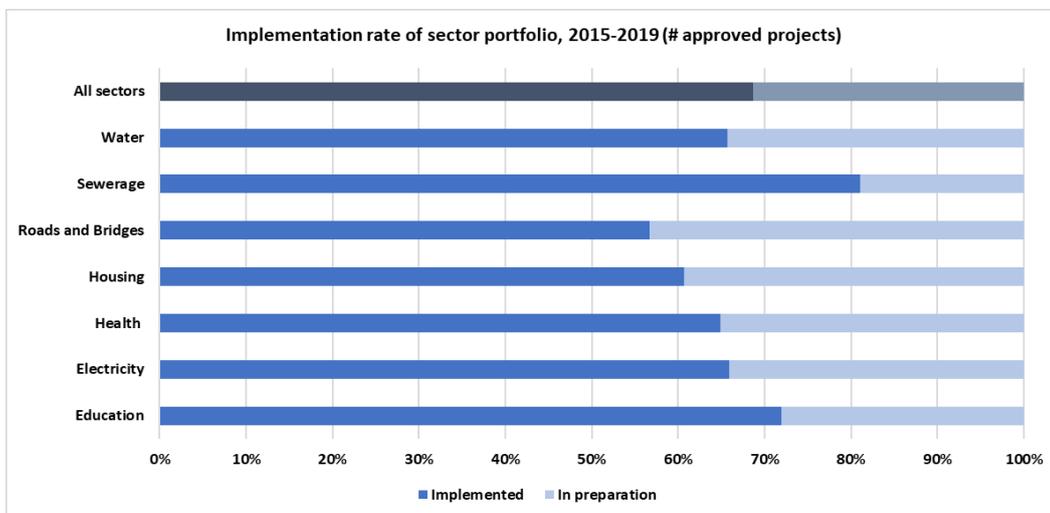
<sup>62</sup> The total number does not fully add up to 100% due to decimals.

<sup>63</sup> FFS budget data, 2015-2019.

<sup>64</sup> The import of specialized equipment was done through international bidding.

In terms of delivery of the sector portfolio of rehabilitated infrastructure, projects across sectors were implemented at a rate of around or higher than 60% of total approved projects. Implementation and completion rates were highest in the sectors of sewerage and education and lowest in roads and bridges and housing. The lower implementation rate is linked to the fact that roads and bridges have the highest share of projects that are still in the BoQ development stage (43%) followed by housing, health, water and electricity. They are typically larger projects that require a longer period of implementation.

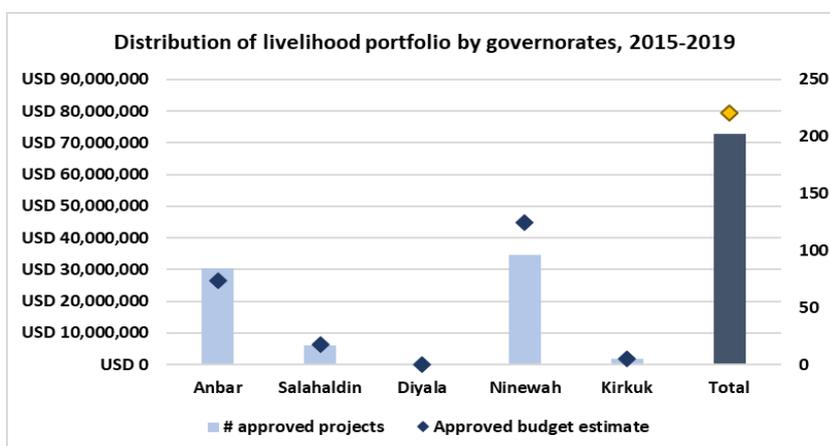
Figure 13: Implementation rate of rehabilitation sector portfolio, 2015-2019



Source: FFS M&E data, 2015-2019; Implemented projects include those that are under implementation and completed.

**Immediate livelihood opportunities.** The livelihood component of FFS strived to ensure that returnees have immediate cash liquidity so they can meet critical needs upon return. Livelihood activities kicked off in 2016 with 14 projects in Anbar, Ninewah and Salahadin and were scaled up in 2017. The portfolio of livelihood activities comprised 202 approved projects in the period 2015-2019. The livelihood budget stood at USD 69,435,776<sup>65</sup>. Ninewah had the largest share of the livelihood portfolio, followed by Anbar. Around 3% of projects went to Kirkuk at a value of around USD 2 million. No livelihood activities were done in Diyala<sup>66</sup>.

Figure 14: Livelihood portfolio by governorate, 2015-2019



Source: FFS M&E data, 2015-2019<sup>67</sup>

<sup>65</sup> FFS budget data 2015-2019.

<sup>66</sup> This governorate was not highly prioritized given that it did not fully match FFS' mandate in terms of being fully occupied by ISIL and return levels were not high compared to other governorates. However, under different projects, UNDP Iraq provided support for livelihood in Diyala during this period (e.g. Iraq Crisis Response and Resilience Programme (ICRRP)).

<sup>67</sup> M&E data reports a budget estimate of USD 79,209,968.

The main FFS modality of providing immediate cash liquidity is through CfW. The number of CfW projects represents 92% of the total livelihood portfolio, the bulk of which (83%) relates to rubble removal and cleanup of public spaces and facilities. Some CfW activities were done for economic infrastructures like irrigation canals, markets and industrial areas, while others for leisure infrastructures such as planting trees in parks. But these types of infrastructures were not prioritized. There are examples of CfW being directly linked to FFS' rehabilitation of infrastructure, such as rubble removal in universities, hospitals and houses to be rehabilitated, renovations and restoration of rehabilitated schools as well as painting and desk repairs in schools. However, this link is not systematically documented.

CfW provided temporary short-term employment and liquidity to 32,516 individuals in the period of the evaluation. These mainly included unskilled labour who apply for the jobs, which are advertised. A total of around USD 65 million was injected in target communities through CfW in the period 2015-2019. This contributed to ensuring immediate basic needs are met but also to kickstarting cash circulation in the local economy through locally hired contractors, workers and field monitors.

Five cash grants projects to female headed households and five small business grant projects focusing on women were provided as a one-off grants in the period of the evaluation. These activities do not represent a significant and sustained livelihood activity. Small business grants were converted into CfW in 2017 as the latter proved more relevant to the scale of immediate liquidity needs.

In terms of implementation rate, 88% of approved livelihood projects were implemented; with 80% completed projects. The remaining 12% were projects under preparation in Ninewah and Anbar (9% in BoQ development, 3% under procurement). This higher rate of implementation is linked to the shorter nature of CfW activities compared to infrastructure rehabilitation.

**Communication.** A key hypothesis of FFS is that IDPs who are potential returnees are aware of ongoing rehabilitation work for it to be a factor that affects their decision to return (Hypothesis 2). In the initial phase of FFS when liberation efforts were still ongoing, communication efforts targeted donors as the main audience. With one communication expert on the team, and no senior communication expert represented in management, FFS did not have a communication vision in view of expediting the return of IDPs. The 2018 extension of FFS expanded the team to two staff. Even though the team is still not represented by a communication specialist in management, the doubling of its capacity resulted in the production of a strategy that set FFS' communication objectives and defined a three-tier audience, namely:

- Iraqi communities to whom FFS showcased rehabilitation efforts in view of restoring confidence in the government using social media (e.g. Facebook) and Iraqi media outlets. Two media partnerships were forged in Anbar and Ninewah where the scale of destruction was largest:
  - In Anbar, a 26-part documentary series was produced and aired on Anbar TV, each series dealing with a specific theme. Audience feedback is not documented. According to UNDP, the fact that the TV re-broadcast it on its own initiative indicates it was a success. This pilot was not replicated due to its high cost and insufficient budget to scale up in other areas.
  - In Ninewah, a 4-part radio series was piloted with Al Ghad FM covering CfW, housing, school and hospital rehabilitation. The series reached audience primarily in Ninewah and generated comments and reactions, with some praising the work while others raising questions and/or asking to get support in their area<sup>68</sup>.
- Donors to meet their need for high visibility through reporting, in addition to tailored requests for stories.
- Broad/Global citizens as the constituents of donors through UNDP social media and web stories.

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<sup>68</sup> Source: Al Ghad Facebook data 2018.

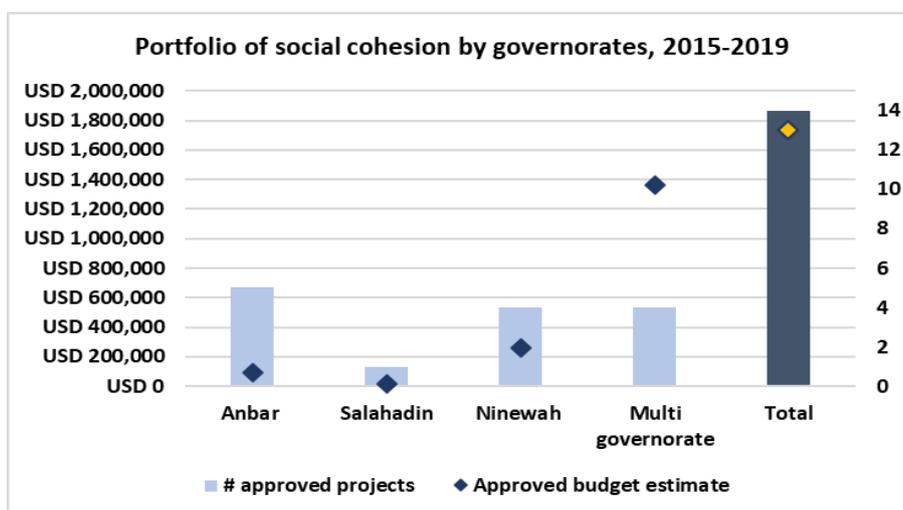
The shift from donor-centric communication to more strategic thinking represents a step in the right direction to communicate outputs achieved in support of Outcome 3 of CPD 2016-2020<sup>69</sup>. In addition, the FFS communication team has since 2018 been participating in the “communicating with communities” working group and liaising with the call center for IDPs. Despite these positive steps, there were no targeted efforts dedicated to communicating FFS’ realized outputs to potential returnees as an audience. Some efforts came in at a later stage. Similarly, closer collaboration with relevant agencies on the dissemination of information to IDPs was not strongly foreseen in the design of FFS from the onset<sup>70</sup>.

**Finding 5. FFS delivered various community level initiatives particularly since 2018 including a few that worked towards facilitating the return of IDPs.**

**Community-based initiatives.** The portfolio of community level social cohesion work represents the “soft” component of FFS designed to stimulate enabling social conditions for returns to communities of origin in liberated areas. Work on social cohesion kicked off in 2015, mainly in Ninewah, working with NGOs. In response to weak capacities of local CBOs, activities focused on training for instance in dialogue, mediation, and reconciliation. The involvement of community groups in reconciliation activities and the conduct of conflict analyses started in 2016. However, all social cohesion activities under FFS were paused and taken over by another UNDP programme in 2017. The resumption of activities in 2018 involved assessments in targeted area and consultations in selected locations. Social cohesion work was strengthened in 2019 following the introduction of an integrated holistic approach for social cohesion programming at UNDP Iraq and strengthened local presence of UNDP through the recruitment of local facilitators to support implementation and monitoring as well as the restructuring of the program teams into the social cohesion pillar. The latter is responsible for all social cohesion work in line with its strategic framework including FFS. Under FFS, core activities comprised area specific conflict sensitivity analyses, CBO grants for community-based initiatives and community reconciliation initiatives in view of facilitating the return of IDPs.

In the period 2015-2019, 14 projects were approved at a total budget of USD 1,768,925<sup>71</sup>. Anbar had the highest number of projects. M&E data indicate that 79% of the estimated budget went to four projects covering multiple governorates.

**Figure 15: Social cohesion portfolio by governorate, 2015-2019**



Source: FFS M&E data, 2015-2019<sup>72</sup>

<sup>69</sup> The importance of communication to IDPs was raised in the first steering committee meeting in 2015.

<sup>70</sup> The evaluation team understands these efforts were led by FFS and that the involvement and capacity development of GoI in communication work has been considered after the evaluation period.

<sup>71</sup> FFS budget data 2015-2019.

<sup>72</sup> M&E data reports a budget estimate of USD 1,732,884.

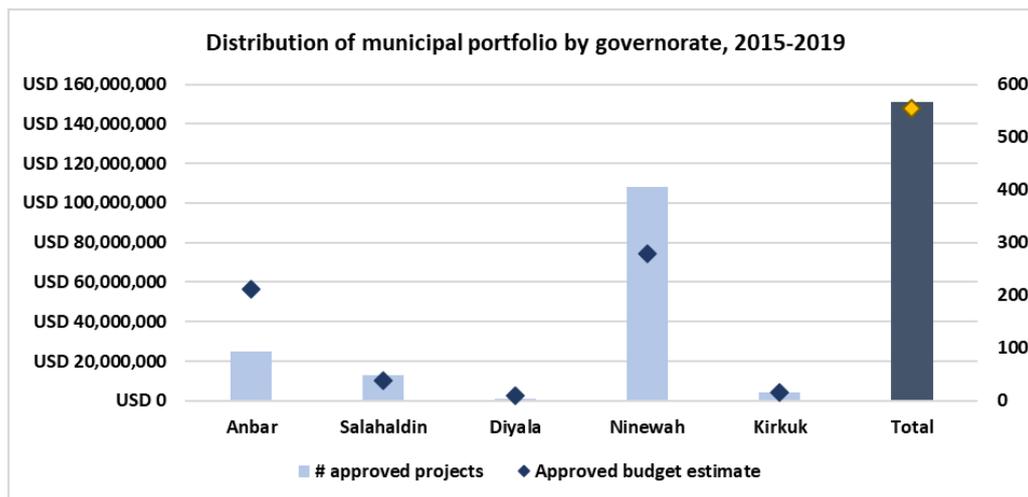
Six of these projects were implemented (43%) during the period of the evaluation, of which half were completed. Apart from one project in procurement, the remaining projects were still in the planning stage. Implemented projects included training sessions for local facilitators, training on peace building, conflict sensitivity and gender equality to UNDP engineers and counterparts, a community initiative on culture for peace including a poetry festival in Haditha, CBO empowerment to strengthen their capacities in facilitating reconciliation, social cohesion and community outreach, as well as managing grants for community-based initiatives such as creative art, community theatre, music, poetry, and folklore to support social cohesion and community peace, and two community reconciliation initiatives to resolve community and tribal conflict in view of facilitating the return of IDPs to their communities of origin in Touz Khormatu in Salahadin and Sagrah in Anbar<sup>73</sup>. The work involved extensive negotiations with representatives of the local communities, local peace committees<sup>74</sup> and local authorities resulting in signed agreements to facilitate returns.

**Finding 6. FFS rehabilitated governorate and municipal facilities, replenished damaged assets that are vital for the work of municipalities, and deployed MSAs to work with actors at municipal level involved in stabilization work.**

The main outputs that FFS delivered in view of building the capacity of municipalities to resume their core functions comprise i) the rehabilitation of municipal facilities (e.g. mayor’s office) and restocking of damaged assets necessary for the resumption of work (e.g. garbage collection trucks) and ii) the deployment of MSAs<sup>75</sup>.

**Rehabilitation and replenishment of municipal assets.** FFS approved 566 municipal projects under Window 3 in the period 2015-2019 at a total value of USD 33,023,049<sup>76</sup>. Ninewah had the highest number of approved projects and budget followed by Anbar and Salahadin. Diyala and Kirkuk together represent less than 5% of the number of approved projects and estimated budget.

**Figure 16: Government rehabilitation portfolio by governorate, 2015-2019**



Source: FFS M&E data, 2015-2019<sup>77</sup>

The most prominent and significant type of municipal support provided comprise the supply of heavy equipment (e.g. garbage collection and compacting trucks), the supply of generators and the installing of traffic police cabins. These represent key assets that are crucial for the daily work of municipalities whose responsibilities are confined to basic services like road maintenance, housing and garbage collection.

<sup>73</sup> Three community reconciliation in Qaim, Sinuni and Ninewah plains were under BoQ development.

<sup>74</sup> Local peace committees were established under another UNDP program working on social cohesion.

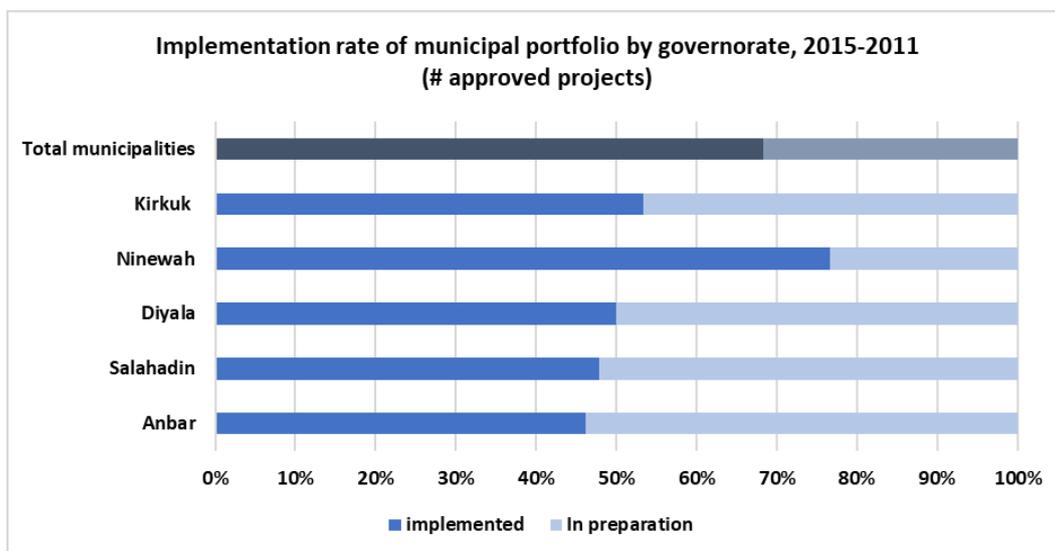
<sup>75</sup> This is in addition to rehabilitating sector specific government buildings under Window 1.

<sup>76</sup> FFS budget data 2015-2019.

<sup>77</sup> M&E data reports a budget estimate of USD 147,741,685.

In terms of delivery, 68% of municipal projects were completed or under implementation between 2015-2019. Ninewah has the highest rate of implementation (77%) above the average for all governorates. For the remaining governorates, the rates of implementation were in the vicinity of 50% as many projects were in the BoQ stage.

Figure 17: Implementation rate of municipal portfolio by governorate, 2015-2019



Source: FFS M&E data, 2015-2019

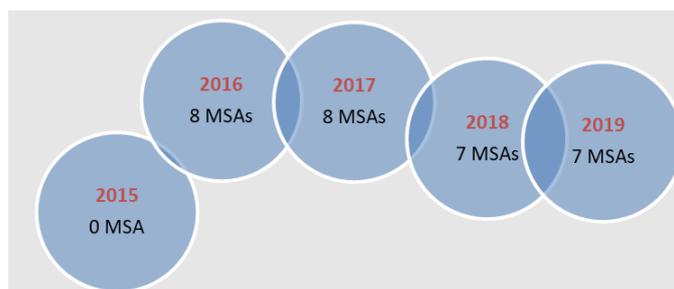
**Deployment of MSAs.** The intention of this deployment is to strengthen municipal capacity in stabilization work. According to their ToR, MSAs “will work with the appropriate municipal officials (principally the mayor and municipal line directorates) [...] to help build municipal capacity in stabilization<sup>78</sup>”. Their scope of work is comprehensive ranging from damage assessments, prioritization of needs and coordination with different parties to monitoring implementation, provide regular updates and reporting. Interviews with MSAs confirm that they primarily contribute the following core tasks:

- Damage assessments.
- Prioritization of projects involving communication with mayors, line directorates and FFS area coordinators.
- Follow up on progress with and support to field engineers.
- Participation in coordination meetings in their areas.
- Coordination with security forces to facilitate access for engineers and other visits.
- Data collection and monitoring.
- Security updates to UNDP.
- Overall problem solving.

The capacity support they provide to municipal authorities is in the form of mentoring and day to day technical support, as MSAs are engineers. Seven to eight MSAs were deployed in targeted governorates and districts in the period of the evaluation. The key factor that was considered when selecting the location of deployment was the return rate at the time of deployment and access to locations which is essential for gathering ground information. In 2018, three additional MSAs were set for recruitment but this did not happen due to funding constraints. While MSAs are attached to one location, they effectively cover a cluster of areas.

<sup>78</sup> Sample terms of reference for municipal stabilization advisor, Qaim, page 1.

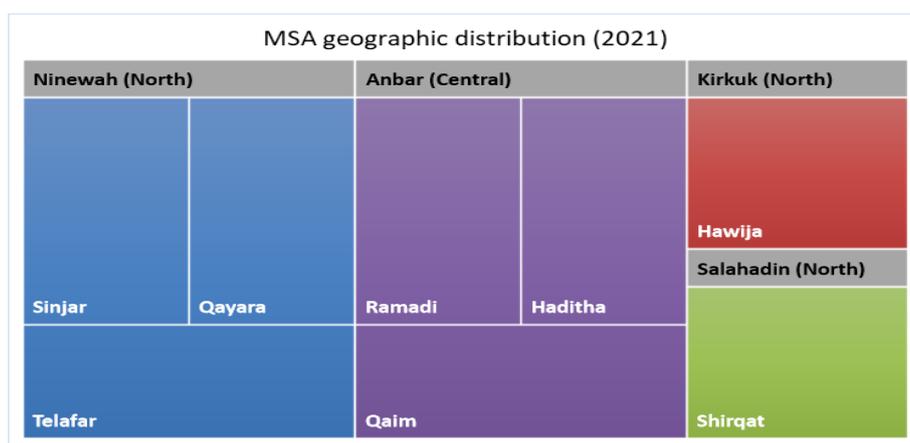
Figure 18: MSA deployment in the period 2015-2019



Source: FFS annual reports 2015-2019

At the time of the evaluation, eight MSAs were recruited covering North (5) and Central (3) as depicted below<sup>79</sup>.

Figure 19: Municipal stabilization advisors by governorate, 2021<sup>80</sup>



Source: FFS evaluation interviews

The field presence of MSAs is a valuable asset for FFS particularly in liberated areas with difficult access and security challenges. In the absence of FFS offices in targeted governorates, MSAs act as the extended presence of FFS on the ground. They play a central role in liaising with government and supporting the assessment and prioritization of projects to be submitted to the governor’s office, overall coordination and follow up.

MSAs work with municipal actors that are critical for stabilization work. According to a series of amendment to Law 21 of 2008 which set the framework for decentralization in Iraq (outside of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG)) and subsequent court decisions, key public functions fall under the responsibility of local departments of the central government, namely line directorates at governorate and district/municipal level. These report to their respective ministries at central level. Together with local administration (governor and mayor’s office), line ministries are responsible for basic service provision in sectors like water supply, health and education that constitute the core portfolio of FFS projects. Municipalities in Iraq do not cover a broad spectrum of social services. Their scope is limited to urban planning, roads, housing, garbage collection and the organization of markets. They refer to the Ministry of Housing and Municipalities. While MSAs work with municipalities on sectors relevant to their mandate, their main counterparts are line directorates and the mayor’s office.

**Results at outcome level** strive to establish the likely contribution of FFS in improving conditions for return in line with Outcome of CPD 2016-2020. This section looks at results generated at the three levels of desired

<sup>79</sup> The evaluation team does not have the historical overview on MSAs.

<sup>80</sup> Northern Salahadin (Shirqat) is part of FFS North given proximity and access considerations.

change in the reconstructed ToC, namely the returnee, community and government/municipal levels (see Figure 8. Core element of reconstructed theory of change).

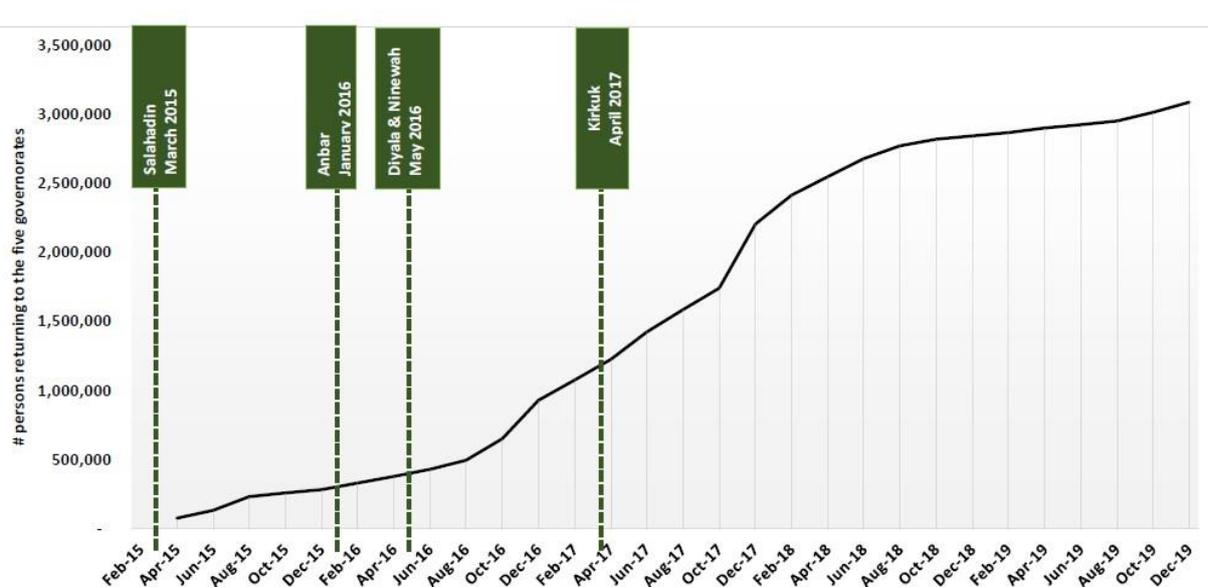
**Findings 7. FFS through the rehabilitation of priority infrastructure contributed to motivating the return of IDPs and to building the necessary conditions for the resumption of services. While a partial return to normal life is noted, many returnees experience a deterioration in their living conditions compared to pre-ISIL levels and are challenged by the lack of local job opportunities and inability to meet basic needs.**

In terms of results generated at the level of returnees, the evaluation first examines the link between FFS and return trends, which resulted in more than 4 million IDPS returning home<sup>81</sup> but has so far not been documented. Then, it looks at whether returnees experience living conditions matching pre-ISIL levels as the ultimate desired outcome.

It is important to note that the evaluation was carried out during the COVID-19 pandemic, which has worsened various facets of life for many individuals, families and businesses. This may have affected perceptions on living conditions today compared to pre-ISIL levels. Moreover, the perception of individuals, be they survey respondents, FGD participants or individual interviewees is shaped by their individual backgrounds and by their displacement experience. Findings on outcomes should therefore be understood within this context.

**Link between FFS and return trends.** IOM has systematically tracked displacement and return trends. Displacement tracking matrix (DTM) data shows an increase in displacement around key pivots (e.g. ISIL occupation in 2014, liberation efforts) and a hike in return trends following the liberation of Mosul in 2017, peaking in 2018 with the declaration of Iraq as free from ISIL. The return curve subsequently saturated with more than one million persons still in displacement today. The figure below shows return trends in the five targeted governorates of FFS and matches return trends with the start of implementation in these governorates<sup>82</sup>.

**Figure 20: Return trends in the five targeted governorates versus FFS start of implementation**



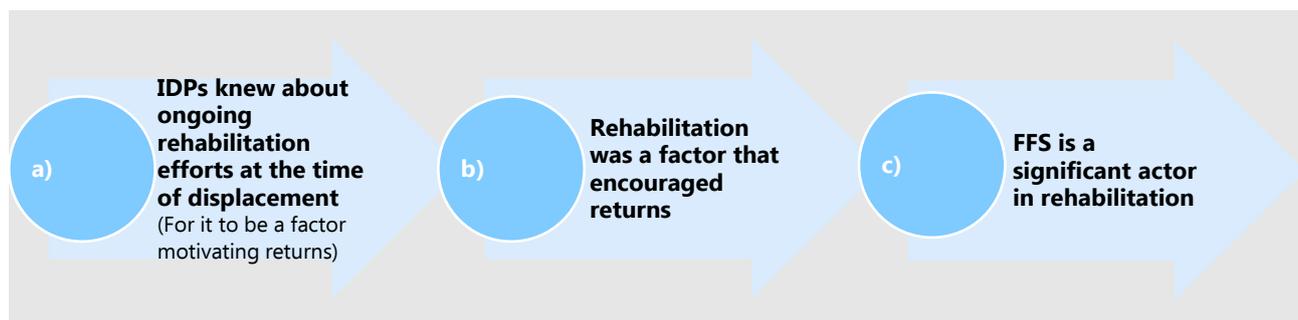
Source: IOM DTM returnee master list dataset (December 2020) (team compilation); FFS M&E data for FFS start dates of implementation

FFS’ expansion has accompanied return trends. However, the contribution of FFS to returns has so far been assumed. In order to explore the link between FFS and increasing return trends as the desired outcome, the evaluation engaged in an exercise i) to establish whether rehabilitation (as FFS’ main output) was a factor in affecting IDP decisions to return and ii) to position FFS within rehabilitation efforts to get an indication of likely

<sup>81</sup> IOM DTM, Returnee master list, December 2020

<sup>82</sup> The start date of implementation does not reflect assessments carried out prior to project approvals.

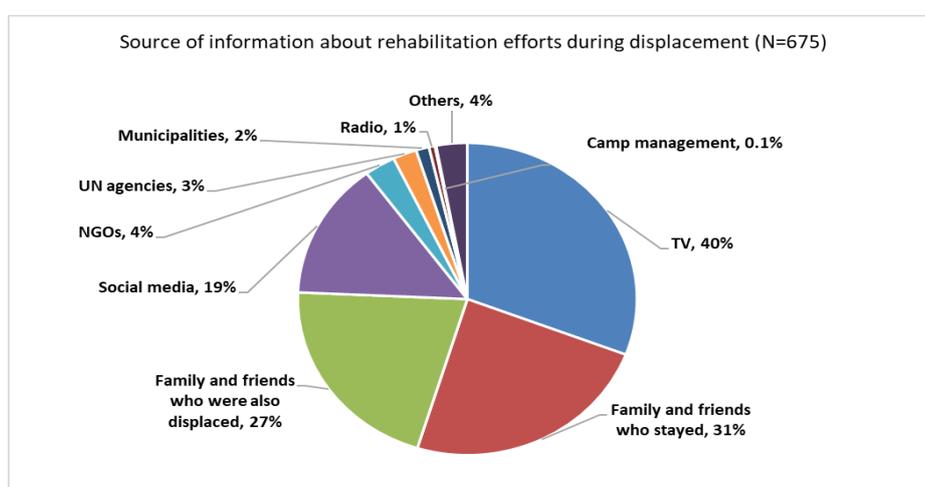
contribution. The scope of the evaluation does not include correlation analysis to establish a statistical relation between FFS and return trends. The evaluation team conducted a survey exclusively targeting returnees in neighborhoods of high return density in the ten evaluation sites<sup>83</sup> to shed light on three key hypotheses as presented below.



Survey findings on hypothesis a) indicate that a modest majority of returnees (67% of total respondents) knew about ongoing rehabilitation efforts at the time of their displacement. Most of the remaining respondents (around one third) who did not know about ongoing efforts (83%) said that having known at the time of displacement would have encouraged them to return home earlier<sup>84</sup>. A study undertaken by the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) and the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) in 2018 also shows that more than one third of returning IDPs were not informed about the situation in their areas of origin<sup>85</sup>. This underlines the importance of strategic communication targeting IDPs from the onset in view of expediting return.

For respondents who knew about rehabilitation efforts (675), the main sources of information were television (TV), and families and friends who stayed in liberated areas or were also displaced. Many of these respondents did not answer or remember the name of the TV station. While only six mentioned Anbar TV with whom FFS collaborated to produce an extensive series on rehabilitation efforts, 45% of respondents who mentioned TV were from Anbar and 44% from Ninewah. Only five respondents mentioned radio. Of these, two recalled radio Al Ghad with whom FFS collaborated. The large majority of respondents (93%) who got information from social media referred to Facebook, which is one of the platforms FFS uses<sup>86</sup>. These were mainly in Ninewah and Anbar.

**Figure 21: Source of information about rehabilitation efforts at the time of displacement**



Source: Evaluation survey, April-May 2021

<sup>83</sup> As noted in the methodology chapter, the selection of returnees for the survey was done independently of whether they benefited from FFS or reside in catchment areas of rehabilitated infrastructures.

<sup>84</sup> 3.3% of this majority said it somewhat would have encouraged them to return home earlier.

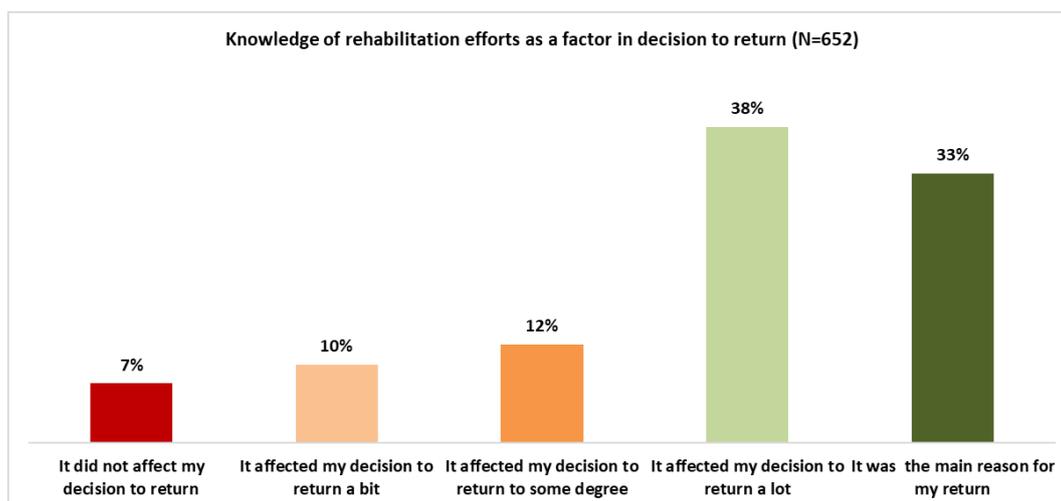
<sup>85</sup> NRC & IDMC Centre (2018): Nowhere to return: Iraq’s search for durable solutions, page 24.

<sup>86</sup> FFS uses Facebook in its strategic communication but the survey did not ask about how this was related to FFS.

Very few respondents received information about rehabilitation efforts through UN agencies and camp management. According to the NRC/IDMC study, none of the returning IDPs had received information from UN agencies or NGOs<sup>87</sup>. This underscores the importance of closer collaboration from the onset in disseminating information through these channels to reach IDPs outside and in camps (at the time). It is worth noting that around one third of respondents who said they got the information through UN agencies recalled UNDP as the source of information. Other sources include word of mouth (43% of respondents who gave other answers), media, church, authorities and having seen ongoing rehabilitation works<sup>88</sup>.

Feeding into hypothesis b), findings show that knowledge about ongoing rehabilitation efforts motivated most respondents who knew about it (93%) to return but in varying degrees. For most of them (71%), this knowledge affected their decision to return a lot (38.5%) or was the main reason for their return (33%). This is particularly the case for Kirkuk, Anbar, Salahadin and Diyala where more than 70% of respondents in each area said it affected their decision a lot or was the main reason to return. In Ninewah, this ratio was 64%.

**Figure 22: Knowledge about rehabilitation efforts as a factor in decision to return**



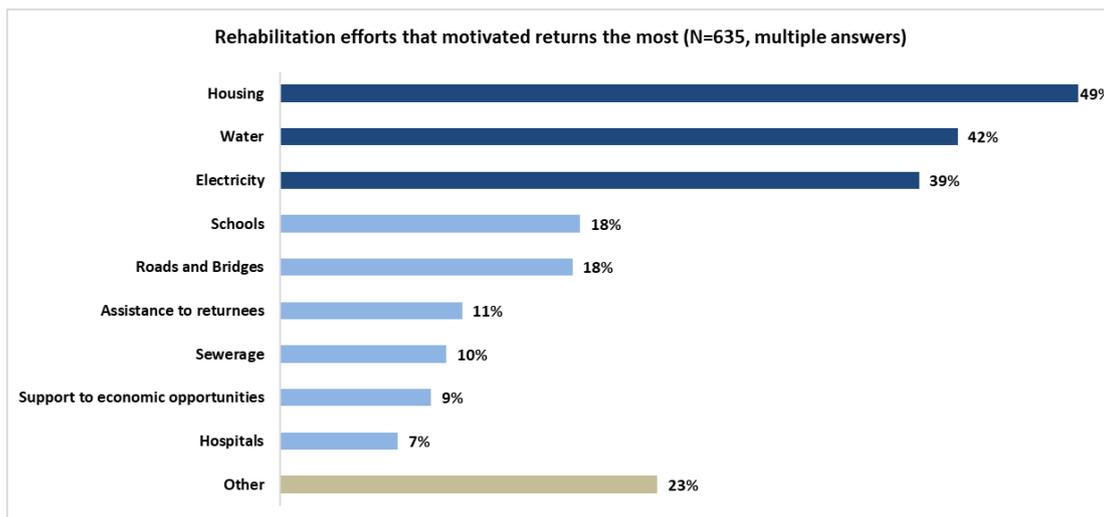
Source: Evaluation survey, April-May 2021

The top three types of rehabilitated infrastructures that motivated respondents the most to return after liberation are housing, electricity and water. This underscores the relevance of having focused on an encompassing set of crucial infrastructure and added the rehabilitation of housing to the FFS portfolio in 2017 even though houses are not public infrastructures. Of the respondents who gave “other” answers, the top two reasons pertained to better security/feeling safe and wanting to go home to where they belong.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> UNHCR facilitated visits of IDPs to their areas of origin, but it is unclear whether the few cases in the survey were part of these efforts.

Figure 23: Rehabilitation efforts that motivated returns the most<sup>89</sup>

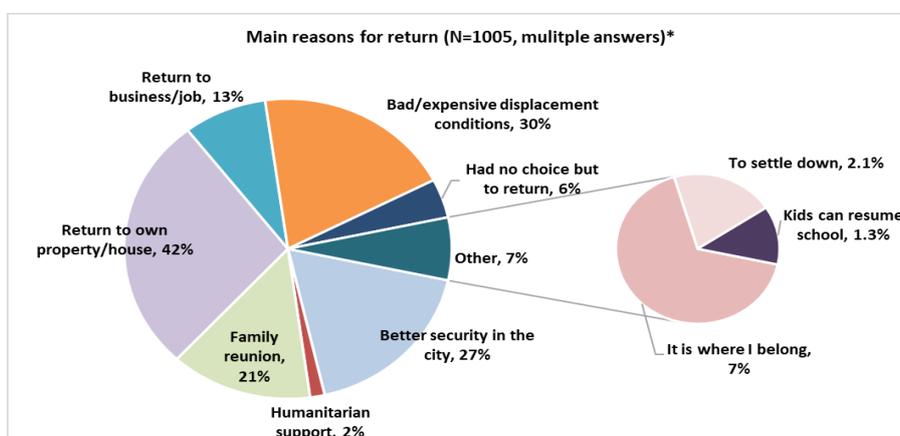


Source: Evaluation survey, April-May 2021

Findings from all FGDs<sup>90</sup> confirm that rehabilitation was an important factor affecting returns as it gave people “hope for the return of normal life”. According to a government stakeholders “All projects were important and their importance came from the fact that they brought life back for the city”. Rehabilitation was also said to have provided job opportunities that encouraged some people to return.

While rehabilitation motivated and affected the decision of IDPs to return to liberated areas, survey results suggest that the main reasons for return are related to wanting to return to own house, bad or expensive displacement conditions and better security. Findings from FGDs align with survey findings but primarily highlight difficult displacement conditions including issues of acceptance and discrimination in access to schools in host communities as well as high costs of living. Many FGD participants recurrently mentioned “this is our area and home” as a main reason for returning. The evaluation findings resonate with the NRC/IDMC study that reports homesickness as the primary motivation for return, followed by difficult displacement conditions in host communities and improved security<sup>91</sup>.

Figure 24: Reported main reported reasons for return<sup>92</sup>



Source: Evaluation survey, April-May 2021; \* 1 don't know.

<sup>89</sup> 635 returnees out of the 675 who knew about rehabilitation efforts answered with multiple answers. The percentage is the ratio of the number of answers given per category out of the number of respondents.

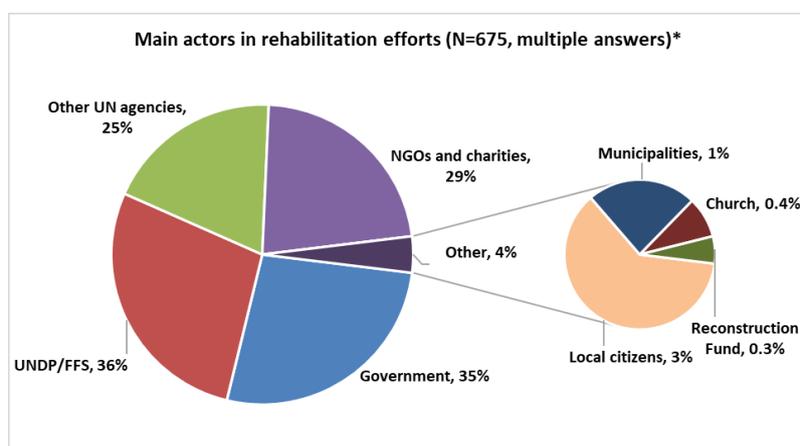
<sup>90</sup> Three FGDs with returnees addressed the question. In other FGDs, most community leaders and teachers were displaced and returned.

<sup>91</sup> NRC & IDMC Centre (2018): Nowhere to return: Iraq’s search for durable solutions, page 22.

<sup>92</sup> The percentage is the ratio of the number of answers given per category out of the number of respondents.

In an attempt to provide an indicative link between FFS and rehabilitation efforts (Hypothesis c), the survey asked returnees about who the main actors doing rehabilitation work were. The top three actors mentioned were UNDP/FFS, the government and NGOs/charities. FGDs suggest the presence of a wide range of actors in rehabilitation efforts spanning the government, UN agencies and international NGOs as well as donors. In FGDs, FFS was reported to be the main actor in Hawija (Kirkuk), and a significant actor in Mosul, Hamdaniyah, Tel Afar and Sinuni (Ninewah), as well as Anah, Ramadi and Falluja (Anbar). Concurring with interviews with government stakeholders, findings suggests that FFS has been an important factor in rehabilitation efforts in liberated areas and in that way contributed to motivating returns, even though the level of its contribution is not established.

Figure 25: Reported main actors in rehabilitation works<sup>93</sup>



Source: Evaluation survey, April-May 2021

It is worth noting the reference made to the government as a key factor in rehabilitation efforts in liberated areas. While it is unclear what survey respondents meant when they referred to government, FGDs mention central and local government including ministries and governorate directorates as being a key factor in rehabilitation efforts. These are said to have rehabilitated government buildings in Tel Afar and Anah (Ninewah), and Ramadi and Falluja (Anbar). While REFAATO<sup>94</sup> did not have a strong representation in the survey, it was mentioned more frequently in FGDs (Tikrit, Ramadi, Falluja, Anah).

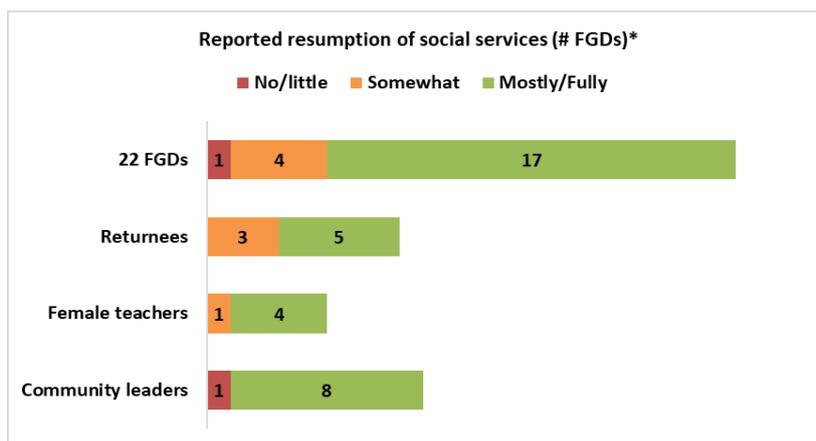
**Living conditions compared to pre-ISIL.** Within its mandate, FFS strived to build the necessary conditions for the resumption of key services and normalization of life. Its ultimate desired outcome is that returnees experience living conditions that match or are better than pre-ISIL levels. This is clearly articulated in its ToC of 2017 (Annex 4) and reflected in the reconstructed ToC. However, the resumption of services following rehabilitation is one of the key hypotheses of FFS (Hypothesis 3). In this section, the evaluation tries to shed light on whether FFS built the basis for returnees to experience living conditions that match pre-ISIL level. For the purpose of the exercise, living conditions are defined in terms of access to basic services namely health and education, adequate housing conditions, livelihood conditions and overall social life.

**Health and education services.** The rehabilitation of health and educational facilities led to an overall resumption of services but this does not always match pre-ISIL levels, although in some cases it exceeds it. Participants in the vast majority of FGDs held (95% of FGDs) experienced a resumption of social services, primarily referencing health and education.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Respondents mentioned the Reconstruction Fund, which is assumed to mean REFAATO.

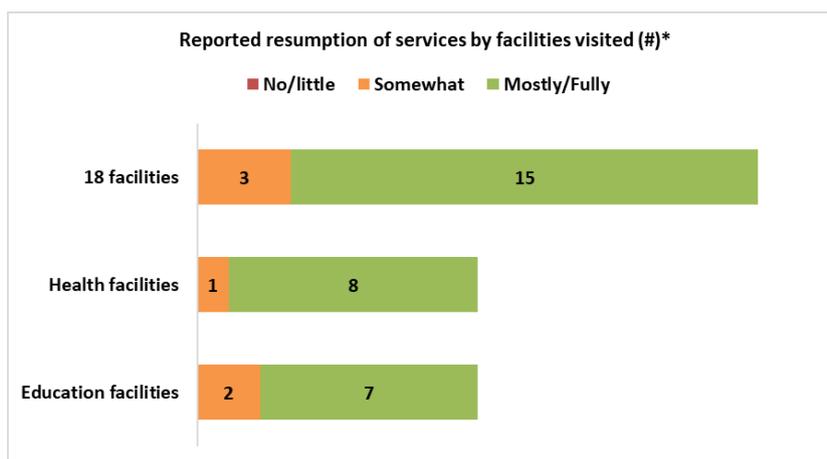
Figure 26: Reported resumption of social services by FGDs



Source: 22 FGDs (excluding 4 with no assessments made)

In a few cases (Anbar, Kirkuk, Ninewah), the rehabilitation of schools was said to have improved the conditions for learning as it avoided overcrowding linked to multiple shifts and increased enrolment compared to pre-ISIL levels. One FGD participant said that *"If it wasn't for rehabilitation, I would not have returned. I only came back after being reassured that the educational services are all back and my children are able to complete their education normally."* Interviews with heads of health and educational facilities that were rehabilitated by FFS unanimously confirm the resumption of services. In most cases (83%<sup>95</sup>), services were said to have mostly or fully resumed following rehabilitation. In 10 out of these 15 interviews (67%), services were reported to have become better than pre-ISIL levels because of the modern equipment provided that upgraded the facilities.

Figure 27: Reported resumption of services by facilities visited



Source: Interviews with health and educational facilities, April 2021; \* Excluding 5 facilities who did not directly answer the question.

All visited facilities report having students and patients coming in but in varying degrees<sup>96</sup>. Those who experienced a decrease in the number of users (6 out of 22 facilities) mainly link it to low levels of returns. These are all based in Ninewah. A good majority (64%) witnessed an increase in the number of users, some more than doubled while two facilities in Ninewah have the same number of users as before ISIL. Field observations confirm that there is activity in visited sites, particularly in health facilities. As for education facilities, student attendance was minimized due to COVID-19 restrictions, although the evaluation team observed students leaving exam rooms. In terms of non-discrimination in access and use of services, none of the interviews or FGDs conducted indicate there were specific groups who were excluded from accessing services, to the exception of children with

<sup>95</sup> 15 out of 18 facilities who answered the question (out of 23 visited facilities).

<sup>96</sup> One recently appointed head of facility could not provide an indication or numbers. The total here is 22 facilities.

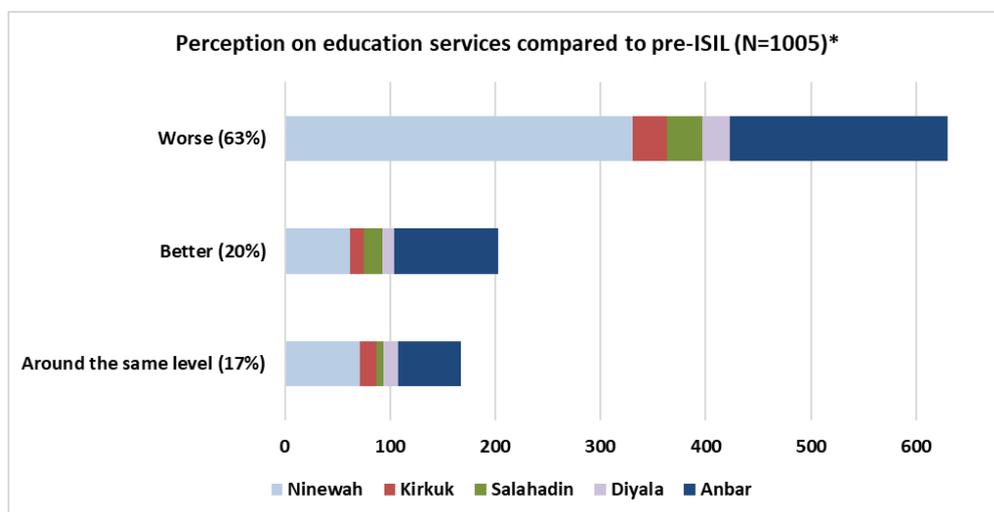
no identity documentation or belonging to ISIL affiliated families who did not have access to schools. This is also highlighted in a study done by NRC, the Danish Refugee Council and International Rescue Committee<sup>97</sup>.

FGD participants profile indicates that most participants send their children to school across all FGDs, some to universities and the vast majority use primary health care centers (see Annex 9). The evaluation asked FGD participants and survey respondents to note schools and university names that children in their families go to, as well as names of Primary Health Care Center (PHC) and hospital they use if needed. The purpose of the exercise was to see whether facilities rehabilitated by FFS are being used as services become available, and to trace back linkages to FFS. More than 500 names were matched to the FFS project database of December 26, 2019. The exercise suggests that many of the rehabilitated health and education facilities by FFS are being used particularly universities<sup>98</sup> but less so for PHCs, schools and hospitals. It is important to note these findings are only indicative since Arabic names can be spelled differently increasing the likelihood of error, and the search only included completed projects<sup>99</sup>.

While the return of services is generally seen to be positive, some FGDs indicated that the quality of services is not at the same level as it was before. Some facilities are facing challenges in terms of availability of equipment, supplies and staffing. This resonates with the challenges noted by facilities, namely shortage of qualified staff particularly doctors and teachers, lack of funding and equipment. Furthermore, a few FGDs pointed out that the return of services has been centralized in urban centers. Rural areas did not yet benefit from the same access to basic services. In one minority location, education and health services are still being provided in caravans given that not all facilities were rehabilitated. One FGD underscored the importance of rehabilitation work that was done in other sectors such as water, electricity and roads, which made it possible for the rehabilitated health and school facilities to resume their services. This underscores the relevance of FFS’ holistic approach to multi-sector infrastructure rehabilitation and its intention of branching out to rural areas in recent years.

While the FFS hypothesis that the rehabilitation of infrastructure built the basis for the resumption of services holds, survey results confirm some of the FGDs finding regarding the quality of available services. Particularly in terms of education services, a good majority (63%) of respondents across the five governorates found that services do not match pre-ISIL level while the remaining respondents experienced similar or even better education services.

Figure 28: Perception on education services compared to pre-ISIL levels



Source: Evaluation survey, March-April 2021; \*Including 5 don't know.

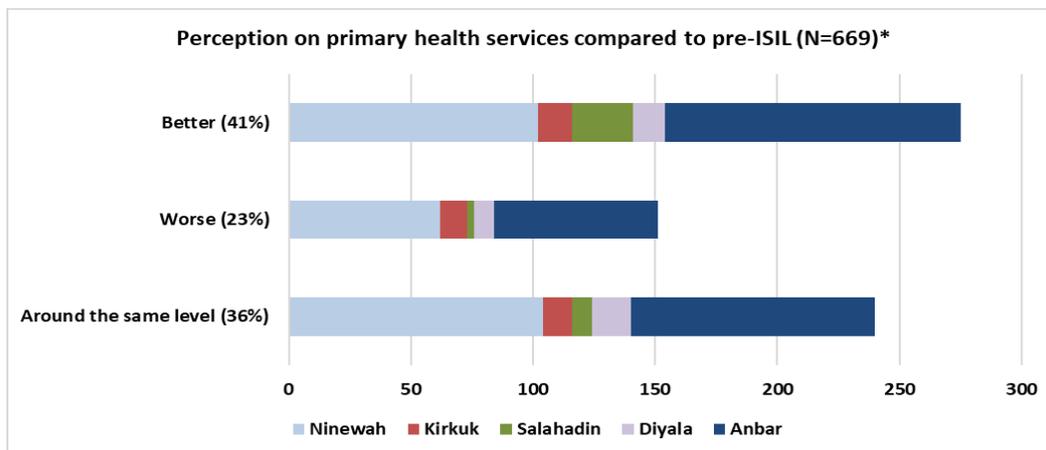
<sup>97</sup> NRC, DRC and IRC (undated): The paperless people of post-conflict Iraq

<sup>98</sup> Mosul university, Northern technical university, Ninewa university, Anbar university, Tikrit university.

<sup>99</sup> The exercise did not quantify the frequency of the names given the large number of facilities mentioned.

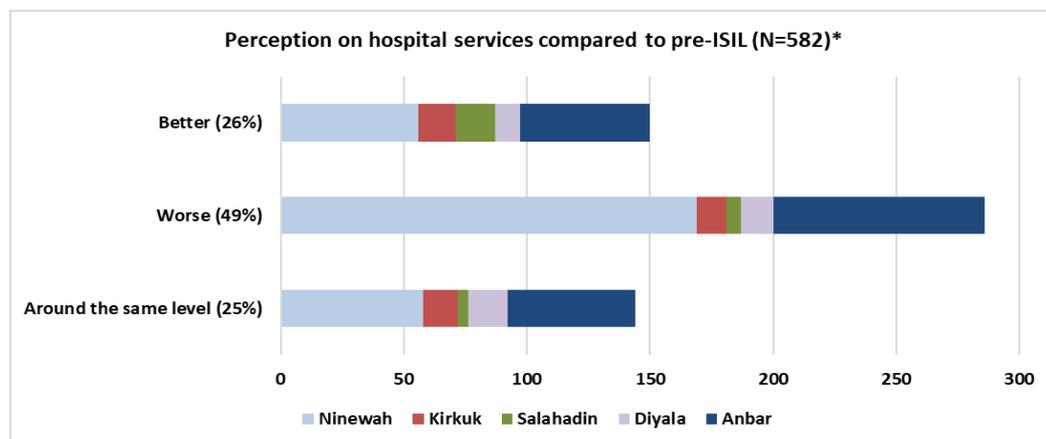
However, the quality of health services was seen more widely to match pre-ISIL levels. 77% of those who responded to the survey question reported that primary health care services matched or were better than pre-ISIL levels. Returnees' experience with hospital services was equally distributed between worse and same/better.

Figure 29: Perception on primary health services compared to pre-ISIL levels



Source: Evaluation survey, March-April 2021; \*Including 3 don't know.

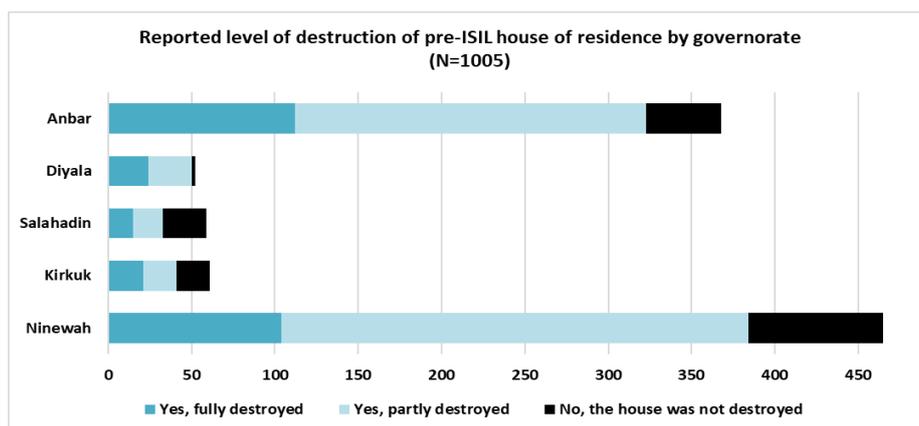
Figure 30: Perception on hospital services compared to pre-ISIL levels



Source: Evaluation survey, March-April 2021; \*Including 2 don't know.

**Housing conditions.** Perceptions on housing conditions compared to pre-ISIL levels were mixed, with a small majority experiencing similar level of adequacy as before. Most survey respondents experienced their houses to have been fully (28%) or partly (55%) damaged while in displacement across the five governorates.

Figure 31: Reported level of destruction of pre-ISIL house of residence

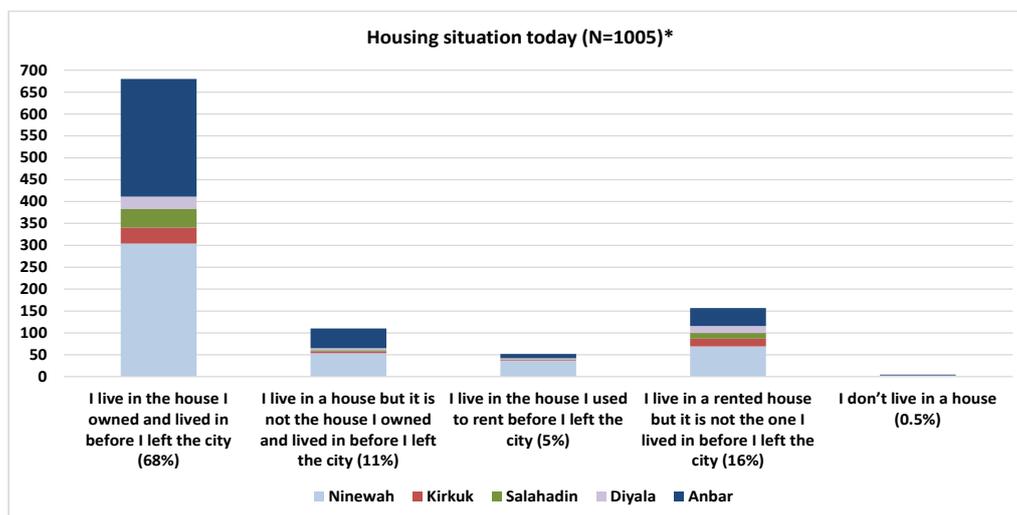


Source: Evaluation survey, March-April 2021

Of the 831 respondents who answered the question, 86% said they had not received any assistance to rehabilitate their houses<sup>100</sup>; Anbar (93%), Diyala (80%), Kirkuk (93%), Ninewah (80%), Salahadin (100%). Ninewah and Diyala however had the highest percentage of those who had received assistance but these represent 20% of respondents in each area.

The survey revealed that 73% of respondents live in the same house as before displacement with a good majority (68%) living in the house they owned prior to having left the city. 11% however do not live in the house they owned and lived in prior to displacement and are renting. In addition, 16% are renting other houses than the ones they rented before. This could indicate around one quarter of returnees who may still be classified as displaced.

Figure 32: Reported housing situation today

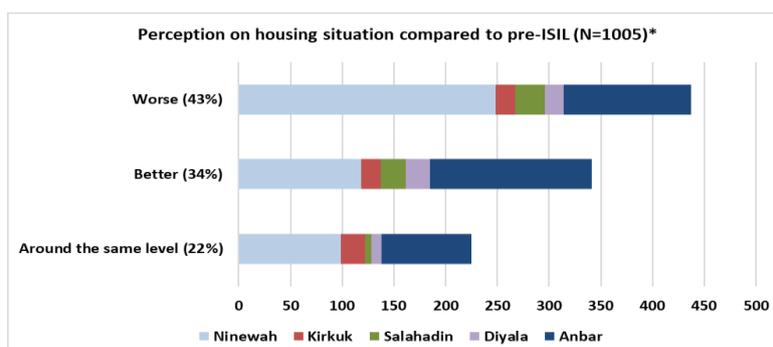


Source: Evaluation survey, March-April 2021; \*Including 1 no answer. (Figures do not add up to 100 due to decimals)

As the majority of respondent live in houses, whether rented or owned, 80% of survey respondents perceive their housing condition to be somewhat adequate or adequate. Respondents with the highest level of satisfaction about the adequacy of their housing situation are in Anbar (74% of Anbar respondents), Salahadin (63% of Salahadin respondents) and Kirkuk (61% of Kirkuk respondents). This compares to 48% of respondents in Ninewah and 46% of respondents in Diyala.

Compared to pre-ISIL levels however, views were more differentiated. 43% of respondent found their housing situation to be worse. Around a quarter reported the situation is the same and one third that it was better.

Figure 33: Perception on housing situation today versus pre-ISIL



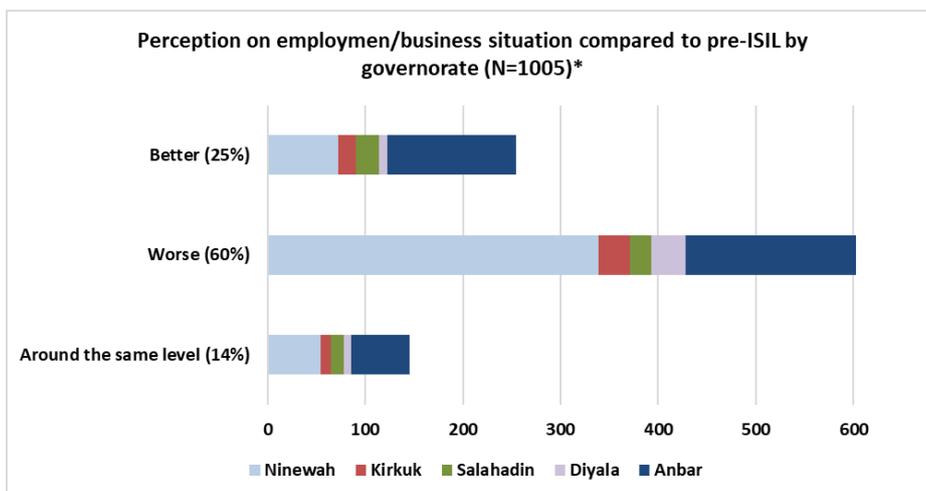
Source: Evaluation survey, March-April 2021; \*Including 2 no answer. (Figures do not add up to 100 due to decimals)

<sup>100</sup> FFS rehabilitated partly damaged houses and did not reconstruct fully destroyed houses during the evaluation period.

**Economic life and livelihood condition.** The resumption of economic activity and livelihood situation is closely linked to the overall worsening economic situation of the country and thereby a general worsening of livelihood conditions for most returnees with some exceptions. It should be noted that since the survey was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, perceptions on the economic situation and livelihood conditions are likely to have been affected by the implications of the COVID-19 crisis.

Survey results indicate that a small majority (60%) of returnees experience a worsening economic situation compared to pre-ISIL levels, while 14% report it is at the same level and a quarter experience an improvement.

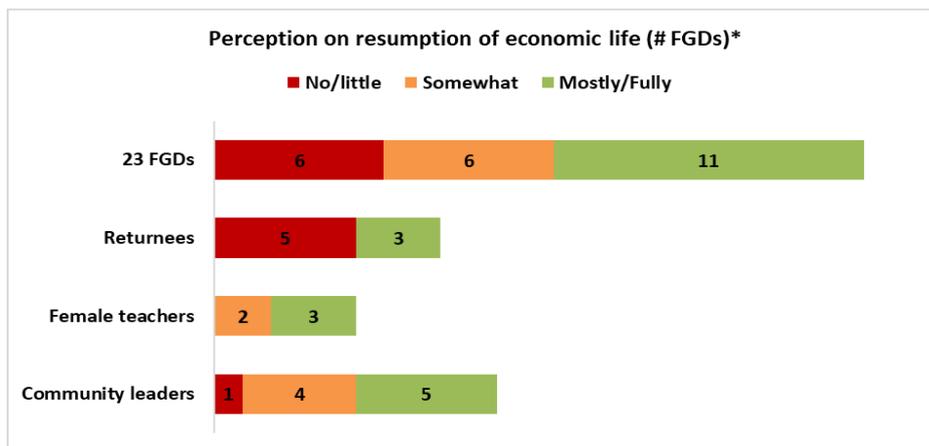
**Figure 34: Perception on economic situation today versus pre-ISIL**



Source: Evaluation survey, March-April 2021; \*Including 3 don't know. (Figures do not add up to 100 due to decimals)

Findings from FGDs do not concur with survey results at first glance, but in fact they are aligned. While the majority of FGDs held (17 out of 23 FGDs) report a resumption of economic life, this is primarily because around half of FGDs held were with community leaders (11) and teachers (7). Apart from one FGD where most participants were daily wage earners, the majority of community leaders consulted are educated and have jobs. Similarly, teachers participating in FGDs are employed at the visited schools. When looking at returnees alone (8 FGDs), the majority report a worsening situation especially because the vast majority of participants are unemployed or daily wage earners. Women are housewives. Only four participating returnees had a business<sup>101</sup>. This explains why the overall FGD perception on the economic situation is biased to the positive and underlines the difficult situation of returnees who are unemployed or do not have regular income.

**Figure 35: Perception of FGDs on resumption of economic life**



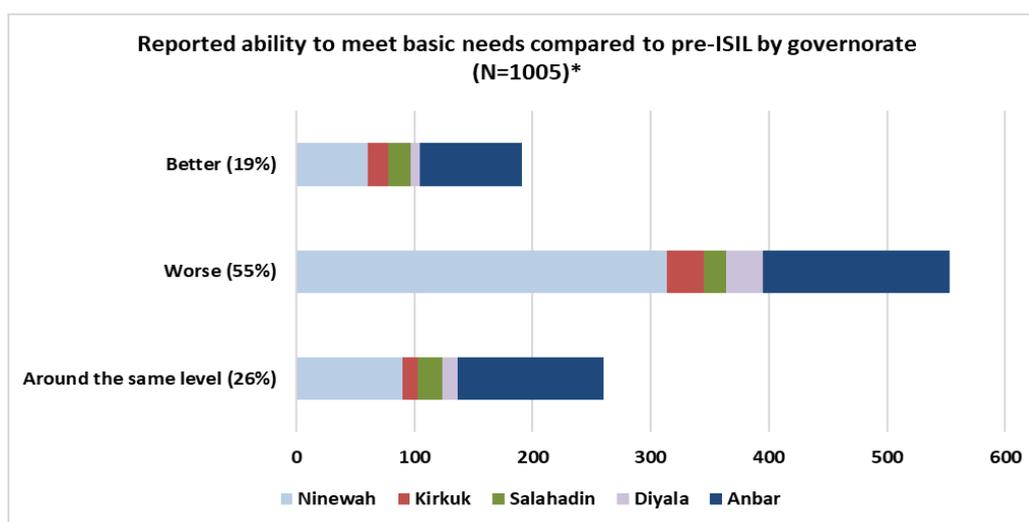
Source: 23 FGDs; \* 3 did not address the question.

<sup>101</sup> See profile of participants in FGDs in Annex 9.

There was a general acknowledgement in FGDs that rehabilitation provided job opportunities in a significant way. However, this was mainly concentrated around urban centers. Moreover, the nature of rehabilitation related employment was temporary and liberated areas face a lack of longer-term job opportunities. Some noted destroyed economic infrastructures that have not yet been rehabilitated to drive job creation (e.g. factories, agricultural land). Despite economic difficulties, some FGD participants noted a positive spill-over effect from the rehabilitation of crucial infrastructures like electricity and water on the resumption of economic life. One FGD participant said that *“the rehabilitation of electricity had positive implications for the return of markets and business life”*. In addition, the rehabilitation of health and education infrastructures also contributed to reviving economic activities around these infrastructures such as shops or businesses servicing these infrastructures.

Overall, around half of returnees face difficulties in meeting basic needs particularly those who do not have regular income sources and/or whose house was destroyed and not rehabilitated.

**Figure 36: Reported ability to meet basic needs compared to pre-ISIL**



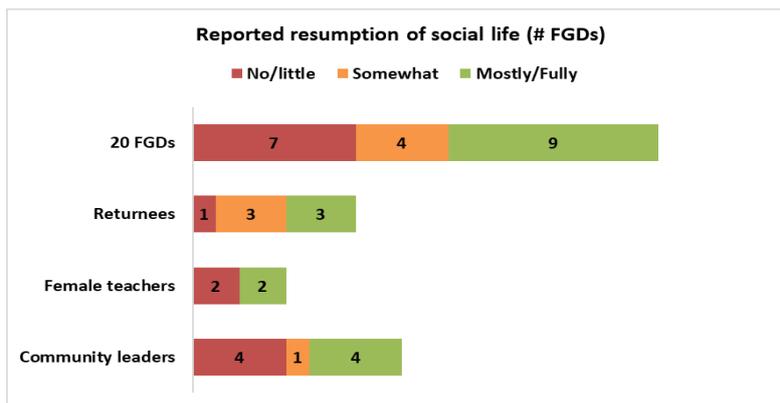
Source: Evaluation survey, March-April 2021; \*Including 1 don't know.

**Social life.** Rehabilitation efforts focused primarily on crucial infrastructure with little attention to leisure infrastructure, but where it happened FGD participants report a resumption of social activities. The majority of FGDs agree and understand that leisure facilities like sports facilities and parks were not at the center of immediate rehabilitation efforts. Where they happened, participants reported that *“it contributed to getting people out for picnics, social and sports activities”* but other factors like availability and security also play a role. However, efforts were not extensive and concentrated on urban centers, where such facilities existed pre-ISIL<sup>102</sup>.

FGDs participants living in rural settings explained that they do not have parks or centers. Overall, the resumption of social life is still challenged despite small pockets of positive developments.

<sup>102</sup> One of the conditions for FFS rehabilitation is that the selected facilities already existed pre-ISIL, which also presumes that it would facilitate the resumption of services by government staff deployment and budget allocation for operations and maintenance (see sustainability).

Figure 37: Reported resumption of social life

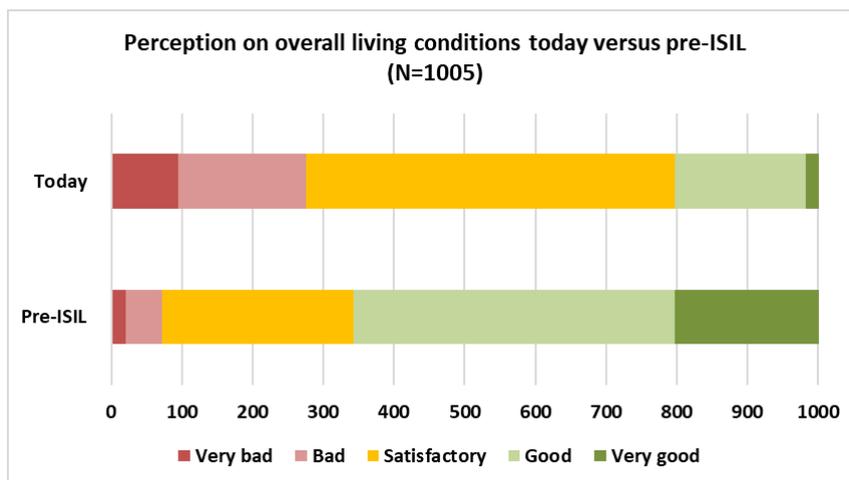


Source: 20 FGDs; \*6 did not address the question or provided irrelevant answers.

**Overall living conditions.** There are divergences in returnees’ assessment of their general living conditions. While survey results indicate satisfactory or better conditions, findings from FGDs do not fully concur and in some cases, there were disagreements within FGDs. This underlines the importance of contextualizing findings that are likely to have been shaped by the displacement and return experiences of returnees, whether positive or negative, as well as the background of participants.

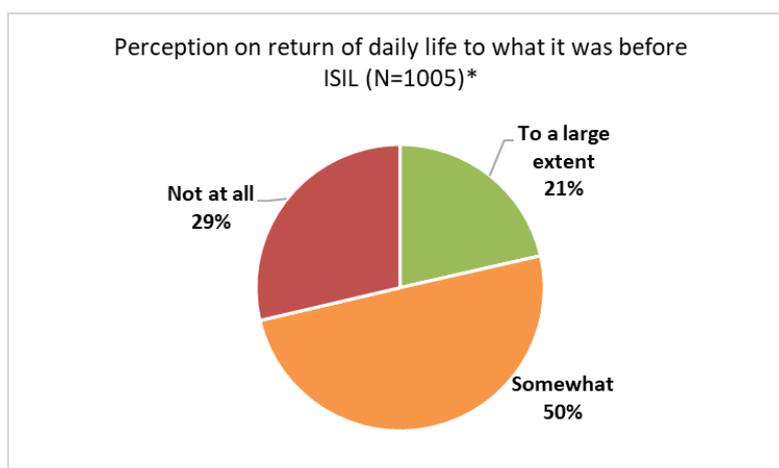
73% of survey respondents report that living conditions today are satisfactory (52%), good (18.5%) or very good (2%). This compares to 93% of respondents who said that their living conditions pre-ISIL were satisfactory (27%), good (45%) or very good (21%), suggesting a significant drop for those who had good or very good living conditions before. On the other side of the spectrum, the share of those who experience very bad or bad living conditions greatly increased from 7% pre-ISIL to 27.5% today.

Figure 38: Perception on overall living conditions compared to pre-ISIL



Source: Evaluation survey, March-April 2021

Despite overall regression in living conditions, a good deal of survey respondents (71%) found that life has returned to what it was before displacement to a large extent or to some extent. Around one third of respondents assess that daily life did not return to what it was before.

**Figure 39: Perception on return of daily life**

Source: Evaluation survey, March-April 2021; \*Including 1 don't know.

Findings from FGDs confirm that overall living conditions have generally worsened for most people. There were disagreements in eight out of 26 FGDs on the status of living conditions today compared to pre-ISIL. While some FGD participants experienced similar or better living conditions that match pre-ISIL levels, a majority reported a worsening of the situation due to lack of job opportunities, indebtedness and lower daily wages. A main factor is the worsening economic situation of the country including rising prices of agricultural inputs and foodstuff, general slowdown in economic activity in the agricultural and industrial sectors including lack of rehabilitation of economic infrastructures, and reduced government support.

**Findings 8. While FFS conducted a range of community initiatives, these initiatives were limited and not strongly guided by the overall intention of improving the environment in communities of origin in view of expediting returns. The most pertinent output that has contributed to returns is reconciliation agreements signed that facilitated the return of a modest number of IDPs.**

**Facilitated returns.** While FFS implemented various community level initiatives, outcome-level reporting on social cohesion activities is limited, making it difficult to assess whether and how FFS contributed to nurturing an enabling social environment for return in communities of origin. Within UNDP, the line between what FFS supported and what other UNDP social cohesion programmes have implemented is difficult to draw, recognizing there are also other actors working in this field. From an FFS perspective, local reconciliation agreements are deemed to be the most pertinent and targeted output delivered for improving conditions for return in view of expediting returns. The evaluation team does not have sufficient information to establish what has driven the choice of social cohesion activities for FFS and whether diagnostics were made to shed light on which influential actors must be targeted in communities of origin to instigate a change in attitudes and behaviors that would nurture a more enabling community environment for returns.

The reconciliation agreements signed facilitated the return of some IDPs who were unable to return to their communities of origin through negotiations with local community leaders and authorities. While the numbers are modest, efforts invested in facilitating these returns were significant:

- In Salahadin, after six months of negotiations, 1,000 families who were unable to return due to ethnic and sectarian conflict, managed to return to their village in Touz Khurmatu <sup>103</sup>.

<sup>103</sup> Interviews with field facilitators who worked on the process confirmed that the number of returnees was 1.000. The team cannot find reporting to confirm the number.

- In Anbar, the signing of a written agreement facilitated the return of 270 people to Al Sagrah (estimated 56 families) out of 1,500 individuals who are expected to return<sup>104</sup>. The barrier to return was tribal tension.

The evaluation team understands that similar efforts to facilitate returns have been pursued since 2020 resulting in families returning, including ISIL affiliated families. But this is primarily taking place under other programs of the UNDP Iraq social cohesion pillar that FFS paved the ground works for but are not part of FFS's facilitation efforts.

**Finding 9. In the context of immediate response to most urgent needs for the resumption of municipal services, FFS' replenishment of damaged assets built the basis for municipalities to resume their daily functions (e.g. garbage collection, road maintenance). Attention to building technical capacities (e.g. maintenance of supplied equipment) has increased in recent years.**

**Capacity to deliver and manage municipal services.** The capacity building of municipal authorities should be understood in the context of stabilization efforts following massive levels of destruction and damage. The immediate response to building municipal capacities has been centered on rehabilitating buildings, also to indicate the return of government, and replenishing destroyed municipal assets that are key for the resumption of work.

It is worth noting that the reconstruction of FFS' ToC focused on rebuilding the capacity of municipalities as the main municipal authority. During the course of the evaluation, the evaluation team came to understand that the term municipalities and municipal authorities can be used interchangeably but can mean different things. In terms of stabilization work within the key sectors of FFS (e.g. water, education, health), key municipal authorities include line directorates at the municipal level and the mayor's office. Municipalities' role is relevant but not as significant within FFS' portfolio. As noted earlier, the key responsibilities of municipalities are limited and include basic services like road maintenance, garbage collection and organization of markets. Accordingly, the restocking of damaged heavy equipment (e.g. bulldozers, garbage collection trucks) has been an important contribution to rebuilding the capacity of municipalities to resume their core functions (e.g. paving roads, rubble removal, garbage collection). It is the evaluation team's understanding that FFS' support responded to priorities through the selection process done at the level of the governor's office-based on projects proposed by municipal authorities<sup>105</sup>. A spill-over benefit from other FFS activities that facilitated the work of municipalities included CfW for rubble removal and painting of sidewalk, which signalled the return of services.

While FFS built the hardware capacity of municipalities to resume their services, there was no immediate effort to work on building softer capacities in view of a gradual handover process. In the given context, the work prioritized what was needed for the resumption of services, also considering the limited decision-making power municipalities and other municipal actors have for instance in terms of budget planning for operation and maintenance. Nevertheless, increased attention to building capacity on technical aspects such as maintenance and operation of supplied equipment have recently kicked off. This is partly linked to more attention and funding being available for this purpose at this stage of the stabilization process.

It is worth noting that the involvement of municipal actors in the process of project prioritization has been a learning process. Consulted government stakeholders at governorate and district/municipal level report having benefited from the support provided by MSAs through interactions on and participation in project selection, studies, implementation, assessments, contracting and monitoring.

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<sup>104</sup> UNDP (2019): FFS Annual Report 2019, page 44.

<sup>105</sup> As noted under methodological limitations, sources of information on government capacities are limited due to security considerations.

**Evaluation Question 3**

How does the project monitor progress on expected outputs and outcomes and generate learning to adjust implementation?

**Finding 10.** FFS has a measured multi-layered M&E framework and system that has tracked and demonstrated output level results on speed and scale. However, as the number of projects grew to exceed 3,000, the excel-based system has fallen short in quickly providing needed data but continues to feed into FFS’ results framework indicators. Attention to outcome-oriented results increased since 2017 but this has not matured to give an indication of outcomes achieved.

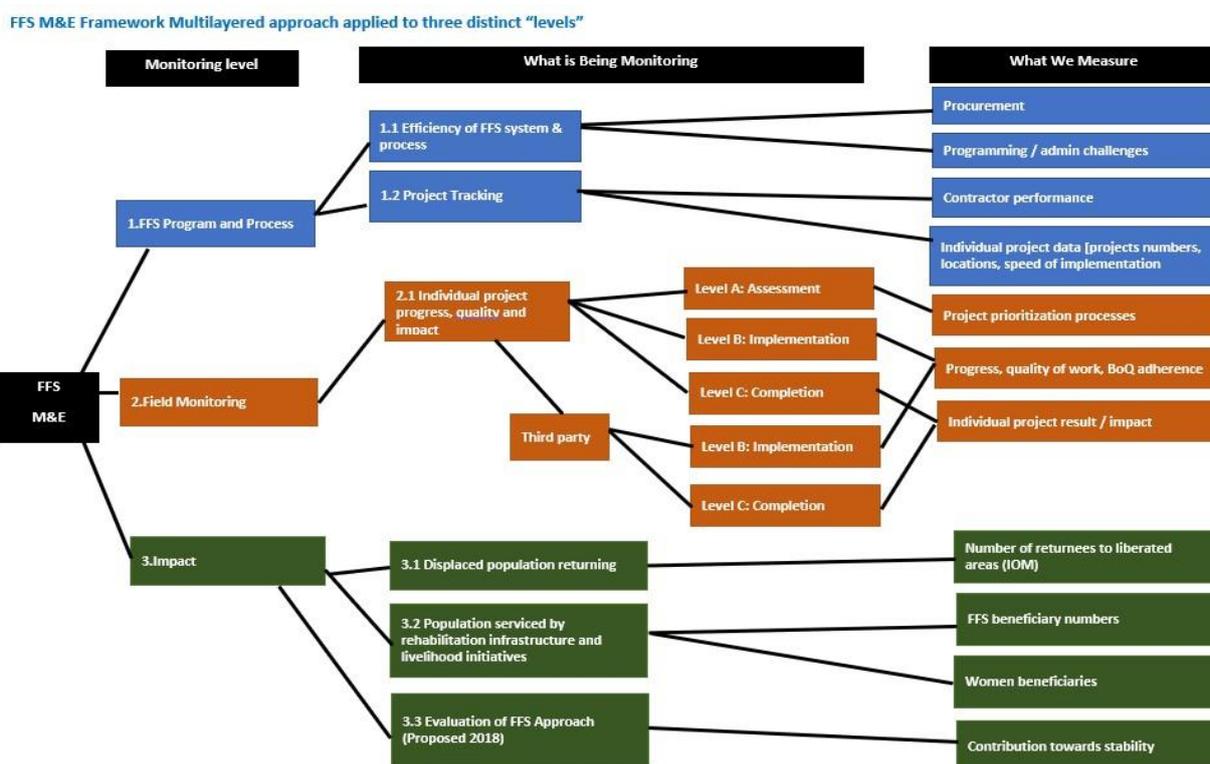
**Finding 11.** M&E data has been used by FFS management to guide decision-making. This has been strongly complemented by third-party monitoring data that played a role in shaping key considerations in the implementation of FFS.

Evaluation Question 3 examines two dimensions. First, it looks at how FFS monitors its progress on intended outputs and outcomes. Second, it assesses how M&E data and other feedback has informed management decision-making and adaptation.

**Finding 10.** FFS has a measured multi-layered M&E framework and system that has tracked and demonstrated output level results on speed and scale. However, as the number of projects grew to exceed 3,000, the excel-based system has fallen short in quickly providing needed data but continues to feed into FFS’ results framework indicators. Attention to outcome-oriented results increased since 2017 but this has not yet matured to give an indication of outcomes achieved.

**M&E framework.** FFS’s monitoring and evaluation (M&E) framework must be understood within the context of stabilization efforts facing massive levels of destruction that required focus on speed and scale of delivery. Accordingly, the FFS M&E framework was designed to ensure the monitoring of internal processes particularly the procurement process, and the implementation of field activities as basis for demonstrating progress made and immediate gains. In 2017, the framework was revamped to adapt to the growing number of projects, with more attention to outcome level monitoring. The multi-layered framework is presented in the figure below.

**Figure 40: FFS M&E Framework Multilayered Approach**



Source: M&E plan, 2017

The framework comprises three core pillars:

- The first pillar deals with internal monitoring of FFS processes. First, the time efficiency of the procurement process. This responsibility lies with the service center which meets on a weekly basis with UNDP and FFS management to follow up on progress of the procurement process, identify bottlenecks and potential corrective actions (see efficiency/timely delivery). Second, project tracking of the stages of progress of individual projects of the FFS portfolio and speed of implementation. This is done by the M&E team.
- The second pillar relates to field oversight of individual projects. It represents the most extensive component of monitoring efforts. Since 2016, FFS has had hundreds of active projects to be monitored at any given time. Therefore, resources were heavily invested to ensure close oversight, timely implementation and compliance with agreed technical specifications and quality standards. Field monitoring provides data on individual projects that inform the management, programme and M&E teams on progress as well as context monitoring to keep FFS management updated on the security context. Third party monitoring contributes to this pillar of the M&E framework. Over a quarter of FFS' entire portfolio is subject to donor driven third party monitoring.
- The third pillar was introduced in 2017 to capture outcome-oriented results tracking outreach and trends of returning IDPs at the district and/or sectoral level. This level is the responsibility of the M&E team and is a growing area of work for FFS. Beneficiary surveys have been conducted since 2018 to assess the impact of specific activities of FFS on targeted population. However, as the M&E system is highly focused on implementation monitoring, outcome level data is not yet comprehensive enough to give an indication on outcomes achieved.

To operationalize the framework, FFS has annual M&E plans. As an example, the table below provides an overview of details of standard operating procedures and roles and responsibilities for field monitoring:

<b>End-user committee</b>	Monitoring of project implementation, and handover of project sites to FFS Sign off on completed projects and cross-check against the agreed BoQs.
<b>Field Engineers</b>	The backbone of the in-house daily and weekly reporting on project progress, conducted by two tiers of engineers (Quality Control engineers conduct daily monitoring and report to senior engineers who are in charge of the project site).
<b>Field Monitoring Specialists</b>	Conduct in-house routine spot-checks on projects. Follow-up on corrective actions when taken.
<b>Health and Safety</b>	Routine health and safety (H&S) focused spot checks conducted by H&S officers (along with relevant trainings for field staff and contractors) Findings are reported to field/site engineers, senior engineers and project managers as necessary (including incident reports within 24 hours of occurrence).
<b>Municipal Stabilization Advisors (MSAs)</b>	Weekly reports on progress and coordination on the stabilization portfolio Security updates On-site daily oversight
<b>Program Teams</b> (Erbil, Baghdad)	Regular missions to allow program and project teams to monitor project progress

**M&E system.** The design of the M&E system was intended to be simple from the onset in view of tracking and demonstrating immediate results and ensuring continuity of donor funding to meet ongoing stabilization needs in liberated areas. The system is therefore strongly focused on field monitoring and output results. According to interviews with UNDP staff, the intention of the system to stay simple was validated by the steering committee and donors.

In terms of resources, FFS invested financial and human resources to collect field data on its wide scope of projects, primarily through LTA to adapt its capacity in line with the project caseload. However, the core M&E team is relatively small compared to the scale of operations. M&E data collection is guided by a suite of templates intended for field staff, which are comprehensive and user-friendly. FFS prioritized providing training and refresher training to all FFS staff and engineers. This comprised themes such as monitoring, filling out report templates, data ethics, confidentiality and security, and complaints mechanisms. The nature of data collected has evolved over time in response to donor priorities. According to UNDP, FFS has in recent years witnessed increasing demand to collect additional data of interest to donors. As a result, FFS developed customized templates to ensure FFS staff and engineers collect the information accordingly.

Field data collected feeds into the project tracker. The latter is FFS' main instrument for gathering and monitoring information on project portfolio, generating data on results framework indicators and information that informs FFS programming. The project tracker is an excel-based database that includes all FFS projects and attributes that allow tracking projects, for instance progress on implementation in four stages: the number of projects under BoQ development, in the service center, under implementation and completed. It includes a classification list for data entry that defines the categories belonging to each sector and window. During the period of the evaluation, the M&E team did an exceptional job in maintaining this excel-based tracker, aggregating a massive dataset of field reports and linking it to the indicator targets of the results framework. The project tracker provides a good overview of FFS' portfolio when applying filters to generate the desired information. The evaluation team relied on project tracker data to generate many of the figures presented in this report. As a result of this exercise, the team notes that i) the classification list needs refinement if the M&E system is to be handed over upon exit. This is to ensure entries are tagged to the relevant categories that serve the purpose of each window. For instance, rehabilitation of some municipal infrastructure or directorates is currently under Window 1. Other municipal level projects including some rehabilitation work are under Window 3. It is therefore not possible to automatically extract and showcase what FFS did to support municipalities or actors at municipal level, ii) the budget source of the M&E tracker relies on cost estimates, which is different from finance budget data, and iii) the number of beneficiaries is based on estimated population numbers in an area, or the absorptive capacity of a given infrastructure. It is understandable that generating and compiling the number of actual users of facilities is a long and complex exercise. Therefore, it is important the differentiation between actual and estimated number of beneficiaries is clearly communicated to donors and Gol.

According to FFS staff, as the number of implemented projects grew to currently exceed 3.000 projects, it became challenging to produce the needed information in a timely manner using the excel-based system. The lack of a centralized online database that can automatically generate required information on FFS status and progress was noted in interviews. The process of obtaining information for instance on total number of beneficiaries, disaggregation according to a specific attribute, and budget figures about ongoing and previous projects in certain districts, was reported to be difficult and highly time consuming. This underlines the need to think of more efficient and effective processes to generate relevant data.

**Results framework and indicators.** FFS's results framework has witnessed various iterations and continues to evolve to reflect the typology of implementation. In the latest revision, three outcome level indicators were added while the remaining elements are unchanged. The overall outcome indicator that FFS follows is the one contributing to Outcome 3 of CPD 2016-2020, tracking the return trends of IDPs to liberated areas. Output

indicators are aligned to output indicators of the same Outcome as depicted in Table 2. The results matrix is presented in Annex 14.

While FFS' indicators are informative about the status of results achieved at output level, they do not inform about outcome level results, for instance the functionality of rehabilitated infrastructures or results achieved by community initiatives beyond the number of initiatives implemented or people reached. The evaluation team understands that the results framework is meant to be output focus given the nature of stabilization work and that outcome-oriented indicators were not included to maintain simplicity. It also recognizes that indicators were approved by the steering committee and donors. However, the evaluation team highlights the relevance of having had an outcome indicator on availability and functionality in view of i) documenting the immediate effects of FFS following rehabilitation, ii) contributing to CPD 2016-2020 indicators on availability and functionality of rehabilitated infrastructure, and iii) getting alerted about the level of resumption of services as a basis for ensuring infrastructures are functioning and stabilization gains are being sustained (see sustainability).

**Finding 11. M&E data has been used by FFS management to guide decision-making. This has been strongly complemented by donor led third-party monitoring data that played a role in shaping key considerations in the implementation of FFS.**

**Learning and adaptation.** Weekly summary reports are provided to FFS management using data generated by the M&E system in place. These weekly reports aggregate the information and data from all field reports of the previous week to present the overall direction of progress in each governorate by sector and location. FFS management has relied on M&E data to keep abreast of project progress. One of the main reflections and learning activities that was referenced during the interviews was the number of retreats that FFS did throughout program implementation. The M&E staff specifically considered 2019 retreat as an opportunity for the FFS team to reflect on lessons learned and key takeaways for the exit strategy of FFS.

In addition to M&E data, feedback from donor led third-party monitoring has contributed to adapting implementation. Two examples are particularly worth highlighting from a third-party monitoring report on housing rehabilitation. First, the establishment of a complaint mechanisms for housing beneficiaries. The report recommended the need to establish a direct line of communication with UNDP to enable beneficiaries to raise complaints and questions. FFS management responded by establishing two independent phone lines to be able to receive calls and questions and inquiries from beneficiaries themselves. FFS also established a mechanism to ensure that the FFS team follows up with an appropriate response to address the issue. According to UNDP, the lines are still operating and have a dedicated team to monitor and overseeing the complaint log which is produced every week<sup>106</sup>. Second, the modification of the standards BoQ for housing rehabilitation to include consideration for PWD. A recommendation from the report proposed the expansion of the BoQ standard list of items that homeowners could choose from to include items accommodating for the needs of households with disabled family members. FFS reacted by introducing additional items to the standard BoQ including railings to the Western toilets, ramps among other items, that FFS was able to deliver as part of its housing rehabilitation projects. Examples of housing rehabilitation that considered accessibility needs of PWD were reported to the evaluation team.

Another factor that has affected the course of implementation is the monitoring of risks and assumptions of FFS. The risk log and risk identification, categorization, and mitigation plan are conducted by the M&E team and are reviewed and approved by senior management in consultation with project teams. The first step of the identification of risks comes from M&E data. This is followed by discussions with the project teams to ensure the team fully understands implementation challenges. These assessments have helped forecast and mitigate various risks associated with FFS implementation including political risks, challenges for security access,

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<sup>106</sup> The verification of this information does not fall under the scope of the evaluation.

challenges regarding reliance on PCC as the main counterpart of FFS. FFS has maintained very detailed level risks assessments associated with some projects like CfW due to higher corruption risk as it involves handling of cash in the field. Another example is the risk associated with housing rehabilitation projects, in particular risks associated with dealing with vulnerable or traumatized households.

**Evaluation Question 4**

To what extent did the project integrate and monitor gender equality considerations and instigate change for women?

**Finding 12.** Despite the relative absence of attention to gender equality in the two first years of implementation, significant progress was made from 2017 to 2019 to strategically integrate gender equality considerations through both larger infrastructure rehabilitations and specific projects, particularly livelihoods.

**Finding 13.** FFS has gradually strengthened its M&E system with regards to using gender-disaggregated data for performance indicators to monitor and measure the results of programme interventions on women and girls. However, this was primarily-focused on outputs. FFS has good examples of how continuous learning and adaptation of gender mainstreaming activities is done.

**Finding 14.** FFS has contributed to improving the conditions for women and girls in accessing services such as health and education and provided short-term livelihood opportunities for women in its selected project locations.

EQ4 is dedicated to explore the extent to which gender equality considerations were integrated in the implementation of FFS. The question looks at three key aspects, namely i) the modality and approach of integrating gender equality in activities, ii) how gender equality was monitored and reported upon, and iii) specific results achieved for women and girls.

**Finding 12. Despite the relative absence of attention to gender equality in the two first years of implementation, significant progress was made from 2017 to 2019 to strategically integrate gender equality considerations through both larger infrastructure rehabilitations and specific projects, particularly livelihoods.**

**Framework for integrating gender equality.** During the first two years of implementation, FFS did not have an explicit approach to mainstreaming gender or gender responsive programming (see relevance). Project approaches, outcomes, outputs and indicators were mainly gender neutral<sup>107</sup>, except for a few gender sensitive indicators/targets under livelihood opportunities (CfW). In 2016, UNDP recognized the need to give more attention to women, particularly as women-headed households are among the most vulnerable returnees. This translated into the recruitment of a gender advisor in 2017 to take lead on developing a Gender Strategy based on consultation with staff<sup>108</sup> and partners, government counterparts, women and women’s groups and community leaders including in missions to Anbar, Diyala and Salahadin governorates. The consultations served to identify practical and strategic needs and to develop a plan which considered the local culture<sup>109</sup>. The Strategy was presented in March 2017, providing an overview of gender integration in FFS across windows. It identified appropriate approaches and principles for women’s empowerment and gender equality and was accompanied by an operational work plan to ensure gender mainstreaming<sup>110</sup>.

As part of implementing the Gender Strategy, annual work plans are elaborated, identifying planned results, activities, actions and timeframe. The gender team, now consisting of an advisor<sup>111</sup> and two gender officers (one

<sup>107</sup> FFS (2017): Gender and Stabilization: A Gender-responsive Approach to Stabilization Programme Funding Facility for Stabilization UNDP, Iraq, March 2017, page 5.

<sup>108</sup> Late 2019, a gender specialist joined the team and the gender advisor became Head of the Gender Team.

<sup>109</sup> FFS (2017): Gender Update, November 2017, page 1.

<sup>110</sup> Gender and Stabilization: A Gender-responsive Approach to Stabilization Programme Funding Facility for Stabilization UNDP, Iraq, March 2017, page 3.

<sup>111</sup> Gender advisor position covers the whole stabilization pillar (FFS and ICRRP).

in Baghdad and one in Erbil<sup>112</sup>), supports program staff in how to consider gender in either large infrastructure projects (e.g. prioritizing a female dorm) as well as gender-specific projects (e.g. CfW for women). It delivers training and accompanies colleagues on field missions as well as conduct their own specific missions. They also worked with contractors in the initial contracting phase to stress the importance of targeting women.

While commitment to gender was translated into the recruitment of the needed expertise, there is no separate budget allocated for gender equality. Yet, some donors earmarked funding for women and girls. The gender team is financed as part of programme management costs (PMC). Planned activity targets guide project prioritization (e.g. 30% minimum women for livelihood activities) rather than specifically allocated budgets.

The evaluation team assesses that efforts of implementing the Gender Strategy from 2017 and onwards and related operational work plan across windows shaped and significantly advanced FFS's integration of gender equality in the remaining implementation period.

**Approach for integrating gender equality.** The conflict context in Iraq and the nature of the FFS support to provide quick rehabilitation support set natural limitations to the level of ambition with regards to what was feasible in terms of integrating gender equality. Women in Iraq have been repeatedly impacted by wars and conflict which further exacerbate their vulnerabilities. The context is largely conservative and there are many obstacles to women's equal participation in society. Women are likewise underrepresented in power and decision-making spaces, which mean that addressing these barriers remain highly relevant in post-war recovery and stabilization efforts.

UNDP has been aware that a fully gender transformative programming was not possible within the scope of FFS. The approach taken to integrating gender equality is characterized by being pragmatic, practical and realistic. The approach adopted initially consisted of continuous dialogue with key stakeholders, internally and externally to the project (primarily local government) to build willingness and awareness to the importance of ensuring women's participation. According to UNDP, there was significant pushback from both staff and external stakeholders and a general sense of "this is not possible". Staff awareness about gender equality was therefore a needed first step. In 2018, more than 150 staff (primarily engineers, field monitors, liaison officers) in Baghdad and Erbil were sensitized on gender integration and gender-responsive planning and implementation<sup>113</sup>. In terms of external stakeholders, the approach consisted of trying to convince local decision-makers to be open to prioritizing gender in specific projects. While initial attempts in Ramadi failed due to resistance, decision-makers in Falluja reluctantly gave the go ahead for a small pilot project involving women in CfW activities. Initial discussions were held with the mayor's office, the directorate staff and a FGD was held with some women. As a result 15 women<sup>114</sup> participated in a pilot to renovate and restore schools in Falluja in 2017. This was later scaled up to involve 169 women workers<sup>115</sup> in 20 schools. Through pilot projects, Falluja (followed by Ramadi) paved the way for directly ensuring women's participation such as in housing project and cash grant for women headed households. These examples were among the first gender-specific projects in Anbar governorate which served as successful models in terms of women's participation and access to resources. This allowed FFS to scale up these initiatives in other liberated areas<sup>116</sup>.

The evaluation team sees the pragmatic and practical approach to promoting awareness of gender equality and focusing on piloting women's participation in specific project to afterwards scale up when proven successful as a sensible approach considering the societal and institutional resistance.

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<sup>112</sup> The position in Erbil became vacant recently.

<sup>113</sup> FFS (2018): 2018 Annual Report, page 200.

<sup>114</sup> The women received USD20 each per day.

<sup>115</sup> FFS (2017): Gender Update, November 2017, page 6.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid, page 3.

**Actions taken to integrate gender equality.** The 2017 Gender Strategy set out ambitions for the different windows<sup>117</sup> in terms of how to integrate gender equality<sup>118</sup>. Below is a brief presentation of the ambitions for Windows 1-3 (in boxes) as well as the key actions taken in the following years.

Gender Strategy ambition to integrate Gender Equality in Window 1 (Rehabilitation)
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Considering gender in major infrastructure projects</li> <li>2. Rehabilitating gender specific projects</li> <li>3. Housing project considers women’s needs (e.g having gender sensitive selection and vulnerability criteria, engagement of women staff as engineers, social organizers to be responsible for the direct involvement of women.</li> </ol>

The team found that UNDP considered gender under major infrastructure projects such as women’s educational institutions (e.g. female university dorms/faculties), women’s health facilities (e.g. maternity hospitals or pediatric care facilities) and in gender-specific projects such as girls schools.

In housing, efforts were made to ensure that women were not merely beneficiaries but took an active role in projects. To improve outreach, 18 social organizers<sup>119</sup> were hired to accompany housing team during assessments. Interviews with female social organizers explain how they, in the initial housing assessment also considered vulnerability, such as female headed households or disability. In an FFS 2020 housing survey conducted with 385 female heads of household almost all responded that they felt completely safe during the home assessment and repair<sup>120</sup>. Interviews with UNDP staff showed that women were also engaged (through CfW) in rehabilitation of their own houses or local schools, or health facilities, indicating synergy between rehabilitation and livelihood activities.

Gender Strategy ambition to integrate Gender Equality in Window 2 (Livelihood)
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4. Gender integration and women’s participation in small business grants</li> <li>5. Cash grants for women headed households (WHH)</li> <li>6. Women’s participation in Cash for work (CfW)</li> </ol>

FFS targeted women in small business grants beyond the initial 30% target. It also specifically targeted female headed households through specific vulnerability criteria for cash grants of USD 500.

Under CfW, significant efforts were made to ensure women’s participation. This resulted in FFS exceeding the targeted 4,000 women, despite the challenging context. Women took part in general CfW projects as well as women only projects (e.g. desk repair and painting). FFS also focused on ensuring equal payment for men and women contractors in CfW<sup>121</sup>. An evaluation exercise was carried out in November 2019 with 1320 beneficiaries<sup>122</sup> of CfW support between 2017-2019. 221 women (of which 56 where heads of households) from West Mosul (majority), East Mosul, Heet and Anah were interviewed. Particularly for female CfW beneficiaries, FFS asked if they felt safe undertaking the work on a daily basis and if they felt that they faced any negative/unwanted attention or consequences because of their participation in the project. 205 women out of 221 said they felt completely safe and 220 women said that they did not face any particular negative consequences as a result of their participation. The evaluation team considers this a positive indication, as livelihood projects can increase women’s vulnerability to risks such as gender-based violence and social tensions.

<sup>117</sup> Window 4 was not running in 2017 and was thus not included.

<sup>118</sup> FFS Gender Update, November 2017, page 2.

<sup>119</sup> Stars Orbit’s staffing numbers.

<sup>120</sup> 2020 UNDP FFS Housing Sector Evaluation.

<sup>121</sup> The verification of this information is not part of the scope of the evaluation.

<sup>122</sup> Beneficiaries consisted of both men and women returnees (majority), remained and IDPs.

**Gender Strategy ambition to integrate Gender Equality in Window 3 (Capacity of local government)**

7. Recruiting more women under FFS and contractors for equal opportunities to access resources (e.g as as engineers, social organizers, monitors).
8. Improved gender responsive M&E, reporting, communication has been incorporated in the plan
9. Regular interactions with donors, UN agencies and other stakeholders<sup>123</sup>

FFS made various efforts to improve its staff gender gap. This included adding a special clause to BoQs/contracts in 2017 ensuring at least 20% women’s participation as part of contract obligation<sup>124</sup>. An interview with the main LTA service provider that recruits staff for FFS revealed that the company recruited 21 female engineers, 163 field monitors, 3 liaison officers and 18 social organizers reaching the 20% target. FFS also made efforts to increase the presence of women in field level monitoring. Between 2015-2019, 163 women were hired as monitors<sup>125</sup>.

Training sessions were conducted in both gender equality and sexual harassment for staff and some local counterparts. In 2019, FFS focused on promoting awareness around sexual exploitation and abuse, including training 90 staff. This training has been scaled up since then to now include a mandatory training for the more than 200 staff (social organizers, engineers, monitors liaison officers, MSAs) working on the ground. The evaluation team found that FFS has paid attention to assessing how women experienced their participation both in a 2019 CfW sector evaluation<sup>126</sup> with women beneficiaries as well as the survey with UNDP field staff (see more below under Finding 2).

According to UNDP, the gender team participates in the Gender Task Force and regular interactions with different stakeholders such as UN and others.

It is the evaluation team’s assessment that the ambitions set out in the Gender Strategy to integrate gender have been largely met and that relevant actions have been taken to integrate gender in the implementation of the different windows.

**Finding 13. FFS has gradually strengthened its M&E system with regards to using gender-disaggregated data for performance indicators to monitor and measure the results of programme interventions on women and girls. However this was primarily focused on outputs. FFS has good examples of how continuous learning and adaptation of gender mainstreaming activities is done.**

**Monitoring and reporting.** In terms of M&E, FFS had a few indicators and targets for gender and youth under job opportunities (livelihoods) in its early years. In 2017, gender was introduced in the monitoring plan and in 2018, a supplementary outcome indicator was added under “level of community engagement (with an emphasis on women and youth) in promoting social cohesion in newly liberated areas, as assessed or observed by relevant proxy indicators”. The 2018 results framework shows an increased attention to gender disaggregating data/indicators as well as setting clear targets for women and youth beneficiaries under with four distinct gender-related output indicators (Annex 14). Going through project monitoring data to assess rates of achievement (Annex 14), it is possible to assess that the output targets set for 2019 have all been met except for business grants<sup>127</sup>. Monitoring data allows for gender disaggregated data monitoring, however only at output level. Outcome-level indicators that would enable FFS to assess changes experienced by women (such

<sup>123</sup> This is taken from the gender strategy and these other stakeholders are not specified.

<sup>124</sup> Data from FFS’ service center confirms that the 20% target was reached.

<sup>125</sup> FFS service center data, 2015-2019

<sup>126</sup> FFS (2019): Livelihood sector survey for Cash for Work

<sup>127</sup> The percentage allocated for women exceeded the 30% target.

as improved recognition of women or improved social acceptance of women's economic participation) and record any unintended effects have not yet been developed.

With regard to annual reports, reporting on gender mainstreaming has gradually improved. In the 2015 quarterly reports, there are examples of gender disaggregated narrative reporting highlighting a few examples of projects where women participated. Until 2017, gender was reported on sporadically. Since then, FFS annual reports have included a specific section on gender mainstreaming. Specific success stories and images have been produced by the communication team for the annual reports and in the TV episodes produced by Anbar TV. The evaluation team sees the success stories as important contributions in terms of showcasing the experiences of working with and for women in FFS, which could be used to promote further endorsement and scale up efforts.

**Learning and adaptation.** The gender team conducts mid-term reviews of the annual plans and consults and support the staff in all windows. Monthly gender review meetings are held with the livelihood or infrastructure rehabilitation teams. In these meetings, progress, challenges and suggestions for improvement are shared between staff including project success stories or examples. This practice serves as an important follow-up and learning mechanism. In the bi-weekly stabilization team meetings, gender is a fixed agenda point. The gender team also engages in field missions, by joining regular missions or by conducting gender specific missions.

The M&E team conducted a number of evaluation exercises such as of the CfW portfolio or housing as noted above. These exercises have a few gender specific questions, and leave some room for more gender-sensitive questions as well as gender-disaggregating responses to better understand the different experiences of men and women beneficiaries and adapt programming. A survey for women field engineers was also done in 2019, targeting women (47 respondents) working in the FFS project such as social organizers (the majority), engineers and field facilitators primarily in Anbar and Ninewah. The survey inquired about women's comfort levels, perceptions of safety and the ease of reporting mechanisms when it comes to matters of gender-based harassment, exploitation or abuse<sup>128</sup>. The evaluation team found that a lot of useful information about women's experiences from working in the field can be obtained from this exercise, including recommendations on how FFS can provide more support to female staff.

The team found examples of M&E exercises contributing to learning and informing project adaptation, particularly through regular follow-up done by the gender team and their collaboration with the project teams, as well as room for improvement with regards to internal gender-sensitive evaluation efforts.

**Finding 14. FFS has contributed to improving the conditions for women and girls in accessing services such as health and education and provided short-term livelihood opportunities for women in its selected project locations.**

The increased attention from 2017 to integrate gender equality in the implementation of FFS can be seen in the reported total number of women beneficiaries reached by FFS over the years. In 2015, 703,075 were reported as beneficiaries<sup>129</sup>. With the expansion of rehabilitation works including infrastructures servicing women and girls, outreach covered 7.3 million women and girls in 2019<sup>130</sup>.

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<sup>128</sup> Six out of 47 women said that they feel at risk of harassment or abuse from beneficiaries, project partners/contractors or end-users, due to the fact that you are a woman when undertaking field-based tasks. Six women also said they have experienced gender-based violence from project beneficiaries or partners and while two experienced it from a colleague or peer. However, only two of them made an official complaint and only one felt it was managed appropriately. The remaining women indicated fear of negative repercussions, being blamed or that the reporting would not make a difference as the main reasons for not reporting. The main reasons for feeling unsafe (11 women out of 47) were walking to and from project site and during house visits.

<sup>129</sup> FFS database maintained by M&E unit (2020).

<sup>130</sup> FFS database (December 2020). The numbers are understood to be estimated numbers of beneficiaries based on area population or infrastructure capacity (see M&E section).

While the evaluation team cannot qualify how FFS affected female beneficiaries, the reported number of women beneficiaries has grown significantly since the project's early stages. This includes a significant number of women and girls who have access to social services such as health and education.

In the table below, the team highlights examples of FFS contributions which are deemed likely to have improved the conditions for women and girls' access to services and opportunities:

Project area/type	Total number of women beneficiaries between 2016-2019) per area <sup>131</sup> and indications of improved conditions
<b>Increased access to basic services in education and health</b>	
Housing projects	77,864 women have benefitted from housing rehabilitation out of 145,435 (53,5% women beneficiaries) <sup>132</sup> . It is plausible that FFS increased access to safe housing for women included in the target areas.
Rehabilitation of schools for girls and young women	109,811 <sup>133</sup> (app. 38%) girls and young women out of a total beneficiary number of 293,377 are counted as beneficiaries to school rehabilitation. Education facilities rehabilitated: 91 primary girls schools, 43 secondary and 16 high schools specially for women (65 high schools in total).
Women access higher to education	A total of 148,382 <sup>134</sup> (47%) young women were estimated as beneficiaries out of a total beneficiary number of 315,339 to universities/technical institutes (6 universities built) <sup>135</sup> . 5,907 women have access to technical colleges/institutes in Anbar and Ninewah (16 technical and vocational schools/institutes).  Evaluation KIIs with education institution manager indicate an increase in the university enrollment of women compared to pre-ISIL.
Number of educational facilities reconstructed/rehabilitated	17 Kindergartens; 595 Primary schools incl. 50 girl schools and 21 mixed schools; 87 secondary schools including 32 girl schools and 2 mixed; 65 high schools including 16 girls schools and 4 mixed schools; 16 Technical and vocational schools/institutes (1 targeting only women); 6 universities: Anbar, Falluja, Tikrit, Mosul, Ninewah and Northern Technical including women dormitories in some places.  20,9% of female respondents in the Evaluation survey that education services in their city were 'better' than pre-ISIL (18,9% answered 'around the same level').  Evaluation FGDs and KIIs also showed very positive accounts of improved participation of girls and young women in education (+30 participants). Some provided the reason that educational facilities were now available, while others expressed more accepting social norms or that enrollment numbers have increased.
Women's access to health services	Rehabilitation of health facilities (PHC and hospitals) are estimated to reach a female population size of 244,6722 <sup>136</sup> . The following larger health facilitates are considered a specifically large contribution: 1) East Mosul hospitals: Al Shifaa Surgical Unit, Ibn Al

<sup>131</sup> FFS Projects Data Information as of December 26<sup>th</sup>, 2019.

<sup>132</sup> Based on 'under implementation' and 'completed'.

<sup>133</sup> These numbers are cumulative of all education projects between 2015 and March 2021 classified as 'under implementation' and 'completed'.

<sup>134</sup> Beneficiaries to 'supply of furniture and equipment not included only direct rehabilitation work.

<sup>135</sup> Women's education facilities dormitories rehabilitated at Mosul University and Fallujah Technical College.

<sup>136</sup> Number based on 'under implementation' and 'completed' and does not include supply of equipment or furniture.

Project area/type	Total number of women beneficiaries between 2016-2019) per area <sup>131</sup> and indications of improved conditions
	<p>Atheer Pediatric Hospital and the Al Khansa Maternity Hospital (finalized in 2018) and 2) maternity hospital in Ramadi<sup>137</sup> (finalized in 2019).</p> <p>In the evaluation survey, when assessing the health services compared to pre-ISIL, 16,4% of women in the survey said clinics were better (while 41,8% said 'around the same level) and 38,9% that hospitals were better (30,6% said 'around the same level').</p> <p>Evaluation KIs with health stakeholders, indicate positive effects of health facility rehabilitation on women's access to health services. Examples provided include: a high share of patients are women, indication of increase in female health sector staff and services provided cater specifically to the needs of women (e.g. family planning, pregnancy support, psychological consultations, breast cancer prevention, equipment for childbirth).</p>
<b>Increased access to opportunities through livelihood</b>	
Cash grants provided for women	6,218 women have received cash grants in Ninewah and Anbar (2016-2019). The cash grants were provided for particularly vulnerable women, and provided temporary economic support. No evidence of longer-term effect of this, yet immediate support was provided to these women.
Small business grants for women	2,582 (primarily in Ninewah) but a few also in Anbar and Salahadin. Some grants were given to women who own micro businesses such as bakeries, clothes shops, beauty salons. <sup>138</sup> No evidence of whether this contributed to the women being able to establish sustainable small businesses.
Cash for work (CfW) livelihood opportunities	<p>5,186<sup>139</sup> women participated in CfW opportunities either through regular CfW projects or through all women CfW projects (in Ninewah and Anbar primarily)<sup>140</sup>. While there is limited evidence of CfW contributing to longer-term income opportunities or sustainable income for women, projects did provide women with immediate employment opportunities. Some evidence from interviews and Anbar TV interviews<sup>141</sup> indicate that women have an increased sense of empowerment and feeling of independence during their CfW participation.</p> <p>Evaluation FGDs conducted with 208 participants of which 80 women (38%) and KIs conducted with 20 individuals indicate that around a quarter of participants think women's economic participation has improved as compared to pre-ISIL. Some share that the conflict has resulted in a renegotiation of gender roles as well as an opening for women to increasingly assume the role as a breadwinner, also in the cases of female headed household. Many also mention the livelihood opportunities provided by FFS and other organisations as a key factor in driving women's economic participation. While around 10 participants mentioned a general improvement in women's participation in society and public life, a few women believe the situation remains unchanged and that conservative culture, customs and traditions present a barrier for women and girls.</p>

<sup>137</sup> The Hospital is estimated to provide maternal and pediatric health care services for 432,000 people in Ramadi, as well as those living in the greater Anbar governorate.

<sup>138</sup> 2019 FFS Gender Update, page 6.

<sup>139</sup> Number based on 'under implementation' and 'completed' and does not include supply of equipment or furniture.

<sup>140</sup> 2019 FFS Gender Update, page 5.

<sup>141</sup> Examples from Anbar TV: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3e9cnbMPpGU&t=26s> (minutes 5 and 6) and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qRBtuz-kvHE&t=135s> (minutes 16 and 18) and Falluja TV: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IXX4i0q0fMo>.

Based on the findings presented above, the evaluation team assesses that the outputs and evidence of improved conditions presented in the table provide a good basis for indicating that FFS has contributed to improving conditions for women targeted by FFS. While the team does not have education enrollment or health patient data available, the rehabilitation of educational and health facilities is likely to have contributed to enabling women to return to education studies and to access health care in the targeted locations of FFS. This is to some extent confirmed by the evaluation survey, FGDs and KIIs.

### 5.3 Efficiency

The efficiency criterion in the context of the evaluation looks at the extent to which the project converted its inputs into outputs in a timely manner focusing on two levels of inquiry, namely i) budget allocation and consumption over the period of the evaluation and ii) timely delivery of outputs.

#### Evaluation Question 5

To what extent did the project convert inputs into outputs in a timely manner?

**Finding 15.** FFS was able to disburse its budget in a satisfactory manner in the period of the evaluation despite average annual spending in some years and overspending on some budget line without exceeding the overall budget of FFS.

**Finding 16.** FFS has delivered on its mandate of speed and scale particularly in its earlier phases of implementation. The pace of the procurement process is reasonable and closely monitored but delays are reported by staff and counterparts in recent years.

**Finding 15. FFS was able to disburse its budget in a satisfactory manner in the period of the evaluation despite average annual spending in some years and overspending on some budget lines without exceeding the overall budget of FFS.**

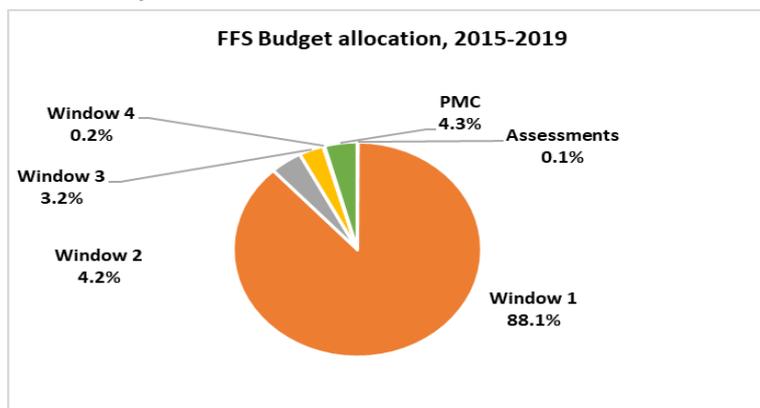
**Budget allocation.** The allocation of the FFS budget looks at the distribution of FFS' budget chapters/activities in relation to the total budget of the evaluation period giving an indication of the percentage of the budget allocated to activities and programme management costs (PMC). The FFS budget comprises six budget activities: a) Assessments, b) Window 1 (Infrastructure), c) Window 2 (Livelihoods), d) Window 3 (Capacity Support), e) Window 4 (Social Cohesion) and f) PMC. The budget design reflects the initial components of FFIS from 2015. FFES, which was added in 2016, is not designated separately but is integrated into Window 1 of FFIS as it covers the same sectors (Infrastructure). The allocation of the budget across the various windows takes into account the needs of the various locations and sectors, and donor earmarking of funds (specific window, sector, geographic location, or a combination). As technical staff do not have management functions, these costs are not included as part of PMC.

The current budget structure means that the shares of FFIS (output 1) and FFES (output 2) are not immediately visible in line with the design of FFS. However, the budget is managed and monitored to track finances against the FFIS and FFES outputs. The budgeting of activities in the UNDP financial management system is done based on a combination of factors that includes the project, activities, donors, and budgetary account codes. These budgetary account codes are selected based on the nature of the contractual service and do not include the sector of the activity. For instance, a budget line that differentiates CfW from other livelihoods activities implemented through contractual services via companies under Window 2 is not visible. These activities are all recorded as contractual services. Needed information can be extracted, but this requires some effort. It is worth noting that this is not FFS specific but linked to the way the UNDP system operates globally.

In the current format, by far the largest budget allocation goes to the rehabilitation of crucial infrastructure (Window 1 including FFES). This resonates with the essence of FFS' immediate and extended stabilization work

given the damage and destruction levels experienced in liberated areas. This core activity represents 88% of the FFS budget for the period 2015-2019; in total around a budget of USD 902 million<sup>142</sup>.

Figure 41: FFS budget allocation, 2015-2019

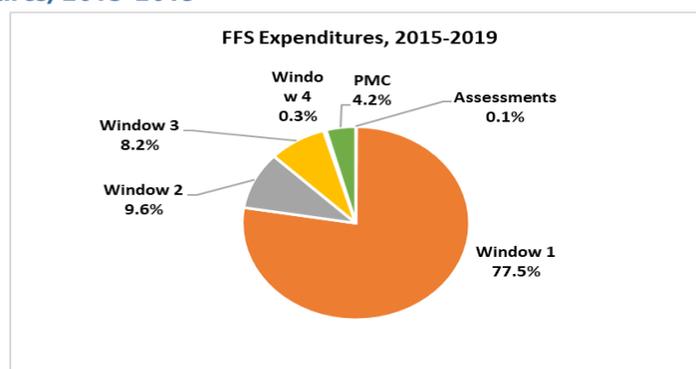


Source: FFS budget data, 2015-2019

The budget for livelihood and municipal infrastructure are in the order of USD 43 million and USD 33 million respectively for the period of the evaluation. While these budgets are significant, they represent a small share of the FFS budget given that the budget is driven by the large investments needed for infrastructure rehabilitation. The softer, labor-intensive pillars of FFS, namely assessments and social cohesion work account for a minor percentage of the total budget, even though their budgets are not insignificant; USD 838,798 and around USD 1.8 million respectively. Given the scale of FFS, its setup within the UN system and procedures, and security considerations for operating in Iraq including liberated areas, PMC of 4% are seen to be reasonable and even low given the labor-intensive nature of the project<sup>143</sup>. The evaluation team understands that technical staff are costed on relevant activities and that all donors contributed to PMC but has no information on the percentage contribution of each donor.

In practice, expenditures generally harmonies with the budgeted amounts. However, livelihood and municipal support gained substantially more significance than envisaged, with around USD 69 million and USD 60 million spent respectively. To a lesser extent, social cohesion work also accounted for a larger share than planned (around USD 2.5 million). In contrast, rehabilitation of infrastructure represented 78% of total expenditures. Assessments and PMC were also within the budgeted amounts. The variances between the budgeted amounts and the actual expenditures is linked to i) differences between estimated and actual costs, ii) partial disbursements on some committed amounts, and iii) newly identified needs.

Figure 42: FFS expenditures, 2015-2019



Source: FFS budget data, 2015-2019

<sup>142</sup> FFS budget data, 2015-2019.

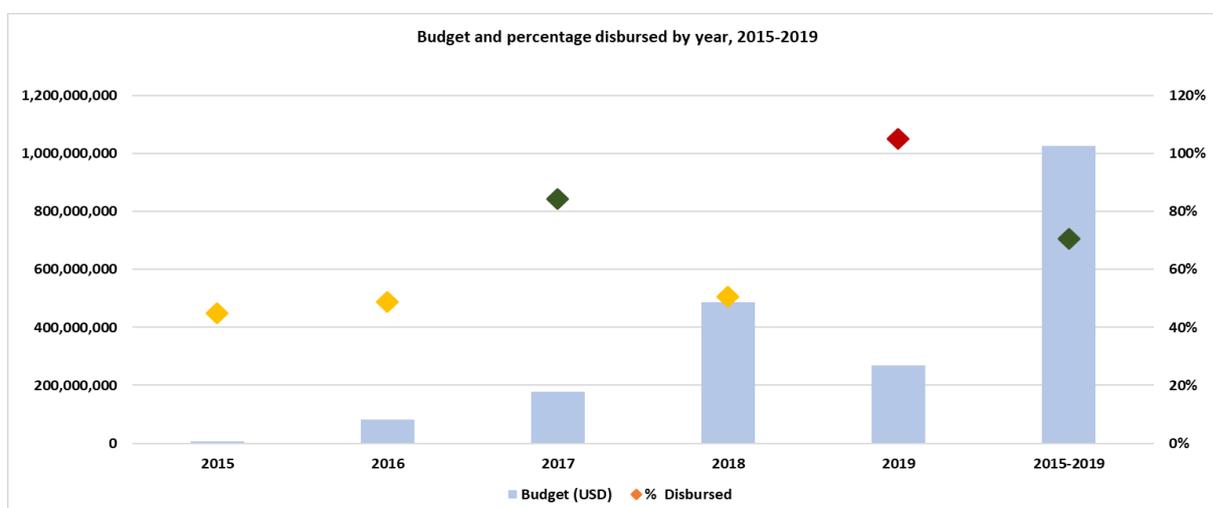
<sup>143</sup> PMC include staff payroll, armored vehicles, common premises, direct project costs, security costs, travel and office supply expenses, IT equipment and communication and reporting costs.

**Disbursements.** The level of budget disbursement is examined at the level of i) the overall budget spent for the period 2015-2019, ii) annual budgets and iii) budget allocations (chapters/activities).

At the overall project level, FFS disbursed its budget at a rate of 71% in the period 2015-2019. According to UNDP, the rate of disbursement is not higher for various reasons. First, no advance payments are made to contractors prior to the completion of works. This means that no contractual commitments are converted into actual disbursements until the full completion of works or when agreed milestones are met. The design of the procurement process not only checks technical specifications and tender budgets but also whether bidders have sufficient liquidity to complete the works with own financing. An exception are NGOs, who get advance payments. However, their smaller share in the budget, due to the nature of works being implemented, does not strongly influence the level of overall disbursements. Second, the completion of works must be evidenced by a certificate of completion before payment can be made. This requires a verification of completed works by engineers and a validation by UNDP and end-users before the certificate is issued. Delays at these levels can affect disbursements. Third, the implementation of larger projects can extend beyond one financial year. Even for smaller infrastructures, works contracted in one year could be paid out the following year depending on when these works are completed, verified and handed-over. Fourth, payment of invoices does not take place before all the required documents are provided and quality assured at multiple stages for incorrect or missing information. The internal controls and multiple verifications start at the field level with UNDP staff with contractors and end-users, then senior engineers and specialists, followed by the Programme and Operations Support Unit, then through programme managers, after which they are shared with the Finance Unit. This cycle is a core aspect of UNDP’s anti-corruption mitigation measures, and has played a critical role in identifying cases of fraud. Lastly, there are commitments from earlier years that have not yet been paid out, particularly in difficult to access or insecure areas where projects are not yet fully completed (see effectiveness on rate of implementation).

Looking at annual levels of budget disbursement, FFS had the highest disbursement rates in 2017, the year where it experienced a substantial growth in its portfolio with the liberation of Mosul, and in 2019<sup>144</sup>. The 5% overspend in 2019 is justified by payments due from contracted projects in 2018. FFS’s disbursement rate has otherwise hovered around 50% due to the type and size of ongoing projects.

**Figure 43: Budget consumption by year, 2015-2019**

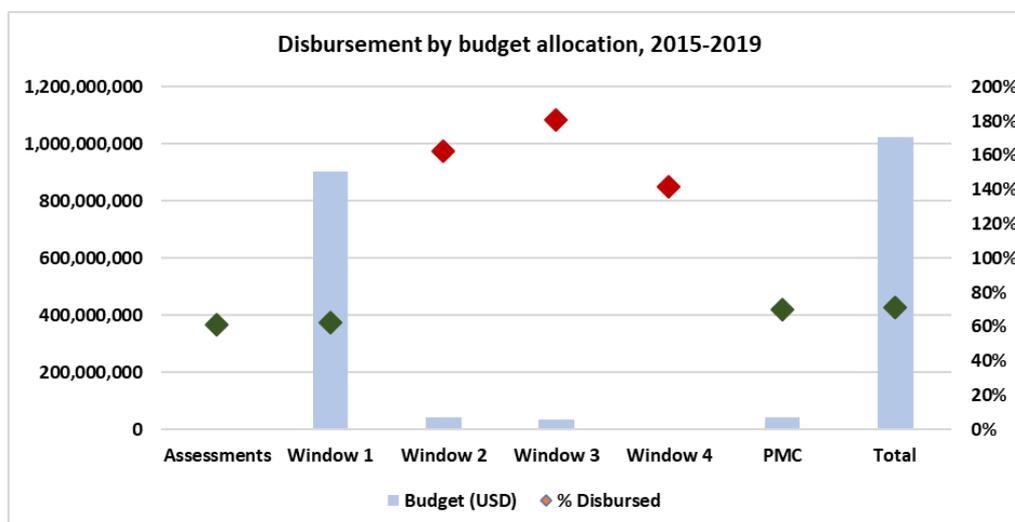


Source: FFS budget data, 2015-2019; Yellow indicates disbursements lower than 60%, green above 60% and red above 100%. (team compilation)

<sup>144</sup> The social cohesion budget was disbursed in 2017 when the window was paused that year and resumed in 2018 where no costs were incurred.

In terms of budget activities/allocations, FFS consumed its budget in varying degrees. The disbursed budget for assessments and rehabilitation of infrastructures stood at around 60% in the period 2015-2019. This should be understood in the context described above, namely that full disbursements is incurred upon project/milestone completion and validation and that larger projects in particular typically extend beyond one financial year (January-December).

Figure 44: Budget consumption by budget allocation, 2015-2019



Source: FFS budget data, 2015-2019; ; Green indicates disbursements of above 60% and red above 100%. (team compilation)

For livelihood, municipal support and social cohesion, disbursements far exceeded the planned budget at the beginning of the year for the given budget allocation. This is related to several factors which include the frequency of budget revisions conducted to update the budget to be in line with the emerging needs (especially for unearmarked funds) and to reflect additional funds received. Monitoring of expenditures was done based on reports generated from UNDP’s financial management system. Financial tracking during this evaluation period was challenged as (i) there were not enough dedicated staff (especially during the first years), (ii) the awarding, implementation and payment disbursement of contracts occurred across two financial years and (iii) the alerts that the system generates are on the overall program level rather than the budget allocation level.

**Findings 16. FFS has delivered on its mandate of speed and scale particularly in its earlier phases of implementation. The pace of the procurement process is reasonable and closely monitored but delays are reported by staff and counterparts in recent years.**

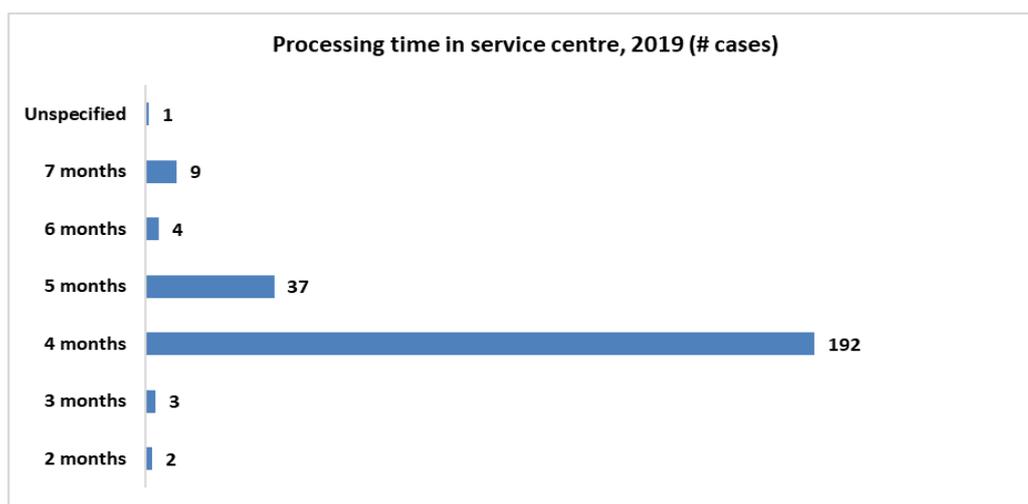
**Timely delivery of outputs.** The timely delivery of outputs is closely linked to the timeline of assessments, project prioritization process and approval during the preparation phase. In the implementation phase, it relies heavily on the speediness of the technical team in developing BoQ together with Gol stakeholders and on the capacity of the service center to process procurement requests once BoQs are received and to award contracts in a timely fashion<sup>145</sup>. There are no metrics to monitor the timeliness of the BoQ development process. Key challenges noted in interviews pertain to two aspects. First, BoQ development initially relied on estimates provided by Gol stakeholders, which were not always realistic. According to UNDP, revisions entailed delays in finalizing BoQs for submission to the service center. This prompted FFS engineers to work more closely with government stakeholders on cost estimation, something that increase the quality of BoQ received and the speed of submission to the service center. Second, there is no one government entity responsible for all sectors in a

<sup>145</sup> The evaluation team does not have data on the timeframe of the preparation phase and the BoQ process. This section is primarily based on data provided by the service center on the procurement process.

governorate. In the current decentralization landscape, approvals must come from the central level. According to UNDP, this has been a main reason for delays. Such delays were confirmed by interviews with government stakeholders that noted the lengthy process of paperwork and approvals.

According to UNDP and in line with its M&E framework (see EQ.3/Figure 40), FFS monitors the speed of its procurement process as the main metric. This is done on a weekly basis by reviewing the date of receipt of a project/case against the date the contract is awarded. While the processing time is not documented in the form of number of days or months to facilitate comparison, this exercise allows the service center to regularly track progress and identify delays if any. The figure below provides a snapshot of the processing time for procurement in terms of number of months it took to process cases in 2019<sup>146</sup>. It shows that 92% of cases were processed within 4-5 months, with the majority (75%) taking four months.

**Figure 45: Procurement processing time in number of months, 2019**



Source: FFS procurement monitoring list, 2019 (team compilation)

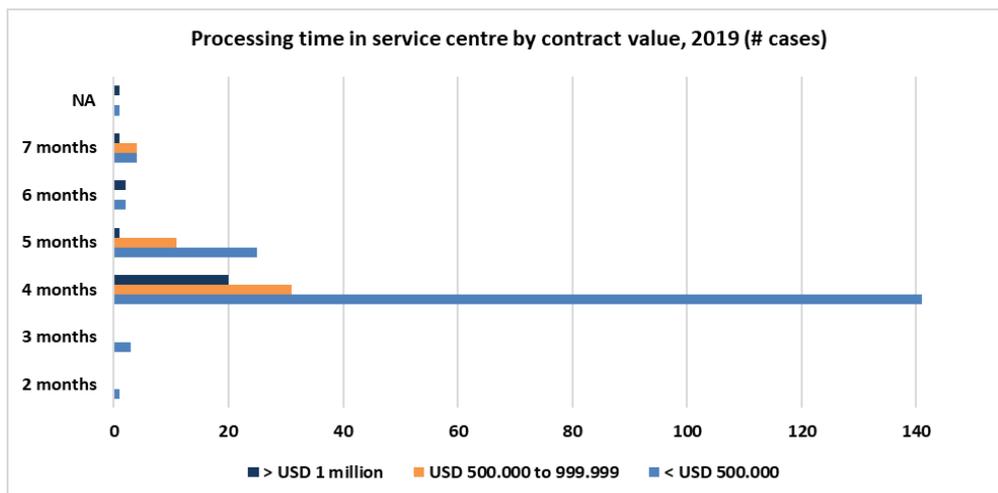
Interviews with project staff resonate with this timeframe. They reveal that compared to the initial phase of FFS, the processing time almost doubled from around 2 months to 4-5 months<sup>147</sup>. Interviews with different UNDP staff underlined the insufficient number of procurement officers compared to their caseload as one of the main challenges for timely delivery. As noted above under disbursements, uncertainty about incoming donor commitments render procurement planning more challenging in terms of planning capacities to meet the needs of its caseload. This underlines the need for fast action to adjust the capacity of staff as needed if annual planning is difficult. In addition, staff turnover and the difficulty in finding competent candidates for recruitment were noted.

Overall, the service center has been systematically expedient in processing cases within the mentioned timeframe of 4-5 months. While the bulk of its cases are smaller projects of less than USD 500,00 (71%), 80% of the larger projects of more than USD 1 million contract value were processed within four months. This included contract values of up to USD 15 million (e.g. hospital rehabilitation).

<sup>146</sup> The cases include all procurement done by the service center including office equipment and consultants.

<sup>147</sup> The evaluation team does not have data from earlier years to confirm the reported timeframe in the initial years of FFS.

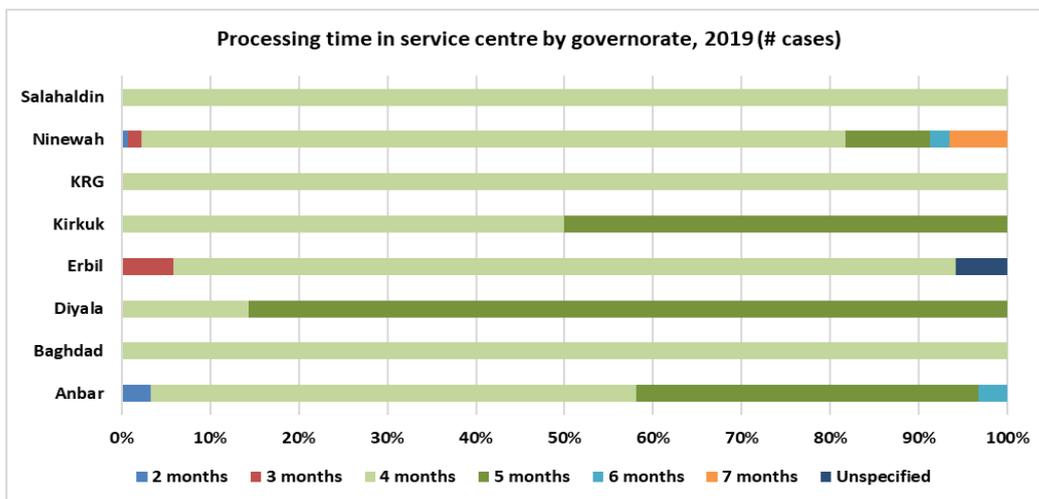
Figure 46: Procurement processing time by contract value, 2019



Source: FFS procurement monitoring list, 2019 (team compilation)

5% of cases took longer than six months to process in 2019. 92% of these cases (12 out of 13) are located in Ninewah covering a variety of projects such as the rehabilitation of schools and university complexes, hospitals, housing units, municipal infrastructure, water treatment plants, electricity and CfW. Three of these cases had a budget higher than USD 1 million.

Figure 47: Procurement processing time by governorate, 2019<sup>148</sup>



Source: FFS procurement monitoring list, 2019 (team compilation)

The timeframe of the procurement process is seen to be reasonable taking into consideration that it involves extensive checks prior to selection and contract award such as security, reference, financial capacity and liquidity checks, particularly because no advances are made to contractors. A key challenge noted in interviews is the difficulty in finding qualified contractors especially for complex projects and the increasing number of bidders which requires more time to assess bids. In addition, the procurement of specialized equipment (e.g. medical equipment) proved to be time consuming, thereby delaying implementation. This was later mitigated through pre-positioning on the procurement of such equipment, but remains a challenge.

A main challenge for FFS in terms of speed of delivery has been security and distance. FFS found modalities to address these risks by extensively relying on third party recruitments through LTAs. As noted in section 5.1, this

<sup>148</sup> For Baghdad, KRG and Erbil, procurement mainly pertains to office related assets, consultancy services and staff recruitment.

has given FFS the ability to quickly hire field staff for implementing and monitoring activities without going through UNDP recruitment procedures and security protocols. A total of 1,234 persons were contracted through the primary LTA provider in the period of 2015-2019. 14% of recruitments had a contract duration of less than three months, 64% of less than one year, 23% of more than a year. Typically, these include field staff like engineers, livelihood monitoring officers and housing social organizers. This fast-track mechanism of recruitment within an average of two weeks has allowed FFS to quickly scale up and down, enabling timely delivery. However, fast track LTA recruitment cannot be used for the service center given that the roles and functions required for the service center must be assigned to UNDP contract holders, underlining the importance of flexibility of such recruitment to match FFS’s changing caseload and timely use of the HR waiver, which is renewed annually.

Timeliness of delivery in the implementation of awarded contracts was confirmed by most visited educational and health facilities that were rehabilitated by FFS. 73% of interviewed facilities reported that the rehabilitation was done in a timely manner immediately after liberation and/or prior to massive returns of IDPs. 17% experienced minor delays due to the security situation, compliance with standards or overlaps with the start of the educational year. 9% said that delivery came in late because it did not precede the start of the educational year or was hampered by procedural issues.

## 5.4 Sustainability

In the context of the evaluation, the likelihood that results will persist after the exit of FFS is looked at in relation to two dimensions. First, at the level of rehabilitated infrastructures, namely their functionality. Second, at the level of returnees in terms of their intention to stay.

### Evaluation Question 6

What is the likelihood that project outcomes will last?

**Finding 17.** The handover plan of the final phase of FFS includes important considerations that were not addressed in previous iterations. However, the future functionality of rehabilitated infrastructure, as a key element for capitalizing on stabilization gains, is not touched upon. While the ongoing capacity needs assessment will shape the design of activities in the final phase, there is a need to confirm the relevance and utility of some standards and procedures proposed for handover to ensure they can be used within existing GoI systems and procedures.

**Finding 18.** The majority of returnees do not regret having returned and intend to stay. However the scenario of secondary displacement is a likely one, particularly affecting returnees who have no job and/or whose houses were destroyed. The scenario is starting to materialize with observed trends of returnees leaving again.

**Finding 17. The handover plan of the final phase of FFS includes important considerations that were not addressed in previous iterations. However, the future functionality of rehabilitated infrastructure, as a key element for capitalizing on stabilization gains, is not touched upon. While the ongoing capacity needs assessment will shape the design of activities in the final phase, there is a need to confirm the relevance and utility of some standards and procedures proposed for handover to ensure they can be used within existing GoI systems and procedures.**

**Functionality of infrastructures.** Findings indicate that the rehabilitation of infrastructure restored and upgraded facilities compared to pre-ISIL standards, building the basis for the resumption of services. However, the worsening macroeconomic and financial situation in Iraq, in addition to security and political challenges, has impacted the quality and level of resumption of services. According to interviews held, the functionality of visited facilities is challenged primarily by budget constraints. Only 55% of these facilities (12 out of 22) received a budget allocation after rehabilitation<sup>149</sup>. Finding from interviews with government stakeholders indicate that around 60% (10 out of 16) received a budget allocation from central government. While five facilities used to

<sup>149</sup> This includes 22 facilities out of 23. One facility did not provide an answer.

receive a budget, but did not receive any allocation after rehabilitation. Five facilities said they never received a budget allocation.

Two third of facilities that had received a budget after rehabilitation reported that it was insufficient to ensure the full functioning of the facilities. Similarly, all consulted government stakeholders said the budget they received from the national budget was less than pre-ISIL levels to the exception of one. The situation is primarily linked to challenges facing Iraq' declining national revenues compared to the economic growth it experienced in pre-ISIL times. Other challenges include understaffing particularly of doctors and teachers in light of difficulties in finding such competences in the areas, particularly in areas of low return. The evaluation team had planned a visit to one rehabilitated school that turned out not to be operating because of lack of female teachers, as the area is still suffering from slow return rates and scarcity of competences.

Observations during field visits indicate that all visited facilities looked well-maintained, partly because they have been newly rehabilitated. This underlines the importance of ensuring that the operation and maintenance of these infrastructures is pro-actively considered looking forward. FFS has so far not required prior commitment from Gol in relation to allocating resources for the maintenance and operation of rehabilitated infrastructures. Its key strategy for ensuring Gol commitment lies in the selection of infrastructures to be rehabilitated. FFS only rehabilitated damaged infrastructures that existed before ISIL. This was meant to ensure that national government will continue financing their operation and maintenance once they are rehabilitated. The evaluation team finds this strategy to be well measured given the extent of damage experienced and the need to move fast on the ground. While it is not part of the mandate of FFS to work on government budget planning processes and capacities, the team underlines the importance of the commitment of national government to sustain the functionality of rehabilitated facilities. This is seen to be part of the intention to *"reaffirm national ownership of the stabilization process and subsequent responsibility to maintain stabilization gains made under FFS"*<sup>150</sup>.

Interviews with national government stakeholders indicated willingness and action to correct situations where operation and maintenance are failing. An example was given of action taken for the operation of provided equipment by ensuring funds were allocated.

Previous versions of the project document noted handover to Gol without explicitly addressing operational aspects of FFS' exit strategy. The project document of 2020 describes a two-tiered approach of the handover to Gol. First, the capacity building of Gol stakeholders. A needs assessment was ongoing at the time of the evaluation. Indicatively, the project document presents a list of procedures to be handed over to Gol. This includes standard operating on conducting needs assessments, procurement procedures, health and safety standards, and gender equality. While some of the themes are relevant, the utility of the future application of some of these procedures within Gol systems and procedures is not fully established (e.g. procurement). Second, governorate specific medium-term peacebuilding and development plans. It is unclear how these will be used post-FFS. While the project document addresses important issues, aspects linked to the future functionality of infrastructure to ensure that stabilization gains are sustained are not visible in the handover plan or in other documentation. This underscores the importance of initiating a dialogue with national government on the future functionality of rehabilitated infrastructure in view of capitalizing on stabilization gains made.

**Finding 18. The majority of returnees do not regret having returned and intend to stay. However the scenario of secondary displacement is a likely one, particularly affecting returnees who have no job and/or whose houses were destroyed. The scenario is starting to materialize with some observed trends of returnees leaving again.**

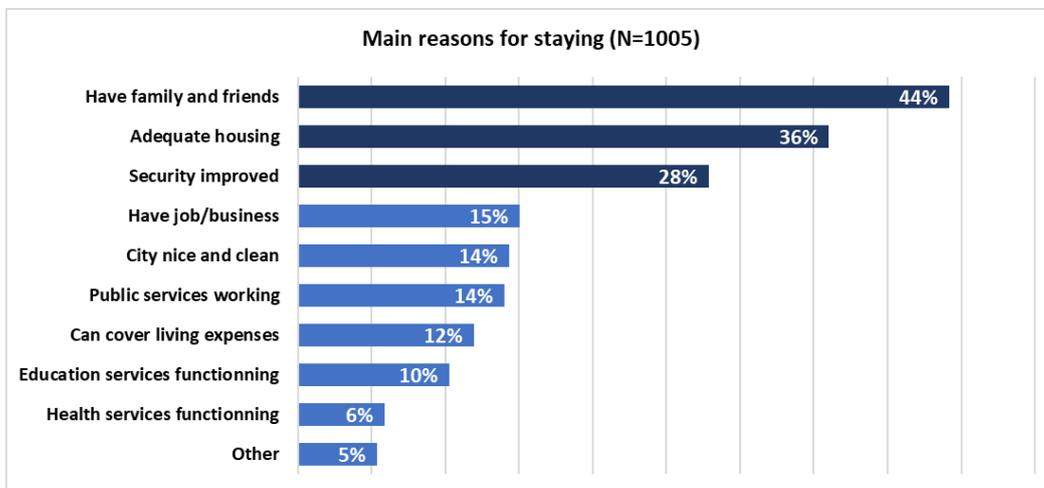
**Intention to stay.** The majority of returnees intend to stay but some have plans to leave primarily because of inability to cover their cost of living and lack of job opportunities. Survey results show that the large majority of

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<sup>150</sup> UNDP (2020) : FFS projet document, page 13.

returnees (89%) do not regret having returned. On average, 91% of all respondents intend to stay across governorates to the exception of Diyala where the percentage of those who intend to stay stood at less than the average (79% of respondents in the area). Around one third of total respondents who plan to stay said they had no choice but to stay in their city, although not many reported it as the main reason for them staying. The top three reported reasons for staying include family and friends, adequate housing and better security.

Figure 48: Reported reasons for staying

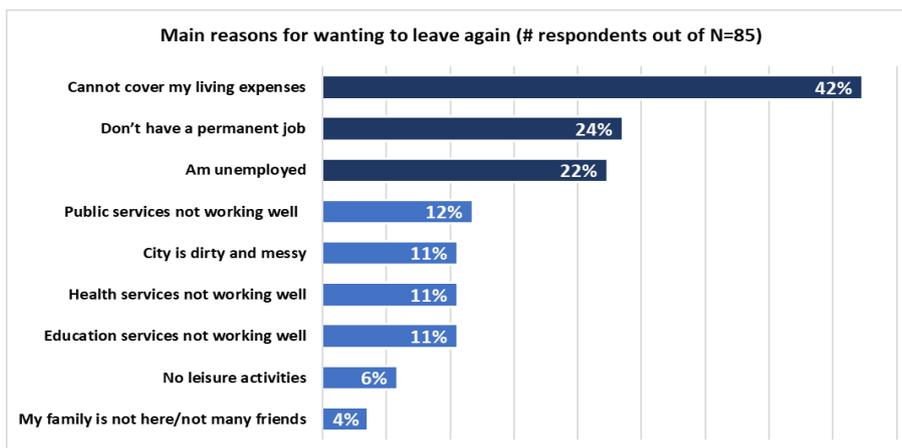


Source: Evaluation survey, March-April 2021; Other include people wanting to stay because they love their city/it is where they belong or because they have no choice/nowhere else to go.

In general, a modest majority of respondents (65%) experience there are enough basic services for them to rebuild their lives and stay in their city. FFS’ internal surveys indicate a higher percentage of responses. In the housing survey in Ninewah (June 2020), 86% of respondents found there were sufficient services. In the CfW survey (November 2019), 73% responded the same. There was an acknowledgement in most FGDs that living conditions are not good enough particularly for the poorer segments in society who don’t have jobs. The assessment is that those who have jobs are likely to stay. The lack of alternatives as a reason for staying was noted in FGDs. Some prefer to stay than experience displacement again.

The minority of survey respondents who reported they plan to leave again (9%) confirm some of the issues raised in FGDs. The top three reported reasons include the inability to cover living expenses, lack of permanent employment and their status as unemployed. It should be noted that less than a third of survey respondents had secondary or higher education. The majority have basic education (61%) or no education (8%). This underscores the importance of qualifying unskilled labour in conjunction with specific job creation opportunities.

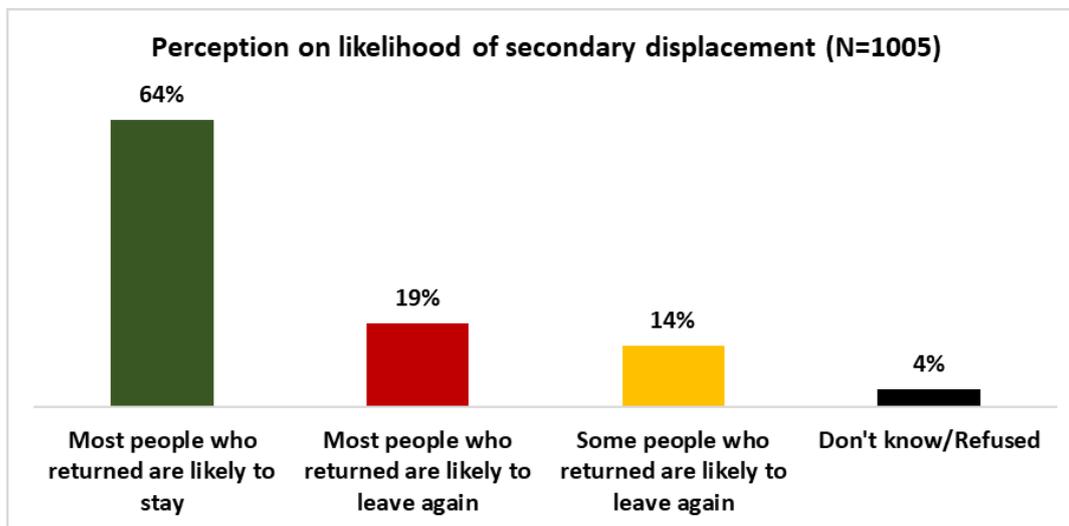
Figure 49: Reported reasons for wanting to leave



Source: Evaluation survey, March-April 2021

The overall assessment of survey respondents is that the modest majority of returnees is likely to stay. Still, 19% think that most of those who returned will leave again. This concurs with assessments made in FGDs, where some participants estimated that 20-25% of those who returned will leave again.

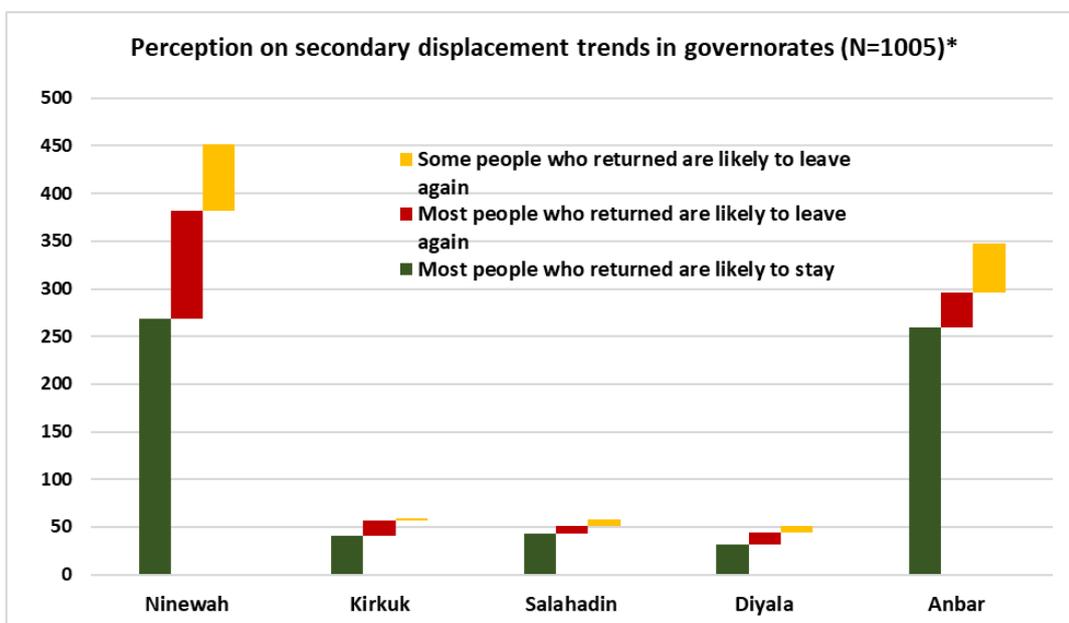
Figure 50: Perceived likelihood of secondary displacement



Source: Evaluation survey, March-April 2021

Compared to the average likelihood that returnees will stay (64%), the highest likelihood of returnees staying is seen in Anbar (Falluja with 81% of area respondents, Ramadi, 70%) and Salahadin (Tikrit, 73%) followed by Kirkuk (Hawija, 67%). In Anbar however, only 36% of respondents in Anah assessed that most returnees will stay. In Ninewah, the picture is differentiated. The highest perceived likelihood that returnees will stay is seen in Tel Afar (66%) followed by Mosul (61%) and Sinjar (54%). In Hamdaniyah, only one third of respondents assessed that most returnees are likely to stay.

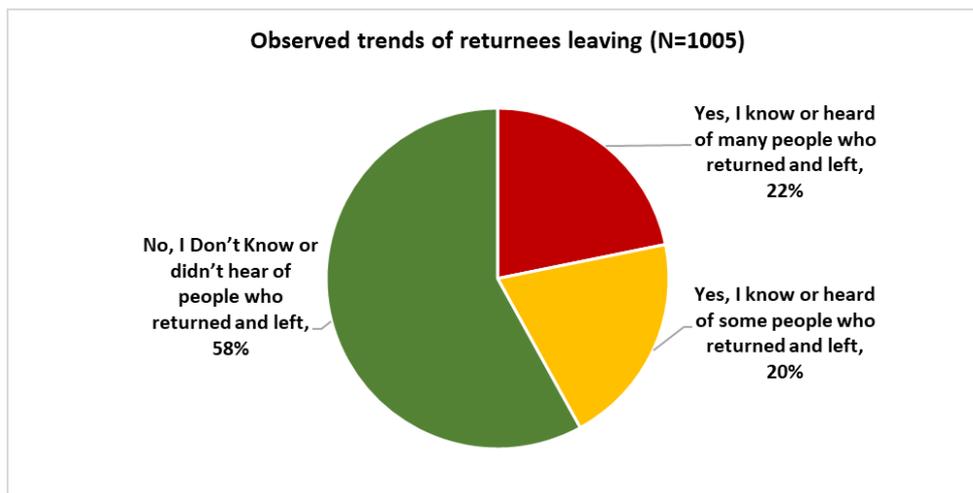
Figure 51: Perceived likelihood of secondary displacement by governorate



Source: Evaluation survey, March-April 2021; \* Excluding 38 don't know.

While the likelihood of secondary displacement is a likely scenario for some returnees, 58% of survey respondents had not heard or known of returnees who left again. In contrast more than 40% had heard or know of returnees who left.

Figure 52: Observed trends of secondary displacement



Source: Evaluation survey, March-April 2021

FGDs report a lack of job opportunities and overall worsening economic situation in the country including the inability to enjoy basic social and economic rights<sup>151</sup>, particularly education and health services, and lack of compensation to rehabilitate damaged houses. While most FGD participants observed that some returnees were leaving again, Sinuni was the only location where none of the participants knew or heard of anyone who left again. FFS’s hypothesis (Hypothesis 4) holds, namely the availability of infrastructure, services and economic opportunities is a key condition for encouraging returnees to stay.

<sup>151</sup> A few FGD participants noted that some returnees experienced better quality of life during their displacement as one reason for leaving again.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

This chapter presents key conclusions in response to the six evaluation questions including the main hypotheses that the evaluation endeavored to shed light on namely:

- Hypothesis 1: FFS (in the design of its four windows: crucial infrastructure, livelihood, municipal support and social cohesion) is *"the most effective package to address short to medium term impediments preventing and dissuading Iraqis from returning home."*<sup>152</sup>
- Hypothesis 2: IDPs were aware of improved conditions at home as a factor that encouraged their decision to return.
- Hypothesis 3: Physical reconstruction of crucial infrastructure will lead to the return and provision of social and municipal services.
- Hypothesis 4: The availability of infrastructure, services and economic opportunities is a key condition for encouraging returnees to stay.

<b>Relevance</b>	<b>EQ1.</b> To what extent does the project respond to the strategic priorities of the Government of Iraq and UNDP and to changes in the context?
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**Conclusion 1. FFS has responded to the strategic priorities of the Government of Iraq in liberated areas and of UNDP priorities with increasing focus on gender equality considerations. It has shown agility in foreseeing and adapting to changes in the context of liberated areas.**

First, FFS aligns with the government's emergency response priorities targeting populations displaced due to ISIL's occupation and returnees in liberated areas. It has contributed to the implementation of the government crisis management program as part of the National Development Plans' post-conflict and reconstruction and development pillar, through its key role in the implementation of the government's stabilization program in liberated areas. FFS has mechanisms in place for liaising with and involving government stakeholders in strategic decision-making and in implementation on the ground.

Second, FFS is well anchored in and aligned to UNDP strategic priorities. It has greatly contributed to the results framework of CPD 2016-2020 including key output and outcome-indicators but excluding indicators on availability and functionality of services. Attention to cross-cutting issues in FFS' design visibly increased since 2018 with primary focus on gender equality. While measures to operationalize non-discrimination and participation, conflict sensitivity and environmental sustainability are not yet fully developed, steps to systematically integrate gender equality are clearly articulated.

Third, FFS accompanied developments in the context and rapidly expanded its geographic scope accordingly. It maintained its relevance to the context thanks to the strategic direction provided by its steering committee and its holistic design which also made it possible to adapt its programmatic scope. FFS' windows were designed to be a simultaneous package whose intention was to expediate returns (Hypothesis 1). The evolution of FFS shows that the different windows represent a progression of stabilization work which has also been shaped by donor priorities over time, acknowledging that the security situation is a factor influencing decisions to return that falls beyond the scope of FFS. While not integrated into its design, the contextual challenge of IED clearance was thought in from the onset despite challenges faced during implementation due to changes in the institutional context of demining. Congruent to its expansion, FFS adapted its organizational capacity through a set of measures taken at its inception to ensure speed and scale of delivery.

<sup>152</sup> FFS Project document (2018), page 4.

<b>Effectiveness</b>	<b>EQ2.</b> To what extent did the project achieve its intended outputs and outcomes?
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**Conclusion 2. FFS delivered its key intended outputs but the implementation of social cohesion activities was not sufficiently targeted and at scale, and strategic communication efforts were not pursued from the onset to support the intention of FFS in expediting returns. HRBA considerations for ensuring access to people with disabilities were addressed in housing rehabilitation but not systematically integrated into other rehabilitation works. FFS contributed to improving the conditions for the return of IDPs in line with Outcome 3 of CPD 2016-2020 through the rehabilitation of priority infrastructure which was a factor in motivating many IDPs to return. Main reasons for return are however linked to other factors. Living conditions are difficult for many returnees compared to pre-ISIL levels, particularly those with no regular income, but this is closely linked to the dire economic situation in the country and lack of local job opportunities.**

*On output delivery* and in view of improving conditions at the level of returnees, FFS rehabilitated smaller and larger infrastructure in crucial sectors including housing. The rehabilitation of houses integrated HRBA considerations in terms of accessibility for people with disabilities, but these have not yet been fully adopted in the design of public infrastructures, which follow government standards. Concurrently, FFS provided immediate cash liquidity mainly through CfW. Even though these jobs were temporary, CfW injected around USD 65 million cash liquidity in targeted communities during the period 2015-2019; an important contribution for meeting immediate needs and kicking off the economic cycle in these communities. FFS reached all five liberated governorates. Its regional portfolio distribution is concentrated in Ninewah and Anbar for reasons that are justified. However, considerations made that led to this distribution are not fully understood by counterparts.

For improving community conditions for return, reconciliation and social cohesion activities picked up in 2018 and a variety of activities were implemented. However, under FFS, the implementation of such activities was not extensive, partly because the window was paused and underfinanced. In addition, the choice of activities was not strongly guided by the ultimate intention of expediting returns.

To build the capacities of municipal authorities, FFS rehabilitated government facilities to signal the return of government and replenished damaged assets that are essential for the daily functions of municipalities. It also deployed MSAs to specific location to support the implementation of FFS' stabilization work, working with key actors at municipal level depending on their areas of responsibilities.

FFS has adopted a strategic approach to communication since 2018, including on realized outputs to a wider audience. However, these efforts came in late. The absence of strategic communication thinking from the onset, partly linked to the absence of communication expertise within FFS management, meant that IDPs as potential returnees were not targeted and collaboration with relevant agencies to disseminate information to IDPs in view of expediting returns was not fully nurtured.

*In terms of outcomes* and contribution to improved conditions for return (Outcome 3 of CPD 2016-2020), FFS through the rehabilitation of crucial infrastructure contributed to motivating the return of IDPs. Hypothesis 2 is evidenced by the finding that i) the modest majority of survey respondents knew about rehabilitation efforts at the time of displacement and ii) for the vast majority of them, the rehabilitation of infrastructure was a factor influencing their decision to return. For those who did not know about ongoing rehabilitation at the time of displacement, the majority said that having known would have encouraged them to return home earlier, underlining the importance of strategic communication from the onset. The main reasons for return however relate to a broader spectrum of factors, namely the wish to return home/own property, bad or expensive displacement conditions and better security.

Through rehabilitating crucial infrastructure, FFS set the foundations for the resumption of basic services indicating that Hypothesis 3 holds. However, the quality of services does not always match pre-ISIL levels even though in some cases exceeds it thanks to upgrades that accompanied rehabilitation. The multi-sector approach

of FFS to rehabilitation has been pertinent in supporting the achievement of desired outcomes. It contributed to the fact that rehabilitated infrastructures, like health and education facilities, were able to operate because other infrastructures were also rehabilitated (e.g. water and electricity). It also facilitated the return of some economic activities which are also dependent on the return of public services like electricity, water and roads and bridges.

FFS' aspiration of contributing to better living conditions that match pre-ISIL levels in view of promoting durable solutions to returnees is challenged by the overall situation in Iraq, particularly budgetary deficits and economic slowdown in addition to other systemic challenges like the security and political situation. While some returnees experience similar or better living conditions, the majority is faced with difficult living conditions especially the economically vulnerable segments of society with no regular income or job opportunities.

FFS' work on nurturing favorable social conditions for the return of IDPs resulted in the return of IDPs who were otherwise not able to return. While the numbers reached by FFS are modest, this is an important milestone.

At the level of municipalities, the replenishment of crucial assets has been a key component of the resumption of core municipal functions such as road maintenance and garbage collection. Municipalities have limited responsibilities in the decentralized landscape of Iraq within the sectors of work of FFS. Line directorates, jointly with the local administration, are the key actors at municipal level who are responsible for the delivery of services in many of FFS' sectors of work such as water, education and health. Efforts in building "softer" capacities were not strongly visible in the period of the evaluation. Attention to building technical capacities has gained more attention recently.

<b>Effectiveness</b>	<b>EQ3.</b> How does the project monitor progress on expected outputs and outcomes and generate learning to adjust implementation?
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**Conclusion 3. The M&E framework and system were designed to serve the needs of stabilization work. The excel-based system has been effective in generating desired output data but was later challenged by the large and growing number of projects. More attention on outcome level results was introduced in 2017, but this has not yet matured to a level that gives an indication of key outcomes achieved. In addition to FFS learning events, donor led third-party monitoring has been valuable in generating learning and adapting implementation.**

FFS has a multi-layered M&E framework and project monitoring system that are meant to track and demonstrate output level results achieved on speed and scale. The focus on outputs is justified given the importance of generating immediate data to track progress of implementation, document results achieved on the ground, and ensure funding flows for continued responsiveness to needs as well as inform management decisions. However, as the number of projects grew to exceed 3.000, the excel-based M&E system has fallen short in its ability to meet data needs in a timely manner. It continues however to be the key instrument for generating FFS' results framework indicators. Increased attention to outcome-oriented results resulted in a series of beneficiary surveys being carried out since 2018. Despite this positive development, FFS has not yet sufficiently matured to provide and consolidate data on key outcomes achieved.

M&E data has been used by FFS management to guide decision-making and been strongly complemented by donor led third-party monitoring data that played a role in shaping key considerations in the implementation FFS. This has been a valuable addition to M&E whose core team is outnumbered by the sheer scale of FFS. Learning initiatives were seen to be highly pertinent in shaping the direction of FFS in its various iterations.

<b>Effectiveness</b>	<b>EQ4.</b> To what extent did the project integrate and monitor gender equality considerations and instigate change for women?
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**Conclusion 4. FFS has made significant progress in integrating gender equality considerations in implementation, monitoring and reporting. It adopted pertinent approaches to drive the gender equality**

**agenda and contributed to larger outreach to women and improved conditions of access to better housing, health and education services and immediate livelihood opportunities.**

Despite limited attention to gender equality in the first two years of implementation, FFS made significant strides in terms of scaling up gender integration efforts. Having dedicated gender equality staff, working with a clear gender strategy and adjacent work plans including actions and direct support under each window effectively ensured attention to gender equality. Good approaches were made to gradually roll out gender equality considerations, initially through awareness-raising then through piloting gender-specific projects, which could be used as showcase examples. The evaluation found that this is a good approach, which could serve as inspiration in other stabilization programs. In terms of M&E, attention has been on gender disaggregated monitoring data. More outcome-level monitoring and evaluation has not yet been pursued. The role of the gender team ensured learning and project adaptation, through regular review meetings and liaison with program staff across windows and with project stakeholders. The efforts of integrating gender resulted in an increase in the reported number of women beneficiaries reached by FFS as well as in improved conditions for these women, particularly in terms of access to housing, education, and health as well as short-term livelihood opportunities.

<b>Efficiency</b>	<b>EQ5.</b> To what extent did the project convert inputs into outputs in a timely manner?
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**Conclusion 5. FFS has generally converted its inputs into outputs in a timely manner in the period 2015-2019 despite annual budget consumption not consistently being high and overspending on some budget chapters within the limits of the overall budget. The speed of delivery is satisfactory but does not always match the speed of the earlier phases of FFS.**

The rate of disbursement of FFS of 71% of the overall budget is satisfactory, but not particularly high for the period 2015-2019. This is primarily because FFS does not disburse advance payments to contractors, payments are initiated once projects and/or agreed milestones are validated as completed by Gol, and projects, especially larger ones, often extend beyond one financial year. This explains why the rehabilitation of infrastructure, as the largest budget component of FFS, has an overall disbursement rate of only 60% despite the scale of works. It also justifies the relatively low annual budget consumption of around 50% to the exception of two years where disbursements were high. Overspending was observed for some activities, but this was within the overall limit of the FFS budget.

The service center has generally been expedient in handling cases. It had an average processing time of around 4-5 months in 2019 including for larger projects with 5% of cases extended over six months the same year. However, FFS staff experience around a doubling of processing time compared to the earlier phases of FFS and insufficient capacities within the dedicated service center to process the needed caseload. Other key bottlenecks include the procurement of specialized equipment and the identification of qualified bidders.

<b>Sustainability</b>	<b>EQ6.</b> What is the likelihood that project outcomes will last?
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**Conclusion 6. Service provision is likely to continue, but the adequacy of service provision compared to pre-ISIL levels and the future functionality of rehabilitated infrastructures are jeopardized. In the complex political dynamics of Iraq and the worsening economic and fiscal situation, national budget allocations for operation and maintenance are reported to be insufficient, and in some cases absent. At the individual returnee level, most returnees intend to stay, indicating that results are likely to be sustained assuming the security situation does not worsen. However, the likelihood that these results will be sustained is threatened by a risk of secondary displacement for those who are most economically vulnerable.**

FFS has a well measured strategy to ensure ownership of Gol by only rehabilitating infrastructure that existed prior to ISIL. However, this assumes that the operation and maintenance of these pre-existing facilities will

resume once these become operational. Findings suggest that the rehabilitation of infrastructure built the basis for the resumption of services, but that service delivery generally does not match pre-ISIL levels. Visited facilities and consulted government stakeholders indicate some challenges, primarily linked to the worsening economic situation in Iraq. While budget allocations cannot be compared to pre-ISIL levels when the Iraqi economy was growing, rehabilitated facilities have been experiencing insufficient budget allocations, in some cases none, for operations, maintenance and investment in equipment. In addition, challenges in finding relevant staff are reported due to low levels of return in specific areas. Governorate and municipal government actors do not have authority over their budget finances to ensure the operation and maintenance of facilities. These are determined by the central level.

The focus of the handover phase as described in the project document of 2020 involves the development of a two-tiered exit strategy. First, capacity building based on an ongoing needs assessment. Indicatively, this includes topics such as standard operating on conducting needs assessments, procurement procedures, health and safety standards, and gender equality. While some of the themes are relevant for future use (e.g. conducting needs assessment if funding is available), the utility of the future application of some of these procedures within GoI systems and procedures is unclear (e.g. procurement). Second, governorate specific medium-term peacebuilding and development plans in line with the longer-term vision foreseen for the handover phase. While UNDP informed the evaluation team that efforts for ensuring the future functionality of infrastructures were ongoing at the time of the evaluation, they are not clearly articulated in the handover vision of the project document revision of 2020. It is crucial that a dialogue on the future functionality of rehabilitated infrastructure is initiated with national government, as the decision-making authority, in view of sustaining stabilization gains made.

At the individual level of returnees, the majority intend to stay, but some have plans to leave. According to the evaluation survey, the main reported reasons for wanting to stay is linked to having family and friends, adequate housing and better security situation. The key reported reasons for wanting to leave are the inability to cover living expenses, not having a permanent job and being unemployed. Within the scope of FFS, this suggests the importance of housing rehabilitation as a main incentive to stay and building the basis for job opportunities with regular income. Around one third of survey respondents assessed that most or some people who returned are likely to leave again. Observed trends of secondary displacement have been noted by IOM. In the evaluation survey, around 40% of respondents knew or heard of people leaving again. Findings indicate that the likelihood of secondary displacement is primarily driven by the inability to cover living expenses, not having a regular source of income and lack of compensation to rehabilitate damaged houses. This underscores the continued relevance of Hypothesis 4 that the availability of infrastructure, services and economic opportunities are a key condition for encouraging returnees to stay.

## 7. RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter presents key recommendations for the ongoing and foreseen last phase of FFS. The set of recommendations is prioritized to what is relevant in the context of the exit of FFS and handover to Gol in 2023, including considerations for durable solutions to returnees. Proposed recommendations are intended for FFS management and program team. They are intentionally kept to a manageable number to enhance the likelihood of their utility and implementation in the remaining timeframe of the current implementation phase.

It is worth noting that the time lapse between the evaluation period (2015-2019) and the time the evaluation was conducted (2021) has made it challenging for the evaluation team to propose recommendations that are meaningful to end-users. The recommendations are made in acknowledgement that the last phase of implementation of FFS has made some adjustments in line with the revision of the project document in 2020.

***With regard to rehabilitation projects***, in view of capitalizing on FFS' strengths in infrastructure rehabilitation and create positive spill-over effects on livelihood and cross-cutting issues:

**Recommendation 1. Ensure a more systematic integration of disability considerations in BoQ development of public infrastructure, which can act as add-on guidance to Gol standards in current and future rehabilitation efforts, preferably with the inclusion of people with disabilities in design considerations.**

The rehabilitation of infrastructure, to the exception of housing, did not consider the accessibility of PWD in the period of the evaluation. Most recently, FFS started to sporadically include accessibility considerations in some BoQs but this is not yet institutionalized. The evaluation survey indicates the percentage of respondents living with a family member with a disability is not insignificant (18% of 1005 respondents). This underscores the relevance of the issue moving forward and beyond FFS if FFS is able to inspire future rehabilitation efforts to use complementary guidance to Gol standards. To ensure utility, it would be relevant to include PWD in planning and design considerations.

**Recommendation 2. Build on FFS' proven competence by pursuing the rehabilitation of economic infrastructures that are commercially viable and promising in their potential for local job creation (including for women) with reliance on green energy in line with UNDP priorities, linking and tailoring skills trainings to potential jobs in these infrastructures as informed by relevant studies.**

FFS's strength lies in its proven experience, competence and performance in rehabilitation works as a key component of stabilization efforts. As focus in immediate stabilization was on basic infrastructures, economic infrastructures were not prioritized. There was reference in FGDs on damaged economic assets that were not rehabilitated to drive local job creation or resumption of economic activities. In light of the findings on the overall living conditions of returnees and risks of secondary displacement primarily driven by a lack of local job opportunities, FFS has the opportunity to capitalize on its strengths and contribute to building the basis for more durable solutions in the form of improved infrastructure conditions for livelihood opportunities. This can be done in complementarity with other economic development-oriented initiatives, by pursuing the rehabilitation of damaged economic infrastructure that are commercially viable and promising in their potential for local job creation during *and* after rehabilitation works. As the majority of survey respondents (69%) only have up to middle level education, FFS must establish linkages with initiatives that can provide skills development in conjunction with rehabilitation efforts and that this is tailored and linked to potential employability within the rehabilitated infrastructure once they are operating. The choice of damaged economic infrastructures to be rehabilitated, feasibility and foreseen wider economic benefits should be informed by relevant assessments, including consultations with returnees, community representatives, market actors and relevant government counterparts as well as feasibility studies, to ensure commercial viability, willingness and commitment for future employment opportunities.

It is important the rehabilitation of damaged economic facilities include those that have the potential for job creation for women to capitalize on gains made on the economic participation of women. In addition, as the project document of 2020 puts emphasis on environmental sustainability that has so far not been strongly integrated into the design of FFS, considerations for reliance on green energy is seen to be an opportunity. However, this must be informed by a relevant study that explores the feasibility of using such sources in the local context and willingness to use solar power and to pay for it, given the foreseen investment, operation and maintenance costs. Skills needed for the maintenance of such equipment could also be an opportunity for upgrading local skills.

**Recommendation 3. Recognizing that the social cohesion pillar has a strategy that guides UNDP Iraq's broader social cohesion work, activities under FFS must be consolidated and re-focused on initiatives that contribute to facilitating the return of IDPs in line FFS' overall intention.**

The scope of the evaluation does not cover the programmes of the social cohesion pillar and is limited to social cohesion activities implemented under FFS. From the perspective of FFS, relevant activities can be divided into two streams, with the first being a direct priority. First, activities that contribute to expediting the return of IDPs in line with the objective of FFS, particularly in view of the context of recent camp closures. Second, activities that intend to nurture better relations within the communities of origin with focus on facilitating the integration of returnees.

For the former, the most pertinent activity that FFS has undertaken in view of expediting returns has been reconciliation agreements that succeeded in facilitating the return of some families. If FFS' intention remains to expediate returns, this should be the focus of social cohesion activities that are undertaken under FFS.

For the latter, following the same argument used above for economic infrastructures, needs in specific communities for the rehabilitation of strategic infrastructure that have a high potential for nurturing the integration of returnees could be sought. In a broader sense, social cohesion activities could capitalize on the infrastructures that are rehabilitated by FFS such as schools, universities, community or sports facilities, all of which are youth-focused, and use these facilities as an entry point for targeted FFS activities and broader work of the social cohesion pillar.

**Recommendation 4. Maintain focus on housing rehabilitation, as damaged houses continue to be a factor influencing the decision of some returnees to return or leave.**

The rehabilitation of housing is reported to have been the top motivation for returns according to the survey conducted by the evaluation team and an important disincentive for not returning home according to external studies. Evaluation findings indicate that those who do not have a job and whose houses are destroyed are the ones who are likely to leave after having returned. Around half of survey respondents experienced their houses to have been partially damaged upon return and a bit more than a quarter saw their houses fully destroyed. The majority did not receive any assistance to rehabilitate their houses. Many consulted stakeholders also reported that the level of housing damage has not yet been met with assistance for rehabilitation. The context of the housing situation, particularly with the recent closure of camps, underlines the continued relevance of prioritizing housing rehabilitation.

*With regards to M&E and exit:*

**Recommendation 5. Invest in developing an online database to replace the current excel-based system to be handed over to relevant government counterparts while ensuring that the design complements and is aligned to government systems to the extent possible, and that these primary end-users are involved in design and training, and commit to the future maintenance of the database.**

The growing portfolio of FFS has made it more difficult to manage the excel-based data base, calling for a leaner system that can automatically generate desired data. An online database will enable FFS to track and visualize data via a series of customizable data dashboards, both at the project level and at the sectoral level. It is essential that in the transition phase project data attributes are tagged to a revised classification list and that budget figures are harmonized with figures in the financial system. The involvement of primary end-users from Gol in design and training is crucial for ensuring the utility of its future use, including alignment to government systems, and commitment to the future maintenance of the platform.

In view of the handover to Gol, the M&E platform would be a useful tool for Gol to have an overview that facilitates future national coordination efforts on stabilization and provide a better informational basis for Gol *"to take stock of the rehabilitated status of liberated governorates"* for future planning (PD 2020, p.13). As annual learning and reflection sessions have been a useful M&E tool, such practices could be used in the development process of the platform including representatives of Gol primary end-users and any other potential Gol user deemed relevant.

### ***In terms of handing over to Gol stakeholders:***

**Recommendation 6. Expand the number of MSAs or support staff to MSAs to ensure sufficient project capacities to accompany the capacity development needs of municipal actors in the handover phase.**

MSAs have been a valuable asset as they represent FFS on the ground in the absence of field offices in liberated areas and ensure regular interaction with municipal actors including technical support for instance in the development of project proposals and project prioritization. However, their scope of work and geographic coverage are extensive. With increased focus on working with municipal actors in view of strengthening their "soft" capacities in the handover phase, there is a need to ensure that sufficient and competent human resources are on the ground to provide the technical assistance needed and accompany capacity needs when and as these are identified by municipal actors.

**Recommendation 7. Engage in dialogue with national government on commitment to operation and maintenance of rehabilitated infrastructures as part of the handover plan to *"reaffirm national ownership of the stabilization process and subsequent responsibility to maintain stabilization gains made under FFS"* (PD 2020, p. 13) and confirm the future utility of envisaged handover procedures.**

In the current handover vision, important issues are raised. However, the functionality of infrastructures rehabilitated by FFS is not directly addressed in view of sustaining stabilization gains made. Evaluation findings indicate that education and health services resumed after rehabilitation but that services do not always match pre-ISIL levels. Given the worsening economic and fiscal situation in Iraq, this is primarily linked to limited, in some cases absent, budget allocations from central level and difficulties in findings specialized staff. In addition, the relevance of handing over FFS procedures, for instance procurement, needs to be re-confirmed in the context of their future applicability within the systems and procedures in use by Gol. It is therefore crucial that, to capitalize on stabilization gains made, dialogue with central government is pursued.

## 8. LESSONS LEARNED

This chapter presents a compilation of lessons learned based on a documentary review and findings from consultations.

FFS has since its inception and increasingly overtime invested efforts to reflect on its implementation and draw lessons learned. The table below provides a compilation of lessons learned identified by the FFS team over the period of the evaluation. These cover lessons learned at the programmatic and organizational level, and in relation to tools, approaches and context related challenges.

**Table 5: Mapping of key lessons learned identified by FFS**

Programmatic					
Small-scale yet strategic investments can have a big impact	Strategic partnerships with demining entities are essential	Specific infrastructures are key drivers of stability (private homes, major public institutions like hospitals, universities)	Expanding services to all neighbourhoods is a catalyst for returns	Complementarity between windows and sectors of work and functionality of facilities is paramount	Cash for work is a preferred approach but requires close monitoring
Tools					Building the capacity of local NGOs requires significant effort and investment.
Early preparation of assessments to ensure timeliness of data collection by government counterparts	Pre-planning and engagement prior to liberation is possible	Developing a stabilization plan prior to clearing operations is key to rapid progress	Conflict analyses are needed to shed light on local dynamics essential for stability and to shape interventions	Third party monitoring ensures field presence and oversees project oversight	
Approach					
Simplicity of approach and single agency implementation	Adaptive programmatic approach to changing context in coordination with government	Cooperative relationships with Iraqi authorities at all levels and consultations with beneficiaries	Transparency in the project prioritization process and creating space for government ownership is a matter of communication	Improving engagement with Iraqi audiences is an essential part of stabilization	Piloting new initiatives to test the ground and document feasibility particularly for women
Context					
Security is one of the most essential factors for an efficient and impactful stabilization programme.	Coordination with and understanding of roles of security entities in project areas	Close monitoring of the stabilization and/or destabilizing effect	Activities for women in enclosed sites increase participation in a conservative cultural context		
Organisational					
Stabilization activities in specific sectors requires specialized skills	Pre-positioning on procurement of equipment	Strict measures to prevent, detect and mitigate against corruption with multi-layered operationalization and resources	Ensuring that the Facility remains fully funded is essential to ensure the continued momentum of implementation		

Source: FFS annual reports Q3-2015 to 2019 (team compilation)

Findings from the evaluation partly resonate with FFS’s reflections on lessons learned. These are presented in the table below.

**Table 6: Findings from the evaluation on lessons learned**

<b>Programme design</b>					
A holistic vision and design from the onset provides flexibility to accommodate for evolving stabilization priorities over time	A multi sector approach for infrastructure rehabilitation has been essential for building the basis for the resumption of social and economic services	Considerations for IED clearance from the onset in terms of fund mobilization and operations, even if not directly integrated into design	Strategic communication from the onset in the design of stabilization work including adequate human resources, budget, and representation in management	Stabilization is a progression focusing initially of immediate response then followed by softer dimensions	Exit strategy must be factored earlier in the stabilization process in view of gradual handover over time
<b>Cross cutting issues</b>					Donor earmarking plays a key role in shaping the response portfolio
Expertise, local context knowledge and resource capacity are essential for driving the agenda within specialized themes		The operationalization of gender equality strategy and workplans require targeted awareness raising internally within UNDP and externally with key decision makers			
<b>Tools</b>					
Strategic thinking and pre-positioning for planning rapid response in specific locations, procurement, and recruitments			Mechanisms to ensure women’s voices and needs are integrated (e.g., housing assessments through female social organizers)		
<b>Approach</b>					
Use of pilots to test before scaling up, particularly useful for integrating gender equality considerations in implementation			Importance of sustained dialogue to build transparency and understanding around selection criteria that shape the regional portfolio over time		
<b>Context</b>					
The presence of feet on the ground when access is challenged is most valuable for information gathering on the security context and implementation					
<b>Organisational</b>					
Steering committee co-chaired by high level representatives from Gol and UNDP with significant role in strategic decision making		Dedicated service center with own authority to meet requirements for speedy procurement	Special measures taken ensured agility and organizational adaptation	Early fundraising ensured budget availability and quick response and scale up	