26 January 2020 – Five years of conflict in Iraq has taken a huge toll on more than 5 million Iraqis who, at one point in time, have had to leave their areas of origin to move to safer places in the country. As many as half a million civilians have incurred some level of injury while thousands have lost limbs.

In 2019, the World Health Organization (WHO), in collaboration with national health authorities, partners and donors, expanded the range of specialized health services for people with physical disabilities to ensure their easy access to physiotherapy and psychosocial support programmes, especially for those that had been internally displaced.

Greater emphasis is also being placed on inclusion and participation of this vulnerable group to
accelerate progress towards the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals.

“WHO, national counterparts and other partners are working hand in hand to ensure that people with disability all over Iraq enjoy equitable and easy access to rehabilitation services, assistive technologies and vocational training to improve their independence and encourage greater participation in society,” said Dr Adham R. Ismail Abdel Moneim, WHO Representative in Iraq.

In November 2019, WHO conducted an assessment in the Talafar and Sinjar districts of Ninewa of WHO-supported physical rehabilitation and mental health services in health facilities serving communities there.

Hiba, Mohamed and Hussain – 3 physical rehabilitation technicians delivering specialized services in the rehabilitation unit in Talafar General Hospital – receive a daily average of 20 patients. “Patients are referred to us by the specialized orthopaedic surgeon in the hospital. All referrals require different physical therapies,” explained Mohamed. “We are very grateful to WHO for availing such services for the people of Talafar. Many here are returnees. We still need additional equipment and physiotherapy machines to deliver improved services,” said Mohamed.
Sabah Khalil from Telafar told WHO “This is my third treatment session at the facility and I am improving, though very slowly,” he said. “But, having this level of physical services available in the district hospital has saved us a lot of effort by not having to travel to the main city for similar care,” Khalil added, thanking WHO and its project-implementing partner Cordaid for availing this type of services in Telafar General Hospital.

Sinjar Hospital has 2 big prefabricated units serving as its physical rehabilitation unit. They were crowded with patients on the day of the visit. “We request that WHO and its partners consider giving us more space and better equipment to accommodate the increasing demand for rehabilitation services in Sinjar Hospital,” said Hassan Amer, a rehabilitation technician with over 15 years of service in Sinjar health facility.
We also met with Noria Kamal, a 62-year-old Yazidi woman who recounted the difficult experience of her family’s displacement to Duhok more than 4 years ago; she is happy to have finally returned to Sinjar. She expressed her satisfaction with the medical team and the quality of services provided by the unit. “The staff are very polite and do their job properly,” she said. “But more services are still needed, especially for older people like me,” she commented.