

Terms of Reference Terms of Reference (ToR)

Position description

Function	Lobby and Advocacy Expert – Capacity Building for Government Staff
Budget number	11448. IQ
Location	Kurdistan region, Iraq
Starting date	21.09. 2025
VNG International:	<p>VNG International is the International Cooperation Agency of the Association of Netherlands Municipalities (VNG). VNG represents all 342 Dutch municipalities and has over 100 years of experience in facilitating local-to-local dialogue and cooperation for its members, providing them with technical expertise and advocating on their behalf towards other levels of government and stakeholders. In 1993, VNG established VNG International, aiming to strengthen democratic local government worldwide. Being part of VNG, one of the oldest and strongest local government associations in the world, our roots in local government are deep: it is second nature for us to work at both the technical and political level of local government. Development partners work with us because we combine practical expertise, knowledge of the needs of local governments and excellent project implementation. VNG International supports decentralization processes and decentralized cooperation. Through our 60+ projects we provide capacity building services to local governments, their associations, training institutes and ministries working in the field of decentralization and local government.</p> <p>VNG International has had an established presence in Iraq since 2003. It has since established an excellent network of local experts in the fields of public sector improvement, basic services, public participation, local economic development, public finance management and spatial planning.</p> <p>VNG International in Iraq has implemented projects in Ninevah, Erbil, Duhok and Halabja governorates. VNG International has an office in Duhok which is supervised by our country representative and which has 5 permanent staff. We also have an office in Baghdad. Through these offices we maintain relations to all (sub)national ministries, local governments, NGOs and key stakeholders in our projects.</p>
Description of Assignment:	<p>The assignment will be part of the larger five-year umbrella programme in 14 countries between VNG International and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs: "Sustainable Development through Improved Local Governance" (SDLG) programme. The intervention in Iraq/KRI focuses on migration and aims to improve responsiveness by Iraqi and KRI subnational governments and local service provision departments to host and displaced communities (IDPs, returnees, refugees). Local governments are the first in line to be confronted by repercussions such as pressure on municipal services, competition for employment, corroding social cohesion and mental health, accelerated urbanization and formation of slums, and inflation in the housing market. In recent years displacement has increased in scale, duration and complexity.</p> <p>The SDLG program in Iraq and KRI, running from 1 January 2022 until 31 December 2026, intends to achieve four outcomes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase of mandate of local authorities/municipalities with the aim to increase their responsiveness to changing circumstances • Increase of the capacity of service delivering departments and entities to deliver services and shaping futures of their citizens • Increasing leadership qualities and skills of municipal leaders

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increasing the engagement of citizens and their organizations i.e. their possibilities to participate effectively in decision making at the local level.
1. Background	<p>The ongoing refugee crisis has evolved into an urban challenge. Many refugee camps in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) have taken on permanent characteristics—marked by poor living conditions, overcrowding, inadequate sanitation and water supply, and limited access to essential services. As emergency response operations scale down, the UNHCR is transitioning the management and responsibility of refugee camps to local governments in line with its <i>Alternatives to Camps</i> policy, which promotes refugee self-reliance and integration into host communities.</p> <p>This transition aligns with the <i>Camp-Transformation</i> approach, developed jointly by UNHCR and VNG International, which promotes inclusive governance and resilience in displacement-affected areas. The success of this approach in Duhok requires strong leadership, legal reform, effective governance mechanisms, and enhanced cooperation among stakeholders at the local, regional, and national levels.</p> <p>Challenges to the transformation include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Absence of legal frameworks to empower local authorities. Limited capacity within municipal institutions. Lack of a clear timetable for the service transfer. Insufficient engagement between stakeholders (e.g., UNHCR, KRG, JCC, municipalities). Public awareness and refugee inclusion in planning. <p>The Steering Committee for Camp Transformation (established in 2024 and chaired by the Vice Governor of Duhok) has served as a crucial interim body for coordinating this transition. However, the committee lacks the formal authority to make decisions or represent regional interests at the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) level.</p> <p>Legal and institutional reform is urgently needed to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enable local governments to manage refugee services sustainably. Lobby for decentralized governance frameworks. Advocate for refugees' access to the labor market. Empower local government to generate revenue through service levies and taxes. Recognize local authorities as central actors in migration governance.
2. Purpose and Objectives	<p>Overall Goal</p> <p>To enhance the lobbying and advocacy capacity of local governments in Duhok and relevant regional and national authorities, enabling them to advocate effectively for legal mandates, improved resource allocation, and inclusive policies that address the needs of both refugee and host communities.</p> <p>Specific Objectives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strengthen local authorities' ability to influence federal and regional legal frameworks. Support policy advocacy for expanding municipal mandates and revenue-generation powers. Promote recognition of local government as central actors in refugee inclusion and camp transformation. Prepare local authorities for the post-UNHCR phase and ensure service continuity. Equip leaders with advocacy tools such as position papers, policy briefs, and stakeholder engagement strategies. <p>Expected Outcomes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved advocacy and lobbying skills among local government staff and leaders. Drafted lobby agendas and presentations. Increased engagement of local authorities in migration-related policy dialogues.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal and administrative reforms supporting decentralized service delivery. • Strengthened response and accountability in addressing displacement challenges. • Advocate for integration of camp services in ministerial budgets • Promote research into service fees in camps
3. Scope of Work	<p>Target Areas</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Duhok Governorate and relevant authorities in Erbil and Baghdad. <p>Target Audience</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local, Regional and national Government officials, municipal staff, and key stakeholders involved in displacement and refugee-related governance. <p>Key Responsibilities The expert will undertake the following tasks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design and deliver in-person training on lobbying and advocacy for local and regional government staff and leaders. • Facilitate co-creation of a Lobby and Advocacy Agenda in coordination with the Steering Committee, VNG International country team, and HQ, based on the recommendations outlined in the report previously published by VNG International • Analyze current institutional frameworks and identify legal/policy gaps hindering service delivery and refugee inclusion. • Assess feasibility of local governments assuming full-service provision in refugee camps. • Organize and lead consultation workshops and roundtable discussions with stakeholders to identify priorities and refine advocacy strategies. • Identify specific role of steering committee, relevant government officials and other stakeholders on advocacy, Lobbying and communication • Run in-person roundtables with government civil servants, officials, and other key stakeholders to build understanding of the importance of local government role engagement in migration related issues <p>Suggested Methodologies The Following methods can be used to complete the above-mentioned tasks and fulfil the purpose as defined by this ToR.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Desk and Literature review of the relevant documents • Consultative meetings/interview with relevant stakeholders • Workshop and meetings with steering committee and government officials and other key stakeholders • Documentation and Presentation
4. Deliverables and Reporting	<p>4.1. Expected Outputs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training Materials and Delivery (End date 10 Oct,2025) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Comprehensive training program delivered to government officials. ○ Enhanced lobbying and advocacy skills among local leaders. ○ Increased capacity for strategic communication and influence. • Policy Analysis and Advocacy Opportunities (End date 10 Nov,2025) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Identification of key legal, financial, and administrative barriers. ○ Mapping of service delivery responsibilities and governance gaps. ○ Political and financial analysis on local authority empowerment. • Lobby and Advocacy Agenda (End date 30 Nov,2025)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Co-developed advocacy strategy with clear policy positions, lobbying goals, and implementation timeline. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Final Report (End date for Draft final report 15 Dec, 2025 and for finalized one 31 Dec 2025) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Summary of activities, findings, lessons learned, and actionable recommendations. <p>4.2. Reporting Requirements</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Expert will report to the Country Director of VNG International (Iraq) and the Project Manager at HQ. • Deliverables are to be submitted progressively. • Final report due by December 31, 2025.
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Terms and Conditions

<p>5. Timeline and Budget</p>	<p>5.1 Timeline</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Start Date: 1st Sep 2025 • End Date: No later than December 31, 2025 • Total Working Days: 17 days (to be discussed) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 4 days: Preparation and coordination ○ 9 days: Training, workshops, roundtable meetings and field engagement ○ 4 days: Lobby and Advocacy strategy development and reporting <p>5.2 Budget and Payment terms</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The expert fee will be based on a (to be determined) • The number of days of this assignment is approximately 17 working days distributed between 1st Sep 2025 - Dec 31, 2025. The fees per day (to be determined). • Final payment will be made upon submission and acceptance of the final report detailing deliverables as outlined above.
<p>6. Required Qualifications and Experience</p>	<p>Education</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advanced university degree (Master's or higher) in Political Science, Public Policy, Public Administration, Law, International Relations, or a related field. <p>Professional Experience</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimum of 7 years of experience in advocacy, lobbying, or public affairs. • Demonstrated expertise in governance, decentralization, and/or humanitarian contexts. • Proven experience advising local governments and facilitating multi-stakeholder engagement. • Experience drafting strategic documents and leading participatory workshops. <p>Skills and Competencies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong communication, negotiation, and facilitation skills. • Analytical thinking and excellent writing abilities. • High political awareness and cultural sensitivity.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fluency in English is required. Proficiency in Kurdish and Arabic is an asset. • Ability to work independently. • Demonstrated capacity for stakeholder coordination and relationship building. • Relevant political network in Dohuk, Erbil and Baghdad
7. Additional Considerations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The consultant is expected to work independently while maintaining close coordination with VNG International staff and partners. • All program-related information must be treated as confidential. • Any conflict of interest must be declared prior to the start of the assignment. • Access to necessary project documents and stakeholder networks will be provided. • Travel to designated local government areas will be required

How to Apply

If you are interested to apply for this position you can share your updated CV and cover letter to Rawshan Atrooshi (rawshan.atrooshi@vng.nl) with '**Lobby and Advocacy Expert, SDLG Iraq**' in the subject.

For questions regarding the function, feel free to reach out to Floor Steenkamp (floor.steenkamp@vng.nl).

Timeline:

- Application deadline: 6:00 PM CET, August 25, 2025
- First round of interviews: September 1-4
- Analysis and notification of the preferred candidate: September 7-11
- Notification of the selected candidate: after 6:00 PM CET, September 25, 2025
- Start date: September 21