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# Displaced women care for their own as Mosul battle rages

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October 25, 2016

The patients are displaced from all over Iraq, and there are also women from Syria. Some women go to the clinics when they discover they are pregnant. Others receive their first-ever gynecological exam.

Zhyan has built four clinics in Erbil province and serves five camps for the displaced and refugees with a mobile unit. One of the camps, at nearby Debaga, has seen an influx of displaced people from villages cleared of IS in recent days. The camp already hosts 36,000 people.

"Zhyan's mobile unit reaches Debaga every Monday and Wednesday," project manager Marta Malaspina told Al-Monitor. "All the displaced from villages around Mosul have to pass through different controls and screenings before coming to [Iraqi Kurdistan]. Most of the camps that were built and prepared before the offensive was launched are in Iraq, except for Debaga, here in Kurdistan."

She explained that men and women who enter Kurdistan are separated. Boys over 11 years old must leave their mothers and join the men. The Kurdistan Regional Government implements strict border controls and anti-terrorism safeguards, as IS stands right at its borders. Kurdistan was hit by suicide bomb attacks last year.

Hoda, a gynecologist at Zhyan's Ashti Clinic in Erbil, used to work at the hospital in Mosul. She has mixed feelings of intense fear and anguish for her family back in her hometown, but also hope, as it might become possible to return home in the coming months.

She called her brother in Mosul, where the family has been stuck in their parents' house for days now, fearing the spread of the war inside the city itself. Hoda and the nurses want to take part in this historical moment by using their medical skills to help the displaced and — soon, they hope — take their support to newly liberated villages.

When Al-Monitor visited the clinics in June, Hoda was welcoming a young Syrian woman who thought she was pregnant. "She is 20 years old. She has a 1-year-old son and is afraid to be pregnant again," Hoda explained. "What we try to do at Zhyan is also cultural work, not just medical. We try to speak with women, especially Syrian refugees, telling them not to have children at this difficult period, when conditions don't allow them to raise children in good health and safety."

With its local partner, Al-Mesalla Human Resources Development Center, the project sponsors awareness campaigns about women's reproductive health, early marriages and family planning and also works to identify cases of gender-based violence and protect women's medical rights. Since July, the psychological and social support unit has been coordinating visits with the mobile units to reach out to patients and vulnerable cases.

Miro, an Iraqi nurse of Bulgarian origin, helped prepare a bed for Hoda's next patient, Melikiyya. The woman, originally from Fallujah, left there two years ago with her sons when missiles were devastating the city. "Whether it was the Americans, the Iraqis or [IS], I don't know; they are all the same for me."

Among many challenges, the Zhyan project faces issues from having a staff of displaced Iraqis. "One of the doctors of the mobile unit, Maya, left Erbil for Tikrit because of her husband's family problems there," said Malaspina. "The new doctor, Aya, is originally from Baghdad, but she was living in Tikrit before coming here because of the recent tensions there. She is a 27-year-old doctor and, thanks to our project, she decided to continue her specialization in gynecology."

No one knows what to expect next, or when. The Mosul offensive has just started. The women try to temper their fear for their loved ones with their positive, resilient energy for the clinic's mission — which is, above all, about life.