

# IRC Protection Needs Overview: Monitoring and Trends

October 2022 – March 2023  
IRAQ



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## Abbreviations

FGD	Focus Group Discussion
HLP	Housing, Land, and Property
IDP	Internally Displaced People
IRC	International Rescue Committee
IS	Islamic State
KII	Key Informant Interviews
MOLSA	Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs
MOMD	Ministry of Migration and Displacement
PRoL	Protection and Rule of Law
PWD	Persons with Disabilities
Q1	First Quarter
Q4	Fourth Quarter
SGBV	Sexual and Gender-Based Violence
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene

## Introduction

Since 2003, the International Rescue Committee (IRC) has provided humanitarian aid and assistance to communities affected by conflict in Iraq. Today we deliver multi-sectoral interventions to support internally displaced people (IDPs), returnees, and host communities. Our Protection and Rule of Law (PRoL) programming works to safeguard the human rights and well-being of Iraqis in Anbar, Kirkuk, Ninewa, and Salah al-Din<sup>1</sup> provinces. This comprehensive approach includes protection monitoring, cash for protection, legal awareness trainings and support, and building awareness and responses to the unique protection needs of vulnerable groups including women and girls, IDPs, minorities, children, and persons with disabilities (PWD). By adopting this holistic approach, we aim to address the multifaceted challenges faced by communities and promote their resilience and empowerment.

IRC Iraq's protection team conducts regular monitoring and needs assessments in our areas of operation to ensure the needs of families and individuals are being registered and that our programming is responsive to emerging trends in protection. These initiatives are instrumental in ensuring that the evolving needs of families and individuals are accurately identified and promptly addressed. This report provides an overview of the data collected during protection monitoring in quarter four (Q4) [September-December, 2023] and quarter one (Q1) [January-March, 2023]. These findings contribute to programming and inform our advocacy at the Baghdad and governorate levels, as well as with key protection stakeholders and international actors. We remain committed to working hand in hand with communities, local authorities, and partners to ensure the well-being and dignity of all those affected by conflict, as we strive towards a more secure and resilient future for Iraq.

## Background

At the end of 2022, the United Nations (UN)-led Humanitarian Country Team and cluster system in Iraq transitioned to a jointly coordinated, humanitarian-peacebuilding-development nexus response led by the Government of Iraq, in partnership with the UN and humanitarian and development partners. This transition occurred in recognition of the progress that has been made in Iraq more than five years since the end of active conflict with the so-called Islamic State (IS). Indeed, humanitarian needs have significantly decreased, nearly five million individuals previously displaced by the conflict have been able to return to their areas of origin, and funding for response activities has shifted to other crises around the world.<sup>2</sup>

Despite these developments, some 2.5 million crisis-affected Iraqis require humanitarian assistance, and nearly 1.2 million individuals remain internally displaced, in both formal IDP camps and out-of-camp informal settlements and sites. These so-called 'complex' cases<sup>3</sup> require tailored solutions to ensure their ability to achieve

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<sup>1</sup> PRoL activities in Salah al-Din governorate are executed by local partner, Justice Center. Due to limited IRC presence, protection monitoring did not take place during the reporting period.

<sup>2</sup> <https://reliefweb.int/report/iraq/iraq-humanitarian-transition-overview-2023-february-2023-enarku>

<sup>3</sup> Internal document, International Organization for Migration, Iraq

durable solutions to their displacement—whether that is returning to their areas of origin or resettlement/integration into secondary areas. Furthermore, the Government of Iraq has committed to repatriating tens of thousands of Iraqi nationals from the Al-Hol detention camp in northeast Syria<sup>4</sup>, necessitating multi-sectoral humanitarian assistance and community engagement to address latent and ongoing social cohesion issues.

Response actors in Iraq are now challenged to meet needs across the humanitarian-peacebuilding-development nexus. IDP, host, and returnee communities are all affected by immediate needs such as protection, housing, and livelihoods support. Moreover, these groups may face challenges due to climate change and resource mismanagement, limited access to compensation and social protection schemes, and issues related to governance in conflict-affected areas and at federal levels.

Against this backdrop, with service delivery shifting to a government-led response in coordination with humanitarian actors, development actors, and UN agencies, the need for active monitoring of the protection and legal rights environment becomes even more crucial. It is essential for actors involved in protection assistance to engage in active monitoring, information sharing, and coordination with international and local partners, as well as with the Government of Iraq at federal and sub-national levels. The IRC plays a significant role in this regard through its protection monitoring efforts, which involve surveying a broad range of the Iraqi population and sharing findings with key stakeholders to inform their response strategies.

## Methodology

The IRC's protection monitoring assessments from October 2022 to March 2023 in Iraq were conducted using a mixed approach and serve as a follow-on to the needs assessment published in January 2023<sup>5</sup>. The data collection methods employed during this period included key informant interviews (KIIs), household-level surveys (HH Survey), focus group discussions (FGDs), and observation assessments. These methodologies aimed to gather comprehensive information on the protection trends and risks faced by IDPs, returnees, host communities, and refugees in 14 locations across Anbar, Ninawa, and Kirkuk governorates. These locations largely remain consistent with data collection sites from previous monitoring efforts. It is important to note that Salah al-Din governorate was excluded from this reporting period due to the lack of direct implementation. Additionally, there have been alterations to data collection sites: one location in Ninawa and one in Anbar were modified in line with funding and program activities.

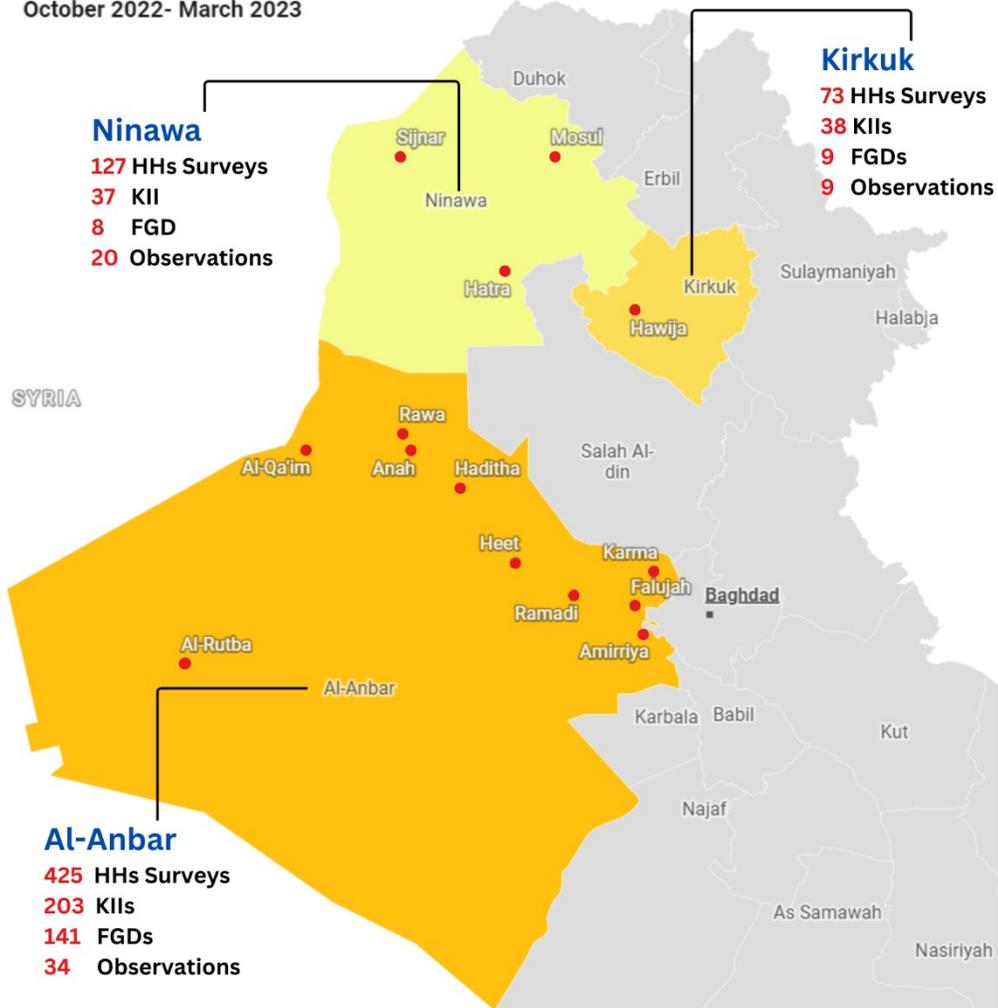
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<sup>4</sup> <https://mofa.gov.iq/2022/06/?p=32406>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.rescue.org/report/irc-iraq-protection-needs-overview-english#:~:text=This%20Protection%20Needs%20Overview%20documents,%2C%20and%20Salah%20al%2DDin.>

## IRC Protection Monitoring Coverage - IRAQ

October 2022- March 2023



The data collection activities during this period reached a diverse range of participants, including men, women, boys, and girls of varying ages, ethnicities, and displacement status. This approach ensures the unique perspectives of target groups are represented. The survey covered critical aspects such as access to essential resources like legal services, education, and healthcare. It also assessed the prevalence of risks including child labor, sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), and barriers to returning home.

During the data collection process, IRC staff ensured the confidentiality and security of the participants' data. Data collectors informed survey, interview, and discussion participants about the measures taken to maintain data security and anonymity. Gender-sensitive collection methods were employed, such as pairing female interviewees with female enumerators and organizing gender-segregated FGDs. These practices aimed to create a safe and inclusive environment for participants to share their experiences and perspectives.

Methods	Q4 2022			Q1 2023			Grand Total
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	
HH Survey	126	177	303	127	195	322	625
KII	97	25	122	116	40	156	278
FGD	186	345	531 (80 groups)	204	330	534 (78 groups)	1065 (158 groups)

Table 1: Gender disaggregated number of participants of protection monitoring activities.

## Key Findings: October – December 2022

During this period, the IRC identified multiple contributing factors within the protection and rights landscape that lead to challenges experienced by individuals in IDP, returnee, and host community groups. These challenges encompassed a spectrum of issues, ranging from inadequate access to essential services such as healthcare, shelter, and educational support, to a lack of awareness regarding the requisite legal processes for obtaining civil documentation and other essential credentials.

The main findings, as reported through KIIs, FGDs, and surveys were:

### **Basic Needs**

- **80%** of household survey respondents reported difficulties in accessing basic services, mainly due to high cost (**81%**) and the distance (**63%**) of services, and women faced additional barriers due to gender norms (**48%**) and lack of information (**41%**).
- **13%** of interviewed participants reported receiving humanitarian assistance, with the most common being food aid.
- The priority public services needed in the surveyed communities were reported as health services (**70%**), livelihood support (**66%**), shelter (**33%**), education (**31%**), and Legal assistance and counseling (**27%**).
- **29%** of interviewed households reported owning a shelter, **28%** renting a shelter, and **24%** residing in an informal site.
- The majority of the interviewed households are living in inadequate shelters; with **42%** living in unfinished buildings without key services such as electricity and water, and **24%** living in buildings that need urgent, essential repairs such as windows, doors, and roofs.
- **82%** of the households asked for referrals to the services including livelihood support, health services, shelter, NFI, food, education, HLP compensation, and legal assistance.

- The main source of income for **65%** of surveyed households was daily wage labor.<sup>6</sup>
- There is a lack of access to education in the surveyed communities, with **40%** of the households reporting that their school-aged children are not going to secondary school and **42%** of the participants reported that girls are not able to attend school regularly due to cultural norms, prioritizing boys' education, safety concerns, and financial difficulties.
- **46%** of households stated the lack of financial and material means to support school attendance is the main difficulty of accessing education.

### **Displacement and Returns**

- **94%** of returnee households reported voluntary returns to their areas of origin. The main reasons behind return were the inability to access basic necessities **65%**, the lack of job opportunities **58%**, and **55%** the inability to afford rent in the displacement area. Returnee households also cited improved security in their areas of origin and the closure of the displacement camp.
- **47%** of IDPs expressed their unwillingness to return to their area of origin due to myriad reasons such as destroyed or damaged shelters, limited income resources, insufficient access to basic services, and community tensions.
- For IDPs who expressed willingness to return to their areas of origin, the main barrier for IDPs to return to their areas of origin was cited as a lack of information about the security clearance process (57%) and inability to access basic services in their areas (55%).
- The top protection risks and needs faced by returnees were lack of access to income and livelihood opportunities, shelter/Housing, Land, and Property (HLP) compensation, legal/basic services, documentation, and social cohesion concerns.
- The most pressing needs of IDPs are health services, livelihood support, nutrition assistance, education, legal assistance, and shelter/HLP compensation.
- **14%** of surveyed households<sup>7</sup> reported receiving eviction threats in the last three months. The largest proportion of threats came from property owners (**41%**), followed by local authorities (**28%**).

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<sup>6</sup> Daily wage labor includes construction, trash collection, and other activities without the guarantee of stable income or job security. These jobs often are accompanied by high levels of physical risk, without protections for injury.

<sup>7</sup> Host and returnee communities living in their areas of origin may live in houses or on land that they do not maintain ownership of, thereby exposing them to threats of eviction. <https://reliefweb.int/report/iraq/iraq-reach-informal-sites-profiling-movement-intentions-survey-may-2023>; [Technical guidance on Informal Site definitionUnited Nations High Commissioner for Refugeeshttps://data2.unhcr.org > documents > download](https://data2.unhcr.org/documents/download)

## Legal Assistance

- **60%** of interviewed households reported missing civil documentation, with the highest needs existing in returnee households (**67%**). The top type of documents they are missing were civil ID, unified card, nationality certificate, birth certificate, and housing card.
- **40%** of households reported family members not registered with Ministry of Migration and Displacement (MOMD)/ Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs (MOLSA) due to lack of information and pending registration cases.
- The legal services that are in highest demand are civil documentation **78%**, along with personal status and family law **75%**, HLP and war compensation **45%**, and cases involving detention and enforced disappearances **19%**.
- The main challenges to accessing legal services are lack of financial capacity and expensive transportation fees, as well as lack of information and reliable legal service providers.

## Heightened Vulnerabilities

- The most vulnerable groups in the community are women, adolescent girls, adolescent boys, PWD, and those lacking civil documentation.
- **34%** of household survey respondents interviewees reported that there are school-aged children in their families who are working during school hours; out of those working, **95%** are working as daily wage labors, they also involved in domestic work, construction, and street begging.
- **20%** of respondents in KIIs reported that they are aware of the illegal child labor activities such as petty theft, begging, garbage collection, and some teenagers are engaged in selling pills and drugs.
- **46%** of KII respondents were aware of unaccompanied or separated children in their areas who need protection, education, and basic necessities such as shelter, food, and access to recreational activities.
- In general, **11%** of interviewed participants reported they see the security situation as unsafe or very unsafe, **12%** of the interviewed girls and women reported the unsafe situation, for women and adolescent girls, risks remain high and data indicated high rates of concern around SGBV (65%), domestic violence (43%), harassment (22%).
- **16%** of the KIIs reported they have witnessed exploitation against certain individuals or social groups in the community, with children begging in streets cited as the top form of exploitation in communities.

## Key Findings: January - March 2023

### Basic Needs

- **78%** of households reported they are facing difficulties in accessing basic services, showing **no significant improvement** in accessing the basic services from the last quarter. The cost of basic services is a significant barrier for accessing them with a large percentage of households **85%**.
- There is a mismatch between the services needed and the services currently available. The most important needed services identified by the participants are livelihood support, health services, legal assistance and counseling. However, the services currently available in their areas are primarily education, WASH (water, sanitation, and hygiene), and food.
- The priority public services required in their community are as follows: livelihood support at **73%**, health services at **66%**, legal assistance and counseling at **45%**, food at **34%**, and shelter at **33%**.
- A large percentage (**83%**) of households expressed the need for referrals to various services, including livelihood support, health services, NFIs, food, shelter, and legal assistance.
- Regarding the main source of income for the families, **55%** of the interviewed participants reported daily wage labor, this shows a **10% decrease** from the previous quarter.
- The majority of households surveyed are living in rented houses **39%** or own a house **34%**, while **12%** live in informal sites. The condition of shelters varies, with **61%** of households residing in unfinished buildings, which shows an **increase of about 20%** from the previous quarter, and a **24%** residing in buildings that require urgent essential repairs such as windows, doors, and roofs.
- Financial and material constraints were identified as the main difficulty preventing children from going to school, with **55%** of households stating this as a major barrier, this indicates an **increase in financial burden** on the families from the last quarter. Additionally, children assisting their families in earning a living **23%**, and lack of civil documentation **13%** were contributing factors.

### Displacement and Returns

- Among IDPs and refugees, a majority **55%** expressed their unwillingness to return to their area of origin, this represents a **small increase** from the previous quarter (**47%**). The main reasons cited for their reluctance included destroyed or damaged shelters **62%**, lack of income resources **57%**, lack of access to basic services **51%**, and community tensions **19%**.
- A significant portion of IDPs and refugees expressed the need for information and support to facilitate their return. The key areas of information needed include accessing basic services, available service providers, security clearance

processes, legal rights, and civil documentation. Addressing these information gaps is crucial in assisting individuals in their return and reintegration process.

- **11%** of surveyed households reported receiving eviction threats in the last three months, this representing **no significant change** from the last quarter. 66% of the threats came from the property owner.

### **Legal Assistance**

- **27%** of respondents reported that household members lack civil documentation. **This represents a significant improvement from the previous quarter** and indicates the **improvement** of legal and civil documentation support in the targeted area.<sup>8</sup> Of households reporting missing documentation the top documents missing include civil ID **50%**, a unified card **31%**, and a housing card **23%**.
- Among the interviewed households, **52%** reported that several family members are not registered with MOMD/MOLSA, comparing with the last the last quarter (**40%**) the **ratio increased**. The main reasons for this include a lack of information about the registration process.
- The most essential legal services needed are personal status and family law matters such as birth, similarity of names, marriage, divorce, death, and inheritance. This is followed by ID and civil documentation services, HLP issues and other war compensations.
- The main challenges affecting the communities' access to legal services include lack of financial capacity to cover legal fees **91%**, expensive transportation fees **88%**, lack of reliable legal service providers in the community **50%**, and lack of information and/or knowledge about legal practice services **38%**.

### **Heightened Vulnerabilities**

- **41%** of KII respondents reported witnessing exploitation against certain individuals or social groups in the community, this represents a **significant increase** from the last quarter (**16%**). The most vulnerable group at a higher risk of exploitation and abuse are women, as the FGDs cited the existence of community-based violence against women especially widows and divorcees, such as domestic violence and gender-based violence (GBV), there is verbal violence and physical violence against women, they are subjected to marginalization, discrimination, and abuse.
- Child labor is prevalent, with a significant number (**26%**) of surveyed households reporting that school-aged children are working during school hours, a small

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<sup>8</sup> Despite improvements in access to civil documentation in IRC's areas of operation for this reporting period, needs remain high throughout conflict-affected areas, with 'complex cases' representing a challenge for civil documentation support and legal aid.

**improved** from the previous quarter (**34%**). The majority of working children are engaged in daily wage labor **73%**.

- In general, **17%** of interviewed participants reported they see the security situation as unsafe or very unsafe, **18%** of the interviewed girls and women reported the unsafe situation, For women and adolescent girls, risks remain high including the presence of armed groups (76%), rates of SGBV (56%), and community tensions/violence (50%).
- Among the KIIs, **27%** reported their awareness of illegal child labor activities, such as stealing, begging, garbage collection, and involvement of some teenagers in selling pills and drugs.
- Several vulnerable groups were identified, including women, children, PwDs, and families headed by women. These groups face various risks and threats, such as limited access to services, exploitation, discrimination, and restricted movement.

## In focus: HLP and Eviction

The IRC protection monitoring activities during the period of October 2022 to March 2023 in Iraq have highlighted the critical issues related to HLP for vulnerable populations. The findings from the survey conducted by IRC staff shed light on the significant percentage of individuals at risk of eviction and the urgent need for housing cards.

According to the reports, 13% of interviewed heads of households reported receiving eviction threats in the last six months. The threats were made by the property owner, local authorities, the host community, and by law enforcement agencies, security, or military forces. These eviction threats were reported across different governorates. 34% of respondents reported living in rented accommodations, and 18% were informal sites. Landlords or government ministries may own these properties and lands which led to the evictions.

The need for housing cards is also a pressing issue identified in the reports. Housing cards serve as important documentation for individuals, providing proof of ownership or occupancy of a property. The survey revealed that a significant percentage of households lack housing cards, with 19% reporting the absence of this crucial document. This lack of documentation can lead to increased vulnerability and limited access to essential services and assistance.

Addressing these issues is crucial for achieving durable solutions for IDPs, returnees, and the host community. Eviction threats and the lack of housing cards contribute to the instability and insecurity faced by vulnerable populations. Without secure housing and property rights, individuals and families are at risk of displacement, homelessness, and further marginalization.

For IDPs, the threat of eviction prolongs their displacement and hinders their ability to return to their places of origin. It creates a cycle of uncertainty and prevents them from rebuilding their lives and communities. Similarly, returnees face challenges in reclaiming their properties and establishing a sense of stability and belonging. The host community also suffers from the consequences of eviction threats, as it can strain resources and exacerbate tensions between different groups.

To address these challenges, the IRC has been working to provide legal support and advocacy for individuals facing eviction threats. This includes legal aid services, community-based paralegal networks, and engagement with local authorities to ensure the protection of housing, land, and property rights. Additionally, efforts are being made to facilitate the issuance of housing cards for those in need, enabling them to access essential services and assert their rights.

## In focus: Child Labor

The reports highlighted the concerning issue of child labor among vulnerable populations. The findings provide insights into the prevalence of child labor, the awareness of this issue among communities, and the types of child labor observed.

According to the reports, on average 30% of interviewed households reported that there are school-aged children in their families who are working. Regional economic conditions and access to services can impact households reporting children engaged in labor: an IRC flash assessment conducted in East Mosul in late 2022 showed 90% of surveyed caregivers had one or more children working.<sup>9</sup> In addition, linkages between missing documentation and socio-economic vulnerabilities are strong<sup>10</sup>, leading to stronger reliance on child labor as a negative coping mechanism.

The types of child labor identified in the reports encompass a range of hazardous and exploitative activities. The majority of working children were engaged as daily wage laborers, indicating that they are involved in temporary and low-paying jobs. Additionally, working children were involved in domestic work, construction, and working in small businesses. The children are also involved in some illegal activities such as petty theft, begging, garbage collection, and the involvement of some teenagers in selling pills and drugs.

Addressing child labor is of utmost importance for the protection and well-being of children. Child labor deprives children of their right to education, exposes them to hazardous conditions, and hinders their physical and cognitive development. It perpetuates a cycle of poverty and limits their future opportunities.

To combat child labor, the IRC has been implementing various protection measures. These include awareness-raising campaigns to educate communities about the negative impacts of child labor and the importance of education. The IRC also works to provide support to families and communities to address the underlying causes of child labor, such as poverty and lack of access to education.

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<sup>9</sup> <https://www.rescue.org/press-release/high-child-labor-rates-iraq-continue-disrupt-childrens-education-childhood-and-basic>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.reachresourcecentre.info/country/iraq/cycle/52142/#cycle-52142>

## In focus: Basic Services

The protection monitoring activities for Q4 2022 and Q1 2023 have shed light on the critical needs for basic services among vulnerable populations. The reports' findings provide insights into the reported needs of communities, the differences in needs between IDPs, host communities, and returnees, and the barriers to accessing these basic services. In light of the humanitarian transition in Iraq at the end of 2022, these findings suggest that humanitarian needs remain across communities and that the government and other actors must continue to provide and maintain high quality service delivery.

According to the findings, 79% of the HHs faced difficulties in accessing basic services, while the most important public services needed in the communities, as reported, were livelihood support 74%, health services 54%, shelter 44%, food 41%, education 26%, legal assistance and counseling 25%, and HLP compensation 21%. These findings highlight the multifaceted nature of the needs, encompassing not only immediate humanitarian assistance but also long-term support for sustainable livelihoods and access to justice. Addressing these needs is critical in the achievement of durable solutions for IDPs and promoting social cohesion in communities receiving returnees or IDPs.

The reports also revealed some differences in needs between IDPs, host communities, and returnees, and findings show that IDPs have a higher demand for immediate humanitarian assistance due to their displacement status. Host communities, on the other hand, require support in terms of livelihood opportunities and access to basic services that are strained by the presence of displaced populations. Returnees have specific needs related to the restoration of their homes, access to justice, access to basic services, and reintegration into their communities.

The monitoring activities also identified several barriers to accessing basic services. Among the difficulties reported by households, the services were too expensive to afford, distant locations of the services, safety concerns in the locations of the services, and a lack of information on accessing the services. This indicates a need for improved communication and awareness-raising efforts to ensure that communities are aware of the available services and how to access them.

Addressing the need for basic services requires a comprehensive approach that involves collaboration between response actors, local authorities, and communities. The IRC has been working to address these challenges by providing support in areas such as livelihood programs, legal assistance, and education initiatives. Additionally, the IRC engages in advocacy efforts to address the barriers to accessing basic services and promote inclusive and equitable access for all vulnerable populations.

## Conclusion

The findings from the protection monitoring activities conducted by the IRC protection team from October 2022 to March 2023 provide crucial insights into the protection needs and challenges faced by vulnerable populations in Iraq, including IDPs, returnees, and host communities.

The data collected during this period sheds light on several key areas of concern over five years after the end of conflict with ISIS. Achievement of durable solutions to displacement remains a complex issue that has a compounding effect on vulnerabilities within groups such as female-headed households, PWD, and others. Lack of basic services affects IDP, returnee, and host communities and needs for direct assistance remain high. Access to legal assistance remains a challenge, with a substantial number of households lacking civil documentation. The need for information and support in obtaining legal documents and understanding legal processes related to HLP is evident.

The evolving response architecture must prioritize targeted interventions to address identified needs and sustained humanitarian funding and assistance must remain available to support vulnerable populations in Iraq. Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive and coordinated approach involving key stakeholders, including the government, international actors, and local partners. The IRC remains committed to leveraging the insights from this protection monitoring data to adapt and enhance its programming and advocacy efforts and will continue to actively engage with communities, local authorities, and partners to strengthen coordination, promote information sharing, and joint efforts towards a more secure and resilient future for Iraq.

## Acknowledgements

IRC Iraq's protection monitoring reports and subsequent analysis are possible thanks to the support of our donors and the participation of our clients.

This publication has been produced with the assistance of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). The contents of this publication are the sole responsibility of the IRC and can in no way be taken to reflect the views of UNHCR. UNHCR contributed funding only towards monitoring activities in 2022.

Co-funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO). Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

