

IRC Protection Needs Overview: Monitoring and Trends

April – September 2023 IRAQ











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Abbreviations

AoO Area of Origin

FGD Focus Group Discussion

HHs Households

IDP Internally Displaced People

IRC International Rescue Committee

IS Islamic State

KII Key Informant Interviews

KIs Key informants

MOMD Ministry of Migration and Displacement

NFIs Non-Food Items

PROL Protection and Rule of Law
PWD Persons with Disabilities

Q2 Second Quarter
Q3 Third Quarter

SGBV Sexual and Gender-Based Violence

UN United Nations

UNHCR United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

Introduction

Since 2003, the International Rescue Committee (IRC) has provided humanitarian aid and assistance to communities affected by conflict in Iraq. IRC currently delivers multi-sectoral interventions to support internally displaced people (IDPs), returnees, host communities, and refugees. IRC's Protection and Rule of Law (PRoL) programming works to safeguard the human rights and well-being of Iragis in Anbar, Kirkuk, Ninewa, Diyala and Salah al-Din 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 works in close collaboration with Iraqi legislature, key ministries and justice sector stakeholders and provides support for people centered institutional system strengthening. IRC also engages with the Iraqi High Commission on Human Rights and Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs and provides support for strengthening state led protection mechanisms.

IRC Iraq's protection team conducts regular monitoring and needs assessments in IRCs 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 through protection monitoring in quarter two (Q2) [April-June, 2023] and quarter three (Q3) [July-September, 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. IRC is 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

Since the end of the conflict against the so-called Islamic State group (IS) in 2017, Iraq has been grappling with the transition from an acute humanitarian crisis to a protracted one. The conflict displaced 6 million people between 2014 and 2017. While progress has been made with 5 million people returning to their areas of origin, around 1.2 million people remain displaced. Access to basic services remains a major challenge for both the displaced and those who have returned.

The IRC has been at the forefront of addressing these challenges, with a strong focus on providing legal aid and protection to the most vulnerable Iraqis. Notably, approximately 100,000 people still reside in informal sites scattered across the Federal Iraq. Furthermore, over 500,000 individuals have moved into secondary displacement,

¹ International Organization for Migration's (IOM) Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) Data – Iraq.

often living in substandard conditions with limited facilities². Displaced Iraqis face significant obstacles in earning an income and providing education for their children. A lack of civil documentation further complicates their access to services and the possibility of returning to their places of origin.

In this post-conflict environment, the Government of Iraq has been working alongside the international community to find durable solutions for the return and legal recognition of displaced populations. While the primary focus has been on facilitating the return of these displaced individuals, local integration and/or resettlement must also be embraced under the durable solutions framework.

Methodology

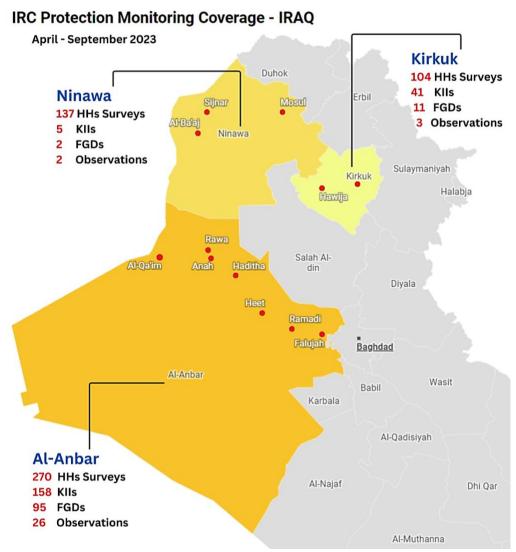
The IRC's protection monitoring assessments from April to September 2023 in Iraq were conducted using a mixed approach and serve as a follow-on to the needs assessment published in July 2023³. The data collection methods employed during this period included key informant interviews (KIIs), household-level surveys (HH Survey), focus group discussions (FGDs), and direct observation assessments. These methodologies aimed to gather comprehensive information on the protection needs and risks faced by IDPs, returnees, host communities, asylum-seekers, and refugees in 12 locations across Anbar, Ninawa, and Kirkuk governorates. These locations largely remain consistent with data collection sites from previous protection monitoring efforts.

The analysis within this report is based on data sets that are not large enough to inform country-wide conclusions and should be contextualized within ongoing monitoring efforts at the federal and governorate levels. The IRC will continue to improve processes during monitoring activities to reach all population groups within our areas of operation, for more representative sampling.

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 to their areas of origin.

² It is imperative to highlight that within the Kurdistan region of Iraq (KRI), some 180,000 people continue to reside in 25 remaining camps for internally displaced people in the Kurdistan region of Iraq.

³ https://www.rescue.org/report/irc-protection-needs-overview-monitoring-and-trends-october-2022-march-2023



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 separate FGDs with men and women. These practices aimed to create a safe and inclusive environment for participants to share their experiences and perspectives.

Methods	Q2 2023			Q3 2023			Crond Total
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Grand Total
HH Survey	109	206	315	79	117	196	511
KII	94	24	118	65	21	86	204
FGD	175	286	461 (66 groups)	84	211	295 (42 groups)	756 (108 groups)

Table 1: Sex-disaggregated number of participants of protection monitoring activities.

Key Findings: April – June 2023

During the reporting 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

- 70% reported encountering challenges in obtaining basic services. The main impediment to accessing these services was **high cost of services (88%).**
- Livelihood support was the most reported priority need at (73%). Other frequently reported priority needs included legal assistance at (52%), healthcare at (49%), and non-food items (NFIs) at (34%).
- The study revealed that 59% of HHs expressed concerns over the lack of emergency health services and ambulance availability within their communities.

Displacement and Returns

- The most prevalent factors that are influencing the return of the families to their Areas of Origin (AoO) were: **lack of job opportunities** in the displacement area (up to **68%**), **inability to access basic necessities** in the displacement area (up to **54%**), and **inability to afford rent** in the displacement area (up to **49%**).
- Among the IDPs, (56%) reported unwillingness to return to their AoO. Specific protection related barriers to return were high, on average the most reported barriers to return were: lack of housing in AoO (up to 75%), lack of livelihood options in the AoO (up to 54%), lack of access to basic services in AoO (up to 33%).
- (16%) of the participants reported **eviction risks** within their communities over the preceding three months. **Ninawa** governorate showed higher rates of eviction risks during this period, (43%), largely as a result of the closure of **Jeddah 5 camp.**
- Approximately 11% of Key Informants (KIs) observed social cohesion issues between returnees/IDPs and host communities in the past three months. These problems include tensions with families returning from Al-Hol and Jeddah camps, as well as within the host communities themselves due to political, tribal, and power struggles. Families with perceived affiliations to armed groups continue to face stigmatization and security concerns.

Legal Assistance

- 43% of participants reported missing key civil documents. The prevalent types of missing documentation were as follows: nationality certificates at (64%), civil IDs at (49%), and unified cards at (15%) for the beneficiaries who already have Civil ID and Nationality Certificates. Notably, for those HHs who are missing nationality certificates and Civil IDs, they will face progressive documentation needs, as they will be in need of assistance to issue the unified cards in future.
- Access to legal services remains a challenge for many vulnerable populations in Iraq, due to a lack of financial resources (87%), lack of legal aid service providers (43%), and lack of awareness of their legal rights (37%),.

Heightened Vulnerabilities

- 14% of the participants reported **not feeling safe** in their communities. The primary contributing factors cited for this perception were the **presence of armed groups** (80% respondents) and instances of **community tensions or violence** (80% respondents). Moreover, 71% of this group reported their feelings of insecurity were related to the heightened risks of **SGBV**, **child abuse and exploitation**.
- **57%** of participants were aware of **school-aged children** under 18 years involved in **child labor**, potentially affecting their education and well-being.
- Girls are at risk of not attending school due to various reasons such as prioritizing boys' education and customary gender norms, which can lead to school drop-out rates and girl children becoming engaged in inappropriate income-generating activities such as begging, child labor, and early marriage.

Key Findings: July - September 2023

Basic Needs

- **65%** of households reported they are facing difficulties in accessing basic services, showing a slight improvement in accessing the basic services from the last quarter. The **high cost of basic services** is a significant barrier to access, with 87% of respondents citing financial burden.
- The priority public services required in the communities are: **livelihood support** (70%), health services (63%), nutrition assistance (43%), both NFIs and shelter at 36%, and legal assistance (32%). Which shows no changes in the top 5 priority needs from the last quarter.
- 72% of the households surveyed reported a lack of access to emergency health
 services and ambulance facilities within their community, this indicates a
 noticeable increase in the concerns expressed about the availability of
 emergency health facilities from the last quarter, this increase is mostly due to

lack of **medical materials** and **staff** such as **specialist doctors** and **ambulances** also lack of **adequate medication** and **the distance** of the facilities from the communities.

Displacement and Returns

- The most prevalent factors that are influencing the return of the families to their (AoO) were: lack of job opportunities in the displacement area (70%), inability to afford rent in the displacement area (52%), and difficulties in accessing basic necessities in the displacement area (47%). There were no significant changes in the top 3 factors impacting the return of the families to the AoO form the previous quarter.
- Within the population of IDPs, a significant 79% conveyed their unwillingness to go back to their AoO, marking a substantial increase from the preceding quarter's (56%). Their primary reasons for this unwillingness were identified as the destroyed or damaged shelters (100%), the absence of basic services in the AoO (82%), a dearth of income resources in the AoO (64%), and a lack of essential civil documentation (45%).
- 11% of surveyed households reported receiving eviction threats in the last three months, this representing a slight decrease from the last quarter (16%).
- **6%** reported witnessing issues between returnees/IDPs and the host communities, which shows a **decrease** in the level of tensions from the last quarter (11%). Tensions among local communities include **conflicts** between returnees, and IDPs possibly stemming from **resource competition** and displacement issues, **disputes** over land usage, and occasional **interclan tensions**.

Legal Assistance

- 45% of respondents indicated that members within their households lack civil documentation, indicating that levels of documentation needs remained static compared to the prior quarter and that IRC and partner organizations expanded civil documentation services into new geographic locations. Among households with missing documentation, the most commonly reported absences were nationality certificates (45%), unified cards (37%), and civil IDs (20%). Progressive documentation needs persist, and households who secure nationality certificates and civils IDs will require unified cards in the future.
- The primary obstacles impacting communities' access to legal services encompass **financial constraints** preventing the coverage of legal fees (84%), an **inadequate presence** of dependable **legal service providers** within the community (35%), and a **lack of information** and understanding regarding **legal procedures** services (29%).

Heightened Vulnerabilities

- Among the participants who were interviewed, 13% expressed a sense of insecurity regarding the prevailing security situation, with no notable change from the previous quarter. The primary factors mentioned as contributing to this perception included the presence of armed groups (76%), destroyed or damaged infrastructure (48%), and tensions or violence within the community (45%).
- Child labor remains a pressing issue, as a substantial proportion (54%) of the participants surveyed reported that they aware of school-aged children are engaged in work during school hours. This has not shown any significant improvement from the previous quarter when it stood at 57%.
- A notable 49% of participants revealed that girls face challenges in attending school consistently. The primary obstacles identified for girls in accessing education are families prioritizing boys' education and entrenched social roles, and domestic responsibilities such as caring for younger children and sick or elderly family members.

Refugees/Asylum seekers Highlights:

Iraq generously hosts close to 300,000 refugees and asylum seekers, over 90% of whom live in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI). There are over 270,000 Syrians, predominantly Kurdish, in addition to refugees and asylum seekers from Iran, Türkiye, the State of Palestine, and other countries⁴. IRC Iraq supports refugees/asylum seekers in 9 districts within Anbar governorates thanks to the generous support of UNHCR. Of the participants surveyed over the period of April-September 2023, 102 of them refugees/asylum seekers participated in data collection. The majority of refugees/asylum seekers fled their AoO due to safety concerns particularly the security situation in north-east Syria. The needs of this population are summarized in the points below:

Basic needs

- All 100% of the asylum seekers/refugees cited they are facing difficulties in accessing basic services, mainly due to the cost and the availability of the services also missing the required civil documents to register for and access the services.
- Shelter, Education, Livelihood support, Health services, and legal assistance were the most services in demand by the participants' refugees/asylum seekers.
- The main income resource for refugees/asylum seeker families in the area is primarily reliant on daily work as mentioned by 65% of them, followed by borrowing money and goods from friends 22% and humanitarian and community support 13%.

⁴ https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/103429

Displacement and Returns

- The majority of them 95% Syrian and 5% Palestinian. They currently reside in the Anbar governorate, Qaim, Ana, and Rawa districts. Most (78%) of them arrived at these locations more than a year ago and 22% less than a year, they left their AoO due to safety concerns, , in addition to the absence and/or difficulties in access to the basic services, also the destroyed or damaged shelters.
- The majority of refugees/asylum seekers' respondents (78%) preferred to stay in their current locations, as they perceived their AoO to be lacking in basic services, income resources, and adequate shelters. They also feared discrimination and persecution from militant/security forces in their AoO. While only A small fraction of them (13%) indicated a willingness to return to their AoO, mainly driven by the difficulties they encounter in their displacement regions, such as insufficient income opportunities, access to basic services, and adequate shelter.
- 75% of the refugees/asylum seekers participants rated the process of integration with the host communities as good, while others mentioned a lack of participation in the integration activities due to discrimination. In the surveyed locations, tensions are observed among refugees/asylum seekers and the host communities. These tensions revolve around the competition over livelihoods due to the severe economic situation.

Legal Assistance

- 43% of refugees/asylum seekers HHs respondents cited that at least one member within their households lacks civil documentation, 40% mentioned they are missing civil IDs also 40% missing passports, and 20% original birth documents.
- Refugees and asylum seekers face many challenges accessing legal services, including financial barriers and distance, as well as annual renewal requirements for residency permits.

Heightened Vulnerabilities

- Syrian refugees make up a significant portion of child laborers, 41% of the respondents' refugees/asylum seekers families report they have children under 18 years working, they are involved in daily wage labor such as construction, work in small shops, and domestic work, additionally, there are cases of children performing hazardous works like collecting garbage and begging.
- 35% of the refugee school-aged children don't go to primary schools and 83% don't go to secondary schools, the main factors for not attending the school were, lack of civil documentation (69%), lack of financial ability (38%), and child helping families to earn living (8%).

• 87% of the refugees report facing a kind of movement restrictions, especially at checkpoints due to the lack of the proper IDs and residency documents, which led to instances of arrest and detention.

In focus: Returns and Progressive Displacement

The IRC protection monitoring activities during the period of April to September 2023, continued to witness significant waves of return and displacement, impacting various communities. Among those affected, there was a notable distribution of returnee households (returnees), IDPs, host community members, and asylum seekers/refugees, each facing distinct challenges and protection needs.

Returnees and IDPs

Approximately 77% of participants interviewed during this period were returnees. The **majority of these returnees (92%) had returned voluntarily** to their AoO within the past year. Their motivations for returning were multifaceted, as noted above, and were also influenced due to restrictions on movement in displacement areas, and due to fear of detention. However, returnees also reported various positive factors, such as improved security in their areas of origin.

It is important to note that **some returnees faced secondary displacement (29%)** due to communal and tribal issues, inadequate services, or security concerns in their areas of origin. These secondary displacements added an extra layer of complexity to their situations, further emphasizing the need for appropriate support mechanisms and protection measures.

A total of 11% of the respondents represented IDPs. The majority of these respondents (66%) expressed unwillingness to return to their AoO, primarily due to destroyed or damaged shelters and a lack of income resources. Discrimination and fear of persecution from police/security forces also factored into their unwillingness to return. However, it's noteworthy that (30%) of these individuals expressed a willingness to return, mainly driven by challenges in their displacement regions as noted above.

Responses indicate a range of plans, from staying in the current area to returning to the AoO or seeking job opportunities elsewhere. It's important to note that respondents generally have knowledge of the situation in the AoO, and there is an acknowledgment of the potential for communal tension or violence, emphasizing the need for conflict prevention and resolution mechanisms.

Displacement from Jeddah 5 Camp

In April 2023, the rapid closure of Jeddah 5 camp by the Iraqi Ministry of Migration and Displacement (MOMD) led to challenges for the 342 evicted families⁵. These families, primarily from Ninawa, Anbar, Salah Al-Din, and Kirkuk governorates, returned or were displaced to areas within Ninawa. Many households were characterized as female-

⁵ https://iraq.un.org/en/228270-statement-office-humanitarian-coordinator-iraq-closure-jeddah-5-camp

headed due to husbands' security-related absence or detention or perceived affiliation with armed groups, particularly ISIS.

The closure of the camp compelled these families to return to their places of origin or enter secondary displacement, where they encountered significant challenges. Many of them found that the quality of life within the camp, despite its limitations, appeared superior to their new circumstances. These challenges included destroyed homes, a lack of basic services, and deficient infrastructure.

Particular vulnerabilities existed for returnees with affiliations to armed groups, as they were at risk of exploitation, discrimination, and security concerns. Additionally, the children of Jeddah 5 households encountered educational obstacles, and children with disabilities required specialized support. In specific areas within Qayyarah subdistrict in Ninawa, returnees faced challenges related to housing, sanitation, clean water, and food scarcity.

In focus: Social Cohesion and Co-Existence

During the period of April to September 2023, the dynamics of social cohesion and coexistence among returnees, IDPs, refugees, and host communities in the surveyed region have been marked by both positive trends and persistent challenges.

Local Integration: Positive Perceptions and Challenges of Integration

Within the durable solutions framework, both IDPs and IDP returnee households may seek to integrate within host communities in new areas or within their AoO. The integration of returnees and IDPs into host communities varies. Some individuals have successfully integrated through activities such as agriculture, employment, family visits, school attendance, and public gatherings, while others have not merged due to various reasons. Restrictions on participation in certain activities are reported, often attributed to customs and traditions.

A significant majority of the participants, 82%, perceived the integration process between returnees/IDPs and host communities as positive, rating it as "good" or "very good." However, it is crucial to acknowledge that 18% of participants reported experiencing difficulties with the integration process. The challenges primarily revolve around families returning from Al Hol and Jeddah 5 camps; while tensions are also evident within the host communities themselves, driven by political, tribal related issues, and power struggles.

Social Cohesion: Tensions and Disputes

A significant concern during this period was the challenges faced by families who were perceived to have affiliations with armed groups, particularly ISIS. These families often faced heightened risks and protection concerns. Discrimination and the fear of arrest or persecution were prevalent, leading to difficulties in reintegration into society. The unique assistance required to ensure their safety, well-being, and reintegration was a critical focus.

Tensions also exist within host communities, and conflicts and disputes over resources, such as agriculture and fishing grounds, have been a prominent source of friction in the surveyed region. Tribal tensions also result in sporadic disputes.

Persistent challenges related to tensions, disputes, and discrimination highlight the importance of continued efforts to foster social cohesion, address grievances, and ensure a peaceful coexistence among all communities in the area. This analysis underscores the diversity of experiences and challenges faced by the region's residents, emphasizing the need for targeted interventions and support to promote long-term stability and coexistence.

In focus: Access to Livelihoods and Income Generation

As noted in sections above, all communities continue to report significant barriers to accessing livelihoods and income generation opportunities. The primary sources of income for surveyed communities may include daily wage labor, government employment, agriculture, social security payments, temporary employment, and community support. These income sources were vital for families to meet their essential needs, particularly in purchasing food.

Daily wage labor was cited as a prevalent source of income for a significant proportion of the population (66%). However, access to these opportunities varied across different groups, with some communities, such as those headed by women, PWDs, widows, divorced women, the elderly, and refugees, facing challenges in securing daily work. These marginalized groups encountered difficulties in accessing regular employment opportunities, thereby limiting their financial stability. A portion of the population secured employment within the government sector, but this opportunity was not equally accessible to all. Vulnerable groups, particularly widows, divorcees, and survivors of violence from armed groups, struggled to access government jobs, which had implications for their financial well-being.

Agriculture is another essential source of income for some families. This income source offered relative stability, but not all community members could engage in it, and access to agricultural resources and support varied across groups. Some individuals reported relying on social security payments to meet basic needs. However, it's crucial to ensure that these support systems are sufficient and accessible to those in need.

Efforts to enhance livelihood opportunities within these communities were observed to be insufficient and varied in their effectiveness. The host communities occasionally offered limited support to families without income resources, including sporadic donations and community assistance. However, these initiatives were inconsistent and unable to address the extensive needs effectively.

Families without a consistent income resorted to various coping strategies, including seeking help from relatives, borrowing, buying materials on credit, reducing expenses, and, in some cases, secondary displacement to find better opportunities. Other negative coping mechanisms included child labor and child marriage. Such mechanisms are indicative of the precarious economic situation faced by many. Some

families sought help from non-governmental organizations (NGOs) for food assistance and employment opportunities, highlighting the role of humanitarian organizations in filling the gaps in livelihood support.

Efforts to improve livelihood opportunities should focus on addressing households' ability to meet basic needs, expanding support for marginalized groups, and strengthening community resilience through more sustainable income-generating activities and social safety nets.

Conclusion

The IRC Iraq Protection Monitoring Report for April to September 2023 provides insights into ongoing humanitarian needs in several governorates of Iraq, revealing challenges faced by conflict-affected individuals and communities.

The report emphasizes key issues, including constrained access to basic services, particularly livelihood support, legal assistance, and healthcare, due to cost and availability barriers. Vulnerable groups, encompassing women, minorities, children, and persons with disabilities, confront heightened risks of violence and discrimination, necessitating improved access to civil documentation and legal services. Safety concerns arise from the presence of armed groups and community tensions, contributing to complex displacement and return issues. While social cohesion and coexistence are generally positive, lingering conflicts and grievances require attention. Limited and unstable access to income underscores the need for additional support to establish sustainable livelihood opportunities.

The report underscores the pivotal role of humanitarian organizations in addressing these challenges, urging targeted interventions, improved service access, and enhanced social cohesion efforts for a more secure and resilient future in Iraq. It stands as a crucial resource for programming, advocacy, and collaboration with local authorities and partners to protect the well-being and dignity of Iraqis and foster their long-term stability and coexistence.

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