IRC IRAQ PROTECTION NEEDS OVERVIEW: MONITORING AND TRENDS

APRIL - SEPTEMBER 2025

INTERNATIONAL RESCUE COMMITTEE

Table of Contents

Abbreviations

AoO	Area of Origin
CP	Child Protection
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DTM	Displacement Tracking Matrix (IOM)
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
HH	Household
HLP	Housing, Land, and Property
ID	Identification Document
ID	Identification
IDP	Internally Displaced People
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IRC	International Rescue Committee
KII	Key Informant Interviews
KIs	Key informants
MoI	Ministry of Interior
MoLSA	Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs
MoMD	Ministry of Migration and Displacement
NFIs	Non-Food Items
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
PDS	Public Distribution System
PHC	Primary Health Care
PRoL	Protection and Rule of Law
PWDs	Persons with Disabilities
Q2	Quarter 2 (April–June)
Q3	Quarter 3 (July–September)
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UXO	Unexploded Ordnance
VAWG	Violence Against Women and Girls
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene

Introduction

Since 2003, the International Rescue Committee (IRC) has supported conflict-affected communities across Iraq through multi-sectoral humanitarian and early recovery programming. IRC's Protection and Rule of Law (PRoL) teams work to strengthen the safety, rights, and well-being of internally displaced persons (IDPs), returnees, host communities, and refugees in Anbar, Kirkuk, Ninewa, Diyala, and Salah al-Din. PRoL programming combines protection monitoring, legal assistance, cash for protection, community-based protection, and targeted support to women, girls, minorities, children, and persons with disabilities, while emphasizing survivor-centered and client-driven approaches.

IRC collaborates closely with key government stakeholders, including the Ministry of Migration and Displacement (MoMD), the Ministry of Interior (MoI), the Civil Status Directorate, the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs (MoLSA), and the Iraqi High Commission for Human Rights, to reinforce people-centered protection systems and expand access to services. These partnerships aim to strengthen national protection mechanisms, improve referral pathways, and ensure that institutional reforms reflect the needs and realities of conflict-affected populations.

Protection monitoring remains a core component of IRC's programming. Through continuous household surveys, key informant interviews, focus group discussions, and site observations, IRC gathers evidence on priority needs, barriers to essential services, safety and security concerns, civil documentation gaps, and the evolving risks affecting vulnerable populations. Findings guide the design and adaptation of PRoL interventions and inform broader coordination and advocacy at the governorate and national levels.

This report presents the results of protection monitoring conducted from April to September 2025 across IRC-supported locations in Anbar, Kirkuk, Ninewa, and Salah al-Din. It builds on previous reporting cycles to identify shifts in protection trends, highlight emerging risks, and analyze the factors shaping households' access to services, legal identity, education, and safe living conditions. The findings contribute to IRC's ongoing efforts to ensure high-quality, evidence-based programming and to advocate for strengthened, inclusive, and accountable protection systems across Iraq.

This report contains sensitive information: it should not be shared without IRC's express permission.

Background

Since the military defeat of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) in 2017, Iraq has continued its gradual transition from emergency humanitarian response toward stabilization and recovery. However, this transition remains uneven across governorates, with many communities still facing overlapping challenges related to displacement, service access, governance, and climate-driven pressures. These structural issues continue to shape the protection environment and affect the ability of displaced and returnee populations to achieve sustainable, safe, and dignified living conditions.

As of mid-2025, Iraq continues to host a significant displaced population despite a gradual decline in overall displacement. According to the IOM's Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM), as of August 2025, nearly one million individuals remain internally displaced.[1] Many of them face persistent barriers that prevent safe, voluntary, and sustainable return or successful local integration. Key obstacles reported by internally displaced persons (IDPs) include insecurity, limited livelihood opportunities, lack of financial resources, missing documentation, damaged or destroyed housing in areas of origin, and unresolved housing, land, and property (HLP) disputes, as well as perceived affiliation with extremist groups. At the same time, as of August 2025, around five million formerly displaced Iraqis have

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[1] IOM DTM Data – Iraq.

returned to their areas of origin, primarily in Ninewa and Salah al-Din governorates.[2] While these returnees formally enjoy rights on par with the rest of the Iraqi population, they also continue to face challenges similar to those of IDPs, including inadequate access to basic services, weak economic opportunities, housing damage, and limited state presence. As a result, a considerable share of returns remains fragile and at risk of becoming unsustainable, particularly in districts affected by insecurity, poor infrastructure, or unresolved legal and social grievances. In parallel, as of August 2025, Iraq hosts more than 340,000 refugees and asylum-seekers, the majority of whom are Syrians, adding further pressure on already overstretched services and host communities.[3] A growing proportion of displaced families, both IDPs and vulnerable returnees, are living in informal settlements, unfinished buildings, and peri-urban areas, where access to essential services is limited and humanitarian coverage has steadily declined.

A notable trend throughout 2025 has been the continued secondary displacement of households who previously left formal camps or attempted returns but were unable to remain due to lack of documentation, safety concerns, community tensions, or service gaps. These families, often categorized as "secondarily displaced" or "relocated", face heightened instability and frequently lack access to civil documentation, social protection mechanisms, or predictable livelihoods. Many struggles with legal identity barriers, particularly households with missing civil IDs, PDS cards, or housing documentation, all of which restrict access to education, health care, compensation schemes, and employment.

Protection concerns remain significant for women, children, persons with disabilities (PWDs), female-headed households (FHHs), minorities, and individuals perceived as affiliated with armed groups. Reintegration obstacles continue to be shaped by social stigma, discrimination, harassment, and limited acceptance, particularly in high-return districts in Ninewa and Salah al-Din. In some communities, unresolved tribal disputes, political polarization, and resource competition contribute to local tensions and reduced social cohesion, affecting both IDPs and returnees. These dynamics continue to influence households' decisions on whether to return, relocate, or remain in displacement.

Economic challenges also remain a key factor influencing displacement and protection trends. Many return areas continue to experience high unemployment, limited livelihood opportunities, increased household expenses, and reduced access to markets. Economic pressure has been compounded by reductions in humanitarian aid and the gradual scale-back of international assistance in certain sectors. These conditions increase household vulnerability, lead to negative coping strategies, and deepen reliance on informal or unsafe work, particularly among youth and female-headed households.

Climate change continues to play an increasingly important role in shaping displacement dynamics and protection conditions. As of September 2025, more than 31,000 families (186,000 individuals) remain displaced across 12 governorates, due to climate-related factors, including drought, water scarcity, salinization, and land degradation, particularly in central and southern Iraq.[4] Water shortages have disrupted agricultural livelihoods, increased migration toward urban centres, and contributed to household debt, food insecurity, and heightened psychosocial stress. Communities report rising competition over limited water resources, worsening environmental pollution in some industrial areas, and increased exposure to climate-related shocks.

Amid these overlapping pressures, displacement, economic strain, insufficient services, documentation barriers, and climate stress, protection risks remain complex and interconnected. The findings in this report aim to capture these evolving dynamics between April and September 2025,

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[2] IOM DTM Data – Iraq.
[3] UNHCR IRAQ Update, August 2025
[4] CLIMATE-INDUCED DISPLACEMENT – CENTRAL AND SOUTHERN IRAQ, IOM DTM, Nov 2025

IRC Protection Needs Overview: Monitoring and Trends April – September 2025

offering insights into the challenges faced by communities in Anbar, Ninewa, Salah al-Din, and Kirkuk, and informing programming, coordination, and advocacy efforts across IRC Iraq's operational areas.

Given that protection concerns affecting displaced populations in Iraq are largely driven by socio-economic vulnerability, human rights deficits, and gaps in the rule of law, the IRC prioritizes durable and inclusive solutions. This includes facilitating access to civil documentation, strengthening pathways to legal identity and rights, and promoting the inclusion of displaced and returning populations within national social protection and service delivery systems, as critical steps toward sustainable recovery and long-term stability. By working alongside government institutions, local actors, and international partners, the IRC seeks to promote safe, voluntary, and dignified return or integration for displaced populations, while addressing the broader drivers and consequences of displacement, including those linked to environmental change.

Methodology

The IRC's protection monitoring assessments for the period April–September 2025 in Iraq were conducted using a mixed-methods approach. It serves as a follow-on to the needs assessment October 2024 to March 2025 previously released [5], building on findings from previous monitoring cycles and ongoing needs assessments. The assessment aimes to identify evolving protection risks, priority needs, and barriers to accessing services among conflict-affected populations, while tracking changes in protection dynamics over time within IRC's areas of operation.

Data collection was carried out across selected locations in Anbar, Kirkuk, Ninewa, and Salah al-Din governorates, targeting internally displaced persons (IDPs), returnees, and host community members. During this reporting period, IRC expanded its protection monitoring coverage, including the resumption of monitoring activities in Salah al-Din governorate and the inclusion of additional locations within previously targeted governorates. This expansion aimed to strengthen geographic coverage and better capture localized protection risks, particularly in non-camp, peri-urban, and return-affected areas.

This reporting cycle also integrates protection monitoring data collected in collaboration with interested IRC partners under the Building Peaceful and Sustainable Institutions (BPSI) programme funded by FCDO UK,, including Justice Centre (JC), House of Coexistence (HoC), and Peace and Freedom Organization (PFO). Partner-collected data were aligned with IRC's protection monitoring framework and tools and were reviewed to ensure consistency in definitions, ethical standards, and analytical approaches. The inclusion of partner data strengthens triangulation, broadens geographic and thematic coverage, and provides additional insights into protection risks, access to legal services, and community-level dynamics across shared operational areas.

The methodology combined household-level surveys (HH Survey), key informant interviews (KIIs), focus group discussions (FGDs), and direct observation assessments, allowing for triangulation of quantitative and qualitative data and a more nuanced understanding of protection conditions at the community level.

The analysis within this report is based on data sets that are not large enough to inform country-wide conclusions, and results should therefore be interpreted within the broader context of ongoing monitoring efforts, coordination mechanisms, and available secondary data at federal and governorate levels. IRC continues to refine its protection monitoring methodologies to improve coverage, data quality, and representation of underserved population groups.
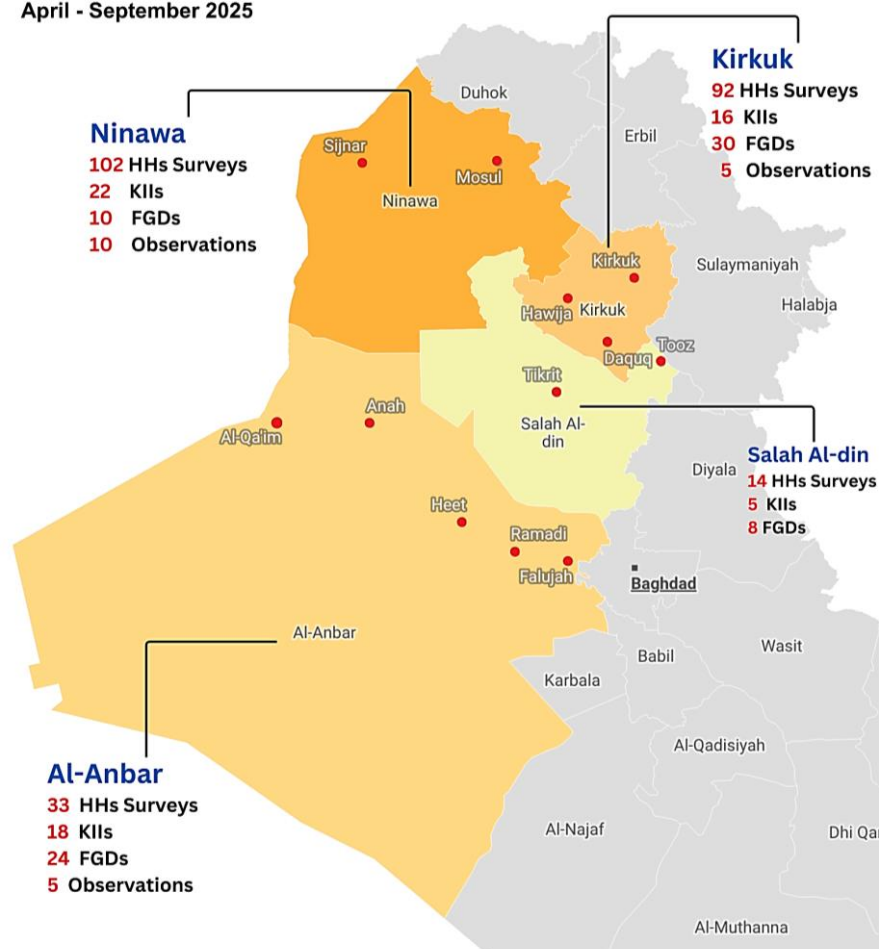
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[5] **IRC Protection Needs Overview: Monitoring and Trends (October 2024 - March 2025)**

IRC Protection Needs Overview: Monitoring and Trends April – September 2025

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 statuses. 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, and violence against women and girls (VAWG), and barriers to returning to their Area of Origin (AoO), in addition to new thematic areas including climate change and border monitoring.

IRC Protection Monitoring Coverage - IRAQ
April - September 2025

Ninawa
102 HHs Surveys
22 KIIs
10 FGDs
10 Observations

Kirkuk
92 HHs Surveys
16 KIIs
30 FGDs
5 Observations

Salah Al-din
14 HHs Surveys
5 KIIs
8 FGDs

Al-Anbar
33 HHs Surveys
18 KIIs
24 FGDs
5 Observations

During the data collection process, IRC staff ensured the confidentiality and security of the participants' data. Data collectors informed surveys, interviews, and discussion participants about the measures taken to maintain data security and anonymity. Culturally sensitive and inclusive 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 2025			Q3 2025			Grand Total
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	
HH Survey	20	57	77	70	94	164	241
KII	8	6	14	32	15	47	61
FGD	36	148	184 (18 groups)	226	234	460 (54 groups)	644 (72 groups)
Observations	12 visits			8 visits			20 visits

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

Key Findings

During the period of April–September 2025, the analysis identified persistent and evolving protection risks affecting internally displaced persons (IDPs), returnees, and host community members across IRC-monitored locations. The findings reflect interlinked challenges related to access to basic services and livelihoods, civil documentation and legal protection, sustainable return and reintegration, child protection and education, and the growing impact of climate change and environmental stressors.

While some indicators showed modest improvements over time, particularly between the second and third quarters of 2025, vulnerabilities remain widespread and unevenly distributed. Economic pressures, service affordability constraints, documentation gaps, and structural barriers to reintegration continue to undermine household resilience and limit progress toward durable solutions. At the same time, climate-related pressures and localized insecurity are increasingly acting as risk multipliers, exacerbating existing protection concerns and influencing dynamics of displacement.

This section presents a comparative analysis of key findings across Q2 (April–June 2025) and Q3 (July–September 2025), highlighting both continuity and change in protection risks and needs. The findings are drawn from community-level assessments and reflect the perspectives of affected populations, providing an evidence base to inform programming, advocacy, and coordination with national and local stakeholders.

The main findings are presented across the following thematic areas:

April – June 2025 (Q2)	July – September 2025 (Q3)
Basic Needs	**Basic Needs**
➢ **82%** of households reported difficulties accessing basic services, with particularly high levels reported in **Qaim (96%) and Mosul (95%) districts**. The **cost of services** was the dominant barrier, cited by **92%** of households, underscoring the significant financial burden faced by affected families.	➢ In Q3, the proportion of households reporting difficulties declined to **74%** (-8**%**) compared to Q2. Despite this improvement, **high service costs** remained the primary barrier, reported by **81%** of households, indicating that affordability constraints continue to drive access challenges even as overall access marginally improves.
➢ **Livelihood support** was the most reported priority need at (**82%**)**.** Other frequently reported priority needs included **Non-Food Items (NFIs)** at (**60%**), **legal assistance** at (**56%**), and **Health Services** at (**33%**).	➢ **Livelihood support** remained the most reported priority, though it **decreased to 77%**, suggesting a modest shift in household needs or coping strategies over time. **Legal assistance** remained a key concern, reported by **46% of households**, indicating continued legal and documentation-related needs. **NFIs needs declined sharply**, (from **60% to 30%**), potentially reflecting seasonal factors, prior assistance, or short-term coping. **Health service needs increased slightly**, from (**33% to 36%**), pointing to growing health-related concerns as the year progressed.
Displacement and Returns	**Displacement and Returns**
➢ In the assessed locations, **67%** of returnee households reported that they had moved back voluntarily to their area of origin (AoO). Reported drivers of return included **limited job opportunities** in areas of displacement (up to **61%**), **unaffordable rental costs** (up to **57%**), and **poor access to basic services** (up to **57%**) and tension with the host community (39%).	➢ By Q3, **lack of job opportunities remained the dominant motivation for return**, reported by **71% of returnees**, indicating increasing economic pressure over time. Rising rent continued to be a significant factor (**60%**), while **poor access to basic services (43%)** and **tensions with host**

- In **Q2**, **55%** of returnees reported feeling **fully accepted** by their communities following return, while **30%** reported feeling only **partially accepted**. At the same time, **26%** of returnees reported **facing issues with host community members**, including **social rejection, harassment, and discrimination**, particularly toward families perceived to have affiliations with armed groups or those returning from camps.
- The most frequently cited barriers to return among IDPs included **lack of shelter (82%)**, **lack of income resources (74%)**, and **poor access to basic services (64%)**. **Lack of civil documentation** was reported by **30% of respondents**, while **community tensions and discrimination** were cited by **18%**.
- **18%** of respondents, primarily from **Qaim** district returnee households, reported experiencing or fearing **eviction** within the preceding three months, indicating localized housing insecurity.
- **18%** of respondents, primarily returnee households in **Qaim** district, reported **experiencing or fearing eviction** in the preceding three months. These risks were closely linked to informal housing arrangements, unresolved HLP issues, and inability to afford rent or provide documentation.

Movements at Al-Qai'im
- In April–June 2025 **(Q2)**, **20%** of respondents reported observing unusual population movements in the **Qaim** district. These movements primarily involved **returns of Iraqi nationals** as well as **asylum seekers and refugees perceived to be entering Iraq**. Observations were largely localized and episodic rather than continuous.
- Community perceptions pointed to violence or instability in neighboring areas as key drivers. Respondents referenced **armed attacks, military activity, and general insecurity** across the border as contributing factors influencing population movements toward or through Al-Qai'im.

communities (33%) remained relevant but showed a decline compared to Q2. This suggests a **partial shift in displacement-area conditions**, while economic constraints continued to drive return decisions.
- In **Q3**, reported acceptance increased substantially, with **82%** of returnees reporting feeling **fully accepted**, representing a **significant rise** compared to the previous quarter. Despite this improvement, **19%** of returnees continued to report **direct issues with host community members**. These issues were increasingly linked to **civil documentation challenges, housing insecurity, and access to services**, particularly for families with detained relatives or unresolved legal status.
- Barriers to return remained consistent but appeared **more severe in scale and complexity**. Among households unwilling to return, **87%** cited **lack of income**, **86%** reported **lack of access to basic services**, and **82%** reported **lack of shelter**. Notably, concerns related to **civil documentation increased sharply to 60%**, indicating a **growing legal protection gap** affecting return feasibility. **Community tensions** were also reported more frequently (**30%**), suggesting increased sensitivity around reintegration and social cohesion.
- By **Q3**, the proportion of households reporting eviction threats **declined to 10%**, again concentrated in **Qaim** district. While this decrease suggests a short-term improvement, the continued geographic concentration indicates **ongoing structural housing insecurity** rather than a resolution of underlying HLP risks.

Movements at Al-Qaiim
- By July–September 2025 **(Q3)**, the proportion of respondents reporting unusual population movements **increased to 23%**, indicating a **modest rise in observed activity**. Returns of Iraqi nationals remained the most frequently reported category, alongside **unspecified or perceived cross-border movements**, reflecting the district's proximity to international borders and transit routes.
- While the frequency of reported movements increased, respondents expressed heightened concern regarding the nature and drivers of these movements. Perceived causes included **fear of imminent attacks** and **ongoing military operations in neighboring countries, deteriorating humanitarian conditions,**

Legal Assistance and Social Welfare
- In Q2 2025, **26%** of households reported that at least one family member was missing key civil documentation. The most commonly missing documents were **IDs/unified cards (57%)**, followed by **housing cards (30%)** and **PDS cards (29%)**.
- Access to legal services was widely reported as a challenge, with **69%** of respondents cited **lack of legal awareness** as a primary barrier, followed by **high transportation and legal costs (65%)** and **limited availability of women-friendly legal services (62%)**.
- **85%** of respondents identified **personal status and family law** as their most pressing legal need, while **77%** pointed to **HLP** and war compensations, and **54%** emphasized **ID and civil documentation services**.
- Regarding social assistance, **73%** of households stated **no one in the family was registered** with MoMD/MoLSA. Reasons for non-registration included **pending cases** (**56%**), **rejection of applications** and lack of registration fees each (**19%**). **lack of information about procedures** (**6%**).

Heightened Vulnerabilities
- In Q2 2025, **26% of respondents** perceived the security situation in their communities as unsafe, with most reports concentrated in **Qaim (Anbar)** and **Daquq (Kirkuk)**. Reported drivers of insecurity included **inter-community tensions (95%)**, **presence of armed actors (92%)**, **harassment (58%)**, and risks related to **violence against women and girls (VAWG), child abuse, or exploitation (50%)**. A smaller proportion cited **high crime (8%)**.
- In **Q2**, **32%** of respondents reported awareness of children under 18 engaged in labor within their communities. The most commonly reported activities were **daily labor**

including lack of access to food, healthcare, education, and livelihoods, and **Intercommunal conflicts** in neighboring areas.

Legal Assistance and Social Welfare
- In Q3 2025, the proportion of households reporting missing documentation **increased to 32%**, indicating a worsening documentation gap. The profile of missing documents shifted: **IDs/unified cards declined** to **35%**, while **housing cards (29%)** and **PDS cards (23%)** remained prevalent. This shift suggests that while some ID-related cases may have progressed, other forms of documentation essential for service access and social protection remain unresolved.
- In **Q3**, financial barriers intensified, with **73%** of respondents reporting **inability to afford legal fees and transportation** as the dominant challenge. A **new and notable concern emerged**, with **33%** reporting **unreliable or inconsistent legal service providers** within their communities. While **lack of legal knowledge (36%)** and **limited women-friendly services (37%)** declined slightly, they remained **significant and persistent barriers**, indicating continued exclusion for women and vulnerable groups.
- Demand for personal status and family law services **remained the top priority**, though it **declined** to **77%**. HLP and war compensation needs **decreased modestly** to **67%**, while ID and civil documentation needs **remained stable** at **56%**, underscoring the persistence of documentation-related barriers. Other legal protection needs, such as those related to discrimination, detention, and serious rights violations, were reported at lower and fluctuating levels, suggesting latent but less frequently articulated protection concerns.
- By **Q3**, the proportion of unregistered households **declined** to **65%**, indicating **modest progress** in access to social assistance systems. However, barriers persisted. Pending registration cases remained the most common reason (37%), while lack of information increased to 24%, and inability to afford legal or transportation costs accounted for 16%. These findings suggest that while some households may have advanced in the registration process, procedural complexity, information gaps, and affordability continue to limit effective access.

(92%), **street begging (50%)**, **work in small shops (43%)**, and **construction work (41%)**, reflecting reliance on informal and often hazardous forms of employment.

➢ **69%** of respondents identified barriers to education for school-aged children. The most frequently cited factors included **early marriage expectations (55%)**, particularly affecting girls, **lack of civil documentation (53%)**, and **financial hardship (43%)**. Additional barriers included **child labor (27%)**, **school accessibility and safety concerns (25%)**, and **damaged infrastructure (15%)**. Qualitative feedback highlighted challenges such as **limited availability of female teachers, restrictive socialnorms, and lack of learning materials geared towards girls**, disproportionately affecting girls' education.

Impact of Climate Change

➢ In Q2 2025, **25% of respondents** reported experiencing direct impacts from climate change or natural disasters. These impacts were described as **multidimensional**, affecting environmental conditions, household economies, and psychosocial well-being. The most frequently reported impact was **loss of livelihoods**, cited by **83% of affected respondents**. This was closely linked to **drought, erratic rainfall, and weather-related disruptions**, particularly affecting agriculture and informal labor. **Psychosocial stress and anxiety** were also significant, reported by **50%**, reflecting the mental health burden associated with prolonged environmental instability. Other concerns included **reduced water quality 33%** and **insufficient irrigation 17%**.

➢ **16%** of respondents who experienced climate-related impacts also reported displacement. While movements were not described as large-scale or permanent, the findings indicate that environmental stressors contributed

Heightened Vulnerabilities

➢ The share of respondents reporting insecurity **decreased to 22%**, remaining largely concentrated in **Qaim and Daquq**. While concerns about **armed group presence (83%)** and **community tensions (79%)** continued to dominate, reports related to **VAWG and child abuse declined to 40%**, and **harassment concerns decreased to 25%**. These trends suggest a **slight improvement in perceived safety**, though insecurity remains a salient concern in specific locations.

➢ In **Q3**, awareness of child labor **rose to 44%**, with respondents reporting broader and more intensive engagement. **Daily labor remained predominant (85%)**, while **construction work (60%)** and **shop work (51%)** increased. Reports of **street begging rose to 64%**, and **domestic labor (33%)** was mentioned more frequently. These findings indicate a deepening reliance on child labor as a coping mechanism, particularly in economically stressed households.

➢ The proportion of respondents reporting educational barriers **declined to 59%**, suggesting some relief in access. However, **structural constraints persisted and became more pronounced**. **Lack of documentation (57%)**, **early marriage (49%)**, and **financial constraints (43%)** remained the leading barriers. While **child labor as a reported barrier declined to 25%**, **general safety concerns increased to 33%**, and reports of systemic challenges, such as limited education curricula adapted to girls, shortage of female teachers, and family preference for boys' education, became more prominent. These trends point to persistent based disparities in educational access, even as overall attendance barriers show modest improvement.

Impact of Climate Change

➢ In Q3 2025, the proportion of respondents reporting direct climate-related impacts **increased** to **33%**, reflecting **widening exposure** during the reporting period. While seasonal variation may influence perception, the increase suggests that environmental pressures remained acute and geographically widespread. A shift in impact profile was observed. Concerns related to **water quality and access** emerged as the most frequently cited impact **(53%)**, increasing substantially compared to Q2. This change may reflect worsening drought conditions,

to household mobility, particularly in environmentally fragile areas.

➢ Additionally, **17%** of participants said they were aware of individuals in their community **considering moving** due to climate-related pressures. This indicates a perception of **anticipated displacement**, even among those who have not yet moved, pointing to the relevance of climate factors in **future migration trends**.

environmental pollution, or declining availability of safe drinking water. Reports of **livelihood loss declined** to **47%**, suggesting limited economic stabilization in some locations or adaptation through coping strategies. **Psychosocial stress and anxiety remained high (47%)**, indicating a sustained mental health burden despite shifts in material impacts.
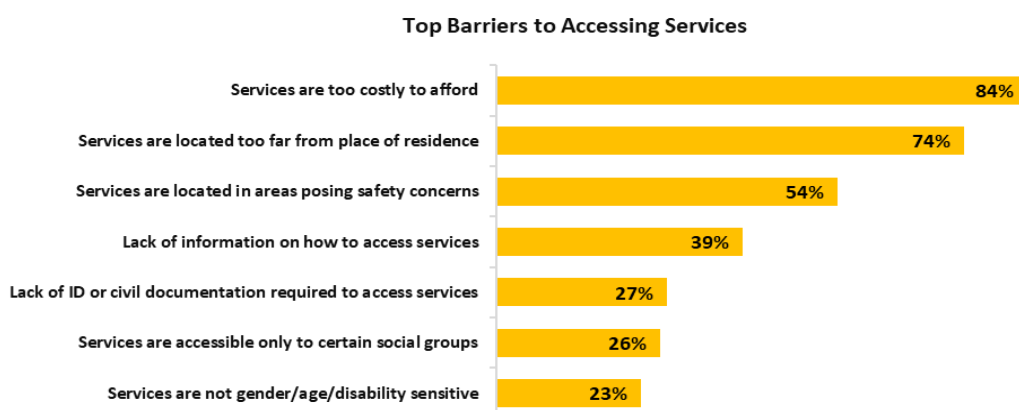
➢ Climate-induced displacement **declined slightly** to **14%** but remained notable. At the same time, anticipatory movement increased, with **27%** of respondents reporting awareness of community members **considering relocation due to climate-related pressures**, compared to **17% in Q2**. This suggests that while immediate displacement may fluctuate, perceived future mobility linked to environmental stress is increasing.

Risk in Focus 1: Barriers to Accessing Basic Services

Limited access to basic services remains a persistent protection risk across IRC-monitored locations. Findings from the April–September 2025 protection monitoring indicate that service availability, physical accessibility, affordability, and information gaps continue to constrain households' ability to meet essential needs, particularly in non-camp, peri-urban, and return-affected areas.

> *"Services exist, but we cannot afford them. Transportation and service fees are too high, so we delay seeking help unless it is an emergency."*
> *Household respondent, Qaim, Anbar*

The analysis shows that 76% of households experience difficulties accessing basic services, with the most reported barriers including high service and transportation costs, long distances to service points, lack of transportation, and limited availability of services. Information gaps and documentation-related barriers further restrict access, particularly for vulnerable households. These challenges were consistently echoed across different assessment components, indicating that barriers to services are structural and persistent rather than temporary.

Top Barriers to Accessing Services

Barrier	Percentage
Services are too costly to afford	84%
Services are located too far from place of residence	74%
Services are located in areas posing safety concerns	54%
Lack of information on how to access services	39%
Lack of ID or civil documentation required to access services	27%
Services are accessible only to certain social groups	26%
Services are not gender/age/disability sensitive	23%

Observational findings indicate that 45% of assessed locations lacked a functional primary health care (PHC) center, limiting access to basic medical services and increasing reliance on distant or private facilities. In locations where health facilities were present, communities reported reduced staffing

levels, limited availability of medicines, and irregular operating hours, further constraining access. Access to hospitals, medical clinics, or women's healthcare centers was in fact frequently described as limited or inconsistent, with many households noting that facilities were not available during night hours, increasing health risks during medical emergencies.

Emergency healthcare access remains uneven. The analysis indicates that only one-third (33%) of households reported the availability of emergency health services or ambulances in their community. 15% of observed locations lacked reliable access to drinking water within the community, increasing the burden on households, particularly women and children, who are often responsible for water collection.

Infrastructure-related barriers were widespread. Poor road conditions and inadequate street infrastructure were observed in 80% of assessed locations, directly affecting mobility, access to services, and emergency response. Observations consistently noted unpaved roads, lack of street lighting, and poor waste management, all of which further restrict safe access to healthcare, education, and administrative services, particularly during evening hours.

> *"Many families do not know where to go or what documents they need to access services. Information is not clear, and there is no guidance."*
> *Key informant, Daquq, Kirkuk*

While some households reported receiving humanitarian assistance during the reporting period, coverage remained limited and uneven across locations. Survey data indicate that only 3% of households received humanitarian assistance in the three months preceding data collection. Among households that did receive assistance, the most common forms included cash or in-kind support, food assistance, and basic relief items. However, unmet needs remain substantial. When asked to prioritize their most urgent needs, households most frequently identified cash or livelihood support, legal assistance, health services, water, shelter-related assistance, and education support, underscoring ongoing gaps in both service provision and affordability.

SELF-REPORTED PRIORITY NEED (Q2+Q3 2025)	IDPs	Returnees	Host Communities
Livelihoods	77%	78%	81%
Legal assistance	47%	51%	43%
NFIs	45%	36%	27%
healthcare	44%	41%	61%
Housing	44%	67%	38%
Protection services (Men, women, Children)	33%	23%	28%
Food	24%	20%	14%
Water & Hygiene	16%	12%	15%
Education	13%	12%	24%

Table 2: Self-reported priority needs by displacement – note that the table includes cumulative data Q2 and Q3 2025

Barriers to accessing legal and administrative services, closely linked to access to basic services, were also highlighted, including transportation costs, long distances to service points, and lack of clear information on procedures. These barriers disproportionately affect households without civil documentation, who are often unable to access multiple services simultaneously.

Effects on Affected Populations

The limited availability and accessibility of basic services have led to negative coping strategies and heightened vulnerability among affected populations. Analysis indicates that households frequently delay or forgo healthcare due to distance, cost, or lack of available services, increasing the risk of untreated illnesses and neglected chronic health conditions.

Education access is similarly affected by service and infrastructure gaps. Poor road conditions and lack of transportation were frequently cited as factors limiting children's, particularly girls', school attendance, especially in rural and peri-urban areas. Where schools exist, documentation requirements, safety concerns, and indirect costs further restrict access, reinforcing risks of dropout and interrupted education.

Limited access to water and sanitation services contributes to health risks, increased household expenditures, and psychosocial stress. These service gaps, combined with weak infrastructure and limited humanitarian coverage, contribute to prolonged displacement, stalled reintegration for returnees, and increased reliance on informal or unsafe livelihood strategies.

Population Groups Most Exposed

The impact of barriers to accessing basic services is uneven and particularly pronounced among:
- IDPs and returnees in areas with damaged or under-resourced infrastructure
- Female-headed households, who face compounded financial and mobility constraints
- Persons with disabilities, due to physical inaccessibility, lack of adapted services, and reliance on caregivers
- Children and adolescents, especially girls, affected by distance, safety barriers, and service availability gaps in education
- Households lacking civil documentation, which face compounding exclusion from health, education, legal, and social protection services

Host communities in areas receiving relocated or secondarily displaced households also reported increased pressure on already limited services, contributing to service degradation and localized tension.

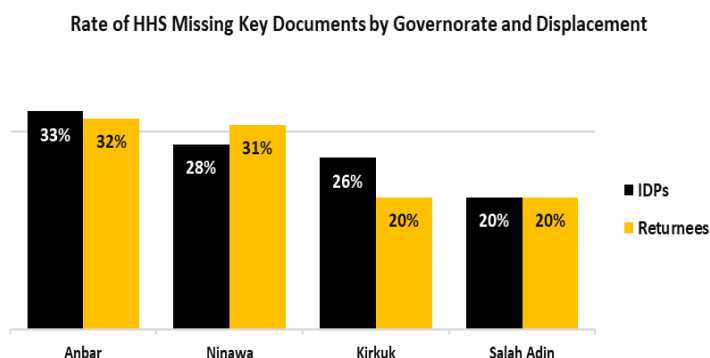**Existing Capacities and Coping Mechanisms**

Despite significant service gaps, some mitigating capacities were identified. Communities continue to rely primarily on informal coping mechanisms to manage gaps in access to basic services. These include seeking support from community leaders, Mukhtars, or tribal figures to facilitate access to services, pooling resources for transportation to distant facilities, and relying on informal networks to share information on available assistance. While such mechanisms provide short-term relief, they remain highly localized, uneven, and often inaccessible to the most marginalized groups, including persons with disabilities, female-headed households, and households lacking civil documentation.

Humanitarian actors continue to provide referrals, mobile outreach, and targeted assistance, particularly in health, legal support, and protection-related services, but their scope and coverage have been visibly reducing. Coverage remains insufficient in terms of needs, and outreach to rural, peri-urban, and return-affected areas remains constrained by funding limitations and decreased operational capacity. Mobile service delivery has helped mitigate some access barriers but has not been implemented at large enough scale to offset structural service gaps.

Government-led service provision remains inconsistent across assessed locations, particularly outside urban centers. No significant expansion in public service delivery or infrastructure rehabilitation was reported during the period, and coordination between service providers remains limited. The absence of formalized protection referral pathways, safe spaces, and coordinated outreach mechanisms continues to restrict timely identification and support for vulnerable individuals, leaving many households dependent on informal and unsustainable coping strategies.
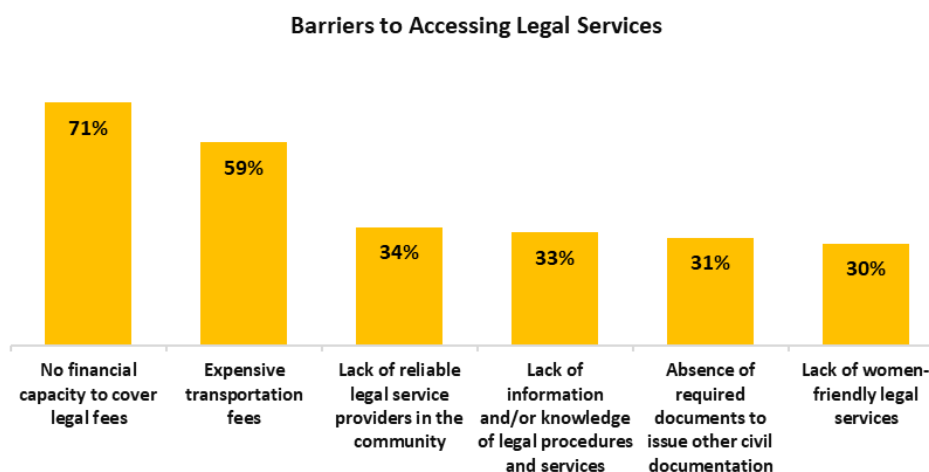
Risk in Focus 2: Civil Documentation and Legal Protection Gaps

Gaps in civil documentation and access to legal protection continue to pose a significant protection risk for conflict-affected populations across IRC-monitored locations. Findings from the April–September 2025 protection monitoring indicate that a notable share, 29% of households, include at least one member missing civil documentation, creating barriers to accessing essential services, public institutions, and legal rights.

Rate of HHS Missing Key Documents by Governorate and Displacement

- IDPs
- Returnees

	Anbar	Ninawa	Kirkuk	Salah Adin
IDPs	33%	28%	26%	20%
Returnees	32%	31%	20%	20%

The analysis shows that missing or incomplete civil documentation, including national identity cards, birth certificates, and residency-related documents, remains prevalent among IDPs, returnees, and households affected by repeated displacement. Documentation gaps were often linked to loss or destruction of documents during displacement, administrative backlogs, complex procedures, transportation costs, and limited awareness of application processes.

Legal protection gaps extend beyond documentation. Access to legal services is constrained by financial barriers, long distances to legal institutions, limited availability of legal aid providers, and lack of information on rights and procedures. In some areas, households also reported fear of engaging with authorities, concerns related to perceived affiliation, or uncertainty regarding eligibility, further discouraging attempts to pursue legal remedies.

Barriers to Accessing Legal Services

Barrier	Percentage
No financial capacity to cover legal fees	71%
Expensive transportation fees	59%
Lack of reliable legal service providers in the community	34%
Lack of information and/or knowledge of legal procedures and services	33%
Absence of required documents to issue other civil documentation	31%
Lack of women-friendly legal services	30%

Observational findings indicate that governmental directorates, police stations, and courthouses were not consistently present or easily accessible across assessed locations. Even where institutions existed, accessibility was often limited by restricted operating hours, lack of guidance for visitors, physical inaccessibility for persons with disabilities, or transportation challenges, reducing effective access to justice and civil registration services.

> *"People want to resolve their cases, but they cannot afford legal fees. Many cases remain pending for years."*
> *Key informant, Mosul, Ninewa*

Effects on Affected Populations

Civil documentation and legal protection gaps have wide-ranging consequences for affected households. Individuals lacking documentation face restricted access to healthcare, education, social protection schemes, humanitarian assistance, and formal employment, reinforcing cycles of vulnerability and exclusion.

Children without birth certificates or civil IDs face heightened risks of school enrollment delays, early dropout, and statelessness-related concerns, which extend beyond education to include restricted access to healthcare and vaccinations, inability to obtain other civil documentation later in life, exclusion from social protection and assistance schemes, and increased exposure to exploitation, early labor, or early marriage. While adults without documentation encounter barriers to employment, property claims, and freedom of movement. For returnees, unresolved documentation and legal issues frequently delay or prevent access to compensation, housing rehabilitation, and public services, undermining sustainable reintegration.

> "*I cannot issue documents for my children because their father is detained. Without papers, they cannot access services or school.*"
> *IDP household, Ramadi, Anbar*

Legal protection gaps also exacerbate housing, land, and property (HLP) disputes, particularly in areas affected by conflict-related destruction or secondary occupation. Households lacking legal documentation or awareness of legal processes are often unable to pursue claims or defend their rights, increasing the risk of forced eviction, informal tenure, and secondary displacement.

For women, particularly female-headed households, legal barriers are often compounded by social norms, limited mobility, caregiving responsibilities, and lack of financial resources, reducing their ability to independently pursue documentation or legal assistance.

Population Groups Most Exposed

The impact of civil documentation and legal protection gaps is most pronounced among:

- IDPs and returnees, particularly those with repeated displacement histories
- Households missing civil documentation, including children without birth certificates
- Female-headed households, facing compounded legal, financial, and social barriers
- Persons with disabilities, due to physical inaccessibility and reliance on caregivers
- Households perceived to have affiliation-related risks, who may avoid engagement with authorities

Minority groups and households residing in informal settlements or remote rural areas also face heightened challenges due to limited institutional presence and outreach.

Existing Capacities and Coping Mechanisms

Communities have been developing their own strategies to overcome those limits. Households continue to rely on informal actors, including Mukhtars, tribal leaders, and community elders, to support identity verification or navigate documentation processes. While these mechanisms can facilitate initial steps, they are not consistently recognized by formal institutions and are often insufficient to resolve complex or multi-layered legal cases.

Institutional capacity to providecivil documentation remains uneven. Civil Affairs directorates continue to operate in urban centers, but access in rural, displaced, and return-affected areas remains

inconsistent. Mobile registration missions by relevant authorities have been deployed intermittently, they are often short-termed, and they do not consistently target the areas of highest need.

Humanitarian actors, including the IRC, continue to provide legal assistance through awareness activities, legal consultations, referrals, and case management. Despite these efforts, legal service providers face significant constraints, including high caseloads, limited funding, access challenges, and security-related restrictions affecting outreach to remote areas. While coordination among legal aid actors has improved, no major expansion in state-led documentation or legal service delivery was reported during the period. The mismatch between growing needs and limited service capacity continues to present a significant protection gap.

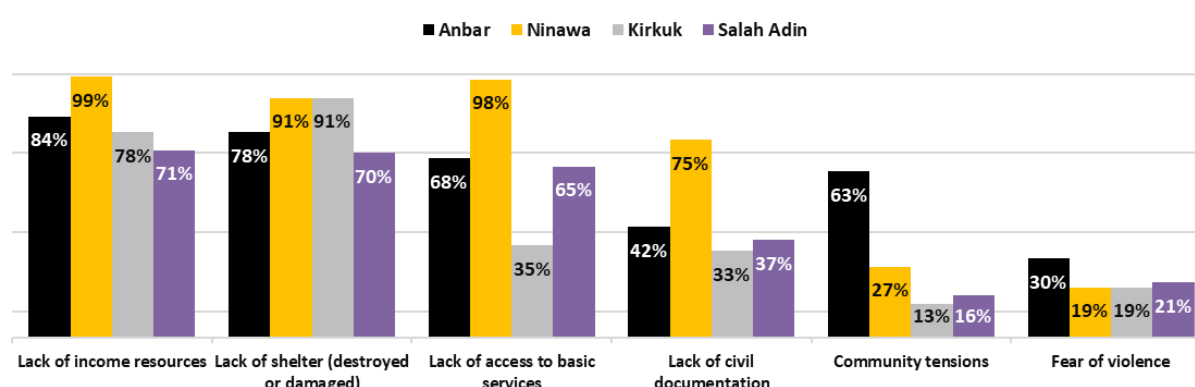## Risk in Focus 3: Obstacles to Sustainable Return and Reintegration

Obstacles to sustainable return and reintegration remain a significant protection risk for displaced and conflict-affected populations across IRC-monitored locations. Findings from the April–September 2025 protection monitoring indicate that while some households have returned to their areas of origin, returns are often constrained by unresolved structural, social, and legal barriers, limiting sustainability and increasing the risk of secondary displacement.

> "*There is no shelter, no work, and no services. Returning feels like another form of displacement.*"
> *Male FGD participant, rural Ninewa*

The analysis indicates that 69% of households reported that they are not willing to return to their area of origin, citing lack of source income, damaged or destroyed housing, lack of basic services, security concerns, and uncertainty about return conditions as the primary reasons. Among households considering return, a significant share reported that return would only be possible if conditions improve, particularly with regard to housing rehabilitation, service availability, and safety assurances. Findings further show that limited access to accurate and updated information about areas of origin remains a key barrier, with households reporting the need for clearer information on security conditions, service availability, and housing status before making return decisions.

Main Barriers for IDPs not to return to the area of origin by the Governorate of Displacement

Legend: ■ Anbar ■ Ninawa ■ Kirkuk ■ Salah Adin

Barrier	Anbar	Ninawa	Kirkuk	Salah Adin
Lack of income resources	84%	99%	78%	71%
Lack of shelter (destroyed or damaged)	78%	91%	91%	70%
Lack of access to basic services	68%	98%	35%	65%
Lack of civil documentation	42%	75%	33%	37%
Community tensions	63%	27%	13%	16%
Fear of violence	30%	19%	19%	21%

Housing, land, and property (HLP) constraints continue to represent a central obstacle to sustainable return. The analysis shows that 70% of households were unable to return to their original homes due to damage, destruction, or occupation of their dwellings, forcing families to remain displaced or reside in substandard shelter arrangements. In several locations, households reported living in insecure

premises or informal shelters, increasing exposure to eviction risks and undermining stability. Eviction-related concerns persist, as 12% of households reported having received threats of eviction, while others described experiences of actual eviction or forced relocation, further discouraging return and reintegration.

Social reintegration challenges also remain prevalent. 28% of returnees reported that they did not feel fully accepted by the surrounding or host community following their return. Community-level tensions, stigma, and disputes, particularly in areas affected by repeated displacement or perceptions of affiliation, were identified as factors undermining trust, safety, and social cohesion. These dynamics reduce households' sense of belonging and discourage both return and longer-term settlement.

> *"Some families are accepted, but others still face rejection because of perceived affiliations or their time in camps."*
> *Community leader, Daquq, Kirkuk*

Security and administrative barriers further complicate return and reintegration. The findings indicate that movement restrictions, security clearance requirements, checkpoints, and the presence of armed actors continue to affect mobility in certain areas. Households reporting insecurity or restricted movement were less likely to express willingness to return or remain in their areas of origin, highlighting the role of both perceived and actual safety in shaping return decisions and reintegration outcomes.

Effects on Affected Populations

The cumulative impact of these barriers has resulted in prolonged displacement and fragile reintegration outcomes. Many households reported uncertainty regarding future plans, with return decisions frequently delayed or conditional on improvements in housing, services, and security.

Unresolved HLP issues increase the risk of secondary displacement, particularly for households lacking legal documentation or access to legal assistance. Households residing in informal or overcrowded shelter arrangements face heightened vulnerability to eviction, instability, and repeated movement.

Economic constraints further weaken reintegration efforts. Limited livelihood opportunities in return areas, combined with high costs related to transportation, shelter repair, and basic services, contribute to continued reliance on humanitarian assistance or informal coping strategies. The analysis suggests that economic insecurity and lack of services in return locations significantly reduce the sustainability of return, even where households initially attempt to reintegrate.

Prolonged displacement, repeated movement, and uncertainty over housing and legal status were also associated with heightened psychosocial stress, affecting household well-being and community cohesion.

Population Groups Most Exposed

The risk of unsustainable return and reintegration is most pronounced among:

- Returnees to areas with damaged housing and limited-service availability
- IDPs residing in informal settlements or substandard shelter arrangements
- Households facing unresolved HLP disputes or insecure tenure
- Female-headed households, who face compounded economic, legal, and social barriers
- Households perceived to have affiliation-related risks, experiencing stigma or movement restrictions

Host communities receiving returnees or relocated households also experience increased pressure on services and livelihoods, contributing to localized tensions and reduced social cohesion.

Existing Capacities and Coping Mechanisms

Some community-led and informal support mechanisms continue to play a role in facilitating return and initial reintegration. These include assistance from local leaders, extended family networks, and religious or tribal actors, who may facilitate temporary shelter arrangements or mediate access to housing and services. However, such efforts remain fragmented, short-term, and sometimes impartial, limiting their effectiveness in supporting sustainable reintegration.

Formal support for returnees remains limited in many areas of return. While humanitarian actors continue to provide targeted legal assistance, non-food items, and mobile protection services, these interventions are often timebound and geographically constrained, particularly in high-return or previously camp-based locations. Comprehensive referral systems, complaint mechanisms, and structured engagement with returnees remain weak or absent.

During the reporting period, protection service availability further declined in some return and IDP-hosting locations, following broader reductions in humanitarian funding. This has resulted in reduced mobile protection services, legal aid coverage, and case management, particularly in districts with high return rates. As a result, fewer cases are being identified and referred, and many households are left to navigate reintegration challenges without adequate institutional or humanitarian support.

Concerns about social stigma, retaliation, or exclusion continue to discourage returnees from raising protection concerns or engaging in local decision-making processes. Limited government engagement and weak institutional presence in return areas further constrain the development of sustainable reintegration pathways.

Risk in Focus 4: Child Protection and Education Concerns

Child protection and access to education remain significant concerns across IRC-monitored locations. Findings from the April–September 2025 protection monitoring indicate that children face intersecting risks related to disrupted education, economic pressure, safety concerns, and limited access to child-focused services, particularly in displacement-affected and economically vulnerable communities.
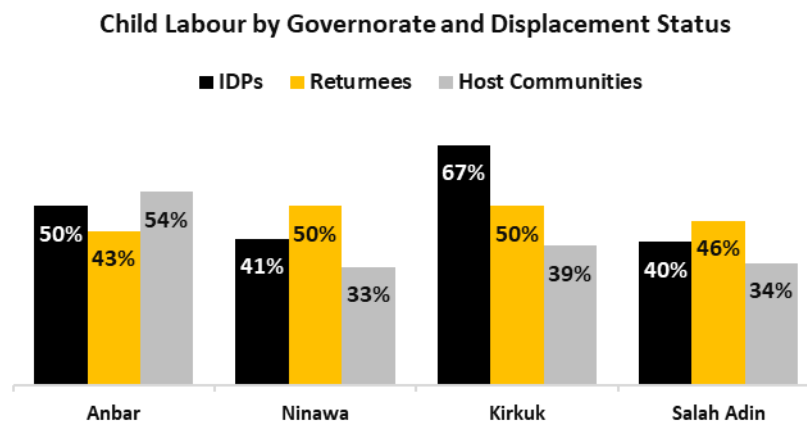
The analysis indicates that a considerable share of school-aged children is not consistently attending school, with disparities observed between boys and girls. The analysis indicates that 73% of households with school-aged children reported that at least one child was not attending school. Among these households, the most commonly cited barriers included financial constraints, distance to schools, lack of transportation, documentation-related barriers, safety concerns, and the need for children to contribute to household income. These challenges were particularly pronounced in rural and peri-urban areas, where infrastructure limitations and service gaps further restrict access to education.

> *"Children are working to support their families. Education becomes secondary when there is no income."*
> *Key informant, Tooz, Salah al-Din*

Child labor continues to emerge as a negative coping strategy in response to economic hardship. Findings show that 42% of households reported having school-aged children engaged in work during school hours, indicating direct interference with education. Community-level analysis further

identified the presence of children involved in informal and potentially hazardous labor, including street vending, agricultural work, workshops, small businesses, and service-related activities. Economic pressure, loss of livelihoods, and rising living costs were consistently identified as primary drivers of child labor.

Child Labour by Governorate and Displacement Status

■ IDPs ■ Returnees ■ Host Communities

	Anbar	Ninawa	Kirkuk	Salah Adin
IDPs	50%	41%	67%	40%
Returnees	43%	50%	50%	46%
Host Communities	54%	33%	39%	34%

Harmful practices affecting children also persist. The data indicate that early marriage remains present as a risk, particularly among adolescent girls. This risk was linked to economic stress, school dropout, social norms, and perceptions of protection, with limited access to education and protective services increasing vulnerability.

Safety-related concerns further compound education and protection risks. The analysis indicates that children in certain communities face exposure to unsafe public spaces, movement restrictions, and community-level tensions, which discourage school attendance and limit participation in social and recreational activities. In some locations, children were observed working in public spaces or in proximity to checkpoints or armed actors, increasing exposure to exploitation and violence.

Effects on Affected Populations

The cumulative impact of these risks has serious and long-term consequences for children's development and well-being. Interrupted education increases the likelihood of early school dropouts, reduced learning outcomes, and limited future livelihood opportunities, reinforcing cycles of poverty and vulnerability.

Children engaged in labor face heightened risks of physical injury, exploitation, psychosocial distress, and exposure to unsafe environments. For adolescent boys, early entry into labor markets often results in permanent disengagement from education. For girls, the combination of school dropout and early marriage significantly increases risks related to early pregnancy, domestic violence, and social exclusion.

Children without access to protective services, including unaccompanied or separated children, children with disabilities, and those living in unstable shelter conditions, face increased risk due to limited identification, referral, and response mechanisms.

Population Groups Most Exposed

The impact of child protection and education risks is particularly pronounced among:

- Children from IDP and returnee households, especially those experiencing economic insecurity
- Children in female-headed households, where financial pressure increases reliance on child labor
- Adolescent boys, who are more likely to engage in income-generating activities

- Adolescent girls, facing compounded risks of school dropout and early marriage
- Children with disabilities, due to physical accessibility barriers and limited adapted services
- Unaccompanied or separated children, with limited access to care and protection mechanisms

Existing Capacities and Coping Mechanisms

Despite these challenges, some protective capacities were identified. Community-based responses to child protection risks continue to rely heavily on informal social structures and family networks. While these mechanisms may offer some level of support or dispute resolution, they often lack child-sensitive approaches and may reinforce social norms that tolerate child labor, early marriage, or underreporting of violence.

Across most assessed locations, formal child protection reporting channels remain weak or absent, and caregivers frequently expressed reluctance to rely on law enforcement due to fear of retaliation or lack of confidence in response mechanisms. Awareness of available child protection services remains limited, particularly in rural and return-affected areas.

Humanitarian actors, including the IRC until June 2025, continue to deliver case management, legal support, and community awareness activities related to protection concerns. However, these services remain limited in scale and geographic reach, and are insufficient to address the magnitude of needs. Observations highlighted significant gaps in child-friendly spaces, psychosocial support services, and specialized support for children with disabilities or unaccompanied and separated children.
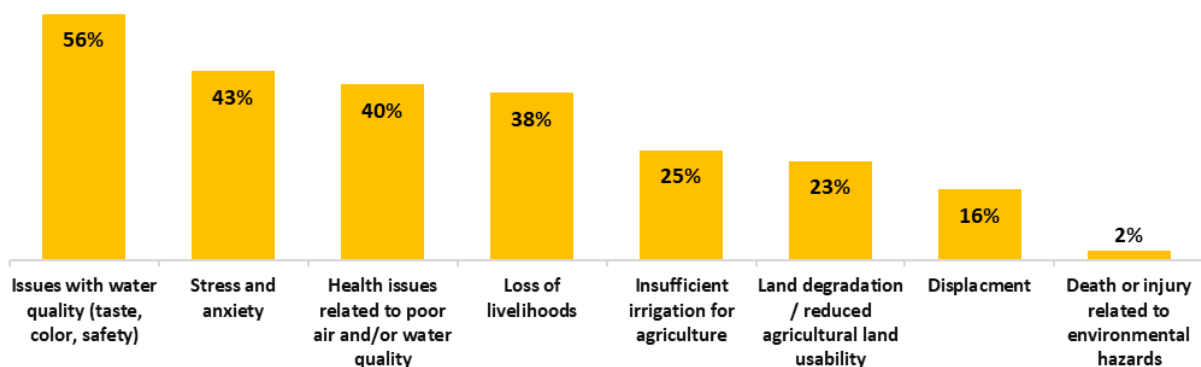
Protection capacities in areas experiencing new or ongoing return movements remain particularly strained, as existing services are stretched beyond capacity. These gaps, combined with persistent economic pressures and harmful social norms, continue to elevate protection risks for children.

Risk in Focus 5: Climate Change and Environmental Stressors

Climate change and environmental degradation continue to exacerbate protection risks for conflict-affected populations across IRC-monitored locations. Findings from the April–September 2025 protection monitoring indicate that environmental stressors increasingly intersect with economic vulnerability, displacement dynamics, and access to basic services, particularly in rural, peri-urban, and environmentally fragile areas.

The analysis indicates that 79% of households reported noticeable changes in weather patterns, including prolonged droughts, increased temperatures, irregular rainfall, and seasonal variability. These changes have disrupted traditional livelihoods, strained already limited resources, and increased household vulnerability.

Types of Climate Change and Environmental Impacts Reported by Affected Households

Category	Percentage
Issues with water quality (taste, color, safety)	56%
Stress and anxiety	43%
Health issues related to poor air and/or water quality	40%
Loss of livelihoods	38%
Insufficient irrigation for agriculture	25%
Land degradation / reduced agricultural land usability	23%
Displacment	16%
Death or injury related to environmental hazards	2%

Water scarcity remains a critical concern. 52% of households reported inadequate or inconsistent access to water, while others described declining water quality, increased costs, or the need to transport water from other locations. Observations further confirmed that some communities lack reliable drinking water infrastructure, increasing health risks and household expenditures.

The impacts of climate change on livelihoods were particularly pronounced among households engaged in agriculture. The data show that allof households involved in agricultural activities reported reduced productivity or loss of income due to drought, water scarcity, land degradation, or crop failure. These impacts have contributed to rising food insecurity, increased debt, and reliance on negative coping strategies.

> *"The water quality has changed. It smells bad and causes illness, but we have no other option."*
> *Household respondent, southern Kirkuk*

Climate-related pressures are increasingly influencing decisions to move to other areas. The analysis indicates that 17% of households have considered relocating due to environmental stressors, citing deteriorating living conditions, lack of water, loss of livelihoods, and reduced access to services as primary factors. In some locations, key informants reported awareness of environmentally driven population movements, particularly from rural areas toward urban or peri-urban centers, which is a sign of acknowledgement of the magnitude of the problem

Despite the growing impact of climate change and the reported awareness, proactive response from local or government-led climate adaptation or mitigation initiatives remains limited. Many households reported insufficient information about available support, early warning mechanisms, or assistance targeting climate-affected livelihoods.

Effects on Affected Populations

The cumulative effects of climate change and environmental stressors have wide-ranging protection implications. Water scarcity and environmental degradation contribute to health risks, increased household expenditures, and heightened psychosocial stress, particularly for women and children responsible for water collection.

Loss of livelihoods and reduced agricultural productivity exacerbate economic vulnerability, increasing reliance on humanitarian assistance or informal coping mechanisms, including child labor, early marriage, and debt accumulation. In displacement-affected areas, environmental pressures compound existing vulnerabilities, further constraining durable solutions and recovery efforts.

> *"Drought destroyed our crops. We lost our only source of income."*
> *Agricultural household, rural Ninewa*

Environmental degradation also places additional strain on host communities, as competition over scarce resources, such as water, land, and employment increases the risk of localized tensions and social friction.

Population Groups Most Exposed

The impact of climate change and environmental stressors is particularly severe among:

- Households dependent on agriculture or natural resources for income
- IDPs and returnees residing in environmentally fragile or underserved areas
- Female-headed households are disproportionately affected due to increased caregiving responsibilities arising from climate-related illness, service disruption, and economic stress,

combined with the growing time, distance, and protection risks associated with collecting essential resources such as water and fuel.

- Children, exposed to health risks and increased likelihood of negative coping strategies
- Host communities experiencing pressure from climate-related displacement

Households with limited financial resources, poor infrastructure, or weak social networks face heightened exposure and reduced capacity to adapt.

Existing Capacities and Coping Mechanisms

Existing capacities to address climate-related protection risks are fragmented and inadequate relative to the scale and severity of environmental pressures. The absence of sustained, coordinated climate-responsive programming continues to limit households' ability to adapt, increasing the likelihood that environmental stressors will further exacerbate displacement, economic vulnerability, and protection risks.

At the community level, households continue to rely primarily on informal and self-directed coping strategies to manage the impacts of climate change and environmental degradation. These include reducing water consumption, altering agricultural practices, seeking alternative short-term income sources, and relying on family or community networks for support. While such strategies demonstrate adaptive capacity, they are often reactive, unsustainable, and insufficient to offset prolonged environmental stress.

In agricultural and rural areas, some households reported informal adjustments to farming practices, such as changing crop types, reducing cultivation areas, or relying on rain-fed production when irrigation is unavailable. However, these adaptations remain limited by water scarcity, land degradation, lack of technical support, and insufficient financial resources, constraining their effectiveness and increasing livelihood insecurity.

Awareness of government or community-led climate adaptation initiatives remains low across assessed locations. Where such initiatives exist, they were described as small-scale, sporadic, or poorly communicated, limiting community uptake and impact. Households reported limited access to early warning systems, climate-resilient livelihood support, or structured assistance addressing environmental risks.

Humanitarian engagement related to climate impacts remains largely indirect, primarily through water, sanitation, livelihoods, or protection programming rather than dedicated climate-focused interventions. While some actors provide emergency water support, cash assistance, or livelihood activities, these efforts remain insufficiently integrated to address the cumulative protection risks associated with climate change.

Institutional capacity to respond to climate-related displacement and environmental stressors remains limited, particularly at the local level. Coordination between environmental, water, agricultural, and protection actors was reported to be weak, and formal mechanisms to support households affected by climate-induced displacement or livelihood loss remain underdeveloped.

Conclusion

The April–September 2025 IRC Protection Monitoring findings reaffirm that protection risks for conflict-affected populations in Iraq remain persistent, interlinked, and increasingly structural. While displacement patterns continue to evolve, and some households have attempted to return or integrate, the overall protection environment remains fragile and uneven, with progress toward durable solutions constrained by systemic barriers.

Access to basic services and livelihoods continues to underpin vulnerability across all population groups. Infrastructure damage, affordability constraints, limitedservice availability, and information gaps persist, particularly in non-camp, peri-urban, and return-affected areas. These challenges are compounded by civil documentation and legal protection gaps, which continue to restrict access to services, social protection schemes, housing security, and formal employment, reinforcing exclusion for already vulnerable households.

Obstacles to sustainable return and reintegration have become more pronounced during this reporting period. The findings indicate that return decisions are often conditional and constrained, shaped by damaged housing, unresolved land and property issues, limited services, security concerns, and social acceptance challenges. As a result, returns do not consistently translate into permanent arrangements and, in some cases, expose households to secondary displacement, eviction risks, or prolonged instability.

Child protection concerns are becoming more visible within this context. While the period was marked by a marginal reduction in cases of violence, economic pressure, disrupted education, and limited access to protective services continue to place children at heightened risk of school dropout, child labor, and exposure to unsafe environments, with long-term implications for well-being and future resilience. These risks are closely linked to household-level coping strategies and broader service and livelihood gaps.

Climate change and environmental stressors are increasingly acting as threat multipliers, exacerbating existing vulnerabilities related to water access, livelihoods, displacement, and social cohesion. Environmental pressures are no longer peripheral but are actively shaping household decisions, coping mechanisms, and displacement intentions, particularly in environmentally fragile and resource-scarce areas.

The findings underscore that piecemeal or sector-specific interventions are insufficient to address the complexity of current protection risks. There remains a critical need for integrated, multi-sector responses that strengthen access to basic services, civil documentation, legal assistance, livelihoods, child protection, and climate-responsive programming, while also addressing social cohesion and community-level dynamics.

IRC's protection programming, through legal aid, protection case management, psychosocial support, community engagement, and climate-sensitive approaches, continues to play a vital role in mitigating both immediate and structural risks. Moving forward, enhanced collaboration with government institutions, humanitarian partners, and affected communities will be essential to strengthen protection systems, expand outreach and mobile service delivery, and support pathways toward safe, dignified, and sustainable solutions for displaced and conflict-affected populations in Iraq.

Acknowledgments