

SINJAR DISTRICT

INTRODUCTION

This factsheet on Sinjar District is an extension of the original pilot project in Ninewa Governorate¹ aimed at assessing progress towards durable solutions to displacement for internally displaced persons (IDPs) and returnees in the governorates with the largest shares of displaced populations in Iraq. The goal is to understand where IDPs and returnees in Sinjar District stand five years after the end of the 2014–2017 crisis and in which aspects they are still struggling. In this respect, this project contributes to a broader discussion and Action Agenda around measuring progress towards solutions and determining the end of displacement. The assessment measured progress along five criteria stemmed from the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Framework for Durable Solutions:² 1) safety and security; 2) adequate standards of living; 3) access to livelihoods; 4) restoration of housing, land and property (HLP) and compensation and 5) personal documentation and participation.

Data collection for this factsheet took place in November 2022, across 3 subdistricts and 17 locations in the district of Sinjar. The focus of the study was on both IDPs and returnees within the district, including IDPs who are displaced within the district itself. Data were collected through IOM's Rapid Assessment and Response Teams (RARTs), composed of over 73 staff members (40% of enumerators are female). They collected data through structured face-to-face interviews with a sample size of 310 IDP and 336 returnee households in Sinjar district.

DTM Master List Round 127 data, collected between July and September 2022, was used as a sample frame for IDP and returnee households. The composite measure to assess the progress towards durable solutions³ was built to conduct a

comparison between groups and define the most problematic domain. For more information on the survey methodology, sampling design, selection of indicators and composite measures, please refer to the [Methodological Overview](#).

As of December 2023, Sinjar District host the third largest IDP population (37,188 individuals) and the fourth largest returnee population in Ninewa Governorate (128,538 individuals).⁴ The current rate of return for Sinjar District stands at 43 per cent, meaning that over half of IDPs displaced from the district have not yet returned. This is the second lowest rate across all districts in the country.⁵

Out of total number of returnees, 112,782 live in severe conditions (88%) as of December 2023. In Ninewa Governorate, the most noticeable increase of returns was observed in Sinjar, compared to the round collected in January – April 2023. This increase was driven by an insufficient electricity supply, related to intermittent transmission interruption to avoid overheating due to excessive use of electricity in the summer. Additionally, challenges associated with protracted displacement, along with hate speech against the Yazidi community in their areas of displacement, prompted some IDPs to return to Sinjar District.⁶

The majority of the IDPs in Sinjar live in locations with medium severity (30,492 individuals). In fact, Markaz Sinjar is one of the main hotspots⁷ for IDPs in Ninewa, with 19,494 IDPs settled across 15 locations. The most critical issue is safety and security, as high concerns were reported among IDPs regarding violence from or caused by tensions among security forces or armed groups, revenge attacks, ISIL attacks and the presence of other security actors.⁸

KEY FINDINGS

IDPs and returnees in Sinjar District have made less progress toward durable solutions than those in elsewhere in the governorate. Roughly a quarter of IDPs (27%) and a fifth of returnees (21%) in Sinjar fell in the low progress group, compared to only 10 per cent of IDPs and 3 per cent of returnees in Ninewa overall. The gap is especially stark between returnees in Sinjar District versus those in the broader governorate. This finding indicates that those in Sinjar District are confronting distinct challenges which impede progress toward solutions.

Within Sinjar District, returnees slightly outperformed IDPs in terms of progress. Roughly two thirds of returnee households (63%) have achieved medium progress, compared to 57 per cent of IDP households. Across

subdistricts, households in Al-Shamal reported the worst progress scores, with half of IDPs and a third of returnees falling in the low progress group. Those in Qaeyrrawan largely receive medium progress scores. Lastly, households in Markaz Sinjar attained the highest degree of progress, with most classed as achieving medium or high progress.

PROGRESS BY DOMAIN

In line with the findings observed in Ninewa Governorate overall, the greatest gap between IDP and returnee households was observed in the HLP and compensation domain. In particular, IDP households were at much greater risk of eviction than returnees. Additionally, they were less likely to have legally

- 1 IOM, *Progress Toward Durable Solutions in Iraq: A Pilot Project in Ninewa Governorate* (Baghdad, 2023).
- 2 The IASC is the longest-standing and highest-level humanitarian coordination forum of the United Nations system. It brings together the executive heads of 18 organizations and consortia to formulate policy, set strategic priorities and mobilize resources in response to humanitarian crises.
- 3 A durable solution is achieved when displaced people no longer have any specific assistance and protection needs that are linked to their displacement and can enjoy their human rights without discrimination on account of their displacement. It can be achieved through return, integration or resettlement. IASC, *IASC Framework on Durable Solutions for Internally Displaced Persons*, The Brookings Institute & University of Bern (Washington D.C., 2010).
- 4 DTM Iraq – *Master List Report 131* (September – December 2023).
- 5 Based on figures from Master List 131. IOM, *DTM Iraq Master List Report 131 (September – December 2023)* (Baghdad, 2023).
- 6 DTM Iraq – *Return Index Round 19* (May – August 2023) (Baghdad, 2023).
- 7 A subdistrict is classified as a 'hotspot' if it scores highly in terms of overall severity and has at least 1,000 IDPs residents. The list also includes subdistricts with medium overall severity and a high score at least on one of the five domains.
- 8 IOM, DTM Iraq, *Displacement Index: Round seven* (Baghdad, 2023)

recognized documentation for their housing or be entitled to compensation for property damage. Moreover, the largest differences in progress scores between Sinjar District and Ninewa Governorate were indicated in this category, suggesting HLP concerns are particularly acute in Sinjar. Among the subdistricts assessed, IDP households in **Qaeyrrawn Subdistrict** reported the lowest average progress score of any group.

Livelihoods are a challenge for both IDP and returnee households, with some of the lowest progress scores observed in this domain. Many households face underemployment, as reflected in the low shares of households engaged in stable forms of work. As a result, the majority of households are not earning enough to meet their basic needs.

Regarding standards of living, IDP households slightly outperformed returnee households in terms of shelter conditions, in contrast to governorate-level findings. Roughly **three in five returnee households (61%) reside in critical shelters**, compared to approximately half of IDP households (47%). Living conditions are particularly severe for IDP households in **Qaeyrrawn Subdistrict**, reflecting critical shelter conditions, challenges accessing basic services and food insecurity. Moreover, relative to returnees across Ninewa Governorate, those in Sinjar District attained significantly lower progress scores in this domain due to poor shelter conditions and limited access to health care.

Greater progress was achieved in the safety and security and personal documentation and participation domains, although certain challenges endure. Households generally felt safe and comfortable seeking help from authorities and were able to move in and out of their location without issue. However, notable concerns about violence from security forces, armed groups and the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) persist. Moreover, non-state security sector actors remain active in the district.

Similarly, IDP and returnee households generally met all personal documentation and participation criteria. However, relatively **low shares of households in Al-Shamal Subdistrict have ID** compared to the broader district and governorate.

GEOGRAPHIC AREAS

As noted above, significant shares of IDP and returnee households in **Al-Shamal Subdistrict** have achieved only limited progress toward durable solutions. This reflects a broad range of challenges across domains, from critical shelter conditions, reduced access to health care, precarious work, a weak financial safety net, lack of ownership documents for housing, limited entitlement to compensation and missing personal documentation. In addition to these issues, IDP households in the subdistrict also face unemployment and risks of eviction. Households in Qaeyrrawn have achieved slightly more progress, with comparably better livelihood scores than other subdistricts. However, standards of living

are severe, particularly for IDP households due to critical shelter conditions, food insecurity and difficulties accessing basic services. IDP households in this subdistrict also face numerous, widespread issues in the HLP domain, such as lack of ownership documents and entitlement to compensation and risks of evictions. Lastly, households in Markaz Sinjar appear to have achieved the greatest degree of progress, reflecting higher standards of living. Nevertheless, HLP-related issues are present in this subdistrict, particularly for IDP households. Additionally, both IDP and returnee households engage in precarious forms of work and struggle to meet unexpected expenses.

PREFERRED SOLUTIONS

Just under **two in three IDP households (63%) prefer to return** to their place of origin. This would primarily involve returning to Al-Ba'aj District as well as elsewhere in Sinjar District. However, **barriers such as housing destruction, infrastructure issues and lack of livelihoods are preventing return**.

Return intentions are much higher in Sinjar compared to the broader governorate, although preferred solutions among IDPs vary significantly by progress level and subdistrict. In particular, a larger share of **low progress IDPs and IDPs in Al-Shamal Subdistrict prefer to return**. This highlights the need to target programmatic interventions in key areas of origin and support the return of IDP households where desired.

On the other hand, most returnees prefer to stay in their current location, with little variation across progress levels or subdistricts. This may reflect an attachment to their areas of origin, as well as the difficulties of living in displacement. Given these intentions, programming should also centre on important areas of return.

FACTORS ENABLING OR PREVENTING PROGRESS

Low progress IDP and returnee households tended to share particular characteristics. **Housing conditions and tenure security appear to be significantly associated with progress**, as they reflect socioeconomic status, shape living conditions and influence eligibility for compensation mechanisms. Relatedly, a **lack of personal and property documentation** may negatively impact the ability of households to access services and obtain compensation for property damage. Other socioeconomic characteristics such as the **educational attainment** of the head of household affected progress levels, as education shapes access to livelihood opportunities. Lastly, IDP households with **a history of failed returns** tended to have lower progress scores. Given the relationship between progress levels and preferred solutions, failed returns suggest that households may prefer to return but are unable to do so, thus remaining in displacement under suboptimal conditions. Moreover, experiences of **multiple displacements** can deplete the savings of families, affecting their financial wellbeing in the process.

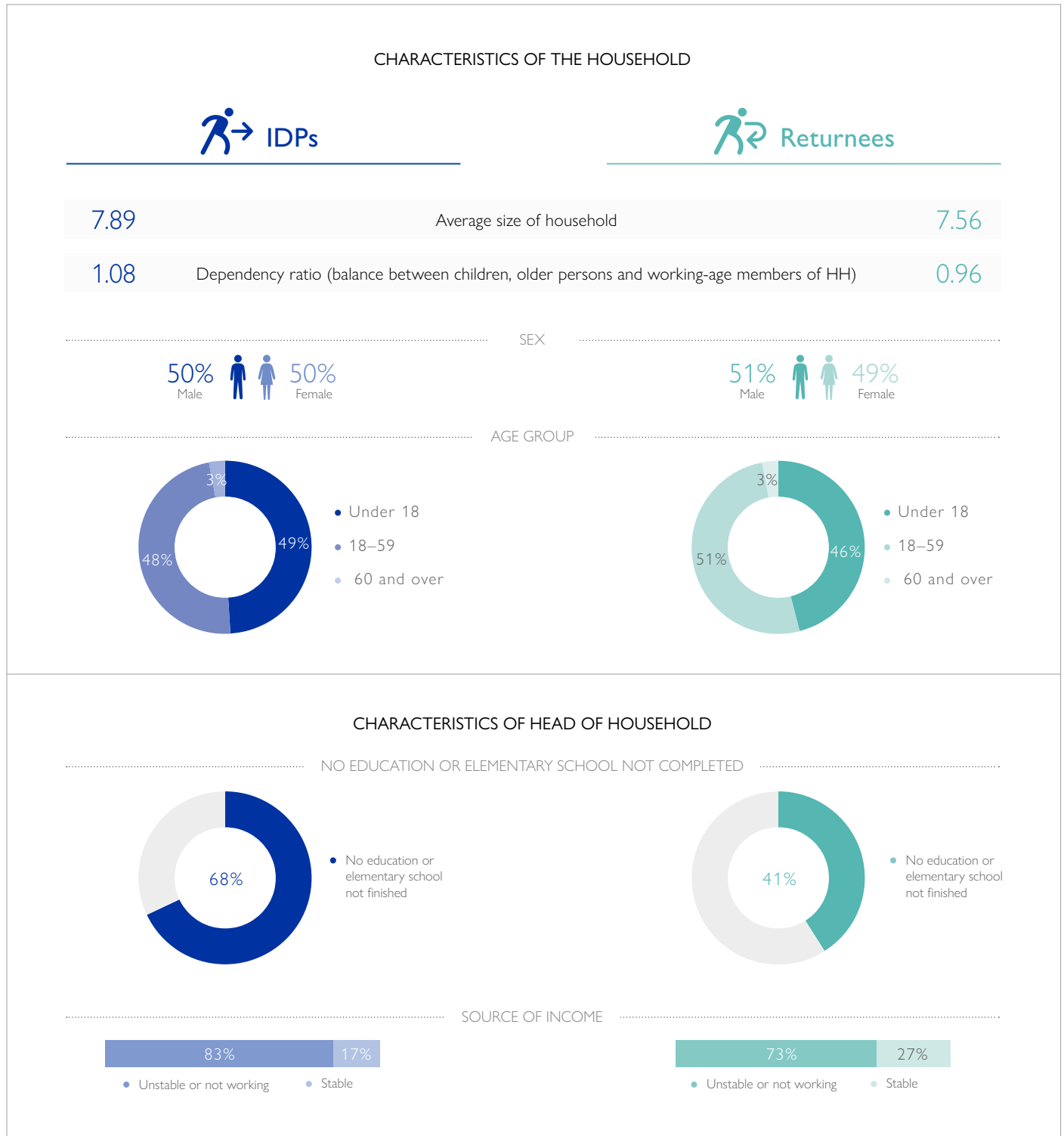
CHARACTERISTICS OF THE DISPLACED POPULATION

SOCIO DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

Generally, the demographic structure of the displaced population is balanced. Half are female (50%) and half are males (50%). Around half (48%) are young adults or middle-aged (18–59 years old), nearly half (49%) are children (under 18 years old) and only a small portion (3%) are older adults (over 60 years old). The average household size is 7.89 for IDPs and 7.56 for returnees.

Around 17 per cent of returnee households are headed by a woman, alongside 15 per cent of IDP households. A smaller percentage of displaced households are headed by an older adult (13% of returnees versus 8% of IDPs). In many IDP households (68%), the head of household (HoH) received no form of education and 83 per cent of IDP and 73 per cent of returnee HoH declared having no stable source of income⁹, slightly higher than in Ninewa overall (77% of IDPs versus 62% of returnees).

Figure 1: Sociodemographic characteristics

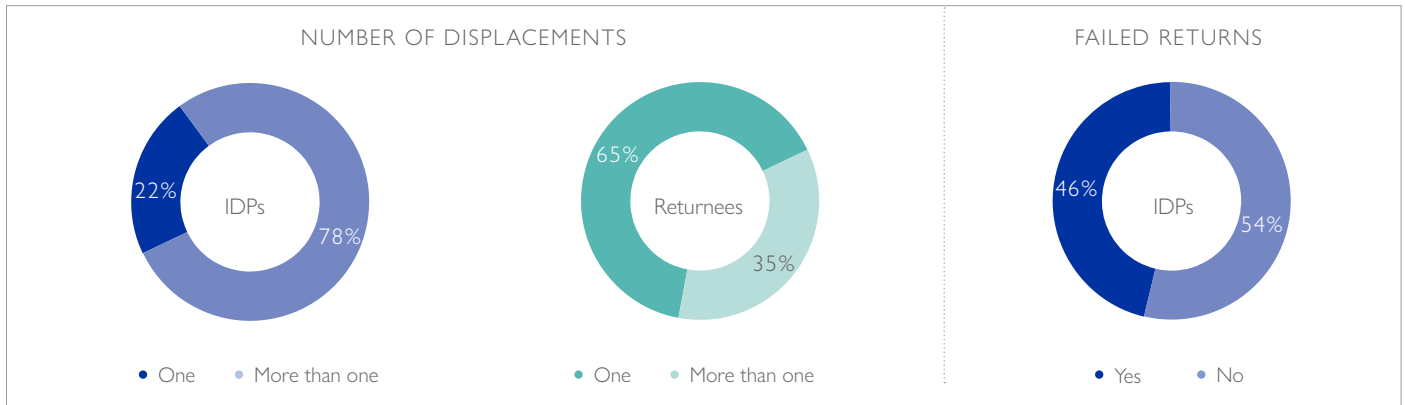


⁹ A stable occupation means that the HoH is regularly employed in the public or private sector, self-employed or retired.

Displacement in Sinjar is mainly protracted and repeated: the majority of IDP households had been displaced for more than 5 years (99%) and the majority had undergone more than one displacement (78% of IDPs versus 35% of returnees).

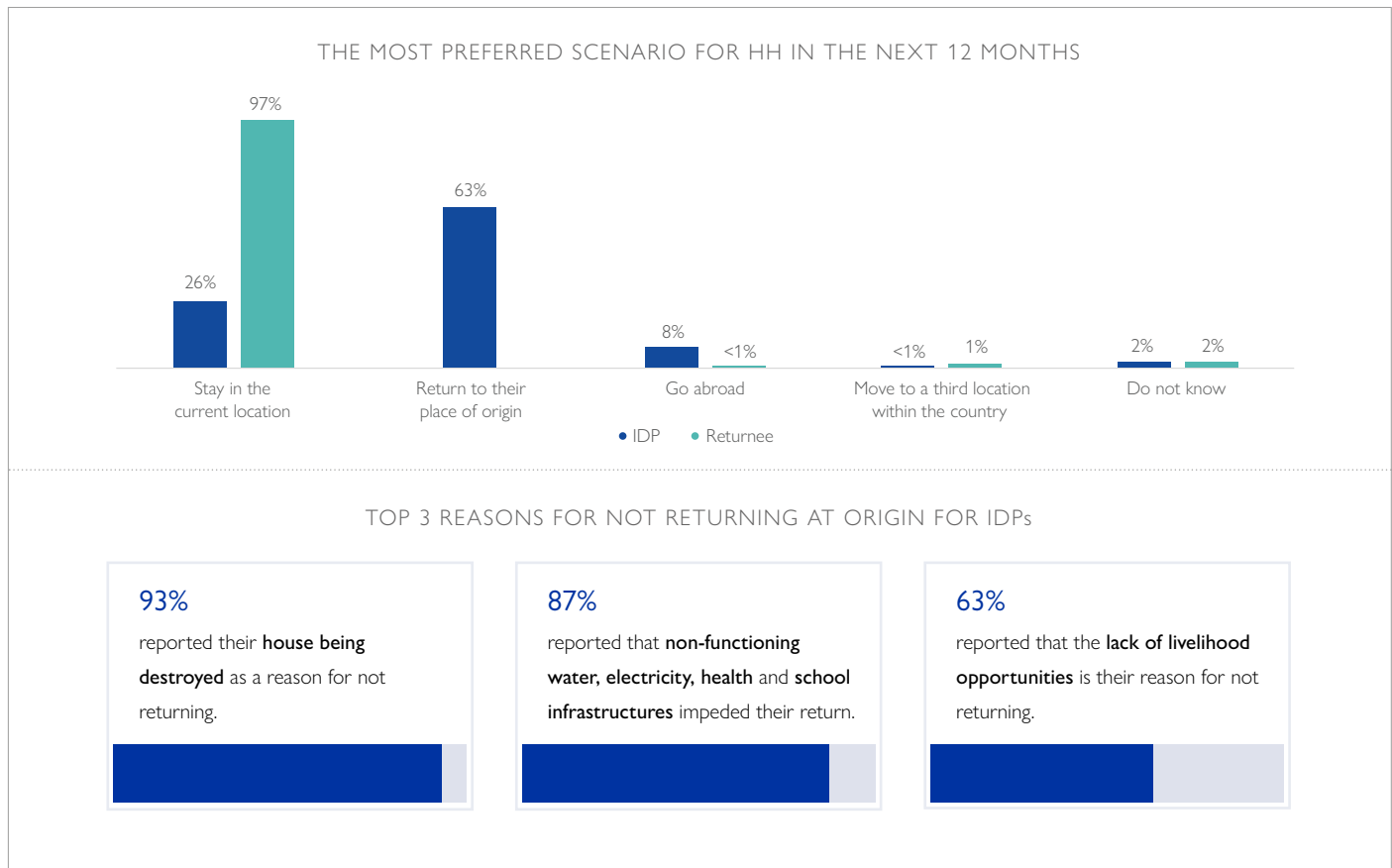
Just under half of households have attempted but failed to return to the location of origin (46%). Failed returns were mostly reported to Al-Qahtaniya (75%) in Al-Ba'aj District and Markaz Sinjar (15%), Sinjar District.

Figure 2: Number of displacements and failed returns



PREFERRED DURABLE SOLUTIONS AND OBSTACLES

Figure 3: Preferred solutions and main barriers to return



Most returnee households (97%) prefer to stay at the location of return in the next 12 months, while only a quarter (26%) of IDP households prefer to stay. This is notably lower than in Ninewa overall, where 58 per cent of IDPs prefer to stay.

Conversely, a substantial majority (63%) of IDP households in Sinjar prefer to return to their place of origin. This preference is notably higher than in Ninewa, where only 31 per cent of IDPs wish to return. A small portion of IDP households in Sinjar (8%) reported that moving abroad would be the preferred solution for their household. This was echoed in focus group discussions conducted with

Yazidis in Iraq, where participants express various drivers behind their migration, including a desire to find better economic prospects and safety abroad.¹⁰

Home destruction remains the most common reason for not having returned to the place of habitual residence (93%), followed closely by functioning problems of basic infrastructure for water, electricity, health and schools (87%). Around 63 per cent reported a lack of livelihood opportunities in their place of origin and around one third of IDP households reported security concerns (32%) as their main barrier to return.

10 IOM, *Yazidi Displacement and Migration from Iraq: Trends, Drivers, and Vulnerabilities* (Baghdad, 2024).

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS PER CRITERIA AND DOMAIN


This section compares progress for IDP and returnee households across five criteria: (1) safety and security, (2) adequate standard of living, (3) access to livelihoods, (4) restoration of HLP and compensation and (5) documentation and participation. Notably, stayees were not assessed in Sinjar as the entire population had been displaced. Consequently, a comparative analysis of progress among IDPs, returnees and stayees was not feasible.

Livelihoods and HLP restoration and compensation are the most challenging domains. With respect to livelihoods, both groups performed poorly. In particular, low shares of IDP households have a stable source of income, while only 18 per cent of returnee households are able to face unexpected expenses of up to 440,000 IQD.

On the other hand, the greatest gap between IDP and returnee households was observed in the HLP restoration and compensation domain. No IDP household reported that they are entitled to compensation mechanisms, such as for property damage, in contrast to 24 per cent of returnee households. Additionally, IDP households appear to be at heightened risk of eviction, a concern less prevalent among returnee households. These findings align with the main obstacles to return, indicating that unresolved HLP issues, including property damage, compensation claims and eviction threats, significantly hinder the ability of displaced populations to return and re-establish their homes and lives in their areas of origin.

IDP and returnee households both achieved better progress when it comes to the standards of living, compared to other domains. Moreover, IDPs and returnees appear to face limited challenges regarding safety and security, since both had a close to the maximum score, with a small gap between the two groups.

Safety and Security

 The safety and security domain considers whether households feel safe, are comfortable getting help from local authorities and are able to move in and out of their location of residence.

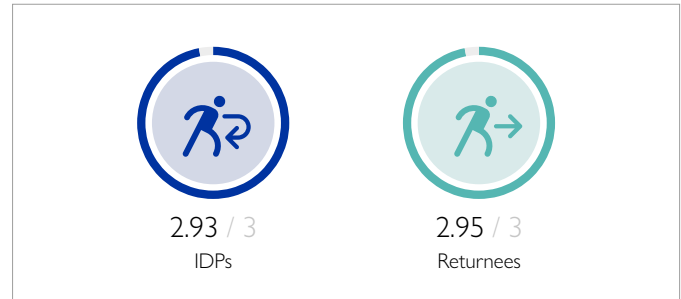
Both IDPs and returnees appear to have achieved a high degree of progress in the safety and security domain. Households report feeling safe in their area, comfortable getting help from authorities and free to move in and out of their area. However, data from the Return Index and Displacement Index indicate that notable security challenges remain, such as concerns over violence from different groups and the presence of multiple, non-state security actors. These findings point to methodological differences between this assessment and the Return and Displacement Indices, as well as complex understandings of safety and security. For example, the household survey emphasizes subjective measures of safety, while the Return and Displacement Indices also incorporates more objective measures, such as the presence of multiple security actors in the area.

While households are likely aware of broader security issues, they may nevertheless feel safe because such issues do not affect them on a personal or daily basis. Moreover, the Return and Displacement Indices stress ‘concerns’ over violence, which may be future-looking and uncertain, whereas the household survey focuses more on current perceptions and experiences. Even if tensions and security risks exist, households may continue to feel safe if such risks do not escalate into violence.


Lastly, community leaders are interviewed for the Return and Displacement Indices, while the household survey samples members of the community. Community leaders and members may have different perceptions of the security situation. On the one hand, leaders may be more aware of risks, as they are

responsible for keeping the collective safe. On the other hand, leaders may be slightly removed from the communities they serve and benefit from enhanced economic status or dedicated security personnel.

Figure 4: The average number of indicators met per safety and security domain

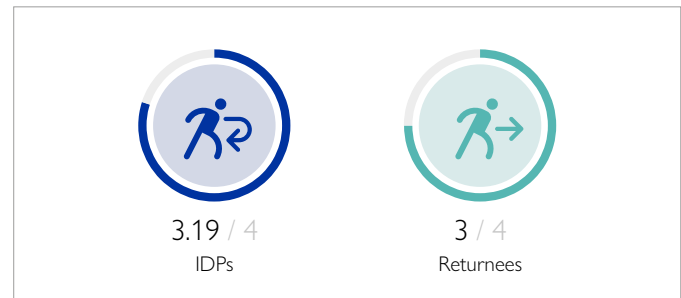


Adequate Standard of Living

 The assessment measured adequate standards of living based on whether households have access to health care if needed or improved sanitation facilities. Additionally, this domain considered whether IDP and returnees’ housing is in good condition. Finally, it examined levels of food security based on households’ scores on the Coping Strategy Index.


IDP and returnee households faced more challenges related to standards of living than safety and security. The most critical indicator was shelter conditions, with 47 per cent of IDP households and 61 per cent of returnee households living in critical shelters.¹¹ On the other hand, the majority of IDP and returnee household were able to access health services and facilities when needed (69% and 71%, respectively).

Figure 5: The average number of indicators met per standard of living domain



Qaeyrrawn subdistrict appears to have the lowest standard of living. All IDP households and most returnee households (87%) reside in housing in poor condition.

Access to Livelihoods

 The livelihoods domain assessed whether at least one member of the household (aged 15–60 years) is employed, whether the household has a stable source of income and whether households are able to face unexpected expenses of up to 440,000 Iraqi dinars.

Employment and economic security appear one of the most critical problems for both groups. Overall, both groups underperformed in this domain. The most critical indicator is the stability of the head of household’s income. In particular,

¹¹ Critical shelters are severely damaged or unsafe dwellings, including damaged apartments or houses, temporary structures like containers or tents, mud or block constructions prone to collapse and unfinished or abandoned buildings. These shelters pose significant risks to occupants and require urgent attention to ensure safety and provide adequate housing.

only a minority of IDP heads of household (17%) have a stable source of income, along with a quarter of returnee heads of household (27%).

These unpredictable incomes in turn affect households' ability to withstand economic shocks. Additionally, only 18 per cent of returnees' head of households are able to face unexpected expenses (of up to 440,000 IQD), compared to a quarter of IDP households (28%).

Figure 6: The average number of indicators met per access to livelihood domain

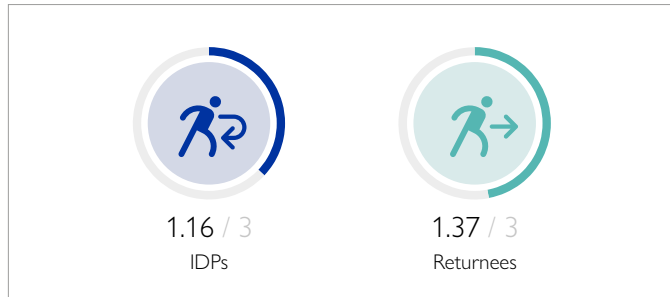
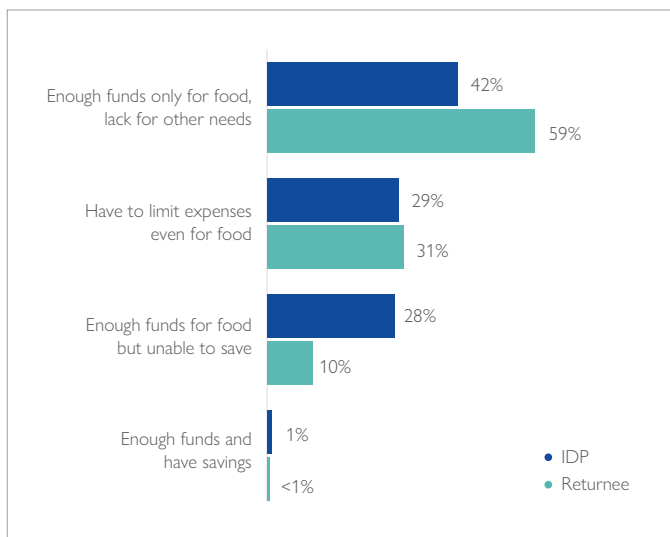


Figure 7: Financial status of IDP and returnee households



A third of IDP (29%) and returnee (31%) households must limit their expenses even for food, while nearly half of both IDP (42%) and returnee (59%) households have enough money for food only.

Given that a significant portion of households are unable to save money, almost all IDPs (98%) that need medical assistance, are unable to pay for medical treatment costs, compared to 90 per cent of returnees. Despite the considerable economic challenges faced by both groups, only a small portion of both IDPs (5%) and returnees (9%) received assistance from the Government or humanitarian organizations or religious groups in the last three months.

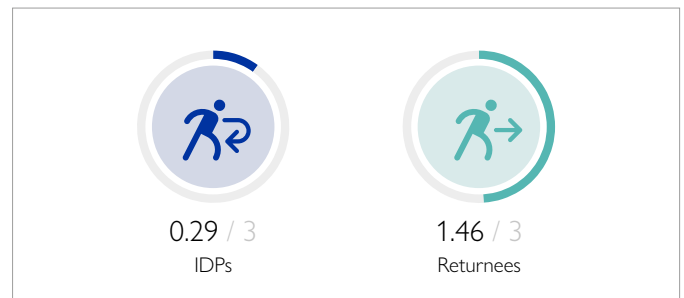
Restoration of HLP And Compensation

With respect to property restoration and compensation, the assessment considered whether households have legally recognized documentation for their housing, whether they are at risk of eviction, whether their property was damaged and whether they have applied for compensation and the claim has been resolved. Additionally, the presence of deceased, imprisoned or missing members was added as a measure of vulnerability.

The greatest difference between IDP and returnee households was in the domain of property restoration and compensation. This gap is largely driven by the elevated share of returnee households (82%) who report that they are not at risk of eviction from their current place of residence, while only 27 per cent of

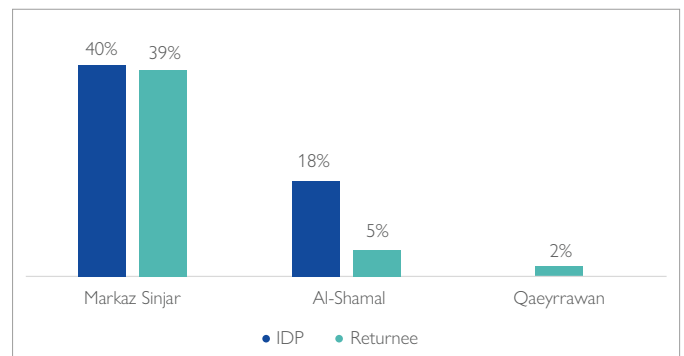
IDP households reported the same. None of DP households reported that they are entitled to compensation mechanisms, including property damage, against 24 per cent of returnee households. In other words, property destruction related to the conflict appears to affect a greater share of IDP and returnee households. Additionally, only 3 per cent of IDP households declared having legally recognized documentation for their lands and properties.

Figure 8: The average number of indicators met per restoration of HLP and compensation domain



Given the widespread challenges related to HLP restoration and compensation, low progress scores were reported across all subdistricts, including Al-Shamal, Markaz Sinjar and Qaeyrrawan. Among IDP households, the lowest average scores were reported in Qaeyrrawan, Markaz Sinjar and Al-Shamal, respectively. For returnee households, the least progress was attained in Al-Shamal, Markaz Sinjar and Qaeyrrawan, respectively. These findings demonstrate the importance of programmatic interventions related to HLP across the district.

Figure 9: IDP and returnee households reporting property damage (vehicles, farming land, furniture, shops and companies)



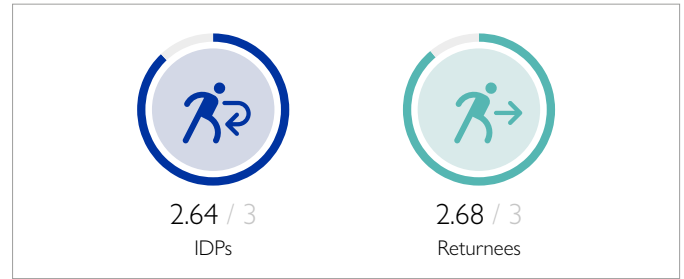
Documentation and Participation

With respect to personal documentation, households were asked whether all members of their household have essential personal documentation, that is, a national or unified ID, Iraqi nationality and a birth certificate. Additionally, regarding participation in public affairs, the assessment considered whether all eligible members of the household voted in the 2021 parliamentary elections. Households were also asked to evaluate the extent to which they felt accepted by the community.

In contrast to HLP and livelihoods, personal documentation and participation in public affairs was one of the strongest performing criteria, both in terms of average score per group as well as the gap between IDP and returnee households. Overall, most of IDPs and returnees met all three documentation and participation criteria. In rare instances where households did not meet all three indicators, most tended to meet at least two out of three indicators. Among the three forms of documentation considered, households were the least likely to possess their National IDs, as reported by 66 per cent of IDP households and 69 per cent of returnee households.

Households in Al-Shamal subdistrict had the lowest shares possessing National IDs, as indicated by one third of IDP households (36%) and half (50%) of returnee households. The majority of these respondents attempted to obtain documentation (98%), but some noted that it was too expensive (27%). In addition to issues obtaining documents, 15 per cent of respondents in Al-Shamal (25% of IDPs and 13% of returnees) reported facing consequences for not having documents, mostly being unable to access services (14%), education (4%) or facing security issues (1%).

Figure 10: The average number of indicators met per personal documentation and participation domain



PROGRESS TOWARDS DURABLE SOLUTIONS

Households were rated according to the number of criteria met. Those who met only one criterion or none are categorized as low progress, while those who met two or three criteria are classified as medium progress and those who met four or all five criteria as high progress.

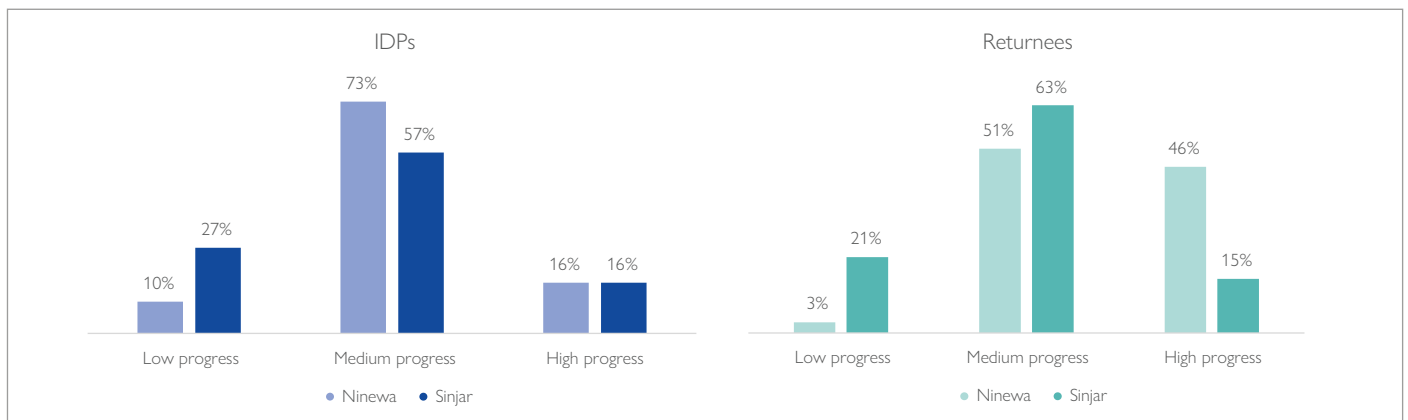
households. Roughly a quarter (27%) of IDP households fall into the low progress category, a slightly larger share than among returnee households (21%). The largest share of IDP and returnee households achieved medium progress (57% and 63%, respectively). Comparable shares of IDP and returnee households were categorized as high progress (16% and 15%, respectively).

Returnee household in Sinjar have achieved relatively similar progress to IDP

Table 1: Number and percentage of households by criteria met and progress group in Sinjar

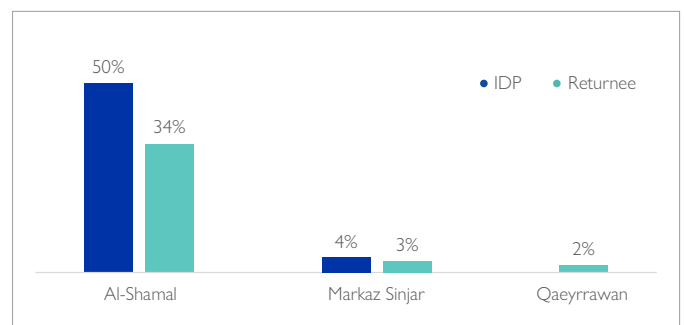
		Number of criteria met						Total
		Low progress		Medium progress		High progress		
		0	1	2	3	4	5	
IDPs	# of households	40	1,574	1,996	1,469	954	0	6,033
	% of households	1%	26%	33%	24%	16%	0%	100%
Returnees	# of households	0	4,307	7,119	5,664	2,877	198	20,166
	% of households	0%	21%	35%	28%	14%	1%	100%

Figure 11: Percentage of households by progress group in Ninewa and Sinjar



Overall, less progress was achieved in Sinjar compared to the rest of the governorate. In particular, a greater share of IDP households attained medium progress at the governorate level compared to Sinjar District (73% vs. 57%, respectively), where more households are categorized as low progress (27%). The percentages of IDP households in the high progress category are similar in Sinjar and Ninewa (16% for each).

Figure 12: IDP and returnee households in the low progress group per subdistrict



Likewise, returnee households in Sinjar made less progress than those across the governorate. Around one fifth (21%) of returnee households in Sinjar fell in the low progress category, compared to only 3 per cent of such households within Ninewa overall. By contrast, just under half (46%) of returnee households in Ninewa achieved high progress, against only 15 per cent of those in Sinjar.

KEY FACTORS LINKED TO PROGRESS

This section presents an overview of the main characteristics of IDP and returnee households by their level of progress towards solutions. While all 16 indicators were analysed only those indicators where differences across progress groups are most prominent are presented in this section. This includes household size, employment status, legal documentation, educational levels, shelter quality, healthcare access and displacement history.

Overall, low progress IDPs were more likely to lack ID, have a HoH with limited education, struggle to access health care, rely on an informal housing agreement, reside in a critical shelter and have experienced a failed attempt at return. Low progress returnee households shared similar characteristics, such a lack of ID, critical shelter conditions, lower levels of education, a lack of ownership documents for housing and difficulties accessing health care.

Nearly all IDP and returnee households who lack ID fell in the low progress group. This suggests that barriers to personal documentation are a distinct challenge among the most vulnerable households.

Educational attainment is also linked to progress levels, as it affects access to livelihoods and thus overall socioeconomic status. In more than four in five low progress IDP households (91%), the HoH did not receive any education or did not complete elementary school.

With respect to housing, a large share of low progress returnee households (90%) resides in critical shelters. Inadequate shelter conditions can have wide ranging consequences for progress toward durable solutions, from safety to health and even to employment opportunities. Moreover, among returnee households, two thirds (66%) of those in the low progress group owned housing without document. This lack of documentation may create challenges when accessing services or seeking compensation for damaged property. Among IDP households, more than three quarters of those in the low progress group relied on an informal housing arrangement or lived for free. In these cases, a lack of formal housing agreement may increase housing precarity and the risk of eviction.

Low progress households were also less likely to be able to access medical treatment when needed. This may reflect not only whether basic services are provided but also the quality of care, access to facilities and costs for treatment. This last barrier, in return, may be an indirect measure of the financial wellbeing of households.

Lastly, a greater share of low progress IDP households reported experiences of failed return – that is, attempting to return to their area of origin, only to re-displace again. Failed returns may reflect unsatisfactory conditions in both the location of origin and displacement, causing households to shift between locations. On the other hand, progress itself may influence the intentions of IDP households, causing some to return before conditions in the area of origin are suitable.

Figure 13: Key factors linked to progress for IDPs and returnees in Sinjar



PROGRESS TOWARD DURABLE SOLUTIONS IN IRAQ: SINJAR DISTRICT

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