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IRC Protection Needs Overview: Monitoring and Trends

October 2024 – March 2025

IRAQ



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Abbreviations

AoO	Area of Origin
DTM	Displacement Tracking Matrix (IOM)
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
HLP	Housing, Land, and Property
ID	Identification Document
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
PDS	Public Distribution System
PRoL	Protection and Rule of Law
PWDs	Persons with Disabilities
Q1	Quarter One (January–March)
Q4	Quarter Four (October–December)
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
VAWG	Violence Against Women and Girls

Introduction

Since 2003, the International Rescue Committee (IRC) has provided humanitarian assistance to communities affected by conflict in Iraq. The IRC currently delivers multi-sectoral interventions to support internally displaced people (IDPs), returnees, host communities, and refugees. The IRC's Protection and Rule of Law (PRoL) programming works to safeguard the human rights and well-being of Iraqis, as well as refugees from surrounding countries, in Anbar, Kirkuk, Ninewa, Diyala, and Salah al-Din provinces. This comprehensive approach includes protection monitoring, cash for protection, legal awareness training and support, and building awareness and responses to the unique protection needs of vulnerable groups including women and girls, IDPs, minorities, children, and persons with disabilities (PWDs). By adopting this holistic approach, we aim to address the multifaceted challenges faced by communities and promote their resilience and empowerment. The IRC works in close collaboration with the Iraqi legislature, key ministries, and justice sector stakeholders and provides support for people-centered institutional system strengthening. The IRC also engages with the Iraqi High Commission on Human Rights and the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs (MOLSA) and provides support for strengthening state-led protection mechanisms.

The IRC Iraq's protection team conducts regular monitoring in IRC's areas of operation to ensure the needs of families and individuals are being registered and that our programming is responsive to emerging trends in protection. These initiatives are instrumental in ensuring that the evolving needs of families and individuals are accurately identified and promptly addressed. This report provides an overview of the data collected through protection monitoring in 2024 quarter four (Q4) [October-December 2024] and 2025 quarter one (Q1) [January-March 2025] in Anbar, Kirkuk and Ninewa. These findings contribute to programming and inform our advocacy at the national and governorate levels, as well as with key protection stakeholders and international actors. The IRC is committed to working hand in hand with communities, local authorities, and partners to ensure the well-being and dignity of all those affected by conflict, as we strive towards a more secure and resilient future for Iraq.

Background

Since the end of the conflict with the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) in 2017, Iraq has been navigating a complex transition from humanitarian response to recovery and stabilization. Despite this shift, the country continues to face interlinked challenges that constrain sustainable reintegration and long-term development.

As of December 2024, data from the International Organization for Migration's (IOM) Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) indicates that approximately 1.03 million individuals remain internally displaced across Iraq. This reflects a slight decline from previous months, suggesting continued but gradual return movements. Simultaneously, nearly 4.93 million individuals are recorded as having returned, primarily to Ninewa and Salah al-Din governorates.[1] However, many returnees face significant reintegration challenges, including damaged infrastructure, limited access to essential services, and unresolved property disputes. The closure of formal camps, especially in the Kurdistan Region, has contributed to the secondary displacement of thousands of families, now residing in informal settlements, peri-urban zones, and underserved rural areas. By the end of 2024, 9,581 families had

[1] IOM DTM Data – Iraq.

exited camps; of these, 17% did not return to their original areas of residence, and are now considered secondarily displaced, relocated, or locally integrated in other areas.[2]

Protection concerns remain critical. IDPs and returnees, particularly women, children, PWDs, and individuals perceived to be affiliated with armed groups, face increased risks of exploitation, violence, and social stigma. Lack of civil documentation further limits access to education, employment, and legal services. Reintegration is often complicated by housing destruction, documentation barriers, and gaps in education and health services. High levels of youth unemployment and intercommunal tensions, particularly in areas with unresolved tribal or sectarian disputes, continue to affect social cohesion. Returnees perceived to be affiliated with armed actors may experience social rejection and risks of harassment, which can hinder reintegration efforts. Likewise, IDPs considering return frequently report challenges in accessing housing, land and property (HLP) rights, civil documentation, and public services. The relocation or integration of displaced populations into non-camp areas has placed pressure on vulnerable host communities and contributed to local-level strains.

Economic instability remains a key factor in displacement dynamics. Limited livelihood opportunities, particularly in return areas, along with reductions in international aid and ongoing political uncertainty, exacerbate vulnerability and undermine recovery. Climate change is also becoming a major driver of displacement. As of December 2024, approximately 170,274 individuals (28,379 families) remain displaced due to environmental factors, including drought, water scarcity, and land degradation, particularly in central and southern Iraq. These pressures disrupt agricultural livelihoods, increase food insecurity, and lead to migration in search of more viable living conditions.[3]

Amid this evolving context, the IRC remains committed to delivering essential protection services, legal aid, and humanitarian support. 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.

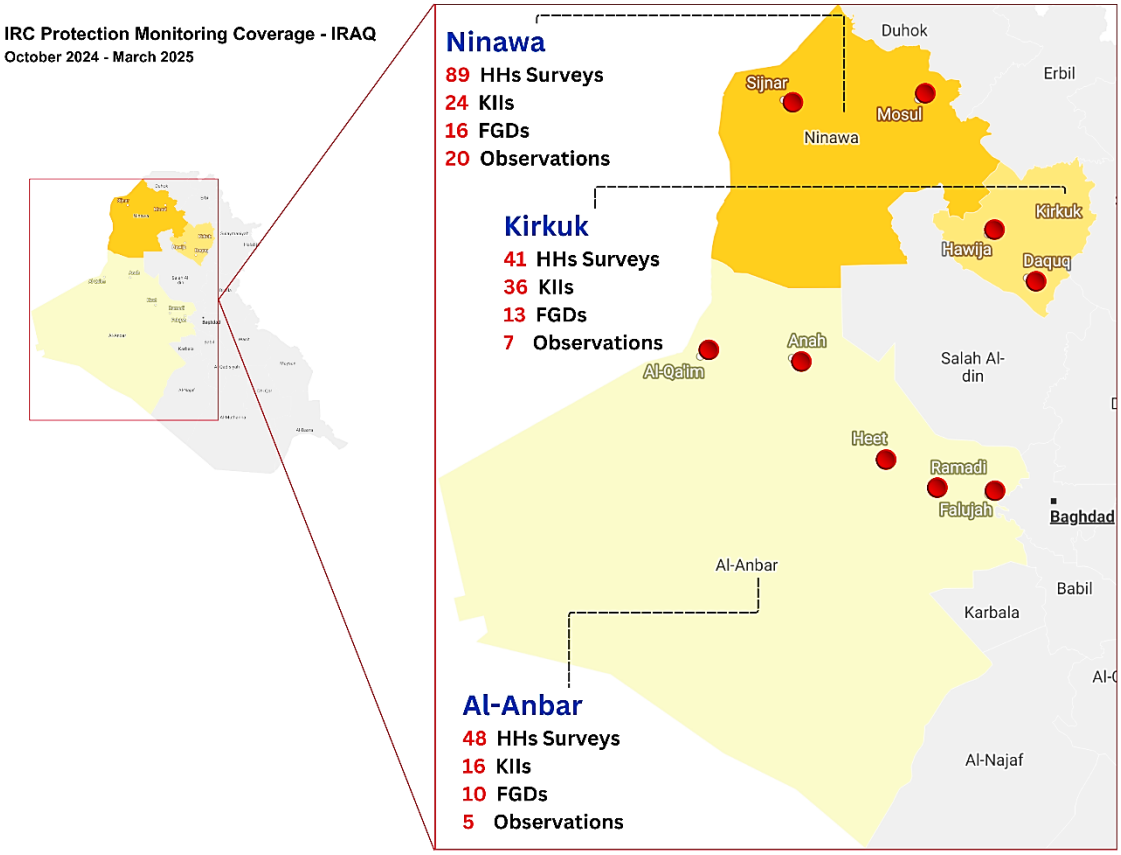
Methodology

The IRC's protection monitoring assessments from October 2024 to March 2025 in Iraq were conducted using a mixed approach and serve as a follow-on to the needs assessment (from April - September 2024). The data collection methods employed during this period included key informant interviews (KIIs), household-level surveys (HH Survey), focus group discussions (FGDs), and direct observation assessments. These methodologies aimed to gather comprehensive information on the protection needs and risks faced by IDPs, returnees, host communities, asylum-seekers, and refugees in 9 locations across the Anbar, Ninewa, and Kirkuk governorates.

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

[2] Movement of IDP Camps, IOM DTM, Dec 2024
[3] CLIMATE-INDUCED DISPLACEMENT – CENTRAL AND SOUTHERN IRAQ, IOM DTM, Dec 2024

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.



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	Q4 2024			Q1 2025			Grand Total
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	
HH Survey	48	73	121	13	44	57	178
KII	33	15	48	21	7	28	76
FGD	52	164	216 (25 groups)	20	115	135 (14 groups)	351 (39 groups)

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

Key Findings

During the reporting period, the IRC identified multiple contributing factors within the protection and rights landscape that lead to challenges experienced by individuals in IDP, returnee, and host community groups. These challenges encompassed a spectrum of issues, ranging from inadequate access to essential services such as healthcare, shelter, and educational support, to a lack of awareness regarding the requisite legal processes for obtaining civil documentation and other essential credentials. This was particularly apparent during this reporting period, with many services halted due to the United States Government's Stop Work Orders before a gradual resumption of specific activities with a life-saving nature.

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

October – December 2024

Basic Needs

- **84%** reported encountering challenges in obtaining basic services, with a high rate for households reporting challenges to access basic needs in **Qaim** and **Mosul** districts (**97%** and **96%**). The main impediment to accessing these services was the **cost of services (91%).**
- **Livelihood support** was the most reported priority need at (**82%**). Other frequently reported priority needs included **legal assistance** at (**52%**), **Non-Food Items (NFIs)** at (**51%**), and **HLP compensation** at (**36%**).

January – March 2025

Basic Needs

- Compared with Q2, there was a significant **increase** in the percentage of households reporting challenges in accessing basic services at **94%** (**+10%**). However, the issue of **high costs** as a barrier slightly **increased (92%)**, suggesting that the financial burden has remained the top barrier for the affected families.
- **Livelihood support** remained the **top priority need** in both quarters but saw an **increase** (from **82%** to **92%**). NFIs compensation emerged as a **significant priority** at (**66%**), and Legal assistance saw a **slight increase** (from **52%** to **53%**), while healthcare needs came up with (**49%**), highlighting evolving community needs.

SELF-REPORTED PRIORITY NEED (Q4 2024+Q1 2025)	IDPs	Returnees	Host Communities
Livelihoods	86%	85%	92%
Legal assistance	59%	57%	38%
NFIs	56%	56%	41%
healthcare	39%	42%	22%
Housing	38%	34%	36%
Protection services (Men, women, Children)	33%	26%	30%
Education	27%	15%	12%
Food	26%	24%	4%
Water & Hygiene	18%	22%	4%

Table 2: Self-reported priority needs by displacement – note that the table includes cumulative data from Q4 2014 and Q1 2025

Displacement and Returns

- In the assessed locations, **89%** 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 **89%**), **unaffordable rental costs** (up to **79%**), and **poor access to basic services** (up to **74%**).
- **81%** of returnee households in the sample noted feeling accepted by their communities following return. Only 5% reported facing **issues with host community members**, most commonly related to financial hardship and limited housing options. Some households reported returning to damaged or uninhabitable shelters.
- Among IDPs, the most frequently cited barriers to return included **lack of income resources** (**84%**), **shelter** (**79%**), and **access to basic services** (**68%**). **Community tensions** were also reported by **21%** of respondents.
- **11%** of respondents, primarily from **Qaim** district returnee households, reported experiencing or fearing **eviction** within the preceding three months, indicating localized housing insecurity.

Movements at Al-Qai'im

- In **Qaim** District, **57%** of respondents reported observing **unusual population movements**. The most frequently noted groups were **asylum seekers and refugees perceived to be entering Iraq** (**88%**), followed by **foreigners entering the country** (**75%**). Other observed movements included internal displacement, returns of Iraqi nationals, and other unclassified cross-border movement.
- Reported community perceptions identified potential drivers such as **violence or instability in neighboring areas**, including references to **attacks by armed actors**, fear of **violence**, and **military activity**. These perceptions reflect heightened awareness of regional dynamics and do not constitute verified causes of movement.

Displacement and Returns

- By Q1, **access to basic needs** emerged as the most commonly cited motivation for return (89%), followed by **rising rent** (86%) and continued **lack of job opportunities** (86%).
- Perceptions of **community acceptance declined**, with **71%** of returnees reporting feeling accepted, down from **81%** in the previous quarter. However, only **3%** reported direct **issues with host community** members, including **social tensions** and **incidents of harassment**, particularly affecting female returnees. These responses suggest that while overt conflict remains low, individual-level concerns persist.
- Barriers to return remained consistent but appeared **more severe**. All respondents unwilling to return cited **lack of income**, and **90%** reported lack of **services and shelter**. A **notable increase** in concerns over **civil documentation** was reported (**50%**), reflecting a growing legal protection gap for potential returnees.
- The percentage of households facing **eviction threats increased slightly** to **13%**, again concentrated in **Qaim** district, reinforcing ongoing concerns around housing security in some return areas.

Movements at Al-Qai'im

- Reports of **unusual population movements** in **Qaim dropped** to **25%**. **Asylum seekers and refugees remained** the most frequently observed category (**67%**). Equal shares of respondents (**33%**) noted observations of foreigners entering Iraq, internally displaced families, returnees, or unspecified movements.
- While the frequency of reported movements **declined**, respondents cited concerns about the nature of these incidents. Perceived drivers of movement included reports of **regional violence**, **insecurity**, and **possible cross-border tensions**. These reports, while unverified, highlight ongoing anxiety in border communities and the need

Legal Assistance and Social Welfare

- In Q4 2024, **26%** of participants reported that at least one member of their household was **missing key civil documentation**, with the most commonly missing documents being **IDs (unified cards)** (**50%**), **PDS cards** (**22%**), and **Passport** (**17%**).
- Access to legal services was widely reported as a challenge, with **88%** citing **high transportation costs and legal fees as primary barriers**, followed by **a lack of legal awareness** (**65%**), and **limited availability of women-friendly legal services** (**48%**).
- **86%** of respondents identified **personal status and family law** as their most pressing legal need, while **82%** pointed to **HLP** and war compensations, and **64%** emphasized **ID and civil documentation services**.
- Regarding social assistance, **52%** of households stated **no one in the family was registered** with MoMD/MoLSA. Reasons for non-registration included **pending cases** (**40%**), **lack of information about procedures** (**33%**), and **rejection of applications** (**24%**).

Heightened Vulnerabilities

- In Q4 2024, **19%** of respondents perceived the security situation in their communities as **unsafe**. Most of these reports came from returnee areas in **Qaim** (Anbar) and **Daquq** (Kirkuk). Participants most frequently attributed their concerns to the **presence of armed actors** (**68%**), **inter-community tensions** (**64%**), risks of **VAWG**, **child abuse or exploitation** (**48%**), **high crime** (**28%**), and **harassment** (**24%**).
- **47%** of respondents indicated **awareness of children under 18 engaged in labor** within their communities. Common types of labor included **daily labor** (**80%**), **construction** (**43%**), **work in small shops** (**41%**), and **street begging** (**39%**). These trends for continued monitoring and support in high-risk areas like Qaim.

Legal Assistance and Social Welfare

- In Q1 2025, the percentage of households with at least one member **missing key civil documents** slightly **increased** to **28%**. The nature of missing documents also shifted, with **civil IDs rising significantly** to (**56%**), while other documents like **PDS cards** and **housing cards** remained steady at **22%**.
- While financial barriers such as the inability to cover **legal fees** (**86%**) and **transportation costs** (**79%**) **remained the dominant challenges**, there was a **notable increase** in reports of **unreliable legal service providers within communities**. Other barriers, including **lack of legal knowledge** and **women-friendly** services, remained consistently high.
- Legal service needs in Q1 2025 showed a **growing demand** for personal status and family law services (**rising** from **86%** to **92%**), which remained the top need. **HLP and war compensations** saw a **slight drop** to **75%**, while needs for **ID and civil documentation** remained consistent at **63%**. Meanwhile, legal protection needs such as actions against discrimination, detention, and grave human rights abuses saw fluctuating but lower levels of prioritization.
- Registration with MoMD/MoLSA remained limited in Q1 2025. The rate of non-registration decreased to **30%**. Leading reasons for non-registration shifted slightly, with inability to afford **legal/transport fees** and **pending registration** cases both reported by **35%**, while **lack of information** dropped to **12%**.

Heightened Vulnerabilities

- Perceptions of **insecurity increased slightly**, with **24%** of respondents reporting feeling **unsafe**. This perception was localized to **Qaim** and **Daquq**, with contributing concerns including the **perceived presence of armed groups** (**89%**) and continued **community tensions** (**67%**). Concerns about **VAWG** and **child**

reflect the impact of economic stressors on households and point to informal work being used as a coping mechanism.

- **74%** of participants identified **barriers to school attendance** among school-aged children. Key issues included **early marriage expectations** (**54%**), especially affecting girls, **financial hardship** (**52%**), and **lack of civil documentation** (**29%**). Other noted factors included concerns about **school accessibility and safety** (**21%**), **damaged infrastructure** (**15%**), and **child labor** (**22%**). Additional challenges cited by respondents involved limited female teaching staff, restrictive social norms, and the absence of inclusive educational materials, which collectively contribute to disparities in girls' education.

Impact of Climate Change

- In Q4 2024, **65%** of respondents reported **experiencing direct impacts from climate change** or natural disasters. These impacts were described as spanning environmental, economic, and psychosocial dimensions. The most cited effect was the **loss of livelihoods** (**87%**), with respondents linking this to drought, erratic rainfall, or other weather-related disruptions, particularly for agriculture and informal labor. **Psychological effects** were also noted, with **32%** of respondents reporting **increased stress and anxiety**, reflecting the mental health strain of prolonged environmental challenges. Other concerns included **reduced water quality**, **insufficient irrigation**, and, in some cases, **injuries or fatalities**.
- **19%** of respondents who experienced climate-related impacts also reported **displacement,** and **6%** mentioned **migration**. While not necessarily permanent or large-scale, this suggests climate stressors are contributing to mobility for some affected households.
- Additionally, **63%** of participants said they were aware of individuals in their **abuse declined modestly** (**44%**), while **anxiety about harassment rose** to **33%**, reflecting ongoing civilian protection concerns.
- Awareness of **child labor declined marginally** to **45%**. Among respondents who were aware of such practices, reports indicated broader types of engagement: all mentioned children involved in **daily labor**, **construction**, or **shop work**. Reports of **street begging increased**, and **domestic labor** was also mentioned more frequently, indicating intensified household reliance on child labor.
- **Educational barriers** were reported by **82%** of respondents in Q1 2025, suggesting growing recognition or deteriorating access. **Early marriage** (**49%**), **financial constraints** (**44%**), and **lack of documentation** (**31%**) remained the **most cited barriers**. Although **general safety concerns declined** to **12%**, other structural issues increased, Including limited availability of inclusive curricula and female teachers, as well as entrenched family preferences for boys' education. These findings suggest a shift from general security fears toward broader systemic issues and disparities in educational access between boys and girls.

Impact of Climate Change

- In Q1 2025, **57%** of respondents reported being **directly affected by climate-related challenges**. This **slight decrease** may reflect seasonal variation or a short-term reduction in observable incidents, but still indicates persistent vulnerability. A shift in reported impacts was noted: **psychosocial stress and anxiety** became the most cited consequence (**67%**, up from **32%** in Q4), highlighting a growing mental health burden amid long-term uncertainty. Reports of **livelihood loss decreased** to **58%**, potentially reflecting limited economic recovery in some locations. Meanwhile, concern over **water quality increased significantly** to **42%** (up from 19%), possibly due to worsening drought,

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**.

pollution, or reduced access to safe drinking water.

- **Climate-induced displacement** was reported by **16%** of respondents, **slightly lower** than Q4 but still notable, while **migration increased slightly** to **8%**.
- Awareness of **potential relocation** due to **climate concerns dropped** to **46%** This could suggest a reduction in perceived immediate pressure, changing local conditions, or underreporting, though the concern remains a key issue raised across locations.

In Focus: Barriers to Basic Services

Across conflict-affected and returnee areas, communities continue to face serious challenges in accessing essential services. In the locations assessed, 86% of households reported difficulties in obtaining basic services. These challenges stem from a combination of infrastructure damage, administrative hurdles, financial barriers, and social discrimination. Key reported drivers included under-functioning public facilities, security-related movement procedures, lack of civil documentation, and the stigmatization of certain vulnerable groups, including female-headed households and families perceived as having security-related affiliations.

Survey data indicated that 24% of respondents experienced movement restrictions, often due to documentation issues, security procedures, or perceived community-level discrimination, particularly affecting women. Some residents also reported fears associated with traveling to health or education facilities, especially in rural areas, citing both cost and safety concerns. Even where services technically exist, physical access is often difficult due to distance, biased allocation of treatment, or social barriers. Respondents from newly returned areas and informal sites reported significant service gaps, including the absence of functioning schools, clinics, and sanitation infrastructure. These challenges are further compounded in areas with limited government presence and inconsistent humanitarian access.

"Most families returning from Al-Hol camp face difficulties accessing services as they live in remote villages far from the district center, struggling to reach water, healthcare, municipal, and electricity services."
FGD: Anbar, Rummanah

Threat's Effects on the Population

The effects of these service barriers vary across demographics. Women and girls reported disproportionate impacts due to mobility limitations, gaps in reproductive health services, and exposure to risks when accessing public spaces. Female-headed households faced additional economic and cultural challenges in reaching or navigating available services. Children, particularly girls, were often unable to attend school due to lack of documentation, insecurity, or social norms. In contrast, boys were more likely to be withdrawn from education to work and support household income. PWDs encountered both physical infrastructure barriers and attitudinal discrimination, limiting

their access to even the most basic services. As a result, many individuals resorted to informal or unsustainable alternatives, which often excluded the most vulnerable.

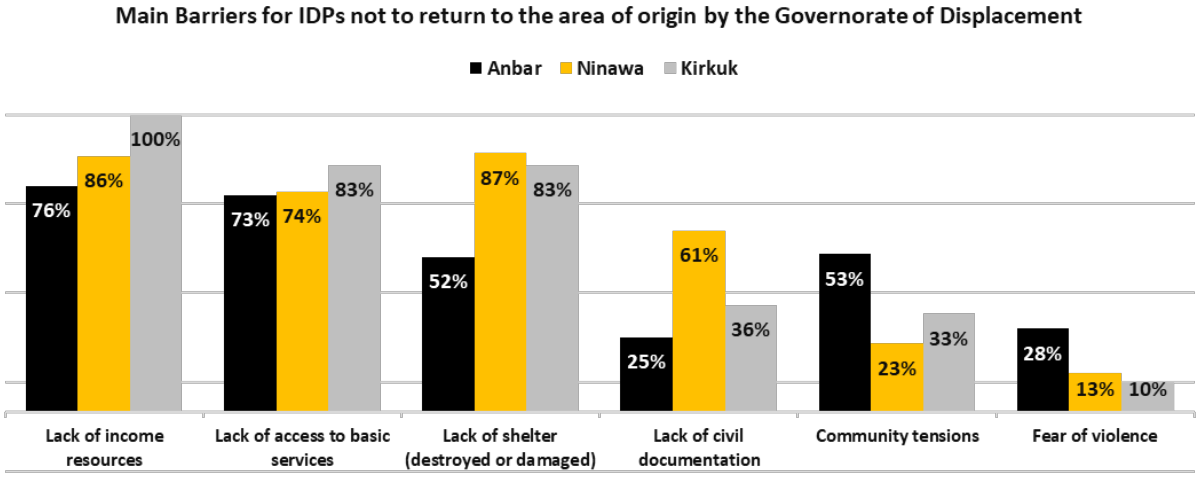
Existing Capacities to Address Protection Threats

Communities have developed informal coping mechanisms to manage access to services. These include relying on tribal or community leaders for advocacy, pooling money for transportation to distant facilities, or arranging informal education alternatives. However, these methods are highly localized and often exclude marginalized groups. While some NGOs provide legal support, health assistance, or education services, these are typically limited by budget and operational reach. Humanitarian actors have offered mobile legal support and facilitated service referrals, but these efforts remain limited in scale and sustainability. Over the past six months, no significant expansion in government-led service provision was reported in the assessed areas. Monitoring data underscores the lack of formal protection referral systems, safe spaces, or coordinated outreach mechanisms, leaving many vulnerable individuals without adequate support.

In Focus: Obstacles to Return and Sustainable Reintegration

Despite continued return movements across Iraq, multiple challenges continue to undermine the sustainability of reintegration efforts for many returnees. These challenges include perceived insecurity, damaged or inadequate infrastructure, limited access to services, and social reintegration barriers. Participants in the assessed areas reported that returns were often motivated by worsening conditions in displacement settings, such as unaffordable rent or reduced assistance, rather than improvements in AoO. While 89% of returns in the monitored locations were described by respondents as voluntary, many cited economic pressures and service gaps in displacement as the primary drivers for returning. These included unaffordable living conditions, lack of job opportunities, and limited access to essential services in their areas of displacement. Conversely, reasons for earlier displacement from places of origin were often tied to insecurity, destruction of homes, or lack of access to income and services.

Among IDPs who reported not being willing or able to return, common barriers included lack of income-generating opportunities, inadequate shelter, limited access to services, and a lack of civil documentation, a challenge that appeared to grow in prominence during the reporting period.



Data from the Al-Hol Protection Working Group shared with the Protection and Rule of Law IRC team shows a reduction of some services, including no longer providing trucks for shipping the returnees' belongings. Each household is allowed to carry only two bags at maximum. This has been triggered by a case of child smuggling, but also because of the full package of assistance provided to arrivals at the Al Amal Center in Iraq.

The reparations from Al-Hol to Al Amal Center continued throughout this reporting period. the compiled data shows that 8 repatriation trips were organized in 2025 making the total number of Iraqi returnees 3927 HHs 15,175 individuals. While the remaining Iraqis in the Camp total to 3,474 HHs / 11,876 individuals. some families show reluctance to join the trips because of the fear of arrest by the Iraqi authorities upon arrival. For example, on January 30th, 33 families scheduled to be repatriated to Iraq didn't show up, which makes up for 40% of the families assigned on the final list of that reparation day.

In February, the General Amnesty Law came into effect following an amendment to the Iraqi 2016 law. the law is controversial. however, it has resulted in the release of hundreds of people daily in the last few months, according to the Iraqi Justice Minister.

Threat's Effects on the Population

Although 78% of returnee households in the assessed areas reported feeling accepted by their communities, FGDs revealed that others expressed concerns around social rejection, fear, or distrust upon returning. Participants noted that certain groups, such as female-headed households and returnees from specific camp settings, were perceived as facing heightened barriers, especially in accessing education or registering children in civil systems.

> *Key Informant in Anbar Stated, "Women returning from the camp are harassed by the host community because one of their family members was affiliated with armed groups."*

Lack of documentation was frequently cited as a key obstacle affecting access to public services, including healthcare, education, and legal procedures. Observations from IRC field staff also noted that many return locations continue to suffer from damaged housing, limited humanitarian assistance, and gaps in infrastructure such as schools, clinics, and water supply systems.

Existing Capacities to Address Protection Threats

Some community-led efforts exist to support returnees, often through informal networks or local leaders. However, these efforts were reported to be fragmented, and in some cases, perceived as exclusionary. Tribal or religious leaders were said to provide temporary shelter support in some cases, but more sustainable reintegration is often limited by weak institutional presence and inadequate public investment.

Returnees in the assessed areas were reportedly hesitant to raise protection concerns or engage in local decision-making, often due to concerns about stigma or retaliation. Formal humanitarian support remains limited in many return sites. While some organizations offer legal aid, basic NFI distributions, or mobile protection services, the absence of comprehensive referral pathways, complaint mechanisms, and sustained government engagement was commonly noted.

In key return areas, informal sites, and IDP-hosting locations, protection responses by international organizations and NGOs significantly decreased following the suspension of USG funding. This has led to reduced availability of mobile protection services, legal aid, and case management, particularly in high-return districts such as Sinjar. The number of referrals has also declined, with many cases that were previously directed to protection actors now reportedly left to navigate risks without adequate support.

In Focus: Intentions for Migration

Monitoring assessments during the reporting period reveal a growing intention among populations in the assessed areas to migrate abroad in search of safety, stability, and opportunities that remain limited within Iraq. The monitoring data confirm that communities, particularly those in displacement-affected and climate change-affected areas, are increasingly considering outward migration as a coping strategy. Potential emigrants originate from both northern and southern Iraq; however, a larger share of climate-affected migration flows comes from the south compared to areas less impacted by climate change. At the same time, the significant number of departures from Sinjar District in Ninewa suggests that conflict-related challenges are compounding long-standing political and security issues.

The preferred destinations for Iraqi migrants vary based on individual circumstances and aspirations. Common destinations include neighboring countries, Europe, and North America. The choice of destinations is often influenced by factors such as existing diaspora communities, perceived opportunities, and ease of access. In 2024, approximately 150,000 Iraqis applied for asylum in European countries, and approximately 12,000 Iraqis applied for migration to the United States.[4] This includes applications for various types of visas, including family reunification, employment-based visas, and humanitarian programs.

The decision to consider migration appears to be driven by a combination of protection risks, limited livelihood opportunities, challenges in accessing durable solutions, and perceptions of environmental and governance-related hardships. These findings align with broader observations by organizations such as IOM and UNHCR, which have reported increased migration pressures among vulnerable populations in Iraq.

As of March 2025, the Government of Iraq, in collaboration with ICMPD and under the leadership of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, operates Migrant Resource Centres to address rising migration pressures by providing counseling, reintegration support, and awareness on safe migration pathways. These centres have become key access points for vulnerable individuals seeking alternatives to irregular migration.

Key Drivers of Reported Migration Intentions:

Protection Risks and Protracted Displacement

Iraq continues to host over 1 million IDPs, many of whom have remained in displacement for extended periods. Respondents reported a range of protection concerns, including lack of civil documentation,

[4] World Migration Report 2024, IOM 2024

risk of eviction, and perceived discrimination, that contribute to a sense of insecurity. For some, these factors were cited as reasons for considering relocation abroad.

Barriers to Durable Solutions

While the majority of returnee households in monitored areas reported voluntary return, many still face obstacles to reintegration. Challenges such as damaged infrastructure, insecurity, lack of documentation, and limited local integration options were frequently cited. For some, the perception that sustainable solutions are out of reach contributes to interest in pursuing alternatives, including migration.

Livelihood Deprivation and Economic Push Factors

Across all surveyed populations, livelihood support was the most commonly reported priority need (92%). High youth unemployment, especially in areas with declining agricultural activity, was frequently raised. In this context, some participants, particularly younger men, described irregular migration as a potential strategy to support their families.

Climate Change and Environmental Displacement

Among households reporting direct impacts from climate shocks (e.g., drought, water scarcity), many described increasing strain on income sources, especially in farming communities, while 7% reported migration as a direct impact from climate change. In total, 46% of respondents were aware of people in their communities who were considering relocation due to climate concerns. While not all are related to international migration, these trends illustrate the role of environmental change in influencing mobility decisions.

Sociopolitical Drivers

Respondents also referenced low trust in institutions, dissatisfaction with available services, and concerns about unresolved legal and security issues as contributing to a broader sense of instability. These perceptions were linked to migration considerations among some respondents, particularly where long-standing grievances remain unresolved.

Migration and Protection Implications

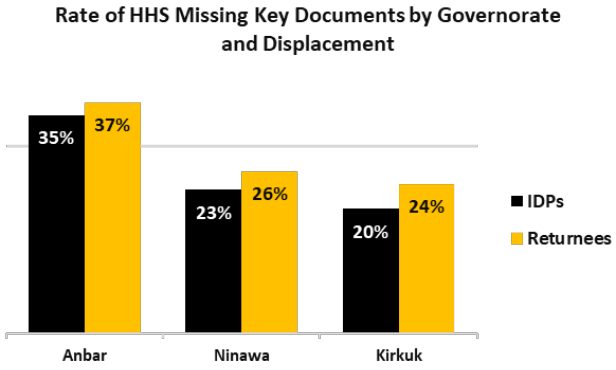
While not a central focus of the IRC's programming, migration-related concerns were frequently cited during protection assessments. For some, the idea of migrating abroad, often through irregular means, was linked to a perception of escaping hardship. Respondents also raised concerns about the risks associated with such journeys, particularly for women, children, PWDs, and other marginalized individuals. These include the potential for exploitation, abuse, or lack of legal protections.

These findings highlight the importance of addressing root causes of displacement and vulnerability, improving access to services and legal support, and ensuring inclusive protection programming that responds to the needs of individuals considering onward movement.

In Focus: Civil Documentation and Legal Barriers

A significant number of households in assessed conflict-affected areas continue to report challenges in obtaining, renewing, or replacing essential civil documentation. In the current reporting period, 27%

of households indicated that at least one member lacked a key civil document, most commonly the unified ID card, housing card, or PDS card. These challenges have persisted at similar levels to the previous monitoring cycle, though increased legal outreach and referrals may have contributed to higher case visibility in some locations. West Anbar, South Kirkuk, and informal settlements in Ninewa were frequently cited as areas where documentation barriers were most acute, often attributed by respondents to limited civil affairs infrastructure and service availability in rural or high-return contexts.



The civil documentation gap can restrict access to public services, legal entitlements, and humanitarian assistance. Reported contributing factors included the long-term effects of conflict on civil registry offices (especially in areas previously under control of armed actors), complex administrative requirements for returnees, limited outreach capacity by the Directorate of Civil Affairs (Ministry of Interior), and prevailing social norms. For example, cultural practices that assign documentation responsibilities primarily to male heads of household may leave women and children particularly vulnerable in the absence of those male figures. While efforts have been made by national institutions, respondents in assessed areas reported that the restoration of registry offices and deployment of mobile services remains limited, especially in more remote or underserved locations.

Threat's Effects on the Population

The effects of missing documentation vary across population groups. Respondents noted that returnees without identification often faced difficulties reclaiming property or accessing support programs. Female-headed households were said to face barriers in registering children or navigating legal systems. Children born during displacement, especially those born outside official facilities or in unregistered marriages, were cited as being at risk of documentation gaps. Elderly persons and PWDs were also reported to experience mobility constraints and challenges accessing support services.

Without documentation, individuals may face restricted mobility, exclusion from education or healthcare, and increased vulnerability to protection risks. Some families reported relying on negative coping mechanisms, such as informal work or early marriage, to navigate bureaucratic obstacles. explored in more detail the reasons and effects of early marriage through legal analysis conducted In February and March in the form of FGDs and KIIs with relevant stakeholders. This followed a comprehensive risk prioritization workshop that highlighted early marriage, lack of civil documentation, detention, and HLP rights violations as key priority protection risks.

The legal analysis revealed that economic desperation, social pressure, and gaps in judicial enforcement are key drivers of early marriage—particularly in displacement settings. Findings also highlighted that early marriage increases girls' exposure to domestic violence, legal invisibility, and sexual exploitation, with limited avenues for redress due to systemic bias and weak protective mechanisms.

Existing Capacities to Address Protection Threats

At the community level, residents often turn to informal actors, such as tribal leaders or Mukhtars, to assist with verifying identities or supporting documentation needs. While these systems can be helpful

in the short term, they are not always formally recognized and may not resolve more complex legal barriers.

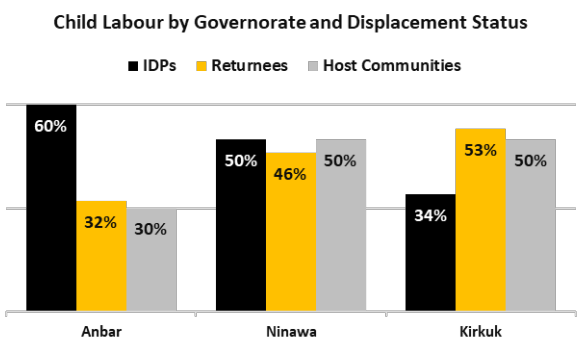
At the institutional level, the Directorate of Civil Affairs remains active in most urban centers, but services in rural, displaced and return areas are reported to be inconsistent. Mobile registration of returnees missions from MoMD and MoI have been deployed in some instances, though respondents noted that these are infrequent and not always available where needs are highest.

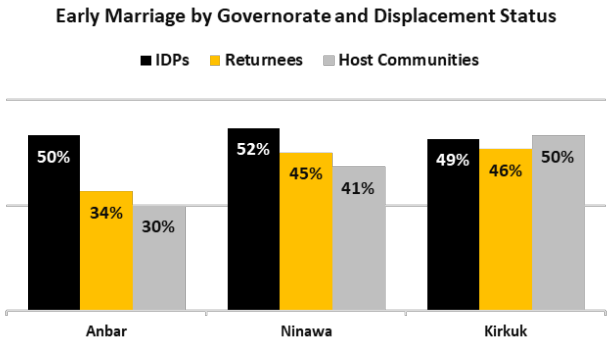
Humanitarian actors, including the IRC, have provided legal assistance through accompaniment services, awareness sessions, referrals, and case management. However, legal teams continue to face obstacles such as high caseloads, security-related access limitations, and funding constraints, especially for mobile or rural outreach. While coordination within the legal aid sector has improved, respondents did not report major expansions in state-led documentation efforts during the period. This ongoing service gap, coupled with increasing needs, continues to present a protection risk, particularly for individuals in underserved or marginalized communities.

In Focus: Insecurity and Violence Affecting Children

Protection monitoring in selected conflict-affected and returnee areas continues to highlight concerns around community-based violence, child protection risks, and unsafe environments, particularly for vulnerable children and adolescents. Participants reported that risks such as domestic violence, inter-communal tensions, and the absence of safe public spaces often affect the daily lives of families, with a disproportionate impact on women and girls.

Child labor was frequently raised in the assessments, with 46% of respondents indicating awareness of children engaged in various forms of labor in markets, agricultural fields, or informal sectors. Participants reported that some children were involved in physically demanding or hazardous tasks, including street vending, scrap collection, domestic work, or informal construction. Early marriage was also highlighted as a recurring concern by participants , particularly among displaced or economically vulnerable families. In the past six months, 44% of respondents across targeted sites reported awareness of early marriage practices. Girls were often cited as being withdrawn from school due to insecurity, lack of female teachers, or social pressure.





Monitoring data also indicated that 35% of school-aged children were either partially attending or not attending school at all. Barriers commonly cited included financial hardship, lack of school supplies,

and the need for children to work during school hours. Respondents noted that child labor during the day often included tasks such as agricultural labor, market sales, and domestic responsibilities.

In over 85% of the locations assessed, IRC staff observed the presence of working children. Additionally, no formal care facilities for unaccompanied or separated children were identified, and safe recreational spaces were notably absent. Several families expressed fears or concerns, and there was a general lack of formal community mechanisms for reporting protection concerns. In both rural and displaced and returnee-heavy areas, the data suggested that children face elevated risks of exploitation and violence.

Threat's Effects on the Population

The consequences of protection threats on children are multi-layered. Boys are more commonly associated with informal labor, while girls were described by participants as being at greater risk of early marriage or restricted movement. Female-headed households, PWDs, and minority families were also cited as facing heightened social and service access barriers. These vulnerabilities contribute to a cycle of stress, educational disruption, and marginalization, both for caregivers and children.

The impact of these risks includes missed educational opportunities, increased emotional distress, and exposure to physical harm. Where protective systems are weak or unavailable, families often resort to negative coping strategies, such as relying on child labor, withdrawing children from school, or arranging early marriage, further compounding the vulnerability of younger household members.

> *"Children are denied school enrollment due to lack of civil documentation. Due to financial hardship, some families can only educate some of their children, while others leave school to work and support their families."*
> *FGD: Ninawa, Mosul*

Existing Capacities to Address Protection Threats

In most assessed locations, community-based responses rely heavily on informal social structures or local leaders. While these systems offer some dispute resolution, they often lack inclusiveness or sensitivity to child protection. Participants frequently expressed reluctance to report violence to law enforcement, citing fear of retaliation or a lack of confidence in response mechanisms. No formal channels for child-specific protection reporting were identified in the majority of visited sites.

Humanitarian actors, including the IRC, continue to provide legal support, case management, and community awareness activities. However, these services are limited in coverage and reach, especially in rural areas where resources remain constrained. Observations revealed significant gaps in available services such as child-friendly spaces, psychosocial support for children, or safe shelters. Protection structures in returnee-dense areas remain weak and under-resourced, while new return movements further stretch existing services. These overlapping gaps, combined with reported social norms that may tolerate violence or child labor, contribute to the persistent and elevated protection risks facing children.

Conclusion

The October 2024 to March 2025 IRC Protection Monitoring Report presents a detailed overview of the persistent and emerging protection risks reported by conflict-affected populations in selected areas of Anbar, Kirkuk, and Ninewa governorates. Based on localized assessments, the findings reflect complex, interrelated challenges faced by IDPs, returnees, and host communities, most notably in relation to access to civil documentation, essential services, livelihoods, and safety, as well as growing environmental stressors linked to climate change.

Although some communities reported progress in reintegration or improved access to services, the protection environment remains fragile. Reports of eviction risks, child labor, and documentation challenges point to increasing vulnerability, particularly among marginalized populations. Participant feedback also reflected a growing sense of uncertainty and consideration of migration among some community members, especially in climate-affected or economically fragile settings.

Systemic service gaps, the limited geographic coverage of humanitarian responses, and the absence of formal referral systems continue to present barriers to durable protection outcomes. Inequalities affecting women and girls, challenges for PWDs, and the evolving impacts of climate-induced displacement underscore the need for holistic and inclusive responses.

The IRC's protection programming, which includes legal aid, case management, psychosocial support, and climate-sensitive interventions, continues to play a key role in addressing urgent and structural protection risks. Moving forward, there is a need for enhanced collaboration with government institutions, humanitarian partners, and communities to strengthen protection systems, invest in community-based and mobile service delivery, and improve access to legal and economic resources.

The IRC remains committed to refining its protection monitoring tools, co-creating locally adapted solutions, and advocating with national and international actors to uphold the rights, safety, and dignity of affected populations while contributing to sustainable recovery and resilience in Iraq.

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