

RETURN INDEX THEMATIC SERIES BRIEFING #3

# RE-DISPLACED: AN EXPLORATION OF DISPLACEMENT AFTER ATTEMPTED RETURN IN IRAQ

FEBRUARY 2020

*The Return Index Thematic Series provides singular analysis and insights on specific indicators, their distribution across conflict-affected areas of Iraq and how they fit within the context in which they are collected.*

## RE-DISPLACEMENT THEMATIC REPORT

Nearly two years after the official end of the conflict with the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), more than 4.5 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) have returned to their places of origin across eight governorates in Iraq. The Return Index measures the severity of physical and social conditions in the locations to which they are returning. This third Thematic Series report focuses on the dynamics and drivers of re-displacement, a type of secondary displacement referring specifically to “IDPs who return to their areas of origin but are unable to achieve sustainable solutions and are consequently displaced again to their first place of displacement or to a new location of displacement.” Despite some gradual improvements of conditions in return areas in Iraq, if local conditions in origin remain severe for a long period of time or undergo a sudden deterioration, returns may not be sustainable. It is in these

contexts that returnee families may face pressures to leave again – in other words, they may re-displace. This report explores which push factors play a role, and to what degree, in making a location more likely to have families re-displacing, through correlating the data on locations with secondary displacement with Return Index indicators on the locations’ physical and social conditions. More specifically, the report presents:

- the context around the decision to displace again after having returned by analysing other global dynamics and trends;
- the number of IDPs in Iraq who have re-displaced after return at governorate and district levels; and
- the overview of drivers of re-displacement in Iraq using the Return Index indicators collected in Round 7 (November - December 2019).

## KEY FINDINGS

- The process of re-displacement frequently includes, first, the decision to attempt return home where conditions are not favourable and unlikely to be sustainable, and second, the decision to leave again given the inability to achieve durable solutions upon return. The analysis of other global case studies helps to explain this type of displacement. Misinformation about the place of origin, involuntary returns, poor and severe conditions upon return, and renewed violence are usually cited as important contextual factors influencing these processes. Similar to other global cases reviewed, many returning families lacked accurate information about the conditions of their home residences or about security gaps and were ultimately displaced again.
- Between March 2018 and December 2019, IOM DTM identified 292 locations where families had re-displaced after having returned. These locations are mainly found in six governorates: Ninewa had the largest number of locations

(166), followed by Anbar (69), Kirkuk (21), Salah al-Din (18), Baghdad (16) and Erbil (2). From these 292 locations, an estimated total of 6,174 families (or 37,044 individuals) have re-displaced. Almost 60 per cent of them re-displaced to out-of-camp locations, while the remaining 40 per cent sought shelter in camps.

- The most impactful indicator explaining why locations experience re-displacement is the prevalence of residential destruction. This indicator is followed by three others which had a lesser but significant impact: presence of families who returned involuntary to their places of origin, insufficiency of security actors, and public tension in community life. Finally, the impact of essential services and livelihoods in causing secondary displacement is found to be low, likely linked to the fact that these indicators are often deemed less important than the absence of social stability and security.

## METHODOLOGY

The Return Index is a tool designed to measure the severity of conditions in locations of return. The Return Index is built from a list of indicators developed in consultation with relevant partners and stakeholders to reflect the displacement context in Iraq (see Table 1). It is based on 16 indicators grouped into two scales: Scale 1, on livelihoods and basic services, and Scale 2, centred around social cohesion and safety perceptions. The overall index ranges from 0 (all essential conditions for return are met) to 100 (no essential conditions for return are met). Higher scores denote more severe living conditions for returnees. Please refer to the Return Index Round 1 and Round 3 reports for more details on the methodology.<sup>1</sup>

Data collection for the Return Index Round 7 took place during the months of November and December 2019 across eight governorates, 38 districts and 1,754 locations in Iraq. For this report, data from the Return Index is complemented with additional data collected on locations that experienced the displacement of families after their return, as reported by local key informants. This data was collected bimonthly between April 2018 and December 2019. The data shows which locations registered this type of secondary displacement, how many families re-displaced, and the likely reasons for their re-displacement, as reported by key informants.

Table 1. Return Index indicator list

SCALE 1: LIVELIHOODS AND BASIC SERVICES	SCALE 2: SAFETY AND SOCIAL COHESION
Residential destruction	Community reconciliation
Employment access	Presence of multiple security actors
Water sufficiency	Blocked returns
Recovery of agriculture	Checkpoints controlled by non-state security actor(s)
Electricity sufficiency	Daily public life
Recovery of businesses	Illegal occupation of private residences
Access to basic services	Mine presence
Reincorporation of government employees	Sources of violence
SCALE 1 SCORE = 100	SCALE 2 SCORE = 100
OVERALL SEVERITY INDEX = AVERAGE OF SCALE 1 AND SCALE 2 SCORES	

<sup>1</sup> Available at <http://iraqdtm.iom.int/>

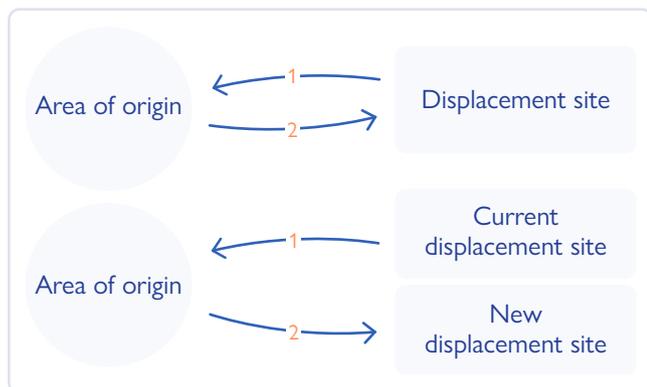
## INTRODUCTION:

### WHAT IS RE-DISPLACEMENT AFTER RETURN?

Nearly two years after the end of the conflict in Iraq, over four million IDPs have returned to their places of origin due to the gradual improvement of living conditions in these areas. Despite these positive changes, if the conditions in origin remain poor for a long period of time or undergo a sudden deterioration, returns may not be sustainable. It is in these contexts that returnee families may face pressures to leave again – in other words, they may re-displace.

Re-displacement after return dynamics refer specifically to “IDPs who return to their areas of origin but are unable to achieve sustainable solutions and are consequently displaced again to their place of displacement or to a new location of displacement.”<sup>2</sup> These cases are usually grouped together into the broad concept of secondary displacement, although this concept also includes other IDP movement dynamics that do not involve return, such as successive displacement into different hosting locations.<sup>3</sup> These additional factors make establishing a specific and clear definition of re-displacement extremely complex. Figure 1 presents the re-displacement movements that involve returns.<sup>4</sup> These movements are the focus of the analysis presented in this report.

Figure 1. Secondary displacement situations related to re-displacement after return



This report aims to explore in detail the concept of “re-displacement,” describing its drivers both conceptually and in the context of Iraq. Following this overview, the report

highlights available estimates of the number of returnees re-displaced in Iraq collected by IOM DTM between March 2018 and December 2019. Lastly, the report correlates the data on movement at the location level with Return Index indicators linked to the physical and social conditions in the places of re-displacement in order to analyze the push factors that play a role in triggering such movements.

This analysis on re-displacement after return is the first attempt to systematically capture these movements through key informant reporting at locations of origin – as such, the main limitation is that it may not fully capture all re-displacement movements, given that key informants are not always aware of every household’s decisions and movements. Therefore, re-displacement may be underreported. However, these initial findings are important to explore, particularly as they relate to other factors in places of origin. These factors combined provide an opportunity to better understand re-displacement in Iraq and refine the ways in which it is conceptualized and measured.

### WHY DO FAMILIES RE-DISPLACE AFTER HAVING RETURNED?

Based on the definition above, IDPs who attempted return but end up re-displacing usually do so when it becomes untenable to achieve durable solutions in their places of origin – this is frequently linked to poor physical and/or social conditions in these locations. Such movement dynamics are not unique to Iraq and have taken place in displacement crises across the world in countries including Afghanistan, Colombia, Somalia, Syria and Western Balkans, among others. These cases shed some light on the decision-making behind this subcategory of secondary displacement, a process that can be separated into two stages: first, the decision to attempt return home where conditions are not favorable and unlikely to be sustainable, and second, the decision to leave again given the inability to achieve durable solutions upon return.<sup>5</sup>

In the first stage of decision-making, involuntary and premature returns feature prominently in explaining why

<sup>2</sup> This definition was accepted by the Iraq Inter Cluster Coordination Group, ICCG Secondary Displacement Definition (Version 06, June 2018). The document can be found in Annex 1.

<sup>3</sup> IDPs that move to different locations during their displacement without attempting to return to their places of origin are often referred as “movers”. They are part of a dedicated analysis in IOM, “Access to durable solutions among IDPs in Iraq: Moving in displacement” (Erbil: IOM, 2019).

<sup>4</sup> These are the two situations out of four presented in the ICCG document cited above which include returns, and are the only situations covered in the current report.

<sup>5</sup> Achieving a durable solution implies that the displaced person no longer has any specific assistance and protection needs that are linked to their displacement situation and can enjoy their human rights without discrimination on account of their displacement. See Inter-Agency Standing Committee, IASC Framework on Durable Solutions for Internally Displaced Persons (Washington DC: IASC, April 2010).

displaced households return to places that are likely to trigger re-displacement. Such decisions are usually taken due to a combination of factors. One of the factors frequently cited is the decision to return to places of origin based on flawed or incomplete information (including misguided expectations about the assistance returnees would receive on return) and later regretting doing so.<sup>6</sup> This (mis)information not only comes from acquaintances back home and media,<sup>7</sup> but also from conflicting information from humanitarian partners.<sup>8</sup> In other cases, families return because they are pushed out of displacement due to conditions in their host communities. These conditions include localized movement restrictions in displacement, systematic xenophobia and societal marginalization in displacement,<sup>9</sup> or direct policies by authorities forcing displaced families to return, creating hostile environments that push families to return to unfavorable conditions.<sup>10</sup> Linked to these factors, the psychological need for family reunification, loneliness or depression in displacement may also motivate return in the same manner.<sup>11</sup>

In the second stage, the decision to re-displace is driven by returnee families' recognition that the poor conditions to which they return in their places of origin impede their sustainable reintegration. In some cases, lack of livelihoods, services or housing issues (both destruction and illegal occupation) are drivers of this type of secondary displacement.<sup>12</sup> In others, the persistence of security risks or the emergence of renewed violence are also key factors playing a role in the decision to leave again.<sup>13</sup> Re-displacement may also be forced on the returning household by the communities, authorities, or security actors already in the place of origin, frequently due to unresolved disputes related to the conflict. These are the main reasons, in general, that will be explored in greater detail in subsequent sections.

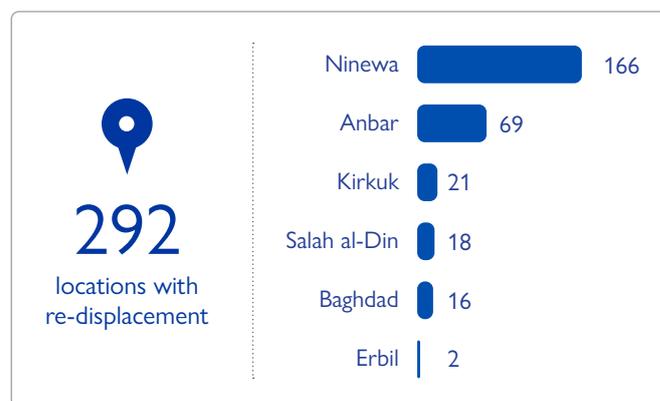
An important caveat to note about movement out of return locations relates to intention. It is challenging to clearly discern between cases of forced or involuntary re-displacement due to poor conditions, and cases of voluntary movement – that

is, migration motivated by the desire to improve one's well-being, whether this migration is to areas of origin or elsewhere. However, these differing motives may be irrelevant in terms of practical solutions, as either type of movement would still require rights-based protection for families to progress towards a durable solution. This is also true for those families living in poor conditions who would consider re-displacing but are not able to do so.

## RE-DISPLACEMENT DATA IN IRAQ

As capturing secondary displacement is often challenging for reasons explained below, data on the number of IDPs in Iraq that have re-displaced after return is available but incomplete. Some data is captured only in displacement camps as families who left for their places of origin end up coming back after a period of time, or as new families seek shelter in camps after being pushed out of their areas of return.<sup>14</sup> Between March 2018 and December 2019, IOM DTM identified 292 locations of origin where at least one displaced household attempted to return and subsequently re-displaced as shown in Figure 2. These locations are mainly found in six governorates: Ninewa had the largest number of locations (166), followed by Anbar (69), Kirkuk (21), Salah al-Din (18), Baghdad (16), and Erbil (2). No location was identified in Diyala.

Figure 2. Number of locations with re-displacement per governorate of origin (March 2018 – December 2019)



<sup>6</sup> Seefar and Mixed Migration Centre, *Distant dreams: Understanding the aspirations of Afghan returnees* (Geneva: Seefar and Mixed Migration Centre, January 2019); David Turton and Peter Marsden, *Taking refugees for a ride? The politics of refugee return to Afghanistan* (Kabul: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, December 2002).

<sup>7</sup> Seefar and Mixed Migration Centre, *Distant Dreams*; IOM, *Returns Working Group, and Social Inquiry, The political economy of choice for IDPs in Iraq* (Erbil: Social Inquiry, September 2019).

<sup>8</sup> Turton and Marsden, *Taking refugees for a ride? The politics of refugee return to Afghanistan* (Kabul: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, December 2002).

<sup>9</sup> Seefar and Mixed Migration Centre, *Distant Dreams*; Schadi Semnani, "Returnees in Syria: Sustainable reintegration and durable solutions or a return to displacement?" *London School of Economics: Middle East Centre Blog*, February 15, 2018; Turton and Marsden, *Taking refugees for a ride*.

<sup>10</sup> IDMC, Samuel Hall, and Norwegian Refugee Council, *Going "home" to displacement* (Geneva: IDMC, December 2017); Judith Möllers, Diana Traikova, Thomas Herzfeld, and Egzon Bajrami, "Involuntary return migration to Kosovo: Tackling challenges for successful reintegration," *Leibniz Institute of Agricultural Development in Transition Economies* 33e (2017); Turton and Marsden, *Taking refugees for a ride*. In addition, some governorates in Iraq hosting IDPs, such as Ninewa and Salah al-Din, have issued orders for all IDPs not originally from these governorates to return to their places of origin, see Almada Paper "A resolution by the Iraqi National Security Council to clear Ninewa camps from IDPs who are from other governorates", September 4, 2019.

<sup>11</sup> Seefar and Mixed Migration Centre, *Distant Dreams*.

<sup>12</sup> IDMC, *Nowhere to Return to: Iraq's search for durable solutions continues* (Geneva: IDMC, November 2018); Susanne Schmeidl "Repatriation to Afghanistan: durable solution or responsibility shifting?" *Forced Migration Review* 33 (September 2009).

<sup>13</sup> IDMC, *Stuck in the Middle: Seeking durable solutions in post-peace agreement Colombia* (Geneva: IDMC, March 2019); IDMC, *Going "home" to displacement*.

<sup>14</sup> See, for instance, the monthly *Iraq Camp Master List and Population Flow dataset* produced by Camp Coordination, Camp Management Cluster Iraq available here: [https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/iraq\\_cccm](https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/iraq_cccm).

From these 292 locations, an estimated total of 6,174 households (or 37,044 individuals) have re-displaced. The timeline of these secondary movements is shown in Figure 3, with the month of March 2018 featuring prominently as a consequence of the

security changes that took place within the disputed territories of Ninewa Governorate after October 2017. Re-displacement spiked again during the first half of 2019.

Figure 3. Number of households re-displaced after return per governorate of origin and time period

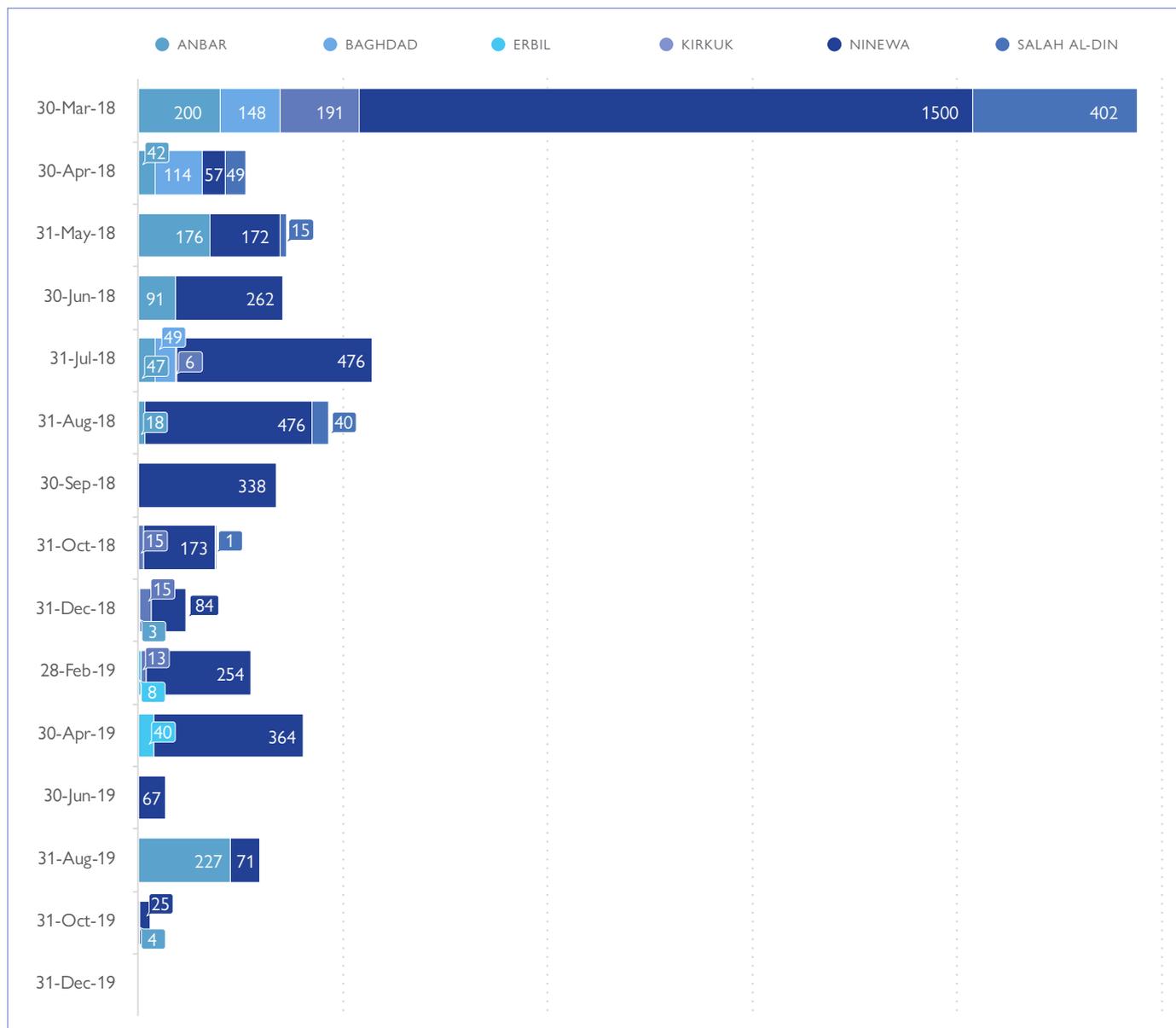


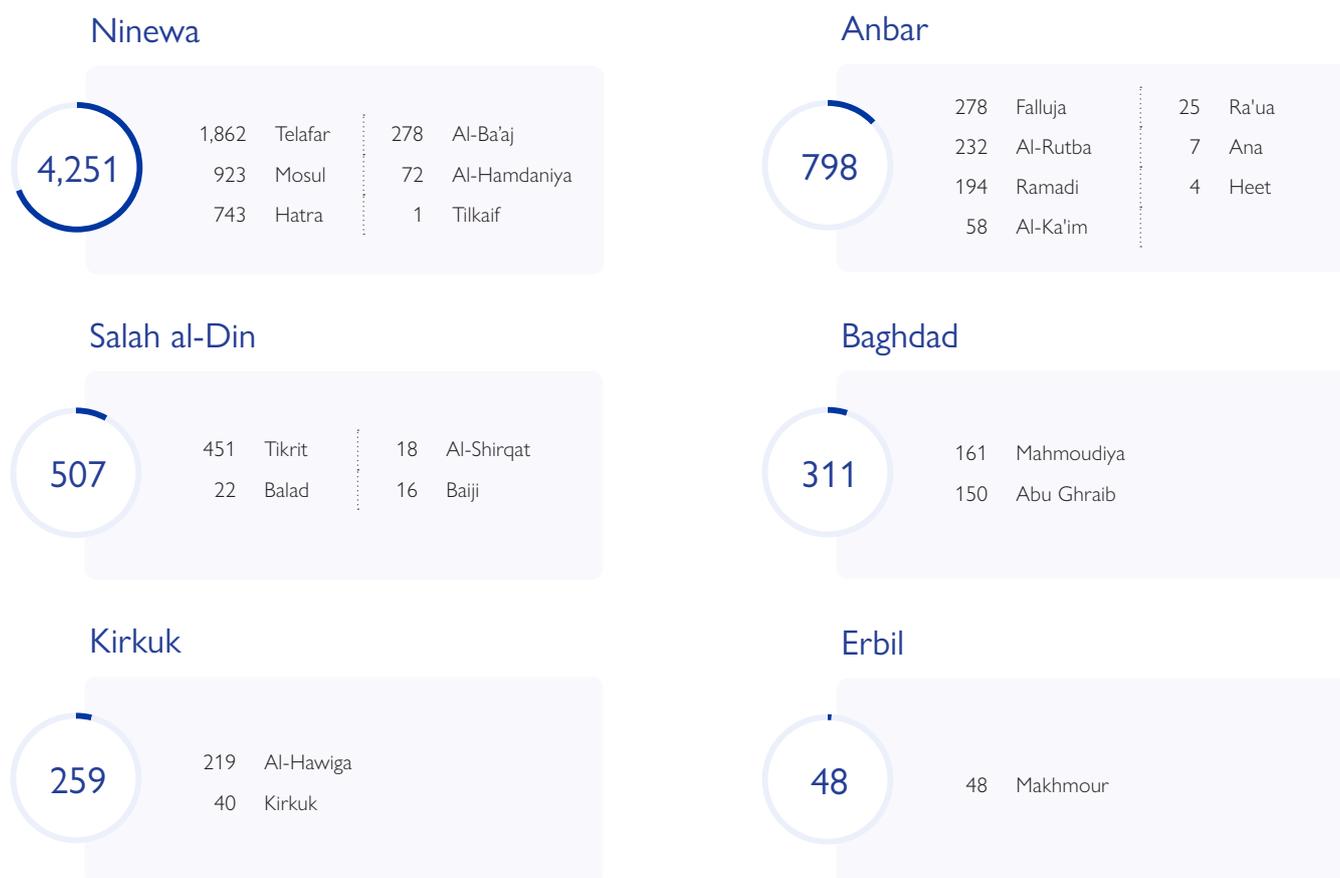
Figure 4 shows the disaggregation of the number of families re-displaced by district for the total period of data collection. The district hotspots are concentrated in Ninewa Governorate, with Tel Afar, Mosul, Hatra, and Al-Ba'aj being the districts with the highest re-displacement. They are followed by Tikrit in Salah al-Din Governorate. In general, the average number of re-displaced households per location is 21. In half of the locations, however, there were no more than ten families who had re-displaced. The reason for this is that when re-displacement takes place, it is typically at a small scale and does not involve

more than a handful of families in these locations, while the majority of families remain.

In the 21 locations that did experience mass re-displacement, all returnees left and abandoned these locations.

Finally, it is important to note that almost 60 per cent of these 6,174 households were re-displaced to out-of-camp locations, 36 per cent sought shelter in displacement camps, and the remaining four per cent of households displaced to undefined locations.

Figure 4. Number of households re-displaced after return per district of origin



## DRIVERS OF RE-DISPLACEMENT IN IRAQ

Why are some locations more likely to experience displacement after return than others? Are negative physical and social conditions more likely to be found in those locations from which returnees flee for a second time, as compared to those locations where they remain? These questions are explored in more detail through a multivariate analysis using data from the Return Index Round 7 collected in November and December 2019. The analysis correlates the Return Index indicators with reported re-displacement for the 1,754 locations in Iraq with returns. Of these locations assessed as part of the Return Index, re-displacement was reported in 12 per cent of them in the last year and a half.<sup>15</sup>

This analysis is built on data collected through key informant interviews in each location about the conditions of return. It provides a better framework to analyse the circumstances under which re-displacement is more commonly found in Iraq, highlighting the context and inter-related factors that may

influence decisions to remain in return areas versus the decision to leave again.

The analysis may also provide an additional evidence base for stakeholders supporting durable returns to determine the best policy options and approaches to address re-displacement.<sup>16</sup>

The statistical model developed includes 11 different indicators related to conditions in each location, namely: housing destruction, basic services, social cohesion, safety perceptions, and quality of returns. This data was combined with the dataset on re-displacement after return, described in the previous section. Table 2 presents the relative impact of each indicator on re-displacement. The most impactful indicator explaining why locations experience re-displacement is the prevalence of residential destruction. This indicator is followed by three others which had a lesser but significant impact: presence of families who returned involuntary to their places of origin, insufficiency of security actors, and public tension in community life.

<sup>15</sup> As indicated in the previous section, the total number of locations identified as having displacement after return is 292. However, as noted, 22 locations report the whole population having re-displaced and the location remains uninhabited – therefore no assessment was possible for these areas, leaving the total number of locations used in the model at 263.

<sup>16</sup> An additional limitation to this analysis is that little information is known about the displacement location – before return nor after re-displacing. Thus, it is unclear whether positive conditions in displacement represented a significant pull factor, and how that relates to negative conditions in return. Furthermore, more information on the circumstances surrounding the decision to return and how long families remained before eventually deciding to displace again answer questions regarding the durability of returns, but are not available in the dataset.

Table 2. Relative impact of Return Index indicators on re-displacement

Dimension	Indicators on physical and social conditions in locations of return	Effect on re-displacement
Housing	Presence of significant house destruction	High
Involuntary returns	Some families have been forced to return	Medium
Security	Insufficiency of security actors (0 or 1)	Medium
	Concerns about armed or communal violence taking place	Low
	There are movement restrictions impacting residents	Low
Social Cohesion	Day-to-day public tensions in community life	Medium
	Inter-communal reconciliation is reportedly required	Not significant
Livelihoods	Many small businesses remain unopened	Not significant
	Residents cannot find employment/livelihood opportunities	Low
Public Services	Lack of access to either health facilities or primary schools	Not significant
	Lack of sufficient electricity or water	Not significant

### A more detailed discussion of the impact of each category of indicators is given below:

- Housing:** The strongest indicator in the model explaining why locations experience re-displacement is the prevalence of residential destruction. Nearly all of the locations reporting re-displacement share notable levels of house destruction due to the conflict. Similar to the other global case studies of re-displacement examined, many returning families lacked accurate information about the conditions of their home residences and were ultimately displaced again due to house destruction. House destruction is also one of the main reasons that IDPs remain in protracted displacement.<sup>17</sup>
- Voluntariness of the returns:** The way in which returns in the location took place also heavily influences the risk of re-displacement. Those locations in which at least some households reportedly returned involuntarily are more likely to experience re-displacement. Involuntary returns in Iraq have impacted return dynamics especially due to the closure of numerous displacement camps during the second half of 2019. This change left in-camp households with few other options but to return to undesirable conditions in areas of origin, forcing many to displace again.
- Security:** Three indicators relating to security conditions on the ground were included in the model. All indicators were significant predictors of re-displacement, with one of them having a relatively moderate effect: with an insufficient number of security actors (0 or 1) in the location, returning households are significantly more likely to re-displace. The other two security indicators (movement restrictions or concerns over physical violence originating from ISIS attacks, clashes between armed groups, or ethno-religious conflict) present relatively weaker impacts than the rest. Overall, security issues and concerns seem to be significantly robust factors influencing displacement and return movements.
- Social cohesion:** Only one of the social cohesion-related indicators was a statistically significant driver of re-displacement, although with a moderately strong effect. This result indicates that locations reporting day-to-day tensions manifesting in people's daily lives were more likely to experience re-displacement. This indicator may point to greater challenges for the reintegration of returning families to their locations of origin as a result of social cohesion issues – either due to the dynamics around families with perceived ISIL affiliation, or the presence of strong inter-community grievances between stayees and returnees. Issues with community reconciliation were not found to be correlated with re-displacement.
- Essential services:** None of the indicators used for public service provision (which includes access to healthcare or primary school facilities as well as sufficiency of water and electricity) are statistically significant, and therefore they do not play a role in explaining why some returnee families are re-displaced. The absence of a causal relation between public services and re-displacement can be explained by the fact that the restoration of services may be considered of secondary importance after social stability and security. Authorities and humanitarian/development actors have faced significant challenges in restoring essential services in areas where the security situation remains unstable.
- Livelihoods:** Two indicators were used as proxy measures of economic activity in return locations: the restoration of small businesses in the location and the availability of employment. While the former was not statistically significant, the latter seems to be a weak (but statistically significant) driver of re-displacement. Promoting the economic recovery in these places, thus, can slightly help in alleviating the risk of re-displacement. However, its impact is likely to be smaller than the previous indicators for security and social cohesion.

## ANNEX I: ICCG SECONDARY DISPLACEMENT DEFINITION

### Background

The Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) requested the Inter-Cluster Coordination Group (ICCG) to work on a definition and harmonized data collection methodology for 'secondary displacement', at its meeting on 20 May. The topic was presented at the ICCG meeting on 24 May. It was agreed to form a small group of interested ICCG members to work on the definition and data collection tools. The group composed of OCHA, IOM DTM, Return Working Group and Protection Cluster met on 30 May. The group, with feedback from other clusters proposes, the following.

### Definition

"Internally displaced people who are voluntarily or forcibly displaced from their current location of displacement to another location of displacement and cannot achieve sustainable solutions (as defined at the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Framework on Durable Solutions for IDPs) and thus require continued humanitarian assistance."

### Situations Under This Definition

There are four situations that can be considered as secondary displacement as following. Please read them in parallel with the diagrams at annex 1.

- **Situation (1):** IDPs who are voluntarily or forcibly displaced to another displacement location and cannot achieve sustainable solutions.
- **Situation (2) and (3):** IDPs who voluntarily or forcibly return to their areas of origin but are unable to achieve sustainable solutions and are consequently re-displaced to their first place of displacement or to a new location of displacement.

- **Situation (4):** IDPs who voluntarily or forcibly, return to their areas of origin but are unable to resume living in their former habitual residence and cannot achieve sustainable solutions, and are consequently re-displaced to a new location within their area of origin.

### Data Collection Methodology

- Data for situation (1) is collected through Camp Coordination and Camp Management (CCCM) tools (key informant method).<sup>18</sup>
- Data for situations (2) and (3) is collected through CCCM and IOM DTM tools (key informant method) for camps and IOM DTM tools (key informant method) for non-camp settings.
- There is no data collection tool available for situation (4).

### Way Forward

It would be most appropriate to define all four situations as secondary displacement. However, given the considerations of displacement tracking tools, it is currently possible to identify secondary displacement only in situations (1), (2) and (3) with the existing data collection tools. As situation (4) requires household level data collection for which there is no existing tool, most likely this cannot be currently used for the purposes of the Humanitarian Programme Cycle. It should also be noted that secondary displacement is not suitable as a proxy for 'protracted displacement' nor does it necessarily indicate a higher degree of need.

<sup>18</sup> Key informant is a person who is likely to be well informed about the situation. Possible limitation of data collection through key informants is the lack of household level confirmation of information.

## Limitations

- There are IDPs (numbers unknown) who have already moved numerous times from one displacement location to another. It has been challenging to identify them in any comprehensive way.

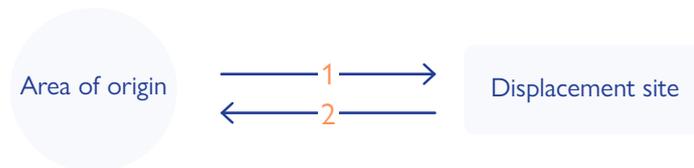
- Data collection for secondary displacement (DTM, CCCM) started January 2018. Therefore, it is possible that these numbers may exclude some people who were secondarily displaced before the date data collection began.

## Secondary Displacement Situations

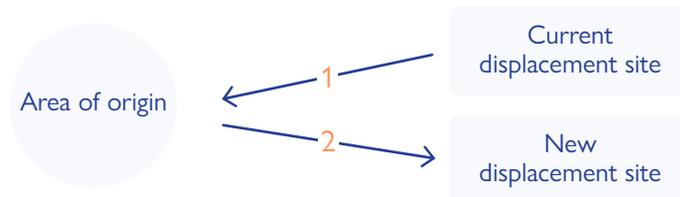
- Situation (1)



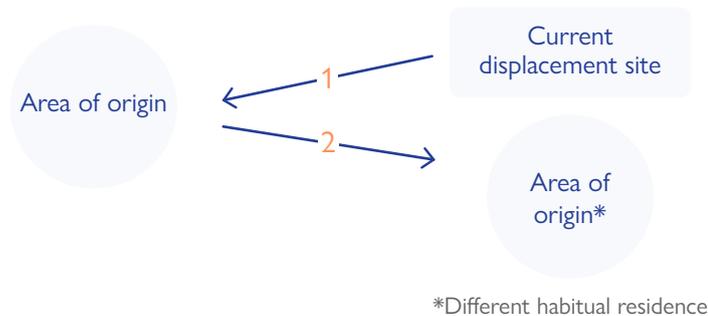
- Situation (2)



- Situation (3)



- Situation (4)



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BRIEFING #3

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FEBRUARY 2020

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