

Situation Overview

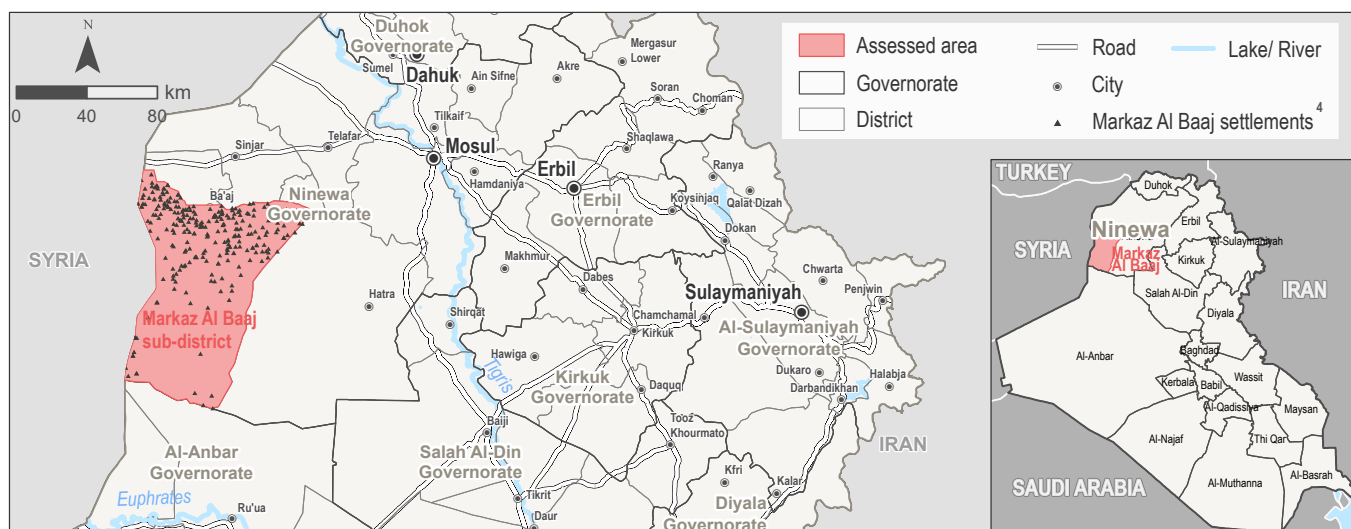
Whilst movement trends in Iraq have generally remained stable since early 2018, there has been a considerable shift since August 2019 with increasing numbers of internally displaced persons (IDPs) returning to their area of origin (AoO) or being displaced for a second time, most notably in Ninewa governorate. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM)'s Emergency Displacement Tracking¹ recorded over 9,600 households displaced or returned to non-camp locations between 29 February and 15 June 2020, 16% of which were recorded in Al Baaj district (37% for Ninewa governorate).²

There have been concerns in the humanitarian and development community over the principled character and durability of new returns and potential consequences for humanitarian needs and social cohesion in areas to which families have returned or been secondarily displaced.³

Markaz Al Baaj

Markaz Al Baaj is a sub-district of Al Baaj district, located south-west Ninewa governorate. KIs reported that Markaz Al Baaj town was housing over 8,000 families before 2014, mostly Sunni Muslim Arab population.

Coverage Map



Background and Methodology

To date, IOM DTM's bi-monthly tracking⁵ of returnees and IDPs provides an overview of numbers and trends in movement and returns. Simultaneously, IOM DTM has run the Returns Index since 2018⁶, collecting data bi-monthly to provide indicative trends in the severity of conditions conducive to return in areas of return (AoR) nationwide. Similarly, the Camp Coordination and Camp Management (CCCM) Cluster, IOM DTM, and the Returns Working Group (RWG) have conducted assessments with IDPs that have left camps following or in anticipation of closures to better understand and map areas of return and secondary displacement.

REACH Initiative (REACH) has been conducting nationwide multi-sectoral assessments which include indicators concerning durable solutions. In addition, in light of recent movement trends, REACH conducted an assessment in Markaz Al Baaj sub-district to have an immediate understanding and in-depth profiling of needs and community interrelations between remainee, returnee⁷, and/or IDP populations⁸. This report outlines the overall conditions to examine how and to what extent durable solutions for returnees and IDPs have or can be achieved.

The sub-district fell under the control of the so-called Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) in 2014 forcing over 6,000 families to flee their homes, as reported by key informants (KIs) during data collection. However, since Markaz Al Baaj was retaken, in June 2017, most residents displaced in 2014 have reportedly returned. At the time of data collection, an estimated total of 414 families were reported to remain in displacement.

Population Profile

- 7,123-9,061 families** were reported by KIs to be residing in Markaz Al Baaj before the events in 2014.
- 75-80%** of the **pre-2014 population** in the neighbourhoods or villages in Markaz Al Baaj reportedly displaced since 2014.
- 90-97%** of the **population displaced since 2014** have returned in total as reported by KIs.
- 360-564 IDP families** are reported to reside in Markaz Al Baaj areas and neighbourhoods (not specified area of origin).

The findings are based on 38 KIs interviews conducted between 16 and 23 June 2020, combining qualitative and quantitative data adapted to the context and restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic. Purposive sampling methods were employed to identify KIs. Findings are based on KI level data and should therefore be considered as indicative. Markaz Al Baaj sub-district was selected for the assessment as: more than 50% of host community members are reported to have returned; social cohesion severity⁹ is high; it is an AoO for IDPs in camps at risk of closure; and recent reports of dynamic population movements and movement intentions to/from this district.

KI Profile

| Markaz Al Baaj sub-district | | |
|------------------------------------|--------|--|
| Community leaders | 12 KIs | |
| IDPs (displaced from the area) | 10 KIs | |
| Returnees (more than 3 months ago) | 5 KIs | |
| Remainees | 6 KIs | |
| IDPs (displaced in the area) | 5 KIs | |

Recent population returns and displacement

Recent returns

16 of 38 KIs reported that additional families returned to Markaz Al Baaj in the six months prior to data collection.

115-160

families returned to Markaz Al Baaj. The main reasons for return, as reported by 11 KIs, were the **sense of increased security** and **following the return of other family members**. One KI also noted **camp closures** in the area of displacement (AoD) as a reason for recent returns.

All KIs reported that the returns of families to Markaz Al Baaj had an impact on **family reunification**; and, **increased job opportunities** for the community members as reported by remainee respondents.

Recent host community displacement

37 of 38 KIs reported that no host community families were displaced from Markaz Al Baaj in the six months prior to data collection.

Recent IDP arrivals

2 of 38 KIs reported that additional IDP families have arrived to Markaz Al Baaj in the six months prior to data collection.¹⁰

All families reportedly arrived from different camps located in Ninewa governorate, impacting **family reunification** in the community.¹¹

Recent IDP departures

One KI reported the displacement of IDP families to camps located in Ninewa governorate due to **lack of jobs and services** in Markaz Al Baaj with no impact on the community.

Failed return movements¹²

235-425 families reportedly attempted to return to Markaz Al Baaj in the six months prior to data collection but did not succeed.

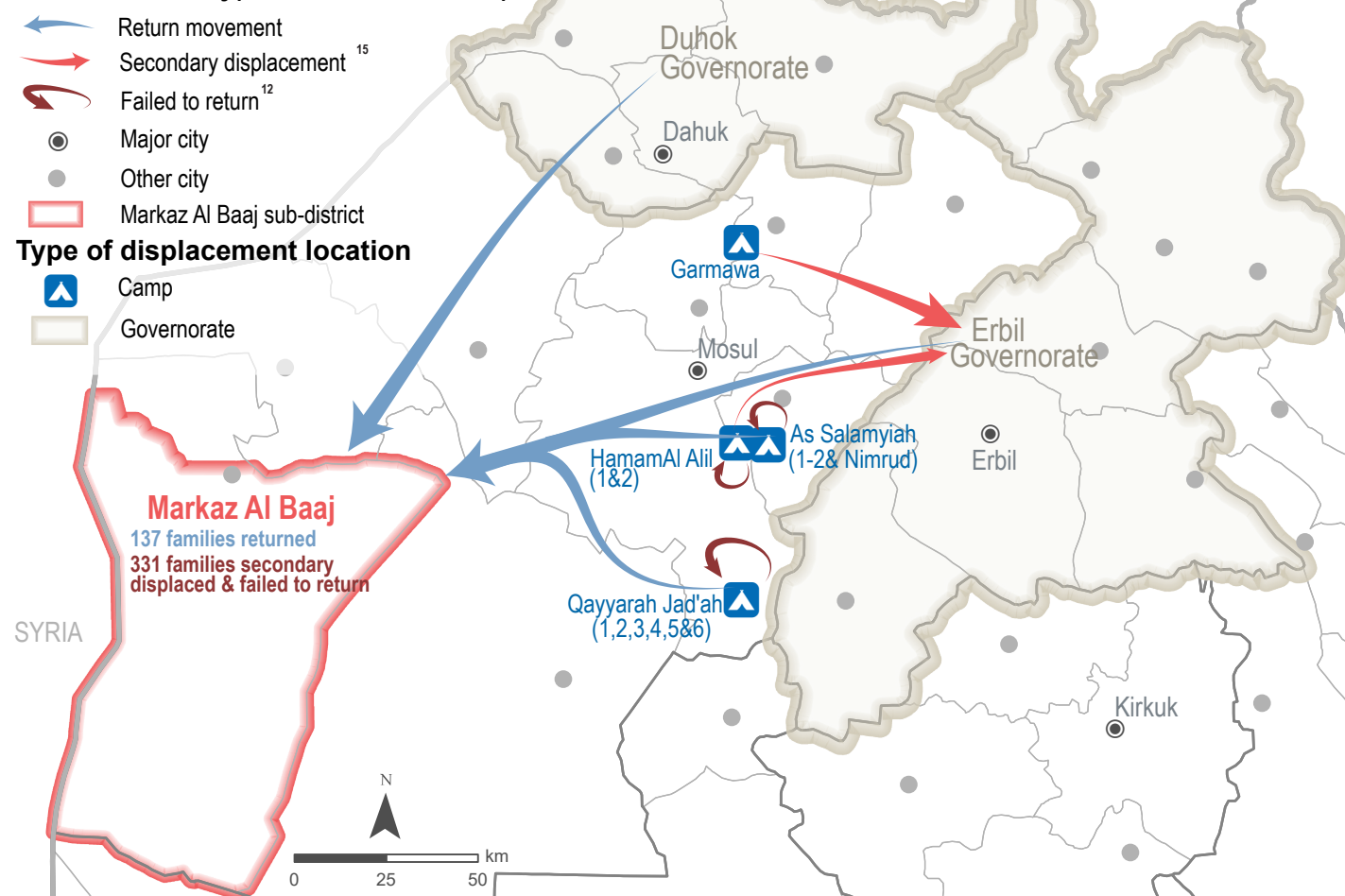
Reported reasons for failed returns^{13, 14}

| | | |
|---|--------|--|
| Destroyed/damaged housing in AoO | 23 KIs | |
| Lack of jobs | 18 KIs | |
| Lack of services | 15 KIs | |
| Resistance from community and/or local actors | 6 KIs | |
| Presence of jobs in AoD | 1 KI | |
| Unstable security | 1 KI | |

All KIs (23 KIs) mentioned that failed returns did not have a relevant impact on the community.

Recent Returns and Secondary Displacements

Return and secondary displacement movements to Markaz Al Baaj (In the last 6 Months)



Expected population returns and displacement

Expected returns

29 of 33 KIs reported that additional families from Markaz Al Baaj might return in the six months following data collection.

260-385 families are expected to return to the area in the six months following data collection, according to KIs' estimates.

Reported drivers for returns ^{13, 14}

| | |
|--|--------|
| Return of other family members | 29 KIs |
| Increased sense of safety and security | 28 KIs |
| Perceived increase in access to services | 3 KIs |
| Camp closure in AoD | 1 KI |

Reported barriers to return ^{13, 14}

| | |
|---|--------|
| Destroyed/damaged housing in AoO | 28 KIs |
| Lack of jobs | 19 KIs |
| House is rented in AoO | 8 KIs |
| Lack of services | 7 KIs |
| Fear of being perceived as ISIL affiliated | 3 KIs |
| Lack of documents to return | 2 KIs |
| Unstable security | 1 KI |
| Family has settled in AoD and prefers to stay | 1 KI |

All KIs (38 KIs) reported that further returns will impact **family reunification**, and 37% of KIs (14 KIs) reported that it will result in **increased job opportunities and humanitarian assistance**.

Expected host community displacement

17 of 23 KIs reported no expected displacement of host community families from Markaz Al Baaj in the six months following data collection.

Expected IDP movements

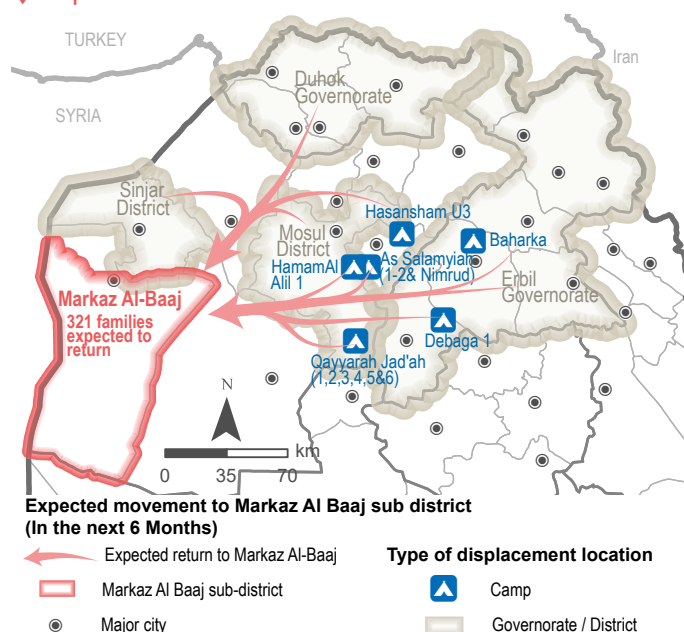
One KI reported that some IDP families might be arriving in the six months following data collection.

Reported drivers for IDP arrivals ^{13, 14}

| | |
|---|-------|
| Arrival of other family members | 5 KIs |
| Increased sense of safety and security | 5 KIs |
| Perceived increase in access to services and jobs | 2 KIs |
| Camp closure in AoD | 2 KIs |

8 of 17 KIs reported no expected IDP displacement from Markaz Al Baaj in the six months following data collection, the rest of KIs did not know about further IDP displacement.

Expected Movements



Primary Community Needs

Primary community needs in Markaz Al Baaj ^{13, 14}

| | First Need | Second Need | Third Need |
|-----------------------|------------|-------------|------------|
| Security | 11 KIs | 0 | 0 |
| House rehabilitation | 9 KIs | 5 KIs | 4 KIs |
| Livelihoods | 6 KIs | 14 KIs | 8 KIs |
| Electricity and water | 6 KIs | 10 KIs | 20 KIs |
| Healthcare | 4 KIs | 8 KIs | 2 KIs |
| Education | 1 KI | 1 KI | 3 KIs |
| Food | 1 KI | 0 | 1 KI |

"After the conflict, the safety in the region has become the most important need. It affects the psychological status of a person which is the most important thing to go on opening business and any new project." - male community leader in Markaz Al Baaj

KIs reported that the primary needs for the community are: **safety and security** and **support to rehabilitate housing**. These needs take into consideration that most of the houses were reportedly destroyed or partially damaged during the military operations by ISIL, and the increased demand for housing due to the presence of IDPs from nearby areas.

The second main community needs most commonly reported were: **access to livelihoods** due to reported lack of jobs in the area, including the need to develop projects to support agricultural activities as reported by four KIs; and, access to **electricity and water** due to the reduced operation hours for governmental services, and the high cost of private generators and water trucking.

"Work is important to be able to provide for the family, develop projects, stabilize the area, and IDPs will return if projects and services are available." - remainee female

Another commonly reported need was **access to healthcare**, considering the limited presence of specialized health facilities and hospitals in Markaz Al Baaj.

Perceptions on access to services and assistance

Access to housing and rehabilitation

All KIs (16 KIs) reported that the majority of families in the area reside in houses.



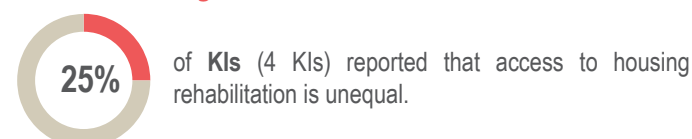
Housing damage proportion

20%-40% of houses in Markaz Al Baaj were reportedly damaged during the events in 2014 due to military operations.

KIs reported that most of the population **resides in damaged houses**. Reportedly **returnees, IDPs and some remainees** are more likely to **reside in damaged or unfinished buildings/houses**. In all groups, **female heads of household and elderly people** reportedly are the most affected.

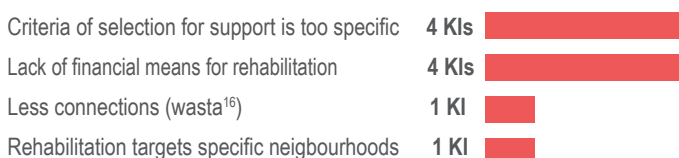
KIs reported that **returnees and IDPs** are the most likely to **reside in tents**. In all groups, **female heads of household, elderly people and minor heads of household** are the most affected.

Access to housing rehabilitation



Reportedly, **returnees, female heads of household, elderly people and minor heads of household** have less opportunities to receive housing support.

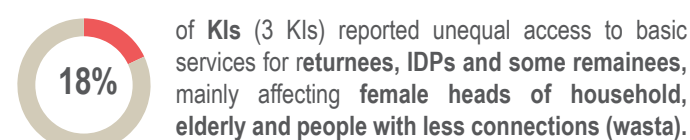
Reported barriers to access assistance for rehabilitation^{13, 14}



Risk of Eviction



Access to basic services

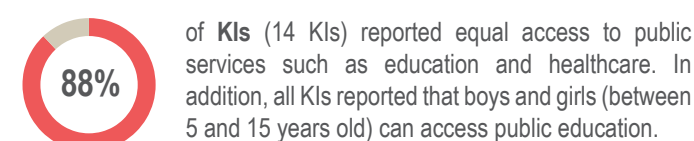


Barriers to access basic services

It was equally reported that less access to basic services is related to:

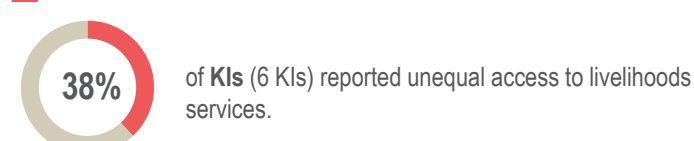
- Criteria of selection for support is too specific;
- Assistance targets specific neighbourhoods;
- Less connections (wasta); and,
- Lack of financial means to access services.

Access to public services



However, one KI reported that returnees and female heads of household have less access to public services. The main reasons were equally highlighted as **less connections or wasta** to access the services, the **lack of financial means** to cover the costs of services and the **specificity of the selection criteria** for the provision of some services.

Access to livelihoods



Returnees and IDPs reportedly have **less access to livelihoods**, but **female heads of household and minor heads of household** in all groups are the most affected.

Reported barriers to access livelihoods^{13, 14}



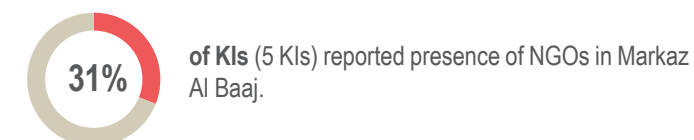
Access to justice

All KIs (16 KIs) reported that access to justice is equal for all population

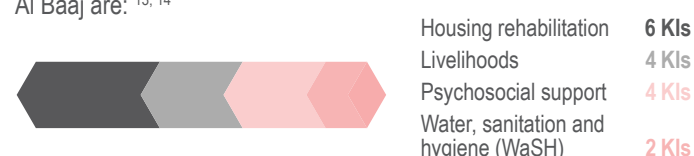
Two KIs reported that the **civil status department** and the **irrigation department** (under the Iraqi Ministry of Water Resources) in Markaz Al Baaj are **closed due to damage to the building and lack of funding** for operations and rehabilitation.

One KI reported that for IDPs in Markaz Al Baaj it is difficult to obtain a passport as they often cannot afford the cost for the process or the transportation due to limited access to resources.

Access to humanitarian aid



82% of KIs (13 KIs) reported that access to assistance is a factor to encourage return, and the most needed activities or projects in Markaz Al Baaj are:^{13, 14}



One KI reported that returnees, IDPs and female heads of household are less involved in activities or projects by NGOs.

Family Reunification

Two KIs reported that some families in the community **still have sons in displacement**. It was equally reported that the reasons for remaining displaced were related to **fear from the past events in 2014 and the current security situation**; **lack of adequate funds to return**; and, **access to employment in the AoD**.

Perceptions on Governance and Safety

Governance and influencing bodies

All KIs (12 KIs) reported that **mukhtars¹⁷ and local authorities are the most influential bodies** with regards to governance, followed by the tribal leaders.

No changes in the levels of influence of groups were reported in the six months prior to data collection.

All KIs (12 KIs) reported that there has been **no appointment of new local authorities** in the six months prior to data collection.


Safety and security

All KIs (16 KIs) reported that their **community members feel safe in the area**, and **they do not avoid any areas or neighborhoods** in Markaz Al Baaj.

Freedom of movement

All KIs (16 KIs) reported that **females and males can freely move at night or during the day**.

Community relations and co-existence




 **94%** of KIs (15 KIs) reported that community members trust each other. All KIs reported that there are no specific population groups which are not welcome by the majority of the community in the area.

However, three KIs (the majority returnees to Markaz Al Baaj) reported that they do not interact with other groups in the community¹⁸.

Community disputes

Two KIs reported that disputes took place within the neighborhoods in the six months prior to data collection due to the **return of some families and housing issues**.

It is expected that disputes will decrease considering: ^{13, 14}

| | | |
|---|-------|---|
| Intervention of local authorities | 2 KIs |  |
| Integration/re-integration in the community | 2 KIs |  |
| Work relationships | 1 KI |  |

No disputes were reported between villages or towns in Markaz Al Baaj and no change is expected in this regards in the six months following data collection.

Retaliation incidents reported

| | |
|--------------------------|-------|
| No retaliation incidents | 8 KIs |
| Do not know | 8 KIs |



All KIs (16 KIs) reported that the presence of the security forces such as the police and the Iraqi armed forces contributed positively to a feeling of safety. In addition, it was generally recognized that security forces are effective in resolving disputes within the community and between different villages.

Contamination of housing, land and property

No contaminated land was reported in the area.

End Notes

1. IOM DTM: <http://iraqdtm.iom.int/IdpMovements> - February 2020 and April 2020
2. IOM DTM: <http://iraqdtm.iom.int/MasterList#Datasets> - February 2020 and April 2020
3. Based on the 2016 Iraq Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) Strategic Objective to ensure 'principled' returns, meaning voluntary, safe, dignified, and durable returns of IDPs to their AoO.
4. Markaz Al Baaj settlements may or may not be populated after the events in 2014.
5. IOM DTM: <http://iraqdtm.iom.int/MasterList#Datasets> - February 2020 and April 2020
6. IOM DTM: <http://iraqdtm.iom.int/ReturnIndex> - February 2020 and April 2020
7. Returnees are commonly categorized as an IDP returning to their AoO, where AoO is defined as the stated original sub-district of origin for the IDP.
8. As clarified by the Iraq Inter-Cluster Coordination Group (ICCG) in 2018, secondary displacement covers multiple scenarios: 1) IDPs who are voluntarily or forcibly displaced to another displacement location; 2) and 3) IDPs who voluntarily or forcibly, return to their AoO, 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; and 4) IDPs who voluntarily or forcibly, return to their AoO, but are unable to resume habitation in their former habitual residence and cannot achieve sustainable solutions and are consequently re-displaced to a new location within their AoO.
9. IOM DTM: <http://iraqdtm.iom.int/ReturnIndex> - refer to methodology, to compute the severity index different parameters are combined..
10. The question was tailored to be specific for the different respondent groups, and in that case it was not possible to identify the number of families or the drivers for IDP arrivals.
11. IDPs in camps secondarily displaced to Markaz Al Baaj looking to be reunited with their family members initially displaced in Markaz Al Baaj.
12. Failed returns refer to the movement of those populations from Markaz Al Baaj who tried to return to Markaz Al Baaj but did not succeed and subsequently ended up back in their original location of displacement or were secondarily displaced to a new location.
13. Sum of answers may exceed the 100% due to KIs being able to select multiple response options, including other topics.
14. Percentages are represented by the number of KIs who answered the questions.
15. Secondary displacements of original Markaz Al Baaj residents.
16. Wasta can be defined as the advantages a person might have due to using one's social connections and influence.
17. Mukhtar can be defined as the head of a village or neighbourhood in some Arab countries.
18. As per IOM DTM, in Markaz Al Baaj the severity of social cohesion is high - <http://iraqdtm.iom.int/ReturnIndex>