

# MCNA X Brief

## Humanitarian needs in times of a transition

February 2023 | Iraq

### KEY MESSAGES

- Key indicators across sectors show little improvement compared to 2021, while noting that the Multi-Cluster Needs Assessments (MCNAs) from 2020 and 2021 recorded a deterioration surrounding COVID-19.<sup>1</sup>
- Households appear economically less resilient than in 2021. Households saw a reduction in real purchasing power, and more frequently reported to rely on negative coping strategies to buy food.
- Districts in Ninewa, Al-Anbar, Kirkuk and Diyala continue to show the most persistent and substantial humanitarian needs.
- A smaller proportion of internally displaced households reported intending to return to their area of origin within 12 months of data collection than in MCNA 2021, indicating that large-scale voluntary returns are unlikely.

### CONTEXT

The year 2023 marks a new chapter for humanitarian actors in Iraq. With the de-activation of the humanitarian cluster system and a substantial decrease in international funding for humanitarian assistance in the coming year, humanitarian actors are repositioning themselves and - more than ever - need to prioritize. This requires a sound and up-to-date evidence base to understand which pockets of humanitarian needs persist and whose, what, and where needs are the most pressing.

Having accurate data to inform humanitarian, development and stabilization planning is also relevant considering the scale and persistence of humanitarian needs in Iraq. Even though large-scale military action against ISIS in Iraq ended more than five years ago, 2.5 million persons still face humanitarian needs according to the 2022 Humanitarian Needs Overview, while close to 1 million persons faced acute needs.<sup>2</sup> Next to that, 1.17 million persons remain internally displaced as of December 2022, 179,000 of whom are in camps and 80,000 in informal sites.<sup>3</sup>

The tenth iteration of the Iraq Multi-Cluster Needs Assessment (MCNA X) was, therefore, conducted in the summer of 2022 in close coordination with the Assessment Information Management Working Group, UN OCHA, and the Inter-Cluster Coordination Group.<sup>4</sup> The objective of the MCNA was to understand if, and how, multi-sectoral household conditions and priority needs of conflict-affected populations have changed in Iraq. By surveying returnee, in-camp and out-of-camp internally displaced person (IDP) households nationwide, as well as host community households in 11 districts, this MCNA provides a critical building block of evidence to analyse the extent to which the transition to development has been mirrored by improvements in the daily lives of conflict-affected persons in Iraq.

### METHODOLOGY OVERVIEW

The MCNA X was implemented through a nationwide household-level survey, which was conducted between June 5 and August 16, 2022. For all out-of-camp samples, a two-stage stratified cluster sampling approach was employed (with 90% level of confidence and a 10% margin of error at population group and district level). Based on the population figures from the IOM DTM Master List,<sup>5</sup> sampling frames were developed for all districts with a minimum of 200 IDP or returnee households and adjusted to align with OCHA-defined administrative boundaries. Within each location, a set of geo-points was randomly generated and provided to enumerators who would then interview an eligible household nearest to a given geo-point. The in-camp IDP population was sampled through a simple random sampling approach (95% level of confidence, 10% margin of error). The adjacent Camp Profiling assessment was conducted using an expanded MCNA questionnaire in all formal IDP camps with at least 100 households (all 26 camps). Districts for host community coverage were selected based on 2021 HNO findings on high number of people in need and/or high severity scores. As such, findings on host community needs should not be generalized to be reflective of the entire country.

\* MCNA X surveyed only host community households in the following districts: Al-Baaj, Al-Fallujah, Al-Hatra, Al-Hawiga, Al-Rutba, Erbil, Sinjar, Sumail and Tooz Khurmato. Districts were selected based on high PiN figures and/high severity in the [2022 Humanitarian Needs Overview](#), and should not be generalized to reflect nationwide host community needs.

## Key Sectoral Findings

MCNA X (2022) data for key sectoral indicators show that access to basic needs and services has not seen substantial improvement since MCNA 2021. MCNA data further indicates that in certain areas – especially the recurring conflict-affected districts in Ninewa, Al-Anbar, Salah-al-Din, Diyala and Kirkuk – both IDP, returnee and host community households are heavily affected by a lack of access to basic services and subsequent humanitarian needs. These district are also in governorates with the highest remaining numbers of IDPs.<sup>6</sup>

### 1. Livelihoods

Nationwide MCNA data indicates that households saw a decrease in economic resilience in terms of amounts and sources of income, expenses and borrowing patterns, and the use of coping strategies to compensate for a lack of livelihoods. Compared to the previous round of the MCNA in 2021, IDP, returnee and host community household income from employment and pensions decreased from IQD 454,000 in 2021 to IQD 418,000 in 2022 (8% decrease).<sup>7</sup> Meanwhile, the price of the Survival Minimum Expenditure Basket reportedly increased between rounds IX and X of the MCNA.<sup>8</sup> Data from the MCNA X further indicates that host community households are not always better off than out-of-camp IDP or returnee households in terms of livelihoods.\* Host community households, for instance, most frequently report having a head of household unemployed and seeking work in Al-Hatra (44%) and Sinjar (30%) compared to lower proportions among out-of-camp IDP and returnee households.

### 2. Food security

At first glance, most households nationwide appear to show acceptable Food Consumption Scores (95%). Nationwide, 2% of the returnee households, 6% of the host community and

in-camp IDP households, as well as 7% of the out-of-camp IDP households show borderline or poor Food Consumption Scores.

However, data from MCNA X indicates that households are increasingly financially stretched to get food on the table. Food expenditure comprised more than 80% of the total expenses for one out of ten IDP, returnee and host community households (10%). For returnee households this is even the case for one out of five households (20%). Moreover, data from this round suggests that households increasingly borrow money to buy food.

There are also stark differences across the surveyed camps and districts in terms of food consumption scores (see Map 4). The highest proportions of out-of-camp IDP households with poor or borderline food consumption scores are found in Al-Mussyab (68%), followed by Al-Hatra (34%) and Kifri (25%). Arbat and Ashti IDP camp fare the worst in terms of Food Consumption Score for in-camp IDP households (25% and 22% respectively). Al-Hatra and Al-Baaj score poorly across all population groups in terms of Food Consumption Scores. In Al-Hatra, the proportion of host community households (41%) showing borderline or poor Food Consumption Scores is notably higher than returnee (35%) and out-of-camp IDP households (27%). This figure is also relatively high for host community households in Al-Baaj (23%), as well as Sinjar and Al-Rutba (both 12%).

These findings should guide actors to 1) consider host communities as part of the remaining humanitarian caseload whenever displaying severe humanitarian needs (as evidenced in districts such as Al-Hatra, Al-Baaj, or Sinjar), and 2) refrain from using host community living standards as a benchmark of relative stability and welfare since host communities in areas are sometimes equally if not more vulnerable than other displaced or formerly displaced households.

Table 1: Access to basic services

		In-camp IDP		Out-of-camp IDP		Returnee		Host community*
		2021	2022	2021	2022	2021	2022	2022
	% of households reporting lacking access to an improved water source	16%	8%	10%	7%	16%	12%	16%
	% of households reporting lacking access to enough water for drinking and domestic purposes	23%	52%	20%	18%	15%	10%	20%
	% of households reporting at least one adult unemployed and seeking work.	28%	30%	30%	24%	25%	19%	25%
	% of households reporting at least one person under 18 years working	8%	12%	8%	7%	5%	4%	3%
	% of households classified as living in critical shelter	NA	NA	14%	11%	7%	4%	8%
	% of households lacking valid Housing, Land and Property (HLP) documentation	69%	65%	57%	64%	40%	45%	47%
	% of households with at least one school-aged child not attending formal education regularly	35%	32%	35%	30%	29%	22%	18%
	% of individuals who report having a health care need in the last 3 months that was unmet	9%	10%	12%	10%	8%	7%	13%

\* MCNA X surveyed only host community households, see footnote page 1.

### 3. Water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH)

MCNA X data indicates that water scarcity forms a more pressing issue for households than sanitation and hygiene. Drinking water was a top-3 priority need for 7% of the displaced and conflict-affected population, whereas only 2% of households cited sanitation services or hygiene items as a priority need. Almost all households reported having soap (99%), and most of the households also reported having access to functioning handwashing facilities with water available (97%). At least 95% of households further noted they have access to improved functional sanitation facility.

Nationwide, however, more than one in five households reported not having sufficient water for drinking or domestic purposes (22%). Over half (52%) of in-camp IDP households nationwide reported not having access to sufficient water for drinking and domestic purposes compared to nearly a quarter in 2021 (23%). The lack of basic water infrastructure is particularly felt in districts where most households reported relying on trucked water as opposed to local, improved sources of water. Nationwide, 92% of the households who reported primarily relying on trucked water did so because of a lack of local alternatives for improved water sources, indicating an absence of functional public water networks.<sup>9</sup> This is in addition to the 39% of households reportedly facing problems related to water quality.

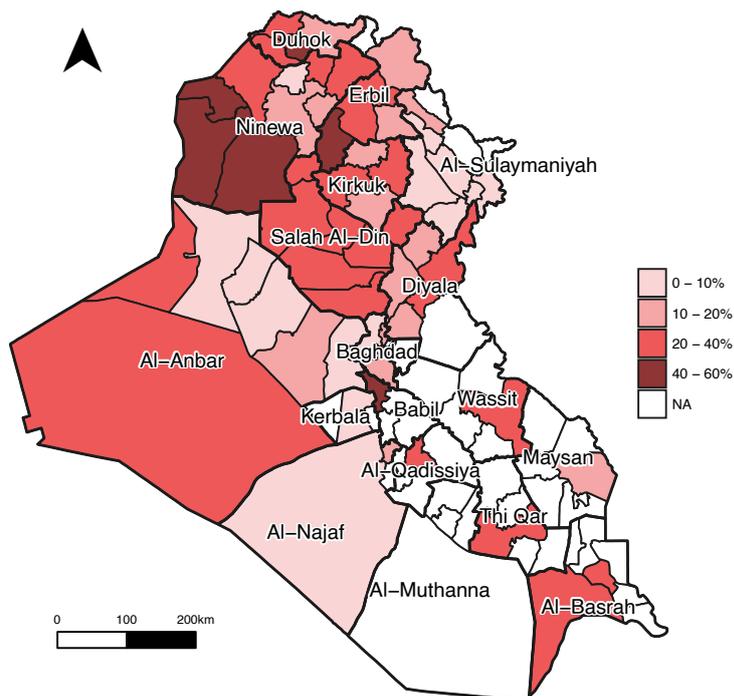
### 4. Shelter & NFI

In 2022, 11% of the out-of-camp IDP households, 8% of host community households, and 4% returnee households continue to live in critical shelter conditions. Al-Hatra (74%), Al-Baaj (50%) and Sinjar (27%) show not only the highest proportion of host community households living in critical shelter conditions, these proportions were also higher than that of out-of-camp IDP and returnee households. That said, these districts also show the highest proportion of returnee households living in critical shelter conditions compared to other districts. For out-of-camp IDP households the proportion is the highest in Al-Fallujah (76%), Al-Ramadi (61%) and Al-Risafa (54%), indicating that shelter needs persist across the country. It is therefore no surprise that shelter and housing was cited as a top-3 priority need by almost half of the households (48%).

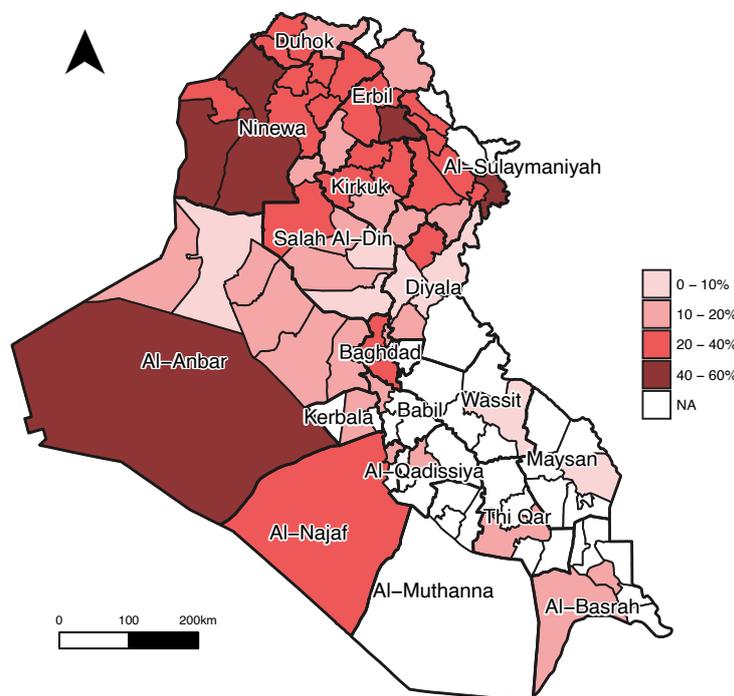
### 5. Education

Little progress has been made compared to last year in terms of school attendance for IDP and host community households (see Table 1). Fewer returnee households, however, reported to have a child not attending school. The three reasons most prevalently reported reasons related to costs of education (30%), an inability to register or enroll the child (24%) and a reported lack of interest on behalf of the child (20%), with in-camp IDP households citing a lack of interest of the child substantially more often than other surveyed households (32%). Twelve percent of the households with school-aged children not attending school further pointed out physical limitations such as distance or lack of transport, indicating that infrastructural issues also affect school attendance.

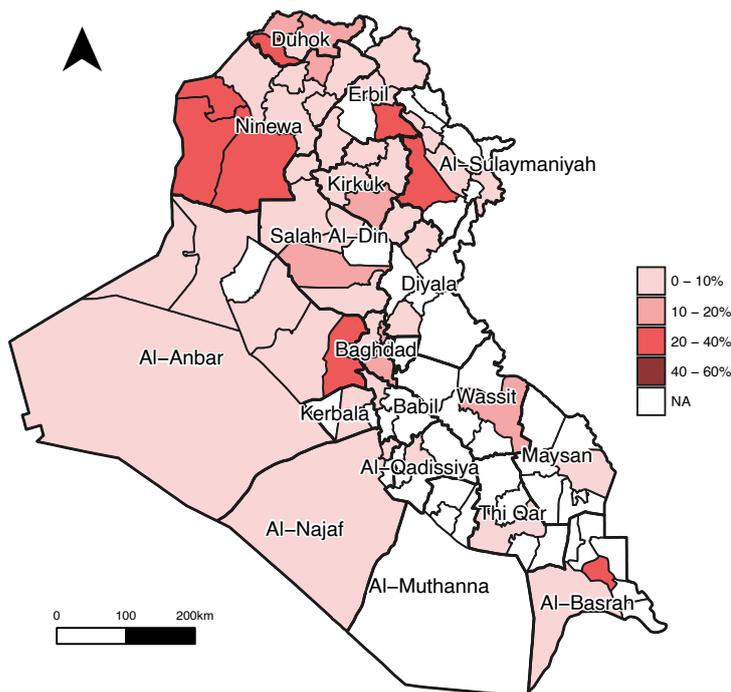
Map 1. Proportion of out-of-camp IDP and returnee households with unemployed head of household



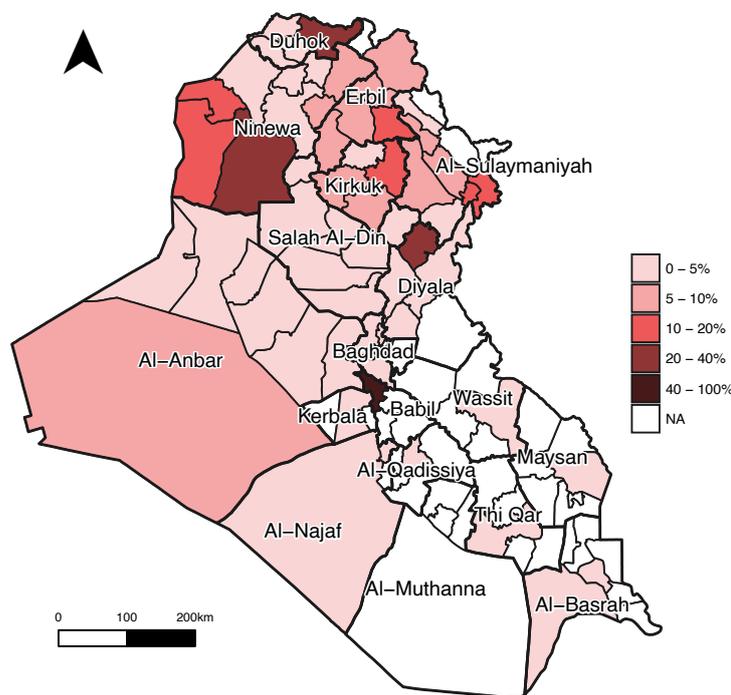
Map 2. Proportion of out-of-camp IDP and returnee households with at least one school-aged child not attending school



**Map 3. Proportion of out-of-camp IDP and returnee households living in critical shelter conditions**



**Map 4. Proportion of out-of-camp IDP and returnee households with unacceptable food consumption scores**



## 6. Health care

More than a third of the households had a member with an unmet health care need in the three months prior to data collection. The high cost of medicines was reported as the primary reason for unmet health needs (82%). Infrastructural or provision deficits also affected households' access to healthcare. Among households who reported a member with unmet health needs, one-fifth (19%) reported that they were not able to access healthcare because facilities were too far away or that there was no mode of transport. Also, a quarter (26%) of households who faced issues delivering a child at home in the 24 months prior to the interview also reported facing transportation or distance constraints.

## 7. Protection

Nationwide, 16% of the households reported missing at least one key household or individual document. MCNA data shows, however, that substantial variation exists both at the district-level and between camps.\* Across all out-of-camp groups, Zakho district (50%, out-of-camp IDP), Al-Baaj district (48%, returnee, host community and out-of-camp IDP), Duhok (46%, out-of-camp IDP) show the highest proportion of households with at least one key document missing in the household. For in-camp IDPs, this figure is highest for households in Hasansham 2 and 3 (49% and 47% respectively) and Khazer 1 (42%).

Social desirability bias - the tendency of respondents give answers that are deemed socially acceptable - makes it hard to get reliable figures on child protection issues,<sup>10</sup> as illustrated by the 1% figure reporting child marriage in their household. Yet, it is because response error that it is extra disconcerting that one in four households reported using violent (physical or verbal) disciplinary measures against their children (26%). Likewise, the 16% of households reporting having at least one child working ought to be viewed as conservative estimates of the true value. In-camp IDP households most often reported to have at least one child working (26%), followed by out-of-camp (15%) and returnee and host community households (both 12%).\*\* Interestingly, while 7 out of 10 children of in-camp IDP households were doing family work such as sewing or farming, this was only the case for 1 in 10 for host community household, who were predominantly engaged in non-structured work such as selling water in the bazaar (45%) and structured work like working in a restaurant (47%).

## Cross-cutting vulnerabilities

### 1. Coping mechanisms

As average income of displaced and conflict-affected populations has decreased and prices of food and basic non-food items have gone up, it is unsurprising that households increasingly rely on negative coping mechanisms to make ends meet. Where 15% of the households cited loans and debts as (one of) their primary income source(s) in 2021, this figure has gone up to 27%.

\* For more details on missing documents in Iraq, see "Civil Documentation - Key Findings Factsheet" (March 2023). See: <https://www.reachresourcecentre.info/>

\*\* MCNA X surveyed only host community households, see footnote page 1.

**Table 1. Proportion of households reported at least one stress, crisis or emergency coping mechanism<sup>11</sup>**

	Stress	Crisis	Emergency
In-camp IDP	82%	15%	9%
Out-of-camp IDP	78%	21%	7%
Returnee	67%	20%	6%
Host community*	67%	13%	7%

Overall, households reported to have a median debt of one million Iraq dinars and 2,300,000 IQD on average (see table 2). Almost two out of three households further reported a debt of more than IQD 90,000 debt per household member. More concerning, however, is that 9 out of 10 IDP households and 7 out of 10 returnee and host community household reported taking debts to cover their basic needs, indicating the limited ability of households to cope with future shocks.

**Table 2. Average and median debt (IQD) reported by households**

	Average	Median
In-camp IDP	2,650,000	1,000,00
Out-of-camp IDP	2,000,000	985,000
Returnee	2,463,000	1,000,000
Host community*	2,820,000	1,000,000

## 2. Pre-existing vulnerabilities

MCNA data further provides indicative insight into how female-headed households show higher vulnerability than their male counterparts in many respects. Female-headed households reported twice as often than male-headed households to have an unemployed head of household seeking work (12% versus 6%, respectively). In addition, over three-quarters of female-headed households (78%) earned less from income and pensions than the Cash Working Group's Survival Minimum Expenditure Basket for 2022 (IQD 440,000) compared to 60% of male-headed households. In connection, among households with children, female-headed households reported twice as often having at least one child (under 18 years old) working to contribute to household income compared to male-headed households (12% versus 6%). Consequently, it is unsurprising that over one-third (35%) of female-headed households reported having at least one school-aged child not attending school regularly, compared to a quarter (26%) of male-headed households. In this sense, the relative vulnerability of female-headed households also clearly affects future generations' opportunities for development.

According to MCNA data, 16% of households nationwide reported having at least one person with a disability.<sup>12</sup> Almost half (40%) of households with one or more disabled members reported that these members were unable to access basic services (e.g. education, markets, and healthcare). Moreover, social security schemes which are in part designed to target households with disabilities fall short in doing so. The five districts with the highest proportions of households with at least one disabled person all had a much lower social security coverage than the nationwide proportion of 17%.<sup>13</sup> These districts also had some of the highest proportions of unemployed heads of households, which might indicate potentially compounding factors to the vulnerability of households in these districts.

## Movement intentions

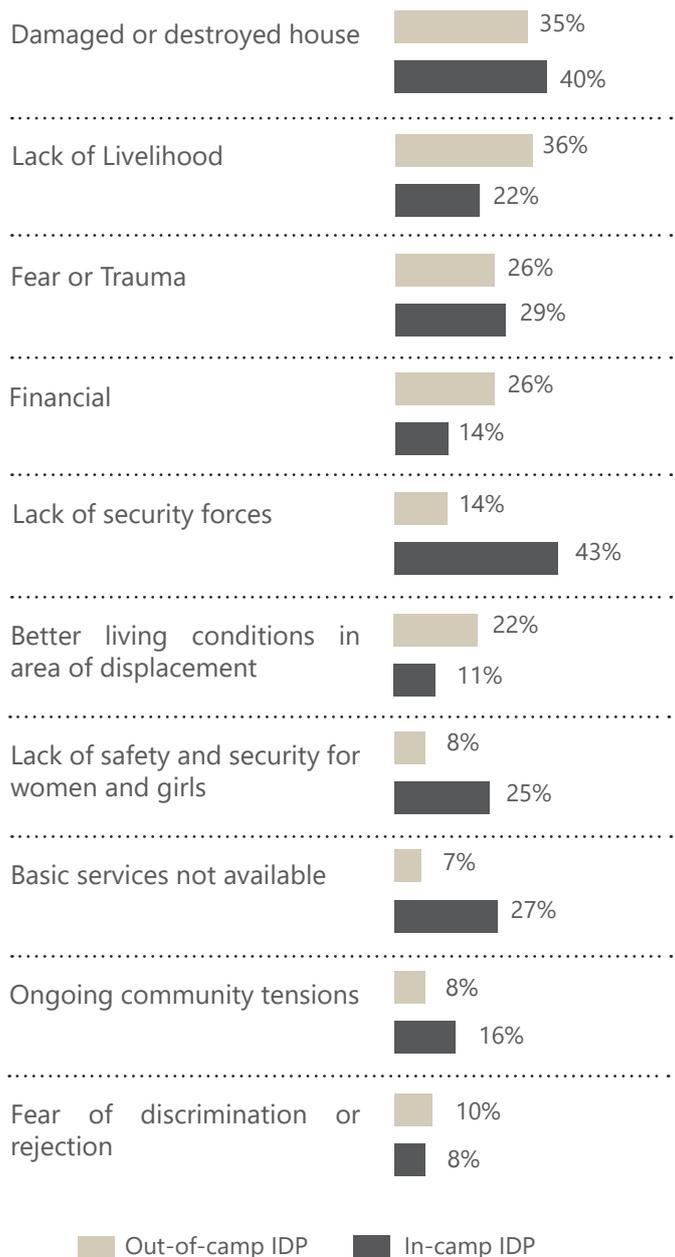
Compared to previous years, both in-camp and out-of-camp IDPs more frequently reported an intention to remain in their location in the twelve months after data collection (90% and 92% respectively for out-of-camp and in-camp IDPs). Over three-quarters (76%) of IDP households also reported intending to integrate for the long-term into their area of displacement.<sup>14</sup>

The reported reasons for IDP households not to return are multi-faceted (see graph 1 below). Consistent with previous rounds of the MCNA, households most frequently cite the damage or destruction of their house as one of their reasons to not return to their areas of origin (37%). Around 32% of the IDP households also reported that there are no relevant or accessible jobs for them in their area of origin. Indeed, districts that witnessed high levels of displacement continue to face high levels of unemployment. A high proportion of household heads were unemployed in districts such as Al-Hatra (37%), Sinjar (27%) and Al-Rutba (16%) compared to 7% of heads of households nationwide. In addition, many IDP households reported not intending to return due to fear and trauma and/or perceived insecurity in their area of origin. In-camp IDPs most frequently reported a lack of security forces in their area of origin as one of their reasons for not intending to return in the coming twelve months (43% for in-camp IDPs and 14% for out-of-camp IDPs). For more than one in four IDP households, fear and trauma also constitutes a barrier to return. In this sense, some IDP households still do not want to return to their area of origin even if labour markets, public services, and infrastructure improve.

Nationwide, 8% of out-of-camp IDP households and 5% of in-camp IDP households reported having attempted to return to their area of origin within twelve months of data collection, but decided to relocate or were re-displaced again. The most cited reasons for their failed return pertain to a lack of security forces (32%), lack of livelihood options (32%), damaged or destroyed housing (29%), community tensions (25%), perceived insecurity for women/girls (25%) and fear or trauma (24%). Encouraged or voluntary returns to areas of origin could cause re-displacement in the absence of sufficient livelihood opportunities, basic service provision, and security.

\* MCNA X surveyed only host community households, see footnote page 1.

**Graph 1. Reasons for not intending to return to area of origin**



## Conclusion

Iraq is a particularly interesting case of post-conflict transition that could mark a defining moment for the international humanitarian community on how to successfully phase out humanitarian assistance and facilitate a comprehensive handover of basic service delivery and social protection to government actors. The tenth round of the MCNA, therefore, was conducted at a critical point in time as it not only provides us with valuable insights into what progress has been made, but also the road that still lies ahead.

Despite the significant progress made since the end of large-scale military operations against ISIS, data from this round of the MCNA also provides some words of caution.

First, improvements at the national level should not obscure the stark differences that continue to persist at the sub-national level. Data from this round of the MCNA shows that

pockets of humanitarian needs continue to persist across the country. Districts such as Al-Baaj, Sinjar and Al-Hatra continue to stand out, but the needs of households in districts across the country, from Sumail to Al-Fallujah, and Al-Rutba to Chamchamal should not be overlooked, nor neglected under the banner of prioritization. MCNA data indicates that households' resilience in these districts will likely wear out soon in the absence of substantial rehabilitation.

Second, progress made in living conditions can quickly be undone by future shocks while recovery often proves to be slow. Data from this round of the MCNA shows that the decline in living standards, income security, and access to basic services witnessed in the 2020 and 2021 rounds of the MCNA has not been surmounted. This is particularly worrisome in anticipation of new shocks such as a potential flare-up of unresolved conflicts, camp consolidation and drought.

While substantial efforts have been made to prepare actors for a transition, there is also a risk that a fragmented handover to the government, coupled with less humanitarian funding and a reduced ability to coordinate among stakeholders, leads to a further deterioration of households' living conditions in 2023.

While Iraq is transitioning from humanitarian assistance to sustainable development in the coming year, other conflicts and crises continue to compete for international humanitarian funding. This will likely steer international attention further away from Iraq. Iraq nevertheless serves as a critical test case and a successful transition in Iraq may yield valuable lessons and insights for other conflict-affected countries as well. Continuous monitoring of households needs and living conditions across Iraq remains pivotal in this regard.

## Endnotes

1. REACH, Iraq – 2020 Multi Cluster Needs Assessment (MCNA). October 2020; REACH, Iraq – 2021 Multi Cluster Needs Assessment (MCNA). October 2021.
2. OCHA, 2022 HNO PIN and Severity Estimates. November 2021.
3. IOM DTM, Informal Sites Overview. July 2022. This figure includes 75,000 IDPs and 6,000 returnees who live in informal settlements of 15 or more households, of which Iraq has 418.
4. REACH Initiative implemented the first MCNA in Iraq following the wave of internal displacement in 2014, in order to support evidence-based decision-making of humanitarian actors, alongside other thematic or area-based assessments.
5. [IOM DTM](#), March 2022
6. Most IDPs originate from the governorates of Ninewa (700k), Salahaddin and Al-Anbar (130k each), Kirkuk (80k) and Diyala (70k). [IOM DTM](#), September 2022
7. A caveat here is the inclusion of host community data from high-vulnerability districts in 2022. However, most population groups' averages between 2021 and 2022 show decreases in average income from employment and pensions.
8. REACH Initiative, [Joint Price Monitoring Initiative](#).

9. Districts where the majority of households primarily rely on trucked water: Al-Baaj (92%), Al-Basrah (89%), Al-Rutb (88%), Al-Hatra (78%), Al-Zubair (57%).
10. Krumpal, I. (2013). Determinants of social desirability bias in sensitive surveys: a literature review. *Quality & quantity*, 47(4), 2025-2047.
11. Selling of assets, buying food on credit or through borrowed money from friends or relatives and reduce spending on non-food items are stress coping strategies. Crisis strategies include child work, selling means of transportation and changing place of residence and accommodation to reduce spending, whereas emergency strategies include forced child or adult marriage, migration of the entire household, children dropping out of school, as well as members in the household engaging in high-risk activities or behavior. Figure represents both household who recently applied this coping mechanisms and household who already exhausted this strategy.
12. The Washington Group Short-Set (WG-SS) of questions is a list of questions inquiring about each households members' functional domains (speaking, self-care, walking, etc.), and assigns a level-3 disability when an individual chooses or was described by a proxy respondent to "have a lot of difficulty" or "cannot do at all" in at least one
13. The top-6 districts nationwide with the highest proportions of households with at least one person with a disability are Al-Mussyab (45%), Al-Rutba (41%), Duhok (27%), Al-Hatra (24%), Al-Shikhan (24%) and Kifri (24%)
14. For more information about reported movement intentions among in-camp IDPs, please refer to: [Movement Intentions Area of Origin](#) and [Movement Intentions Governorate of Displacement](#) factsheets.