

## Al Abassy

Kirkuk Governorate, Iraq - July 2019

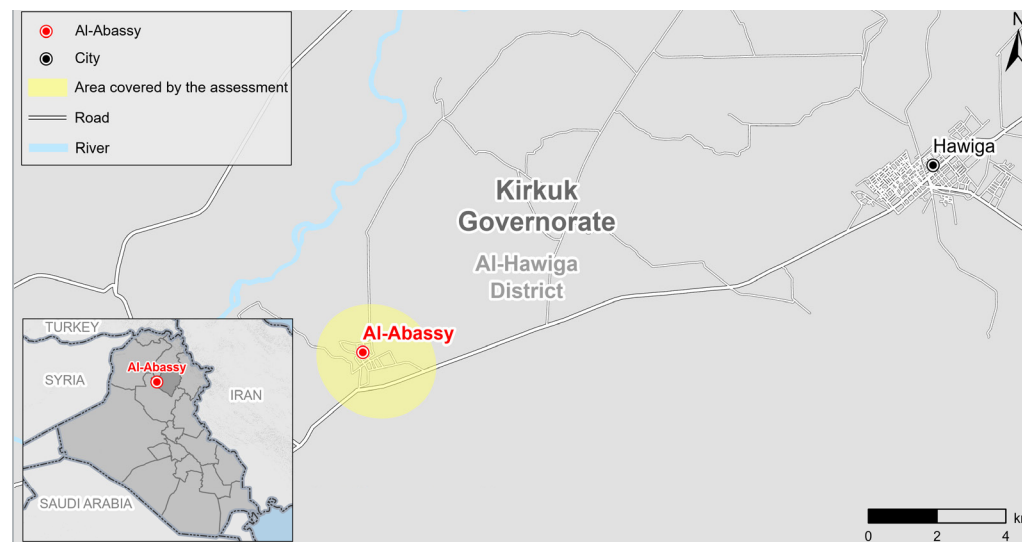
### Overview

Al-Abassy town is a small urban settlement in the district of Hawija, within Kirkuk governorate; it is located approximately 80 kilometres south-west of Kirkuk, and 270 kilometres north of Baghdad. There are no reliable estimates of the population and demographic composition of the town itself, but Hawija district was estimated to have a population of 300,000 individuals, mostly Sunni Arabs (85%) with a minority of Shia Turkmen.<sup>1</sup> In June 2014, the so-called Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) entered the area, which is strategically positioned in the centre of Iraq, right on the border of three governorates (Kirkuk, Ninewa, and Salahaddin). Following a prolonged siege, the Government of Iraq (GoI) declared it had re-established control over the area in October 2017.<sup>2,3</sup>

The vast majority of the residents of Hawija district reportedly fled during the siege and the military operations in 2017. However, since the GoI re-established control over the area, almost all of those that were displaced have since returned.<sup>4</sup> According to recent estimates, approximately 1,500 families have returned to al-Abassy town, and 4,800 to surrounding villages within the sub-district.<sup>5</sup> However, reported figures on returnees have remained relatively stable since July of 2018 (ranging from 1,300 to 1,500), suggesting that the area has seen limited new returns in the last year.<sup>5</sup>

Existing overviews and reports of conditions in the area have indicated that those residing in al-Abassy continue to be affected by conflict-related damage to housing and infrastructure, as well as an unstable security situation, potentially affecting the sustainability of returns.<sup>6,7,8</sup> There are significant information gaps regarding the current situation, contributing to a limited understanding of how best to implement recovery and rehabilitation activities, and how to ensure durable solutions for populations in and from al-Abassy. As such, REACH – in partnership with the Returns Working Group (RWG) – conducted a Rapid Overview of Areas of Return (ROAR) assessment between June and July 2019, which seeks to inform the recovery process in order to support durable and safe returns. The ROAR assessment looks at the motivations behind return, along with the current context related to protection issues, livelihoods, and the provision of basic services in areas of Iraq that are experiencing returns. Given the accessibility of the area, REACH was also able to conduct a 'ROAR+', which includes participatory mapping, in order to provide more detailed visualization of neighbourhood delineations and infrastructure (see Methodology for further detail).

Map 1: Al-Abassy in relation to other cities



### Priority Needs

Community leaders from al-Abassy were asked what the priority needs in the area were and reported that they **most urgently required**:

- **Food assistance** or food rations from the Iraq Public Distribution System (PDS),<sup>9</sup>
- **Healthcare**
- **Education, and,**
- **Job opportunities**<sup>10</sup>

<sup>1</sup> OXFAM. Hawija district report. August 2018. Available [here](#).

<sup>2</sup> Derek Henry Flood. The Hawija Offensive: A Liberation Exposes Faultlines. CTC SENTINEL. Volume 10, issue 9. October 2017. pp 24-28. Available [here](#).

<sup>3</sup> BBC NEWS. Iraqi Kurds 'fully control Kirkuk' as army flees. 12 June 2014. Available [here](#)

<sup>4</sup> Reported by 11 out of 11 community leaders or 'mukhtars' from the area that were

interviewed as key informants (KIs).

<sup>5</sup> IOM. Iraq DTM. Returnees. 30 April 2019. Available [here](#).

<sup>6</sup> IOM. Continued Winter Assistance Needed for Displaced and Vulnerable Iraqis. 15 January 2019. Available [here](#).

<sup>7</sup> IOM. Return Index Thematic Series: The Physical and Social Dimensions of Housing in Conflict-Affected Areas. January 2019. Available [here](#).

<sup>8</sup> MSF. Iraq: Treating chronic conditions in the aftermath of conflict in Hawija. 25 March 2019. Available [here](#).

<sup>9</sup> Social protection. [Iraq Public Distribution System \(PDS Ration Cards\)](#).

<sup>10</sup> Several KIs that reported food as a priority need explained that due to the lack of livelihoods opportunities, families were no longer able to purchase food and therefore required assistance.

## Key Findings

### Displacement and Return, Protection Concerns

- As indicated by the International Organization for Migration Displacement Tracking Matrix (IOM DTM) figures, only small numbers of returns were reported between July 2018 and July 2019, indicating that **the majority of the population remained in their area of displacement (AoD)**.
- KIs returning to al-Abassy (returnee KIs) **primarily reported coming back to reclaim property and a perceived improvement of the security in the area**.
- Among KIs that were in displacement from the area at the time of interview (IDP KIs), the **main reasons given for not returning were a perceived lack of job opportunities in their area of origin (AoO), and their property being destroyed, damaged, or looted**.
- As with many areas in the country, families with perceived affiliations to ISIL were reportedly not allowed to return to the area.

### Livelihoods

- Livelihood opportunities were said to be very limited in the area**, and according to KIs, salaries for daily workers had decreased.
- Furthermore, **the main source of employment and income in the area was agriculture**.<sup>1</sup> However, farmers faced financial barriers to invest in equipment, seeds, and fertilisers.

### Access to Basic Services

- Access to clean water was reported to be an issue of concern. Eight KIs reported that piped water was insufficiently treated, and indicated that this led to residents falling ill.** Water expert KIs reported that the main water treatment plant (WTP) needed rehabilitation.
- Electricity had reportedly improved in the last 12 months, with almost all residents able to access the public grid**, but varied across neighbourhoods and by season. Electricity experts reported that there was a need for more transformers and maintenance of the electricity plant.
- Quality and availability of healthcare and education services in al-Abassy had reportedly been considerably affected by the conflict, due to a lack of qualified staff**, according to KIs. KIs also reported that there was a lack of basic equipment and supplies, in all education and healthcare facilities.
- KIs also reported the **need for support for municipal waste collection services, as collection trucks often ran out of fuel**.

### Methodology

REACH enumerators collected data from 45 key informants (KIs) from al-Abassy town,<sup>11</sup> with the exception of two subject-matter experts (SMEs) who lived elsewhere in the region. The KIs were: 9 returnees, 9 IDPs from the town but in displacement, 11 community leaders or 'mukhtars',<sup>12</sup> and 16 SMEs with specialist knowledge in one of the sectors covered by the assessment (see Table 1). Respondents were identified through partners operating in the area, REACH KI networks, followed by a snowballing sampling methodology. Data collection took place between 22 May and 1 June 2019, through remote telephone interviews.

REACH conducted 8 participatory mapping sessions in al-Abassy town between 15 and 18 July 2019, to develop a general infrastructure map, in which participants were asked to identify the location, condition, and functionality of relevant buildings and parts of infrastructure on maps of satellite imagery.

### Limitations

- Findings from KIs should be interpreted as indicative only and are not statistically representative of the entire population.
- Population figures are provided as estimates rather than exact figures, and are based on the perception of KIs.
- Due to issues in obtaining access to al-Abassy town, the participatory mapping component was conducted more than a month following the remote calls with KIs. Whilst this time lapse may mean that KI reporting may not reflect the same state of infrastructure as recorded in the participatory mapping, the risk of this is minimal in light of the time taken to implement reconstruction projects.

Table 1: Number and profession of KIs with specialist knowledge (SMEs)

Area	# of KIs
Education	2
Healthcare	2
Protection	2
Electricity	2
Water	2
Waste	2
Livelihoods	2

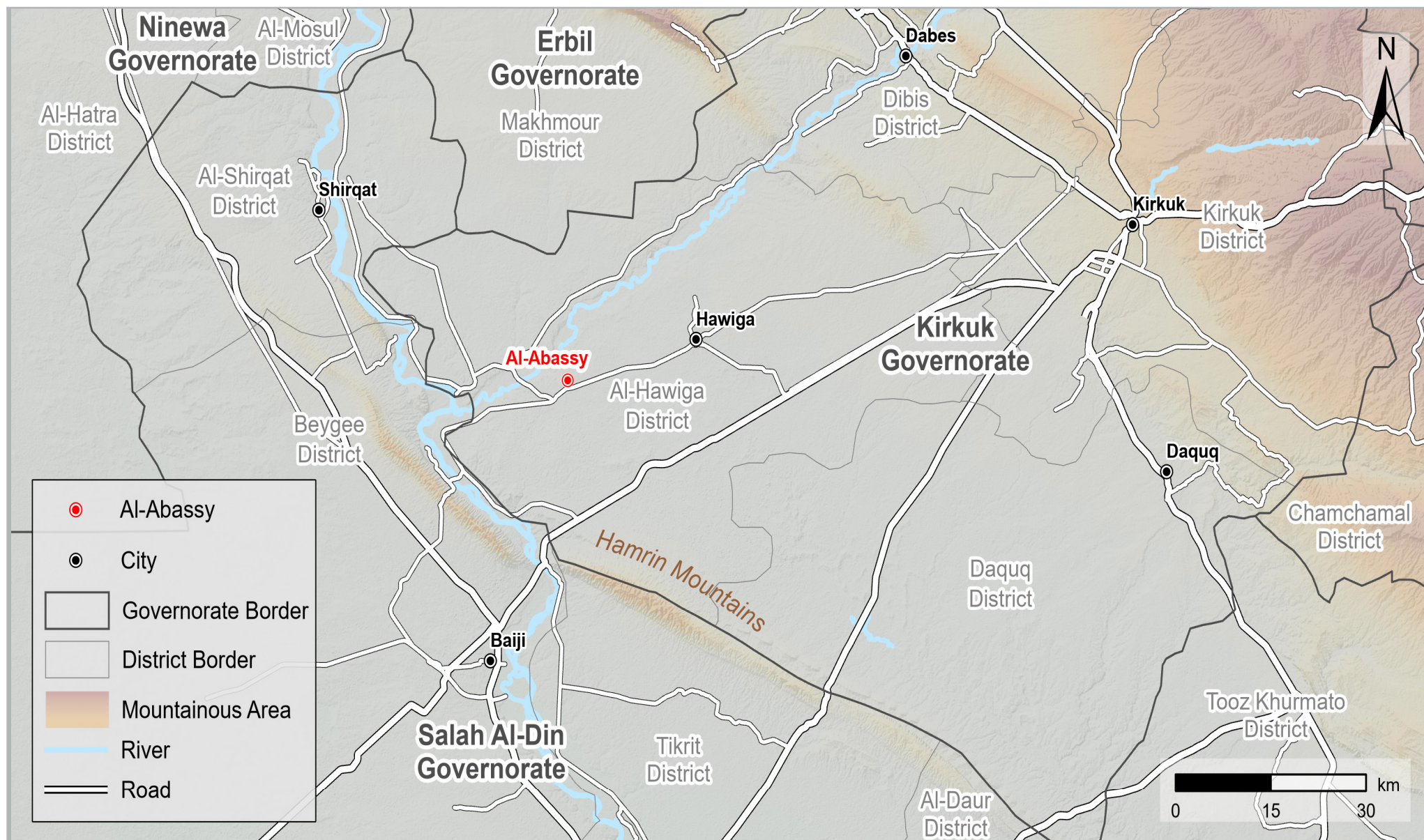
<sup>11</sup> The assessment aimed to have an equal number of male and female KIs. However, given the context in al-Abassy, only male KIs could be identified by the assessment team.

<sup>12</sup> Mukhtars are community leaders, and are appointed by the local councils in each neighbourhood. They represent the most local level of governance and act

as a primary intermediary between residents and government service providers within their area of responsibility. The mukhtar keeps records of the households living within his neighbourhood, addresses the community concerns to the relevant authorities, and assigns households to Public Distribution System (PDS).

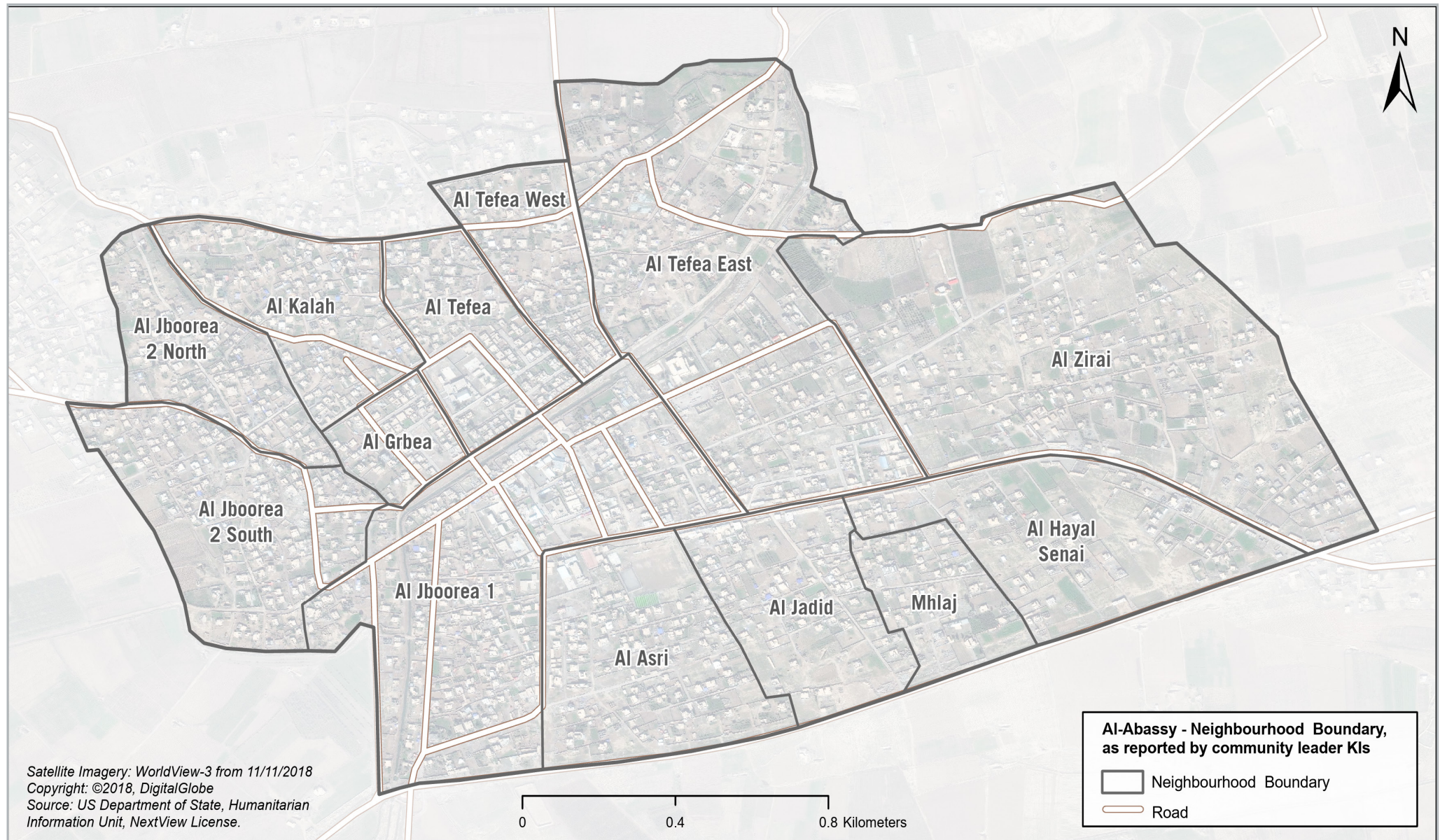


**Map 2: Al-Abassy reference map in relation to Kirkuk and Hamrin mountains**





Map 3: Al-Abassy's neighbourhoods





## Movement Intentions

### Current Trends

- At the time of data collection, the collective population estimate of all community leaders interviewed (11 in total) was approximately 2,500 families within al-Abassy town. Of this, approximately 90% were reported to be returnees, with the remaining 10% made up of predominantly remainees, and a small number of IDPs. A community leader KI indicated that most of the IDPs in al-Abassy came from surrounding villages.
- The majority of community leader KIs reported that there was still a small number of families that remained in displacement: approximate numbers ranged from 4 to 20 families that had not returned, per neighbourhood.
- All returnee KIs reported returning in either 2017 or 2018, which supports indicative trends from IOM DTM that the majority of returns took place before the last year. Most of the returnee KIs indicated that they required some form of clearance to return; most indicated a need for approval from community leaders in al-Abassy, as well as security forces. Two thirds of the returnee KIs reported that families with perceived affiliation to ISIL were not allowed to return.
- Three community leader KIs and seven returnee KIs reported instances of re-displacement from the area (between 3 and 10 families). All reported that re-displacement of families was due to a lack of livelihoods opportunities in the area or finding employment elsewhere, and that these families were displaced to locations elsewhere in Kirkuk governorate. Of the IDP KIs interviewed, all reported being displaced within Kirkuk governorate.

### Why are returnees returning?

- Returnee KIs were asked to report the primary reasons for choosing to return to their AoO. The most frequently reported reason was to reclaim property, followed by the security situation having improved, and a lack of livelihoods opportunities and cost of living in their AoD (Figure 1).
- Two KIs reported instances of people being forced to return to take on their previously-held job positions.
- Almost half of the returnee KIs reported that they had visited their AoO at least once, prior to returning, with a further two reporting that they had contacted friends and family that had already returned. Although not explicitly reported, this may indicate that visiting the AoO may help to facilitate voluntary returns.

### Why are IDPs not returning?

- All IDP KIs reported employment as a major factor affecting movement intentions, indicating a need for livelihoods opportunities in al-Abassy to be able to return. Similarly, all KIs reported having employment in their AoD as a reason to remain displaced. The next most frequently cited needs to enable return were: improvement of the security situation, and rehabilitation of housing (Figure 2).
- All IDP KIs reported that they received information on conditions in the area through phone calls with family members who had already returned to the area. No KIs reported receiving information through official channels from international or government actors.
- A number of IDP KIs, as well as community leader KIs, reported ongoing insecurity in the area due to attacks from ISIL. In addition, two community leader KIs reported that people were not returning to areas outside of al-Abassy town, near the Hamrin mountains, due to continued ISIL presence in the area. Furthermore, the issue of crop burning, allegedly connected to attacks by members of ISIL, was mentioned by returnee, IDP, community leader, and SME KIs as affecting both the community's feeling of safety as well as its livelihoods opportunities. There have been multiple reports of crop burning in 2019, widely perceived to have been started by ISIL, across Northern Iraq, including Hawija district in Kirkuk.<sup>13</sup>

Figure 1: Number of returnees reporting the reasons that influenced their decision to return (out of 9 KIs)

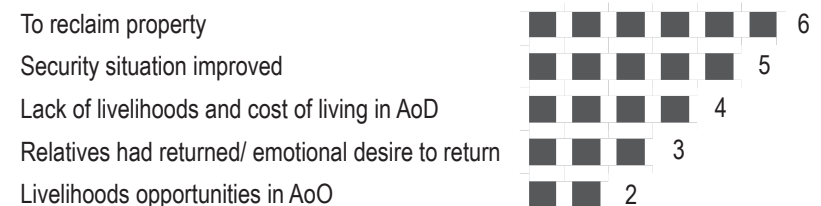
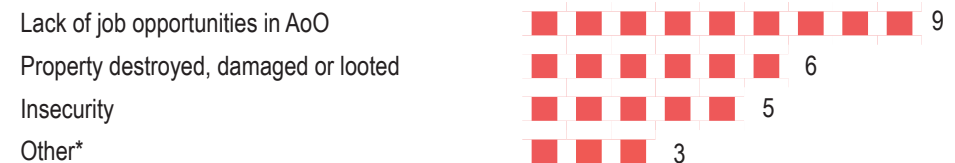


Figure 2: Number of IDPs reporting the reasons to remain in the area of displacement (out of 10 KIs)



\* Including: a family member needing special healthcare due to the conflict, family member enrolled in university in the area of displacement, financial barriers to pay the journey of return and repair housing.

<sup>13</sup> WFP Iraq Situation Report #64, June 2019. Available [here](#).

## Protection Concerns

### Perceptions of Safety and Security

- Almost all community leader KIs reported that they felt safe in the area and that there were enough security forces. One KI reported feeling unsafe, and explained that this was due to attacks on farmers and crops in the areas surrounding al-Abassy, which were perceived to be initiated by ISIL.
- Just over half of all returnee KIs interviewed similarly reported feeling safe in the area and mentioned that there were enough security forces. However, four returnee KIs indicated not always feeling safe, reportedly due to the threat of ISIL attacks; two specifically mentioned casualties that had occurred as a result of the crop fires. News outlets reported that five farmers and firefighters died and another 10 were injured during a complex attack, including crop fires, on the farmlands surrounding al-Abassy on 25 May 2019.<sup>14</sup>
- Reflecting on changes to the security situation over time, only three returnees reported that the security situation had improved in the last year; while others reported that the situation had stayed the same, highlighting the continued instability in the area.

### Freedom of Movement

- All community leader and returnee KIs reported being able to move freely within the town. However, several KIs reported that there were areas in close proximity to the Hamrin mountains, that they avoided, due to reports of continued presence of ISIL. According to a report from World Food Programme (WFP), there were ongoing military operations against sleeping ISIL cells taking place in the Hamrin mountains (approximately 30km from al-Abassy town).<sup>15</sup>
- All community leader and returnee KIs reported that there were movement restrictions outside the city between 10pm and 6am, with exceptions occasionally made for emergencies. One KI did report that the curfew had been extended in late May. No KIs explicitly reported the reason for this curfew but they indicated it to be linked to a reportedly higher ISIL activity at night.

### Legal Concerns

- All KIs<sup>16</sup> who were asked about the legal system reported that there were available courts with enough judges, lawyers, and prosecutors in al-Abassy. All community leader KIs and legal expert KIs reported that criminal complaints would often be processed the same day, although it could take up to three days depending on the case.
- All community leader and legal expert KIs reported that there were also informal mechanisms to

resolve disputes; this included tribal and community leaders addressing civil disputes, such as between families or over housing and property. These were reported to be largely effective in resolving civil matters and were reportedly available to all residents.

- However, one community leader KI and six returnee KIs reported that families perceived to be affiliated with ISIL faced barriers to accessing legal services.
- Whilst the legal expert KIs and four community leader KIs reported that no groups faced barriers to replacing civil documentation, other community leader KIs and the majority of returnee KIs reported that the families perceived to be affiliated with ISIL members had difficulties in accessing or renewing documentation. A community leader KI reported that in such cases, individuals were required to publicly denounce the family member in court. In addition, three returnee KIs reported that replacing civil documentation required authorization from security forces.

### Housing, Land, and Property (HLP)

- All community leader KIs and returnee KIs reported that looting had been wide-spread across the town whilst under ISIL control.
- Similarly, all KIs indicated that some houses and infrastructures had been damaged due to the conflict. However, the level and scale of the damage was unclear and may have varied between different neighbourhoods
- Almost all KIs<sup>16</sup> reported that government compensation for damage and destruction to housing had been promised but not yet received; there was no alternative to government compensation. However, two returnee KIs did report that more recently some members of their community had received compensation.

#### Improvements Suggested by KIs and actors providing services

- As a means **to improve legal services**, legal experts suggested the creation of a legal framework to enable the processing of difficult cases in the aftermath of ISIL in al-Abassy.
- KIs also reported having received or receiving **humanitarian assistance** with legal support in obtaining civil documentation and sessions of mine awareness.

<sup>14</sup> Kurdistan 24. ISIS bombing kills 5, injures 10 who were extinguishing fire in disputed Kirkuk. May 25 2019. Available [here](#).

<sup>15</sup> WFP. Iraq Situation Report #4, April 2019. Available [here](#).

<sup>16</sup> KIs included: community leaders (11), returnees (9), and legal experts (2).

## Livelihoods

- The majority of returnee and community leader KIs indicated that there was a lack of livelihoods opportunities in the area. Approximately 20% of households were reported not to have any stable source of income, although estimates varied across different neighbourhoods. Overall, households in al-Abassy were reported to not have a sufficient income and the livelihoods situation was reportedly worse than before the ISIL-occupation.
- According to community leader, returnee, and expert KIs, approximately 50% of the town's population relied on agriculture as their main source of income. Others were reportedly dependent on government salaries (approximately 20%) and daily labour (30%).
- Returnee and community leader KIs indicated that many who had previously relied on agriculture were no longer able to generate income. This was reportedly due to multiple reasons, including: the perceived lack of support for farmers to buy seeds and farming equipment; reduced subsidies to farmers to support selling of produce; market competition due to cheaper imports; as well as insecurity related to fear of ISIL and potential crop fires.
- Furthermore, a livelihoods expert KI reported that over 1,000 people had been working for the security forces and receiving government salaries pre-ISIL, but they were no longer employed.
- In terms of wages, KIs reported that government salaries had stayed the same compared to before the ISIL occupation. However, wages for daily workers had reportedly fallen down from an average of 25,000 IQD,<sup>17</sup> per day before ISIL occupation to an estimated 10,000-15,000 IQD<sup>18</sup> during the time of data collection. Community leader and experts KIs reported that daily workers, farmers and widows, were unable to cover their basic needs with their wages.
- Community leader and returnee KIs reported that households were resorting to a number of strategies to cope with the lack of income and to meet their household needs, including: relying on friends and relatives' assistance, taking on debt, and sending women and children to work.

### Improvements Suggested by KIs and actors providing services

- Livelihoods **expert KIs suggested the following to improve livelihoods:** government and/or (I)NGOs assistance to farmers (such as seeds, equipment, cash, and subsidies) to reduce selling costs; cash support or home-based job opportunities for widows; cash or food assistance for families; small business grants to create new employment opportunities and investment in local manufacturing infrastructure.
- **Humanitarian actors reportedly provided livelihoods assistance** such as food, cash for work programmes to rehabilitate housing, and cash and other types of assistance for farmers.

## Basic Services

### Electricity

- According to expert KIs, as well as community leader and returnee KIs, all neighbourhoods in al-Abassy reportedly had access to the public grid. Almost all KIs<sup>19</sup> reported that the electricity supply was sufficient.
- KIs reported that the hours of electricity per day varied according to the season, commonly indicating 20 hours of electricity in the spring and autumn months, and 10-12 hours during the winter and summer months.
- The electricity expert KIs reported that availability of electricity from the public grid also varied across neighbourhoods, as the electricity plant was damaged during fighting or lacked equipment due to looting whilst the town was under ISIL control. They also reported not having enough transformers to cover the whole town and its surrounding villages.
- All expert KIs reported electricity from the public grid being free of charge. This was supported by four community leader KIs who reported that, at the time of interview, residents were not being charged for public electricity; of the remaining community leaders that did report paying, the amount depended on the meter and individual household usage, ranging from 10,000 to 30,000 IQD<sup>20</sup> per month.
- One KI explained that the Directorate of Electricity was not charging households with low incomes. However, an electricity expert also reported that the Directorate did plan to start charging all households, between 5,000-25,000 IQD<sup>21</sup> monthly, depending on the meter.
- Around 40% of the population had access to community generators at the time of the survey, according to two expert KIs. The other half of the population reportedly could not access the community generators due to financial barriers. The community generators were used whenever the public grid was off (approximately 8 hours a day), and cost approximately 8,000 IQD<sup>22</sup> per ampere.
- All KIs reported that access to electricity had improved over the last 12 months, with the exception of five community leaders who reported that it had stayed the same.

### Improvements Suggested by KIs and actors providing services

- Electricity **expert KIs reported the need to** repair damage to the electricity plant and to provide additional transformers across the city, as well as the need for support for the maintenance of community generators.
- Electricity expert KIs reported **government activity** aimed at improving electricity services. In addition, KIs reported the **assistance from INGOs** who had provided transformers for the electricity plant to improve electricity access.

<sup>17</sup> 21 USD (Price converted using [www.xe.com](http://www.xe.com) on 07.07.2019.)

<sup>18</sup> 8-13 USD (Price converted using [www.xe.com](http://www.xe.com) on 07.07.2019.)

<sup>19</sup> KIs included: community leaders (11), returnees (9), and electricity experts (2).

<sup>20</sup> Approximately 8 to 25 USD (Price converted using [www.xe.com](http://www.xe.com) on 07.07.2019.)

<sup>21</sup> Approximately 4 to 21 USD (Price converted using [www.xe.com](http://www.xe.com) on 07.07.2019.)

<sup>22</sup> Approximately 7 USD (Price converted using [www.xe.com](http://www.xe.com) on 07.07.2019.)

## Water

- Water expert KIs reported that the town had access to piped water, which was treated at the nearest water treatment plant (WTP). This was supported by all community leader KIs and returnee KIs.<sup>23</sup>
- However, three KIs reported that there were some households without access to piped water in Al Tefea and Al Jboorea neighbourhood (Map 4). One of the water expert KIs estimated that 10% of households did not have access to piped water, explaining that these were newly constructed houses.
- Similar to electricity, some KIs reported that the government was not billing them due to their financial situation. However, they expected to start receiving bills in the following months. Those who reported having to pay for water (2 community leader and 3 returnee KIs) reported paying between 1,000-8,000 IQD<sup>24</sup> per month.
- Water expert KIs reported that piped water was available for around 10 hours per day. Community and returnee KIs reported water supply of 3 to 12 hours, varying between neighbourhoods. Furthermore, some KIs reported that the availability of water depended on the electricity supply, as it affected the pumping of water from the WTP.
- Contrary to reports of piped water being treated, two community leader and two returnee KIs, reported that the water contained sand and residue in Al Jboorea neighbourhood. Furthermore, almost half of the returnee KIs in this neighbourhood, and community leaders from different neighbourhoods, mentioned cases of kidney disease, inflammation of the urinary tract, and diarrhoea as likely results of residents drinking the untreated water.
- Although there were reported issues with the availability and quality of the water, the majority of KIs reported that the water situation had improved over the last 12 months. Others reported that the situation had stayed the same. KIs attributed this improvement to assistance provided by NGOs, such as the ICRC and Save the Children, who had helped to repair the WTP and had provided new equipment.

### Improvements suggested by KIs and actors providing services

- **Water expert KIs suggested** to substitute the water channel coming from Hawija for water pipes; to extend the water pipes to the areas with newly built houses; to provide oil for the generators in the WTP; and to repair the old WTP, especially the filters to clean the water tanks.
- KIs reported that **humanitarian actors had provided assistance** with WASH and shelter programs (reconstruction, water tanks, and hygiene), and repairs to the WTP.

## Waste Disposal Services

- Solid waste was reported to be collected by the Municipality from Sunday to Thursday, once a week in each neighbourhood.
- Waste collection was reportedly free for residents but not for businesses, who reportedly paid 5,000 IQD<sup>25</sup> every month.
- Most of the KIs<sup>26</sup> reported the waste was collected from the houses and taken to a landfill outside the city. However, KIs from the neighbourhood of Al Tefea reported that waste was collected only from the main streets. Two KIs from this neighbourhood reported health problems due to waste, mostly skin diseases. One of these KIs reported that people lived far from the main streets, and people left the rubbish in their front doors, which attracted many insects.
- Two KIs reported that the frequency of waste collection was not enough so people disposed of their waste by transporting it with their own vehicles to lands in the vicinity.

### Improvements Suggested by KIs

**Waste disposal expert KIs reported** that they needed more collection trucks, money to employ more workers, oil for the trucks, general equipment, as well as awareness raising activities about proper waste disposal practices.

<sup>23</sup> KIs included: community leaders, returnees, and water experts.

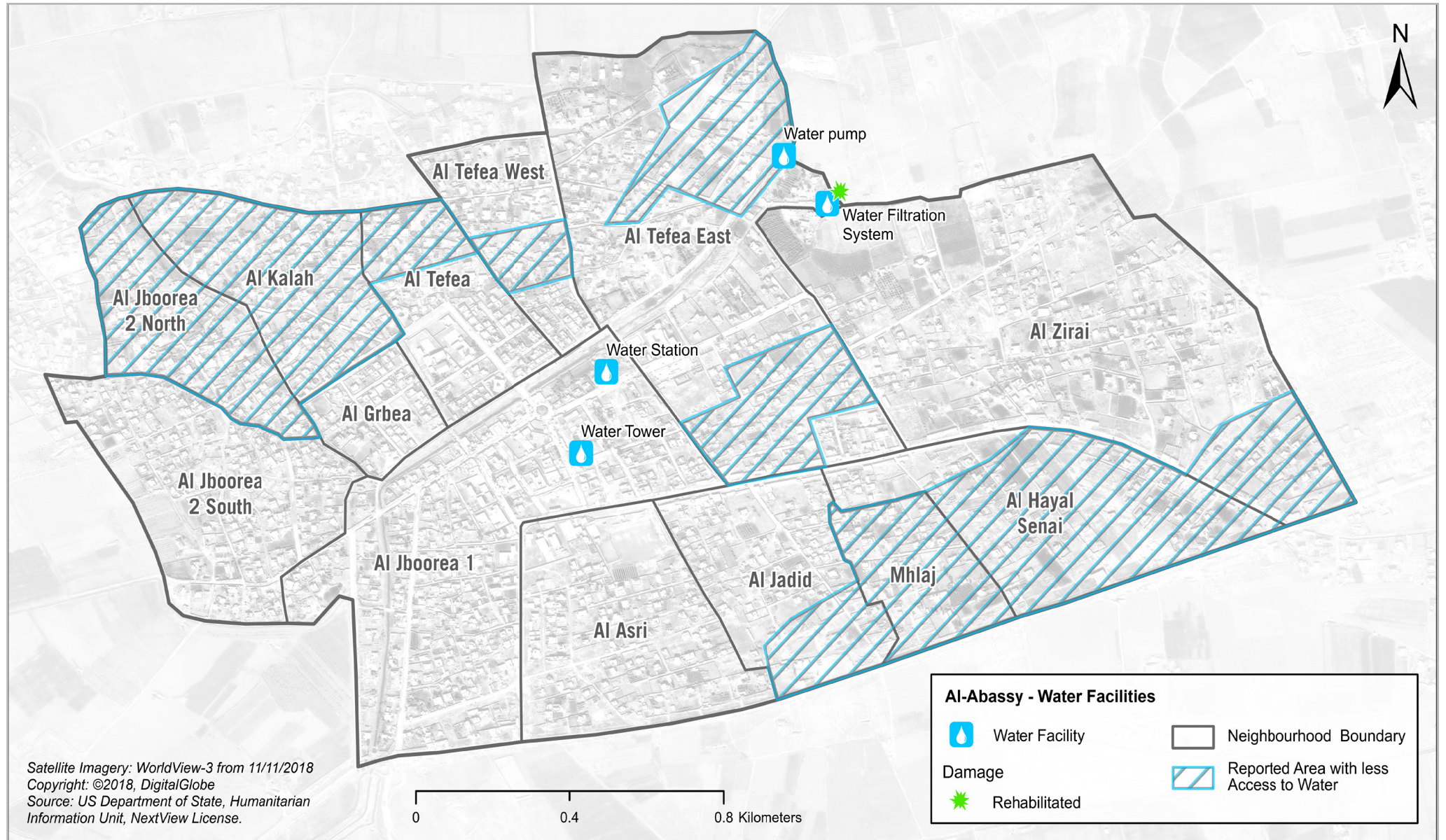
<sup>24</sup> Approximately 1 to 7 USD (Price converted using [www.xe.com](http://www.xe.com) on 07.07.2019.)

<sup>25</sup> Approximately 4 USD (Price converted using [www.xe.com](http://www.xe.com) on 07.07.2019.)

<sup>26</sup> KIs included: community leaders, returnees, and waste disposal experts.



Map 4: Water provision in al-Abassy



## Healthcare

- Overall, healthcare services were reported to be available but limited, with one hospital and one public clinic operating in al-Abassy town (Map 5). Although the hospital was functional, it was reported to have been damaged during fighting and only part of the building was operational. Part of the hospital services were provided in a small building next to it.
- Cost of treatment was approximately 1,000 to 2,000 IQD<sup>27</sup> for a visit to public services, excluding any additional costs for medication.
- All KIs<sup>28</sup> reported that there was a lack of doctors, with a particular need for specialists in maternity care and the treatment of patients with chronic illnesses. Also, equipment was needed due to damage and looting during fighting, limiting the treatment and healthcare available.
- All KIs reported that there were no specialised public services available for surgery, maternity care, and mental health services, and that there were only emergency services during daytime (until 2pm). Consequently, residents had to travel to al-Hawiga or Kirkuk to receive treatment, which was costly and had reportedly led to the deaths of some residents who had not been able to receive timely treatment. The curfew reportedly made emergency services more problematic.
- Health expert KIs reported that private services were available for surgery and dentistry, but that this was more expensive and presented an access barrier to poorer families. Private healthcare was reported to cost between 8,000 IQD and 15,000 IQD,<sup>29</sup> and one KI reported that treatment could cost more than 15,000 IQD.
- KIs reported the number of pharmacies (approximately 7) being sufficient and most medication being available; but KIs also reported that it was more expensive than before ISIL occupation.
- Health expert KIs and the majority of other KIs (7 community leader and 6 returnees) reported that there had been no change in the availability and quality of healthcare services in the last 12 months. Where KIs reported that services had improved, several reported this to be due to assistance provided by Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), which had been delivering medicines, providing doctors and offering other support.

### Improvements Suggested by KIs and actors providing services

- **Health experts suggested** that the clinic needed to be rebuilt, more medical equipment had to be provided, more doctors were needed, especially for maternity care, and there was a need for more generators for the clinic.
- KIs reported **NGOs providing assistance** with doctors, treatment, medicines, children's psychological support, and medical mobile units.

## Education

- KIs reported that there were schools operating at all levels, with three functional primary schools, one middle school, and one high school. One primary school in Al Tefea neighbourhood was reported to be non-functional due to conflict-related damage (Map 6).
- However, the education expert KIs and a community leader KI reported that education services were insufficient. The education experts reported that there were approximately 60 students per class.
- In addition, all KIs<sup>30</sup> reported that there were not enough teachers, and schools were being run by volunteer teachers who were being paid by the community. They received 5,000-10,000 IQD<sup>31</sup> from each primary student and 25,000 IQD<sup>32</sup> from each middle or high school student per school season.
- Furthermore, there was a lack of equipment and supplies, including desks, chairs, books, and stationary.
- Sixteen (16) KIs reported barriers to accessing education, including: the lack of teachers and equipment, financial difficulties to cover education expenses, lower quality of education due the shortage of teachers, as well as changes to the curriculum creating additional difficulties for both teachers and students.
- According to the education expert KIs, the availability of education services had worsened compared to before ISIL occupation.

### Improvements Suggested by KIs and actors providing services

- **Education experts suggested the following improvements:** new equipment, including electronics (air conditioner, a printer), desks, chairs, blackboards and books and stationery for the schools; more teachers or cash assistance to support the volunteer teachers, and more facilities to reduce overcrowding.
- KIs reported some **NGOs assistance** in schools who provided after school classes and creating of child friendly spaces.

<sup>27</sup> Approximately 1-2 USD (Price converted using [www.xe.com](http://www.xe.com) on 07.07.2019.)

<sup>28</sup> KIs included: community leaders, returnees, and health experts.

<sup>29</sup> Approximately 7 to 13 USD (Price converted using [www.xe.com](http://www.xe.com) on 07.07.2019.)

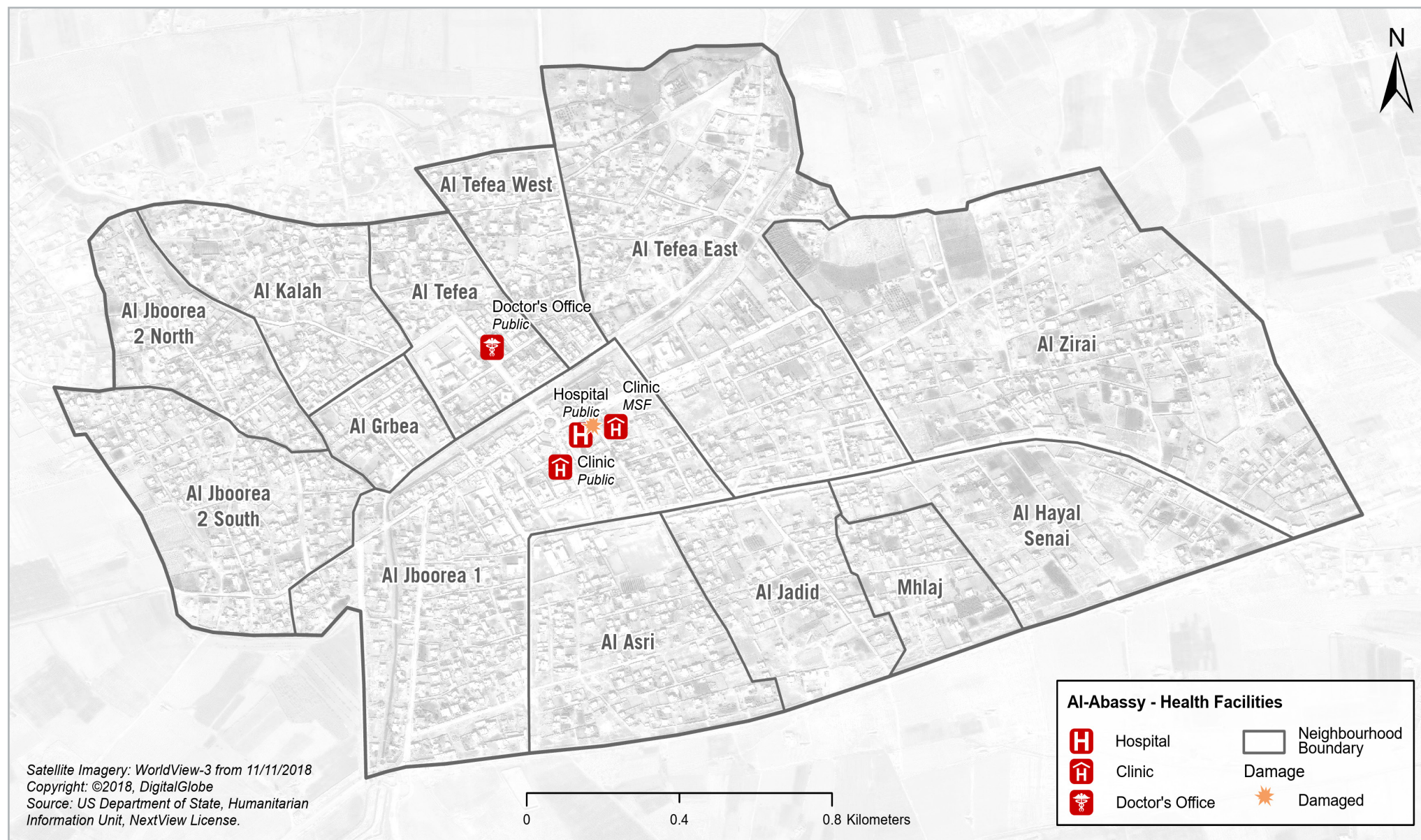
<sup>30</sup> KIs included: community leaders, returnees, and education experts.

<sup>31</sup> Approximately 4-8 USD (Price converted using [www.xe.com](http://www.xe.com) on 07.07.2019.)

<sup>32</sup> Approximately 21 USD (Price converted using [www.xe.com](http://www.xe.com) on 07.07.2019.)

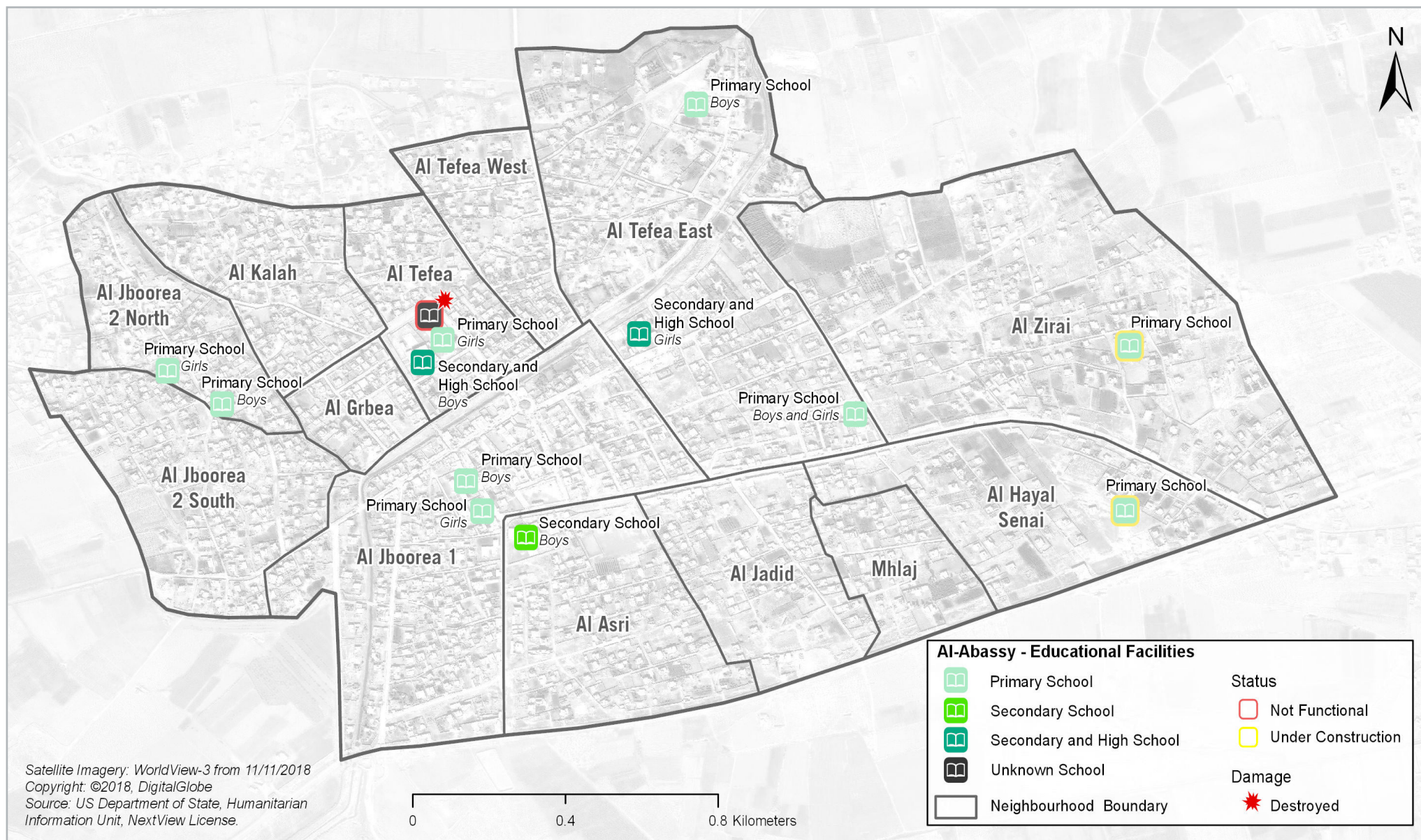


Map 5: Healthcare facilities in al-Abassy





Map 6: Education facilities in al-Abassy





## Conclusions

Since the GoI re-took control of al-Abassy town in 2017, the vast majority of IDPs that fled from the town are thought to have returned. However, despite the scale of resettlement, residents of the area continue to be affected by the after effects of occupation and conflict. Due to information gaps concerning the scope and scale of needs in the area, particularly relating to basic services and infrastructure, REACH, in coordination with the RWG, conducted a ROAR+ assessment to support evidence based recovery and rehabilitation activities to support durable returns.

Findings indicate a lack of livelihood opportunities for returnee households in al-Abassy. Due to a combination of a traditional reliance on agriculture and a lack of investment in seeds and farming equipment, families face barriers making a living. In addition, the security situation, even though reportedly stable in al-Abassy town, was perceived to be volatile in surrounding areas and farm lands, highlighted by recent crop fires that were allegedly caused by ISIL. With limited access to livelihoods, households faced additional challenges accessing food, and reportedly relied on coping mechanisms such as taking on debts to be able to afford basic food items.

Regarding services, KIs highlighted the need for rehabilitation of the local water treatment plant to improve access to potable drinking water, a lack of which reportedly caused related diseases among residents. Furthermore, although returnees could access most basic healthcare services, KIs reported the urgent need for specialists in the fields of maternity care, chronic diseases and surgery.

In order to best support durable and safe returns in al-Abassy and prevent cases of secondary displacement, humanitarian, development, and governmental organisations need to implement programming that facilitates the growth of livelihoods and income generating opportunities, while providing support to households in the short-term to enable them to meet their basic needs. In addition, there is a need for improved public services, particularly rehabilitation of water infrastructure, and improved access to health services.

### About REACH

REACH facilitates the development of information tools and products that enhance the capacity of aid actors to make evidence-based decisions in emergency, recovery and development contexts. All REACH activities are conducted through inter-agency aid coordination mechanisms.

All our reports, maps and factsheets are available on the REACH resource centre. For more information, visit our website at [www.reach-initiative.org](http://www.reach-initiative.org), follow us on Twitter: @REACH\_info and Facebook: [www.facebook.com/IMPACT.init](https://www.facebook.com/IMPACT.init) or write to [geneva@reach-initiative.org](mailto:geneva@reach-initiative.org)

### About the Returns Working Group (RWG) Iraq

The Returns Working Group (RWG) is an operational and multi- stakeholder platform on returns, which was established in line with Strategic Objective 3 of the 2016 Iraq HRP “to support voluntary, safe and dignified return” of IDPs; to monitor and report on conditions in return areas, and determine to what extent durable solutions have been achieved- or progress made- for returnees.

The key objective of the group is to establish coherence of information, data and analysis, strengthen coordination and advocacy, give guidance on activities related to the key areas, and enhance complementary action among its partners with the overall goal of supporting and reinforcing the national response to Iraq’s coming reintegration challenge.