

# IRAQ Displacement in Southern Governorates

Babylon, Kerbala, Najaf, Qadissiya & Wassit, January 2015

**REACH** An initiative of  
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## SITUATION OVERVIEW

### Summary

Escalating insecurity in much of northern and central Iraq since January 2014 has caused the internal displacement of approximately 1.9 million persons across the country. Iraq's southern governorates, including Babylon, Kerbala, Najaf, Qadissiya and Wassit, have for the most part not been directly exposed to the conflict but have instead received a large influx of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). A total of 38,350 displaced families now reside across all five assessed governorates, with the majority in Kerbala and Najaf.

IDPs in the five assessed governorates predominantly originate from Anbar and Ninewa, and arrived in three distinct phases: before June; between June and September; and from September. The first wave was characterised by an influx of IDPs from Anbar where fighting has been ongoing between Armed Groups (AGs) and the Iraqi government since December 2013.

The second wave saw IDPs arriving from Ninewa, following the spread of violence on to the Ninewa plains. The last wave included a continued, but smaller stream of arrivals from Ninewa and an increase in IDPs from Anbar.

The majority of IDPs in these governorates live in public buildings and collective shelters, with the remainder mostly renting or hosted by families. Although the assessed area is largely accessible to humanitarian actors, relatively little assistance has been delivered to date compared to northern areas.

Host communities have thus far been largely resilient to the added pressure of displaced populations, with little rise in unemployment and limited food shortages. However, the surge in populations has stretched and will continue to stretch local services.

This report provides an overview of displacement trends and the priority needs of communities hosting IDPs. It should be read alongside dashboards for each governorate.



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## METHODOLOGY

All IDP figures used in this report are from the IOM DTM. The objective of this assessment was to gather information on the conditions in communities hosting IDPs as a result of the conflict, in Babylon, Kerbala, Najaf, Qadissiya and Wassit governorates, and to further qualify and confirm IOM DTM findings.

The assessment was based on group discussions and key informant (KI) interviews with host communities. REACH selected individual participants based on criteria relative to the research question, in order to gain reliable and relevant information. A total of 117 group discussions and interviews were held, 20–21 interviews in Kerbala, Najaf and Wassit, and 33 interviews in Qadissiya. 16 interviews and 14 group discussions were held in Babylon.

## LIMITATIONS

All interviews were with host community KIs. KIs were asked specific questions about the situation for IDPs and the host community, as well as on the overall situation. Throughout the report, findings refer either to IDPs, hosts, or to both population groups. As data collected was based on purposive sampling, findings cannot be statistically generalised to the governorate level, but provide a general overview.

## DISPLACEMENT TRENDS

The IOM DTM reports that a total of 38,350 IDP families have fled to Babylon, Kerbala, Najaf, Qadissiya and Wassit. All five governorates have received an influx of IDPs seeking refuge from the escalating conflict in northern and central Iraq. Najaf and Kerbala have the heaviest caseloads of 13,602 and 11,125 displaced families respectively. Only Babylon has been subject to direct fighting in its northern territories, and therefore is the only governorate of the five assessed to have witnessed both internal and external displacement.

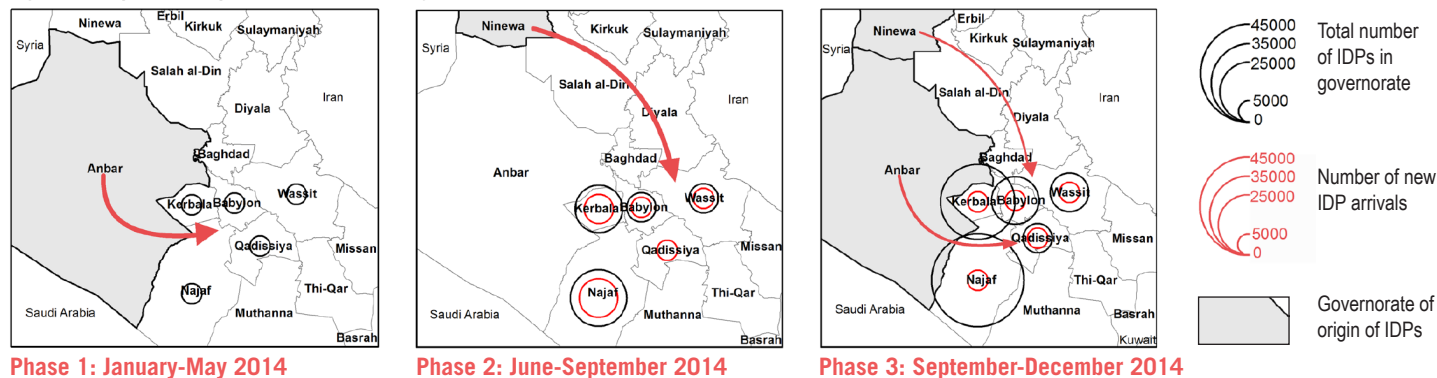
### Displacement Phases

**PHASE 1: January-May 2014, displacement from Anbar.** Throughout the first half of 2014, fighting between armed groups and the Iraqi government in Anbar governorate spurred a steady stream of IDPs seeking refuge elsewhere in Iraq.

Half the IDPs fleeing from Anbar in the assessed governorates settled in Kerbala because it was closer and perceived safer than Babylon. Most of these families travelled in family and/or convoy units using private or rented vehicles. By the end of May the overwhelming majority of displaced families living in these governorates originated from Anbar. Najaf also hosted a number of families from Ninewa, while Qadissiya hosted IDPs from Babylon, Baghdad, Diyala and Kirkuk.

**PHASE 2: June-September 2014, displacement from Ninewa.** During June and July armed groups rapidly expanded their presence in north eastern and central Iraq, including the takeover of Mosul City on 6 June and intense fighting in Tal Afar on 16 June. This threatened and marginalised non-Sunni ethno-religious groups living in Tal Afar and the Ninewa Plains, prompting an exodus towards the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) and southern Iraq. In particular, towards the end of July an increasing number of Shabak

**Figure 1: Displacement phases between January and December 2014**



and Turkmen Shia Minorities from Ninewa arrived in Shia-majority governorates of southern and central Iraq, choosing traditional pilgrim routes and religious sites as their destination (see Map 3).

Most families would travel for several days, renting cars or buses and driving in convoy. Many took routes through the KRI, via Erbil or Sulaymaniyah (some via Kirkuk) and then through travelled through Khanaqin district towards Baghdad or Basrah. Increased insecurity in and around Baghdad forced more IDPs to use

the Iran-Iraq border, and to relocate even further south of the city. From 3 August 2013, violence spread further into the Ninewa Plains, towards Sinjar, Zummar, and areas to the north and east of Mosul. This resulted in a third, largest and fastest, wave of displacement. The majority of those who travelled towards southern governorates were Shabak and Turkmen Shia, using similar routes to those outlined in Phase 2. During this period many displaced families were promised a monthly incentive from the central Iraqi

government to travel to and settle in the south rather than the KRI.

**PHASE 3: September-December 2014, Displacement from Ninewa and Anbar.** The period from mid-September to the start of December saw a continued but reduced stream of IDP arrivals from Ninewa in the assessed southern Iraqi governorates. Although some fighting continues in northern and central Iraq, most of the families able to move appear to have done so at the start of the crisis.

**The IDPs who fled Ninewa in August and Anbar in September and October are especially vulnerable.** While wealthier families were able to afford to leave earlier in the year, the relatively newly displaced moved as a last resort and have few resources left.

Moreover, as seen in Map 4, the displacement during these two periods occurred immediately after respective crises, indicating instant and spontaneous movement and rendering them particularly vulnerable. While these IDPs are generally more vulnerable than many families displaced in July, who were able to prepare for their displacement and bring more belongings, many of these IDPs who arrived in the south before August were also in critical need.

Months later, these IDPs are now facing protracted displacement. With initial savings becoming rapidly exhausted, many of these IDPs are resorting to prolonged negative coping mechanisms, with little access to humanitarian assistance.

## ACCESS TO BASIC NEEDS

### Shelter

**Host communities reported that only a minority of IDPs is living in open air** in Wassit, Babylon and Qadissiya. These families are the most vulnerable and in need of immediate assistance. Exposure and lack of household facilities such as stoves for heating and cooking, will be exacerbated during the winter months (for example an average daily minimum of around 8 degrees celcius and 24 mm of rainfall in February in Qadissiya). These households unlikely to be able to afford sufficient food and medicines.

**The majority of IDPs in Najaf and Babylon, and large proportions in the remaining three governorates were known to be living in collective shelters** (including schools and mosques). Collective shelters seldom provide adequate access to water, sanitation, electrical and heating facilities. They also raise protection concerns due to

the lack of privacy and lighting, particularly for women and children. For example, showers and latrines in informal shelters are rarely lockable, lighted or separated by gender.<sup>2</sup> These IDP families also face the risk of eviction with the start of the academic year (which was due to begin in September but has in some cases been postponed to December) or as landowners start to claim rent. This could force IDPs to resort to makeshift shelters or open air sleeping arrangements if they lack the resources or personal support network for private accommodation.

**Many IDP families across the assessed governorates Iraq were reportedly renting or being hosted—especially in Kerbala, Qadissiya and Wassit.** IDPs residing in rented accomodation or staying with friends or relatives are in less immediate need of assistance, but as the arrival of IDPs increases competition for jobs in host communities, and damage to transport infrastructure harms businesses, the ability to pay rent is unsustainable and could encourage IDPs to relocate to less formal shelter arrangements.

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<sup>1</sup> NRC Safety Audits, August 2014.

Both IDP and host community populations in all assessed governorates, apart from Babylon and Wassit, were reportedly mostly able to access electricity for more than ten hours a day via the main network. In Babylon many households had access between 6 and 10 hours only per day and in Wassit host community homes and IDP shelters faced difficulties accessing the main network. These shortages are common prior to the start of the crisis in 2014. Any electricity shortages that are faced are unlikely to affect households' access to heating during the winter months, as reportedly only residents in Kerbala were mainly reliant on electrical heating appliances.

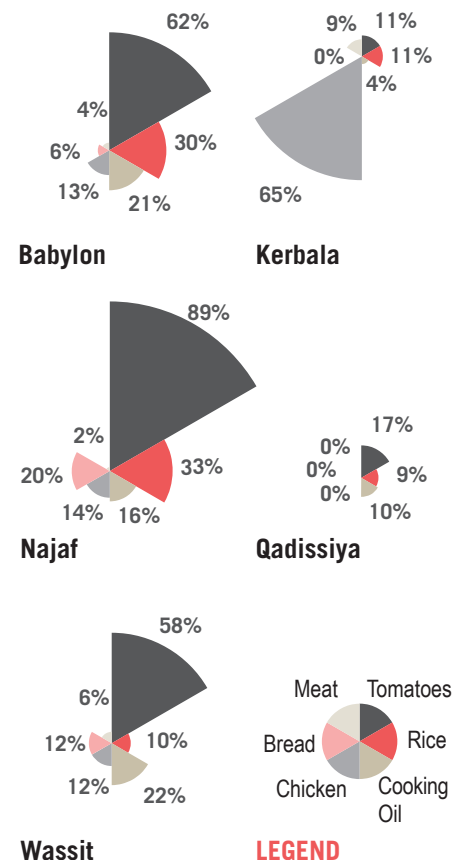
Both host communities and IDPs in the remaining governorates overwhelmingly relied on kerosene for heating. Although the assessed Iraqi governorates have been less affected by fuel shortages dominating much of the country as a result of the almost year-long conflict and absence of budget law, many residents in Qadissiya reportedly faced fuel several

times per week, and the majority in Wassit had limited access on a weekly basis. The remaining governorates typically faced fuel shortages on a monthly or sometimes weekly basis. Fuel shortages will increase the price of fuel and risk inhibiting the ability to meet cooking and heating needs.

## Food

**The ongoing conflict has disrupted normal food supply routes, including the Public Distribution System (PDS) that is used to distribute food throughout Iraq.<sup>2</sup>** This creates some food security concerns, as damaged roads, checkpoints and other infrastructure limits the availability of food and causes a spike in costs. Babylon, Najaf and Kerbala have been particularly affected by obstructed supply routes running through Anbar between Baghdad to Jordan.<sup>3</sup> Armed groups also now

**Figure 2: Average estimated price increase of staple food items according to respondents at the time of assessment since the start of June 2014**



<sup>2</sup> OCHA, 'Situation Report Iraq IDP Crisis No.7', 9-15 August 2014.

<sup>3</sup> Al Arabiya, 'Official: armed tribesmen seize two Iraqi cities', 21 June 2014.

control a large proportion of Iraq's grain warehouses and supplies.<sup>5</sup> Subsequently respondents reported food shortages were experienced both by IDPs and host communities across the assessed Iraqi governorates, mostly in Kerbala and Qadissiya and to a lesser extent in Najaf. However, it is also important to bear in mind that some harvested foods were out of season during the time of assessment and therefore shortages at that time of year were not highly out of the ordinary. Overall, food shortages were not reported to be life threatening.

**The decrease in availability of staple food items, restricted production and arrival of many IDPs, has led to a rise in food prices in the assessed Iraqi governorates.** The conflict has also hampered local food production due to shortages in water, electricity and fuel (see below). Most staple food items, apart from meat, chicken and bread in Qadissiya and bread in Kerbala, were reported to have risen in price by the time of assessment since the start of the June

2014. For example, the average cost of tomatoes in Najaf was estimated to have increased by around 90% and the price of bread by 20%. Despite this, the overall increase in food prices was reportedly not too uncommon or dramatic for the time of year. In addition, IDPs were reportedly able to transfer their ration cards to their displaced governorate and so often do not need to spend large amounts of money on food. However, sustained increases food prices are likely to compound negative effects of food shortages as some host community and IDP families will not be able to afford to maintain their regular diet.

## WASH

**IDP families living in open air arrangements most often will not have access to showers or latrines at all. In turn, collective shelters seldom have an adequate number of sanitation facilities.** This heightens the risk of water borne disease. The nearby conflict has also affected the general water supply, with water access prioritised for military

purposes or targeted by fighting parties.<sup>6</sup>

**Both host community and IDP households in Najaf were the most vulnerable to drinking water shortages, with large proportions facing shortages on a daily basis.** The majority of both population groups in this area reportedly accessed drinking water via the main network. The majority of both population groups in Wassit also relied on the main network and subsequently faced shortages on a weekly basis.

Shortages in Wassit are likely to become even more regular as the state budget has recently been capped as federal budgets have not yet been released.<sup>7</sup> Many host community and IDP households in the remaining governorates reportedly faced monthly water shortages, primarily purchasing bottled water – apart from Qadissiya where trucked water was reported to be the primary source of drinking water. The delivery of trucked water is expensive and inhibited by conflict-

<sup>5</sup> Reuters, 'Special Report: Islamic State Uses Grain to Tighten Grip in Iraq', 30 September 2014

<sup>6</sup> ISW, 12 September 2014.

<sup>7</sup> OCHA, 'Iraq Crisis Situation Report', 15-21 November 2014.

related damage to transport infrastructure across the country.

## Livelihoods

According to KIs the majority of host community **populations who were working before June this year were still working at the time of assessment**, with the smallest proportion in Wassit.

The majority of respondents reported that agricultural production was the primary source of income amongst host communities in the 30 days prior to assessment across all assessed governorates, apart from Najaf. The agricultural sector is the largest source of employment in rural areas in Iraq. Most farming in central and southern Iraq involves planting a single crop per year, this summer crop is mostly planted in the spring and harvested in autumn.<sup>8</sup>

Many respondents highlighted a primary reliance on own trade businesses in Babylon, Najaf and Babylon. IDP families in civil employment reported that they were

able to transfer their jobs to the assessed southern governorates and still receive their salary from the central government.

**Babylon reportedly had the largest proportion of IDP and host community households who had suffered a reduction in income.** This may be a result of the disruption caused by fighting in northern Babylon and displacement of families both to and from the governorate. In turn, respondents reported the smallest number of cases of reduced income in Kerbala.

Throughout the assessed governorates, the fall in income and increased competition for jobs with IDP communities was sharply felt in relation to the spike in the cost of non-food items since the arrival of IDPs, particularly for items such as blankets and mattresses, which were in high demand with the onset of winter. Respondents estimated that the cost of general bedding had increased by 10% since June 2014.

**Most host community households in Babylon and Wassit were reportedly reducing the portion size of meals in**

**order to cope with limited resources.** If prolonged, this strategy will negatively impact nutritional intake. Many households that had suffered a reduction in income in Najaf and Qadissiya were borrowing from friends or relatives. Households in debt are

<sup>8</sup> Food and Agricultural Organisation of the UN, FAO Investment Centre, 'Iraq Agricultural Sector Note', 2012.



likely to face greater difficulties recovering from the the impact of a crisis.

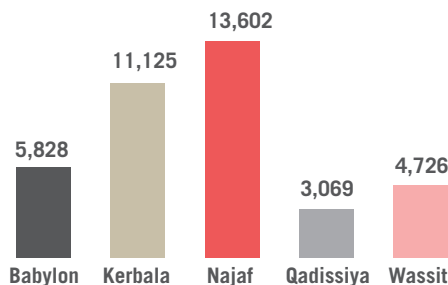
## CONCLUSION

The assessed governorates are hosting a large number of vulnerable IDPs - mainly families fleeing protracted conflict in Anbar and Shia-families escaping expansion of violence and persecution in the Ninewa Plains - due to the percieved safety is these host governorates and majority Shia host populations. Babylon was the only governorate from which some displacement had taken place. This was due to activity from armed groups in the northern area.

**Fewer IDPs arrived from Ninewa after August despite continued violence in the area of origin, indicating that the large majority of Shia populations targetted in the Ninewa Plains have already fled.** It is therefore unlikely that the assessed governorates will witness another large influx of IDPs from these areas. In turn, the renewed wave of IDPs in Anbar in the aftermath of fierce clashes in October is

still relatively small compared to those that arrived before June.

**Most of the IDPs able to escape the protracted conflict in the area did so earlier, whereas the latest arrivals fled as a last resort.** Therefore any remaining civilians are most likely trapped in Anbar governorate. Overall it is foreseeable that unless violence erupts in new areas or against other specific communities the arrival of IDP populations to Babylon,



**Figure 3: Total number of IDP families per governorate, December 2014 (IOM DTM)**

Kerbala, Najaf, Qadissiya and Wassit will continue to level out.

**The majority of IDPs in the assessed governorates are understood to be living in collective shelters and public buildings, with the remaining population mostly living in rented or hosted accommodation.** Despite concerns about inadequate services and protection in collective shelters, and awareness that other households may soon exhaust savings which they use to pay rent, in the short term shelter arrangements are mostly not life-threatening. The current and future needs of the IDPs residing in Babylon, Kerbala, Najaf, Qadissiya and Wassit need to be further assessed in order to prioritise and prepare the delivery of assistance.

In turn, host communities appear to have been coping with the influx of IDPs and subsequent added pressure on public services and livelihoods relatively well. All the assessed governorates were facing a rise in the price of most staple food items but these were not yet considered



dramatic or life threatening. The majority of households are still employed since the onset of the second crisis in June 2014 and are able to cope with the expensive cost of food. Host communities are mostly at risk from shortages in public water and health services which have been exacerbated by the conflict. Further degradation of public services will limit the absorption capacity of host communities.

**Overall, IDPs and host communities in the assessed governorates are facing a protracted situation as the conflict is unlikely to abate soon and few IDP households will be able to return to their areas of origin.** IDP households in particular may soon exhaust their savings and face further degradation of living conditions, becoming particularly vulnerable during the heat of the summer months. Remaining information gaps on shelter improvement and preparation for summer need to be filled. Profiling of IDP sites is necessary in order to locate and address shelter needs, including water provision, access to and lighting

of sanitation facilities, and access to electricity. Household items, such as air conditioning units and coolers should also start to be considered in order to avoid a last minute intervention in the second quarter of 2015.

As more humanitarian assistance is delivered these sites will likely become more formalized. Identifying informal settlements and/or any IDP camps that could benefit from management assistance could facilitate the improvement of service provision in these areas. In addition, access to health services from these IDPs sites need to be assessed in order to prioritise needs and provide mobile health clinics in the face of dwindling public services.

Within host communities, unemployed households are particularly vulnerable to increased competition for jobs, food shortages and a rise in the cost of food and non-food items. They should also be monitored to understand whether unhealthy coping mechanisms start to be employed in response to reductions

in income. More in-depth information on the most common livelihoods of host communities could be explored in order to consider employment and cash assistance.

Moreover, as competition for scarce resources grows and areas become more crowded, tensions between host communities and IDPs are likely to increase.<sup>8</sup> More research on social cohesion in the different governorates

### About REACH Initiative

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<sup>9</sup> Washington Post, 'Iraqi Kurds say their fight is against more than just the Islamic State', 28 August 2014.