

CONTEXT

As more people return to their places of origin than remain displaced in Iraq, it is necessary to know the severity of conditions in the locations to which they are returning, how the severity changes over time and which locations have limited returns and why in order to shape strategies for intervention and resource allocation. The Return Index is a tool developed to measure these factors in over 1,850 return locations across the country.

This document presents a short overview of the methodology and guiding principles of the Return Index. Further details on how the Return Index was constructed in Iraq by delving into its most important building blocks, as well as discussing lessons learned during the design and implementation process, are available in the report “[Building Blocks of the Return Index in Iraq](#)”.

INTRODUCTION

The return of internally displaced persons is often seen as a significant and critical step toward durable solutions in the aftermath of conflict. However, it also signifies that the context may require a shift in programming from humanitarian to recovery-oriented policies, interventions and funding. While population and location figures highlight the significant number of people in Iraq who may be in need of assistance upon return, they do not shed light on what type of assistance is needed, who needs it, and where to prevent secondary displacement or prolonged residence in poor physical and/or social conditions. In other words, such data alone cannot answer two critical and inter-linked questions necessary for strategizing, advocating, and operationalising responses for returning populations in Iraq:

1. What are the conditions in areas of return and how do they evolve over time?
2. Which locations have limited returns and why?

Thus, a more precise tool is needed to understand the “quality of returns” in Iraq and to this end IOM DTM, the Returns Working Group, and Social Inquiry developed the Return Index. This tool serves as a means of measuring the severity of conditions in areas of return, and allows for partners to better strategize regarding resources and operations in vulnerable areas or to mitigate the risks of push/pull factors when it comes to return. The Return Index facilitates a more specific set of coherent interventions that bridge humanitarian, recovery and stabilisation needs.

METHODOLOGY

The Return Index is built on a list of indicators developed in consultation with relevant partners and stakeholders to reflect the displacement context in Iraq. To measure the severity of conditions in each location of return, the Return Index is based on 16 indicators grouped into two scales: (i) livelihoods and basic services, and (ii) social cohesion and safety perceptions. A regression model is used to assess the impact of each of the indicators in facilitating or preventing returns and to calculate scores for the two scales. For example, the model tests how much less likely a location where no agricultural activities are back to normal has returns compared to a location where

this is not the case. To compute an overall severity index, the scores of two scales are combined. The severity index ranges from 0 (all essential conditions for return are met) to 100 (no essential conditions for return are met). Higher scores denote more severe living conditions for returnees. The scores of the severity index can be grouped into three categories: ‘low’ severity conditions, ‘medium’, and ‘high’ (which also includes the identified ‘very high’ locations).

Table one shows the list of the indicators for both scales. Indicators at the top of the list increase the overall severity index.

Table 1: Indicator list for each scale

SCALE 1	CONDITION EVALUATED IN EACH LOCATION	SCALE 2	CONDITION EVALUATED IN EACH LOCATION
Residential destruction	Existence of houses destroyed, combined with presence of reconstruction efforts.	Community reconciliation	Need for a reconciliation process that is not currently taking place.
Employment access	Part of the population unable to find employment.	Multiple security actors	Presence of at least four different armed groups in control of security provision.
Water sufficiency	Part of the population with insufficient public water supply.	Blocked returns	Part of the pre-conflict population not allowed to return.
Recovery of agriculture	Agricultural activities not taking place as before.	Checkpoints controlled by other security actors	Presence of PMU, TMU or other groups in control of checkpoints apart from the Iraqi army, the local police and the federal police, combined with concerns about harassment.
Electricity sufficiency	Part of the population has insufficient electricity supply.	Daily public life	Existence of tensions among residents and preference to not leave the house unless necessary.
Recovery of businesses	Existence of businesses that have not been restarted.	Illegal occupation of private residences	Presence of private residences illegally occupied by others (residents, armed groups, etc.).
Access to basic services	Existence of access difficulties to primary education or primary health provision.	Mines	Existence of concerns among the population about explosive devices in houses.
Provision of government services	Lack of government services provision	Sources of violence	Existence of concerns among the population about violence in the area (ISIL attacks, acts of revenge, clashes between security forces, or ethno-religious-tribal tensions).
SCALE 1 SCORE = 100		SCALE 2 SCORE = 100	

This tool is built upon the following key methodological principles:

- The main assumption used to build the analytical model is to consider whether the severity of living conditions for returnees (i.e., the likelihood or sustainability of returns) can be measured by whether the pre-conflict population has fully returned or not. The assumption is that locations where all residents have returned are likely to have good conditions for return. Accordingly, locations where not all of the population have returned are likely to have issues with services, livelihoods, safety or social cohesion. This measurement has limitations, given that the presence of full returns in a location may not be due to good conditions, but rather to pushed returns from places of displacement.
- The 16 indicators used to build the Return Index help define living conditions in locations of return. These indicators represent a set of minimum or critical living conditions that are necessary to make a location conducive to returns. Therefore, they are expected to be statistically representative and explain the likelihood that a population group returns. In practical terms, the model responds the following question: are there conditions on the ground that explain why a location is more likely to have partial returns as opposed to full returns?
- These indicators were formulated into a survey format and collected bi-monthly through key informants in each

location with population returns. The advantage of using key informants is that many locations can be covered in a short period of time. However, its key limitation is that it relies on one representative reporting on the views of a potentially large and diverse set of returnees. The unit of analysis is the location, which can be a town, village or neighborhood in a city.

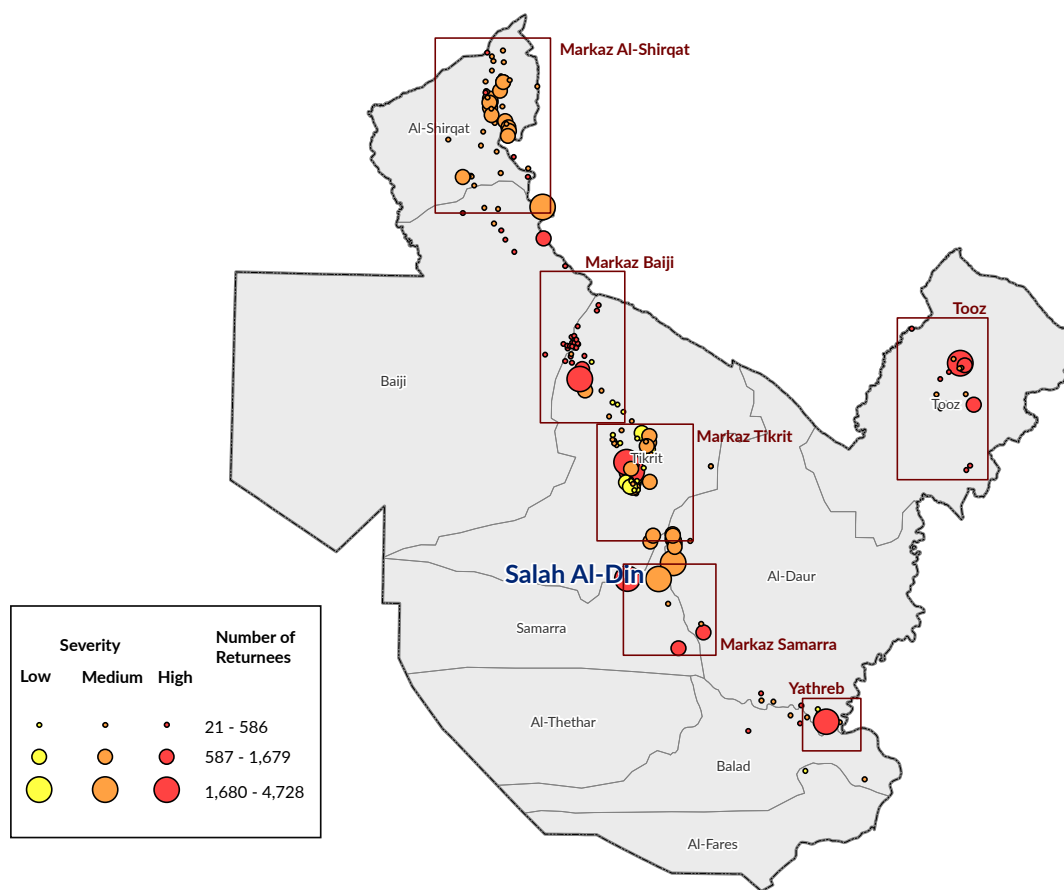
- The scoring is derived from a logistical model with the state of returns in a location as the outcome to be explained (dependent variable) through the 16 indicators (explanatory variables). This model generates an odds ratio for each statistically significant indicator, which measures how much less likely a location is to have full returns if the condition described in the table above applies. These ratios are used to assess the relative impact of each indicator on returns. This type of analysis is used based on the assumption that not all indicators have the same likelihood of inducing or sustaining returns.
- The final result is that every indicator has a value associated with it, so that it is possible to calculate scores of the “livelihoods and services” scale and “social cohesion and safety perceptions” scale. The scores of the two scales are then combined to create an overall severity index by calculating the average score of these two scales. The index ranges from 0 (all essential conditions for return are met) to 100 (no essential conditions for return are met). Higher scores denote more severe living conditions for returnees.

GOVERNORATE HOTSPOTS OF SEVERITY

The Return Index can be used for identifying hotspots and the main problematic areas in certain governorates, districts or subdistricts, using a combination of the severity score for at least one of the scales as well as the number of families living in the area. For instance, DTM has identified six hotspots in Salah al-Din Governorate: Yathreb in Balad District; Tooz District, Markaz Baiji in Baiji District, Markaz Samarra in Samarra District, Markaz Al-Shirqat in Al-Shirqat District and Markaz Tikrit in Tikrit District.

Access to employment is an issue in Salah al-Din. In Markaz Baiji Subdistrict, in as many as 97 per cent of locations no residents can find work. In Markaz Samarra and Markaz Al-Shirqat, in 80 and 75 per cent of locations respectively, less than half of residents can find work. Slow recovery of small business affects Yathreb, more than 60 per cent in Markaz Al-Shirqat, Markaz

Baiji, Markaz Samarra and one third of locations in Markaz Tikrit and Tooz. Concerns about the presence of other security actors were identified across Salah al-Din. Residents report this factor as a concern in Yathreb, Markaz Baiji (90%) and in 60 per cent of locations in Markaz Samarra. The situation is less severe in Markaz Tikrit, as 71 per cent of locations report that no other security actors are present. A particular issue in Tooz is the need for community reconciliation (in 94% of locations). In Markaz Samarra, daily public life is tense in 80 per cent of locations: streets remain sparsely populated and residents only leave their homes when necessary. The issue of blocked returns is also reported in more than 80 per cent of locations in all hotspots, apart from Tooz where some families are reportedly blocked from returning in 41 per cent of locations.



IOM Iraq thanks the U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration (PRM) and USAID for its continued support.



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