CONTEXT

The Return Index is a tool designed to measure the severity of conditions in locations of return. Data collection for the Return Index Round 20 took place during September and December 2023 across nine governorates, 39 districts and 2,187 locations in Iraq. During this round, an additional 17 locations of return were assessed.

RETURNEE POPULATION IN SEVERE CONDITIONS

- Out of the 2,187 return locations assessed, 477 **present severe conditions and host 12 per cent of the returnee population**, or 604,656 individuals.

- **An increase of 4,176 returnees living in severe or poor conditions** has been observed since the round collected in May–August 2023, when the share of returnees in severe conditions was also 12 per cent (600,480 individuals).

DETERIORATION OF CONDITIONS

- The largest increases were recorded in **Salah al-Din** (6,642 individuals) followed by **Ninewa** (1,104) and **Anbar** (120) governorates.

- In **Salah al-Din** Governorate, the most noticeable increase was observed in **Baiji District**, where an additional 5,784 returnees were recorded. This increase is attributed to the to the start of the new academic year and the poor living conditions in the displacement areas. Most returns were recorded in Al-Siniya subdistrict, which is still experiencing residential destruction, slow recovery of businesses, limited access to employment, poor provision of government services, water and electricity, alongside concerns about mines, violence, illegal occupation of private residences and blocked returns.

- In **Ninewa** Governorate, the most noticeable increase was recorded in **Al-Ba'aj** and **Al-Hamdaniya districts**. A total of six additional locations with severe conditions were assessed in **Al-Ba'aj District** and three in **Al-Hamdaniya District** in this round. In **Al-Hamdaniya District**, three of the newly assessed locations with 810 returnees have severe conditions due to insufficient electricity supply, housing destruction and lack of employment opportunities. **Al-Ba'aj District** keeps suffering from poor access to employment and government services, insufficient water supply in Al-Qahtaniya subdistrict and concerns about violence

and checkpoints being controlled by other security actors in Markaz Al-Ba'aj subdistrict.

- The increase in **Anbar** Governorate was notably observed in **Heet District** after the return of individuals (mostly from Erbil and Jeddah camp) after having received security clearance; however, the area still scores high on security concerns, as residents remained concerned about violence, particularly ISIL attacks. Furthermore, the existence of armed groups other than security forces and the harassment residents endure at checkpoints continues to pose a challenge.
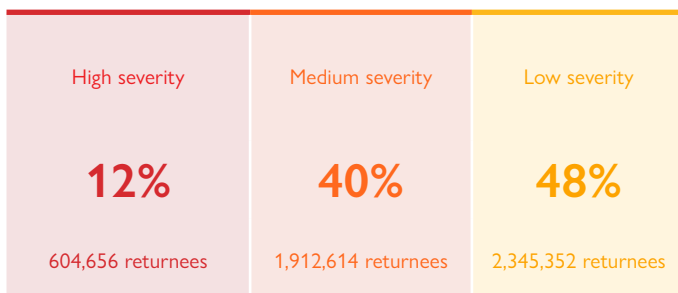
IMPROVEMENT OF CONDITIONS

The largest decrease in the number of returnees living in severe conditions was recorded in **Diyala** Governorate (2,790 individuals) followed by **Baghdad** and **Kirkuk** governorates (546 and 444 individuals respectively).

- The decrease in **Diyala** Governorate was mainly observed in **Al-Muqdadyiah** and **Khanaqin districts** due to improvement in electricity and water supply. However, **Muqdadiyah** showed a slow recovery in business and agiculture, and **Markaz Khanaqin** subdistrict in **Khanaqin** district insufficient water supply. Additionally, there are still concerns in both districts about violence and checkpoints being controlled by other security actors.

- In **Baghdad** Governorate, the decrease is mainly observed in **Tarmia District** due to the improvement in electricity and water supply, yet the agriculture and businesses recovery is still slow.

- In **Kirkuk** Governorate, the decrease was mostly recorded in **Al-Hawiga District** due to the reconstruction of some destroyed houses in the district; however, the situation is still severe regarding electricity and water services alongside with security concerns about the checkpoints being controlled by other security actors.

METHODOLOGY

The Return Index is based on 16 indicators across two domains: (1) livelihoods and basic services, and (2) 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. The scores of each domain and overall index are grouped into three categories: low, medium and high severity of living conditions. For more information on the methodology, please refer to the Methodological Overview.

Figure 1. Proportion of returnees by category of severity

High severity	Medium severity	Low severity
12%	**40%**	**48%**
604,656 returnees	1,912,614 returnees	2,345,352 returnees

4,862,622 Returnees
+17,010
Since round 19 (May–August 2023)

9 governorates	39 districts	810,437 households	2,187 locations +17 since Round 19

Data Collection Period: **September–December 2023**

Table 1. Number of returnees and locations per governorate by category of severity

Governorate	HIGH		MEDIUM		LOW		TOTAL	
	No. of returnees	No. of locations	No. of returnees	No. of locations	No. of returnees	No. of locations	No. of returnees	No. of locations
Anbar	59,460	16	734,262	203	755,214	112	1,548,936	331
Babylon	1,860	2					1,860	2
Baghdad	1,128	4	9,984	16	83,478	102	94,590	122
Dahuk					744	1	744	1
Diyala	53,358	51	157,512	118	30,366	55	241,236	224
Erbil	4,656	15	12,078	29	46,032	24	62,766	68
Kirkuk	2,508	13	73,482	70	115,656	113	191,646	196
Ninewa	271,422	293	617,280	443	1,071,858	261	1,960,560	997
Salah al-Din	210,264	83	308,016	88	242,004	75	760,284	246
Total	604,656	477	1,912,614	967	2,345,352	743	4,862,622	2,187

GOVERNORATE HOTSPOTS OF SEVERITY

Subdistricts are classified as 'hotspots' if they score highly in terms of severity on at least one of the two scales (either livelihoods and basic services or safety and social cohesion) or if they score medium in terms of severity but also host relatively large numbers of returnees – at least 60,000 returnees in a subdistrict.

Thirty-one hotspots were identified across five governorates in this round. Compared to the round collected in May–August 2023, all hotspots stayed the same except for Markaz Tikrit subdistrict in Tikrit District located in Salah al-Din Governorate, which was removed from the list due to the improvement of the electricity and water services in most of locations of this subdistrict.

SALAH AL-DIN: 490,344 returnees in hotspots

- Al-Amerli
- Al-Dujeel Center
- Al-Eshaqi
- Al-Moatassem
- Al-Siniya
- Markaz Al-Balad
- Markaz Al-Daur
- Markaz Al-Shirqat
- Markaz Baiji
- Markaz Samarra
- Suleiman Beg
- Yathreb

NINEWA: 617,658 returnees in hotspots

- Al-Qahtaniya
- Al-Qayara
- Al-Shamal
- Ayadiya
- Hamam al Aleel
- Markaz Al-Ba'aj
- Markaz Sinjar
- Markaz Telafar
- Qaeyrrawan
- Zummar

ANBAR: 400,884 returnees in hotspots

- Al-Amirya
- Al-Forat
- Al-Garma
- Husaibah Al-Sharqiah
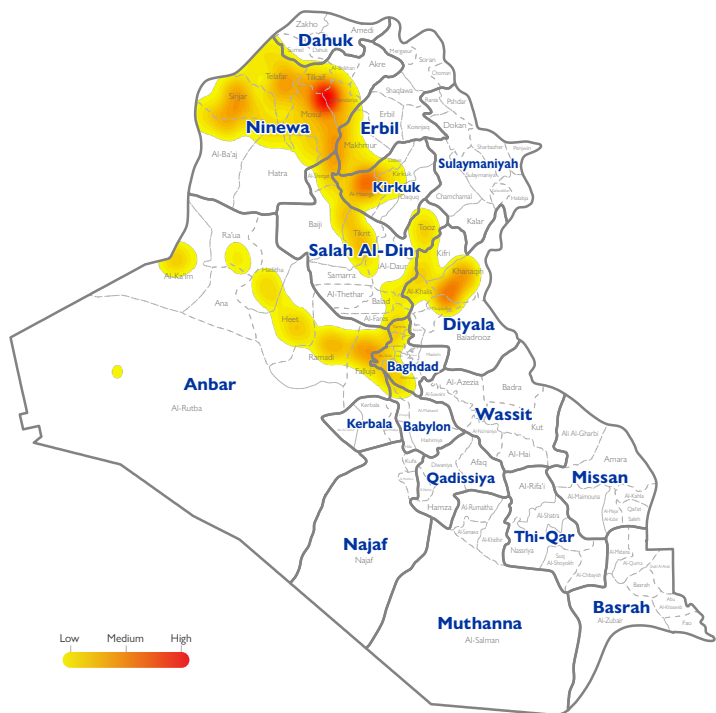- Markaz Al-Ka'im
- Markaz Heet

DIYALA: 83,784 returnees in hotspots

- Jalula
- Qara Tabe

BABYLON: 1,860 returnees in hotspots

- Al-Iskandaria

Map 1. Returnee population density by overall severity score

Low   Medium   High

This map is for illustration purposes only. Names and boundaries on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by IOM.

The map shows conditions of severity based on population size and severity score of each assessed location. The darker colours indicate a larger concentration of families living in severe conditions of return, while the brighter colours indicate lower severity conditions or areas with low levels of returns.