



INTRODUCTION

At the close of 2007, international attention began to focus on the return of Iraqis from displacement internally and abroad. This phenomenon has been raised as a political issue and used as an indicator in debates on the Iraqi context. However, the return of displaced Iraqis is first and foremost a humanitarian issue that requires assessment and assistance. Understanding the nature of return is essential to effective humanitarian response.

Since December 2007, IOM has worked closely with MoDM to track and assess returnee populations, building a database of humanitarian information while developing the capacity of the Iraqi government to assess and report on this issue. An explanation of the assessment methodology can be found in the Appendix at the end of this report. IOM and MoDM consider a returnee as someone who has returned to his/her original home or original neighborhood. Iraqis who return but not to their original home or neighborhood are considered secondarily displaced.



Al-Wardiyah, Baghdad: An Iraqi surveys the neighborhood to which he has returned.

IOM/MoDM assessments find that for many returnees, return has not brought them relief from the humanitarian crisis they experienced in displacement. Many have returned to find their houses destroyed and their livelihoods gone. The majority report food, fuel, and non-food items as priority humanitarian needs.

This report presents the data collected by IOM returnee assessments to date, along with analysis of return trends and reporting on specific locations. This document, along with a range of other IOM reports released on displacement in Iraq, can be found at <http://www.iom-iraq.net/library.html#IDP>. Comprehensive tabulated statistics are available in the MoDM report "Returnee Monitoring and Needs Assessments, Tabulation Report" March 2008.

OVERVIEW OF RETURNEE POPULATION

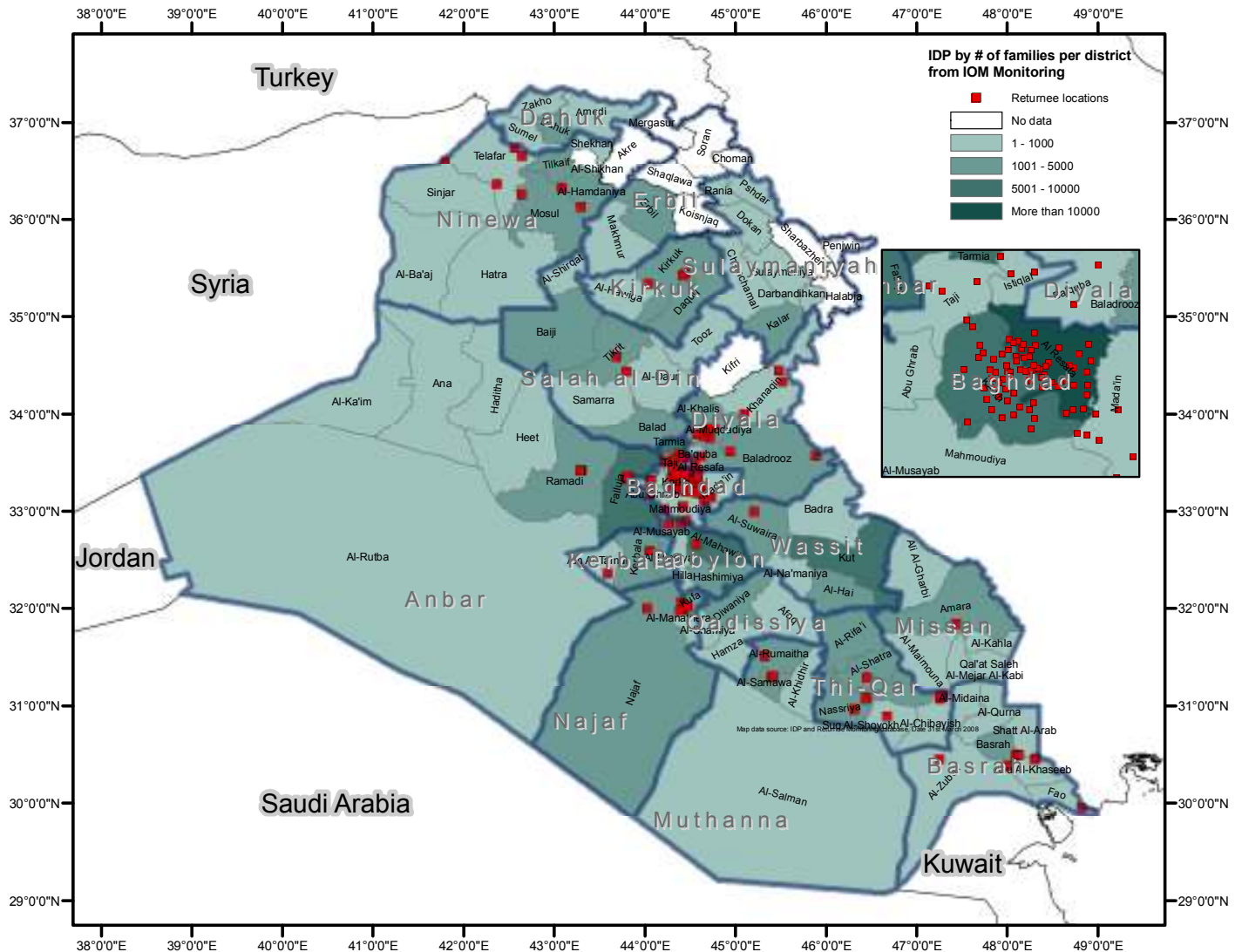
Based on available information from MoDM's Returnee Support center, IOM and MoDM monitors' field visits, UNHCR Rapid assessments (snapshot), and other sources, locations have been identified for **13,030 returnee** families (an estimated 78,180 individuals) throughout Iraq. 17% of these families are returnees from abroad (refugees) and 83% are returnees from internal displacement (IDPs).

This figure is not comprehensive, since not all returnees are immediately identified by monitors. However, it is likely that this list represents the majority of returnees. Returns continue to represent only a fraction of the displaced population: this figure constitutes less than 1% of the estimated five million Iraqis displaced both internally and abroad¹.

¹ According to the IDP Working Group's "Internally Displaced Persons – Update, 24 March 2008" there are 2.77 million Iraqis internally displaced within Iraq. According to various sources, more than an additional 2.5 million have fled to countries in the region.

Identified returnee locations are as follows: 59% are in Baghdad, 21% are in Missan, 6% are in Diyala, 5% are in Anbar, 4% are in Basrah, 2% in Ninewa, and 1% in Kerbala. The map below shows identified returnee locations vs. the IDP populations assessed by IOM.

IOM IRAQ – ATLAS IDPs by district & returnee locations, MARCH 2008



PROFILE OF ASSESSED RETURNEE FAMILIES

To date, IOM monitors have conducted in-depth interviews with **900** of these returnee families (5,208 individuals). 8% of those interviewed are refugee returnees and 92% are IDP returnees. These assessed families are located as follows: 71% in Baghdad, 11% in Diyala, 9% in Missan, 4% in Ninewa, 3% in Anbar, and 1% each in Babylon, Kirkuk, and Basrah.

Places of return vs. prior places of displacement for the assessed population:

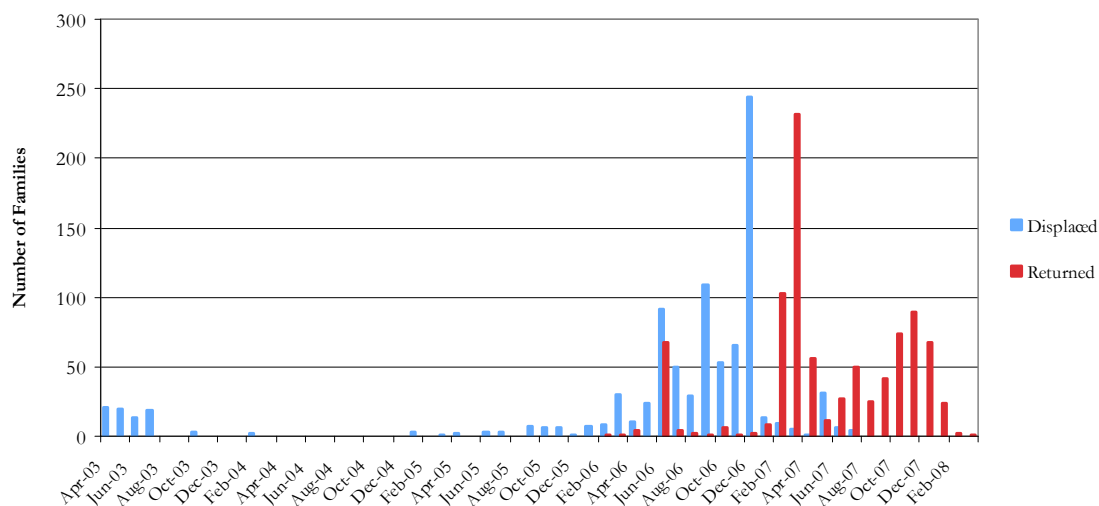
Assessed movements	%
Internal returns in Baghdad	51.2%
Internal returns in Anbar, Diyala, and Ninewa	10.6%
Returns from Baghdad to central governorates	2.2%
Returns from Baghdad to southern governorates	9.0%
Returns from Syria to Baghdad, Anbar, and Diyala	5.8%
Returns from central and northern governorates to Baghdad	2.7%

Returns from southern governorates to Baghdad	13.0%
Returns from southern governorates to Diyala	1.7%
Other returns (including from Jordan)	3.9%

Dates of Displacement and Return

The majority (76%) of assessed returnees were displaced in 2006 and returned in 2007. As the chart below demonstrates, the peak month for displacement *of the assessed population* was December 2006, and the peak month for return was March 2007².

Dates of Displacement vs. Return for Assessed Families



Major movements from the chart above:

The longest displaced returnees were 67 Shia Arab families (7% of total assessed) who fled from Amarah district, Missan governorate in the spring and summer of 2003 to displacement in Baghdad and Diyala. They cited improved security and difficult conditions in displacement as the reasons for their return to Missan in June 2006.

213 families (24% of total assessed) were displaced in December 2006 from Hay Al-Wehdah and Ja'ara/Al-Hardaniya in Mada'in district, Baghdad governorate and returned in March and April 2007. This return movement included both Sunni and Shia Arab IDPs, with 97% of the Shia returning to Ja'ara/Al-Hardaniya and 85% of the Sunnis returning to Hay Al-Wehdah. The Sunni IDPs returned from displacement in Baghdad or Salah al-Din while the Shia IDPs returned from Baghdad, Qadissiya, Babylon, Missan, Najaf, Sulaymaniyah, and Wassit. Improved security in the return area and difficult conditions in displacement were given as the primary reasons for return.

In February and March of 2007, 60 families (7% of total assessed) returned to Rashidiya in Al-Adhamiya/Istiqlal district, Baghdad governorate. All these families had been displaced in September 2006. The ethnoreligious composition of this group is 60% Shia Arab and 40% Sunni Arab. The Shia families returned from locations in Baghdad and Missan while the Sunni families returned from Baghdad, Salah Al-Din, and Missan. 57% cited intertribal reconciliation as the primary reason for return, while the remaining 43% cited improved security. Reason for return did not vary significantly by ethnoreligious identity.

The majority of assessed returnees were displaced for less than a year:

Length of displacement	% of assessed families
Less than 3 months	0.9%

² March 2007 as the peak month for returns is corroborated by information from the Government of Iraq's Ministry of Displacement and Migration (MoDM). See p. 17 of the 24 December 2007 MoDM report "Summary Results IDP Registration – February 2006 to December 2007."

3-6 months	45.5%
7-12 months	17.7%
13-18 months	20.1%
19-24 months	5.6%
25-36 months	5.5%
37-48 months	4.8%

The table below shows the reasons for displacement reported by assessed returnees vs. those reported by assessed IDPs³. This statistic does not vary significantly between these populations, despite speculation that those who fled direct death threats or forcible displacement from property would be less likely to return.

Reason for displacement	% of returnees	% of IDPs
Direct threats to life	38.3%	30.8%
Other	18.1%	0.6%
Forced displacement from property	14.7%	14.6%
Left out of fear	13.1%	20.6%
Generalized violence	11.5%	25.6%
Armed conflict	3.4%	7.7%
Ethnic/religious/political discrimination	0.8%	

Reasons for Return

50% of assessed returnees said that they had returned due to improved security in their place of origin. Another 40% cited both improved security and difficult conditions in displacement. Only 6% cited the difficult conditions in displacement as their reason for return without citing improved security as well; 3.8% cited tribal reconciliation in the place of origin, and less than 1% said that the financial incentives for returnees were a factor.

In Anbar, monitors observed that refugees returning from abroad tending to cite increased hardship in displacement as their main motive, rather than improved security in Anbar. Refugees returning from Jordan in particular cited difficult economic conditions and harsh treatment by authorities as reasons for returning. In Kerbala, MoDM and local authorities are encouraging IDPs from Baghdad to return due to security improvements and the financial incentive offered by the Iraqi Government. Some IDPs in Kerbala have returned, but many others are waiting due to uncertainty about security sustainability and continued violence in some areas of Diyala, Mosul, and Baghdad.

Returnee Ethno-religious Identity

Ethno-religious identity	%
Arab Shia Muslim	72.4%
Arab Sunni Muslim	24.8%
Turkmen Sunni Muslim	1.7%
Kurd Shia Muslim	0.3%
Kurd Sunni Muslim	0.3%
Turkmen Shia Muslim	0.3%
Arab Christian	0.1%

Nearly all assessed Shia Arab returnees are in the Abu Ghraib, Karkh, Mada'in, Mahmoudiya, Taji, and Al-Adhamiya districts of Baghdad; the Al-Khalis, Al-Muqdadiya, and Ba'quba districts of Diyala; and Amarah district, Missan. Most assessed Sunni Arab returnees are in the Fallujah and Ramadi districts of Anbar; the Al-Adhamiya, Al-Resala, Karkh, and Mada'in districts of Baghdad; the Ba'quba district of Diyala; and the Telafar district of Ninewa. Most of the assessed Turkmen Sunni returnees are in the Telafar district of Ninewa governorate.

³ IOM has assessed 166,167 post-February 2006 IDP families throughout Iraq.

Security/Protection

Of assessed returnees, 55% said that they consistently felt safe in their place of return, 43% said that they sometimes felt safe, and 1% said that they do not feel safe at all. Those who did not always feel safe cited general insecurity, continued insurgent activity in their area, and detention campaigns.

In Al-Wardiyah, Baghdad armed groups have shot at returnee families' houses. Returnee families in Al-Forat, Al-Rasheed sub-district, Baghdad feel unsafe since the area is near the airport and is still unstable. Some returnee families in Ba'quba, Diyala were displaced again after receiving death threats, and other returnee families have been threatened in Hay Al-Tahrir and Hay Al-Mua'alemeen in Ba'quba (Diyala). In Basrah, a member of a Sunni IDP family who had returned from Ninewa was killed in Hay Al-Khaleej.

In Ninewa, tensions are high between the community that remained in Tala'far district and IDPs who are returning to find their houses damaged or looted. Tribal and religious leaders and local authorities are holding meetings to resolve issues between the returnees and those community members they accuse of destroying their property. These tensions and the destruction of property in Tala'far are deterring some IDPs from returning to the area.

Monitors observed that in some areas of Diyala, the families who remained are afraid of vengeance by IDPs of a different sectarian affiliation returning to the area. For example, 10 families were displaced from Zaghniya to Hay Al-Tahrir, Ba'quba immediately after 116 IDP families returned to Zaghniya. These 10 families fled because they were afraid of retaliation by the returnees, although monitors observed that the returnees had not in fact threatened this group.

Shelter/Property

Many returnees have found their houses destroyed or damaged, placing them in need of shelter assistance. Furthermore, of IDPs assessed nationwide by IOM, 32% report that the property they left behind has been occupied by others⁴. Even among *returnees* assessed, 10% still report that their property is occupied. Monitors report most disputes over property ownership are in Baghdad. Resettlement is currently being handled on an ad hoc basis by various authorities in Baghdad. In the event of future large-scale returns, a comprehensive policy and mechanism will be essential to prevent renewed tensions.

Of returnees assessed, 84% had returned to their original house and the remaining 16% are living in their original neighbourhood but not their original house⁵.

Housing status	%
Own house in good condition	45.8%
Own house in bad condition	33.2%
Renting	13.8%
Live with neighbor / friend / relative house	4.8%
Other	1.3%
Improvised shelter on own land	0.9%
Improvised shelter on others' land	0.2%

Status of non-moveable property (house, land)	%
Accessible and in good condition	53.8%
Partially destroyed	28.2%
Occupied by others	10.3%



Sheikh Ma'roof, Baghdad: A destroyed house belonging to a returnee family.

⁴ IOM has assessed 166,167 post-February 2006 IDP families throughout Iraq.

⁵ IDPs or refugees who have moved from displacement to another location that is not their original house or neighborhood are still "internally displaced" and are therefore assessed as IDPs, not returnees.

Completely destroyed 7.7%

Status of moveable property (car, furniture)	%
Lost / stolen (do not have it now)	49.6%
Have it still	36.1%
Used by family during displacement (do not have it now)	11.7%

Gender, Vulnerabilities and Employment

Families with unemployed female heads of household, pregnant women, chronically ill or disabled members, or young children are often especially vulnerable in humanitarian crisis. Widowed heads of household in particular have great difficulty finding employment in the Iraqi context.

Gender and age breakdown of the 900 assessed families (5,208 individuals):

Gender and Age	% of total	
	Male	Female
Children 0-17	25.19%	24.46%
Adults 18-59	24.52%	23.21%
Elderly 60+	1.56%	1.06%

19% of assessed returnee families reported that they had family members who were chronically ill or disabled.

Married men are the heads of household for 82% of the assessed families. Unemployment in this group is 48%. Another 12% of families are headed by female widows, 94% of whom are unemployed. The majority of these unemployed female widows are in the Karkh and Mada'in districts of Baghdad and Amarah district, Missan. Another 5% of families are headed by widowed men, 72% of whom are unemployed.

Some returnee families have been able to resume the jobs they originally left. Returnee families in villages such as Al-Wardiyah, Baghdad are working in agriculture and husbandry. In Al-Sweeb/Al-Firat, returnees work in construction, transport, or markets. However, monitors still observed unemployment rates of up to 70% in these two areas of Baghdad. Furthermore, even those with sources of income are not necessarily able to fully support themselves.

Other returnee families return to find their old livelihoods gone. In Al-Ahnaf, Baghdad, Iraqis returned to find their agriculture destroyed and their livestock gone. Similarly, returnees in Al-Ameriya, Diyala have no source of income because their farms have been destroyed. These groups must wait for next year's season before they can begin farming.

Water and Sanitation

89.9% of those assessed have access to municipal water networks:

Water Source	%
Municipal water/pipe grid	89.9%
Rivers, streams or lakes	7.9%
Other	0.8%
Public wells	0.6%
Water tanks/trucks	0.6%
Open or broken pipe	0.3%

Returnee families in Al-Latifayah, Baghdad are drinking unsanitary river water because they do not have access to a proper water network. Al-Mada'in and Al-Wardiyah villages in Baghdad have no sewage systems; swamps have formed beside houses, posing a serious health hazard.

Access to Electricity

Daily electric supply	%	Electricity source	%
1-2 hours	36.8%	Public network	79.2%
3-6 hours	14.9%	Private generator	7.4%
8-10 hours	24.2%	Public and private sources	11.2%
12-18 hours	22.4%	No electricity at all	1.8%
More than 18 hours	1.7%		

Although 61% of the assessed said that they had access to fuel in their area, 58% said that they cannot afford to buy it.

Monitors observed that with the onset of warmer weather, the strain on public electric networks has decreased somewhat because fewer families are running electric heaters. However, electrical shortages are still widespread. In Al-Wardiyah village (Baghdad), villagers have erected electrical lines at their own expense. Despite this effort, the electric supply is still inconsistent and lasts two hours a day on average. In Al-Sweeb, private generators are used to supplement public electricity so that the supply lasts for seven hours a day. In Al-Forat, returnee families reported power outages for more than 20 days. Electric supply in Al-Kadhimiya is better, with supply rates of up to 20 hours a day.

PDS Rations and Government Grant for Returnees

98% of assessed returnees reported that they have a valid PDS card. 48% of returnees reported regular access to PDS rations, 50% said they have intermittent access, and 2% said they have no access at all.

26% of assessed families reported that they had registered and received the Government of Iraq's financial grant for returnees. Of the total assessed, another 40% said that they had registered for the grant but had not yet received it. The remaining 27% had not registered for the grant (7% did not answer). Nearly all the families who actually received the grant are in Baghdad – of families assessed in governorates other than Baghdad, only 3% had received the grant.

Health Care

Of assessed returnee families, 43% have access to health care and 56% do not. When asked why they could not access health care, IDPs cited lack of health facilities and a shortage of medications. Access to health care is worse in Baghdad: 70% of returnees assessed in Baghdad said they have no access to health care, while only 20% of those assessed in other governorates reported non-access. Access to medications is also worse in Baghdad: of returnees assessed in Baghdad, 54% said that they cannot access medications they need, while only 20% of those assessed in other governorates said they cannot access medications.

Returnee families reported a complete absence of health care in Al-Latifayah, Al-Mada'in, and Al-Wardiyah, Baghdad. Similarly, in Rikiyah village, Al-Ahnaf, northern Kadhimiya, Baghdad, the closest health care is 8 km distant. Infant deaths have been reported due a lack of skilled midwives.

Education

Of families with school-age children, 79% reported that they have access to schools and their children are attending.

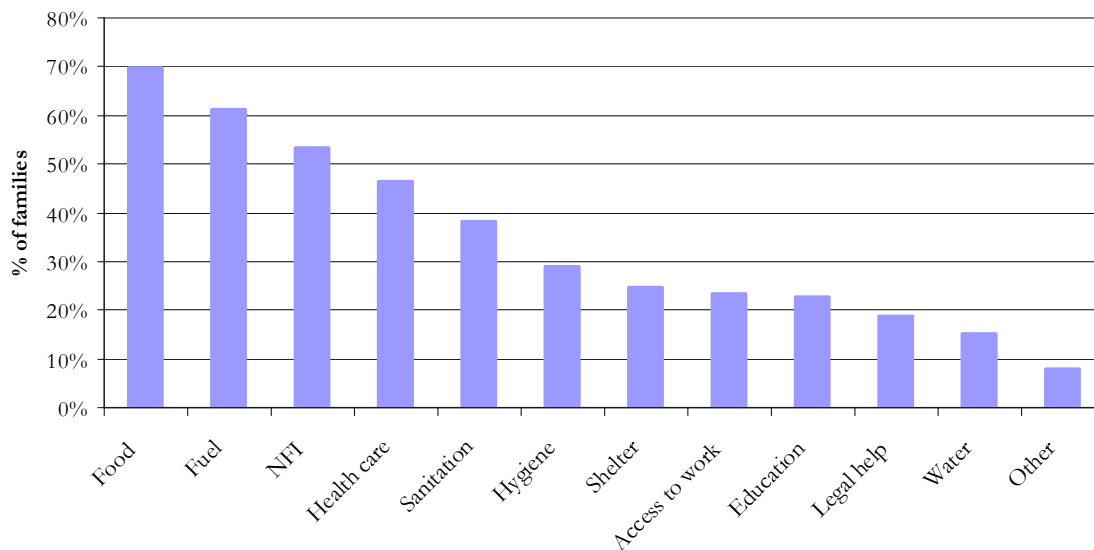
Students in Al-Latifayah, Baghdad must walk more than 4 km because there is no school nearby. In Al-Forat, Baghdad parents keep their children home because the surrounding area is dangerous. In Al-Ameriya, Diyala returnee families have not sent their children to school because they did not study in displacement and have already lost the school year. In Albu Nasir, Diyala the local primary school was destroyed by armed groups and the closest school is in the sub-district centre, 7 km distant. In village areas such as Al-Wardiyah and Al-Rikiyah, Baghdad, students are able to attend local primary schools but there are no junior or middle schools available nearby. Baghdad monitors

observed severe overcrowding in these primary schools – students were sitting on the ground due to a shortage of desks.

Priority Needs

The most frequently reported priority needs are food (70% of the assessed), fuel (61%), and non-food items (53%). Nearly half (47%) of the assessed reported health care as a priority need.

Priority Needs for Assessed Returnees



Assistance Received

When asked if they had received other assistance *from the government* besides PDS rations and the returnee grant, only 1.7% of those assessed said that they had.

When asked about other sources of assistance *apart from the government*, 89% of those assessed said that they had not received any aid. For the rest, 5.6% had received help from relatives and 2.3% from neighbors. Humanitarian organizations had reached 4.4% of assessed families. Religious groups, MNF-I/IF, and armed group had assisted less than 1%.

Other sources of assistance	%
Have not received any assistance	89.0%
Relatives	5.6%
Humanitarian organizations	4.4%
Neighbors	2.3%
Religious groups	0.2%
Military (MNF-I/IF)	0.2%
Militia/Insurgents	0.1%
Other	0.1%

CONCLUSION

Iraqis who return from internal or external displacement are finding a grim situation in their places of return. Many are unemployed, cannot afford fuel, and lack access to health care. Only 11% of returnees have received any form of assistance besides the PDS ration and government returnee grant. Although most of the assessed have consistent or intermittent access to PDS and nearly all have valid PDS cards, the PDS rations are rarely sufficient to meet families' food needs. Since many returnees have no or limited income and cannot afford food, food assistance is the most frequently requested priority need. Similarly, fuel and non-food items are a priority because most families cannot afford them.

In addition to these immediate emergency needs, returnees are also in need of sustainable solutions, in particular for the shelter and livelihood sectors. Many returnees have found their houses destroyed, seriously damaged, or occupied. Many have returned to find their livelihoods gone. These families will require durable solutions that allow them to rebuild their lives.

As noted on page 1, identified returns to date constitute less than 1% of the total displaced Iraqi population. Given the fragile nature of security gains and continued insecurity in many areas of return, the United Nations and IOM do not currently encourage Iraqi IDPs or refugees to return to their place of origin. However, IOM is committed to providing humanitarian assistance to those who have chosen to do so and are in need.

In the current Iraqi context, assistance should be delivered not exclusively to returnees, but also to surrounding displaced and host populations. The scale of Iraqi displacement and the consequent humanitarian crisis remain more urgent than the phenomenon of return.

There is a potential for dramatic increases in return: 59% of recently displaced IDPs assessed by IOM say that they intend to return. However, such returns will be contingent upon continued or improving security in places of origin.

Please note that displacements and returns are occurring on a continuous basis, and IOM strives to update this information as frequently as possible. Through its monitoring and needs assessments, IOM also disseminates biweekly displacement updates, Governorate Needs Assessment Profiles, the 2007 Iraq Displacement Year in Review, and IDP camp updates. For these and information on the IOM's needs assessment methodology, see <http://www.iom-iraq.net/idp.html>.

For further information on IDP displacement in Iraq, please contact Dana Graber Ladek, Iraq Displacement Specialist, at dgrabler@iom-iraq.net (+962 79 611 1759).

APPENDIX – RETURNEE ASSESSMENT METHODOLOGY

IOM has monitored internal displacement in Iraq since 2003. In 2007, IOM expanded its nationwide monitoring coverage to assess Iraqis who are returning from abroad and within Iraq to their place of origin, while continuing to assess recently displaced IDPs. In Baghdad, IOM and MoDM are jointly implementing returnee assessments.

Monitors work with local authorities, MoDM branch offices, community leaders (tribal and religious), provincial councils, and local “awakening” groups to identify returnee locations. In coordination with MoDM, these locations are processed into a list that contains precise locations and family counts. Monitors then work through these location lists as they individually interview returnee families using an in-depth IOM questionnaire. The data from these questionnaires is entered into an IOM database, allowing statistical analysis of the return context.

In March, prior to the widespread deterioration of security due to events in Basrah, monitors observed an increase in returns that generally outstripped the capacity of MoDM and local authorities to identify all locations. The map of locations and returnee count at the beginning of this report is not comprehensive, although it is likely that it represents the majority of returnees to date. Furthermore, monitors to date have assessed only a fraction of the returnee locations identified. As capacity expands and assessments continue, new returnee locations will be identified and the in-depth assessments published by IOM will be based on an increasingly larger sample of the identified returnee population. However, for the time being, anecdotal reporting from IOM partners across the country does corroborate the humanitarian needs identified by IOM assessments thus far.