

# RETURN DYNAMICS IN ERBIL GOVERNORATE

**JUNE 2021**

The Return Index is a tool designed to measure the severity of conditions in locations of return. The Return Index is based on 16 indicators divided into two scales: Scale 1, on livelihoods and basic services, and Scale 2, centered around social cohesion and safety perceptions. A regression model is used to assess the impact of each of the indicators in facilitating or preventing returns. 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. The scores of the severity index are grouped into three categories: low, medium and high (which also includes very high). Refer to the report "[Methodological Overview](#)" for more details on the methodology.

The Return Index Governorate Profiling provides an analysis of returns in a specific governorate. This report focuses on the return dynamics in Erbil Governorate. The first section of this report

presents the overview of conditions across the governorate at the end of 2020 with a comparison of the returnee population and severity of living conditions over the course of 2020 (from 31 December 2019 to 31 December 2020). This section also outlines the areas of no return recorded by IOM's Rapid Assessment and Response Teams (RARTs) as well as the newly assessed locations, the returnee population living in critical shelters and the displaced population hosted in the governorate. The second section is devoted to the mass arrivals from camps due to camp closures, which began in mid-October, and highlights the living conditions of new arrivals either when they returned to their villages and neighbourhoods of origin or arrived in new locations of displacement. The third section provides an analysis of conditions at the district level and focuses on the main drivers of severity across subdistricts and changes that occurred between December 2019 and December 2020.

## CATEGORIZING CONDITIONS IN AREAS OF RETURN

As of December 2020, the total number of returnees in Erbil Governorate stands at 54,336 individuals out of 4.83 million nationwide, concentrated in one district across 67 locations.<sup>1</sup> This is the second lowest returnee population, with around 1 per cent of all returns in Iraq (Figure 1). Between December 2019 and December

2020, the returnee population in Erbil increased by 9,378 individuals, the highest increase in percentage terms of any governorate in 2020. Erbil is also unique among the governorates for recording significantly more returns in 2020 than the previous year, when only 3,174 individuals returned (December 2018 to December 2019).

Figure 1. Proportion of returnees per governorate



1 Master List Round 119 (November–December 2020)

## RETURNEE POPULATION IN SEVERE CONDITIONS

During the Return Index Round 11 collected in November and December 2020, a total of 67 locations of return were assessed in Erbil. Out of these 67 locations assessed, 12 present severe conditions.<sup>2</sup> Erbil Governorate hosts 1,170 returnees living in severe conditions. In relative terms, this means that 2 per cent of the returnee population in Erbil has returned to locations classified as

high severity, followed by 8 per cent to medium severity and 90 per cent to low severity locations. This distribution of returnees per severity category is significantly lower than the national average, which has 10 per cent living in high severity locations and 41 per cent living in medium severity locations (Figure 2).

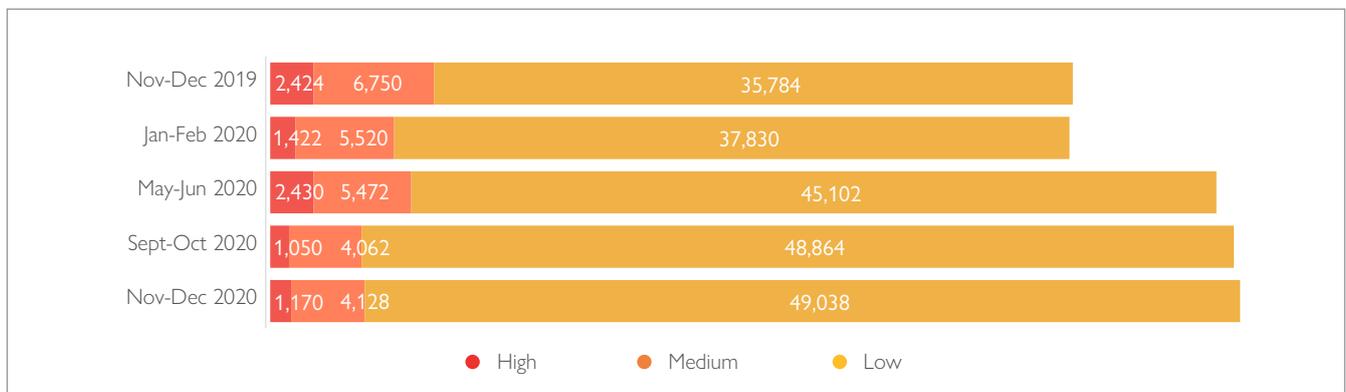
Figure 2. Proportion and numbers of returnees by category of severity in Erbil Governorate



Over the course of 2020, Erbil Governorate witnessed a very slight decrease in the number of returnees living in locations classified as high severity (Figure 3). Between December 2019 and December 2020, a decrease of 1,254 individuals living in severe or poor conditions was recorded. There was a spike in the number of returnees living in severe conditions in the round collected in May–June 2020

due to the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) outbreak and ensuing lockdown, which worsened the employment situation and led to changes in daily public life. However, the total number of returnees in Erbil increased significantly in May–June 2020 (by 8,232) suggesting that the restriction measures within the governorate did not discourage returns.

Figure 3. Yearly trend of returnees by category of severity in Erbil Governorate



## LOCATIONS WITH NO RETURN AND NEWLY ASSESSED LOCATIONS

A location is recorded as having had no returns if none of the population displaced since 2014 has returned to date.<sup>3</sup> As of December 2019, DTM identified 25 locations with no returns in Erbil Governorate. Out of these 25 locations, two witnessed returns

over the course of 2020. The same year, DTM identified 23 additional locations with no returns in Erbil. As a result, 46 locations did not record returns as of December 2020. All of these locations are in the district of Makhmur, where all returnees in Erbil reside.

2 The terms 'severe or poor conditions' in this report refer to conditions in the locations classified as high severity.

3 These locations, having no key informants and no population, are difficult to record and monitor and are generally identified through word-of-mouth.

## RETURNEE POPULATION IN CRITICAL SHELTERS

As of December 2020, only 150 returnees arrived at shelters in critical condition in Erbil, that is, less than 1 per cent of the total returnee population in the governorate.<sup>4</sup> Specifically, around

two thirds of those returnees in critical shelters reside in informal settlements, with the remaining one third in unfinished or abandoned buildings.

## INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS (IDPs) IN ERBIL

Between December 2019 and December 2020, Erbil Governorate witnessed a decrease in the number of IDPs, from 239,052 to 230,469 individuals. Despite this decrease, Erbil remains the governorate hosting the third largest number of IDPs in Iraq (19% of all IDPs), with the

majority (217,344 individuals or 94% of IDPs in the governorate) living in out-of-camp settings. However, Makhmur, the only district of return in Erbil, hosts a relatively small proportion of the IDPs in Erbil (3%) all of whom reside in camp settings (Table 1).

Table 1: Number of returnees and IDPs per district in Erbil

District	Average Severity (return locations)	Total Returnees (individuals)	Total Non-camp IDPs (individuals)	Total Camp IDPs (individuals)	Locations with more IDPs than Returnees
Makhmur	Low	54,336	0	7,090	0
<b>Erbil Total</b>		<b>54,336</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>7,090</b>	<b>0</b>

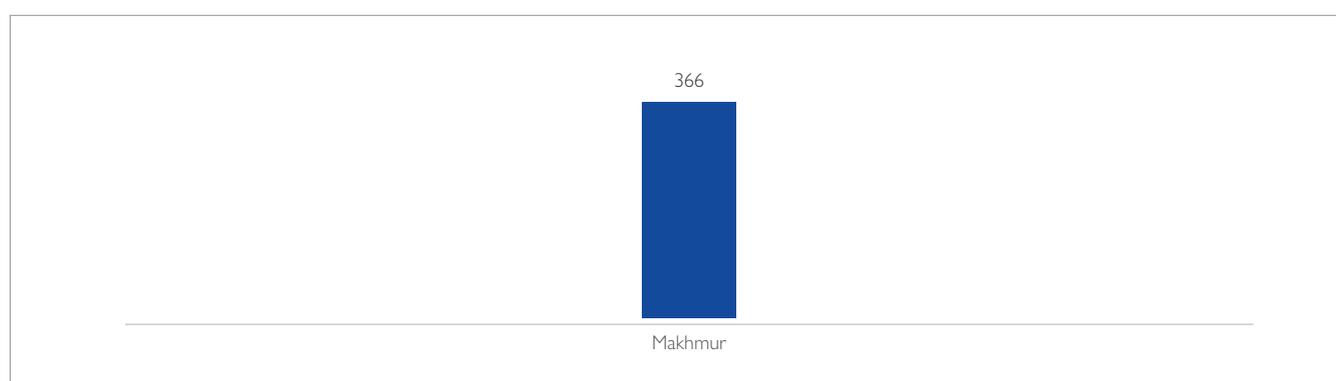
## ARRIVAL FROM CAMPS AND CORRELATION WITH SEVERITY<sup>5</sup>

### ARRIVAL OF IDPs FROM CAMPS TO NON-CAMP SETTINGS IN ERBIL GOVERNORATE

Between November and December 2020, DTM tracked a total of 366 individuals (61 households) who arrived in non-camp settings in Erbil after departing camps across the country.<sup>6</sup> Most of these movements were a consequence of the camp closures and consolidation, which began in mid-October 2020. All the households who returned from camps have returned to their district of origin with no instances of secondary displacement. In addition to the camp

closures and the IDP's desire to return home due to improved security in their area of origin, a notable push factor for departures from camps was related to movement restrictions imposed to contain the COVID-19 pandemic. These restrictions, which limited the ability of IDPs to work outside camp settings or to move freely between the area of origin and area of displacement, pushed returns to areas of origin. Makhmur district received all arrivals from camps to Erbil.

Figure 4. Number of individuals arriving from camps to districts in Erbil (November–December 2020)

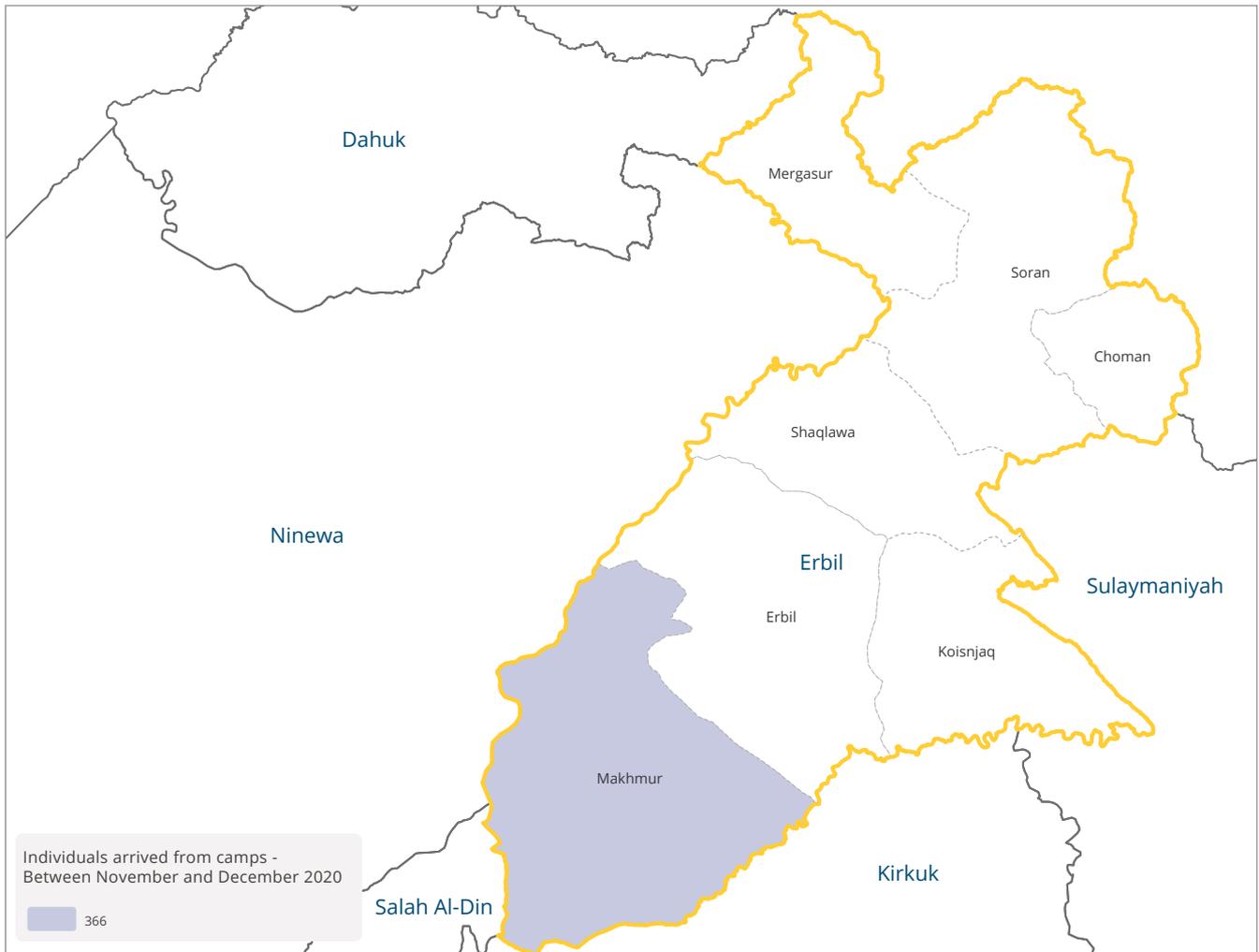


4 Critical shelters include collective shelters (such as religious buildings, schools or other public buildings), unfinished or abandoned buildings, tents, caravans and other temporary, sub-standard or makeshift shelters; as well as severely damaged or destroyed habitual residences and long-term rental accommodations that are unfit for habitation (having the characteristics of unfinished or severely damaged buildings).

5 Refer to the Emergency Tracking report on "[Movement of Camp IDPs](#)" for more details on new arrivals since camp closures began in mid-October.

6 Master List Round 119 (November – December 2020)

Map 1: Locations in Erbil that recorded new arrivals from camps by number of individuals as of December 2020

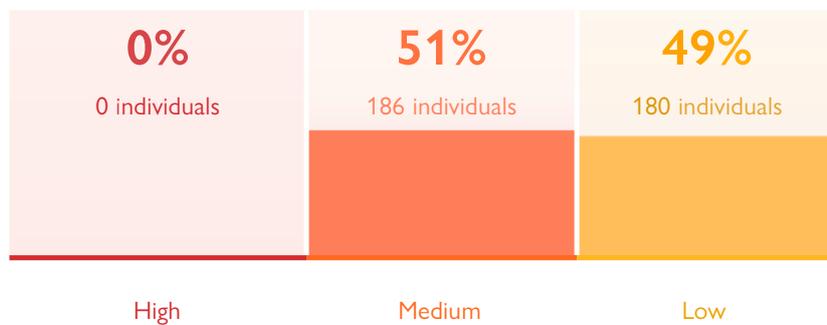


### SEVERITY OF CONDITIONS IN LOCATIONS WITH ARRIVALS FROM CAMPS (NOVEMBER TO DECEMBER 2020)

At least 186 individuals of the new arrivals from camps to non-camp locations in Erbil settled in locations classified as medium severity,

that is, 51 per cent of the total returnees from camps (Figure 5). The remaining 180 individuals (49%) settled in low severity locations.

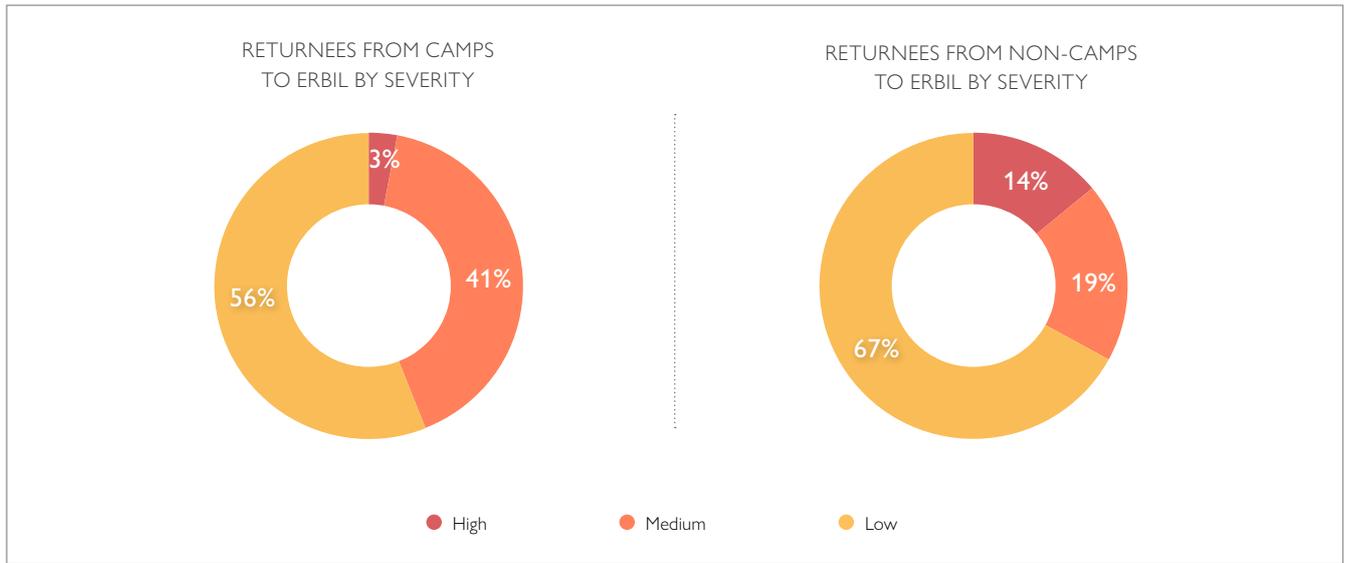
Figure 5. Distribution of new arrivals from camps to non-camp locations in Erbil by category of severity



Over the course of 2020, a total of 1,536 returnees (256 households) arrived from camps to their respective districts of origin in Erbil, while 7,842 returnees (1,307 households) arrived from non-camp locations. A total of 48 individuals (3%) of those who

returned from camps in 2020 are currently living in high severity conditions as compared to 1,122 individuals (14%) of returnees from non-camp locations to Erbil (Figure 6). All returnees from camps and non-camp locations arrived to Makhmur district.

Figure 6. Returnees to Erbil from camp and non-camp locations by category of severity (December 2019 to December 2020)



## SEVERITY OF CONDITIONS AT THE DISTRICT LEVEL

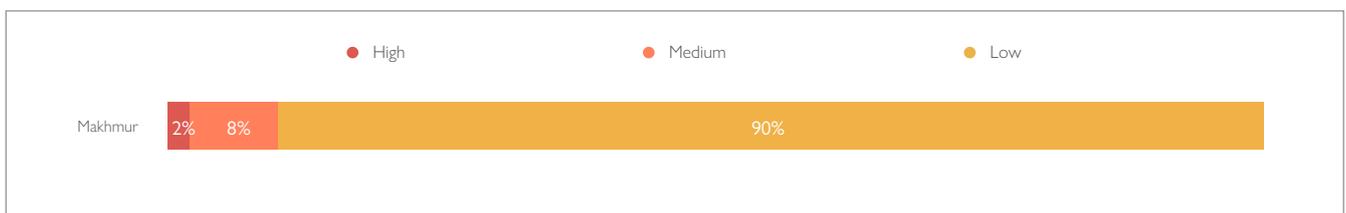
As of December 2020, Makhmur is the only district in Erbil that hosts returnees (Table 2). In relative terms, 2 per cent of the returnees residing in Makhmur live in high severity conditions, with 80 per cent

of the returnee population in medium severity conditions and 90 per cent in low severity conditions (Figure 7).

Table 2: Number of returnees per district and category of severity in Erbil Governorate<sup>7</sup>

DISTRICT	HIGH SEVERITY	MEDIUM SEVERITY	LOW SEVERITY	NUMBER OF RETURNEES
Makhmur	1,170	4,128	49,038	54,336
<b>All districts</b>	<b>1,170</b>	<b>4,128</b>	<b>49,038</b>	<b>54,336</b>

Figure 7. Proportion of returnees per district and category of severity in Erbil Governorate



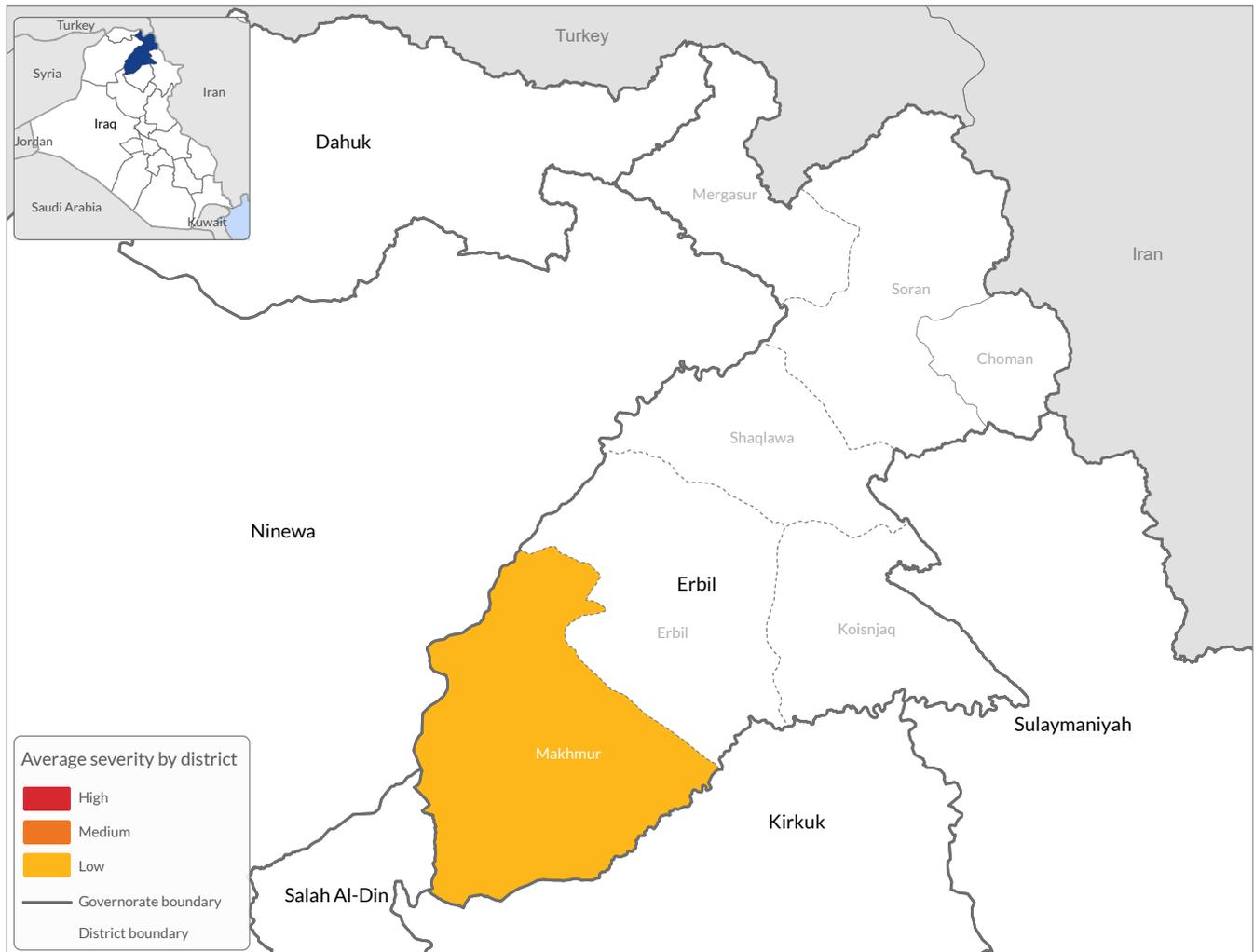
<sup>7</sup> This total only includes returnees in locations assessed for the Return Index and does not constitute the total number of returnees in Erbil, as some locations have not been assessed.

## VARIATION AT DISTRICT LEVEL BETWEEN DECEMBER 2019 AND DECEMBER 2020

The analysis presented in this section focuses on the overall severity in each of the districts in Erbil as well as the main drivers that

contribute to particularly high severity conditions and changes that occurred between December 2019 and December 2020.<sup>8</sup>

Map 2: Districts in Erbil by category of severity



<sup>8</sup> Drivers of severity are calculated at the subdistrict level and provide information on living conditions that contribute to severity to better inform interventions. It is built on the Return Index indicators, and considering the impact of each of the indicators in facilitating or preventing returns and the size of the returnee population in a subdistrict.

Figure 8. Overall severity per district in Erbil in December 2019 and December 2020



### VARIATION IN THE DRIVERS OF SEVERITY AT SUBDISTRICT LEVEL BETWEEN DECEMBER 2019 AND DECEMBER 2020

#### Makhmur District

Overall, **Makhmur district** remained stable in low severity between December 2019 and December 2020. Over the course of 2020, the overall severity of conditions in **Gwyer** subdistrict remained at low severity. However, there was an increase in severity related to essential services, which was specifically driven by fewer residents being able to access running water from May–June 2020. In addition, severity is driven by the poor provision of government services and the level of employment in the sub-district. **Markaz Makhmur** also remained at low severity over the course of 2020, despite variation in some drivers. The improvement in essential service provision is primarily attributable to better access to sufficient electricity and running water. Less concern about mines and unexploded ordnance is the primary driver of the improvement in the levels of concern related to safety and security, which occurred

in September–October 2020 and was maintained throughout the remainder of the year. The slight worsening in severity related to the extent of housing destruction is more difficult to explain but is possibly attributed to relatively high influx of new returnees arriving in the sub-district to find their habitual residences destroyed. **Qaraj** sub-district presents the most severe conditions within Makhmur but saw improvements across all drivers except safety and security in the course of 2020. Concerns around sources of violence and the presence of mines and unexploded ordnance increased in May–June 2020 and remained relatively high throughout the rest of 2020. However, Qaraj also recorded significant improvements in levels of residential destruction, the recovery of agricultural activities, the provision of government services and the openness of daily public life.

Balad	Overall Security	Residential Destruction	Livelihoods	Essential Services	Safety and Security	Social cohesion
Gwyer	Low	Low	Medium	Low ▼	Low	Low
Markaz Makhmur	Low	Low ▼	Low	Low ▲	Low ▲	Low
Qaraj	Low ▲	Medium ▲	Medium ▲	Low ▲	Low ▼	Low ▲

▲ – Improvement; ▼ – Worsening compared to the round collected in November – December 2019

## IOM IRAQ

 [iraq.iom.int](http://iraq.iom.int)

 [iomiraq@iom.int](mailto:iomiraq@iom.int)

UNAMI Compound (Diwan 2),  
International Zone,  
Baghdad/Iraq

     
@IOMIraq

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