

RETURNS IN IRAQ: 2020 OVERVIEW

DECEMBER 2019 (ROUND 7) – DECEMBER 2020 (ROUND 11)

JULY 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 Returns in Iraq: 2020 Overview provides an analysis of returns across the country. The first section of this report presents an

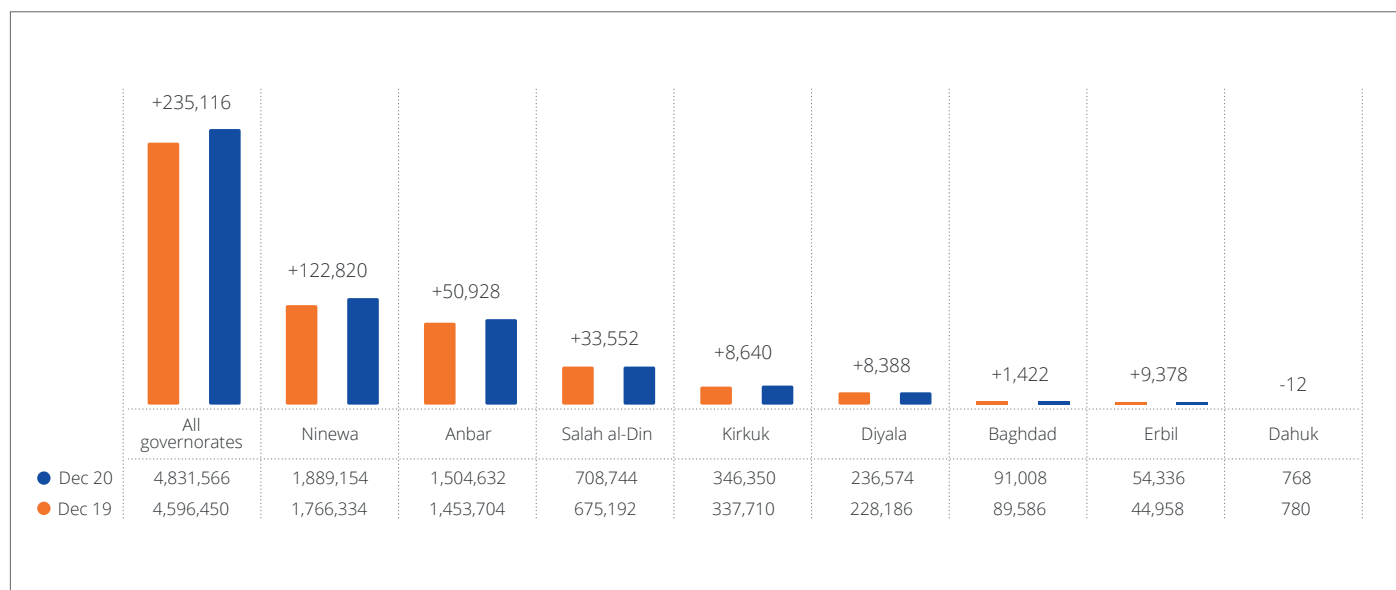
overview of returns in 2020. The second considers conditions across all governorates of return at the end of 2020 and examines the relationship between the rate of return and the severity of those conditions. The third section outlines the areas of no return and newly assessed locations recorded by IOM’s Rapid Assessment and Response Teams (RARTs), and the returnee population living in critical shelters. Next, the report examines the mass arrivals from camps due to their closure, which began in mid-October, and highlights the living conditions of new arrivals when they returned to their area of origin. The final section presents a more granular analysis of the factors driving severity in subdistricts of return which are designated as ‘hotspots’, and how these factors changed between December 2019 and December 2020.¹

OVERVIEW OF RETURNS

Between December 2019 and December 2020, the returnee population grew by 235,116, equivalent to roughly 39,186 households (Figure 1). This is around half the number of returnees recorded in the previous year, when 431,130 individuals returned (December 2018 to December 2019). The rate of change, that is, the percentage change in the returnee population between rounds of data collection, also slowed significantly in 2020 (5%) compared with 2019 (10%).

Over half of returns between December 2019 and December 2020 were to Ninewa Governorate (122,820 individuals, 52%); Anbar accounted for around one in five returns (50,928 individuals, 22%) and Salah al-Din was the third major recipient of returnees (33,552 individuals, 14%) (Figure 1). While far smaller in absolute terms, Erbil saw 9,378 individuals return in 2020, which constitutes a 21 per cent increase in the returnee population.

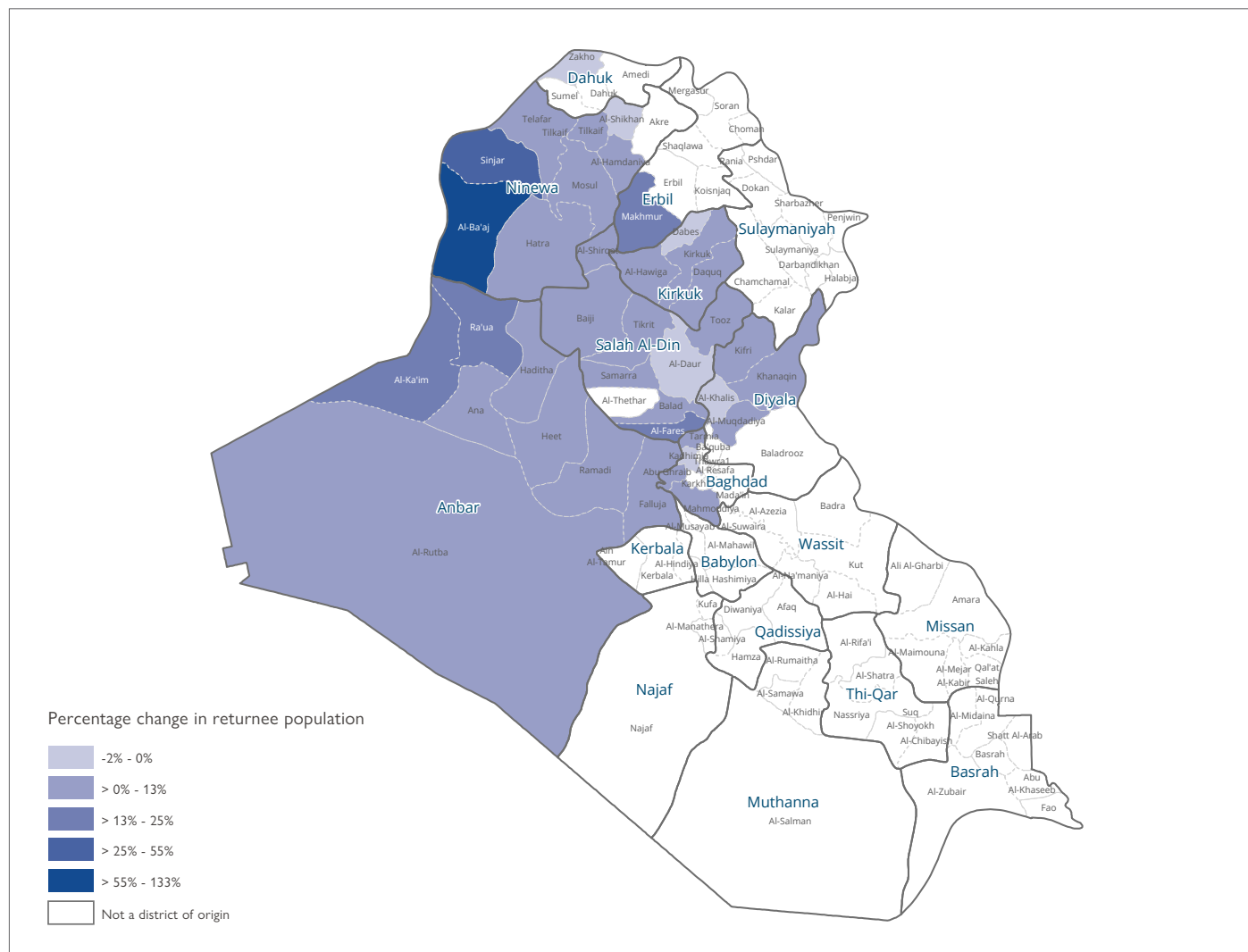
Figure 1. Changes in returnee population by governorate²



¹ The return index classifies a subdistrict as a ‘hotspots’ if it scores highly in terms of severity on at least one of the two return index scales. A sub-district can also be considered a ‘hotspot’ if the area is scored as medium severity in one or both scales, but also hosts a relatively large number of returnees.

² Data collected: November – December 2019, Master List Round 113 and November – December 2020, Master List Round 119.

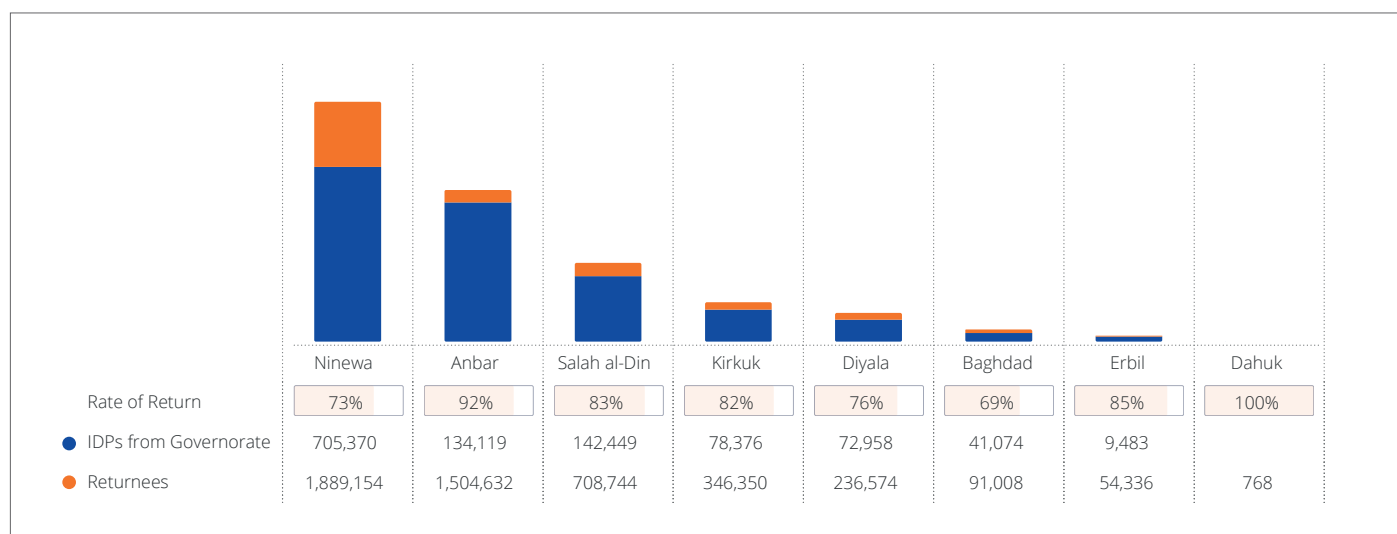
Map 1. Change in returnee population per district in 2020³



As of December 2020, Ninewa hosted the largest number of returnees (1,889,154 individuals), with 73 per cent of the population displaced from that governorate having since returned (Figure 2).

Nearly all of Anbar's displaced population has returned (92%), with 1,504,632 returnees. Salah al-Din, with the third largest returnee population of 708,744 individuals, has a rate of return of 83 per cent.

Figure 2. Rate of return per governorate⁴



³ Data collected: November – December 2019, Master List Round 113 and November – December 2020, Master List Round 119.

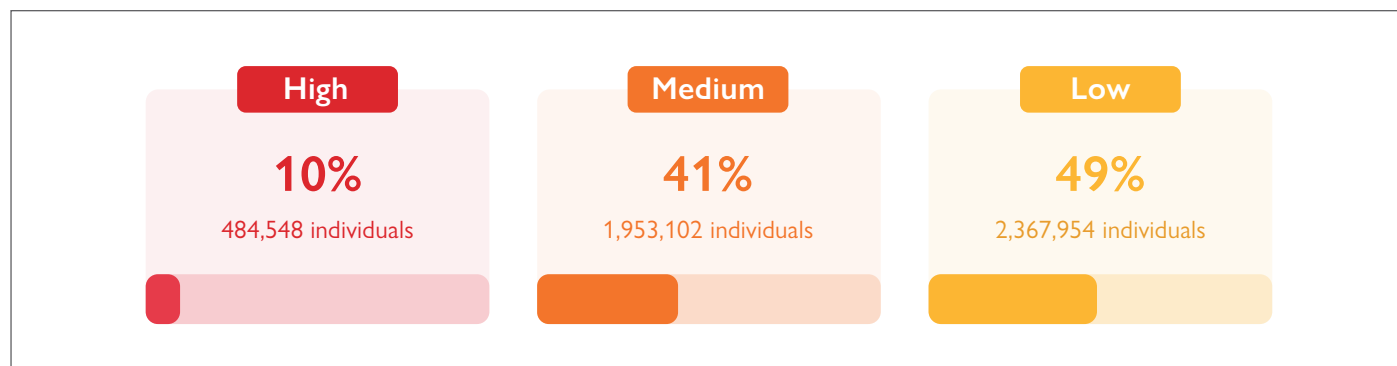
⁴ The rate of return calculated here divides the number of returnees per governorate by the total number of returnees and IDPs originating from that governorate. Data collected: November – December 2020, Master List Round 119.

RETURNEE POPULATION IN SEVERE CONDITIONS

During the Return Index Round 11 collected in November and December 2020, a total of 2,076 locations of return were assessed. Out of these assessed locations, 423 presented severe conditions.⁵

Ten per cent of all returnees in Iraq live in severe conditions, equivalent to 484,548 individuals. However, just under half of all returnees in Iraq live in locations of low severity (49%) (Figure 3).

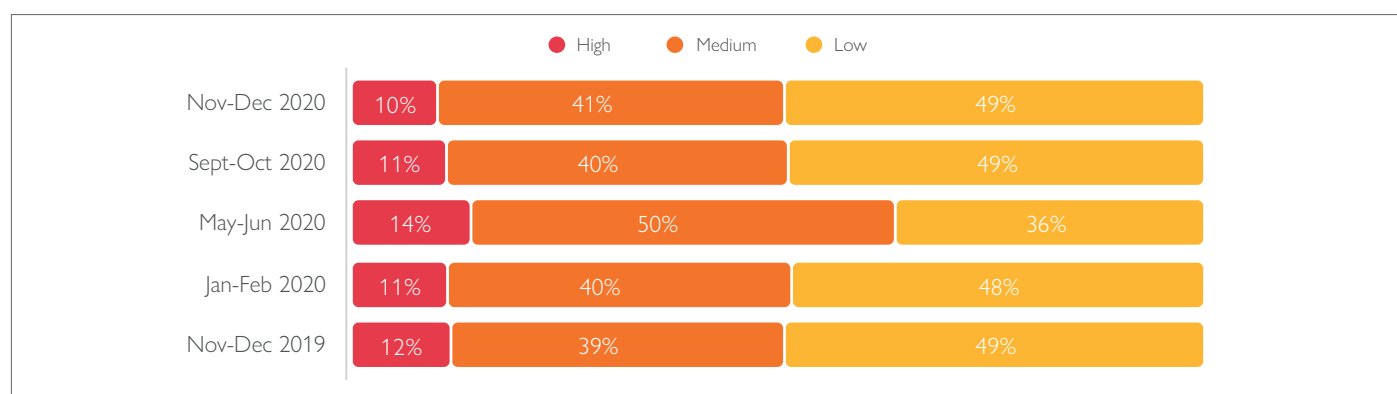
Figure 3. Proportion and number of returnees by category of severity



Overall, the proportion of returnees living in locations classified as high and medium severity stayed relatively constant over 2020 (Figure 4). Between December 2019 and December 2020, the proportion of returnees in locations of high severity reduced from 12 to 10 per cent, a reduction of around 37,000 individuals. The notable increase in

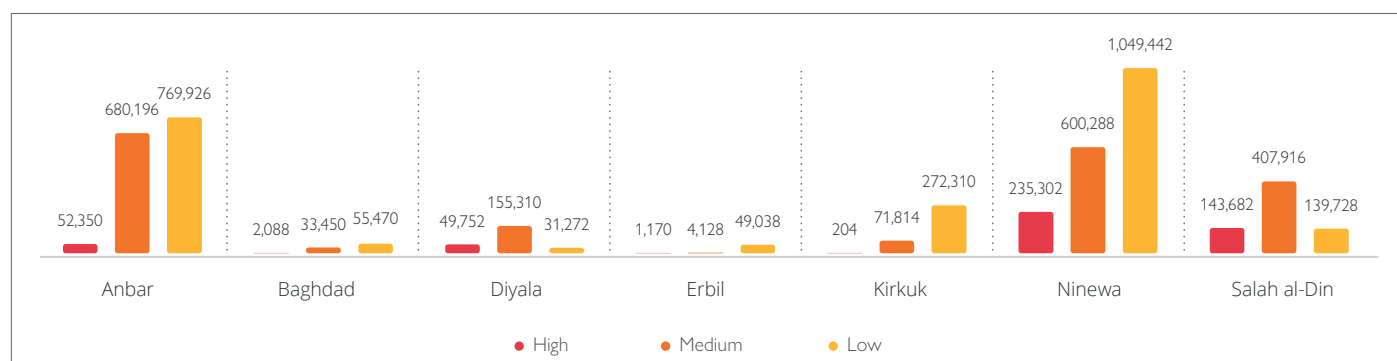
individuals living in high and medium severity conditions that occurred in May–June 2020 can be correlated to a deterioration in employment, concerns about sources of violence, and restrictions on daily public life associated with the measures imposed to curb the spread of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19).

Figure 4. Yearly trend of proportion of returnees by category of severity (% of Individuals)



In absolute terms, the governorates with the highest number of returnees living in severe conditions are Ninewa (235,302 individuals) and Salah al-Din (143,682 individuals) (Figure 5).

Figure 5. Number of returnees by category of severity for all governorates of return (December 2020)⁶



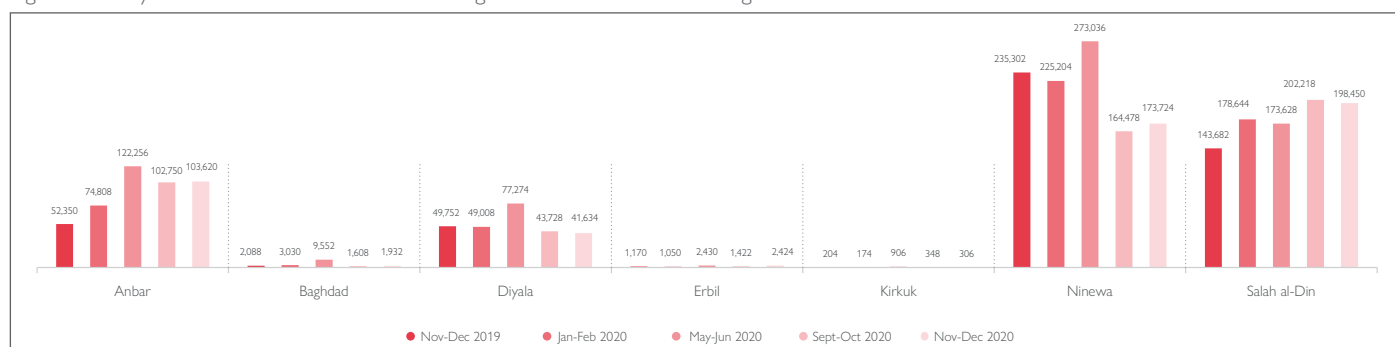
⁵ The wording 'severe' or 'poor' conditions in this report refers to conditions in the locations classified as high severity.

⁶ Dahuk is not on the chart as all 768 returnees are living in locations classified as low severity as of December 2020

The sharp increase in severity recorded in some locations during May–June was most pronounced in Anbar, Diyala, and Ninewa

where, in each case, the number of returnees in severe conditions in September–October fell to pre-pandemic levels (Figure 6).

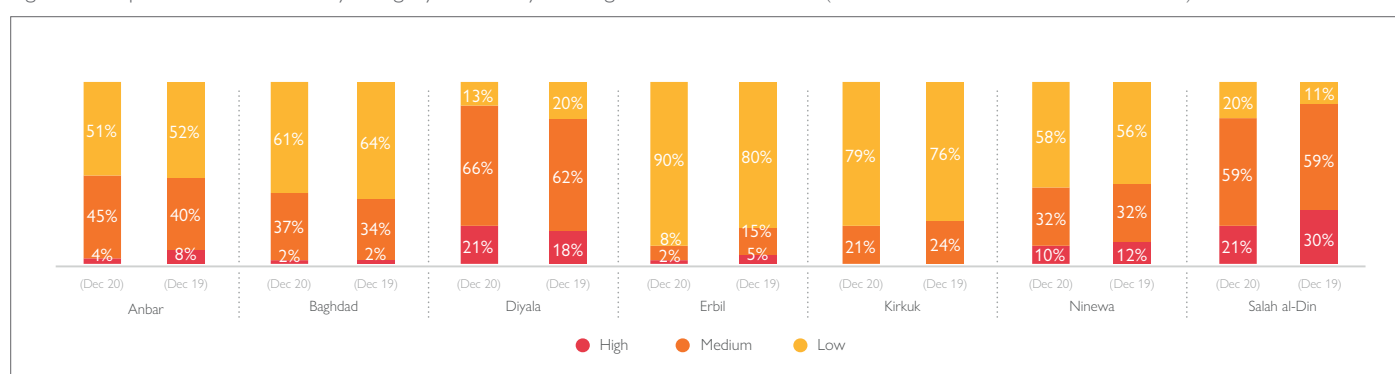
Figure 6. Yearly trend of number of returnees living in severe conditions for all governorates of return



In terms of proportion of returned population, Salah al-Din and Diyala have the highest percentages of returnees living in severe conditions with 21 per cent each (Figure 7). Salah al-Din and Anbar governorates

witnessed the largest reduction in proportion of returnees living in locations of high overall severity.

Figure 7. Proportion of returnees by category of severity for all governorates of return (December 2019 and December 2020)

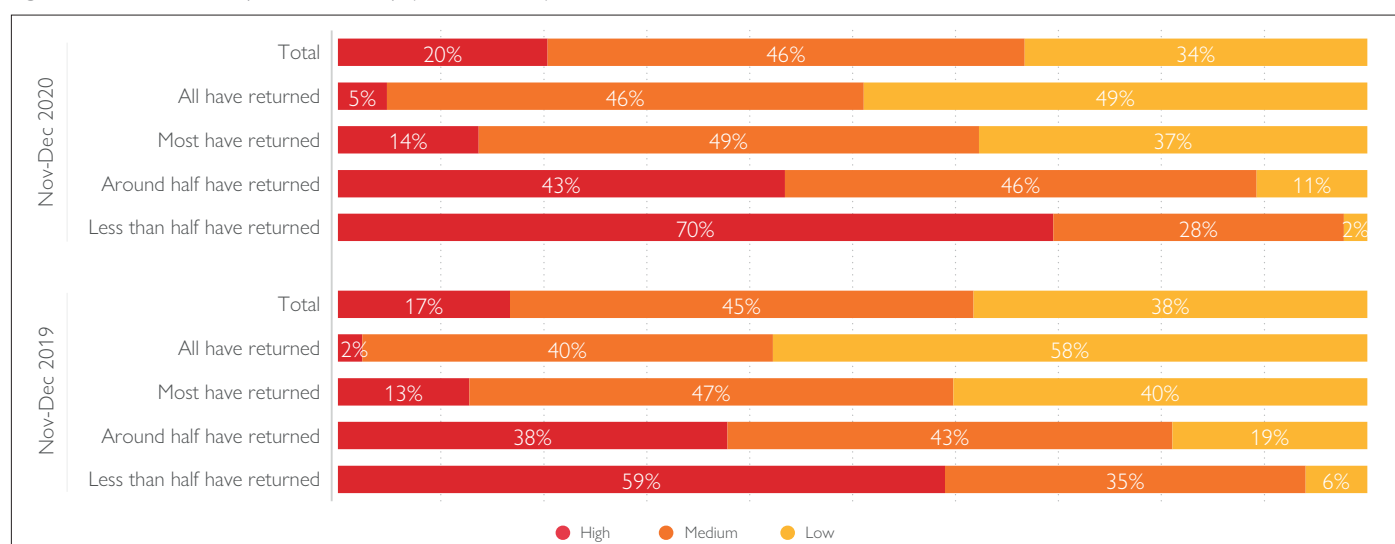


RETURN RATE PER CATEGORIES OF SEVERITY

Analysis of Return Index data from December 2019 to December 2020 indicates a moderate association between the return rate and categories of severity (Figure 8).⁷ Locations classified as low severity have more often witnessed the return of all its displaced population while locations classified as high severity more often witnessed the return of less than half its displaced population. However, the

proportion of locations that were high severity and where all the displaced population had returned increased slightly in 2020 (from 2% in December 2019 to 5% in December 2020). Just under half of all locations with full returns are medium severity (46%) and half are low severity (49%).

Figure 8. Rate of return by overall severity (% of locations)⁸



⁷ Moderate association (Cramer's $V = 0.327$, $p < .001$ in Round 11 and Cramer's $V = 0.281$, $p < .001$ in Round 7).

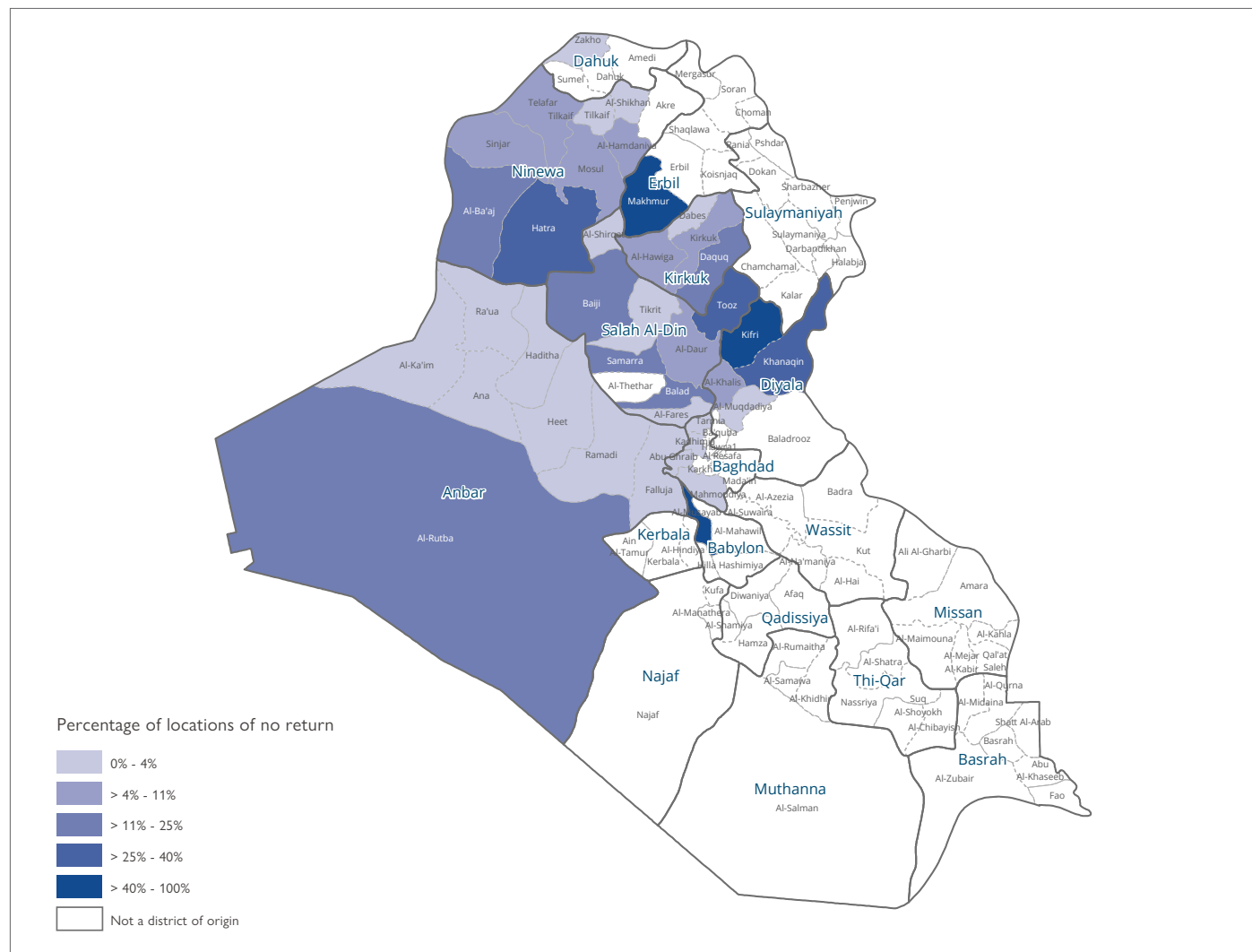
⁸ Here the rate of return is calculated as part of the return index, in which a key informant is asked how many households have returned in each location, according to the categories shown in the chart.

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.⁹ As of December 2019, DTM identified 261 nationwide locations with no returns. Over the course of 2020, 62 of these locations witnessed returns. However, DTM identified

an additional 88 locations of no return during the year. Nearly half of these locations were in Ninewa (48%), with a further 26 per cent in Erbil and 22 per cent in Diyala. As a result, as of December 2020, there were a total of 287 nationwide locations of no return.

Map 2. Percentage of locations of no return per district

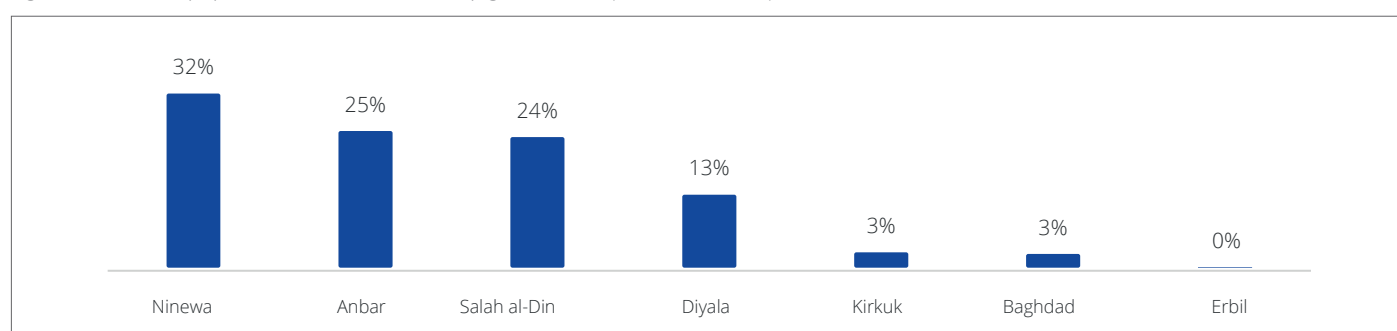


RETURNEE POPULATION IN CRITICAL SHELTERS

As of December 2020, 177,096 returnees reside in shelters in critical condition, representing around 4 per cent of the total returnee population nationwide.¹⁰ Specifically, most returnees in critical shelters reside in destroyed or heavily

damaged pre-conflict residences. Around 32 per cent (56,670 individuals) of returnees in critical shelters are concentrated in Ninewa Governorate, followed by Anbar (25%), Salah al-Din (24%) and Diyala (13%) (Figure 9).

Figure 9. Returnee population in critical shelters by governorate (December 2020)



⁹ These locations, having no key informants and no population, are difficult to record and monitor and are generally identified through word-of-mouth.

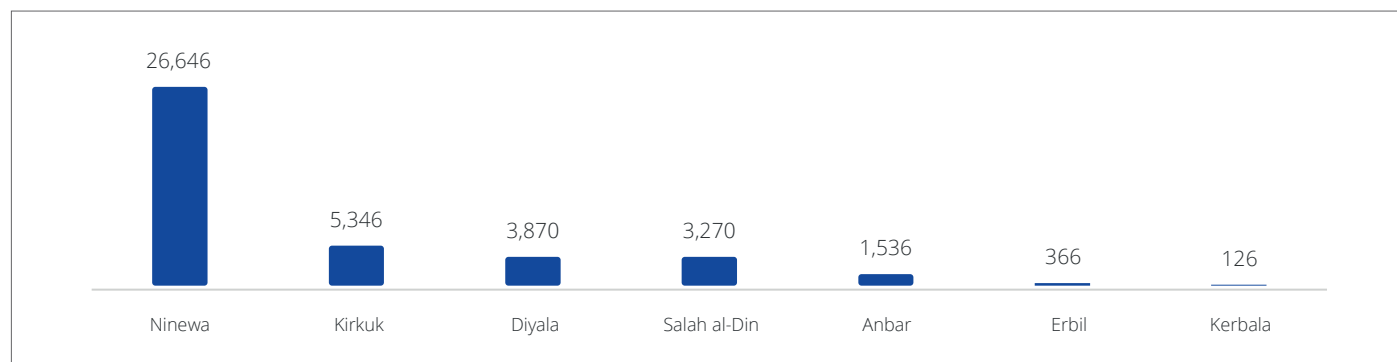
¹⁰ Critical shelters include collective shelters (such as religious buildings, schools, or other public buildings), unfinished or abandoned buildings, tents, caravans and other temporary, sub-standard or makeshift shelters; as well as severely damaged or destroyed habitual residences and long-term rental accommodations that are unfit for habitation (having the characteristics of unfinished or severely damaged buildings). Data collected: November – December 2020, Master List Round 119.

IMPACT OF CAMP CLOSURES

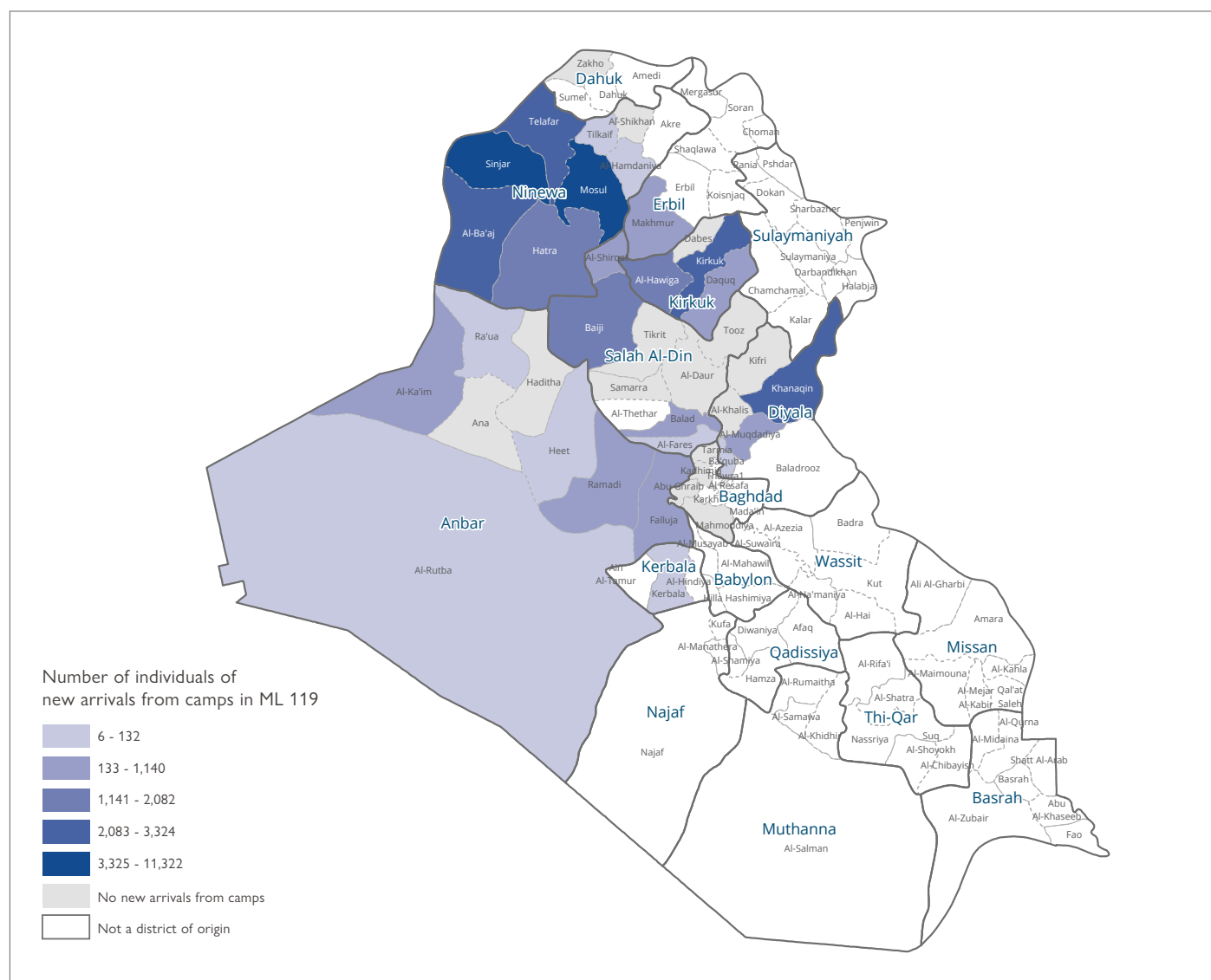
The closure of several IDP camps began around mid-October 2020 following the Government's announcement to close and consolidate camps across the country. Between November and December 2020, a total of 41,160 individuals were recorded as leaving camps for non-camp settings in Anbar, Diyala, Erbil, Kerbala, Kirkuk, Ninewa and Salah al-Din governorates. These individuals departed camps in seven governorates across the

country. Among these, 31,422 individuals (76%) returned to their district of origin while the remaining 9,738 individuals (24%) moved to new locations of displacement, thus becoming out-of-camp IDPs. Ninewa Governorate received the highest number of individuals arriving from camp settings, accounting for more than half of the population from camps (26,646 individuals), followed by Kirkuk (5,346) and Diyala (3,870) (Figure 10).

Figure 10. Arrivals from camps to non-camp locations by governorate of arrival (November to December 2020)



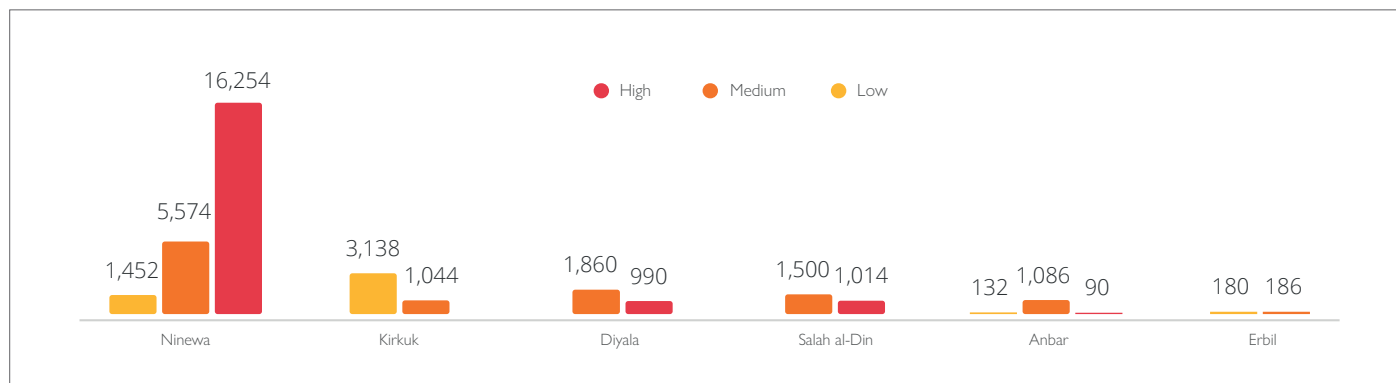
Map 3: Districts that recorded new arrivals from camps by number of individuals (November–December 2020)



Around half of the individuals who arrived from camps settled in locations with high severity (18,348 individuals); 27 per cent (11,034 individuals) settled in locations classified as medium severity. Ninewa Governorate hosted the largest population of camp arrivals who settled in high severity locations (16,254) (Figure 11), accounting for 39 per cent of all arrivals from camps, followed by Salah al-Din,

Diyala and Anbar governorates. Although Erbil and Kirkuk governorates did not receive camp arrivals in high severity locations, 51 per cent of individuals who left camps arrived to medium severity locations in Ninewa while 17 per cent settled in medium severity locations in Diyala.

Figure 11. Number of individuals from camps by severity level of location by governorate of arrival








DRIVERS OF SEVERITY IN KEY AREAS OF RETURN

The analysis presented in this section focuses on five thematic areas of the Return Index indicators: residential destruction, livelihoods, access to essential service, social cohesion, and safety (Figure 12). To provide a more granular understanding of severity and obstacles to return, the Return Index indicators are grouped into five drivers of

severity,¹¹ which track problematic aspects that particularly contributing to severe conditions. This section presents an analysis of how the severity for each driver has changed across 'hotspots'¹² between December 2019 and December 2020.

Figure 12. Drivers of severity and composite indicators¹³

DRIVER	 RESIDENTIAL DESTRUCTION	 LIVELIHOODS	 ESSENTIAL SERVICES	 SOCIAL COHESION	 SAFETY AND SECURITY
INDICATORS	Residential destruction	Recovery of agriculture	Provision of government services	Daily public life	Concerns regarding mines and unexploded ordnance
		Recovery of business	Electricity sufficiency	Community reconciliation	Concerns about sources of violence
		Access to employment	Water sufficiency	Illegal occupation of private residences	Presence of multiple security actors
			Access to basic services	Blocked returns	Checkpoints controlled by other security actors

¹¹ Drivers of severity are calculated at the subdistrict level and provide information on living conditions that contribute to severity to better inform interventions. Each driver is comprised of several Return Index indicators and considers the impact of each indicator in facilitating or preventing returns and the size of the returnee population in a subdistrict.

¹² 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. As of December 2020, 33 hotspots were identified across five governorates.

¹³ An interactive dashboard presenting data on drivers of severity and rate of return for hotspots can be found at <http://iraqdtm.iom.int/ReturnIndex>. In addition, a detailed analysis of how drivers of severity varied across all subdistricts of return can be found in the respective governorate profiles, available at <http://iraqdtm.iom.int/ReturnIndex#GovProfiles>.



RESIDENTIAL DESTRUCTION

Overall, the extent of residential destruction and the presence of reconstruction efforts in most hotspot subdistricts is categorized as low severity. This means that, while there may be variation at the location level, in general, fewer than half of the households in these areas are destroyed, and reconstruction efforts are ongoing. A notable exception is Al-Nasir Walsalam in Baghdad Governorate, which remained at high severity for residential destruction throughout 2020. Similarly, Balad district in Salah al-Din Governorate has three subdistricts of return with high severity for residential destruction, and no improvement over the course of the year.

Notably, the subdistrict of Al-Gamra, Anbar Governorate, saw significant improvements in residential destruction, moving from medium to low severity. However, a worsening severity was recorded in Al-Amerli subdistrict in Salah al-Din Governorate, which may be attributed to returns over the course of the year in newly assessed locations with moderate housing destruction.

Figure 13. Variation in severity for residential destruction in all hotspots (December 2019 to December 2020)



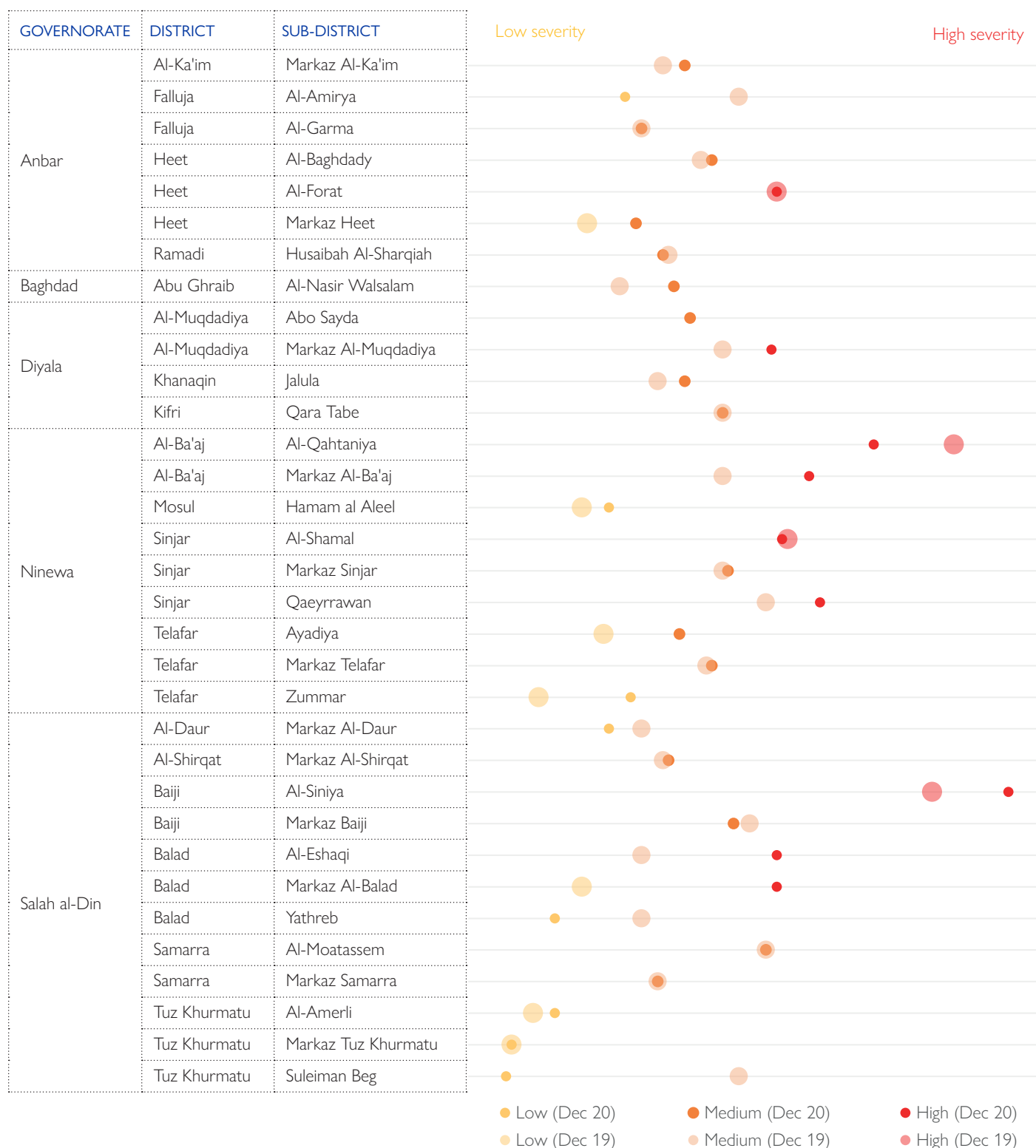


LIVELIHOODS

Many hotspots witnessed significant variation in the recovery of economic activities and access to employment over the course of 2020. While the impact of restrictions associated with COVID-19 caused a notable worsening of severity in May–June, many hotspots recorded a worsening of severity over the course of the year with little sign of recovery although restriction measures were eased. This suggests the impact of other underlying structural factors such as low oil prices, widespread youth unemployment and poor access to financial services across many areas of return.¹⁴

Most hotspots within Ninewa Governorate recorded a worsening of severity regarding livelihoods, with subdistricts in Al-Ba'aj and Sinjar moving from medium to high severity. Balad district, Salah al-Din Governorate, recorded two hotspots that worsened significantly over the year – from low and medium to high severity. However, the uneven impact of market fundamentals on livelihoods is best exemplified by the subdistrict of Suleiman Beg, also in Salah al-Din, which recorded the largest overall improvement in severity during 2020.

Figure 14. Variation in severity for livelihoods in all hotspots (December 2019 to December 2020)



14 Hamilton, Alexander (2020) *Is demography destiny? The economic implications of Iraq's demography*. LSE Middle East Centre Paper Series (41). LSE Middle East Centre, London, UK.

SERVICES

Access to services remained good among all hotspots in Anbar and Baghdad governorates, and among some hotspots in Salah al-Din Governorate. Elsewhere, severity remained high, most notably in Sinjar district, Ninewa Governorate, where all hotspots reported high severity with regard to services. Significant worsening in severity

was recorded in Al-Siniya, Markaz al-Balad and Al-Amerli subdistricts, Salah al-Din Governorate. Very few hotspots recorded a significant improvement in access to services over the course of 2020, though some districts such as Telafar, Ninewa Governorate, had low severity for services across all hotspots.

Figure 15. Variation in severity for services in all hotspots (December 2019 to December 2020)



SOCIAL COHESION

While there was limited variation in social cohesion over the course of 2020, there was a pronounced escalation in severity recorded in May and June. For the most part, this increase in severity can be attributed to a worsening in daily public life and limited freedom of movement associated with the restriction measures introduced to curb the spread of COVID-19. Across most hotspots, this sharp increase in severity related to daily public life returned to pre-COVID levels of severity.

Two hotspots in Tuz Khurmatu district, Salah al-Din Governorate, witnessed significant improvement – moving from high to medium severity. Similarly, Markaz Telafar, Ninewa Governorate, improved from medium to low severity.

Figure 16. Variation in severity for social cohesion in all hotspots (December 2019 to December 2020)



SAFETY AND SECURITY

Overall, more hotspots recorded high severity for safety and security driver than for any other driver. Three hotspots in Anbar Governorate recorded significant worsening of severity, driven by rising concerns over sources of violence, reported blocked returns and violent non-state actors in control of checkpoints. There were no significant variations in severity for hotspots in Diyala Governorate, although all remained high severity, except for one subdistrict which was newly

assessed by the Return Index in 2020. Most hotspots in Ninewa Governorate improved in severity related to safety and security, most notably in Markaz Sinjar and Qaeyrrawan, both in Sinjar district, which moved from high to medium severity. Hotspots across Salah al-Din Governorate vary significantly in severity related to safety and security, with those in Tuz Khurmatu district recording the highest severity.

Figure 17. Variation in severity for safety and security in all hotspots (December 2019 to December 2020)



Disclaimer

The opinions expressed in the report do not necessarily reflect the views of the International Organization for Migration (IOM). The designations employed and the presentation of material throughout the report do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of IOM concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area, or of its authorities, or concerning its frontiers or boundaries.

IOM IRAQ

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

 iraq.iom.int

 iomiraq@iom.int

    @IOMIraq



Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the
Netherlands



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE



© 2021 International Organization for Migration (IOM)

This report was developed with support from the COMPASS project funded by the Government of the Netherlands. Data in this report was collected through a project funded by the US State Department's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) and USAID.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise without the prior written permission of the publisher.