

# A CLIMATE OF FRAGILITY

HOUSEHOLD PROFILING  
IN THE SOUTH OF IRAQ:  
BASRA, THI-QAR AND MISSAN



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In order to better define the magnitude and geographic prevalence of issues pertaining to environmental degradation, climate-induced migration, economic insecurity, a lack of investment in development, tribal conflict, criminal and political violence, and civic mistrust and unrest in southern Iraq, IOM and Social Inquiry designed this profiling of Basra, Thi-Qar, and Missan governorates to serve as go-to sources of evidence to shape further in-depth research, analysis, and advocacy on specific issues, geographical areas, and/or population groups and guide the design, monitoring, and evaluation of interventions and policies to best meet the needs of people in these fragile environments.

The specifically designed indicators framework for this profiling focuses on a breadth of topics including demographics, housing, access to services, socio-economic situation, agriculture, migration, wellbeing, governance, security, and social cohesion and divided into three levels: household characteristics, individual perceptions and attitudes, and roster of household members.

A total of 3,904 surveys were collected across all 18 districts in these three governorates between December 2021 and January 2022. This sample size guarantees the standard 5% margin of error for data for each governorate and an 8% margin of error at district level. In addition, for each district, the sampling was also stratified by urbanicity and gender, thus generating a representative sample for urban and rural areas as well as for male and female respondents that can be analyzed at different levels of disaggregation.

The profiling findings presented herein serve as an updated baseline of dynamics in Basra, Thi-Qar, and Missan governorates delineating the scale and scope of issues that span the humanitarian-development-peace nexus in a setting that while not emerging from conflict per se is mired in significant violence, a lack of government and development support, poverty, and inequality. While the analysis shows variation in prominence and impact of different indicators by governorate and location type, by far, the starkest difference in outcomes relates most to age. Specifically, the youngest populations already or will grow to bear the brunt of this increasingly unstable and insecure environment and uncertain future if drastic changes to the status quo are not enacted and soon.

Some key overarching findings emerge from the analysis that may serve as guideposts in developing, implementing, and monitoring coherent interventions and strategies to address this fragility and in seeking to identify where more nuance and detail from further research and analysis is needed for such purposes.

### THESE TAKEAWAYS ARE AS FOLLOWS:

- The existence of weak and unequal public service provision, with dissatisfaction particularly high in Thi-Qar Governorate overall and most pronounced in rural areas across governorates.
- The presence of extended relative poverty overall, concentrated among non-educated, social support reliant, female-headed, and rural households and within Faw, Zubair, and Basra districts in Basra Governorate, Chibaysh district in Thi-Qar Governorate, and Qalat Saleh and Kahlaa districts in Missan Governorate.
- Rapid urbanization and population growth is posing a challenge to formal land rights as almost half of residents experience some form of housing, land, and property informality with those in irregular housing either building on agricultural land or settling on public land without official permission to do so.
- The role of agriculture is diminishing in rural livelihoods due to environmental degradation, namely lack of water supply and related yield loss or livestock deaths, with less than half of rural households engaging in farming, livestock, or fishing for revenue and even fewer whose sole income source comes from these activities.
- There is very localized (and contained) migration among urban populations, primarily related to a lack of good living conditions in place of origin; unemployment; and securing a new job in the destination location prior to moving there. The prospect of migration nevertheless shapes public consciousness as depopulation is cited as a main social concern among rural residents while a sizeable proportion of residents overall, and the young in particular, express a preference to move from their current location to somewhere else in the governorate at some point in the future.
- “New” and looming unemployment, especially among the young, is stemming from a weak private sector that does not offer growth, a diminished agricultural sector, and a public sector unable to absorb the growing numbers entering the labor market as it previously had. This leaves those youth who are working less well paid and in less steady employment than their older counterparts, despite being just as or more educated overall. The situation is especially acute among young women who are barely present in the workforce even though they are completing higher levels of education and who face significantly higher likelihood of unemployment if they do enter the labor market.

- A safe daily life exists within a violent environment that is marked by a high visibility of firearms among the civilian population, so-called “tribal conflicts” pertaining to social disputes and increasingly political ones as various tribes, security actors, political parties, and criminal networks overlap and compete for power, and relatedly, an emerging drug trade. In this context, substance abuse and addiction are criminalized rather than treated as a growing public health concern.
  - The priority grievances people want to see resolved are structural in nature and encourage young men to publicly express their views, and reportedly call for systemic rather than individual solutions to resolve, though a non-negligible proportion believe there is no way to resolve grievances related to corruption and behavior of local political parties. Grievances pertain to a lack of government support, lack of opportunities, and corruption overall while young men also cite a lack of justice, behavior of political parties, and targeting after 2019 as issues they are most upset about as well.
- Furthermore, while public expression of grievances is relatively high among young men, confidence in electoral processes is exceedingly low across all population groups.
- The overall social environment is characterized by low institutional trust in formal and customary actors, where even the top-rated among them, religious leaders, tribal leaders, and security forces, generate only moderate support; low inter-personal trust in others in the community; and high levels of marginalization felt as citizens, particularly by the state, indicating an eroding social cohesion. Once again, a generational divide emerges where young men and women tend to exhibit a greater tendency toward mistrust of others in the community than their older counterparts. Specific gender differences are also seen in that women have significantly less trust in religious leaders, tribal leaders, and security forces than men and a relatively substantial proportion of women also report feeling marginalized as citizens by the rest of society as well as by the state.

## INTRODUCTION

The southernmost governorates of Iraq, particularly Basra, Thi-Qar, and Missan, are the scene of increasing environment degradation, climate-induced migration, economic insecurity, a lack of investment in development, tribal conflict, criminal and political violence, and civil unrest. In-depth journalistic reporting and qualitative analysis have helped to delineate these trends and bring them to the fore, generating a greater interest among national and international stakeholders in seeking to sustainably address them.

As attention in Iraq shifts southward, however, little current data exists as to the magnitude or geographic prevalence of the issues raised above that could help inform priorities, interventions, policies, or advocacy, considering that the last representative data available for these governorates comes from 2012.<sup>1</sup>

IOM and Social Inquiry designed this baseline profiling of Basra, Thi-Qar, and Missan governorates to fill this evidence gap, to avoid the potential for oversampling of vulnerable communities with multiple and overlapping assessments, and to enable as many stakeholders as possible to utilize not only the analysis presented herein, but the data itself for their own needs.

In focusing on a breadth of topics including population demographics, housing, access to services, socio-economic situation, agriculture, migration, wellbeing, governance, security, and social cohesion, the aim is to provide robust and relevant datasets and analyses that can serve as go-to sources of evidence to shape further in-depth research, analysis, and advocacy on specific issues, geographical areas, and/or population groups and guide the design, monitoring, and evaluation of interventions and policies to best meet the needs of people in these fragile environments.

This profiling report provides an in-depth examination of key findings and trends across the thematic topics listed above, disaggregated as relevant by governorate, location type (urban and rural), gender, and age. The following sections will detail the methodology of this profiling exercise, highlight general demographic trends in each governorate, present main findings and analysis by thematic topic, and finally, provide a summary of overarching findings as potential points of departure for intervention, policy, and additional research.

<sup>1</sup> Iraq Central Statistics Office and World Bank, Iraq Household Socio-Economic Survey (2012).

## METHODOLOGY

This research was designed to obtain a statistically representative baseline of the population currently living in the governorates of Basra, Thi-Qar and Missan through a comprehensive household survey, measuring key household- and individual-level indicators developed for this purpose.

The indicators framework that forms the survey aimed to cover topics that help to understand what characterizes social dynamics in the southern dynamics. As such, after initial development, they underwent an internal formulation process across units within IOM Iraq. These indicators are grouped in different levels:

- Household-level indicators, aimed at characterizing living conditions and impacts for the household as a whole. These include housing, access to services, socio-economic situation, agricultural activities (if any), and migration movements (if any).
- Individual-level indicators, aimed at characterizing the personal views, attitudes and perceptions held by the actual household member responding to the survey. Questions here dealt with topics related to personal wellbeing, governance, rule of law, safety, social cohesion, and public participation. To note, only one respondent per household was surveyed and this respondent had to be older than 18 years of age to participate.
- Roster indicators, aimed at characterizing the individual members that formed the household. This included counting every single household member (all ages) and, for each, gathering information on age, gender, education level completed (if older than 12), and employment status (if older than 12).

A total of 3,904 surveys were collected across the 18 districts in these three governorates. As shown in Table 1, around 200 households were surveyed for each district (300 if the district was the governorate capital). This sample size guarantees the standard 5% margin of error for data for each governorate and an 8% margin of error at district level. In addition, for each district, the sampling was also stratified by urbanicity and gender, thus generating a representative sample for urban and rural areas as well as for male and female respondents that can be analyzed at different disaggregation levels.

With the intention to be as comprehensive and generalizable as possible for the three southern governorates, the data collection took place in more than 200 locations (57 urban and 146 rural), spread across all subdistricts in the region. Urban locations included district and subdistrict administrative capitals, with all other locations coded as rural. Data collection took place between December 2021 and January 2022.

The dataset generated was processed into headline tabulations that allow for analysis at different levels of disaggregation: by governorate, district, location type, gender, age, or any combination of these. Weights were applied for this purpose to make the data demographically representative – this included weighting the data by each district's population size, urban/rural ratios, and gender.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> For population weights, data on population size for each district as well as the urban/rural population ratio were obtained from Iraq Central Statistics Office and World Bank, Iraq Household Socio-Economic Survey (2012). For gender weights, results were weighted to obtain a 50/50 proportion between men and women.

Table 1. Sampling for the profiling

GOVERNORATE	DISTRICT	HOUSEHOLD SURVEYS
Basra	Basra	301
	Abu al-Khaseeb	198
	Al-Zubair	201
	Al-Qurna	201
	Al-Fao	200
	Shat al-Arab	200
	Al-Midaina	201
	<b>Total Basra</b>	<b>1,502</b>
Thi-Qar	Nassiriya	300
	Al-Shatra	200
	Al-Rifaii	202
	Al-Chibayish	204
	Suq al-Shuyukh	196
	<b>Total Thi-Qar</b>	<b>1,102</b>
Missan	Al-Amarah	300
	Ali al-Gharbi	200
	Al-Maimouna	210
	Qalat Saleh	198
	Al-Majir al-Kabir	200
	Al-Kahla'a	192
	<b>Total Missan</b>	<b>1,300</b>
<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>	<b>3,904</b>	

## DEMOGRAPHICS IN BASRA, THI-QAR AND MISSAN

The population covered in this study, across the three governorates, is estimated to be approximately 5.4 million people, based on data from 2012.<sup>3</sup> This is a relatively urban and especially young society, a factor that is of significant importance to understand the dynamics described ahead.

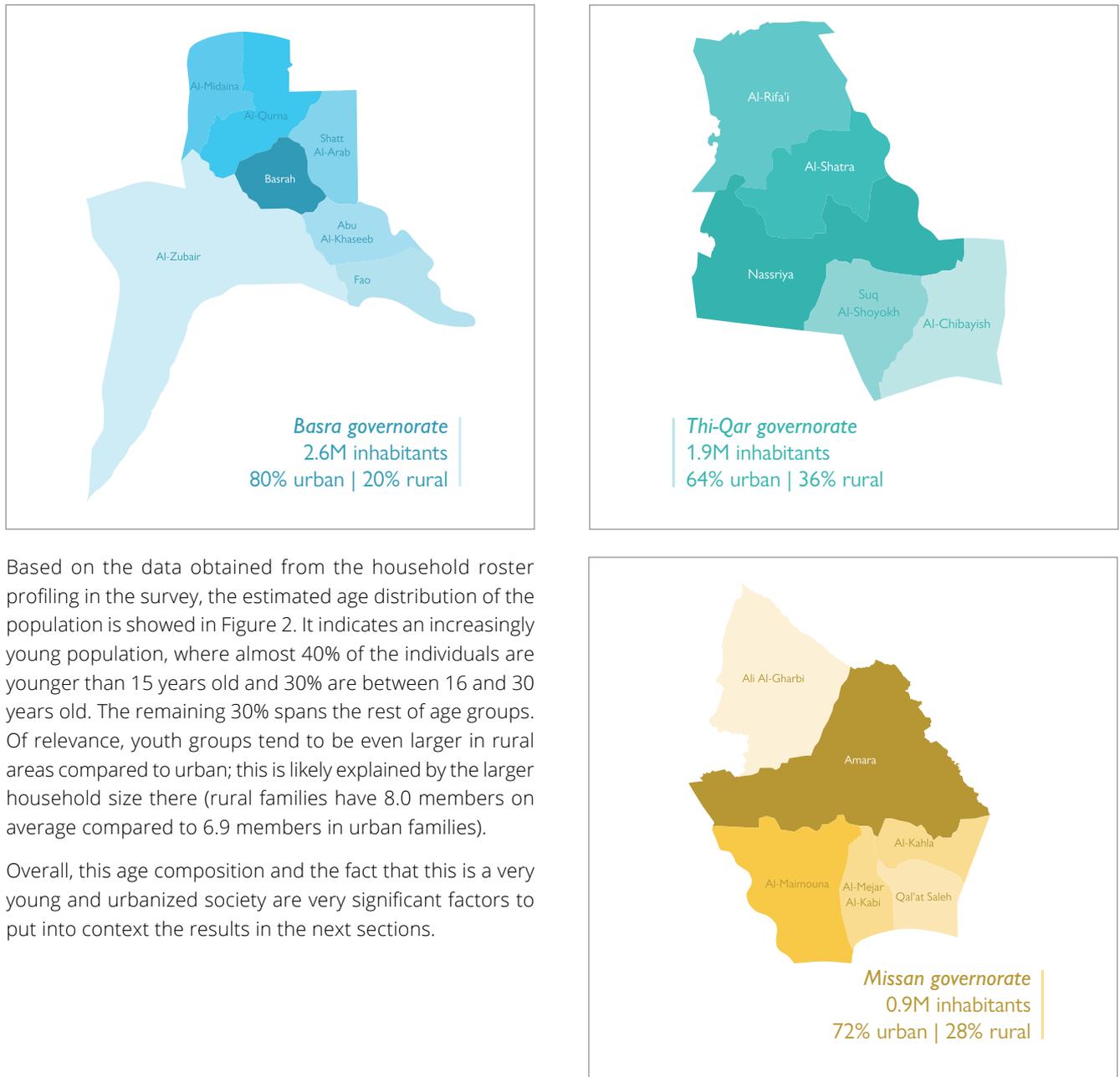
The distribution of population size across governorates is showed in Figure 1, which also includes the ratio between urban and rural population.<sup>4</sup> Basra is the largest governorate

by far and is also the most urbanized. The capital itself is one of the largest cities in the whole of Iraq, with more than one million inhabitants. For Thi-Qar and Missan governorates, a key characteristic is that, out of the capital districts, the remaining districts tend to be mostly rural as opposed to urban – that is, a majority of the population live in villages and rural settings and urban centers tend to be smaller in size.

3 Iraq Central Statistics Office and World Bank, Iraq Household Socio-Economic Survey (2012).

4 Ibid. It should be noted that the population estimates may be outdated and the total population for the three governorates is likely to be closer to 6 million inhabitants now.

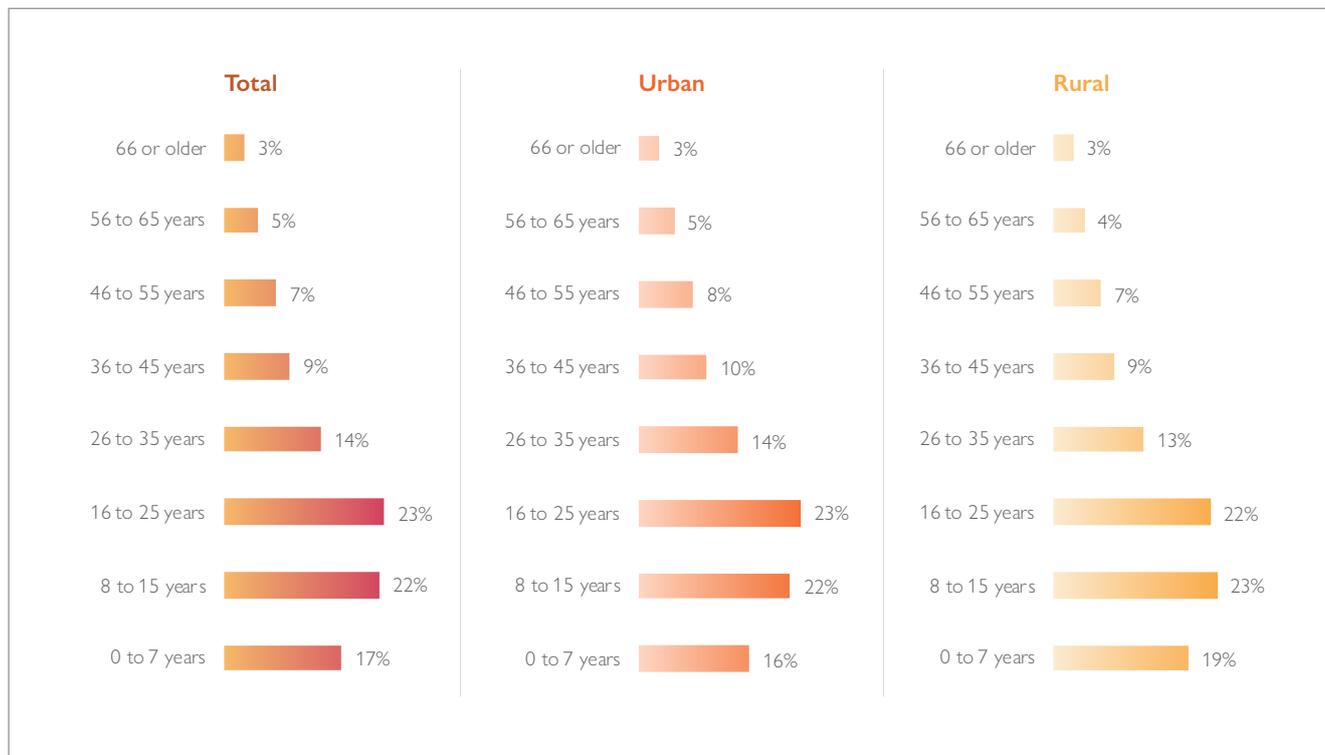
Figure 1. Population size and urbanicity ratio in each governorate assessed



Based on the data obtained from the household roster profiling in the survey, the estimated age distribution of the population is shown in Figure 2. It indicates an increasingly young population, where almost 40% of the individuals are younger than 15 years old and 30% are between 16 and 30 years old. The remaining 30% spans the rest of age groups. Of relevance, youth groups tend to be even larger in rural areas compared to urban; this is likely explained by the larger household size there (rural families have 8.0 members on average compared to 6.9 members in urban families).

Overall, this age composition and the fact that this is a very young and urbanized society are very significant factors to put into context the results in the next sections.

Figure 2. Age composition of the population represented



## SERVICE PROVISION

Both satisfaction and access to basic public services, mainly water, electricity, healthcare, and education are explored here. By and large, the overwhelming majority of households rely on the public provision of these services rather than private providers or self-provision. While this is a positive sign of state presence, there is significant variability in quality of these services across locations.

### WEAK AND UNEQUAL SERVICE PROVISION

There is a generalized dissatisfaction among all residents in the south of Iraq regarding both the quality and quantity of basic public service provision; that is, water and electricity supply, education, and healthcare. There are geographical disparities between governorates in terms of the prevalence of this dissatisfaction, as Table 2 shows. Thi-Qar in particular presents a very critical situation. These disparities however are most pronounced when taking location type into account across governorates, with satisfaction in rural areas generally 10 percentage points lower than that reported in urban areas overall. For example, while 35% of residents in Basra's urban areas are satisfied with healthcare provision, only 25% are in rural areas.

Table 2. Percentage of households in each governorate describing service provision as “very good” or “good”

	BASRA	THI-QAR	MISSAN
Healthcare provision	33%	9%	18%
Education provision	41%	23%	31%
Water supply	24%	20%	26%
Electricity supply	80%	17%	32%

The vast majority of households report having access to the public electricity grid, public health facilities and public education centers. The exception to this access relates to water provision, which largely relies on supply through private water trucks or carts. The issues with public services raised by far are less about the lack of provision per se than the cost and quality of provision—again, pointing to a disparity

in services between governorates as well as between their urban and rural areas, the latter of which tend to be more poorly served.

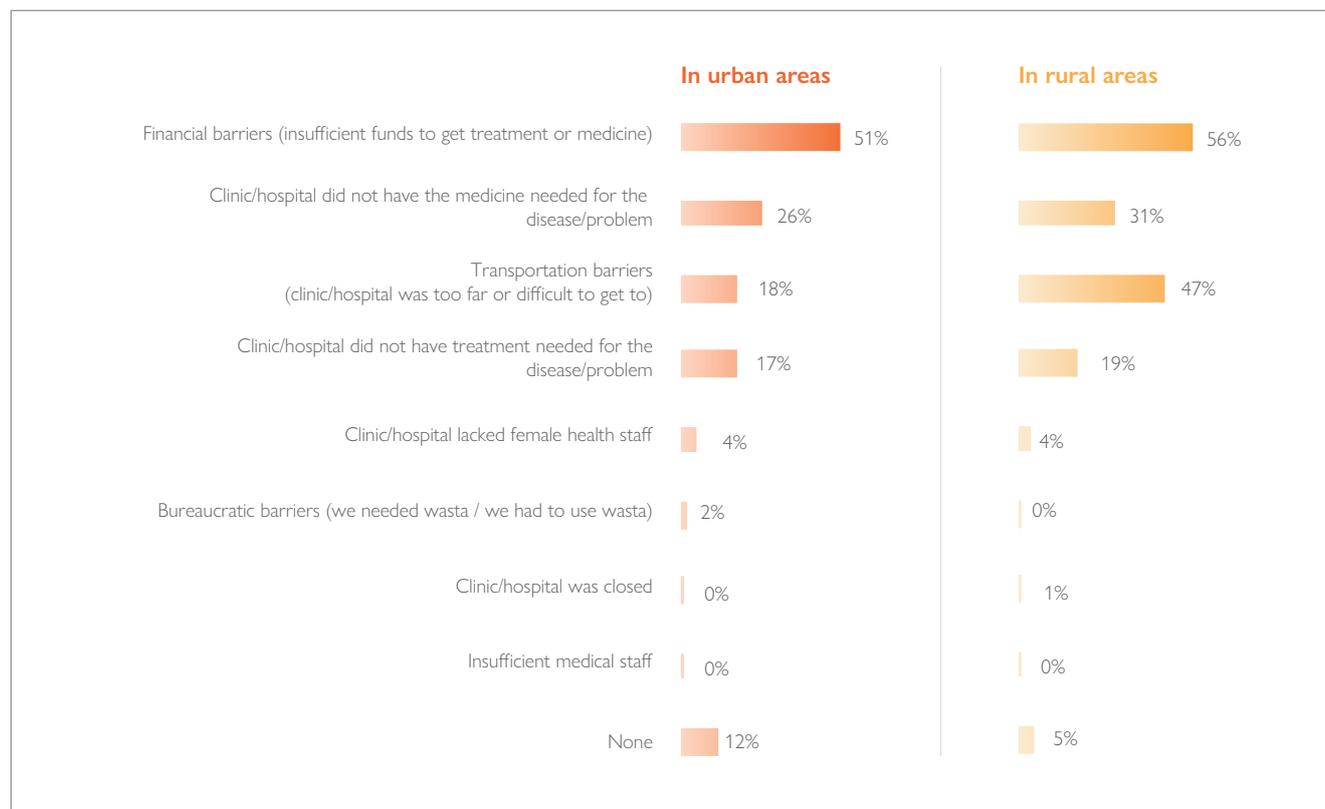
### SELECTED ISSUES IN THE QUALITY OF HEALTHCARE PROVISION

A positive aspect regarding healthcare provision is that less than 1% of households report being completely unable to access or receive treatment when needed. This implies a decent level of state coverage for at least basic healthcare even for rural and poor households.

The negative aspect is that users tend to experience a myriad of impediments that drive levels of satisfaction with the service downward (Figure 3). There is significant variation between urban and rural areas as to what those impediments are and to what proportion. Affordability issues, lack of medicines or treatment at medical facilities, and transportation issues are the three major obstacles to accessing healthcare in urban areas. The order shifts for rural areas, where physical access issues play a more prominent role. This is linked to the need to travel long distances on dirt roads to reach the nearest urban center where medical facilities are typically located. There is also a gendered aspect to healthcare provision here as well in that rural women report higher rates of being unable to reach healthcare facilities in a timely and safely manner as compared to men overall and women in urban areas.<sup>5</sup>

5 This aligns with other findings from rural Basra and Thi-Qar, for example, where women's obstacles to care include the lack of female healthcare providers as well as gynecological and obstetric care in close proximity to where they live, see WFP and Social Inquiry, *Prospects for Resilience Amid Fragility: Conflict Analysis of Al-Qurna and Al-Dair Districts in Basra Governorate* (Baghdad: WFP, 2021) and WFP and Social Inquiry, *Improving Prospects for Peace and Stability in Vulnerable Communities in Southern Iraq: Thi-Qar Governorate Conflict Analysis* (Baghdad: WFP, 2021).

Figure 3. Percentage of households reporting the following barriers when accessing healthcare



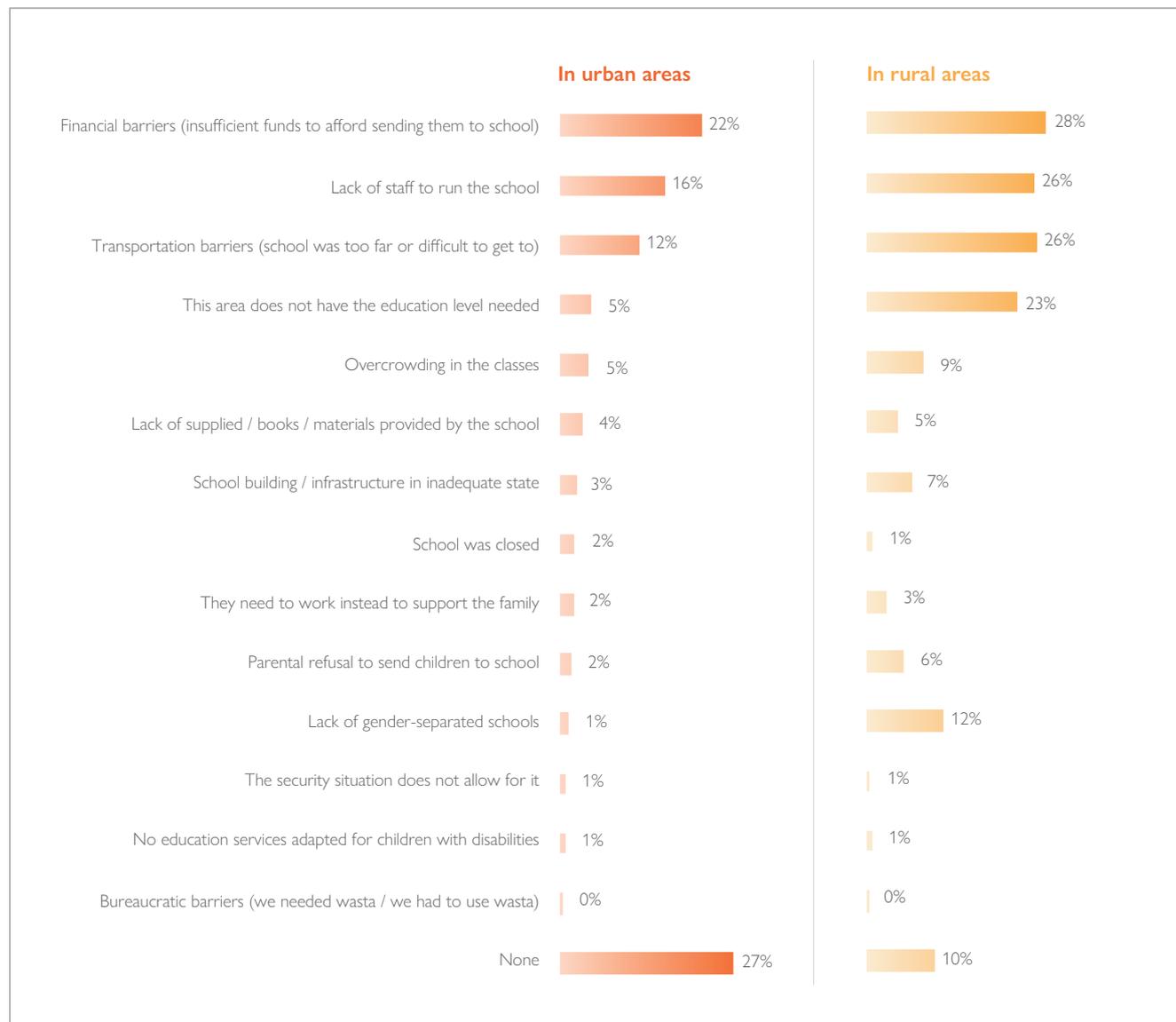
Note: multiple choice indicator.

### SELECTED ISSUES IN THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVISION

Education provision tends to receive better access ratings across the areas—there are relatively more households that do not report any issue at all as compared to healthcare. Reported impediments to education are varied though less prevalent overall, with prominent differences again between urban and rural households (refer to Figure 4). In rural locations, the diversity of obstacles include: financial

barriers to sending kids to school, a lack of teaching staff at schools, physical access barriers to reaching schools and, most importantly for young people’s opportunities, a lack of availability of higher levels of education. Many clusters of locations do not have, for example, secondary schools nearby where local kids can continue their educations. Thus, this group tends to stop schooling early, or drops out of school after accessing what is available.

Figure 4. Percentage of households reporting the following barriers when accessing education



Note: multiple choice indicator.

## HOUSEHOLD SOCIO-ECONOMIC SITUATION

To understand the socio-economic situation of households in the south of Iraq, three indicators are evaluated here: household income sources, economic vulnerability measured as the level of material wellbeing households can afford, and the possession of or access to a financial safety net. The three indicators are inter-related, and show a relatively unequal socio-economic situation, with families clustered at the relative top or bottom of this spectrum of indicators.

### HOUSEHOLD INCOME SOURCES

The profile of household income sources in the three governorates analyzed here is not particularly different from what is seen in other parts of the country. Income tends to generally be split between relatively secure sources, either from government salaries or, in very limited cases, from formal employment in the private sector, and more meager or unstable sources, usually from informal daily labor or from social welfare available to vulnerable families.

Table 3 shows this split in economic terms in society. Government salaries (and pensions) are the most common types of income households obtain, with 42% overall depending on this. Salary from security forces (13%) could also be considered as public sector payroll further increasing the proportion of households overall reliant on the public sector for income. Daily labor and informal commerce features next in importance as income sources (30%), followed by revenue from businesses or workshops (26%). The percentage of families depending on social welfare is also relatively high, with 19% reporting this as an income source.

Table 3. Household income sources by location type

	ALL HOUSEHOLDS	URBAN HOUSEHOLDS	RURAL HOUSEHOLDS
Government salary or pension	42%	44%	36%
Salary from security forces	13%	11%	16%
Paid job in a company	3%	3%	3%
Revenues from business or workshop	26%	30%	17%
Daily labor or informal commerce	30%	29%	30%
Agriculture, livestock, fishing	9%	3%	24%
Income from renting property	1%	1%	0%
Governmental social support	19%	18%	22%
Family support or charity	2%	2%	2%

Note: multiple choice indicator.

Differences across governorates are relatively minimal from this general picture, as showed in Table 4. It is worth noting however that the number of families generating income from

agriculture is larger in Missan and Thi-Qar governorates due to the larger proportion of rural populations and relatively lower public sector presence there compared to Basra.

Table 4. Household income sources by governorate

	HOUSEHOLDS IN BASRA	HOUSEHOLDS IN THI-QAR	HOUSEHOLDS IN MISSAN
Government salary or pension	43%	44%	37%
Salary from security forces	9%	16%	15%
Paid job in a company	4%	3%	2%
Revenues from business or workshop	25%	27%	29%
Daily labor or informal commerce	30%	32%	25%
Agriculture, livestock, fishing	3%	14%	14%
Income from renting property	1%	1%	1%
Governmental social support	14%	25%	23%
Family support or charity	2%	1%	1%

Note: multiple choice indicator.

This income distribution has further implications for both poverty, which is explored below, and employment opportunities, discussed in greater detail later in this report.

## SELF-REPORTED ECONOMIC VULNERABILITY

A second dimension to profile the socio-economic situation in these governorates is by analyzing the material and financial wellbeing of households. This is done through a self-reported indicator of affordability, in the absence of accurate estimates of household income or expenditure figures. It asks households about what level of material wellbeing they can afford. Self-reported affordability is a proxy widely used to categorize perceived relative wealth and poverty.

Households tend to cluster around an intermediate level of affordability, that is, a situation in which they can reportedly afford food, clothes, and daily needs relatively comfortably, but not expensive items or investments (Table 5). A more negative view of this finding, however, also means that almost 40% of households are clustered in the lowest two tiers of affordability. These are the households that can be classified as struggling in economic terms to make ends meet.

Table 5. Self-reported levels of household affordability and purchasing power

SELF-REPORTED AFFORDABILITY		PERCENTAGE OF HOUSEHOLDS
Lowest	We do not have enough money even for food	9%
	We have enough money for food, but not enough to buy clothes and shoes as needed	30%
	We have enough money for food and clothing, but not enough to buy expensive items if we had to	34%
Highest	We can buy some expensive items but we cannot buy everything we want	24%
	We can buy whatever we want	3%

Differences in overall household socio-economic situation are found especially between districts. The poorest districts based on this measurement include Faw, Zubair and Basra, in Basra Governorate, Chibaysh in Thi-Qar, and Qalat Saleh and Kahlaa in Missan (Table 6). It is of note that Basra

district, home to the second largest city in Iraq, presents one of the highest rates of self-reported vulnerability among households—indeed the economic fragility identified here aligns with recent findings from previous research in the city.<sup>6</sup>

Table 6. Percentage of households that fall in the two lowest tiers of affordability in each district

BASRA GOVERNORATE		THI-QAR GOVERNORATE		MISSAN GOVERNORATE	
Faw	59%	Chibaysh	45%	Qalat Saleh	51%
Zubair	45%	Shatra	37%	Kahlaa	48%
Basra	45%	Nassiriya	37%	Majir al-Kabir	41%
Qurna	44%	Rifaai	33%	Maimouna	38%
Midaina	36%	Suq al-Shyukh	31%	Ali al-Gharbi	37%
Abu al-Khaseeb	30%			Amara	32%
Shat al-Arab	29%				

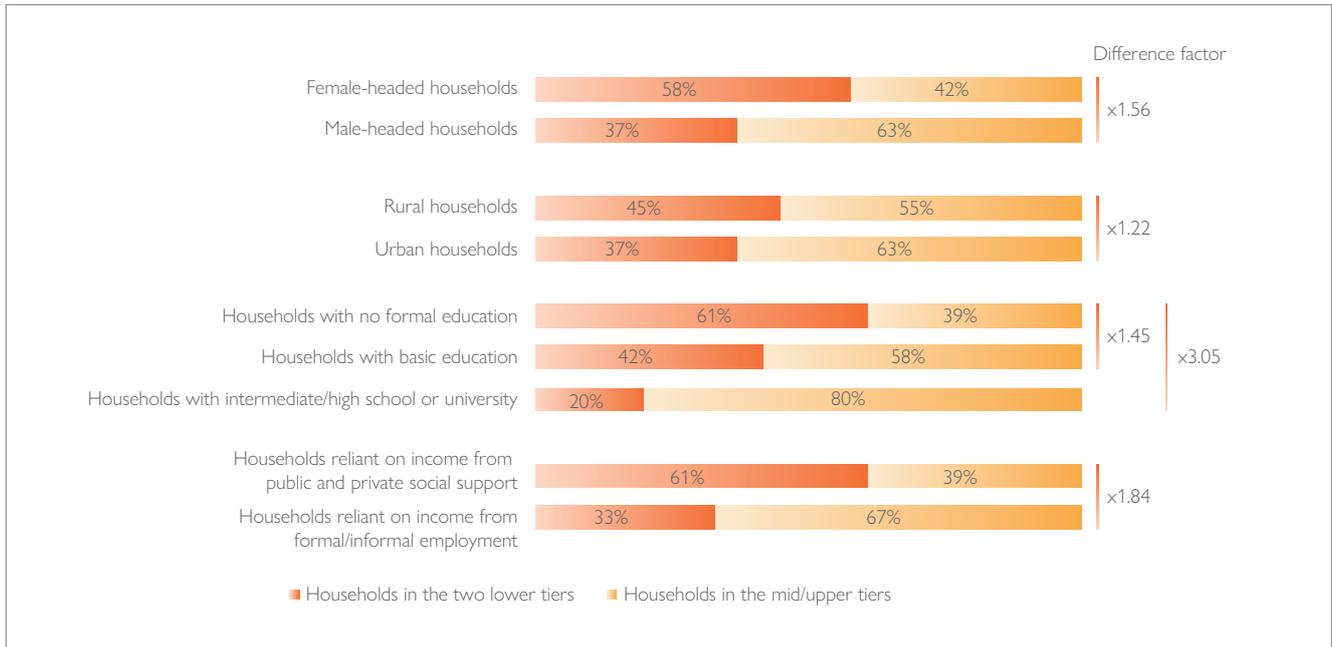
## DETERMINANTS OF SELF-REPORTED ECONOMIC VULNERABILITY

Specific factors, identified through statistical analysis, explain which households are more likely to be relatively poorer than others and why. These factors are ranked from most to least significant in Figure 5. The figure depicts the percentage of households within a given typology that cluster into the lowest two tiers of self-reported economic status, with the difference factor indicating how much more likely a household in that typology is to report being poor than a household.

The largest driver of economic vulnerability is found in the level of education of the head of the household. Households with no formal education have a rate of relative poverty three times higher than that of households with high school or university degrees completed. Similarly, households with no income from employment, but rather from public welfare, family support, or charity, are almost twice more likely to be poor than households relying on income from employment of any type. In addition to this, being a female-headed household or living in rural areas are also significant predictors of being relatively poorer than other households.

6 IOM and Social Inquiry, Migration into a Fragile Setting: Responding to Climate-Induced Informal Urbanization and Inequality in Basra, Iraq (Baghdad: IOM, 2021).

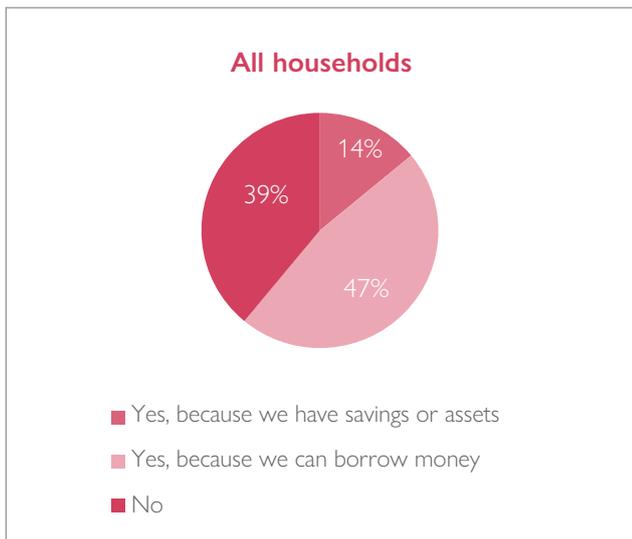
Figure 5. Determinants of self-reported levels of affordability and household purchasing power



### CAPACITY TO BORROW OR SELL ASSETS AS A FINANCIAL SAFETY NET

More than half of households, on average, report having access to a financial safety net, that is, they have enough capital or they could tap into their social networks to obtain resources to face unexpected domestic expenses or shocks. Capacity to borrow is significantly more extended among households than asset wealth. However, there are pockets of financial insecurity where households have no recourse to deal with shocks, which are mostly found in rural areas (Figure 6).

Figure 6. Reported household safety nets



## HOUSING AND LAND

In exploring families' housing situations, it is clear that rapid urbanization and population growth are challenging the formal land rights system, which is not flexible enough to adapt to these changes and have left many families in a situation of informality.

### FORMAL LAND RIGHTS CHALLENGED BY URBANIZATION AND POPULATION EXPANSION

The rapid expansion of cities and towns in southern Iraq has led to an overall context where a significant proportion of households inhabit land that is not legally zoned for residential purposes. In urban areas, 59% of households

live in a situation where both their homes and the land they are built on are owned and registered as residential (the most formal ownership configuration), while in rural areas, this proportion only reaches 7% of households (Table 7). The rest of households across the urban and rural landscape thus feature different degrees of informality with regard to their housing, land, and property situations.

Table 7. Households' land and house ownership status

WHAT IS THE OWNERSHIP STATUS OF THE LAND YOUR CURRENT HOUSE IS BUILT ON?	URBAN HOUSEHOLDS	RURAL HOUSEHOLDS
Private residential land (purchased and registered)	59%	7%
Private residential land (not purchased)	7%	1%
Public land (purchased or gifted)	4%	1%
Public land (built on it without official permission)	10%	5%
Agricultural land (purchased or gifted)	13%	47%
Agricultural land (not purchased)	5%	33%

For those in irregular housing, the most common trend is to expand onto agricultural land or settle on public land without official permission. The transformation of agricultural land for residential purposes is indeed an emerging issue, where land-owners divide the surface of plots and sell or rent them to new families.<sup>7</sup> This not only creates another driver for these land-owners to abandon agriculture, but also puts the families who now live on this land at legal risk and exposes them to poorer service provision and to natural hazards.

On this last issue of natural hazards, for example, in the sample, there is a relationship between those households affected by flooding and those residing informally on agricultural land. As expected, this is more prominent in

rural areas, where 49% of households report having been affected by floods or torrential rains. In addition to this informal urbanization, the type of construction materials used, primarily mud bricks, also leave these houses more vulnerable to such hazards.

### ISSUES LINKED WITH LAND INFORMALITY

Land ownership informality does not necessarily equate to insecure tenure or eviction risk, as only 3% of households across governorates report a concern in this regard. However, cases of mass eviction have been reported in the past in these governorates, mostly executed by local authorities on informal settlements on public land (in many cases

<sup>7</sup> Moi Peter Elia and Gary Campbell, "Basra Fact-Finding Mission Report 3," (Erbil: NRC, 2018); and WFP and Social Inquiry, Prospects for Resilience Amid Fragility.

inhabited by migrants).<sup>8</sup> Previous research in the area also indicates that housing informality tends to be accompanied by weaker safety conditions and lower material wellbeing at the neighborhood level, creating dynamics where social

vulnerability reinforces itself.<sup>9</sup> Poorer households tend to cluster in less serviced, less safe, and less formal areas of cities and towns.

## AGRICULTURE AND ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION

Agriculture traditionally held a predominant position as the most important, and in some cases the only, economic sector in rural areas of southern Iraq. The sector, however, is experiencing significant impacts and undergoing significant changes. This section discusses the diminishing role of agriculture in rural livelihoods due to environmental degradation and households' main barriers to cope considering this. Data is discussed separately for farming, livestock, and fishing activities.

### THE ROLE OF AGRICULTURE IN RURAL LIVELIHOODS

Agricultural activities (farming, livestock, and fishing) take place mostly in rural locations. Some households in urban areas do engage in these activities too, but at a very limited rate. The focus here is thus kept on the situation reported by rural households only. Farming and livestock are not the predominant sectors they traditionally once were in rural areas considering that the majority of households do not earn a living from agriculture at all. At present, 22% of households are engaged in farming and 31% are engaged in livestock—frequently these activities overlap (Figure 7). These proportions differ significantly by governorate, with most of these activities taking place in Thi-Qar and Missan governorates and rural households in Basra only marginally engaging in either farming or livestock. Fishing or fish farming, for their part, are generally very limited activities and localized in specific districts including Fao, Chibaysh, and Suq al-Shyukh.

Of note, the proportion of farmers and livestock owners that fully rely on these activities for income is even more limited. Many of these households also engage in other employment

sectors and receive income beyond agriculture. For example, among the 22% of households that currently farm, only 8% report revenue solely from this type of employment while the other 14% report other income sources, mainly from the public sector, either in government jobs or security forces.

Figure 7 also indicates a gradual abandonment of agricultural activities. Many rural households report that they used to engage in agriculture for a living five years ago, but they do not anymore. Thus, the percentage of households farming, for example, dropped from 34% then to the current 22% now, with similar trends in livestock. This also corresponds to findings from Iraq's statistics body in which the amount of land dedicated to growing wheat and barley across the three southern governorates fell by around 12% between 2016 and 2017 to 919,000 dunums (91,900 hectares).<sup>10</sup> Other sources also highlight that agricultural activity had all but come to a halt in many districts of Basra Governorate in 2018, where land was increasingly being turned over informally for residential use.<sup>11</sup>

### CHANGES IN ACTIVITY LEVELS FOR HOUSEHOLDS ENGAGED IN AGRICULTURE

One key factor that can explain this decreasing role of agriculture in rural livelihoods is the struggle many report in sustaining production and yields. As seen in the bar charts at the right of Figure 7, an overwhelming 86% of households currently engaged in farming report a diminished harvest as compared to their situation five years ago; for livestock owners, similarly, 72% report a diminished herd; for those in fishing or fish farming, the negative impact affects 90% of them.

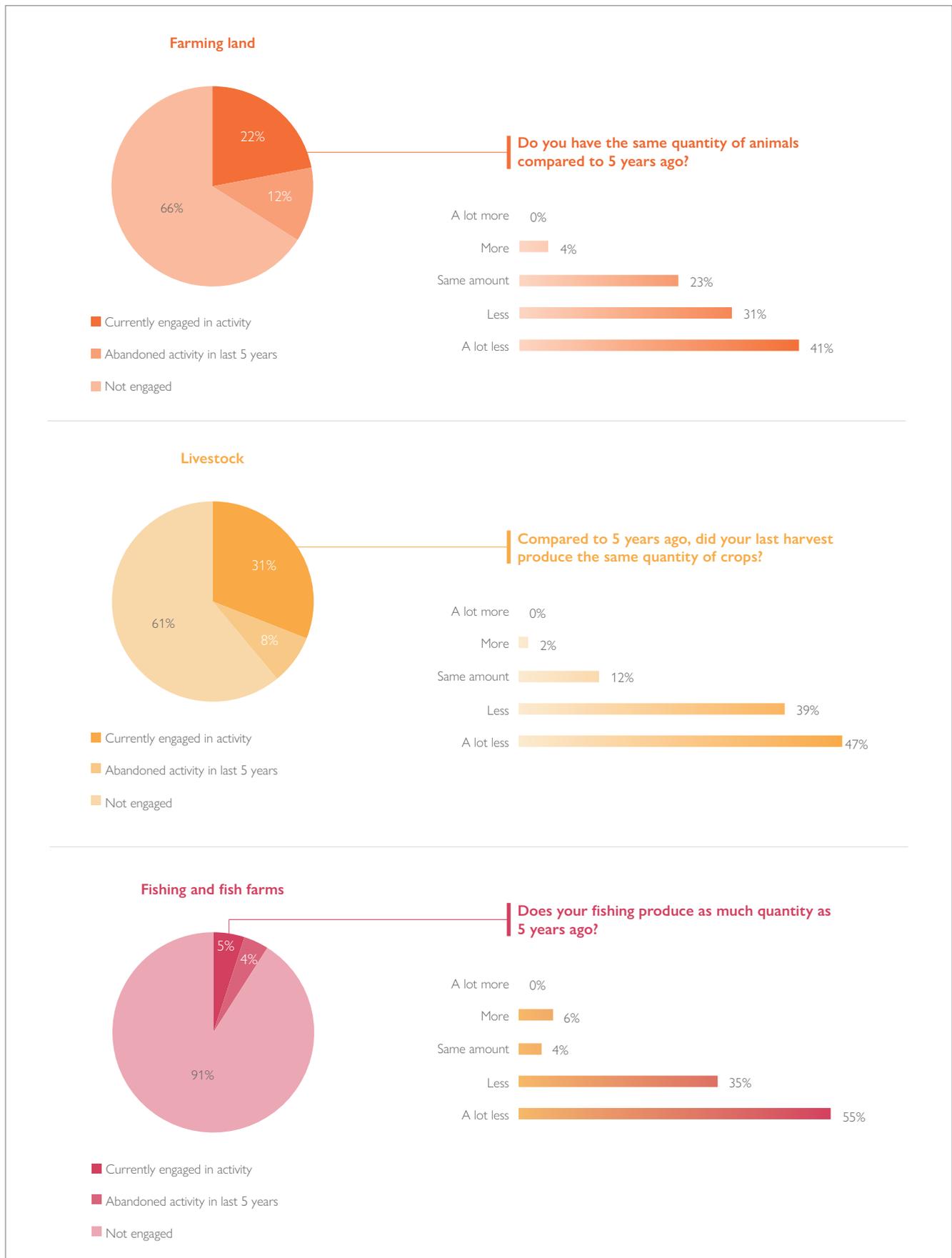
8 Babar Mumtaz and Ivan Thung, *Basra Urban Profile* (Giza: UNHABITAT, 2020).

9 IOM and Social Inquiry, *Migration into a Fragile Setting*.

10 Iraq Central Statistics Office, *Annual Abstract*, 2017.

11 Moi Peter Elia, "Livelihoods and Market Assessment, Basra, Iraq," (Erbil: NRC, 2018).

Figure 7. Prevalence of agricultural activities among rural households and variations in production experienced



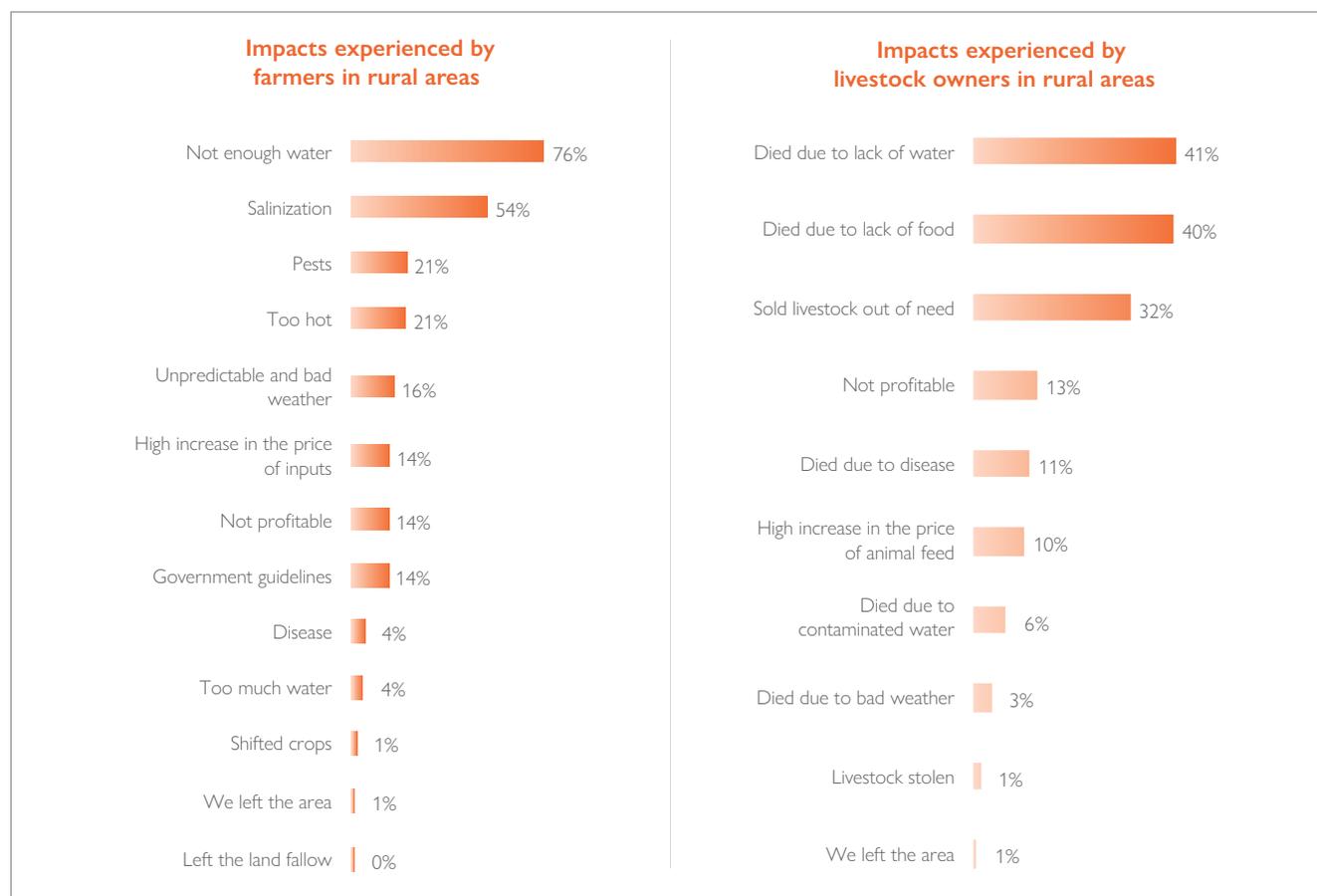
Note: these results are for rural households only.

## CAUSES OF LOWER AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION WITH FOCUS ON ENVIRONMENT

To put these findings into context, discussions about the changing dynamics in agriculture in the southern governorates cannot be disconnected from an examination of environmental degradation and climate-related impacts to this sector. Farming mostly relies on intensive irrigation facilitated by a vast network of canals flowing southwards or diverted from the river, on which livestock is also dependent. As such, the quantity and quality of water resources in these governorates are highly vulnerable to environmental issues currently existing upstream as well as downstream, both climate-triggered (e.g., decreasing rainfall at the origin of the Tigris-Euphrates Basin, pushing neighboring countries to build dams and reservoirs to preserve their own water supply, and increasing temperatures) and man-made (e.g., lack of wastewater treatment along the river and poor investment and maintenance in the canal network). Considering the implications this has for the country as a whole, it has become one of the most discussed policy issues in Iraq.<sup>12</sup>

It is not surprising then that environmental degradation is at the core of the explanations given for the reduced activity in agriculture and for its abandonment altogether (Figure 8). Affected farmers report lack of water supply and water salinization issues as primarily impacting their ability to farm crops, followed by issues directly related with local climate in the form of heat, unpredictable weather, and associated pests. For livestock, affected herders also report lack of water as well as food for their animals, which links to the struggles in land farming and the lower availability of fodder. They also frequently report sale of livestock out of financial need as well. These factors are exactly the same as those given by households that fully abandoned agriculture already—thus, this indicates that the persistence of this slow-onset environmental degradation is likely to push affected farmers and herders still in business out of it in the long-term if trends continue as they are or worsen further.

Figure 8. Prevalence of detrimental impacts to agricultural livelihoods reported by rural respondents engaged in these activities



Note: multiple choice indicator.

12 Dilan Sirwan, "Iraq will discuss Water Issue with Iran, Turkey at 36th FAO Regional Conference," Rudaw, February 8, 2022; and Planetary Security Institute, "Fostering Climate Security and Environmental Cooperation in South Iraq," workshop held in Basra, Iraq, June 14, 2021.

## MIGRATION MOVEMENTS

This household profiling aimed to shed light on the question of migration by trying to estimate the magnitude of population movements triggered, for the most part, by economic insecurity. This section discusses how migration trends are very localized (and contained) so far, in line with other quantitative measurements available. Nonetheless, this topic is strongly shaping public consciousness as many people are concerned about depopulation in rural areas and there exists a preference among the population to migrate towards large cities.

### SIZE OF MIGRATION AND ITS TRIGGERS AND DIRECTIONS

Roughly 3% of households overall have a family member that migrated over the last 10 years (that is, moved out of the household to live in another district for reasons other than marriage or education).<sup>13</sup> This outmigration is more prevalent in Basra and Thi-Qar governorates and less so in Missan. This figure seems to indicate that migration movements in the last decade to now are relatively small in magnitude. It may stem from the fact that this indicator only measures migration movements when they imply crossing and changing the subdistrict of residence—for instance, moving from a location in a rural subdistrict towards the governorate’s capital or even district’s main town. Other movements however do also take place within subdistricts as well, from villages and farms toward subdistrict town centers.<sup>14</sup> These movements are not included here and may slightly raise the migration rate. At the same time, the 3% figure captured in this analysis aligns with other recent

figures related to population movements in southern Iraq in which migration is not particularly widespread at present.<sup>15</sup>

The outmigration captured here is more prevalent in urban areas than rural ones. This implies that vulnerable people in cities are more likely to migrate to a different area in search of better opportunities than those in small towns or villages. It is indeed vulnerable families who see higher emigration of their members, as 10% of households at the lowest self-reported socio-economic status report a family member who migrated.

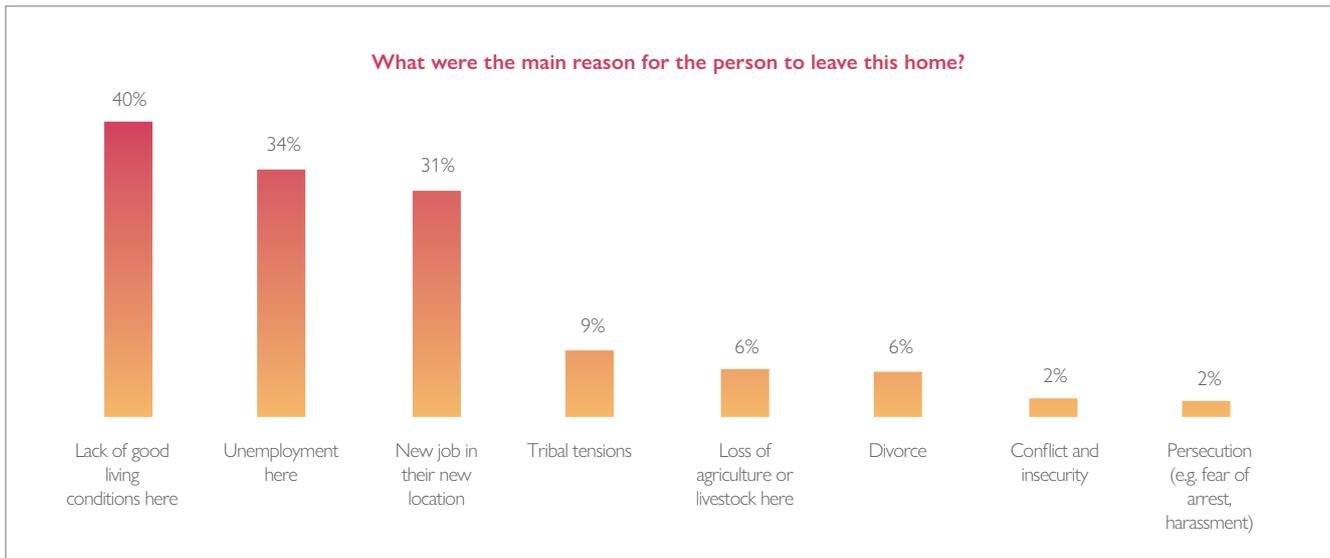
Drivers of migration are mostly contained in three interrelated categories linked to wellbeing and life opportunities (refer to Figure 9). In decreasing order, these drivers include lack of good living conditions in place of origin; unemployment; and securing a new job in the destination location prior to moving there. Security-related issues such as tribal conflict are not significantly cited as a factor in population movement.

<sup>13</sup> Migration is captured in two ways through the profiling survey. First through a set of questions aimed at identifying immigrant households (i.e., households that moved to their current location within the last 10 years for reasons other than marriage or education and are originally from a different district) and second through a set of questions to identify emigrant households (i.e., households that have a member who has moved elsewhere for reasons other than marriage or education). The findings above rely on the second measure of migration because it may be more accurate than the first. Immigrant households are difficult to capture in a random sample design given that they are frequently clustered in specific or hard to access areas (e.g., random farm plots in rural areas where data collection did not take place).

<sup>14</sup> Roger Guiu, *When Canals Run Dry: Displacement Triggered by Water Stress in the South of Iraq* (Geneva: IDMC, 2020).

<sup>15</sup> For example, IOM Iraq’s Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) identified and monitors slightly more than 20,000 individuals from the south of Iraq who migrated due to environmental degradation and livelihoods loss, see: IOM, “Climate-Induced Displacement Central and South Iraq” for March 1-15, 2022.

Figure 9. Reported drivers pushing individuals to migrate



Note: reasons linked to “marriage” or “studying” have been excluded.

Migrant destinations track with these triggers. Basra Governorate’s capital district attracts a large proportion of this migration from Missan, Thi-Qar, and other parts of the governorate itself. Nassiriya and Amara, the governorate capitals of Thi-Qar and Missan respectively, also attract a significant proportion of migration from these governorates in particular, but less than Basra City overall. Finally, in third

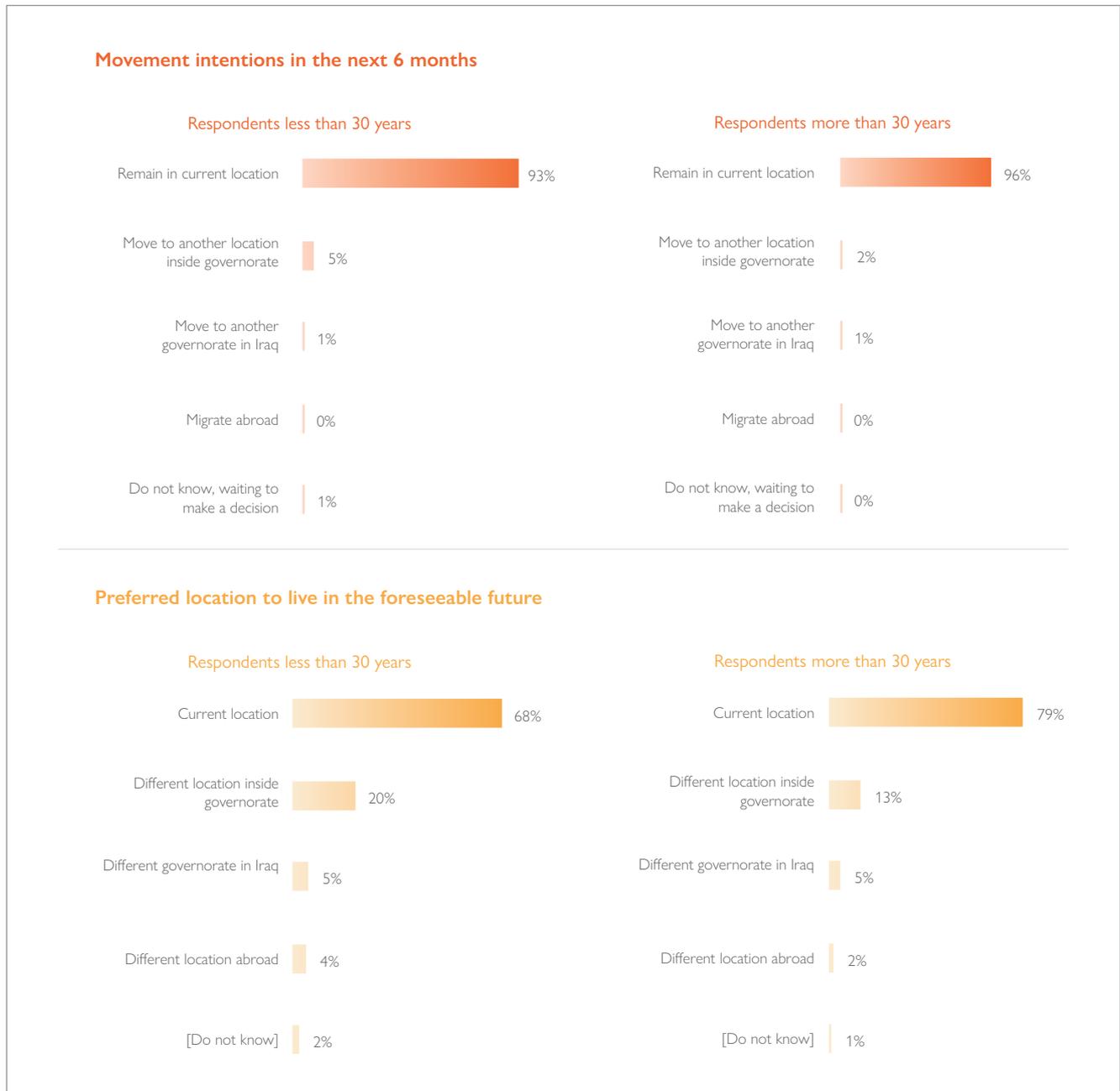
place, Baghdad, Najaf and Kerbala governorates are other relevant destinations for migrants. In some instances, migrant households may move to other rural areas where there is more available work in the agricultural sector. This is most likely for those moving to Najaf and Kerbala given the presence of intensive farming there that is less impacted by water loss and that allows them to work as hired hands.

### OVERALL MOVEMENT INTENTIONS IN THE SHORT- AND LONG-TERM

Another indicative factor of how present the issue of migration is can be found in the movement plans and preferences of all families (migrant household or not), which are reported in Figure 10. In line with the current magnitude of migration reported here, relatively small population movements are expected in the short-term. Only 5% of households expressed an intention to move out of their current location in the coming months. These households are mostly found in Basra and aim to remain within the governorate when moving. Even so, stated intentions do not always materialized in actual movement, which implies that migration is likely to remain localized and limited in the very near future.

However, there is a more sizeable proportion of households that express a preference to move from their current location elsewhere at some point in the future. These preferences in terms of movement strongly depend on the age of the respondent: 32% of respondents below age 30 want to move, while 21% of respondents above age 30 wish to do so. Most of these respondents prefer to remain within their current governorate or within the country. In any case, there is still a large majority of people who absolutely prefer to stay where they are, and this is common for all governorates and with no differences in terms of location type or gender of the respondent.

Figure 10. Movement intentions and preferences among all respondents by age



**DEPOPULATION REMAINS A CRITICAL SOCIAL CONCERN AMONG COMMUNITIES**

Despite the relatively small magnitude of movement flows reported, the idea of migration is at the forefront of mind in especially rural communities. Depopulation and outmigration are major concerns reported in rural areas of Missan and Thi-Qar in particular. Around 25% of rural respondents signal these factors as the top social concerns they face. Many are indeed feeling that their communities are hollowing out (or

at risk of doing so) as eventually more people are attracted elsewhere. It is an issue if not occurring at great frequency yet is being thought about and perhaps discussed in daily life particularly by young people (as described above) and threatens what agency these communities feel they may have as concerns about depopulation are frequently associated with a loss of voice vis-à-vis the authorities, in that they will matter less in decision-making.<sup>16</sup>

16 Guuu, When Canals Run Dry.

## WORKFORCE AND EMPLOYMENT

The addition of a roster module in the profiling survey, which captures demographic data for all members in respondents' households, allows for the accurate calculation of indicators on both employment and unemployment. The focus here is given to the "new" and looming issue of unemployment, especially among the young, seeking to identify its causes and implications.

### LABOR FORCE PARTICIPATION

The labor force, also referred to as the economically active population, includes any working-age individual (aged 16 years and above) who participates in the labor market, either because they are employed formally or informally as workers or self-employed or they are unemployed but actively seeking work. It does not include the economically inactive population, including students, housewives, retired people, those who cannot work, and those unwilling to work. Data on labor force participation is shown in Table 8 disaggregated by location type and gender.

Table 8. Employment status for individuals 16 years of age and older by gender and location type

URBAN AREAS	WOMEN	MEN	TOTAL
Employed	7%	55%	32%
Unemployed and looking for work	2%	17%	10%
Total economically active	9%	72%	42%
Inactive	76%	6%	40%
Retired	2%	7%	4%
Full-time student	13%	15%	14%
Total economically inactive	91%	28%	58%
<b>TOTAL URBAN WORKING-AGE POPULATION</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

RURAL AREAS	WOMEN	MEN	TOTAL
Employed	3%	55%	30%
Unemployed and looking for work	1%	17%	10%
Total economically active	4%	72%	40%
Inactive	86%	7%	45%
Retired	1%	6%	3%
Full-time student	9%	15%	12%
Total economically inactive	96%	28%	60%
<b>TOTAL RURAL WORKING-AGE POPULATION</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

Note: representative data from the household roster, not from individual survey respondents.

Overall, approximately 40% of the working-age population is economically active. This figure is broadly consistent from the nation-wide rate for Iraq, which was estimated at 42%, or from the whole of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, estimated at 46%, both for 2017.<sup>17</sup>

The most stark and visible difference in Table 8 is the low rate of participation of women in the workforce. Even in urban areas, only approximately 1 out of 10 women above the age of 16 is either working or seeking work. This ratio is even lower in rural areas. The female workforce rate here remains significantly lower than the average for the region, estimated at 19% with data from 2021.<sup>18</sup> Most of the work reported by employed women is in the public sector. For the rest, the vast majority of women hold domestic roles in their households and as such, remain economically inactive.

17 World Bank Database, see: <https://data.worldbank.org/>

18 Ibid.

Finally, while workforce participation among men remains high and in line with other contexts in the region, what is relatively unique and concerning here is the proportion who are unemployed. This is extraordinarily high and remains the focus for the rest of the analysis.

## THE ISSUE OF UNEMPLOYMENT

Based on the data presented above, the unemployment rate in the south of Iraq stands at 24%.<sup>19</sup> This rate on its own could be considered critically high. It is even more concerning when compared with the unemployment rate in the MENA region as a whole, estimated at 11% with data from 2017.<sup>20</sup> Extrapolating this rate over the total population, it implies that there are approximately 338,000 unemployed individuals in Basra, Thi-Qar and Missan governorates.

Table 9 shows that this rate of unemployment is very similar across all three governorates analyzed. It is also the same in urban and rural communities as well as for men and women alike—bearing in mind that there are less women unemployed in actual terms due to their lower participation in the workforce. Unemployment is thus deeply structural, affecting every facet of the society.

**Table 9. Estimated unemployment rate disaggregated by different geographic and demographic characteristics**

	Unemployment rate
<b>BY GOVERNORATE</b>	
Basra	25%
Thi-Qar	22%
Missan	25%
<b>BY GENDER</b>	
Women	22%
Men	24%
<b>BY LOCATION TYPE</b>	
Urban areas	24%
Rural areas	24%
<b>BY AGE</b>	
People between 16 and 30 years	37%
People older than 30 years old	10%

The only factor that sheds additional light on unemployment and that is particularly important to understanding it, is age. Specifically, the rate among the young (those aged 16 to 30 years) is 36% compared to a 10% rate among those over 30 years of age, that is, an unemployment rate almost four times higher for youth. In some districts, such as Ali al-Gharbi and Kahlaa, both in Missan Governorate, youth unemployment slightly surpasses 50%.

As such, unemployment is at the forefront of public opinion and is reflected by the fact that an overwhelming majority of residents indicate that the lack of jobs, especially for the youngest working-age members of the household, is the top social concern their communities face above anything else (grievances will be explored in more detail in later sections). Unemployment at this level is indeed a relatively new social phenomenon, given that mostly youth are affected by it with 8 out of every 10 unemployed people in the south of Iraq aged below 30—meaning that older generations did not experience this level of struggle in securing livelihoods previously.

## EXPLAINING THE GENERATIONAL GAP IN EMPLOYMENT

The source of this employment gap between younger and older generations is mainly found in the opportunities available to them (Table 10).

**Table 10. Employment sector of individuals who are currently working disaggregated by age group**

EMPLOYMENT BY SECTOR	YOUNGER THAN 30 YEARS OLD	OLDER THAN 30 YEARS OLD
Public sector – salaried	13%	33%
Security forces	6%	14%
Private sector – salaried	5%	3%
Daily labour	46%	18%
Own business	22%	24%
Agriculture/ livestock	7%	7%
Informal commerce	1%	1%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

Note: representative data from the household roster, not from individual survey respondents.

<sup>19</sup> The unemployment rate is calculated by dividing the unemployed population by the total workforce (i.e., the economically active working age population). The economically inactive population is not included in this calculation.

<sup>20</sup> World Bank Database.

The above break-down indicates that the young who are working tend to have less well-paid and less steady employment, mainly consisting of daily labor, as compared to their older counterparts who tend to hold salaried public sector posts or are part of the security forces. This gap in participation in the public payroll is very significant. The state has traditionally been able to incorporate a large proportion of the growing workforce into its payroll especially after 2003--this explains the large presence of older generations in the public sector posts.<sup>21</sup> The number of public sector jobs available has fallen off during the last decade and especially since the economic crisis of 2014-2015. This has thus mostly affected opportunities for the youngest generations entering the labor market, negatively impacting their livelihood prospects. This trend is likely to continue for years to come as Iraqi state finances will not have the capacity to absorb new employees at particularly high rates as before.

This is concerning as opportunities outside the public sector also seem non-existent. The formal private sector remains weak as can be seen in the meager percentage of people employed in it, young or old. In addition, the role of agriculture as a buffer is also limited, due to the impacts of environmental degradation and reduction of activities (as described in previous sections).

Finally, it is worth noting that education does not play a role in explaining the lower employment rate among youth. Based on the data, young people (both men and women) are usually as educated as their older counterparts or, in the case of rural youth, even more prepared.

Overall, this is a considerable concern given that 40% of the population is 15 years of age or lower. Every year a growing number of people will be seeking livelihood opportunities that at present are scarce at best and non-existent at worst for those already in the workforce. This is especially acute among young women who are barely represented in the labor market and who have lower opportunities. Given this context, it is not surprising that many analyses link this pervasive unemployment, especially among young men, with not only security risks and conflict,<sup>22</sup> but also with stronger social push for change.<sup>23</sup>

21 Ali Al-Mawlawi, *Public Payroll Expansion in Iraq: Causes and Consequences* (London: LSE Middle East Centre, 2019).

22 EPC, "Maysan and the Cycle of Violence in Southern Iraq," Emirates Policy Center, March 23, 2022; and Ali Ahmed Ramin, "The Toll of Iraq's Growing Drug Trade," Fikra Forum, March 8, 2022.

23 International Crisis Group, *Iraq's Tishreen Uprising: From Barricades to Ballot Box*, Middle East Report No. 223 (Brussels: ICG, 2021).

## SAFETY AND SECURITY

Safety perceptions and experiences are explored in this section. Residents mostly report feeling safe on a daily basis, while pointing out concerns that arise from living in an environment prone to violence. Thus, attention is paid to the key security incidents and issues that residents highlight as most prevalent and concerning, with special focus on violence originating from tribal infighting, political competition, and the emerging drug trade in the south.

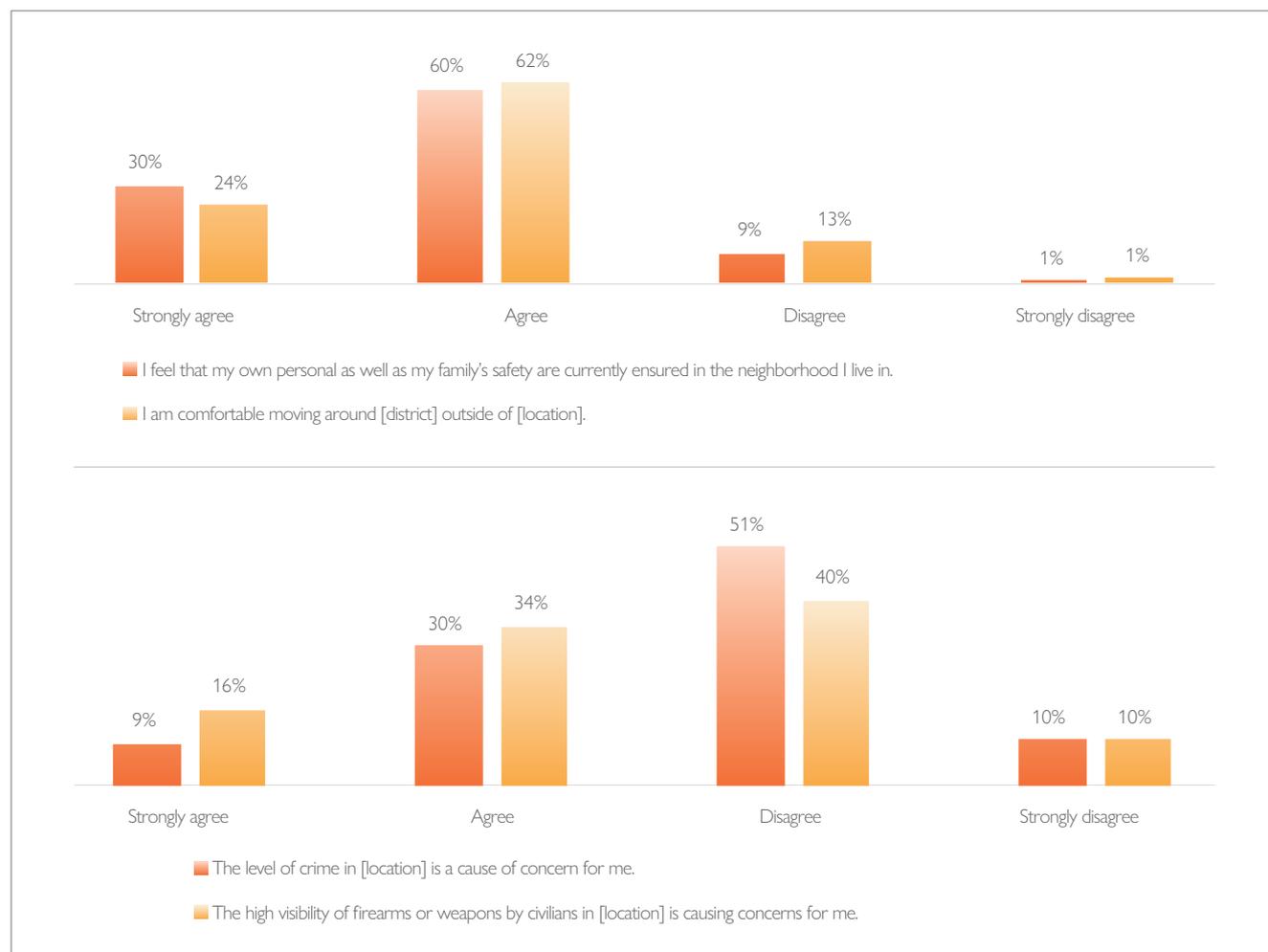
### SAFETY PERCEPTIONS

The profiling survey sought to gain insight from households into different dimensions of security, ranging from day-to-day experiences to general perceptions of their environment. For the first dimension, trends show that residents overwhelmingly report that they do not feel any threats to their safety in their daily lives (see the first two indicators depicted in Figure 11). Nearly 90% of respondents agree or strongly agree that they feel personally safe and that they are comfortable moving around their respective districts. This holds true for those in urban and rural locations and for men and women as well.

There are exceptions to this general feeling of safety in that specific geographical clusters have slightly higher rates of personal insecurity reported. These can be found in the rural areas of relatively isolated districts including Majir al-Kabir and Qalat Saleh in Missan Governorate.

Despite positive everyday dynamics, many residents also note a weak security environment surrounding them related to structural insecurity or protection issues affecting the whole of the community in general. The widespread presence and visibility of firearms among the civilian population and exposure to crime and violent events, which correspond to the two last indicators in Figure 11, are of significant concern to 39% and 50% of residents, respectively, with no variation in perceptions between male and female respondents.

Figure 11. Respondents' perceptions of personal safety



### NATURE OF INCIDENTS

The factors that seem to explain this structural insecurity in both urban and rural locations alike, are relatively frequent tribal conflicts and related gun violence, considering the pervasive presence of weapons in the community at large

(Table 11). Tribal conflicts are also listed as the second most critical social issue facing communities after unemployment. It is important to note that “tribal conflicts” may be a catch-all term for armed violence with differing underlying causes as described below.

Table 11. Incidents reported by respondents that took place where they live in the last six months

	RESPONDENTS IN BASRA	RESPONDENTS IN THI-QAR	RESPONDENTS IN MISSAN
Tribal conflict	41%	52%	42%
Drug consumption	32%	45%	33%
Theft	28%	36%	28%
Gun violence (shootings)	25%	44%	47%
Drug selling	16%	20%	16%
Bribery or extortion	10%	13%	11%

	RESPONDENTS IN BASRA	RESPONDENTS IN THI-QAR	RESPONDENTS IN MISSAN
Verbal or physical harassment or intimidation	7%	3%	9%
Suicide	6%	12%	6%
Murder or assassination	6%	12%	13%
Detention or interrogation by armed forces	2%	6%	3%
Vandalism of property	2%	2%	2%
Kidnapping or assault	2%	6%	3%
Recruitment into gangs	0%	1%	1%
No incident	25%	20%	22%

Note: multiple choice indicator.

In some cases, this type of violence tends to emerge over social disputes where customary processes take predominance in resolving issues and law enforcement tend not to engage in such matters—this can spiral into greater conflict as law enforcement bodies do not have the monopoly of weapons and tribal elements are frequently well armed.<sup>24</sup> As a case in point, some survey respondents included additional commentary to their responses here indicating that they did not send their children to school alone for fear of them being entangled in a tribal dispute or shooting that could take place unexpectedly.

Increasingly this violence also stems from political disputes as various tribes, security actors, political parties, and criminal networks overlap and compete for power<sup>25</sup>—even if some of these incidents including targeted killings are still classified as social disputes to avoid formal investigation.<sup>26</sup> Missan Governorate highlights these dynamics in particular where in 2021 and early 2022 alone, judges, a police chief, and officers at the Ministry of Interior were assassinated, violent clashes between different factions of the security

forces took place, and, during data collection for this study, Qalat Saleh District was under curfew after witnessing days of turf war between armed factions.<sup>27</sup>

## DRUG TRAFFICKING AND ABUSE FEATURE PROMINENTLY IN THIS VIOLENT ENVIRONMENT

Violence at this level is also increasingly related to the emerging drug trade in these governorates. Iraq is not only a transit route for synthetic illicit drugs, such as Captagon or crystal meth, smuggled along the Iranian and Syrian borders, but also a large consumer base for them as well.<sup>28</sup> Residents report incidents linked to drug trafficking and abuse second only to tribal conflicts as taking place around them, which gives an indication of how critical the magnitude and scale of the problem has become. It is a growing source of violence linked to that described above as these drug-related activities rely on the operations of the various armed factions present at border crossings and inside cities.<sup>29</sup>

24 WFP and Social Inquiry, *Prospects for Resilience Amid Fragility*.

25 Ibid.; Mustafa Saadoun, "Tribal Disputes Cripple Iraq's Oil-Rich Basra," *Amwaj Media*, March 27, 2021; Benedict Robin D'Cruz, "Violence and Protests in South Iraq," *LSE Middle East Blog*, August 18, 2020; and Zmkan Ali Saleem and J. Mac Skelton, *Mosul & Basra After the Protests: The Roots of Government Failure and Popular Discontent*, IRIS Working Paper (Sulaimaniya: Institute of Regional and International Studies / Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, 2019).

26 Suadad Al-Salhy, "In South Iraq, Political Murders are Dismissed as 'Personal' to Quash Investigations," *Middle East Eye*, April 1, 2021; and Saadoun, "Tribal Disputes."

27 EPC, "Maysan and the Cycle of Violence in Southern Iraq;" Adnan Abu Zeed, "Baghdad Announces Crackdown on Drug Trafficking, Gangs in Maysan," *Al-Monitor*, February 11, 2022; and Shafaq News, "Demonstrators in Maysan Demand the Dismissal of Governor Diwaili," *Shafaq News*, February 8, 2022.

28 Ramin, "The Toll of Iraq's Growing Drug Trade."

29 Abu Zeed, "Baghdad Announces Crackdown on Drug Trafficking;" Sinan Mahmoud, "Captagon Crisis: Watch Iraqi Special Forces Raid Drug Rings 'More Dangerous than Terrorism,'" *The National*, October 25, 2021; and Sami Zubair, "Parliamentary Defense: That Some Tribes Control Border Crossings is a 'Breach,'" *Rudaw*, January 19, 2020.

As such, while still relatively taboo, residents seem more open to raising drug use and abuse as a top social concern facing their communities. However, the current approach for dealing with both trafficking and abuse is highly securitized

and criminalized, with little to no access to care for treating addiction and with a high social stigma associated to people involved in any way.<sup>30</sup>

## GRIEVANCES AND PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Moving now to social and political dynamics, this section discusses how priority grievances that people hold are structural in nature, link to the concept of the social contract (or lack thereof), encourage young men to become involved in public affairs, and call for systemic change rather than individual solutions to resolve.

### PRIORITY GRIEVANCES HELD BY RESIDENTS

Residents, when asked what, if any, priority grievances (i.e., the social issues they are most upset about that impact their lives) they have, generally clustered their responses around three main topics linked directly to the core functioning of the state: a lack of government support (and lack of development), lack of (job) opportunities, and widespread

corruption, respectively (Table 12). Taken altogether, the vast majority of respondents selected at least one among this combination of grievances. Other priority grievances raised following relatively behind these three main issues include lack of justice, the behavior of political parties, and environmental degradation, with this latter mostly expressed by residents in rural areas of Missan and Thi-Qar.

Table 12. Respondents' priority societal grievances

	RESPONDENTS IN BASRA	RESPONDENTS IN THI-QAR	RESPONDENTS IN MISSAN
Lack of opportunities	48%	61%	54%
Lack of investment in development and government support	41%	74%	57%
Corruption	40%	54%	43%
Lack of justice	19%	34%	23%
Environmental degradation	14%	26%	13%
Local political parties	13%	24%	21%
Land / housing disputes or destruction	7%	2%	5%
Religious extremism in [governorate]	6%	6%	5%
Targeting after 2019	4%	7%	4%
Discrimination	2%	3%	3%
Foreign interference	2%	8%	4%
Nothing, no reason to be upset	14%	5%	10%

Note: multiple choice indicator.

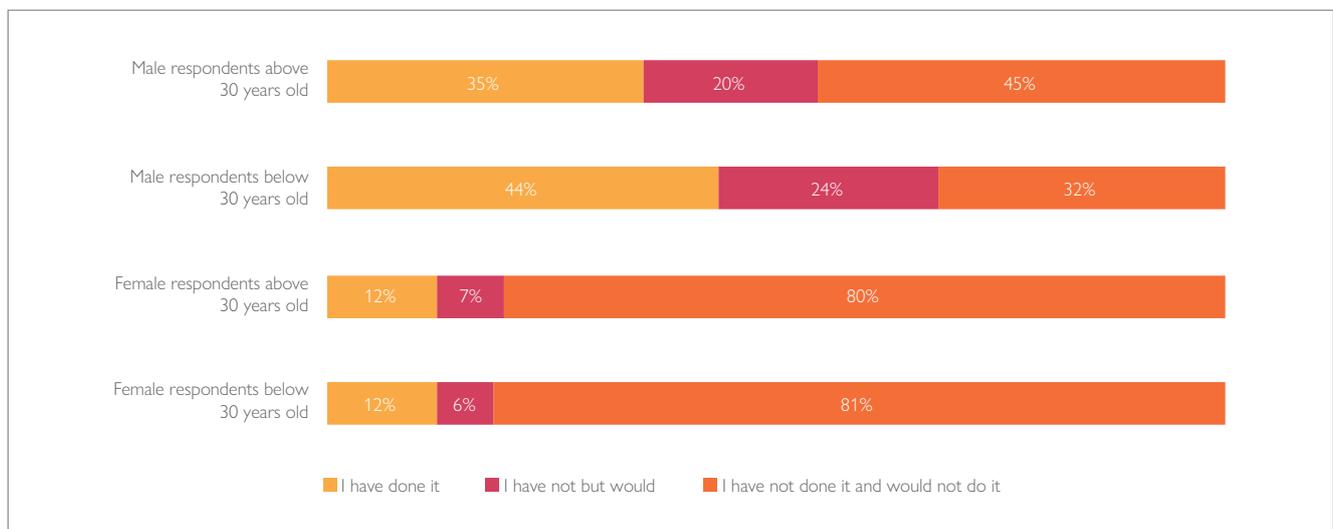
30 Ramin, "The Toll of Iraq's Growing Drug Trade;" WFP and Social Inquiry, Prospects for Resilience Amid Fragility; and Alissa J. Rubin, "Iraq Faces a New Adversary: Crystal Meth," New York Times, September 14, 2019.

There is a noticeable generational and gender divide to these grievances between residents as well. Among the youngest respondents, particularly men, priority grievances tend to also focus on a lack of justice and on targeting and repression by authorities since 2019, in addition to the ones described above. This likely connects to their experiences of youth-led mass protests in recent years in these governorates and critically the responses to them.

### INVOLVEMENT IN PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Within this social environment overall, residents have and continue to exhibit moderate to high levels of participation in public affairs in these communities. This is measured in terms of residents expressing grievances or demands in public, on social media, or by contacting a community leader or authority, among others. Results are shown in Figure 12 disaggregated by gender and age of respondents, which are the most important differentiating factors for this type of participation.

Figure 12. Level of public participation among respondents by gender and age group



The highest rates of public participation are precisely found among young men. Almost half report having engaged in such activities in the previous year; only a small minority indicate they would never participate or be encouraged to express their grievances. Thus, the younger the respondent, the more likely he is to have participated in publicly expressing grievances in some form.

This is a realm, however, in which women do not seem to participate. The vast majority express that they would never engage in such activities. Rather, they seem to be more engaged in civic activities such as volunteerism and charity work, but again at lower rates as compared to men. Actions in this regard traverse generations as well.

### CONFIDENCE IN ELECTIONS

Another means for civic expression and voice is through participation in electoral processes, which took place in Iraq in the form of national parliamentary elections in 2021 prior to data collection for this study. Here, however, views are significantly less positive in terms of participation. The overwhelming majority of residents tend to perceive that elections are an ineffective means by which to bring change (Table 13). This sentiment is pervasive across all segments of the sample in general and all geographical areas—and is further reflected in the particularly low voter turnout overall in the country's latest elections.<sup>31</sup> The lack of reported trust in formal mechanisms like elections to change the status quo rather than entrench it may partially explain the high engagement in public affairs for this purpose instead.

31 AP, "Early Results Show Record Low Turnout in Iraq's Parliamentary Elections, Associated Press, October 11, 2021.

Table 13. Level of confidence in electoral processes among respondents

HOW CONFIDENT ARE YOU THAT IRAQI ELECTIONS CAN HELP TRANSLATE PEOPLE'S EXPECTATIONS INTO POSITIVE CHANGE?	PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS
Completely	1%
A lot	12%
A little	26%
Not at all	56%
[Not concerned / not interested / indifferent]	5%

### CHANGES THAT PEOPLE WANT TO SEE IMPLEMENTED TO ADDRESS GRIEVANCES

This profiling also sought to gather insights from residents about what they want to see occurring to solve or ameliorate their stated priority grievances. Although there is no one outcome sought that is clearly above all others, the plurality of respondents state that material and social investments in the districts as well as reforms to guarantee that the dynamics leading to grievances do not keep recurring are most needed (Table 14). Criminal prosecutions of perpetrators, especially related to targeting and repression after 2019 and corruption, are also demanded but to a lesser degree.

Table 14. Respondents' preferences for measures to address priority grievances

WHAT DO YOU THINK IS MOST NEEDED TO RESOLVE THESE GRIEVANCES YOU EXPRESSED?	PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS
Material and social investment in district to remedy the issues	27%
Reforms to ensure that these issues do not occur again	21%
All perpetrators punished to full extent of the law	13%
Nothing can be done to resolve these issues	12%
Individual financial compensation for all affected people	8%
Acknowledgement of wrongdoing by those most responsible	5%
[Do not know]	3%
[No grievance expressed]	12%
Total	100%

In seeking material and social investments (as well as reforms), people seem to place value on widescale, structural improvements to their communities from fixing and improving local infrastructure, establishing and repairing public safety nets, and improving governance rather than one-off, individual measures such as financial compensation for wrongdoing infringed alone. This view is especially strongly held in rural areas, where issues related to a lack of government support and lack of development feature more prominently.

Of note is also the relatively sizable proportion of respondents (12%) who indicate that no resolution is possible for their priority grievances. This sentiment is strongest in relation to corruption and behavior of political parties.

## TRUST AND MARGINALIZATION

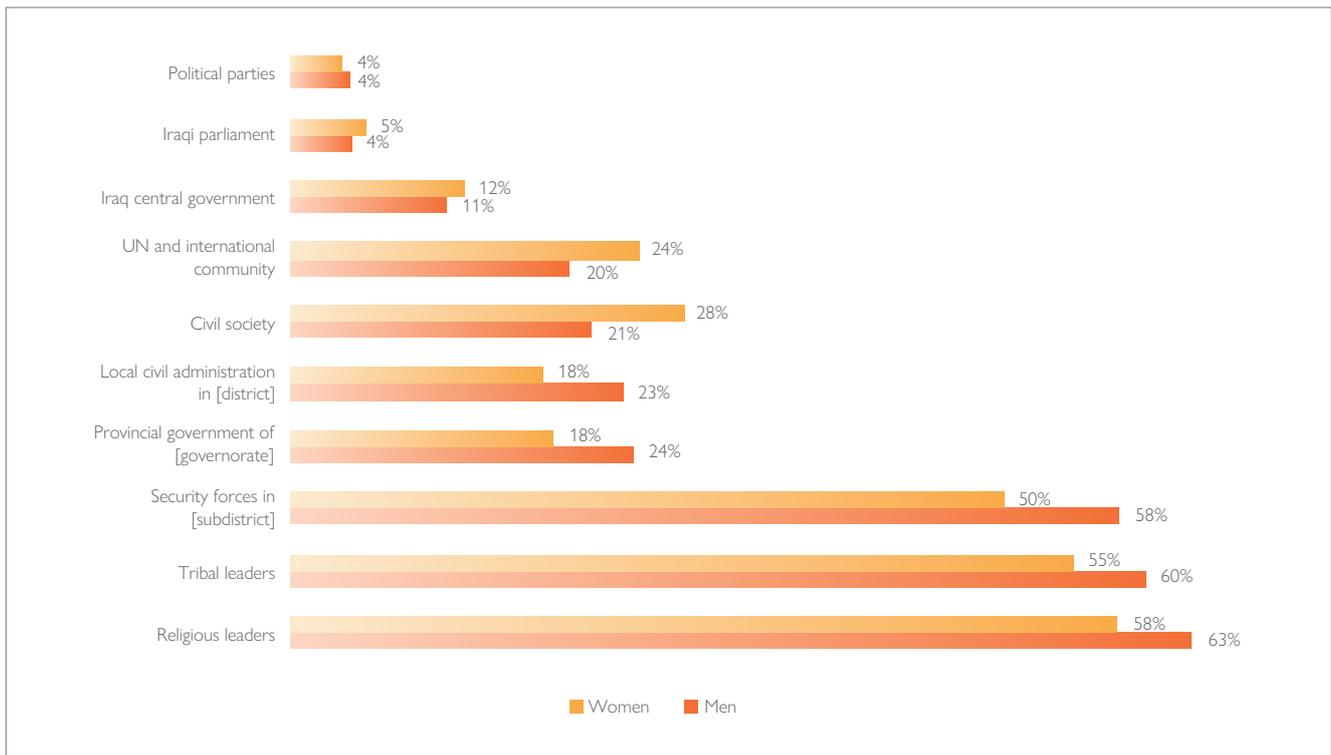
Building on the concept of the social contract, indicators here explore people’s trust in institutions and in the rest of their community. There is a pervasive lack of trust in institutions, particularly formal government actors, and in other citizens. Further to this, feelings of marginalization, particularly by the state, are extremely high. Key gender and generational differences also emerge with regard to trust and marginalization, with findings overall pointing to an erosion of social cohesion given the ever-growing gap between citizens’ expectations of the state and in turn of each other and the actual situation they experience.

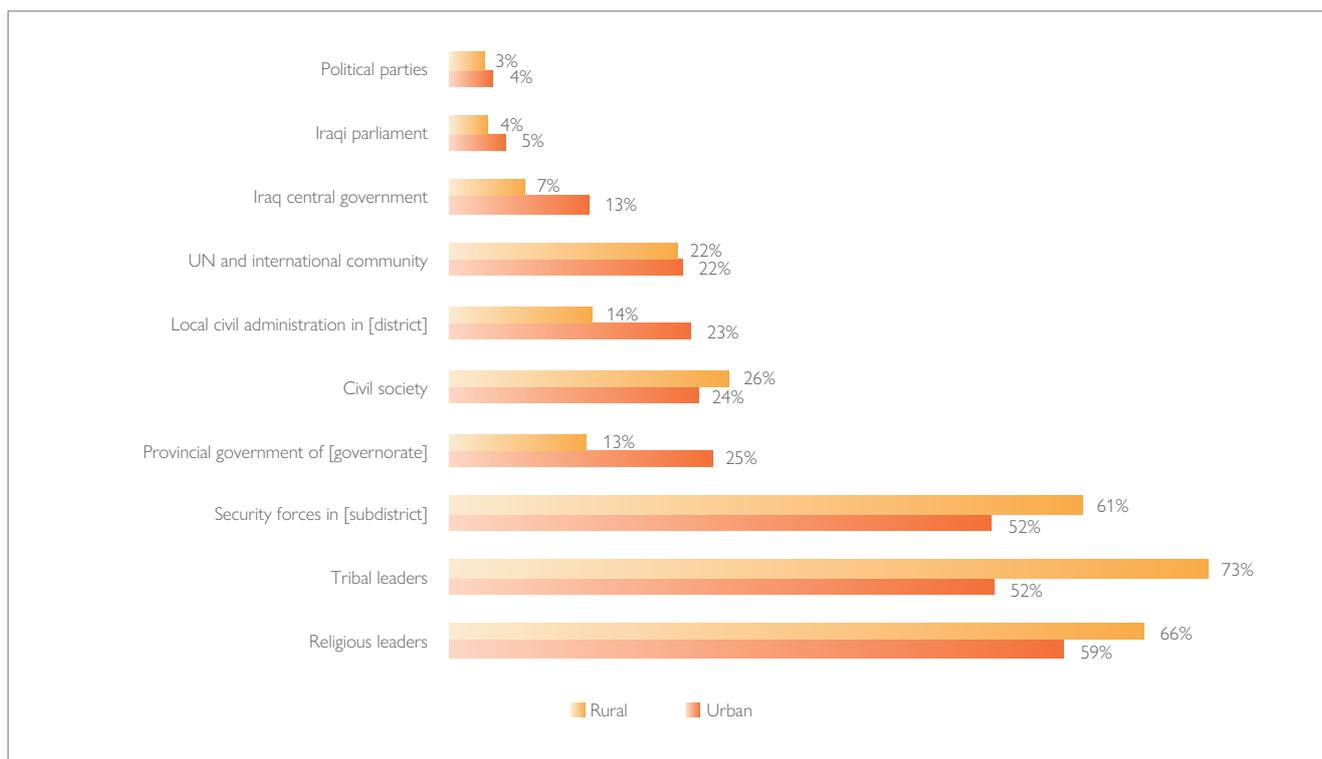
### SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT CHARACTERIZED BY LOW INSTITUTIONAL TRUST

This profiling asked respondents to rate different formal and customary institutions and actors in terms of the confidence they feel in each acting in the best interests of citizens. There is, overall, a considerably low level of trust in any of these institutions and actors in this regard. Even for actors that

garner more positive views from residents, including religious leaders, tribal leaders, and security forces, they nevertheless do so with moderate reported confidence levels (Figure 13). Furthermore, many residents report no confidence at all in any listed institution or actor.

Figure 13. Percentage of respondents that report having “completely” or “a lot” of confidence in the following actors working for the best interest of all residents





Confidence is particularly low for the more formal governing institutions, particularly political parties, parliament, and the central government and to a lesser degree, the local and provincial administrations, respectively. This is a trend seen in other parts of Iraq as well, pointing to a country-wide lack of trust in state institutions.<sup>32</sup>

There is an important gender divide to note here in that women have significantly less trust in the aforementioned actors than men (i.e., report “not at all” more frequently), including with respect to religious and tribal leaders, and security forces. This is reasonable given religious, tribal, and security norms that tend to limit their representation and participation and may impact them in particularly negative ways.

### SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT CHARACTERIZED BY LOW INTER-PERSONAL TRUST

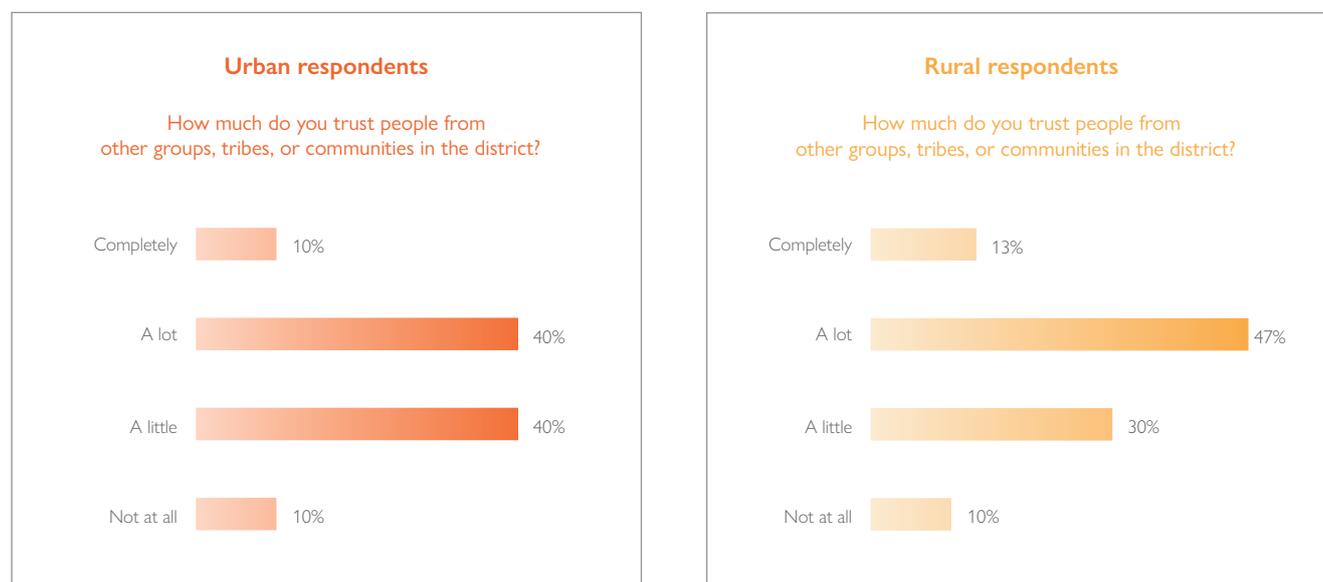
The previous findings raise concerns as low levels of confidence in institutions (and a view that institutional actors fail to uphold public trust) tend to also erode social cohesion and social capital.<sup>33</sup> Such erosion can be seen to a certain extent in the low levels of trust residents report in other members of their respective communities. Over 40% of the sample overall indicate having little to no trust in others.

Figure 14 shows the disaggregation between urban and rural respondents in this regard, where lack of community trust worsens for those in urban areas. In addition to this, there is once again a generational divide to these findings in the sense that both young men and women feel significantly lower levels of trust in others in the community as compared to older respondents.

32 IOM and Social Inquiry, “Reimagining Reintegration,” (forthcoming report).

33 Liesel Ashley Ritchie, “Individual Stress, Collective Trauma, and Social Capital in the Wake of the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill,” *Sociological Inquiry* 82, no. 2 (2012): 187-211.

Figure 14. Level of community trust among respondents by location type



### FEELINGS OF MARGINALIZATION

An indicator that further conveys and underscores the findings above relates to whether respondents feel marginalized as citizens. Results in this regard are significantly negative as could be expected, with 32% of residents indicate feeling extremely marginalized and another 41% very marginalized.

By and large, the sources of this marginalization come from the (lack of) responses from the central government and provincial and local authorities. Beyond this, a relatively substantial proportion of women also report feeling marginalized by the rest of society as well.

Table 15. Perceptions of marginalization among respondents by age group and gender

DO YOU FEEL YOU ARE MARGINALIZED OR NEGLECTED AS CITIZEN?	ALL RESPONDENTS	RESPONDENTS BELOW 30 YEARS OLD	RESPONDENTS ABOVE 30 YEARS OLD	FEMALE RESPONDENTS	MALE RESPONDENTS
Extremely	32%	37%	30%	35%	30%
Very	41%	40%	42%	45%	38%
Moderately	10%	10%	10%	6%	13%
Slightly	5%	4%	5%	4%	6%
Not at all	11%	9%	5%	9%	12%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

While these percentages are high, the population segment that feels the most widespread levels of marginalization is urban youth, both men and women. Younger generations in the south strongly exhibit a higher level of dissatisfaction

in the direction current affairs are moving in, especially in relation to their lives and with regard to the expectations they have of the state, of others, and of themselves.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Louisa Loveluck and Emilienne Malfatto, "Roar of Hope. Silence of Despair," Washington Post, April 21, 2021; and International Crisis Group, Fight or Flight: The Desperate Plight of Iraq's 'Generation 2000', Middle East Report No. 169 (Brussels: ICG, 2016).

## CONCLUSION AND KEY TAKEAWAYS

The profiling findings presented here serve as an updated baseline of dynamics in Basra, Thi-Qar, and Missan governorates delineating the scale and scope of issues that span the humanitarian-development-peace nexus in a setting that while not emerging from conflict per se is mired in significant violence, a lack of government and development support, poverty, and inequality. While the analysis shows variation in prominence and impact of different indicators by governorate and location type, by far, the starkest difference in outcomes relates most to age, considering that 70% of the population in these areas is under the age of 30 overall and of this the majority group is under the age of 15. In other words, the youngest populations already or will grow to bear the brunt of this increasingly unstable and insecure environment and uncertain future if drastic changes to the status quo are not enacted and soon.

Some key overarching findings emerge from the analysis that may serve as guideposts in developing, implementing, and monitoring coherent interventions and strategies to staunch this fragility and in seeking to identify where more nuance and detail from further research and analysis is needed for such purposes.

### These takeaways are as follows:

- The existence of weak and unequal public service provision, with dissatisfaction particularly high in Thi-Qar Governorate overall and most pronounced in rural areas across governorates.
- The presence of extended relative poverty overall, concentrated among non-educated, social support reliant, female-headed, and rural households and within Faw, Zubair, and Basra districts in Basra Governorate, Chibaysh district in Thi-Qar Governorate, and Qalat Saleh and Kahlaa districts in Missan Governorate.
- Rapid urbanization and population growth is posing a challenge to formal land rights as almost half of residents experience some form of housing, land, and property informality with those in irregular housing either building on agricultural land or settling on public land without official permission to do so.
- The role of agriculture is diminishing in rural livelihoods due to environmental degradation, namely lack of water supply and related yield loss or livestock deaths, with less than half of rural households engaging in farming, livestock, or fishing for revenue and even fewer whose sole income source comes from these activities.
- There is very localized (and contained) migration among urban populations, primarily related to a lack of good living conditions in place of origin; unemployment; and securing a new job in the destination location prior to moving there. The prospect of migration nevertheless shapes public consciousness as depopulation is cited as a main social concern among rural residents while a sizeable proportion of residents overall, and the young in particular, express a preference to move from their current location to somewhere else in the governorate at some point in the future.
- “New” and looming unemployment, especially among the young, is stemming from a weak private sector that does not offer growth, a diminished agricultural sector, and a public sector unable to absorb the growing numbers entering the labor market as it previously had. This leaves those youth who are working less well paid and in less steady employment than their older counterparts, despite being just as or more educated overall. The situation is especially acute among young women who are barely present in the workforce even though they are completing higher levels of education and who face significantly higher likelihood of unemployment if they do enter the labor market.
- A safe daily life exists within a violent environment that is marked by a high visibility of firearms among the civilian population, so-called “tribal conflicts” pertaining to social disputes and increasingly political ones as various tribes, security actors, political parties, and criminal networks overlap and compete for power, and relatedly, an emerging drug trade. In this context, substance abuse and addiction are criminalized rather than treated as a growing public health concern.
- The priority grievances people want to see resolved are structural in nature and encourage young men to publicly express their views, and reportedly call for systemic rather than individual solutions to resolve, though a non-negligible proportion believe there is no way to resolve grievances related to corruption and behavior of local political parties. Grievances pertain to a lack of government support, lack of opportunities, and corruption overall while young men also cite a lack of justice, behavior of political parties, and targeting after 2019 as issues they are most upset about as well. Furthermore, while public expression of grievances is relatively high among young men, confidence in electoral processes is exceedingly low across all population groups.

- The overall social environment is characterized by low institutional trust in formal and customary actors, where even the top-rated among them, religious leaders, tribal leaders, and security forces, generate only moderate support; low inter-personal trust in others in the community; and high levels of marginalization felt as citizens, particularly by the state, indicating an eroding social cohesion. Once again, a generational divide

emerges where young men and women tend to exhibit a greater tendency toward mistrust of others in the community than their older counterparts. Specific gender differences are also seen in that women have significantly less trust in religious leaders, tribal leaders, and security forces than men and a relatively substantial proportion of women also report feeling marginalized as citizens by the rest of society as well as by the state.

## 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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