

FINDINGS ROUND TWENTY-THREE – IRAQ

DATA COLLECTION PERIOD: SEPTEMBER–DECEMBER 2024

JANUARY 2025

CONTEXT

The Return Index is a tool designed to measure the severity of conditions in locations of return. Data collection for the **Return Index Round 23** took place during **September and December 2024** across **9 governorates, 39 districts, and 2,230 locations** in Iraq. This report provides an overview of returns at the end of 2024 and changes between December 2023 and December 2024. During this round, an additional **43 locations** of return were assessed since round 20 which was conducted during the last trimester of 2023 (September–December 2023).

RETURNEE POPULATION IN SEVERE CONDITIONS

- Out of the 2,230 return locations assessed, **455 present severe conditions and host 12 per cent of the returnee population, or 609,954 individuals.**
- **An increase of 5,298 returnees** living in severe or poor conditions has been observed since the round collected in September – December 2023, when the share of returnees in severe conditions was also 12 per cent (604,656 individuals).

DETERIORATION OF CONDITIONS

Between Round 20 (September – December 2023) and the current Round 23 (September – December 2024), the largest increase in number of returnees living in severe or poor conditions were recorded in **Salah al-Din (7,902 individuals)** and **Ninewa (5,682 individuals) governorates**. This was mainly due to the return of IDPs from camps in Al Sulaymaniyah and Duhok to their areas of origin in these two governorates, motivated by decision announced by the Iraqi Council of Ministers to close the camps, scheduled for 30 July 2024, and the opportunity for the IDPs to receive MoMD grant.

Salah al-Din Governorate witnessed the most noticeable increase that was observed in **Balad (7,542 individuals)** and **Al-Fares (5,346 individuals)** districts, mainly due to the return of families from Ashti IDP camp in Al Sulaymaniyah to their place of origin in these two districts, which are still experiencing severe or poor conditions.

- Key informants in **Balad District** report that returnees remain concerned about violence, particularly ISIL attacks in Al-Duloeyah, Al-Eshaqi, Markaz Al-Balad and Yathreb subdistricts with some residents still blocked from returning. Additionally, businesses are recovering slowly and some houses are destroyed and not yet reconstructed in Al-Eshaqi, Markaz Al-Balad and Yathreb subdistricts.
 - Al-Eshaqi and Yathreb subdistricts continue to suffer from illegal occupation of some properties and the presence of armed groups other than local security forces at checkpoints, which raises concerns among returnees about the potential for harassment. Moreover, concerns about uncleared mines and explosives are ongoing in Al-Eshaqi subdistrict. Returnees in Al-Eshaqi and Markaz Al-Balad subdistricts are still experiencing limited access to employment and slow recovery of agriculture.
 - Since December 2023, returnees in Markaz Al-Balad subdistrict have felt less safe carrying out daily activities as there are increased concerns about the presence of armed groups other than local security forces at checkpoints which in turn increases the potential for harassment and the existence of uncleared mines and explosives in the area. Residents also reported a deterioration in access to basic services, particularly the water supply, in 2024. They continue to suffer from poor provision of governmental services and electricity supply along with unresolved conflicts that need attention to prevent future violence.
- Returnees in **Al-Fares District** keep suffering from limited access to employment, slow recovery of agriculture and business and poor provision of job opportunities, government services including electricity, along with areas to which returns are

blocked in Al-Dujeel Centre subdistrict. Moreover, concerns about violence have increased, particularly ISIL attacks and the presence of armed groups, other than local security forces at checkpoints, which heightens the potential for harassment and makes returnees feel less safe to carry out daily activities.

In **Ninewa Governorate**, the most increase is in **Al-Ba'aj (6,426 individuals)** and **Telafer (4,050 individuals)** districts.

- In **Al-Ba'aj District** the increase was mostly due to the return of IDPs from Duhok camps to locations in Al-Qahtaniya and Markaz Al-Ba'aj subdistricts, which are still experiencing severe or poor conditions. Returnees keep suffering from lack of job opportunities, poor provision of government services and water supply which cause slow recovery in agriculture. They are also concerned about possible ISIL attacks and the presence of armed groups other than local security forces at checkpoints, which raises concerns among residents about the potential for harassment in these subdistricts.
 - Al-Qahtaniya subdistrict reports slow recovery in business and government services. Moreover, returnees' concerns have increased regarding uncleared mines or carrying out daily activities as they feel that there are unresolved conflicts that need attention to prevent future violence. Additionally, there have been limited efforts to reconstruct houses destroyed during the previous year.
 - In Markaz Al-Ba'aj subdistrict, returnees report concerns about the security situation and limited access to employment.
- The increase in **Telafer District** was mainly due to the returnees feeling unsafe because of the increased presence of armed groups other than local security forces at checkpoints, which raises concerns among residents about the potential for harassment in Zummar subdistrict.
 - Markaz Telafer and Ayadiya subdistricts still report safety and security concerns as residents remained concerned about possible ISIL attacks. Furthermore, the presence of armed groups, other than local security forces at checkpoints, which raises concerns among residents about the potential for harassment continue to pose a challenge in Ayadiya and Rubiya subdistricts.
 - In Ayadia subdistrict, there are still tensions that need to be resolved to prevent future violence, but limited efforts are being made in this direction, alongside a lack of government service provision. Rubiya subdistrict still experiences slow recovery of businesses and agriculture, as well as poor provision of government services, water and electricity.

Figure 1. Proportion and number of returnees by category of severity

High severity	Medium severity	Low severity
12%	39%	49%
609,954 returnees	1,919,748 returnees	2,398,188 returnees
+5,298 since Round 20	+7,134 since Round 20	+52,836 since Round 20



4,927,890 Returnees

+65,268

Since Round 20 (September – December 2023)

9 governorates	39 districts	821,315 households	2,230 locations <small>+43 since Round 20</small>
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Data Collection Period: September–December 2024

IMPROVEMENT OF CONDITIONS

The largest decrease in the number of returnees living in severe conditions was recorded in **Diyala Governorate (6,090 individuals)**. The decrease in **Diyala Governorate** was mainly observed in Khanaqin District (7,500 individuals).

- The decrease in **Khanaqin District** was mainly due to improvement in services provision in Markaz Khanaqin, Jalula and As-Saadia subdistricts, particularly government services in Markaz Khanaqin subdistrict. Additionally, improved electricity supply and reconstruction of some destroyed houses in As-Saadia and Jalula contributed to this decrease in severity. In Jalula subdistrict, access to employment improved, with more job opportunities available due to the

reopening of markets that were previously closed for security reasons, along with improvements in water supply and a decline in residents' concerns about possible armed clashes.

- However, **Khanaqin District** still experiencing the presence of armed groups other than local security forces at checkpoints in Markaz Khanaqin, Jalula and As-Saadia subdistricts, which raises concerns among residents about the potential for harassment. Returnees in Markaz Khanaqin and As-Saadia subdistricts are still concerned about possible ISIL attacks and poor water provision in the area.

Figure 2. Number of returnees per governorate by category of severity as of December 2024

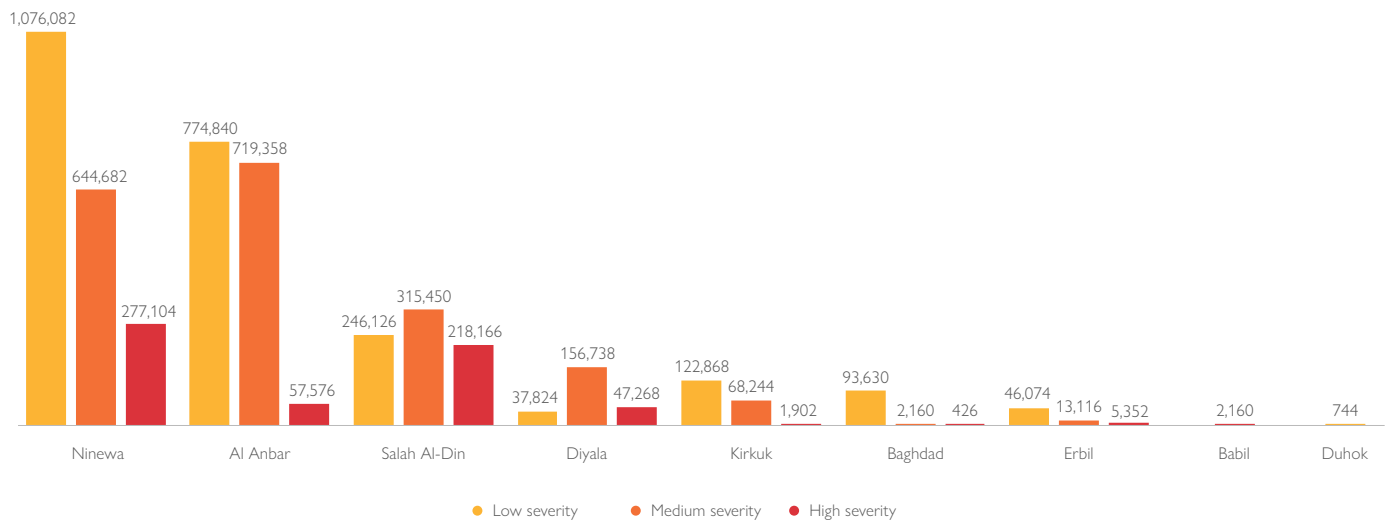
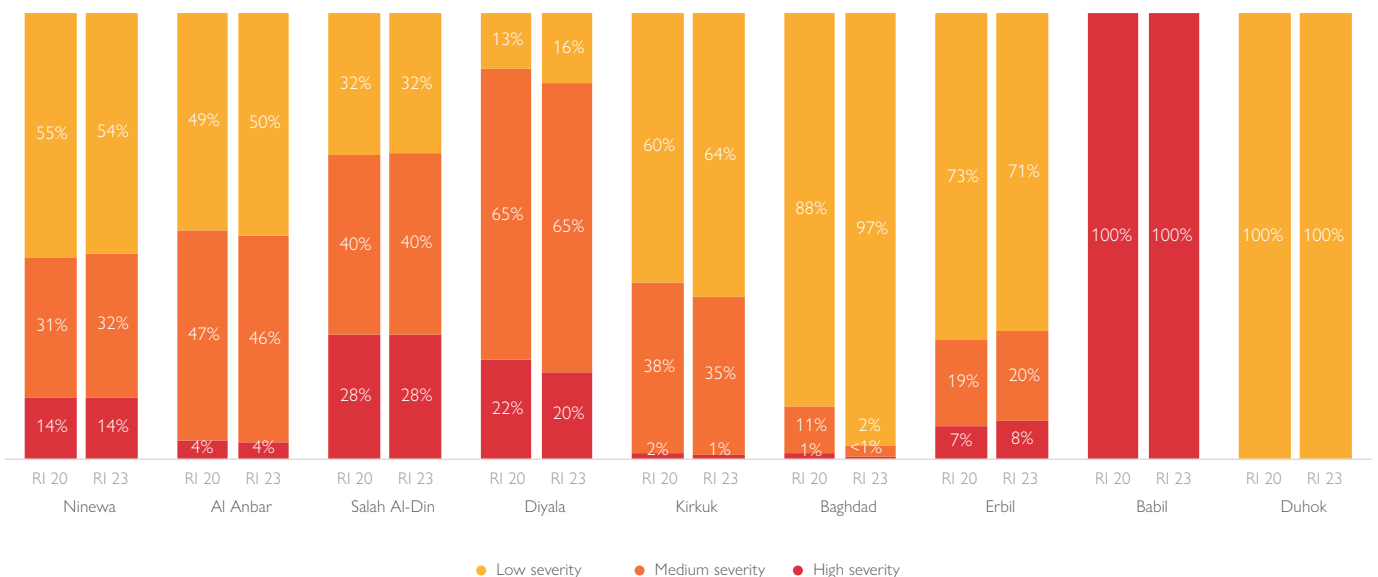


Figure 3. Proportion of returnees by category of severity for all governorates of return (December 2023 and December 2024)



GOVERNORATE HOTSPOTS OF SEVERITY

Subdistricts are classified as ‘hotspots’ if they score highly in terms of severity on at least one of the two scales (either livelihoods and basic services or safety and social cohesion) or if they score medium in terms of severity but also host relatively large numbers of returnees (at least 60,000 returnees in a subdistrict). Thirty-one hotspots were identified across five governorates in this round. The same hotspots were reported in the round collected in September – December 2023.

NINEWA:

650,118 returnees in hotspots

- Al-Qahtaniya
- Al-Qayara
- Al-Shamal
- Ayadiya
- Hamam al Aleel
- Markaz Al-Ba’aj
- Markaz Sinjar
- Markaz Telfar
- Qaeyrrawan
- Zummar

SALAH AL-DIN:

509,466 returnees in hotspots

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

ANBAR:

402,276 returnees in hotspots

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

DIYALA:

84,084 returnees in hotspots

- Jalula
- Qara Tabe

BABIL:

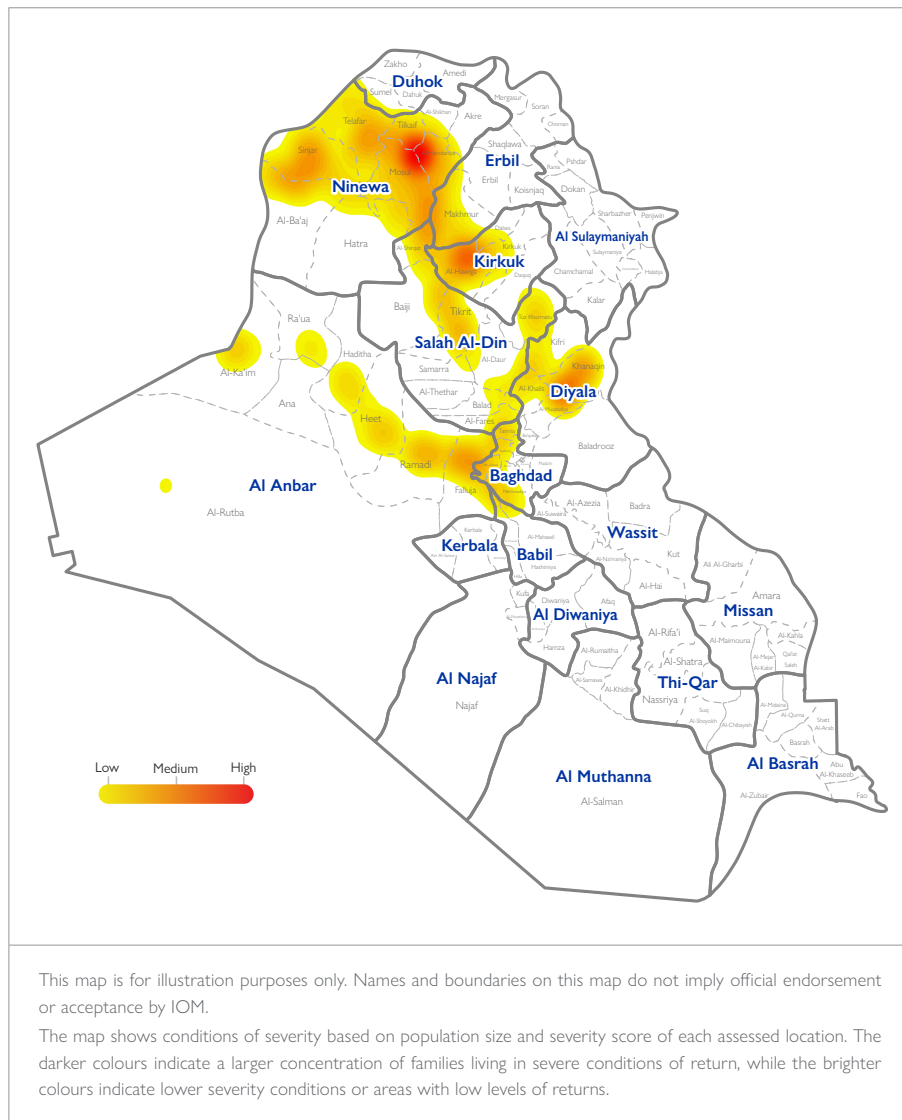
2,160 returnees in hotspots

- Al-Iskandaria

METHODOLOGY

The Return Index is based on 16 indicators across two domains: (1) livelihoods and basic services and (2) social cohesion and safety perceptions. A regression model is used to assess the impact of each of the indicators in facilitating or preventing returns and to calculate scores. The scores of each domain and overall index are grouped into three categories: low, medium and high severity of living conditions. For more information on the methodology, please refer to the [Methodological Overview](#).

Map 1. Returnee population density by overall severity score



IOM Iraq thanks the U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration (PRM) and Norway for their continued support.

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