RETURN INDEX THEMATIC SERIES

BRIEFING #1

THE PHYSICAL AND SOCIAL DIMENSIONS OF HOUSING IN CONFLICT-AFFECTED AREAS

JANUARY 2019

The Return Index Thematic Series provides singular analysis and deep insights on specific indicators, their distribution across conflict-affected areas of Iraq, their links with other indicators in the Index, and how they fit within the context in which they are collected.

THEMATIC SERIES PRESENTATION

As of 30 October 2018, nearly one year after the official end of the conflict with The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), more than 4.1 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) have returned to their places of origin across eight governorates in Iraq. The Return Index provides a means of measuring the severity of living conditions in the locations to which they are returning. Developed by IOM DTM, the Returns Working Group, and Social Inquiry, this tool provides singular analysis and deep insights information that will bridge humanitarian, recovery and stabilization needs. This will allow partners working in Iraq to better strategize for interventions and resource allocation in vulnerable areas.

METHODOLOGY

The Return Index correlates data available on returnee population figures with 18 different indicators, grouped into two scales: (i) livelihoods and basic services, and (ii) social cohesion and safety perceptions. The aggregation of these indicators provides an index score for every location with population returns. Higher scores denote more severe living conditions for returnees. This thematic paper uses data collected in October 2018 (Round 2) through key informant interviews at location level in 1,504 locations of return.

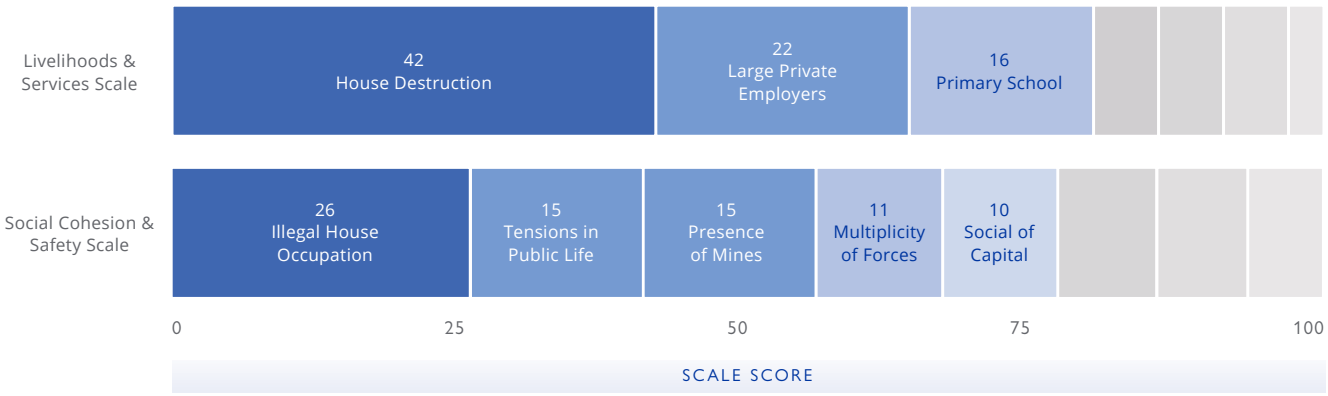
INTRODUCTION ON HOUSING INDICATORS IN THE RETURN INDEX

Given the heavy burden the conflict with ISIL inflicted on property and infrastructure in Iraq,[1] it is expected that housing indicators play a prominent role in the design of the Return Index. These indicators, which capture both the physical damage and societal challenges related to households in the aftermath of conflict, are as follows:

- Levels of house destruction and severe damage (livelihoods and basic services scale)
- Presence of illegal house occupation, (social cohesion and safety scale)

In both cases, these are the leading indicators used to calculate the score that determines the severity of conditions in each location for their respective scales in the Return Index (Figure 1).[2] Combined, house destruction and illegal occupation total one third of the combined Return Index score for a given location; the other two thirds are determined by the remaining 13 indicators.

Figure 1. Disaggregation of the Return Index indicators based on their individual score



Maximum potential score is set at 100. A location presenting severe conditions in all indicators would receive a score of 100.

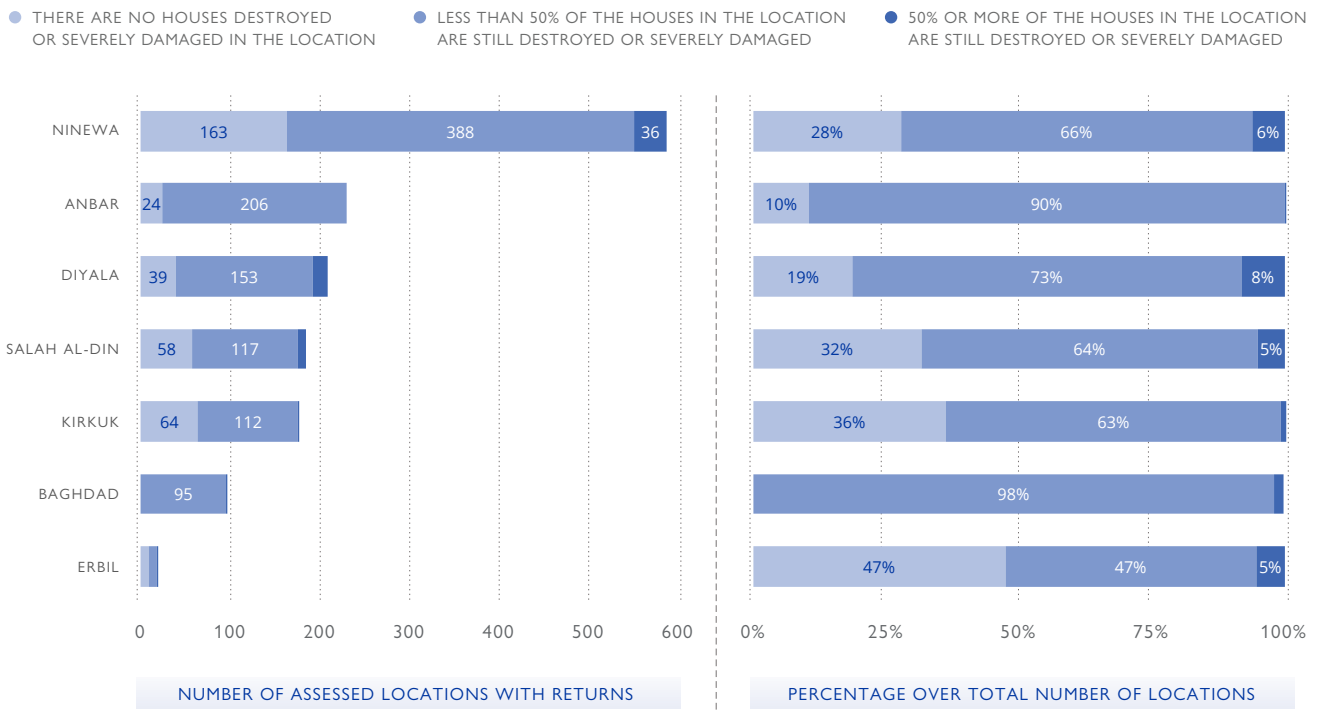
It is therefore worth exploring each housing indicator in more detail and placing each indicator within the broader context of return. This thematic briefing therefore highlights geographical hotspots of medium to high severity areas for housing-related indicators, as well as relevant contextual factors related to poverty, community recovery and diversity.

1 *World Bank, Iraq Reconstruction and Investment, Part 2: Damage and Needs Assessment of Affected Governorates (World Bank: Washington, 2018).*
2 *IOM, Returns Working Group, and Social Inquiry, Returns Index Findings Round 1 (IOM: Erbil, 2018).*

HOUSE DESTRUCTION: A WIDESPREAD PROBLEM

The recent conflict has left widespread residential destruction and severe damage across the conflict-affected governorates. Of the 1,504 locations assessed in the Return Index round 2, 1,080 had up to 50% of destroyed or severely damaged houses, and 66 locations had more than 50% houses in such conditions. This roughly corresponds to three quarters of the total locations in the Return Index. The remaining quarter (358 locations) reportedly had no destroyed or severely damaged houses. Most of the locations with destruction are in the governorates of Ninewa and Anbar. This does not, however, take into account the many locations that are both destroyed and empty, where no residents have returned yet.[3]

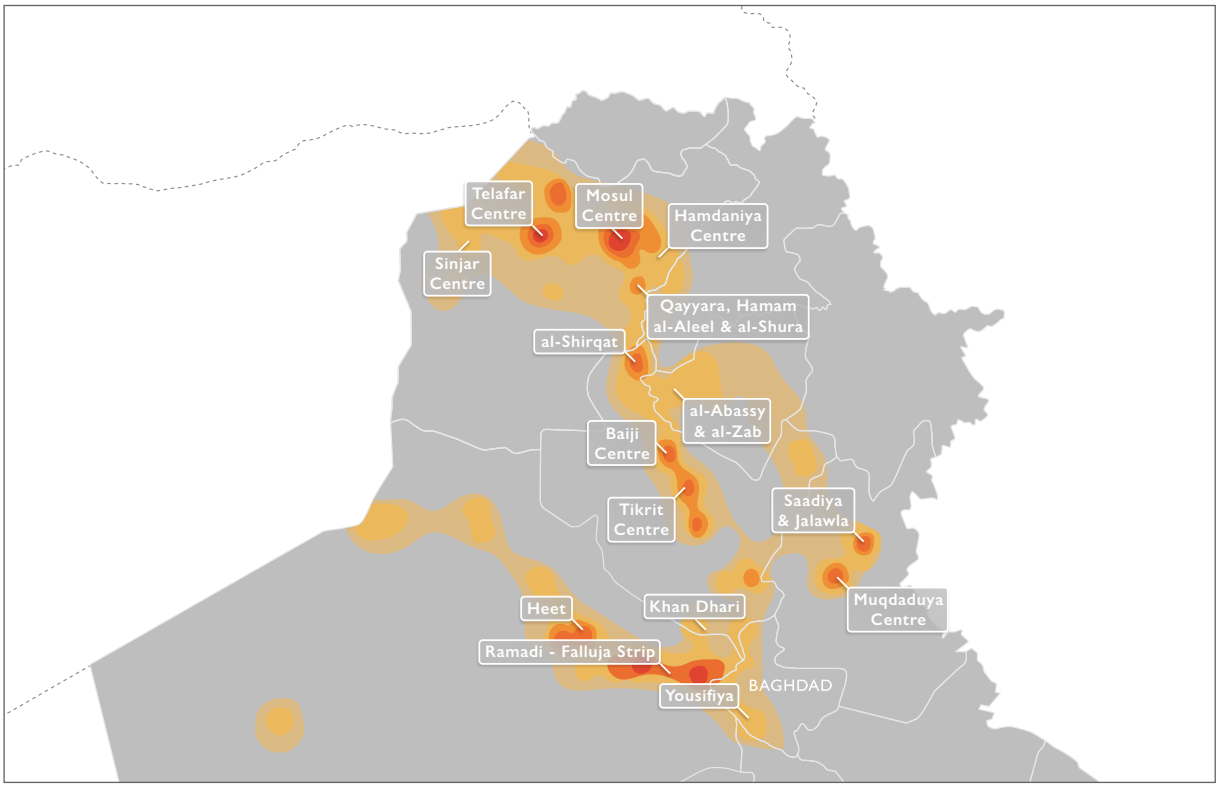
Figure 2. Number of locations per governorate and severity of destruction



Map 1 shows the breadth and depth of house destruction across governorates. Those areas in the map with a higher concentration of returnees living in locations with some degree of house destruction are displayed in darker colors. Due to the large numbers of returnees, the following are notable geographical hotspots: Mosul Centre and Telafar Centre (Ninewa Governorate); al-Shirqat and Tikrit Centre (Salah al-Din Governorate); Muqdadiya, Saadiya and Jalawla (Diyala Governorate); and, finally, Heet and the Ramadi-Falluja strip (Anbar Governorate). In addition, there are other clusters of less populated locations across the map that have particularly severe and widespread levels of destruction worth highlighting. These include: Sinjar Centre, Hamdaniya Centre, and the southern part of Mosul district, including Qayyara, Hamam al-Aleel, al-Shura and Muhalabiya (Ninewa Governorate); Hawija district, including al-Abassy and al-Zab (Kirkuk Governorate); Baiji Centre (Salah al-Din Governorate); and Yousifiya and Khan Dhari (Baghdad Governorate). Even though these clusters make up over 90% of locations with some level of residential destruction, they are often not as bright and visible in density maps compared to other locations because of their smaller population sizes.

3 Forthcoming work from IOM includes a mapping of displacement-affected locations where there are no returns yet.

Map 1. Density map for the house destruction indicator across conflict-affected governorates



Note: the map plots locations with medium to high severity house destruction; data visualization also weights the indicator's severity by the size of the population of returnees in each location.

Data show that population returns have even occurred in locations where houses have been severely damaged and destroyed. People often return and seek alternative shelter solutions within their neighbourhoods or villages if their houses are destroyed, including living in tents and other critical shelters.[4] Locations with high levels of house destruction and severe damage, are nevertheless associated with a low rate of returns. For example, 75% of locations assessed with high levels of housing destruction are reported to have up to only half of their pre-conflict population back.

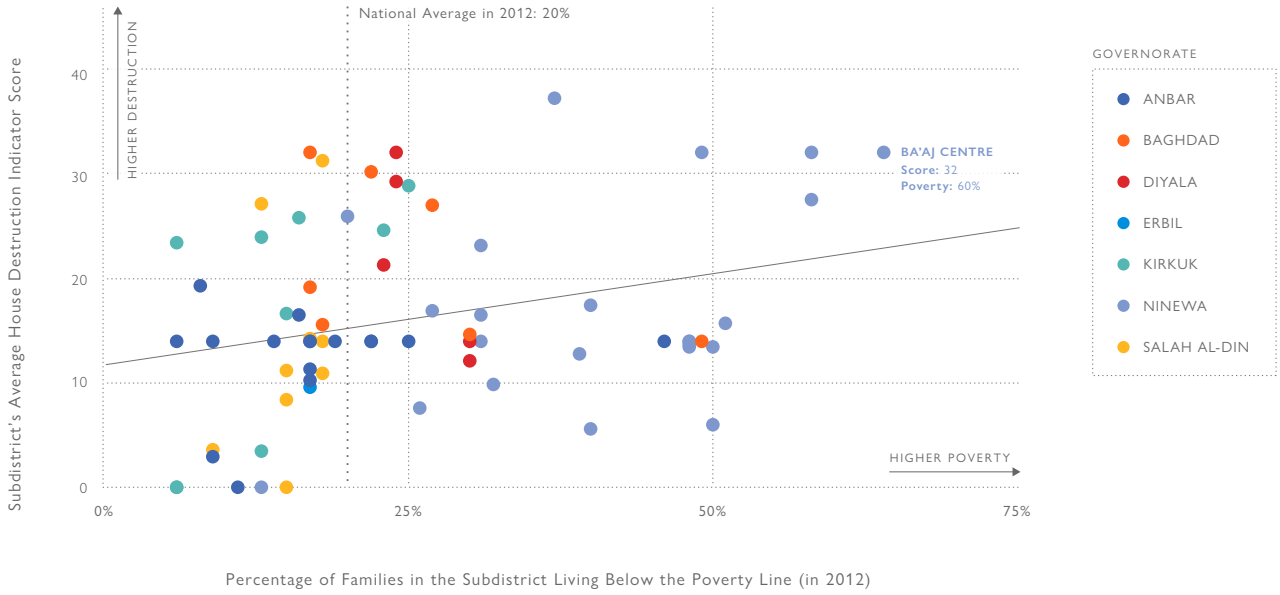
This widespread physical damage creates considerable challenges. These challenges are further compounded because there are many different causes of destruction. For example, destruction may have occurred as a result of targeting by an extremist group, during military operations, and/or as retaliatory actions during or after the conflict. Understanding who the alleged perpetrators of house destruction are is similarly nuanced, as destruction may have been carried out by the different parties to the conflict as well as community members. The Return Index does not collect data on how house destruction occurred, who carried it out, or when it happened in the different locations. However, understanding these complexities is critical as they have implications on whether or not families qualify for compensation;[5] moreover, if left unaddressed this issue may reinforce existing social cleavages and further perpetuate tensions.

4 *According to IOM DTM, there are 119,838 returnees living in their habitual residence in damaged or destroyed houses. See IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix, DTM Round 107 (IOM: Erbil, 2018).*
5 *See, for example, Center for Civilians in Conflict, "We Hope, But We are Hopeless" Civilians' Perceptions of the Compensation Process in Iraq (CIVIC: Erbil, 2018).*

A CHALLENGING CORRELATION: RESIDENTIAL DESTRUCTION ON TOP OF POVERTY

The areas with the highest levels of house destruction are also those that have historically had high levels of poverty. Figure 3 shows this correlation: subdistricts with a more severe house destruction indicator tend to also have an above-average number of families living under the poverty line. This association is particularly important because it highlights the need to pay attention to the existing underlying conditions in locations most severely affected by the conflict.

Figure 3. Scatter plot of levels of house destruction and poverty for all subdistricts assessed



Technical note: Every dot corresponds to a subdistrict. The average score for the subdistrict (vertical axis) is calculated as the simple mean for all locations within the subdistrict weighted by the number of returnees per location. It ranges from a minimum of 0 (no location with house destruction) to 42 (all locations have high severity of destruction). The national poverty estimations (horizontal axis) are obtained from the World Bank (2014) based on a national poverty line of 105,500 IQD per person per month.

More than half of the subdistricts assessed in the Return Index have a higher percentage of families living under the poverty line than the national average, set at 20% as of 2012.[6] This situation particularly affects subdistricts in Ninewa and Diyala Governorates. Ba'aj Centre (Ninewa Governorate) is one of the most extreme cases in this regard, with 60% of families living below the 2012 poverty line; it also has one of the highest levels of residential destruction across its villages and towns.

Because poverty is structural it does not fluctuate drastically from year to year. The conditions that affected these communities before conflict have most likely persisted and been exacerbated. Thus, house destruction on top of pre-existing and potentially worsening poverty levels makes it even more difficult for families to cope in the aftermath of conflict. Therefore, response should not be limited to restoring living conditions to pre-conflict levels, but for relevant actors to improve them beyond this level. Residential reconstruction is one aspect of recovery but must be complemented with other measures, if the eventual aim is to "build back better."[7]

6 *2012 is the last year in which nationwide data on poverty was collected in Iraq. For more information, see World Bank, Where are Iraq's Poor? Mapping Poverty in Iraq (World Bank: Washington, D.C., 2014).*

7 *"Build back better" refers to the use of the recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction phases after a shock to increase the resilience of communities through integrating disaster risk reduction measures into the restoration of physical infrastructure and societal systems, and into the revitalization of livelihoods, economies, and the environment. For post-conflict settings it also refers to integrating peacebuilding and reconciliation into these principles.*

COMMUNITY RECOVERY IS LINKED TO HOUSE RECONSTRUCTION

The house destruction indicator also captures whether reconstruction efforts are taking place in a given location. However, this indicator does not explicitly determine which actors are responsible for reconstruction, this could include government intervention, UN and international donors, NGOs, or by the residents themselves. Field research in return areas points to the latter being common: families tend to not wait for assistance before starting repairing and reconstructing of their homes. In some cases they return prematurely and live in tents on their destroyed property or within their damaged houses.[8]

Data for this indicator points to Anbar as the governorate where residential reconstruction is taking place in nearly all affected locations (Table 1). At the other extreme, only one third of locations in Kirkuk Governorate report reconstruction activities. The significant difference between these two governorates may come down to the fact that most of Anbar was retaken in 2015, while military operations to retake affected areas in Kirkuk did not begin until late 2017. As such, so far more people have returned to Anbar than Kirkuk. For the other governorates, housing reconstruction is taking place in slightly more than half of the locations.

Table 1. Distribution of locations with destroyed houses per governorate by reconstruction efforts

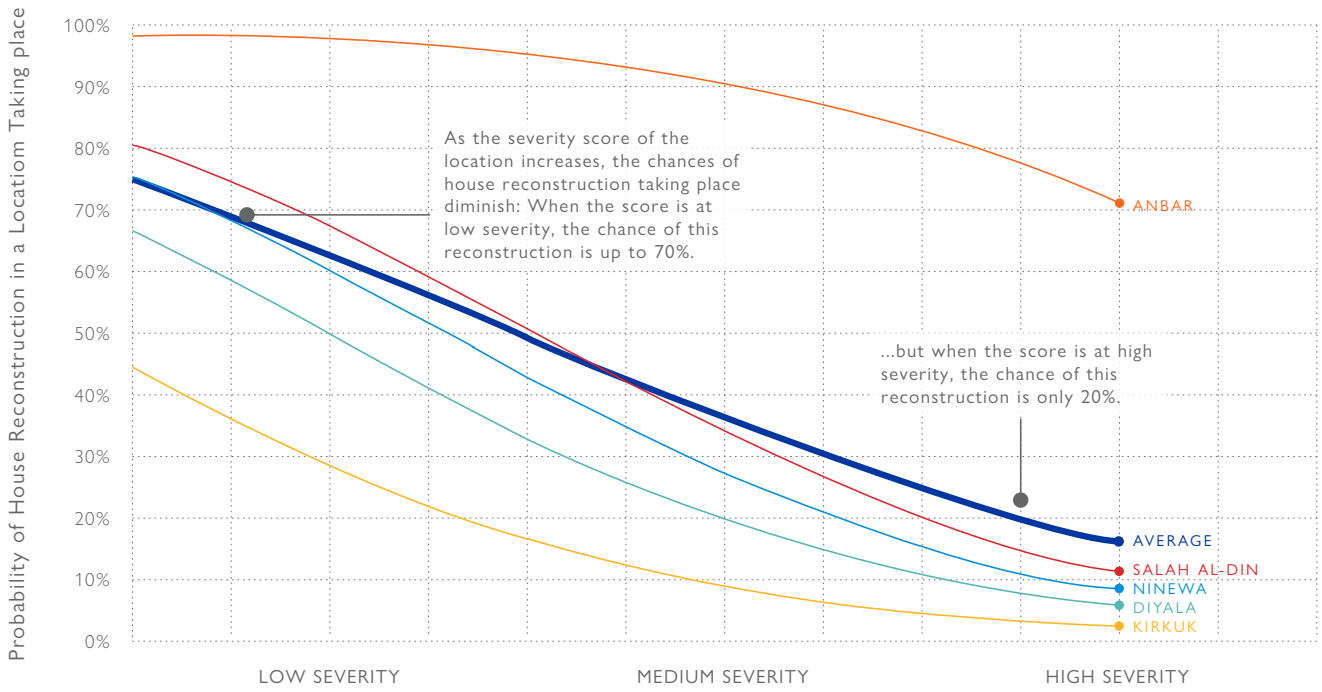
GOVERNORATE	PERCENTAGE OF LOCATIONS WITH HOUSE DESTRUCTION AND...		NUMBER OF LOCATIONS WITH DESTRUCTION REPORTED
	...WITH RECONSTRUCTION	...WITHOUT RECONSTRUCTION	
Anbar	97%	3%	206 out of 230
Baghdad	70%	30%	97 out of 97
Diyala	56%	44%	170 out of 209
Erbil	50%	50%	10 out of 19
Kirkuk	34%	66%	113 out of 177
Ninewa	58%	42%	424 out of 587
Salah al-Din	58%	42%	126 out of 184

8 *See, for example, UNHCR, Danish Refugee Council, and Social Inquiry, New Population Returns, Protection, and Social Dynamics in North Ninewa: Assessment of Bashiqa, Rabbia, Zummar, and Wana Subdistricts (UNHCR: Erbil / Dohuk, 2018). The DTM round 107 (November - December 2018) also recorded 132,774 returnees who are living in critical shelters. This includes informal settlements, religious buildings, schools, unfinished or abandoned buildings and habitual residences that are severely damaged or destroyed.*

To put the above data into context, particularly because much housing reconstruction is family-led, Figure 4 compares the likelihood of house reconstruction with overall severity conditions.[9] This figure illustrates that the worse the state of general living conditions in a given location, the less likely it is that house reconstruction is taking place. In the figure, housing reconstruction is more likely to take place in those locations that fall on the left-hand side of the horizontal axis than those on the right-hand side.

This data therefore highlights the positive spillover effects of overall community revitalization and infrastructure rehabilitation in encouraging housing reconstruction. It is therefore necessary to understand in more detail why so many locations are on the right side of the axis and how to shift toward lower severity of general living conditions.

Figure 4. Plotted likelihood of house reconstruction by general living conditions in a location



Technical note: Severity score (horizontal axis) is proxied by taking into the calculation all indicators in the Return Index (livelihoods, public services, social cohesion, and safety perceptions) with the exception of house destruction, which has been excluded. This probability of house reconstruction per location (vertical axis) is estimated through a logistical regression taking into account the severity score previously calculated and controlling by governorate and population size of the location.

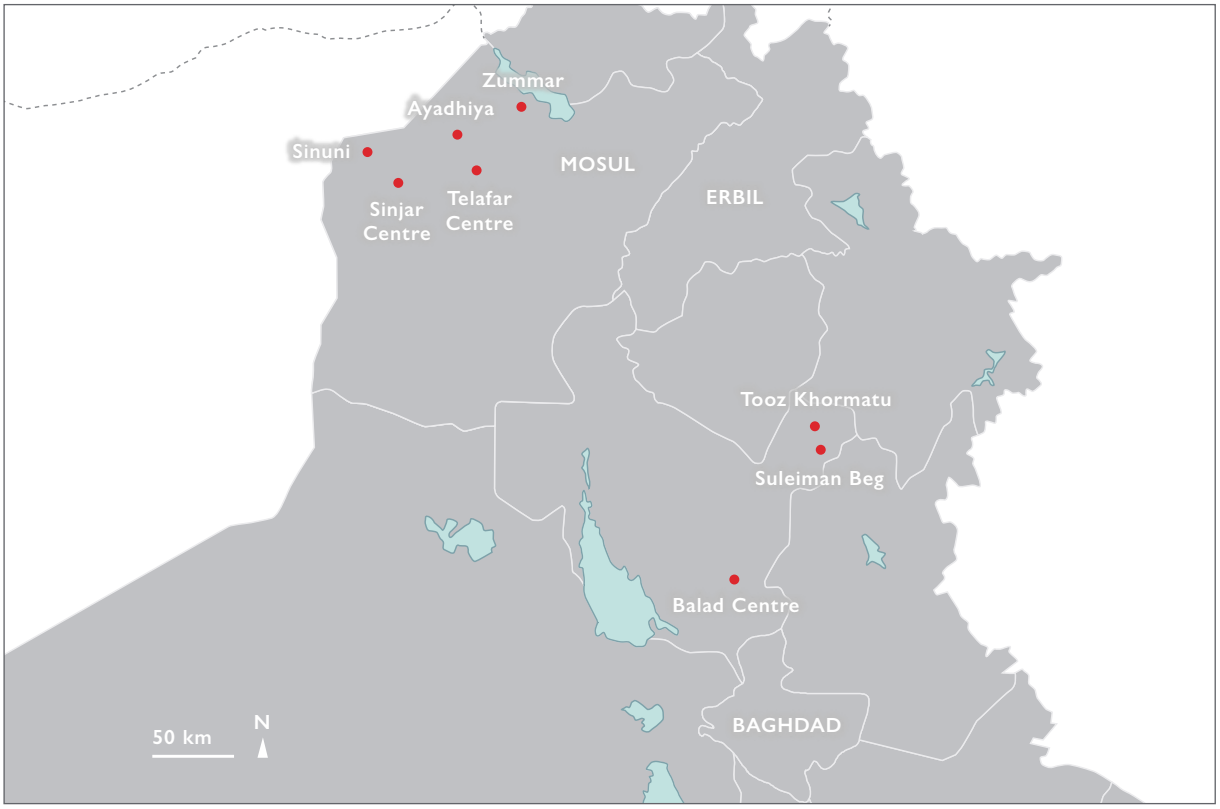
9 *The figure uses a version of the Return Index that includes all indicators (livelihoods, services provision, social cohesion and safety perceptions), except house destruction.*

COMMUNITY DYNAMICS TO BE CONSIDERED

One in four locations with some degree of house destruction are located within ethno-religiously diverse subdistricts. Diversity adds a layer of complexity when dealing with housing issues, especially regarding historical grievances and polarization between communities. Data available shows that diverse locations with severe social cohesion and safety issues (as measured in Scale 2 of the Return Index) tend to have more house destruction than locations with homogeneous populations or with less severe social cohesion and safety issues. Therefore, there is a higher prevalence of residential destruction in those locations where different ethno-religious groups live together in poor social conditions.

Thus, targeted house destruction may be a consequence of pre-existing low cohesion as well as the source of ongoing social problems, depending on the context. To further understand this interaction, and provide adequate responses, it is critical to analyse underlying social dynamics and history in these locations, which include Sinjar Centre, Sinuni, Zummar, Tal Afar Centre, and Ayadhiya in Ninewa Governorate[10] and Tooz Khormatu, Suleiman Beg, and Balad Centre in Salah al-Din Governorate (Map 2).[11]

Map 2. Ethno-religiously diverse hotspots with severe house destruction and severe social cohesion and safety issues



10 *Social Inquiry, "'We Don't Want Them Back': Balancing the Rights of Displaced, Returning, and Remaining Populations in the Aftermath of ISIS in Northern Ninewa, Iraq," Policy Brief 1 (Erbil: Social Inquiry, 2017); and IOM, Tal Afar District Center Rapid Conflict Assessment (IOM: Erbil, 2018).*
11 *GPPI, Iraq After ISIL: Tuz (GPPI: Berlin, 2017).*

ILLEGAL HOUSE OCCUPATION: A COMPLEX ISSUE WITH THE POTENTIAL FOR LONG-TERM CONSEQUENCES

Housing, land and property issues, which range from lack of ownership documentation to disputed ownership due to legacies of appropriation, are longstanding in Iraq. The indicator linked to these issues in the Return Index focuses specifically on illegal occupation of housing that took place during or after the recent conflict. Unlike house destruction, illegal occupation of housing is not widespread across all conflict-affected governorates, but more concentrated in specific areas. Table 2 shows the geographical hotspots in areas of return where illegal house occupation is more severe. These are mainly concentrated in **Ninewa** and **Salah al-Din** governorates.

Table 2. Frequency of locations per subdistrict with reported illegal house occupation

GOVERNORATE	SUBDISTRICT	NUMBER OF LOCATIONS	PART OF DIBs*
Ninewa	Telafar Centre	11	
	Qayyara	8	
	Sinjar Centre	8	Y
	Rabbia	8	Y
	Hamam al-Aleel	3	
	Sinuni	2	Y
	Shura	1 (centre)	
	Zummar	1 (centre)	Y
	Ayadhiya	1 (centre)	
	Hatra Centre	1 (centre)	
Salah al-Din	Tikrit Centre	8	
	Tooz Khormatu Centre	5	Y
	Suleiman Beg	1 **	Y

* DIB refers to Iraq's Disputed Internal Borders.

** This location comprises the whole subdistrict, with no further divisions due to accessibility issues.

While the Return Index does not capture information on who is occupying houses, additional follow-up with key informants in these locations indicates that most residences are occupied by security forces, who use them as offices and barracks. These residences usually belong to people who are still displaced. In some cases, the owners are not allowed to return and in others, occupation is the reason they continue to be displaced.

Furthermore, over half of the hotspots listed above fall within the disputed internal borders of Iraq. These locations have a history of forced population change and longstanding – and in many cases, unresolved – housing, land and property concerns. This context have the potential to exacerbate house occupation resulting from the conflict with ISIL, whether this occupation is carried out by security forces, neighbors/other community members, IDPs, or some combination thereof.

Given this complexity, it is, again, critical to know the location-specific factors related to this particular dimension of housing, land and property – and how it connects to other issues. This knowledge will allow stakeholders to shape policies and interventions that take into account the consequences of occupation and historical grievances, to better tackle the root causes of occupation. Getting this right has the potential to help those affected to continue seeking durable solutions, avoid further protracted displacement, and mitigate involuntary population change.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The extent of damage to houses and the social implications of house occupation are the two most significant indicators within the Return Index. IDPs corroborate these results as they report housing issues as paramount when describing why they remain in displacement.[12] The two indicators also encompass the history of Iraq: house destruction and occupation have occurred in many waves, and have proven to be difficult to resolve, with the cumulative consequences carrying over into present-day Iraq.

Understanding geographical patterns of where housing obstacles are found, and their context, will help shape more localized responses that better address the needs of returnees and those who intend to return. Such responses can serve as a bridge between immediate needs and longer-term issues linked to poverty eradication, general reconstruction, governance and peacebuilding.

12 IOM, Returns Working Group, and Social Inquiry, Reasons to Remain: Categorizing Protracted Displacement in Iraq (IOM: Erbil, 2018).

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