

# IRC Protection Needs Overview: Monitoring and Trends

October 2023 – March 2024

IRAQ



# Table of Contents

<b>Table of Contents</b> .....	2
<b>Abbreviations</b> .....	3
<b>Introduction</b> .....	4
<b>Background</b> .....	4
<b>Methodology</b> .....	5
<b>Key Findings:</b> .....	7
<b>In Focus: Restrictions on Accessing Legal Identity</b> .....	11
Lack of Documentation .....	11
Barriers in the accessibility of legal assistance .....	11
Current Legal Needs .....	12
Access to Education.....	13
Child Protection Concerns .....	14
<b>In focus: Protection of Persons with Disabilities</b> .....	15
Access to Basic Services for Persons with disabilities.....	15
Social Groups and Safety Concerns .....	15
Economic Vulnerability and Access to Income .....	15
<b>Conclusion</b> .....	16
<b>Acknowledgements</b> .....	16

## Abbreviations

AoO	Area of Origin
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
HHs	Households
IDP	Internally Displaced People
IRC	International Rescue Committee
KII	Key Informant Interviews
KIs	Key informants
MOMD	Ministry of Migration and Displacement
MOLSA	Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs
PRoL	Protection and Rule of Law
Q1	Quarter One
Q4	Quarter Four
UN	United Nations
VAWG	Violence Against Women and Girls

## Introduction

Since 2003, the International Rescue Committee (IRC) has provided humanitarian assistance to communities affected by conflict in Iraq. IRC currently delivers multi-sectoral interventions to support internally displaced people (IDPs), returnees, host communities, and refugees. IRC's Protection and Rule of Law (PRoL) programming works to safeguard the human rights and well-being of Iraqis, as well as refugees from surrounding countries, in Anbar, Kirkuk, Ninewa, Diyala, and Salah al-Din provinces. This comprehensive approach includes protection monitoring, cash for protection, legal awareness training and support, and building awareness and responses to the unique protection needs of vulnerable groups including women and girls, IDPs, minorities, children, and persons with disabilities. By adopting this holistic approach, we aim to address the multifaceted challenges faced by communities and promote their resilience and empowerment. IRC works in close collaboration with the Iraqi legislature, key ministries and justice sector stakeholders and provides support for people-centered institutional system strengthening. IRC also engages with the Iraqi High Commission on Human Rights and Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs (MOLSA) and provides support for strengthening state led protection mechanisms.

IRC Iraq's protection team conducts regular monitoring in IRC's areas of operation to ensure the needs of families and individuals are being registered and that our programming is responsive to emerging trends in protection. These initiatives are instrumental in ensuring that the evolving needs of families and individuals are accurately identified and promptly addressed. This report provides an overview of the data collected through protection monitoring in 2023 quarter four (Q4) [October-December 2023] and 2024 quarter one (Q1) [January-March 2024]. These findings contribute to programming and inform our advocacy at the national and governorate levels, as well as with key protection stakeholders and international actors. IRC is committed to working hand in hand with communities, local authorities, and partners to ensure the well-being and dignity of all those affected by conflict, as we strive towards a more secure and resilient future for Iraq.

## Background

Iraq is undergoing a challenging transition from a humanitarian crisis to post-conflict recovery, marked by significant economic insecurity, protracted displacement, weak governance, and the increasing effects of climate change. These interconnected issues continue to pose substantial obstacles to the country's stability and development.

Iraq continues to face significant humanitarian challenges with approximately 1.1 million IDPs and 4.9 million returnees<sup>1</sup>. Key challenges include displacement, limited access to basic services, socioeconomic hurdles, and ongoing insecurity. Protection issues include a lack of legal documentation, child protection concerns, and violence against women and girls (VAWG). Access to essential services, such as healthcare, education, and livelihood opportunities, remains limited, especially in hard-to-reach areas. Barriers include physical security risks, bureaucratic hurdles, and socio-economic constraints. Vulnerable populations, such as women, children, minorities, and persons with disability, face heightened risks of exploitation, violence, and neglect. The IRC has been at the forefront of addressing these challenges, with a strong focus on providing legal aid and protection to the most vulnerable Iraqis.

The situation for IDPs in Iraq remains unstable. The government of Iraq decided to close all IDP camps by July 30, 2024, which has complicated the return process. Most of the IDPs are still in KRI camps,

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<sup>1</sup> *International Organization for Migration's (IOM) Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) Data – Iraq.*

and many do not want to return to their areas of origin (AoO). There is an enforced return process by the authorities, and many IDPs cannot return to their AoO due to several issues and challenges including lack of security and safety in their AoO, unresolved property disputes, destroyed or damaged housing and infrastructure, lack of access to essential services, and limited livelihood opportunities. Additionally, social cohesion issues, including ethnic and sectarian tensions further complicate the return process. As a result, they are forced to return to other areas or informal displacement sites. Additionally, there is a return process from Al-Hol camp in northeast Syria to Jadaa camp in Iraq. These returnees need substantial assistance and support. Many want to return to Iraq, but the procedures from authorities are delayed due to security checks. These returnees will stay in Jadaa camp for three months before leaving the camp.

Iraq's economic landscape remains troubled despite being classified as an upper middle-income country. The reduction in international assistance, political instability, corruption, and an over-reliance on oil revenues have severely impacted economic recovery. The country continues to grapple with poverty, high unemployment rates, especially among the youth, and insufficient livelihood opportunities. Governance challenges in Iraq are reflected in the complexities surrounding government formation, the influence of political dynamics on judicial processes, and ongoing concerns about corruption. The country faces challenges in improving its ranking on the Transparency International Index, with ongoing efforts needed to address the efficient allocation and management of public resources. Iraq is one of the countries that are most susceptible to the impacts of climate change, experiencing rising temperatures, reduced precipitation, intensified droughts, and water shortages. These environmental challenges threaten livelihoods, food security, and increase displacement and social fragmentation.

## Methodology

The IRC's protection monitoring assessments from October 2023 to March 2024 in Iraq were conducted using a mixed approach and serve as a follow-on to the needs assessment published in December 2023<sup>2</sup>. The data collection methods employed during this period included key informant interviews (KIIs), household-level surveys (HH Survey), focus group discussions (FGDs), and direct observation assessments. These methodologies aimed to gather comprehensive information on the protection needs and risks faced by IDPs, returnees, and host communities in 16 locations across Anbar, Ninawa, Kirkuk, and Salah Adin governorates. These targeted locations extended to cover four new sites in Salah Adin governorate from previous protection monitoring efforts.

The analysis within this report is based on data sets that are not large enough to inform country-wide conclusions and should be contextualized within ongoing monitoring efforts at the federal and governorate levels. The IRC will continue to improve processes during monitoring activities to reach all population groups within our areas of operation, for more representative sampling.

The data collection activities during this period reached a diverse range of participants, including men, women, boys, and girls of varying ages, ethnicities, and displacement statuses. This approach ensures the unique perspectives of target groups are represented. The survey covered critical aspects such as access to essential resources like legal services, education, and healthcare. It also assessed the prevalence of risks including child labor, and violence against women and girls (VAWG), and barriers

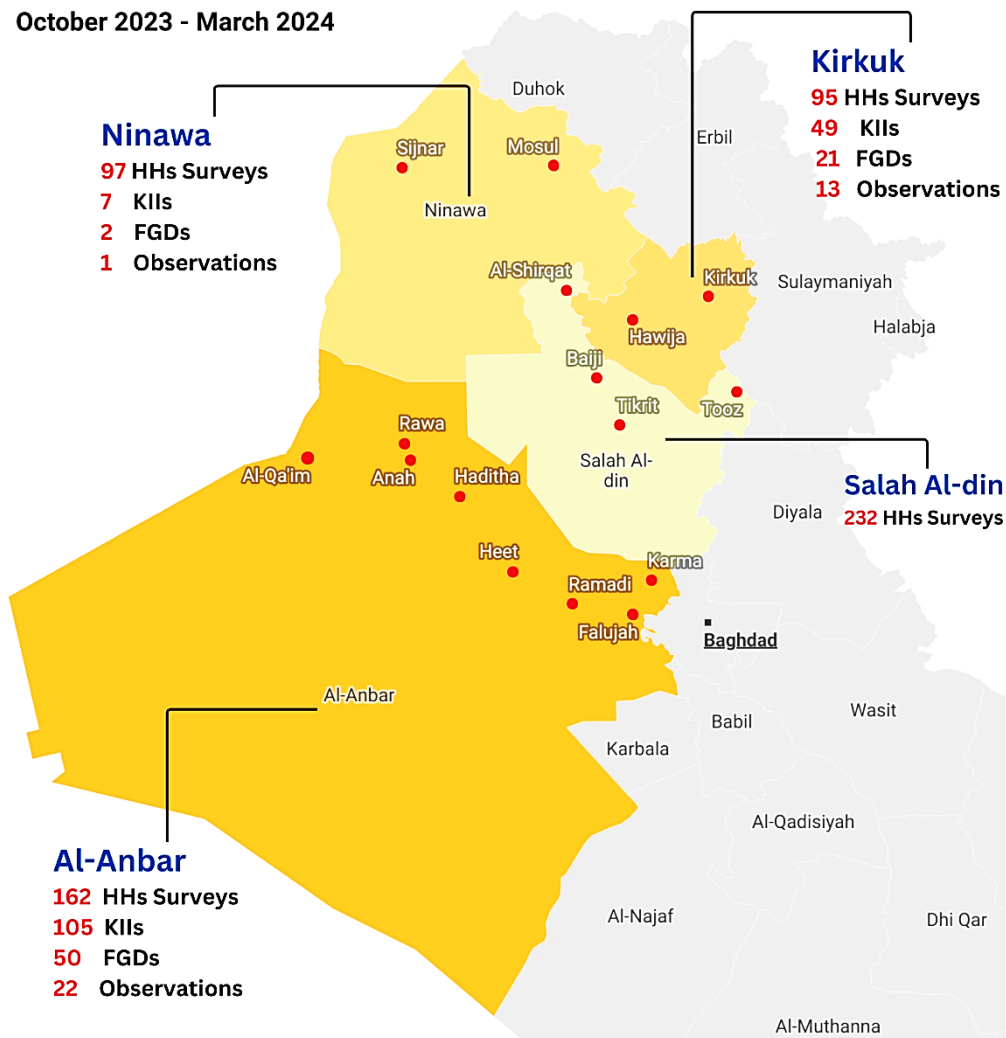
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<sup>2</sup> <https://reliefweb.int/report/iraq/irc-protection-needs-overview-monitoring-and-trends-april-2023-september-2023-enar>

to returning to their AoO, in addition to new thematic areas including climate change and border monitoring.

### IRC Protection Monitoring Coverage - IRAQ

October 2023 - March 2024



During the data collection process, IRC staff ensured the confidentiality and security of the participants' data. Data collectors informed survey, interview, and discussion participants about the measures taken to maintain data security and anonymity. Culturally sensitive and inclusive collection methods were employed, such as pairing female interviewees with female enumerators and organizing separate FGDs with men and women. These practices aimed to create a safe and inclusive environment for participants to share their experiences and perspectives.

Methods	Q4 2023			Q1 2024			Grand Total
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	
HH Survey	63	133	196	215	175	390	586
KII	54	12	66	73	22	95	161
FGD	121	138	259 (35 groups)	86	177	263 (38 groups)	522 (73 groups)

Table 1: Sex-disaggregated number of participants of protection monitoring activities.

## Key Findings:

During the reporting period, the IRC identified multiple contributing factors within the protection and rights landscape that lead to challenges experienced by individuals in IDP, returnee, and host community groups. These challenges encompassed a spectrum of issues, ranging from inadequate access to essential services such as healthcare, shelter, and educational support, to a lack of awareness regarding the requisite legal processes for obtaining civil documentation and other essential credentials.

The main findings, as reported through KIIs, FGDs, and surveys were:

### October – December 2023

#### Basic Needs

- **72%** reported encountering challenges in obtaining basic services. The main impediment to accessing these services was **high cost of services (71%)**.
- **Livelihood support** was the most reported priority need at (**68%**). Other frequently reported priority needs included **healthcare** at (**65%**), **food** at (**45%**), and **legal assistance** at (**39%**).
- The study revealed that **80%** of the HHs stated the **lack of health facilities** nearby their communities such as **hospitals, health centers, and medical clinics**, and **78%** of HHs expressed concerns over the lack of **emergency health services** and **ambulance** availability within their communities. **20%** of the HHs reported having a family member with a **serious illness** or **chronic medical condition**.

#### Displacement and Returns

- **84%** of the returnee HHs returned voluntarily to their AoO, the most prevalent factors that are influencing the return of the families to their AoO were: **lack of job opportunities** in the displacement area (up to **81%**), **inability to access basic necessities** in the displacement area (up to **52%**), and **inability to afford rent** in the displacement area (up to **68%**).

### January – March 2024

#### Basic Needs

- There was a **decrease** in the percentage of HHs reporting challenges in accessing basic services from Q4 2023 to Q1 2024 (**72%** to **52%**). However, the issue of **high costs** as a barrier **increased significantly**, suggesting that while fewer HHs overall are reporting difficulties, the financial burden has become more acute for those who do.
- **Livelihood support** remained the **top priority need** in both quarters but saw a **slight decrease** (from **68%** to **66%**). Legal assistance saw a **slight increase** (from **39%** to **41%**), and HLP (Housing, Land, and Property) compensation emerged as a **new significant priority (39%)**, highlighting evolving community needs.
- There was a **substantial reduction** in HHs reporting a lack of **emergency services** from last quarter (from **78%** to **39%**). This may suggest **improvements** in the **availability or awareness** of health services. The significant drop in reported health service challenges might also reflect changes in survey focus as it mostly comes from the new targeted location included for the protection monitoring in Salah Adin governorate.

- **78%** of the returnee HHs feel accepted by society after the return from displacement. Only (**4%**) of the returnee HHs mentioned facing **issues with the host community** regarding their return, such as **disputes** between the host community and those returning from the camps, the **difficulty in finding a rental home** with a suitable rent, and the **lack of issuance of legal documents**.
- Among the IDPs, (**64%**) reported **unwillingness to return** to their AoO. Specific protection related barriers to return were high, on average the most reported barriers to return were: **lack of shelter and housing** in AoO (up to **81%**), **lack of livelihood** options in the AoO (up to **59%**), **lack of access to basic services** in AoO (up to **41%**), and **lack of civil documents** (up to **37%**) same for **community tensions** in the AoO.
- (**16%**) of the participants reported **eviction risks** within their communities over the preceding three months. **Anbar** governorate showed higher rates of eviction risks during this period, (**21%**), specifically in **Qaim** and **Faluja** districts.
- Approximately **16%** of Key Informants (KIs) observed **social cohesion issues between returnees/IDPs and host communities** in the past three months. These problems include tensions with families returning from the camp. These conflicts often revolve around the returnees' reintegration into their AoO, leading to ongoing problems and affecting overall community cohesion.

#### **Legal Assistance**

- **27%** of participants reported missing key civil documents. The prevalent types of missing documentation were as follows: **civil IDs** at (**42%**), **unified cards** at (**33%**) for the beneficiaries who already have Civil ID and Nationality Certificates, and **housing cards** at (**21%**).

#### **Displacement and Returns**

- There was a **noticeable shift** in the **influencing factors**. While the **inability to afford rent** slightly increased (from **68%** to **69%**), the lack of job opportunities saw a **significant decrease** (from **81%** to **68%**). The difficulty in accessing basic necessities **rose substantially** (from **52%** to **67%**), indicating that access to essential services has become a more **prominent issue**.
- There is a **significant decrease** in the percentage of IDPs **unwilling** to return (from **64%** to **42%**), suggesting improved conditions or changes in perception. However, the reasons for unwillingness show high percentages for **shelter** and **income resources**, indicating these **remain major issues**.
- There is a significant increase in eviction threats from the previous quarter (from **16%** to **25%**), indicating growing **instability in housing security**.
- There is a **slight decrease** in reported social cohesion issues (from **16%** to **13%**). However, the nature of the problems, particularly **discrimination** and **abuse against vulnerable** groups, underscores the need for focused efforts to promote social integration and protect vulnerable populations.

#### **Legal Assistance**

- The percentage of HHs missing key civil documents **slightly decreased** from **27%** to **25%**. However, there was a shift in the types of missing documentation, with **unified cards** becoming the **most commonly missing document** in Q1 2024 (up from **33%** to **51%**), while the percentage of missing civil IDs **decreased significantly**.



- Access to **legal services** remains a challenge for many vulnerable populations in Iraq, due to a **lack of financial resources to cover the legal fees and transportation fees (92%)**, **lack of reliable legal aid service providers (36%)**, and absence of **needed documents** to issue other civil documents (**29%**).
- Most needed legal aid services within the targeted areas were **86% ID and civil documentation** services, **82% personal status and family law**. Additionally, **HLP** issues and other **war compensations** were identified as significant legal needs, comprising **53%** of the reported requirements.
- Out of the total HHs interviewed, **60%** revealed that **no one** of their family members was **registered with MOMD/MOLSA** for social welfare. This lack of registration can be attributed to several factors. **31%** of registrations were reported as **rejected**, **27%** of the registrations were still **pending**, and financial constraints also play a role, with **23% unable to afford legal and transportation fees** required for registration, **15% limited awareness** regarding the procedures and policies of MOMD/MOLSA directorates, and the rest factors include **uncomfortable with sharing the information MOMD/MOLSA** and **lack of knowledge**.

#### **Heightened Vulnerabilities**

- **20%** of the participants reported they see the security situation as **unsafe** in their communities. The primary contributing factors cited for this perception were the **presence of armed groups (81%)** and instances of **community tensions or violence (69%)**. Moreover, (**39%**) of this group reported their feelings of insecurity were related to the heightened risks of **VAWG, child abuse and exploitation**.

- **Financial barriers** remained the **primary challenge** in accessing legal services, although there was a **slight decrease** (from **92%** to **89%**). However, there was an **increase** in reported barriers related to **lack of information about legal services** and **insufficient women-friendly services**, highlighting evolving challenges in legal service accessibility.
- The demand for **personal status and family law** services **increased slightly**, becoming the **top priority** in Q1 2024. The need for **ID and civil documentation** services decreased but **remained significant**. The importance of **HLP** issues and **war compensations** rose, indicating an increased focus on property and compensation-related legal needs.
- There was a **slight decrease** in the percentage of HHs without any family member registered with MOMD/MOLSA (from **60%** to **55%**). The primary reason shifted to **pending registrations**, which **increased significantly** (from **27%** to **51%**). **Financial constraints and registration rejections** saw a **decrease**, suggesting some improvements in processing but highlighting ongoing delays and information gaps.

#### **Heightened Vulnerabilities**

- There is a **slight decrease** in the percentage of participants feeling **unsafe** (from **20%** to **18%**). The **presence of armed groups and community tensions** or violence remain the primary concerns, though both factors saw a **slight decrease**. However, concerns related to **VAWG**, and **child abuse** increased significantly (from **39%** to **50%**), indicating growing awareness or increased instances of these issues.
- Awareness of **child labor** has **increased** (from **55%** to **59%**), suggesting that the issue may be becoming more prevalent or that awareness campaigns are making more people conscious of this problem.

- **55%** of participants were aware of **school-aged children** under 18 years involved in **child labor**, potentially affecting their education and well-being.
- Girls are at risk of not attending school due to various reasons such as **lack of financial ability, early marriage, lack of civil documentation, customary social norms, child labor, safety and accessibility concerns, and prioritizing boys' education.**

### **Impact of Climate Change**

- A significant majority (**65%**) of respondents or their acquaintances have been directly impacted by disasters or climate change. The predominant impacts are psychological, including stress and anxiety, which are closely linked to the environmental changes they are experiencing. Issues with **potable water quality** and **insufficient irrigation** for agriculture due to persistent droughts and reduced rainfall has significantly lowered water levels in major rivers like the Tigris and Euphrates over the past year. These water-related challenges increase the mental health impacts, as communities face uncertainty and stress about their water supply and agricultural productivity. Additionally, Iraq has also experienced extreme heat waves, with temperatures soaring above 50°C in some areas, further contributing to water scarcity and increasing psychological distress. This indicates that water scarcity and mental health are intertwined primary concerns driven by the ongoing climate crisis.
- Among those impacted by climate change, **18%** have **experienced displacement**. While displacement is not the most common impact, it is still a significant issue, affecting nearly one-fifth of those impacted by climate change.

- The proportion of participants recognizing **challenges for girls** in attending school **increased significantly (64%)**. The obstacles identified remain consistent, with **financial constraints, early marriage, and lack of civil documentation** being prominent issues. Safety concerns and customary social norms continue to **play significant roles** in hindering girls' education.

### **Impact of Climate Change**

- Compared to the previous quarter, there is a **slight decrease** in the percentage of respondents directly impacted by climate change (down from **65%** to **47%**). This suggests a potential **seasonal variation** or **improvements in resilience** or reporting.
- There is a **notable increase** in **displacement** (from **18%** to **40%**) and **loss of livelihoods** (from **36%** to **78%**), indicating that the **severity of impacts** may be **rising**.
- Awareness of **potential relocation** due to climate concerns has **increased** (from **24%** to **35%**), suggesting growing concern or recognition of the need for relocation.

- **24%** of respondents are aware of community members **considering moving** due to climate change concerns. This indicates a potential for increased displacement as climate impacts become more severe.

## In Focus: Restrictions on Accessing Legal Identity

The IRC's protection monitoring data from October 2023 to March 2024 highlights significant challenges faced by HHs in Iraq concerning access to legal identity and documentation.

### Lack of Documentation

According to protection monitoring data, **26%** of HHs in the targeted areas are **missing key civil documentation**, with the **Unified Card** and **Civil ID** being the most commonly absent documents, affecting these HHs. These documents are fundamental for identity verification and access to various services. Additionally, the HHs lack **Housing Cards**, which are crucial for proving residence. The absence of **PDS Cards**, affecting the HHs, impedes access to government-subsidized food and other necessities. **Birth Certificates** and **Proof of Birth** are missing in the HHs, impacting legal identity and **access to education and health services**. Other significant documents missing include **Marriage Contracts**, **Passports**, and various **public health registration documents** related to birth and death.

### Barriers in the accessibility of legal assistance

Access to legal services in Iraq is severely limited by a multitude of factors, creating significant barriers for communities. From the insights gathered, it is clear that both financial and systemic obstacles are prevalent.

Firstly, expensive transportation fees present a major obstacle, especially for individuals in remote or underserved areas, in these areas, costs can be significantly higher due to the necessity of using private vehicles or traveling long distances which, on average, range between \$25 and \$40. The high costs associated with traveling to legal service providers make it difficult for many to access necessary legal assistance. Compounding this issue is the lack of financial capacity to cover legal fees. Many individuals simply do not have the resources to pay for legal services, which can be prohibitively expensive. This financial barrier is widespread, affecting people across various demographics and locations, and significantly limits their access to justice.

Another major barrier is the lack of information and knowledge about legal practices and services. A substantial portion of the community lacks awareness or understanding of available legal services and how to access them. This knowledge gap prevents people from seeking help even when it is available. Moreover, there is a lack of reliable legal service providers within many communities. The absence of trustworthy and dependable providers means that individuals often have nowhere to turn for legal assistance. Additionally, many legal services are not designed to be accessible or sensitive to the needs of women, creating further barriers for them in accessing legal help.

The procedural and systemic issues within the legal framework also pose significant challenges. Unreasonable delays in undergoing legal procedures are a common experience, often attributed to discrimination, mediation, and bribery within government departments. Specific documents, such as birth certificates, death certificates, and the unified card, are particularly affected by these delays. The complexity of legal processes, coupled with the procedural challenges faced within government institutions further complicate matters, making it a persistent challenge for those seeking legal assistance. Systemic issues, including concerns about fairness and transparency, can lead to delays and inconsistent treatment of individuals, increasing the challenges faced.

Security concerns add another layer of difficulty, especially in conflict or post-conflict areas where security clearance requirements are more stringent. These clearances can prevent individuals from accessing legal services. Additionally, the absence of legal or judicial authorities in some regions makes it impossible for residents to access legal services locally.

Accessing police stations, governmental directorates, and courthouses presents significant difficulties due to a combination of distance, transportation costs, security procedures, and social barriers. The long distances from residential areas or displacement complexes to these legal departments necessitate transportation, which many cannot afford. Security checks and procedures create additional obstacles, particularly for those with security concerns. Cultural and social customs further complicate access, especially for women who face harassment and societal disapproval. Physical accessibility issues also affect Persons with disability, adding another layer of difficulty.

*"The transportation fees and the need for frequent visits to legal offices are major obstacles. Many of us cannot afford the cost of traveling long distances multiple times."*

*FGD: Anbar, Ana*

When seeking legal assistance or information, individuals primarily turn to NGOs, both international and local, for support. Lawyers are another source of assistance, though the costs associated with hiring them can be prohibitive for many. Community leaders, such as the Mukhtar, also provide support in some cases. However, many people do not seek help due to financial constraints, lack of trust in the system, or not knowing where to turn for assistance. This indicates a reliance on informal networks and NGOs for legal support, highlighting the gaps in accessible and affordable legal services.

*"We rely on organizations, both international and local NGOs, for legal assistance. They offer services that we can't access otherwise."*

*FGD for IDPs: Anbar, Faluja, Low-Cost Housing*

### **Current Legal Needs**

The needed legal services in the community are diverse and encompass several critical areas. The predominant legal needs focus on **Personal Status and Family Law**, including issues such as birth registration, name similarity, marriage, divorce, death, and inheritance. A significant portion of the community requires assistance with these fundamental aspects of personal and family life.

Another high-priority area is **ID and Civil Documentation**, which includes obtaining or renewing identification documents. These documents, such as Unified National Cards, Residence Cards, Ration Cards, Birth Certificates, Death Certificates, and Proof of Lineage, are essential for accessing various services such as healthcare, education, and social welfare benefits, and exercising rights. The need

for civil documentation is paramount, as these documents are crucial for the legal and daily lives of individuals.

**Housing, Land, and Property (HLP) and War Compensation** also represent significant legal needs. These services address property issues and compensation for damages suffered due to conflict, including disputes over property ownership, land rights, and claims for war-related losses. The intertwined nature of HLP issues with civil documentation and personal status highlights the complexity of legal needs in this area.

**Detention and Enforced Disappearances** are additional areas where legal services are needed, reflecting concerns about individuals who may be unlawfully detained or missing. While less frequently cited, these issues still demand attention due to their serious nature.

The types of information on legal assistance and protection most needed by individuals are varied and comprehensive. There is a high demand for detailed procedural information on obtaining civil documents, securing compensation, and accessing legal consultations. Specifically, individuals need guidance on the processes for obtaining birth certificates, death certificates, proof of lineage, and unified cards, as well as issuing residence cards and birth statements. Information on compensation processes, particularly for home reconstruction and repairs, is also highly sought after, indicating a need for financial redress mechanisms to address significant property losses.

General legal consultations are needed to navigate various issues related to civil documentation and personal status. Additionally, there is a strong interest in understanding citizens' rights and the mechanisms available for lodging complaints and obtaining legal representation. Awareness and educational resources on women's rights, human rights, early marriage, and self-development are also requested, underscoring the importance of addressing broader social and legal issues. Lastly, information on naturalization processes and proof of lineage is needed, highlighting the complex legal scenarios faced by individuals in this context.

## **In focus: Education and Child-related Concerns**

During the period of October 2023 to March 2024 IRC's assessment highlighted significant barriers to education for both boys and girls. Despite efforts to promote education, financial constraints, cultural norms, safety concerns, and infrastructural deficiencies continue to impede children's ability to attend and benefit from schooling. The child protection concerns within the community are deeply intertwined with economic hardship and cultural practices. Child labor and child marriage are prevalent issues that significantly impact the well-being and development of children.

### **Access to Education**

#### **Boys' Education**

Boys' education in the surveyed families reveals that while **45%** of school-aged boys **attend school fully**, **35%** only **attend partially**, and **20%** have **no attendance**, indicating significant gaps in educational access. The majority of families (**76%**) have only one or two boys attending school, suggesting limited resources for larger families. The primary challenge is the **lack of financial and material means** to support school attendance, many families struggle to afford the costs associated with transportation. In some areas, public transportation is not available, necessitating private transportation since schools are far from the communities. Beyond transportation fees, there are additional material needs such as uniforms, books, and other supplies that low-income families cannot afford. These additional costs can prevent children from attending school regularly or at all. Followed by the necessity for boys to **help families earn a living**, and issues related to the **lack of civil**

**documentation.** Safety and accessibility concerns, along with a shortage of teaching staff and inadequate curriculum, further increase these challenges. Additionally, boys face difficulties due to schools being damaged or destroyed.

## **Girls' Education**

For girls, educational attendance patterns are similar yet slightly lower than boys, with **42%** attending **fully**, **34%** **partially**, and **24%** having **no attendance**. Most families (**66%**) have one or two girls attending school. The foremost challenge for girls is **financial constraints**, though **cultural factors** play a significant role, with **41%** dropping out due to early marriage expectations and social norms, girls most commonly drop out of school between the ages of 12 and 17. Many girls leave school during the transition from primary to secondary education, typically around grades 7 to 9. This period is critical because cultural and economic pressures often intensify, leading to higher dropout rates among girls compared to boys. Additionally, girls face issues due to a **lack of civil documentation**, and families **prioritize boys' education**. Girls also help families financially and face safety concerns both in accessing and within schools. The shortage of female teaching staff and lack of inclusive curriculum further hinder their education, along with responsibilities for younger or elderly family members.

## **Child Protection Concerns**

### **Child Labor**

Child labor remains a significant concern in the community, with approximately **18%** of families reporting that school-aged children work. This issue is widely recognized within the targeted communities, as nearly (**96%**) of KIs are aware of children under 18 employed in various capacities. The issue of child labor spans a wide age range, typically involving children from ages 6 to 17, with a notable concentration of labor among children aged 10 to 14. The types of work these children engage in are varied; **boys** are more often involved in physically demanding and outdoor labor such as **construction, agriculture, and daily labor**. They may also be engaged in **shops, markets**, and more hazardous forms of employment like **association with armed groups**. On the other hand, girls are more likely to be involved in **domestic work** and roles that might still be hazardous but are often indoors. This includes tasks such as cleaning, cooking, and other household chores. **Girls** might also work in **shops** and markets, but they are less frequently involved in physically strenuous or overtly dangerous activities compared to boys. However, both boys and girls can be found in illegal activities, such as **street begging, theft, and drug trafficking**, although the specifics of their involvement can vary by location and community dynamics. The distinction in labor types is a reflection of societal norms and social roles, which influence the opportunities and expectations placed on boys and girls in these communities. Child labor is prevalent due to poverty and the lack of income sources, particularly in families headed by women or without other breadwinners. The financial necessity driving this practice is difficult to control, as many families depend on child labor to meet their basic needs. The widespread nature of this issue is a result of both economic hardship and the lack of effective regulatory mechanisms to protect these vulnerable children.

### **Child Marriage**

Child marriage is another critical concern within the community. Awareness of child marriages involving individuals under 18 is high, with **89%** of the participants acknowledging its prevalence. Child marriage remains a significant issue, especially impacting girls. A considerable number of girls are married before reaching 18, and many girls experience marriage before they turn 15. Additionally, unregistered marriages, which are often religious ceremonies, include a notable proportion of girls under the age of 14, increasing the issue due to the lack of legal recognition and protection for these

marriages. This practice, while varying in extent, is primarily driven by **economic hardships** and **cultural customs**. Child marriage is more common in rural areas and among economically disadvantaged families. Often seen as a means to alleviate financial burdens, it is sometimes considered a normal practice and not perceived as harmful within certain societal norms.

### **Children's Immediate Needs**

The immediate needs of children in the community are diverse and urgent. There is a necessity for increased **access to education, protection, recreational activities**, and **basic needs** such as shelter, food, and non-food items. However, there is a severe lack of dedicated spaces and services for children. Most community members reported no available or accessible spaces/services for children, with some mentioning limited recreational places for youths only. The lack of safe and supportive environments exacerbates the vulnerability of children and limits their opportunities for healthy development.

## **In focus: Protection of Persons with Disabilities**

People with disabilities in the community face multifaceted challenges. These include significant barriers to accessing basic services, pervasive safety concerns, and severe economic vulnerability.

### **Access to Basic Services for Persons with disabilities**

Persons with disabilities face significant barriers in accessing basic services. The primary challenge is the lack of awareness about the specific needs of Persons with disabilities. This ignorance is further compounded by the lack of accessible physical infrastructure, which is identified as a critical issue. Discriminatory treatment is another pervasive problem, affecting the disabled population. These individuals are often subjected to harassment and face safety concerns, which hinder their ability to access essential services. Additionally, the respondents noted that Persons with disabilities are at risk of violence, including VAWG, exploitation, or abuse. The lack of societal awareness and infrastructural support severely impacts their quality of life.

### **Social Groups and Safety Concerns**

Safety for Persons with disabilities in their communities is frequently compromised. Many individuals reported that the community is unsafe for Persons with disabilities due to bullying, harassment, and the absence of special infrastructure and facilities tailored to their needs. Discrimination and mistreatment are rampant, and there is a notable lack of effective laws or support from the government to protect this vulnerable group. The majority of respondents indicated that the basic needs of Persons with disabilities, such as special chairs and seats, are not met, and there are no designated safe spaces or facilities for them. Safety concerns, coupled with societal ignorance, contribute to a hostile environment for Persons with disabilities.

### **Economic Vulnerability and Access to Income**

Persons with disabilities are among the most affected groups in terms of accessing income resources. These families often struggle to find employment and sustain a livelihood due to societal discrimination and the physical inaccessibility of workplaces. The lack of income-generating opportunities increases their economic hardships, making it challenging to meet basic needs and access services. Economic vulnerability further marginalizes these individuals, limiting their ability to lead dignified and independent lives.

## Conclusion

IRC Iraq Protection Monitoring data from October 2023 to March 2024 highlights the multifaceted and evolving challenges faced by IDPs, returnees, and host communities in Iraq. Key issues identified include barriers to accessing basic services, legal assistance, and education; heightened vulnerabilities due to security concerns, child labor, and child marriage; and the profound impacts of climate change.

Financial constraints, lack of infrastructure, and systemic barriers significantly impede access to essential services such as healthcare, shelter, and legal documentation. Displacement dynamics reveal a complex interplay of factors influencing voluntary returns and the reluctance of IDPs to return to their AoO. The legal landscape is characterized by widespread missing documentation and significant barriers to obtaining legal assistance. Vulnerable groups, particularly children and Persons with disabilities, face severe protection concerns, including exploitation, abuse, and discrimination. Climate change continues to exacerbate these vulnerabilities, contributing to displacement and livelihood challenges.

Despite some improvements, such as increased awareness and slight reductions in specific barriers, the overall protection environment remains precarious. The data underscores the need for targeted, sustainable interventions to address these pressing issues and support vulnerable populations in achieving durable solutions.

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