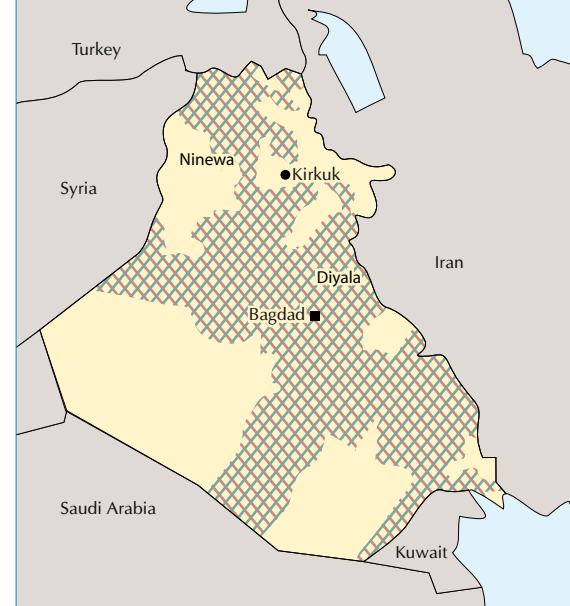


Iraq



Quick facts

Number of IDPs	2,764,000
Percentage of total population	9.0%
Start of current displacement situation	1968
Peak number of IDPs (Year)	2,840,000 (2008)
New displacement	Undetermined
Causes of displacement	International and internal armed conflict, generalised violence, human rights violations



Six years after the 2003 US-led invasion, Iraq remained deeply divided in 2009. Approximately 15 per cent of the population were displaced inside and outside Iraq, and they had limited prospects of durable solutions. At the end of 2009, between 2.7 and 2.8 million people were believed to be internally displaced, close to half of whom were displaced prior to 2003. They were dispersed across Iraq in rented accommodation, informal settlements or public buildings, or occupying private houses which others had fled from. They were relying on the support of host communities as well as national authorities and international humanitarian agencies and non-governmental bodies, including some with political affiliation.

This internally displaced population – equivalent to one in ten Iraqis – had been displaced in three phases. Since February 2006, around 1.5 million people had fled sectarian and generalised violence including military operations by multinational, Iraqi, Turkish and Iranian forces in northern Iraq. Approximately 190,000 people had been displaced by military operations and generalised violence from 2003 to 2005, and close to a million by the policies of the former government of Saddam Hussein, including the “arabisation” of Kurdish areas, destruction of marshlands in southern Iraq, and repression of political opposition.

In 2009, despite continued improvements in security, the country remained volatile. Though there was no further major conflict-related displacement, there were ongoing isolated cases of displacement throughout Iraq including in Kirkuk, Ninewa, and Diyala. In 2009, security measures including checkpoints, curfews and security barriers continued to restrict the movement of people including IDPs. Meanwhile, rising tensions over disputed territory in northern Iraq raised fears of further displacement.

IDPs continued to face a wide range of protection issues. Though the vulnerability of IDPs was likely to be greater, many of these were shared by non-displaced groups. Iraq’s many minority groups faced particular threats, including Christian Assyrians, Faeli Kurds, Yazidis, Palestinian refugees, and also Sunni and Shia people where they were in the minority. Children and women faced recruitment by armed groups, sexual and gender-based violence, and labour exploitation.

Despite the decline in violence, the UN and the humanitarian community continued to report human rights abuses and violations against civilians by militias, criminal gangs, and security forces, with perpetrators generally avoiding

prosecution. Though Iraq was no longer in the grip of a humanitarian crisis, daily life for all Iraqis remained precarious. Public health, electricity, water and sanitation services were inadequate and for the majority of IDPs, ensuring shelter, food and employment remained urgent priorities. Unemployment particularly affected IDPs who had left behind their sources of income and moved to areas where their skills might not be marketable.

The prospects of durable solutions were limited for most IDPs, with policies supporting return instead of other settlement options. Returns were reported, principally to Baghdad and Diyala, but the rate of return did not increase through the year as initially expected. The insecurity and new sectarian make-up of areas of origin, the lack of basic services and livelihoods there, and the destruction or secondary occupation of private and public properties all remained as serious obstacles to their return.

Though hampered by limited capacity and internal divisions, the government continued to take steps to address forced displacement. Centres which it had set up in 2008 in Baghdad continued to help returnees register, receive assistance and resolve property issues. In mid-2009, the government extended support measures adopted in Baghdad to Diyala where it launched its first inter-agency and inter-ministerial programme to rebuild homes and make returns sustainable; the programme focused on 400 villages with high returnee populations, many of which were ethnically mixed.

IOM and UNHCR are the leading organisations addressing displacement. UN agencies continued to expand their presence in Baghdad and in governorates including Basra, Najaf, Kirkuk, Mosul and Irbil. While the UN had access to all governorates in 2009 through operational partners, its ability to undertake effective humanitarian work continued to be impaired by its operational restrictions and dependence on the Multi-National Force in Iraq for security. Critics questioned the effectiveness of the UN’s coordination mechanisms and its ability to accurately monitor operations. Several international NGOs relocated international staff to central and southern Iraq, but due to insecurity many continued to operate remotely from northern governorates controlled by the Kurdish Regional Government or from neighbouring countries. The activities of multi-national forces and non-state armed groups continued to limit the space for needs-based humanitarian action.