



Iraq



Quick facts

Number of IDPs	2,800,000
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	Armed conflict, deliberate policy or practice of arbitrary displacement, generalised violence, human rights violations
Human development index	-

In 2010 around 2.8 million people were internally displaced in Iraq, as a result of repression by the government prior to 2003, fighting following the invasion of Iraq in 2003, and the sectarian violence which followed the destruction of the Askari Shrine in 2006. Around one in every 11 Iraqis was internally displaced.

By 2010, people from the same sectarian or religious group had been concentrated into the same locations as IDPs fled to areas where their group was dominant. About half of the total number came from the ethnically diverse governorates of Baghdad and Diyala. As a result the country was more ethnically and religiously homogenous than at any time in Iraq's modern history. Iraqi society remained deeply divided along sectarian lines, with many minority groups facing particular threats, including Christians of various denominations, Fae'eli Kurds, Yazidis, Palestinian refugees, and Sunni and Shi'a Muslims where they were in the minority.

Tensions remained high in 2010 yet increasingly confined to the disputed areas of the ethnically diverse northern governorates of Kirkuk and Ninewa. While the security situation in Baghdad remained fragile, it had improved to some extent because the major political parties had renounced violence to jockey for political influence. The only identified pattern of new displacement in 2010 was that of Christians from Baghdad and Mosul: following threats and targeted bombings, an undetermined number were displaced to the three northern governorates under the authority of the Kurdistan Regional Government.

Internally displaced children and women were particularly at risk, and faced widespread gender-based violence and labour exploitation. In a country that gives women fewer opportunities than men, internally displaced women and families headed by women had significantly greater needs than other displaced people in the same area.

Many of the vulnerabilities faced by IDPs were shared by non-displaced groups who all suffered from high rates of unemployment, limited access to basic food rations and clean water, and a declining standard of living. However, IDPs faced the additional challenge of the constant threat of eviction as most displaced families were living in rented or privately-owned houses, in collective settlements, or in public buildings.

As the duration of their displacement increased, IDPs in towns and cities faced increasing difficulties in registering for a range of entitlements and services, including food subsidies, schools and voting cards. As most remained unemployed

their savings had been increasingly depleted by rent and other expenses.

Meanwhile the number of returnees dropped in 2010; most returns were to Baghdad and Diyala, the areas from which most people had been displaced. IDPs who expressed an interest in returning voiced concerns about political uncertainty, poor public services and their safety in places of origin where they would be in an ethnic or religious minority. Many of their homes had been destroyed, and if not, they had often been occupied by others. For many, the lack of livelihood opportunities in return areas was also a barrier.

The percentage of IDPs who wished to integrate locally increased from 12 per cent in 2006 to 37 per cent by mid-2010. Until 2010, most government policies continued to favour return over other settlement options. However, at the end of the year, the new Ministry of Displacement and Migration moved to establish a four-year plan to promote durable solutions for IDPs which also recognised the need to support IDPs to integrate in their place of displacement or to resettle elsewhere in the country. The plan also envisaged a survey of IDPs' intentions, a study of the psychological and social impacts of the violence on families, and initiatives to improve access to employment.

Though elections were held in March 2010, the results did not enable the formation of a government until December. The stalemate prevented any improvements in the delivery of public services to citizens. Meanwhile, the intense political competition left little room for reconciliation between sectarian groups or the development of effective policy, and so durable solutions remained out of the reach of the large majority of IDPs.

Though hampered by its limited capacity and internal divisions, the government continued to help returnees to register and receive assistance. The government's inter-agency support programme for rebuilding homes in Baghdad and Diyala helped to make returns sustainable in about 400 villages in 2009 and 2010.

Meanwhile, UN agencies and international organisations continued to extend their presence in the country as security levels allowed, and increasingly took the lead in addressing internal displacement. However, while the UN had access to all governorates through operational partners, its ability to provide effective humanitarian assistance continued to be impaired by its operational restrictions and the lack of security.