

UNHCR Iraq Refugee Returnee Monitoring: 2011 Mid Year Report

Contents

1- Summary of findings:.....	2
2- Regional Iraqi Refugee Returnee Trends	5
2.1. Regional Iraqi refugee returnee trends.....	5
2.2. Possible sources and locations of future Refugee Return to and in Iraq	6
2.3. Government of Iraq Refugee Returnee Assistance:.....	7
3- UNHCR Iraq Refugee Returnee Monitoring: January – July 2011	8
3.1. Introduction	8
3.2. Primary reasons for Refugee return to Iraq from country of asylum:	9
3.3 Iraqi Refugee Returnees specific location of return in Baghdad.....	11
3.4. Iraqi Refugee Returnees to Baghdad access to property.....	12
3.5. Living situation in location of return of Iraqi Refugee Returnees to Baghdad	14
3.6. Income and specific needs of Iraqi Refugee Returnees to Baghdad Governorate .	14
3.7. Iraqi Refugee Returnees to Baghdad Governorate requesting assistance by Government of Iraq line ministries other than Ministry of Displacement and Migration	16
3.8. Personal safety and security of Refugee Returnees to Baghdad Governorate	17

1- Summary of findings:

1. From UNHCR Iraq Returnee Monitoring results more Refugees Returnees to Baghdad Governorate monitored in 2011, compared to 2010, have permanently returned from their Country of Asylum to Baghdad Governorate out of a positive response to improved security and political conditions in their location of return in Iraq rather than needing to return from their country of asylum because as they could no longer afford to continue to reside there. Additionally, the vast majority of eligible Refugee Returnees (97%) monitored by UNHCR in 2011 who have registered with the Government of Iraq Ministry of Displacement and Migration have successfully received or are in the process of receiving MoDM returnee cash assistance.

- A significantly larger number of Iraqi Refugee Returnee families monitored in 2011 (from 31% of families monitored in 2010 to 64% in 2011) claim to have returned to Baghdad from their Country of Asylum out of a positive response to improvements in the security and political situation in Iraq rather than a need to return to Iraq due to lack of financial resources in their former country of asylum.
- Results from UNHCR Iraq Refugee Returnee monitoring conducted in 2011 show that in Baghdad Governorate 97% of Refugee Returnees monitored who had registered with MoDM as a returnee and were eligible for the Returnee Cash Grant had received it within 3 months of applying for it. From June – August 2011 23,507 Refugee Returnee families throughout Iraq have been cleared by MoDM to receive Returnee Cash Assistance Grant of 4 million IQD.

2. While improvements have been made by the Government of Iraq MoDM in returnee assistance delivery to eligible Refugee Returnees (mainly cash assistance), the sustainability of many Refugee families return to Baghdad Governorate remains fragile due to the significant financial challenges many households face (in the form of employment, income and access to property), exacerbated in some cases by mainly medical related specific needs, in the overall context of an improved but still uncertain political/ security environment.

UNHCR Iraq Refugee Returnee Monitoring: August 2011

- Only 49% of Refugee Returnees monitored claimed to have returned to their original house while 65% of Refugee Returnees monitored have been able to return to their original neighborhood and 27% have returned to a different district in Baghdad Governorate.
- There is a noticeable increase (13%) in the number of persons monitored in 2011 compared to 2010 who claim not to have property, and a relatively small decrease in a) the number of families who have lost access to their former property and b) who still have access to their former property.

The above may possibly indicate that:

- more Refugee Returnees, in the absence of other income generating opportunities, may now be selling previously owned property to support their permanent return to Iraq and/or
 - more Refugee Returnees have been able to re-claim their former occupied or damaged property, many with Government of Iraq assistance and/or
 - more Refugee Returnees monitored in 2011 may have never owned property before or after fleeing from Iraq.
- The vast majority (80%) of Iraqi Refugee Returnees monitored who can not live in their original house since returning to Baghdad are living in independent rented houses with a minority currently living with relatives (18%). This may indicate that many Refugee Returnee households lack significant financial resources to purchase a house since their return and/ or Refugee Returnees continue to have uncertainty regarding the sustainability of their return in the context of a perceived improved but still fragile current and future security and political environment in their location of return.
 - 75% of Refugee Returnees stated that their current household income was insufficient to meet the household's basic needs. 43% claim their primary source of income in Iraq is from work in Iraq. 26% of Refugee Returnee families monitored however stated that they had no current primary or secondary income source while 16% claim that their primary source of income is assistance from family and friends (mainly family) in Iraq. The above indicates a prevalence of not only unemployment but also underemployment amongst a large proportion of Refugee Returnees monitored in 2011 which is severely impacting on the ability of many Refugee Returnees households to meet the families' basic needs and may impact on the future durability of their return and reintegration in Iraq.

UNHCR Iraq Refugee Returnee Monitoring: August 2011

- Regarding non-income specific needs (but which may well impact on a Refugee Returnee's 'household' economy): 14% of households claimed to have at least one member of the household with specific needs of which 72% claim general medical related needs, survivors of violence/ torture or have physical or mental disabilities.
- 13% of Refugee Returnees monitored claimed to require returnee related assistance from Government of Iraq line ministries, of whom the large majority requested assistance from the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (applications for state benefits, assistance with regaining public sector work).
- Despite increasing levels of security in Iraq,
 - 51% of Refugee Returnees monitored claimed to feel physically unsafe in their location of return in Baghdad Governorate.
 - 10% of Refugee Returnee families monitored stated that they had experienced security incidents affecting their family or in their specific location of return in the 6 months period before being monitored of whom 37% of refugee returnees and their families claimed to be exposed to abuse/ harassment in the 6 months while 32% stated that they had experienced serious security incidents (kidnapping, murder, large explosion).

3. Regarding future Refugee Returnees to Iraq; when studying the profile of active UNHCR registered Iraqi refugees in regional countries of asylum it would be expected, should conditions in Iraq allow, that proportionally more Iraqi Refugee Returnees may permanently return from Syria and return to Baghdad Governorate. This trend may be amplified in the coming months should the security situation in Syria remain unstable or continue to deteriorate.

2- Regional Iraqi Refugee Returnee Trends

2.1. Regional Iraqi refugee returnee trends

As can be seen in charts 1.1 and 1.2 the majority of Iraqi nationals recorded as returning to Iraq (UNHCR CoA registered and unregistered cases) between August 2010 – July 2011 have returned from Syria and Iran and have permanently returned to Baghdad (31%), Najaf (19%) and Kerbala (15%) Governorates.

During the reporting period the majority of refugees who have returned from Iran comprise of persons who fled Iraq prior to 2003 due to persecution by the former Saddam Hussein Regime are mainly Shiah and have returned to Najaf and Kerbala. Meanwhile the majority of Iraqi Returnees from Syria in the same period consist of persons who fled Iraq as a result of the sectarian violence, most between 2006 -2008, and are more of a mixed religious profile and mainly returned to Baghdad Governorate.

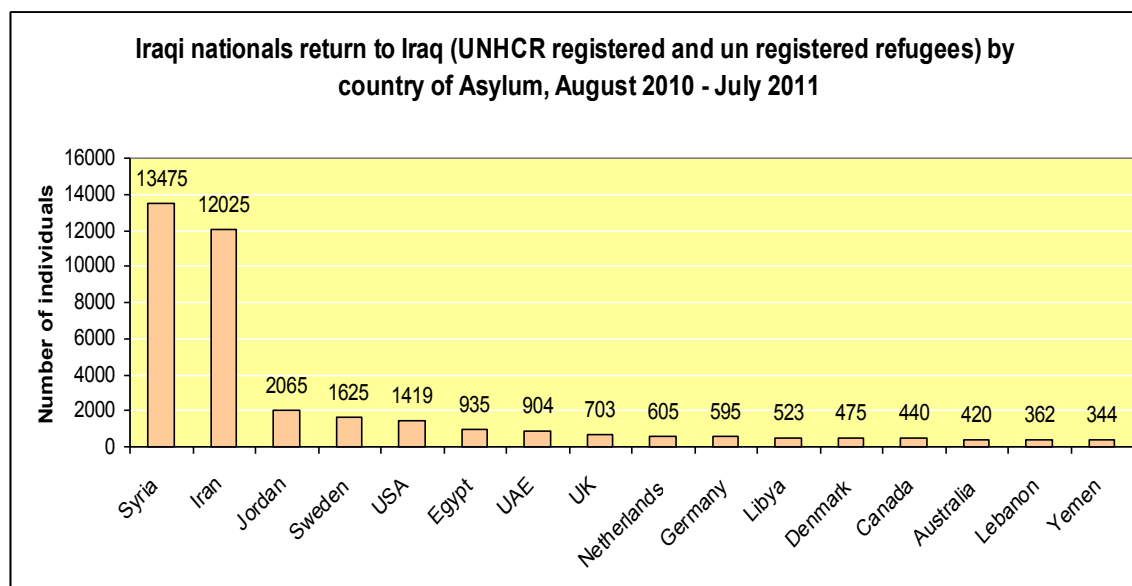


Chart 1.1 Source: UNHCR Iraq: Data Unit July 2011

UNHCR Iraq recorded returnees are derived from Government of Iraq (Ministry of Displacement and Migration) registered Refugee Returnees and Refugee Returnees registered with Local Councils in locations of return in Iraq.

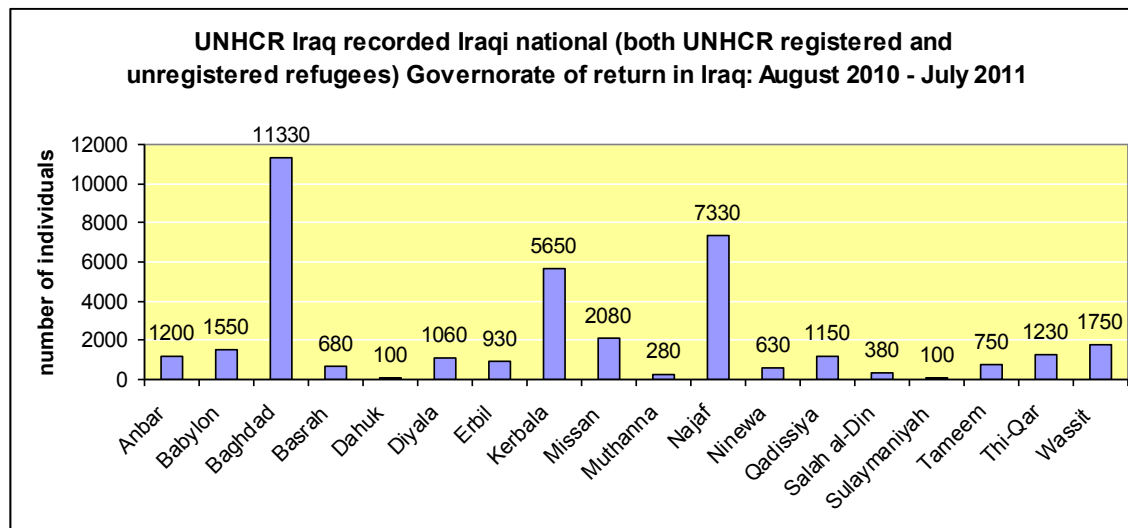


Chart 1.2 : Source UNHCR Iraq, Data Unit: July 2011

2.2. Possible sources and locations of future Refugee Return to and in Iraq

Regarding possible locations of future Iraqi Refugee return in Iraq and regional countries of Asylum that refugee may return to Iraq from.

As can be seen by chart 1.3 over 54% of active UNHCR registered Iraqi refugees currently live in Syria while over 70% of all UNHCR regional active registered Iraqi refugees originate from Baghdad governorate (see chart 1.4). It would be expected therefore that if returns of Iraqi refugees from regional countries of asylum continues, a larger proportion of total regional Iraqi Refugee Returnees would return from Syria and return to Baghdad Governorate in the future. This trend may be even more pronounced in the coming months given the deterioration in the security situation in Syria since March 2011. However, there has been no large scale increase in UNHCR Iraq recorded Iraqi Refugee Returnees in the April – August 2011 period.

The above projection of possible locations of return inside Iraq and countries of asylum where returnees may return from is based on the following assumptions.

1. The number of and Governorate of origin details of UNHCR unregistered individuals in regional CoAs remain unclear.
2. Future political and security conditions in Iraq allow for their permanent return
3. Alternative durable solutions for the majority of Iraqi refugees in regional CoAs remain absent.
4. A sizeable, unknown number of Iraqi nationals, due to their former imputed political associations/ activities (most prior to 2003) may not be able to return to Iraq in the near or long term future.

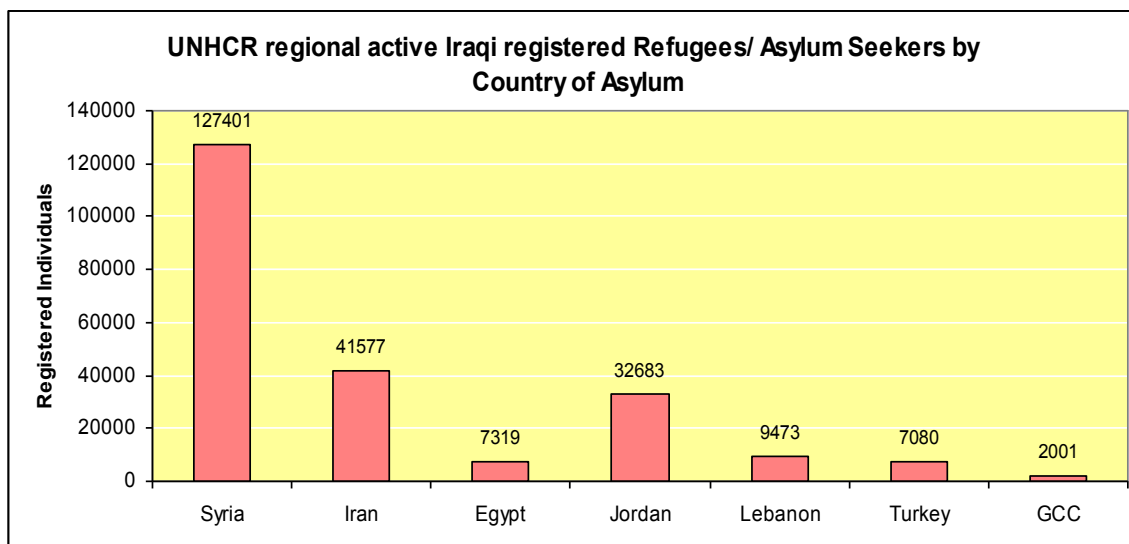


Chart 1.3 Source: UNHCR Iraq Operation Regional HUB: June 2011
 N.B. Of the 41,577 registered Iraqi refugees in Iran 35,777 are registered with UNHCR Iran.

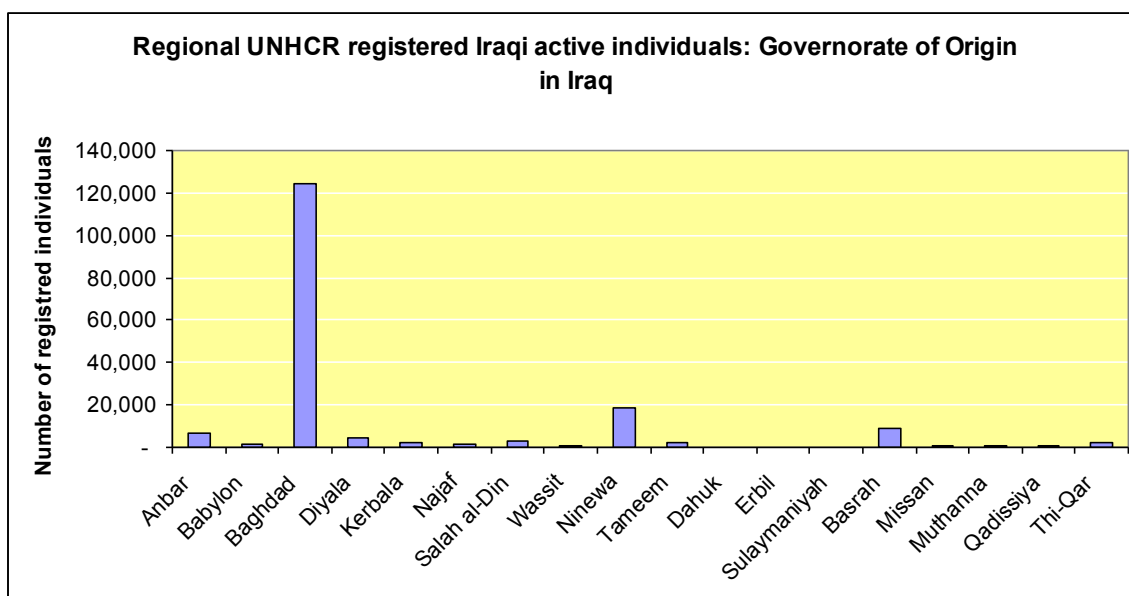


Chart 1.4 Source UNHCR Iraq Operation Regional HUB: June 2011

For more information on Iraqi nationals cross border movement trends between Iraq and Syria, in the context of the current deterioration in security conditions in Syria, including an analysis on types of return to Iraq, reasons for Iraqi nationals departing to Syria (including Iraqi ‘new arrival refugees’), intentions of Iraqis permanent return to Iraq and possible projections of future permanent return to Iraq please see the UNHCR Syria – Iraq joint paper September 2011.

2.3. Government of Iraq Refugee Returnee Assistance:

The Government of Iraq Ministry of Displacement and Migration (MoDM) offers the following assistance to eligible Refugee (and IDP) Returnees who register at its offices in their location of return in Iraq.

UNHCR Iraq Refugee Returnee Monitoring: August 2011

- 4 Million Iraqi Dinar Returnee Grant (increased from 1.5 Million IQD in June 2011)
- Facilitation letter for possible exemption of electricity, water and telephone bills owed by the returnee in the property left behind during the period of displacement
- Facilitation letters for possible regaining of public sector employment (there is additional assistance to highly skilled former public sector workers such as University professors, access to education, property restitution, obtaining missing documentation, passports and letters from the Municipal Council.

Eligible Refugee Returnees are those who either: -

1. Fled between 01/01/2006 to 01/01/2008, being displaced for not less than 8 months outside of Iraq or;
2. Fled Iraq one year prior to 09/04/2003 and returned to Iraq after 09/04/2003 (this group may also be eligible for additional returnee assistance from MoDM including allocation of land)

From June – August 2011 23,507 Refugee Returnee families Iraq wide have been cleared by MoDM to receive Returnee Cash Assistance Grant of 4 million IQD in four separate tranches. UNHCR Iraq has been informed by MoDM that these monies have been or are in the process of being disbursed for collection either in cash at specified banks or through the ‘smart’ card mechanism.

Results from UNHCR Iraq Refugee Returnee monitoring conducted in 2011 show that in Baghdad Governorate 97% of Refugee Returnees monitored who had registered with MoDM as a returnee and were eligible for the Returnee Cash Grant had received it within 3 months of applying for it.

3- UNHCR Iraq Refugee Returnee Monitoring: January – July 2011

3.1. Introduction

Between January and July 2011, UNHCR Iraq Repatriation Assistants working at the Government of Iraq Returnee and Assistance Centres (managed by International Medical Corps) in their two centres in Baghdad (Karkh and

UNHCR Iraq Refugee Returnee Monitoring: August 2011

Resafa), have counselled and monitored Iraqi Refugee Returnees approaching the RACs concerning their motivations for returning, conditions of return, access to returnee assistance and needs for further assistance from the Iraqi Government, UNHCR and other UN and NGO partners.

During this period, a total of 1895 Iraqi Refugee Returnee families (representing 9475 individuals) were monitored of whom 90% were monitored at the RAC offices in Karkh and Resafa and the remaining 10% by Returnee Telephone Monitoring. All monitoring was conducted by UNHCR Repatriation Assistants.

While the monitoring exercise was conducted between January and July 2011 the majority of refugees interviewed had returned prior to 2011 and were approaching MoDM at this time either for new registration or for other returnee related assistance. Additionally due to vagaries in the MoDM registration process there is at times a lack of clarity regarding the year and month of a Refugee Returnees actual date of return. MoDM RAC offices have at times recorded a Refugee Returnees first date of return to Iraq as their 'official return date' despite the fact that they had not registered as a Returnee with MoDM until a later date.

As the returnee monitoring takes place at the MoDM Returnee Assistance Centers, verification of a returnees claims of specific needs or other returnee related issues are not made at that specific location. Individuals and families that do have identified specific needs are counseled at the RACs by UNHCR Repatriation staff and, where appropriate, referred to UNHCR supported returnee centres for further follow up, verification and possible intervention.

More detailed information details on the below analysed returnee issues at the district and sub district level in Baghdad can be provided on request.

Monitoring Results

3.2. Primary reasons for Refugee return to Iraq from country of asylum:

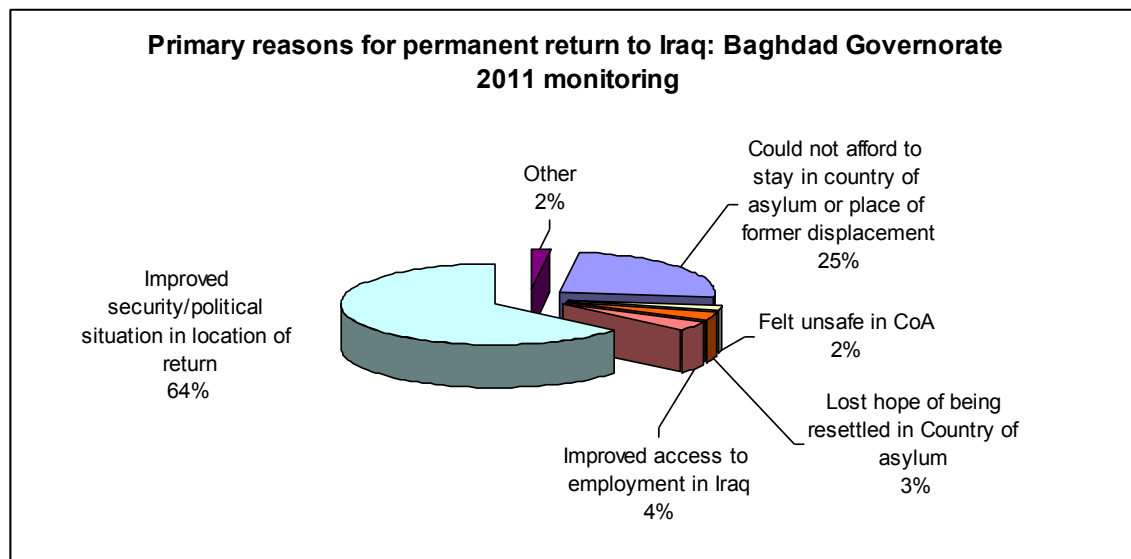
As can be seen by Chart 2.1 the majority of Refugees Returnees site the improved security/ political situation in their area of return as the primary reason for permanent return to Iraq, while a quarter of Refugee Returnees state that they could no longer afford to live in the country of asylum (could not find work and/ or have used all their savings).

The relatively small number of Refugee Returnees who claim to have returned to Iraq because they did not feel safe in the country of asylum in the

UNHCR Iraq Refugee Returnee Monitoring: August 2011

context of a deterioration in the security situation in Syria since March 2011 is believed to be due to: i) most refugee returnees monitored who permanently returned from Syria did before the deterioration in the security situation in Syria in March 2011 and intensification of violence in June - August 2011; ii) despite the unrest in Syria this has not, to date, led to a large increase in Iraqi individuals and families permanently returning from Syria to Iraq, since March 2011 and registering with the MoDM (*please see UNHCR Iraq July returnee report and UNHCR Border Monitoring Reports*).

Chart 2.1



UNHCR Iraq Refugee Returnee Monitoring Jan – July 2011

When compared to Chart 2.2 showing UNHCR Iraq returnee monitoring results in 2010 (which monitored Iraqis who had returned mainly in 2009 and before) significant differences in the primary reasons for return are apparent.

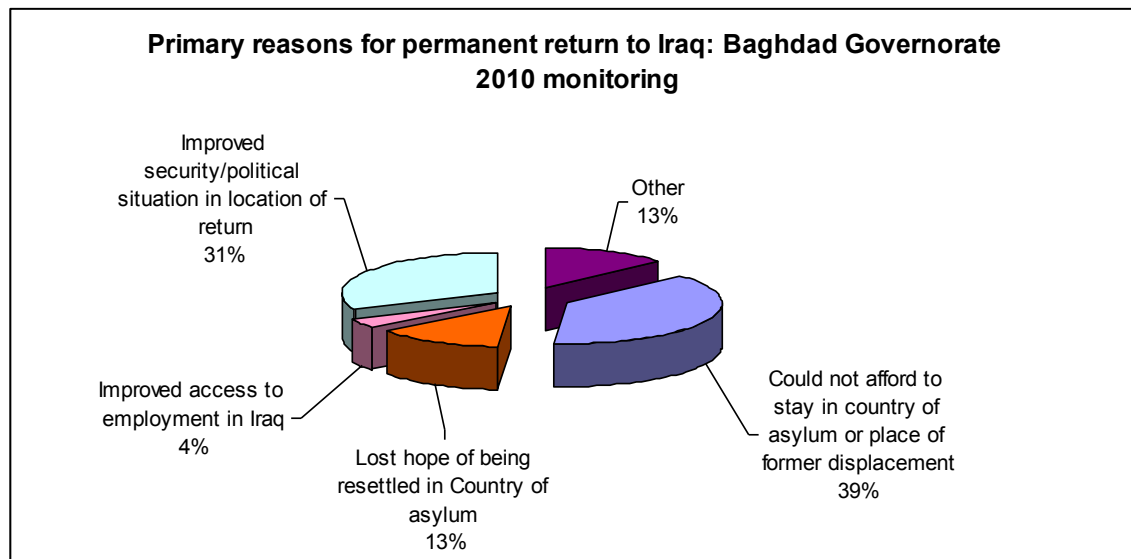


Chart 2.2: UNHCR Iraq Refugee Returnee Monitoring Jan – July 2011

When comparing monitoring results of 2010 to 2011. There has been a significant increase, in the number of persons claiming their primary reason for return is due to the improvement in the security/ political situation and a noticeable decrease in the number of refugee returnees who claim to have primarily returned because they could no longer afford to live in the country of asylum.

The increase in numbers stating the improved security/ political situation in Iraq as the primary reason for return is consistent with the marked decline in all security related incidents in Iraq in 2010 and to an even greater degree in 2011 (despite continued intermittent spikes of violence such as experienced on August 16th 2011) especially when compared to the height of the sectarian violence in 2006 -2008. It also appears to indicate that more Refugee Returnees monitored in 2011 returned out of a positive response to the level of security in Iraq rather than a negative need to return due to lack of financial resources in their former country of asylum.

3.3 Iraqi Refugee Returnees specific location of return in Baghdad

Chart 2.2 below shows that 65% of Refugee Returnees monitored have been able to return to their original neighborhood. Of which 49% of returned to their original (pre flight) house (owned and rented) and 16% to a different house within their old neighbourhood .

UNHCR Iraq Refugee Returnee Monitoring: August 2011

Over a quarter of returnees monitored however, returned to a different district in their original Governorate which is thought to be in part due to certain neighborhoods and districts becoming increasingly homogeneous since 2006 according to sectarian (Shiah – Sunni) divisions.

It is noted that only a very small number of returnees returned to Baghdad had formerly resided before displacement in a different Governorate. Unfortunately UNHCR Iraq returnee monitoring in 2010 did not ask this specific question and so no 2011 -2010 comparisons can be made.

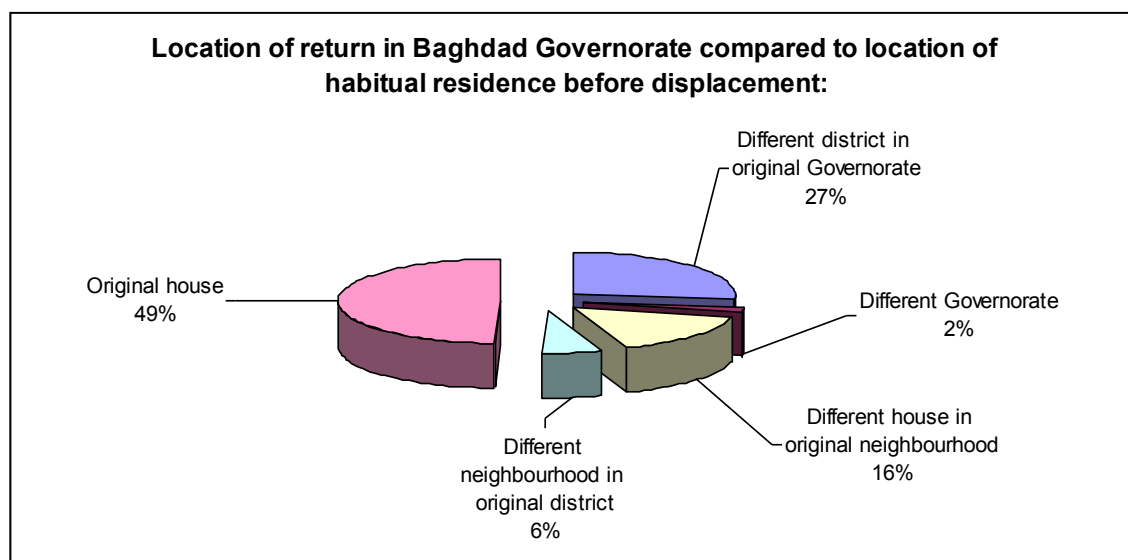


Chart 2.2: UNHCR Iraq Refugee Returnee Monitoring Jan – July 2011

3.4. Iraqi Refugee Returnees to Baghdad access to property

From chart 2.3 below it can be seen that the majority of Iraqi Refugee Returnees to Baghdad monitored (59%) claim to have access to their original property. While 29% do not have property and 12% have lost access to their property.

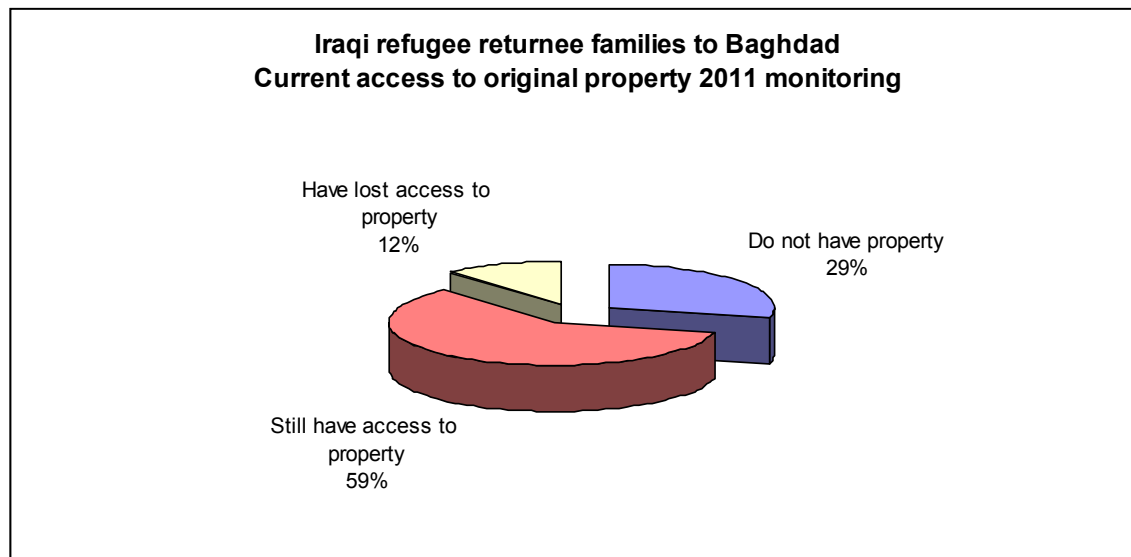
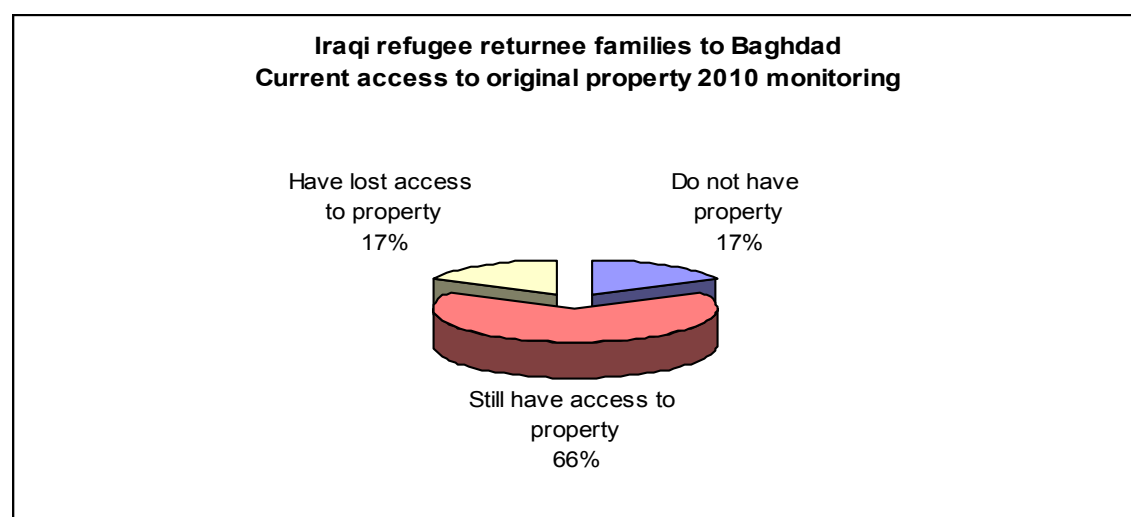


Chart 2.3: UNHCR Iraq Refugee Returnee Monitoring Jan – July 2011

When compared to UNHCR Iraq Refugee Returnee monitoring results for 2010 (chart 2.4) there is a noticeable increase in the number of families monitored in 2011 who claim not to have property, a small decrease in the number of families who have lost access to property and in the number of families who still have access to property.

While further in depth study of these results is needed the results indicate that i) Refugee Returnees who may have owned property may have sold it in order to support their families efforts to permanently re-establish themselves in Iraq in the context of lack of other sufficient income/ revenue sources on return, ii) more Refugee Returnees monitored in 2011 have been able to reclaim their former property than those monitored in 2010 and finally, iii) more Refugee Returnees monitored in 2011 may have never owned property before or after fleeing from Iraq.



3.5. Living situation in location of return of Iraqi Refugee Returnees to Baghdad

Chart 2.5 below shows the living situation of Refugee Returnees to Baghdad Governorate who have not returned to their original house. As can be seen the vast majority are living in independent rented houses with a minority currently living with relatives. While further research is needed, it does appear that of the Refugee Returnee families who did not return to their original house only a very few (2%) purchased a house after return. This may indicate that many Refugee Returnee households lack significant financial resources to purchase a house. In addition, possible uncertainty regarding the future security/ political situation in Iraq may negatively influence a Returnee house holds decision to buy a house, or banks' decision to lend money to potential home buyers.

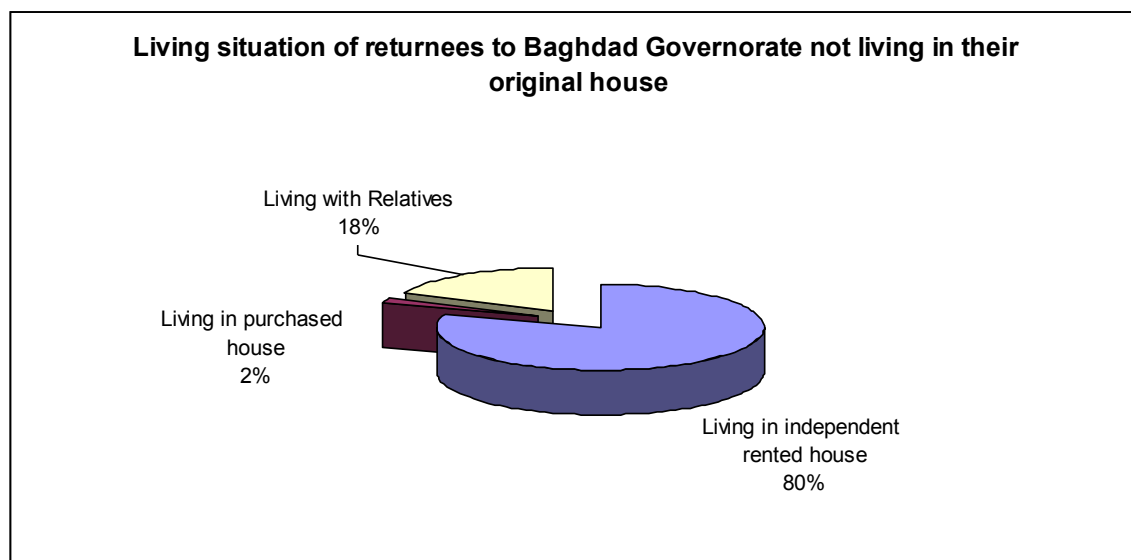


Chart 2.5: UNHCR Iraq Refugee Returnee Monitoring Jan – July 2011

For Living Situation in location of return in Iraq, UNHCR Iraq returnee monitoring in 2010 did not ask this specific question and so no 2011 -2010 comparisons can be made.

3.6. Income and specific needs of Iraqi Refugee Returnees to Baghdad Governorate

Regarding monitored Refugee Returnees claimed income sources Chart 2.6 shows that 43% claim this is from work in Iraq carried out by them or the head of their household. 26% of Returnees monitored, however, stated that they had no current primary or secondary income source while 16% claim that their primary source of income is assistance from family and friends

UNHCR Iraq Refugee Returnee Monitoring: August 2011

(mainly family). 17% of returnees monitored stated that they rely on Iraqi state pensions as their primary income source.

While 43% of Returnees monitored claim to be working in Iraq, a larger proportion, 75%, of Returnees monitored stated that their household's current income was not sufficient to meet their families basic needs, indicating the prevalence of not only unemployment, but also underemployment amongst a large proportion of Returnees.

All Returnees claiming that their current income was insufficient and who fit certain eligibility criteria have been or are in the process of being referred to IOM for assessment and possible consideration in IOM supported income generation projects. Many have also been referred to UNHCR supported return centers for additional assistance where required, subject to verification and assessment.

Due to the nature of the monitoring process no verification of Returnees claims could be made at the RAC location and therefore it is expected that some returnees monitored may give inaccurate information regarding their current economic situation in the expectation of greater assistance.

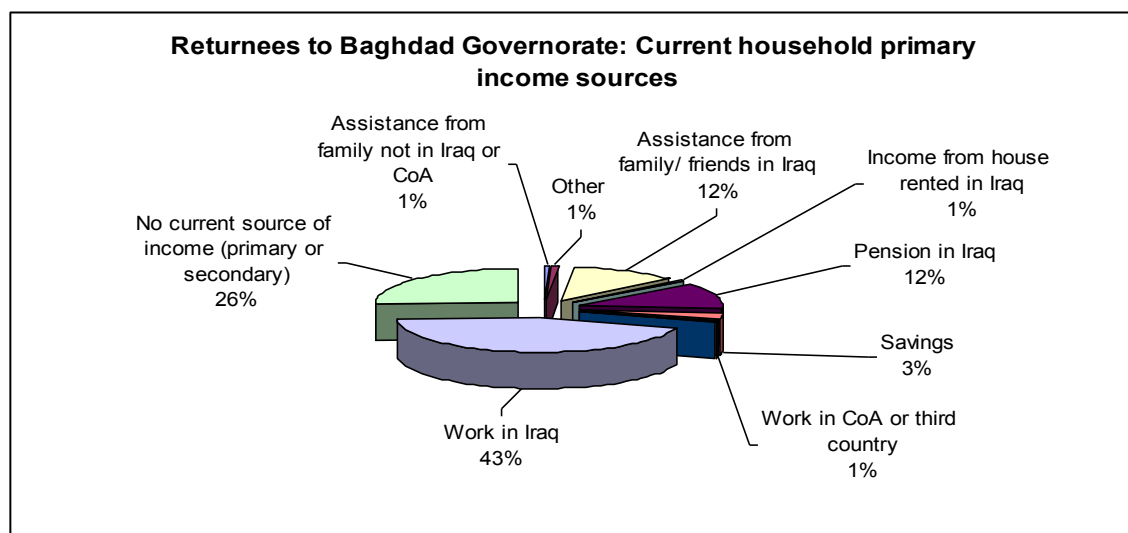


Chart 2.6: UNHCR Iraq Refugee Returnee Monitoring: January – July 2011

Regarding non financial/ income/ lack of employment-related specific needs, 14% of Refugee Returnees monitored claimed to have other forms of specific needs. A significant majority of these Returnees (58%) claimed that they or someone within their household has a serious medical condition (other than a physical/ mental disability or trauma), while 10% of households claimed to contain elderly in need of care or elderly headed households. 18 % claimed to be disabled or have a disabled family member, 6% claimed to be a survivor of violence/ torture and 4% claimed to be female headed households or unaccompanied women.

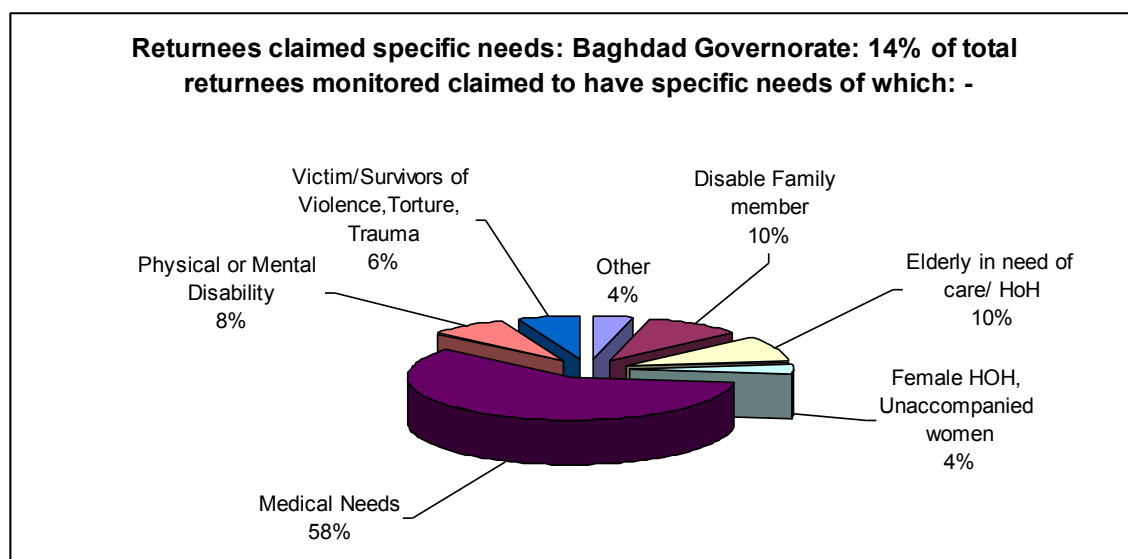


Chart 2.7: UNHCR Iraq Refugee Returnee Monitoring Jan – July 2011

The large number of returnees who claim to have medical needs and may require medical assistance and of households with physically or mentally disabled/ traumatized members is in part linked to the level of violence Iraqis civilians were exposed to since 2003, mainly in the period 2006 – 2008 which has been exacerbated by a public health system that struggles to cope with the demands placed on it by Refugee Returnees.

Due to changes in the Returnee Monitoring questionnaire in 2011 where sources of income and specific needs categories have been updated to increase the accuracy of the interview, comparisons with 2010 Refugee Returnee monitoring results are not possible.

3.7. Iraqi Refugee Returnees to Baghdad Governorate requesting assistance by Government of Iraq line ministries other than Ministry of Displacement and Migration

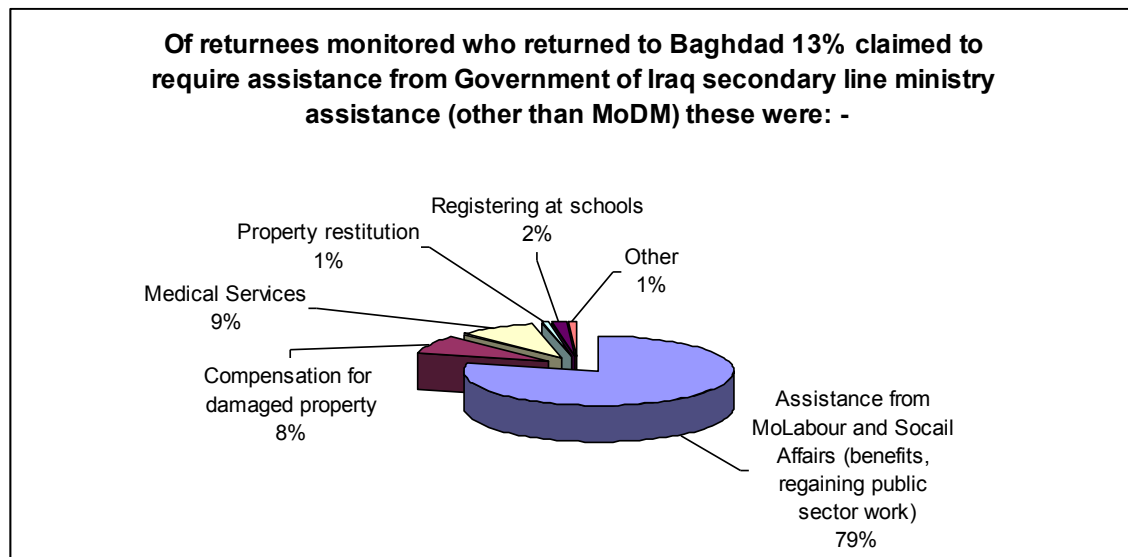


Chart 2.8: UNHCR Iraq Refugee Returnee Monitoring Jan – July 2011

The vast majority (87%) of Refugee Returnees interviewed stated that they did not require additional assistance from Government of Iraq line ministries other than MoDM (mainly in the form of cash assistance). Of the 13% of all returnees monitored who claim to require assistance from Government of Iraq line ministries, the vast majority claim to need assistance from MoLSA for assistance with benefits and regaining public sector work. While a much smaller number were seeking assistance with medical services (9%) and compensation for damaged property (8%). As many Refugee Returnees monitored in 2011 at the MoDM RACs have only recently registered as returnees it is often too early, at that time, their access to the requested for assistance. UNHCR Iraq is in the process of tracking returnees access to GoIraq line ministry assistance, results for which will be included in the next monitoring report in December 2011.

Unfortunately, UNHCR Iraq returnee monitoring in 2010 did not ask this specific question and so no 2011 -2010 comparisons can be made.

3.8. Personal safety and security of Refugee Returnees to Baghdad Governorate

UNHCR Iraqi Refugee Returnee monitoring results for 2011 show 51% of Refugee Returnees monitored felt physically unsafe in their location of return at the time of being monitored.

As can be seen in chart 2.8, of the 10% of returnee families who stated that they had experienced security incidents affecting their family or in their specific location of return, 37% of refugee returnees and their families claimed to be exposed to abuse/ harassment in the 6 months before they were monitored while 32% replied that they had experienced serious security incidents (kidnapping, murder, large explosion).

All cases that have claimed to have directly experienced security incidents were counseled and informed by UNHCR Repatriation staff at the RACs as to UNHCR and operational partners Protection services. All cases requiring urgent intervention were directly referred to the UNHCR Protection Unit for appropriate follow up.

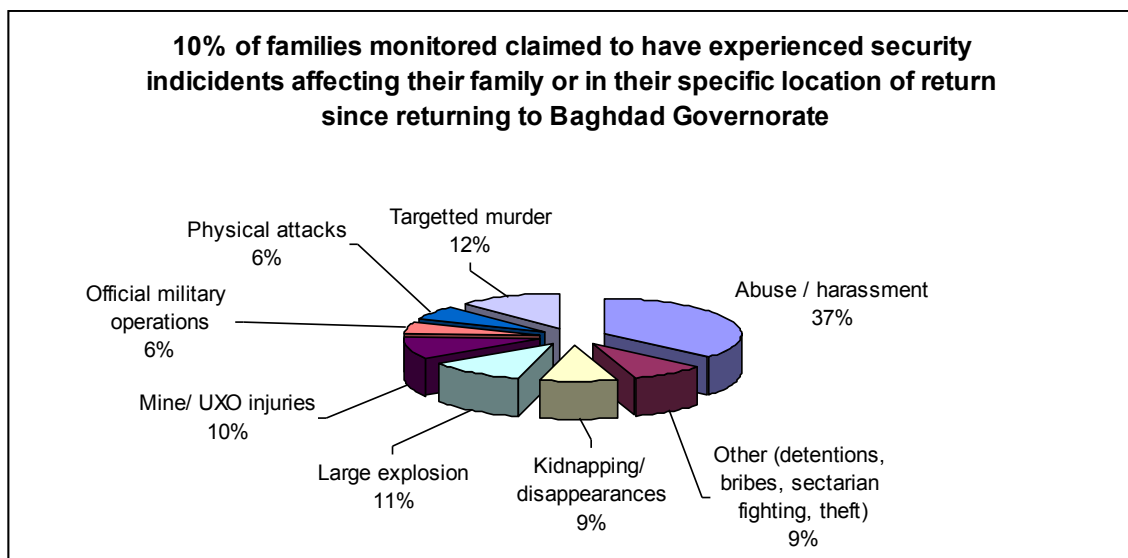


Chart 2.9: UNHCR Iraq Refugee Returnee Monitoring Jan – July 2011

Due to changes in the Returnee Monitoring questionnaire in 2011 where sources of income and specific needs categories have been updated to increase the accuracy of the interview, comparisons with 2010 Refugee Returnee monitoring results are not possible.