

Twice displaced: The unmet needs of Iraq's children in informal settlements

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Acknowledgements:

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Cover photo: A girl stands in front of the door to a damaged tented settlement in Bzebez. Photo: Ahmed Kaka/NRC

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Executive summary

While largescale military operations to combat the Islamic State (IS) group ceased in 2017, 1.18 million people remain internally displaced in Iraq in 2022. The estimated 200,000 displaced households continue to face significant barriers to returning to their areas of origin and achieving durable solutions, especially in the midst of internally displaced person (IDP) camp closures over the last several years. Tens of thousands of IDP families have consequently been secondarily displaced, meaning that they have been voluntarily or forcibly displaced from their current location of displacement to another location.

As a result, an estimated 103,000 secondarily displaced individuals dwell in informal settlements, or sites that host five or more displaced households living in sub-standard conditions that were not constructed to accommodate people.¹ Families living in such sites constitute one of the most complex caseloads currently left in Iraq. Needs remain significant due to inadequate shelter and an absence of public services, which presents particular challenges for the education and welfare of secondarily displaced children, particularly girls.

In early 2022, 615 household surveys and 38 key informant interviews (KIIs) were undertaken to understand the unmet needs of secondarily displaced children in informal settlements in Iraq. Children and their caregivers, teachers, community members, and government officials were surveyed and interviewed throughout Anbar, Kirkuk, Ninewa, and Salah ad-Din governorates to assess key vulnerabilities related to the education, protection, and wellbeing of secondarily displaced children.

Key findings from household and child-focused surveys and interviews include:

Barriers to physically accessing education, namely overcrowding, inadequate school facilities, and long distances to school, have negatively impacted learning in informal settlements.

Secondarily displaced children face additional hurdles in accessing learning in informal settlements as 55 percent of students surveyed stated that their classroom was overcrowded and that many students had to share seats. Displacement was found to be the key cause of overcrowding as families move into new communities and additional resources are not allocated to accommodate waves of new students. Furthermore, educational facilities continue to fall below minimum standards in informal settlements as only 56 percent of enrolled students stated that there was a bathroom available in their school. Ninety-eight percent reported that



A young boy stands in front of his tented house in Bzebez informal settlement outside of Fallujah. Photo: Ahmed Kaka/NRC

bathrooms were not accessible for children with disabilities. Lastly, long distances to access school have led to dropouts as one in eight out-of-school children state that the main reason they are not in school is because it is too far away. Secondly displaced children in Daquq, Kirkuk, and Tikrit districts described needing an average of 30 minutes or more to reach their schools, which was exacerbated by the cost of transportation and harassment and bullying on the way to class.

Secondarily displaced children have been disproportionately impacted by external factors related to the COVID-19 pandemic and the economy.

More than half of secondarily displaced children surveyed noted that their schools closed during the pandemic and that they lacked access to electronic devices or regular internet connection or electricity to actively participate in remote learning. Sixty-five percent of out-of-school secondarily displaced children surveyed stated that they dropped out of school due to the pandemic. School-aged children in informal settlements in Ramadi, Kirkuk, and Fallujah reported that it is too difficult to catch up after missing several years of schooling due their displacement and their inability to access remote learning during COVID-19 school closures. In addition, secondarily displaced children noted that they needed to work to provide for their families in light of deteriorating economic conditions exacerbated by the pandemic. One in five secondarily displaced children stated that a lack of money was a central cause of stress in the decision as to whether their families could afford to keep them enrolled in school, particularly as the associated costs related to transportation, textbooks, and school fees became increasingly unaffordable in informal settlements.

Repeated displacement and exposure to conflict and trauma have an adverse effect on secondarily displaced children's wellbeing and motivation towards education.

Following years of displacement resulting from conflict and camp closures, secondarily displaced school-aged children's motivation to participate in school has reportedly declined. All parents and teachers in key informant interviews noted a decrease in children's ambition toward their lessons as a result of the physical and psychological toll of continuously moving and adapting to new areas. The experience of displacement has also resulted in a higher likelihood of stress and psychosocial needs among children. One-third of children surveyed reported feelings of fear related to past events and exposure to violence and how this has impacted their wellbeing, concentration, and motivation to learn. Secondarily displaced female students described experiences of harassment in the community that have affected their sense of safety and have prevented them from continuing their studies.

A lack of civil documentation remains a key obstacle for unenrolled secondarily displaced children to attend school.

Secondarily displaced children described challenges in accessing documentation in informal settlements as a result of their repeated displacement or in relation to their family's perceived

affiliation with IS. Missing civil documentation was reported as a key challenge in enrolling children in school as 62 percent of all unenrolled secondarily displaced children surveyed lack civil documentation, namely birth registration that is a prerequisite for school enrolment. In Bzebez and Kilo 7 in Anbar governorate and in informal settlements around Mosul, more than three-quarters of unenrolled students state that they are not attending school because they do not have the required civil documents. This has impacted their wellbeing and interest in their studies as a result of the complex, prolonged and costly process of obtaining documents, on top of the additional obstacles they face related to limited access to health services, ration cards, and movement restrictions. Families with perceived IS affiliation in informal settlements face added barriers related to security clearance and many reported being blocked from returning to their areas or origin to acquire needed documentation.

These findings indicate that secondarily displaced children have significant and unmet education, psychosocial, and civil documentation needs in informal settlements in Iraq. They face additional barriers to physically accessing learning and civil documentation, and their mental health, wellbeing, and motivation has been negatively impacted by their repeated displacement.

A lack of investment in improving access to schools, providing psychosocial support, and enhancing access to civil documentation will continue to inhibit the achievement of durable solutions in informal settlements and will have a lasting impact on the next generation. The Government of Iraq, donor governments, and humanitarian and development actors should take tangible steps to understand the needs of children and youth in informal settlements at a district level and invest in policies and programming that address key vulnerabilities related to secondarily displaced children's educational outcomes, wellbeing, and future.



A girl sits and reads outside of her family's tent at an informal settlement in Anbar governorate. Photo: Ahmed Kaka/NRC

Introduction

The rise of the Islamic State (IS) in 2014 and subsequent military operations to retake areas controlled by the group significantly damaged infrastructure and displaced an estimated six million Iraqis over the span of three years. While largescale combat activities ceased in 2017, 1.18 million individuals remain internally displaced in Iraq in 2022. The estimated 200,000 displaced households continue to face major barriers to returning to their areas of origin, which include destroyed infrastructure, a lack of civil documentation, and an absence of livelihood or education opportunities and public services in their areas of origin.

Over the last three years, many internally displaced person (IDP) camps throughout the country have been closed to encourage this population to return to their places of origin. However, the sudden consolidation and closure have displaced many families for a second or third time as they lack the ability or resources to return to their areas of origin. As a result, tens of thousands of Iraqi families dwell in informal settlements, or sites that host five or more displaced households living in sub-standard conditions that were not constructed to accommodate people.²

Throughout the estimated 477 informal settlements in Iraq, needs remain significant as households lack adequate shelter, public services, and access to education and livelihood opportunities.³ Secondarily displaced children in informal sites face additional challenges physically accessing educational facilities and resources, as well as civil documentation. In addition, repeated displacement has negatively affected children and youth's wellbeing and motivation to participate in education across informal settlements.



Nahla, a teacher in Tuz, Salahaddin governorate, leads an Arabic lesson at a primary school for girls. Photo: Ahmed Kaka/NRC

Methodology

To understand and analyse secondarily displaced children's needs, a mixed methods approach was employed to survey secondarily displaced households and interview key informants across four governorates. Quantitative data was collected in early 2022 through two household surveys related to secondary displacement and the needs of children respectively, while qualitative data was compiled through key informant interviews with stakeholders and case studies with children and their caregivers.

A total of 408 households were surveyed across Anbar, Salah Ad-Din, Kirkuk, and Ninewa to assess the immediate and long-term needs of secondarily displaced families. To identify secondarily displaced households, locations were targeted through data from the IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) and Integrated Location Assessment (ILA), the 2022 Humanitarian Needs Overview, and CCCM Cluster analysis. A snowball system was applied in these governorates with each respondent being asked to help identify other secondarily displaced households in each respective area.

In addition, 207 households with children under the age of 18 were surveyed across the same governorates to better understand the experiences of children and their caregivers in secondary displacement. Within these governorates, surveys were conducted in eight districts, namely Ramadi, Fallujah, Tooz, Tikrit, Daquq, Kirkuk, Mosul, and Sinjar. Sampling for the child-focused survey across the aforementioned districts was based on UNICEF's data for out-of-school children for each targeted governorate.⁴

Twenty-two key informant interviews (KIIs) were conducted across all governorates to complement and reaffirm household survey findings in early 2022. Government officials, NGO staff, teachers and school management from each district were interviewed to shed light on secondarily displaced children's key needs. Lastly, NRC conducted 16 KIIs from June to August 2022 to reaffirm findings found in the child-focused survey. NRC staff interviewed teachers, parents, and students to elucidate key trends impacting motivation toward education, learning outcomes, and barriers faced resulting from secondary displacement.



A young girl from Tuz participates in remedial classes after school. Photo: Ahmed Kaka/NRC

Background

Secondary displacement is defined as when IDPs are voluntarily or forcibly displaced from their current location of displacement to another location of displacement and cannot achieve sustainable solutions and thus require continued humanitarian assistance.⁵ Secondary displacement can encompass IDPs that have attempted but failed to return to their area of origin, those that were previously living in a camp that was closed or reclassified, or returnees that have not been able to settle in the same living conditions in their area of origin.⁶

In the context of Iraq, it is estimated that 1.18 million people remain in displacement in 2022, including those that have been secondarily displaced and those whose returns have failed or not been sustainable.⁷ While the Government of Iraq has closed and consolidated IDP camps since 2019 to hasten returns and close the displacement file, many displaced families are still not able to return to their areas of origin as they continue to face barriers related to a lack of financial resources, civil documentation, or livelihood opportunities at home.

Those forced out of camps can seldom return to their areas of origin and are often forced to select new locations out of necessity rather than choice, which has increased the size and number of informal settlements for families that have endured repeated displacement. An informal settlement is defined as a site where five or more families have settled collectively where the land use is not in accordance with approved urban master plans and authorities have not assumed responsibility for its management or administration.⁸ Informal settlements can be characterised by sub-standard shelter arrangements, ranging from tents, makeshift shelters, and unfinished buildings, as well as inadequate services and WASH facilities.

Informal settlements have grown in number and size over the last three years, with 17,416 families dwelling in 477 informal sites across Iraq as of September 2021.⁹ The estimated 100,000 people in informal settlements are often left outside the scope of humanitarian and government services. A 2021 IOM study reports that in 81 percent of informal settlements, the majority of households cannot meet basic needs and are not economically active.¹⁰ More than one-third of informal settlements have an issue with the main drinking source for the site. Due to high economic vulnerability, the majority of IDPs in 84 percent of informal settlements plan to stay in their current location.¹¹

However, as a result of the lack of coordination and specified mandate from the government or non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in informal sites, longer term programming related to



Two boys sit outside of tarps and blankets in front of their tent in Bzebez informal settlement. Photo: Ahmed Kaka/NRC

employment schemes and education infrastructure have not been invested in. There are limited governmental, UN, or NGO plans for supporting this caseload to access services, as well as no clear blueprint for how organisations should approach this in terms of programming. Children and youth in informal settlements thus face significant vulnerabilities related to their education and wellbeing. Insufficient education infrastructure, a lack of trained teachers, an absence of psychosocial support, and incomplete civil documentation impede their educational outcomes.

Geographic scope

Ninewa governorate hosts the largest share of individuals residing in informal settlements in Iraq at 32,300 people.¹² Anbar, Salah ad-Din, and Kirkuk governorates account for an additional 40,000 individuals in informal settlements.¹³ These governorates were assessed by NRC to survey the needs of secondarily displaced children in informal settlements, as indicated in Figure 1. Profiles of the informal settlements in each governorate and the key reported needs of children are detailed below.

Figure 1: Child-focused surveys by governorate				
Governorate	District	Communities	UNICEF estimates of Out-of-School children	Number of child focused surveys
Anbar	Ramadi	Kilo 7	77,000	19
	Fallujah	Bzebez		17
Salah Ad-Din	Tooz	Tooz	66,000	16
	Tikrit	Al-Qadissiah 2		20
Kirkuk	Daquq	Klesa and Alsalam neighbourhoods	59,000	14
	Kirkuk	Kirkuk City		15
Ninewa	Mosul	Al-Obour 2 neighbourhood	224,000	53
	Sinjar	Sinuni		53
Total			426,000	207

Anbar

Anbar is the largest governorate in Iraq and hosts 20,661 individuals in informal sites.¹⁴ Secondly displaced families have been displaced by conflict, as well as recent camp closures and consolidations over the last four years throughout the governorate. NRC surveyed the Kilo 7 community in Ramadi district, as well as Bzebez in Fallujah district.

Kilo 7 is an informal settlement that was previously government-owned housing and now hosts secondarily displaced households primarily from al-Qaim and Hit. Thirty-two percent of families surveyed in Kilo 7 live in public buildings, while 53 percent are forced to live in tents. Eighty-four percent of caregivers mentioned education as the highest need for their children, followed by food and health services.

Bzebez is an informal settlement in Fallujah that has grown amidst the closure of Al-Amiriya Al-Fallujah (AAF) camp. Surveyed households in Bzebez originate mainly from Jurf al-Sakhr and al-Owaisat. An estimated 15,000 IDPs that formerly lived in camps across Anbar have moved to the Bzebez informal settlement.¹⁵ Ninety-four percent of those surveyed in Bzebez live in tents, while 6 percent dwell in a public building. In terms of children's needs, 41 percent of caregivers noted that civil documentation was a priority need among their children, which is exacerbated by the fact that none of the Fallujah sub-districts have a Civil Affairs Directorate.¹⁶ High civil documentation needs have impacted school enrolment as only 12 percent of children surveyed in Bzebez are enrolled in school.

Key barriers for secondarily displaced households in Bzebez to return to their areas of origin include areas being blocked for returns due to security reasons, lacking necessary clearance from authorities, or social cohesion concerns related to perceived affiliation. Families from Jurf al-Sakhr and al-Owaisat described challenges related to security control of their areas of origin that have impeded them from returning, as well as a lack of civil documentation, particularly for families with perceived affiliation.

Kirkuk

Kirkuk governorate is located in north-eastern Iraq and hosts 91,410 IDPs, of which more than seven thousand are estimated to be secondarily displaced in informal settlements.¹⁷ Secondly displaced households primarily live in Daquq and Kirkuk districts following the closure of Yahyawa and Laylan camps in 2020.

Households in Kirkuk district were surveyed in neighbourhoods characterised by secondary displacement, namely in Al-Askery. Secondly displaced families primarily originated from Hawija, Mosul, and Tikrit. Seventy-three percent of the households surveyed own a house, while twenty-seven percent pay rent, suggesting that some displaced families are able to physically and financially access shelter that is more adequate than tents as compared to



Figure 2: Ramadi and Fallujah districts in Anbar governorate



Figure 3: Kirkuk and Daquq districts in Kirkuk governorate

other governorates. Eighty-seven percent of secondarily displaced households in Kirkuk district identified education and food as the key needs for their children.

In Daquq district, secondarily displaced households were surveyed in the Klesa and Al-Salam neighbourhoods. Twenty-one percent of families reported living in an unfinished building, while 43 percent pay rent and 36 percent own a house. Food and health services were reiterated as the key needs of children according to their caregivers.

Community leaders commented that living conditions were better in informal settlements in Kirkuk governorate than in former camp settings, namely due to the ability of IDPs to rent or purchase their own homes. Only one in three households surveyed in informal settlements throughout Kirkuk and Daquq districts reported that they do not intend to remain in their current location.

Ninewa

Ninewa governorate remains host to the highest number of IDPs throughout Iraq, as well as the greatest proportion of secondarily displaced households. More than 32,000 people live in informal sites in Ninewa, particularly as a result of failed return attempts, widespread destruction, and the closure of major camps, such as the two Hamam al-Alil camps which were inhabited by over 37,000 people in 2019 and 2020.¹⁸ Secondarily displaced households were surveyed in al-Obour neighbourhood in Mosul and in Sinuni in Sinjar district.

In Mosul, more than three-quarters of secondarily displaced households live in unfinished buildings. In terms of household vulnerabilities, families mentioned health services as their key need, followed by shelter and food. In addition, half of all surveyed families stated that civil documentation was a priority need for their children, especially following the closure of major camps in recent years. In Mosul, 75 percent of locations in the IOM DTM ILA have no access to a Civil Affairs Directorate within their sub-district,¹⁹ and families who lack documentation widely report not being eligible for ration cards or not being able to send their children to school. Households that remain displaced near Mosul face some of the most complex challenges of the remaining displaced population due to perceived affiliation and subsequent persecution, extrajudicial arrests, and lack of acceptance to return home.

Sinjar is one of the districts with the highest population living in informal settlements, particularly as a result of the infrastructure destruction caused by IS and the military operations to retake the district.²⁰ Returns have been gradual or failed due to the devastation and caregivers indicated that education, health services, housing, and food were top needs for their children.



Figure 4: Mosul and Sinjar districts in Ninewa governorate

Salah ad-Din

Salah ad-Din governorate is in central Iraq and hosts nearly 12,000 secondarily displaced individuals across 55 informal settlements.²¹ IDP households have been significantly affected by camp closures over the last three years, particularly with the most recent closure of Al-Karameh camp in December 2020. In addition, half of all returnees in the governorate are living in informal sites due to poor return conditions.²² More than one-third of secondarily displaced households in the governorate live in Tikrit alone.²³ Secondarily displaced families were surveyed by NRC in Tikrit and in Tooz districts.

In both districts, the majority of secondarily displaced families originated from Baiji. In Tikrit, 55 percent of secondarily displaced households pay rent, 15 percent stay with family or friends, and another 15 percent stay in unfinished buildings and structures. In addition, 10 percent dwell in schools or other public buildings. The high proportion of households paying rent is indicative of a level of integration with the host community in the district. However, financial vulnerability remains significant as 90 percent of caregivers noted food as the key need of their children, followed by education.

In Tooz, the living situation of secondarily displaced households is similar to Tikrit with the highest proportion of families renting (44 percent), followed by living in unfinished buildings (19 percent). Furthermore, caregivers are concerned about their children's access to food and health services in informal settlements.

An estimated half of all respondents in informal settlements in Salah ad-Din governorate reported that they must soon move again as a result of the poor services in their area. Even families renting apartments reported that they do not have the financial savings to continue paying rent in the future, especially as it comes to the detriment of purchasing needed food and medicine for their children.



Figure 5: Tikrit and Tooz districts in Salah ad-Din governorate



A teacher leads a class to his students in Mosul. Photo: Ahmed Kaka/NRC

Key findings

1. Barriers to physically accessing education, namely overcrowding, inadequate school facilities, and long distances to school, have negatively impacted learning in informal settlements.

Secondarily displaced children described additional hurdles that they faced in physically accessing learning in informal settlements. Students and teachers described how overcrowding in classrooms affected children's ability to learn. Fifty-five percent of secondarily displaced students surveyed stated that their classroom was overcrowded and that many students had to share seats. In Mosul, there was an average of 46 students per teacher in a classroom and 43 in Tooz and Fallujah, which has affected students' ability to focus and learn. In Bzebez in Fallujah, none of the secondarily displaced students surveyed stated that all students have their own seat in the classroom.

Key informant interviews with parents, community leaders, and NGO staff also spoke to the relationship between displacement and overcrowding in classrooms and how this has impacted the quality of learning and education. Key informant interviews found that displacement was one of the key causes of overcrowding in schools as families have moved into new communities and the education system has been unable to adapt or accommodate waves of new students. A teacher in Kirkuk described how her school enrolls IDP children that have not been accepted in other schools, which has resulted in overcrowding in classrooms as there are now 200 IDP children out of a total of 350 students. Parents in particular shared frustrations that their children in informal settlements were not receiving the attention they needed in classes to help them catch up due to the number of students in a classroom.

Furthermore, resources in educational facilities are overstretched with the number of students and insufficient classroom space. Only 56 percent of all enrolled students surveyed stated that there was a bathroom available in their school. In Mosul and Tooz, none of the secondarily displaced students surveyed reported that they had a bathroom available in their school. Ninety-eight percent of all secondarily displaced children surveyed stated that bathrooms were not accessible for children with disabilities. Overcrowded classrooms and the lack of WASH facilities have negatively impacted students' comfort level in school, the quality of their education, and retention rates in informal settlements.

Lastly, another impediment to access to education is the distance for secondarily displaced students required to reach their schools. Overall, one in eight out-of-school children state that the main

reason they are not in school is because it is too far away. This was cited most often by out-of-school children in Daquq, Kirkuk, and Tikrit districts who described needing on average 30 minutes or more to reach their schools. On top of the cost of transportation, safety issues, harassment, and bullying were also central concerns expressed by both students and parents regarding the lengthy route to school. The combination of poor access to transportation and long distances can have a disproportionate impact on secondarily displaced children and their learning.

2. Secondarily displaced children have been disproportionately impacted by external factors related to the COVID-19 pandemic and the economy.

The retention rates of secondarily displaced students have been significantly affected over the last several years by the pandemic and its ongoing aftereffects. More than half of secondarily displaced children surveyed noted that their schools closed throughout 2020 and 2021. Although the Government of Iraq designed an online learning platform in response to school closures, secondarily displaced students described their inability to participate in these lessons without access to electronic devices or regular internet connection or electricity. Students in rural areas and those living in tents and informal structures, particularly in Bzebez in Anbar governorate, described how they struggled to regularly access electricity to participate in online learning. In addition, families with multiple children also witnessed added challenges as they required more devices than they could afford for each child to participate in remote lessons.

Nearly half of school-aged IDP children living in out-of-camp settings did not access distance education regularly in the period that schools were closed.²⁴ A teacher in West Mosul highlighted that families in informal settlements in the area did not have mobile phones or devices to access the internet and some students did not participate in remote learning at all for nearly two years. Parents and school administration in Kirkuk and Ninewa stated that this inconsistency and resulting learning loss negatively impacted school retention rates and increased dropout rates even when schools returned to in-person learning.

Sixty-five percent of secondarily displaced children surveyed not currently attending school stated that they dropped out due to the pandemic. They said that even though some received support from NGOs handing out learning materials in their homes, they lost too much time not being able to participate in lessons and now are not as interested in attending school. School-aged children in informal settlements in Ramadi, Kirkuk, and Fallujah reported that it is too difficult to catch up after missing several years resulting from their displacement and from remote learning during COVID-19 school closures.

In addition to issues related to accessing online education resources, secondarily displaced children in informal settlements reported that they needed to work to provide for their families in light of deteriorating economic conditions resulting from the pandemic.

Teachers noted how families that had been secondarily displaced were more likely to face economic hardship, which increased the likelihood that their children would be forced to drop out of school to contribute to household income. One in five secondarily displaced children surveyed stated that a lack of money was a central cause of stress in the decision as to whether their families could afford to keep them in school. One twelve-year-old child in Bzebez said, “Displacement has significantly affected us financially as we do not have a breadwinner. My brothers and I depend on ourselves to support our family.”

The associated costs related to attending school, which include transportation fees and the price of books and stationery, also posed a significant challenge to secondarily displaced children. Transportation was cited as a key barrier for children to access education in informal settlements, which was seen as costly but essential to travel the distances typically required to attend school. Eighty percent of caregivers in Daquq stated that they could not afford the transportation fees for their children to attend classes. A parent in Tooz said that their family could not send all of their children to school because of the high transportation costs. They could barely afford food for their family and the costs of attending school became too high as informal employment opportunities became increasingly limited after the height of the pandemic.

The cost of transportation disproportionately impacted girls as parents stated that they chose to send their sons to school rather than their daughters because it was safe enough for them to walk. Secondarily displaced female children surveyed confirmed that the adverse economic conditions forced many of them to remain at home while other siblings continued with their education. In addition, some teachers shared concerns as one in seven teachers witnessed cases of child marriage in schools in informal settlements.

Secondarily displaced households continue to live the impact of the pandemic and its economic aftereffects as a result of their repeated displacement. This has been manifested in children’s inability to participate in and continue with their studies, particularly as secondarily displaced children and their parents and teachers report that they lost out on an average of two years of school due to displacement even prior to two years of COVID-19 school closures.

3. Repeated displacement and exposure to conflict and trauma have an adverse effect on secondarily displaced children’s wellbeing and motivation towards education.

Following years of displacement as a result of conflict and camp closures, secondarily displaced school-aged children’s motivation towards school has reportedly declined. All parents and teachers in key informant interviews noted a decrease in children’s interest and ambition in their lessons. Children and their families referred to the mental and physical toll of continuously moving and adapting to new areas, teachers, and schools and how children’s self-esteem had been impacted by falling behind in school after gaps in their education. One ten-year-old child in Anbar stated, “I used to love

school and was enthusiastic about it. I never was in a bad mood. But now I hate school and am unwilling to attend again.”

In addition, the experience of displacement has resulted in a higher likelihood of stress and psychosocial needs among children, which has also impacted motivation levels in school. Key informant interviews highlighted how ongoing displacement has had a negative impact on mental health, leaving students isolated from their home communities and friends for multiple years.

Secondarily displaced students described fear for their personal safety as a source of stress, which has deterred them from leaving home and attending school. One-third of children surveyed reported feelings of fear related to past events and exposure to violence and how they have impacted wellbeing, concentration, and motivation to learn. Some children, especially girls, described experiences of harassment in the community that have affected their sense of safety and have prevented them from continuing their studies. These gendered risks to the continuity of education are significantly exacerbated in rural areas, where mixed classrooms present cultural barriers for female teachers in schools and leave female students without a safe learning environment and the support of positive female role models, thereby impacting motivation levels and retention rates.

Others described the impact that secondary displacement has had on the atmosphere in their home, namely family members shouting at each other and worrying about financial and safety issues. Parents and caregivers in KIIs also noted how familial stress weighs on their children, especially as the uncertainty and experience of repeated displacement continues to impact the whole family, their wellbeing, and their future aspirations.

Teachers notably remarked that they lack the resources and training to address and support psychosocial needs among their students. One teacher in a caravan school in Bzebez commented, “Our students’ wellbeing is always a concern. The children lack [appropriate] shelter and many are orphans or in families that have been widowed. They are just trying to make ends meet. They wear the same clothes everyday regardless of the season and they often act out or never speak at all. We as teachers understand because we also have gone through this, but we don’t have the training or skills to support them. We don’t know how to help them after everything they have been through.”

Other teachers commented that while they have received support from NGOs to integrate psychosocial support and training in their classes, there is still a strong emphasis on the use of corporal punishment in schools to address student behaviour. They describe wanting to shift to approaches that prioritise and support mental health and wellbeing for secondarily displaced students; however, they lack additional teachers, trainers, and support from government officials at the Directorate of Education.

Furthermore, plans to move again and uncertainty over living situations in the future has negatively impacted children’s interest in school. One student on the outskirts of Mosul described how her

family does not know where they will settle in the future. They don't have any furniture in their house and her mother has not been able to find work. This has affected her ability to successfully integrate in school, trust her teachers, and invest in her studies. The ongoing experience of displacement and associated trauma with past events will thus continue to hinder not only children's learning, but also their mental health and wellbeing without additional support and investment.

4. A lack of civil documentation remains a key obstacle for unenrolled secondarily displaced children to attend school.

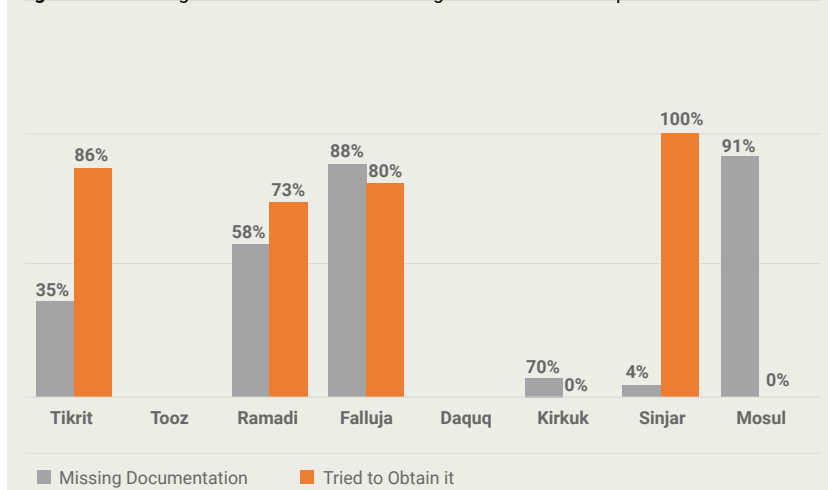
Secondarily displaced households throughout Anbar, Ninewa, Kirkuk, and Salah ad-Din described challenges in accessing documentation, namely Iraqi national IDs, family records, and birth certificates, as a result of their repeated displacement or challenges related to perceived IS affiliation. School-aged children are especially impacted by the lack of documents as Iraqi national IDs are required for school enrolment, even though there is no legal provision mandating this. A lack of civil documentation was thus found to correlate with low educational enrolment levels in informal settlements. Sixty-two percent of all out-of-school secondarily displaced children surveyed lack civil documentation.

Nowhere was this more significant than Bzebez, Kilo 7, and Mosul as more than three-quarters of out-of-school students stated that their lack of civil documentation is the main reason they are not enrolled in school. Informal settlements in Bzebez and Kilo 7 host a large number of IDPs from areas where they cannot return to in central Iraq due to security concerns and control, which has inhibited their ability to obtain civil documentation. In Mosul, the issue of perceived IS affiliation serves as the primary barrier to acquiring documentation.

One hundred percent of caregivers surveyed in Fallujah and 60 percent in Mosul reported missing civil documentation as the most common challenge in enrolling their children in school. Furthermore, Fallujah and Mosul have the lowest percentage of secondarily displaced children enrolled at 12 percent and 18 percent respectively.

Although a high proportion of secondarily displaced households in Mosul, Fallujah, and Ramadi have reported that they lack civil documents, none of the households in Mosul have attempted to obtain the documents, while 80 percent in Fallujah and 73 percent in Ramadi have tried to acquire the documentation. Key informant interviews demonstrated perspectives indicating that paying for food and shelter were prioritised before documentation on the hierarchy of needs, as well as the fact that 75 percent of Mosul sub-districts lack a Civil Affairs Directorate to apply for and acquire documentation.²⁵ In addition to the lack of proximity to these directorates in informal out-of-camp settings, survey respondents also noted potential discrimination and harassment from government services as a result of perceived affiliation.

Figure 6: Percentage of households with missing documents and steps taken to obtain them



The lack of civil documents has had a negative impact not only on secondarily displaced children’s ability to enrol in school, but also their wellbeing, motivation levels, and future opportunities. Parents commented that the complex, prolonged, and costly process of obtaining civil documentation made their children feel hopeless and reduced their motivation and interest in school and other activities. Secondarily displaced children shared that they did not receive enough assistance in obtaining the documentation. A child from Ramadi described, “No one helped me to get these documents because my father is dead. My mother is responsible for us, but she is unable to complete the procedures needed for us to get our documents.”

Further, secondarily displaced children without documentation have limited access to health services, ration cards, and assistance from the Ministry of Migration and Displacement and they encounter movement restrictions on top of their inability to attend school. KIIs showed that these vulnerabilities put children and youth in informal settlements at risk of violence, trauma, child labour and child marriage.

Some of the students and households without civil documentation described challenges related to perceived affiliation with IS and the resulting issues that arise with obtaining security clearance from Iraqi intelligence, a necessary step to apply for civil documentation. The process to acquire documentation is interlinked with security clearance of the children’s parents, presenting further barriers to enrolling in school and amounting to collective punishment. Families with perceived affiliation face significant stigmatization and are frequently prevented from returning to their area of origin due to lack of government approval and civil documents, which has also contributed to repeated and prolonged displacement. Although not required by Iraqi law, immediate family of suspected IS members must complete a legal proceeding that includes a criminal complaint, collectively referred to as *tabriya*, to be cleared to apply for civil documents, which opens up a host of possible protection risks for wives of perceived IS members and their children. A teacher in West Mosul commented, “Society blames these children for the sins of their fathers.”

Secondarily displaced mothers in Bzebez described their inability to obtain civil documents for their children as a result of perceived affiliation. Their children started off as listeners in school, meaning that they could sit in for classes but they were not formally enrolled due to their lack of documentation. Because of their inability to advance to the next grade and take exams as listeners, they grew frustrated and dropped out as they did not see the purpose of their education any longer. Children described their anger and pessimism at the prospect of acquiring civil documentation in the immediate term, which has led them to leave their studies. The lack of accredited and recognised learning will prevent children from acquiring livelihood opportunities and achieving durable solutions in the future.



A boy sits amongst his family in their tent in an informal settlement in Anbar governorate. Photo: Ahmed Kaka/NRC

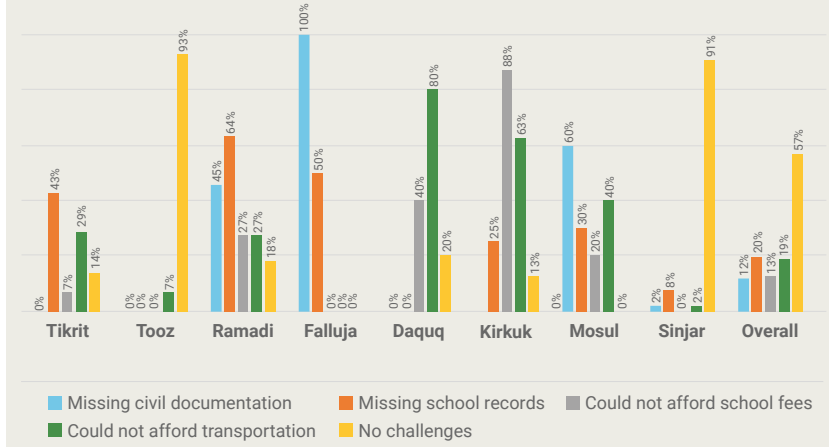
Conclusion and recommendations

Secondarily displaced children have significant and unmet education, psychosocial, and civil documentation needs in informal settlements in Iraq. They face a myriad of barriers to physically accessing schools, particularly as a result of overcrowding in classrooms due to displacement waves, inadequate school facilities without sufficient chairs, desks, books, or bathrooms, and long and unsafe distances to travel to reach schools. Secondarily displaced children have also been disproportionately affected by COVID-19 as a result of the lack of electronic devices, internet connection, and electricity to attend classes remotely, as well as the subsequent economic hardship that has forced many to drop out of school to work and support their families.

Furthermore, repeated displacement and exposure to conflict and trauma have had negative repercussions on secondarily displaced children's wellbeing and motivation towards education. They have a higher likelihood of stress and psychosocial needs that remain unaddressed as teachers and schools lack the resources to address needs in informal settlements. Lastly, a lack of civil documentation remains a key barrier for unenrolled secondarily displaced children to attend school as nearly two-thirds of all out-of-school children in informal settlements lack civil documents.

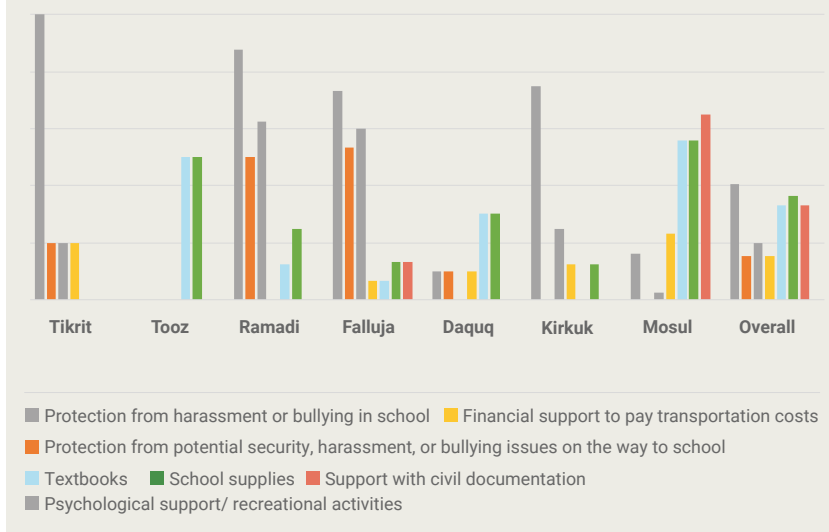
These findings illuminate that opportunities and challenges faced by secondarily displaced must be nuanced with regards to location. For example, in Salah ad-Din governorate, households face significant challenges paying for transportation fees to go to school in the short term and will require new schools closer to these communities in the long term. In Ramadi and Fallujah in Anbar, missing civil documentation is a central impediment to enrolment. Secondarily displaced households in Daquq and Kirkuk districts in Kirkuk governorate face issues paying for school fees, as well as transportation fees. Lastly, households in Mosul also encounter challenges with civil documentation and transportation fees that have impeded the enrolment of children in school and access to humanitarian services. Interventions in support of children in different locations need to offer integrated services that address not only educational needs, but also barriers linked to access to education as well as overall physical and psychosocial well-being.

Figure 7: Challenges encountered by caregivers enrolling their children in school



Thus, recommendations must be tailored to the key vulnerabilities in each informal settlement, as defined by secondarily displaced children themselves, their caregivers, and their teachers. Out-of-school children in informal settlements described the support required to help them access education. Forty-one percent highlighted psychosocial support; 36 percent report provision of school supplies; and 33 percent emphasize support with civil documentation. Others pointed to financial support to pay for transportation, as well as protection from harassment and bullying.

Figure 8: Unenrolled children’s opinions on the support required to access education



The following recommendations detail policies and programming that can address the unmet education, psychosocial, and education needs in informal settlements, developed from the voices and perspectives of secondarily displaced children and their families in Iraq.

Ministry of Education and Directorates of Education (DoEs):

- Invest in school facilities in informal settlements to ensure there are adequate desks, seats, and accessible WASH facilities in schools.
- Resume recruitment of teachers and payment of salaries to teachers in informal settlements.
- Adapt reintegration services for secondarily displaced children in informal settlements to consider years out of school as a result of conflict, displacement, and COVID-19. Introduce accelerated education programming opportunities in communities where children have been out of school for multiple years
- Provide schools with the resources to subsidise transportation costs for students in the short term with an emphasis on female students. In the long term, advocate for the opening of new schools closer to communities according to population density.
- Offer training for teachers and school administration staff on psychosocial support and wellbeing.
- Organize meetings between DoEs and Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs) to discuss community-led solutions to key barriers faced by secondarily displaced children and youth.
- Allow for students without complete civil documentation to attend reintegration services and formal education and take final exams at the end of the school year in the immediate term.

Ministry of Interior:

- Streamline the processes for secondarily displaced households to acquire complete civil documentation for undocumented children born during the conflict.
- Ensure the reopening and full functionality of Civil Affairs Directorates in close proximity to informal settlements.
- Authorise court proceedings for secondarily displaced families in their location of displacement for those who cannot return to their area of origin.

Donors

- Increase investment in school infrastructure and teacher training for schools in informal settlements with secondarily displaced children.
- Prioritise funding for programming in informal settlements to address key unmet needs children face related to education, their wellbeing, and civil documentation.
- Advocate to the Government of Iraq (GoI) of the necessity to support secondarily displaced families and improve public services and educational and livelihood opportunities in informal settlements.

Humanitarian and Development Actors:

- Offer psychosocial support training to teachers and school administration to enhance capacity related to addressing displacement-related trauma and integrating psychosocial aspects into daily curriculum.
- Support the GoI with the implementation of the Safe Schools Declaration commitments to prioritise the safety of students, teachers, and schools.
- Provide support to students who have safety concerns traveling to school in terms of subsidised transportation and/or supervisors to accompany children to the school building with a specific emphasis on girls. Work with communities to develop solutions to accessing schools, such as a walk to school campaign.
- Develop additional accelerated education programming for secondarily displaced children who missed out on years of school due to both displacement and inability to access remote learning during COVID-19.
- Provide financial support for the associated costs of attending school, namely registration fees, transportation costs, and the price of textbooks and school supplies.
- Administer legal assistance for secondarily displaced households with children who lack civil documentation in informal settlements.
- Support the local implementation of the written communication from Ninewa and Salah ad-Din governorate authorities allowing children without documentation to attend school and sit for exams.



Primary school children sit in a caravan classroom in the Bzebez informal settlement.
Photo: Ahmed Kaka/NRC

Endnotes

- 1 [OCHA, Iraq Humanitarian Snapshot, September 2021; CCCM Cluster Iraq, Technical Guidance on Informal Site Definition, September 2020.](#)
- 2 [CCCM Cluster Iraq, Technical Guidance on Informal Site Definition, September 2020.](#)
- 3 [OCHA, Iraq Humanitarian Snapshot, September 2021.](#)
- 4 [UNICEF & MICS-EAGLE, Iraq Education Fact Sheets, 2020.](#)
- 5 [IOM Iraq, Re-Displaced: An Exploration of Displacement after Attempted Return in Iraq, February 2020.](#)
- 6 [OCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview: Iraq, Humanitarian Programme Cycle, March 2022; IOM Iraq, Re-Displaced: An Exploration of Displacement after Attempted Return in Iraq, February 2020.](#)
- 7 [IOM Iraq, Displacement Tracking Matrix: Displacement Index, 2022.](#)
- 8 [CCCM Cluster Iraq, Technical Guidance on Informal Site Definition, September 2020.](#)
- 9 [OCHA, Iraq Humanitarian Snapshot, September 2021.](#)
- 10 [IOM Iraq, Informal Sites Assessment 2020-2021, November 2021.](#)
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- 12 [OCHA, Iraq Humanitarian Snapshot, September 2021.](#)
- 13 [Ibid.](#)
- 14 [Ibid.](#)
- 15 [OCHA, Iraq Humanitarian Bulletin, November- December 2021.](#)
- 16 [IOM Iraq, Overview of Internal Displacement in Iraq: DTM Integrated Location Assessment VI, 2021.](#)
- 17 [OCHA, Iraq Humanitarian Snapshot, September 2021.](#)
- 18 [Ibid.](#)
- 19 [IOM Iraq, Overview of Internal Displacement in Iraq: DTM Integrated Location Assessment VI, 2021.](#)
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- 22 [IOM Iraq, Overview of Internal Displacement in Iraq: DTM Integrated Location Assessment VI, 2021.](#)
- 23 [Ibid.](#)
- 24 [REACH, Iraq Multi-Cluster Needs Assessment, 2021.](#)
- 25 [IOM Iraq, Overview of internal displacement in Iraq: DTM Integrated Location Assessment VI, 2021.](#)



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