

# MIGRATION INTO A FRAGILE SETTING:

RESPONDING TO CLIMATE-INDUCED  
INFORMAL URBANIZATION AND INEQUALITY  
IN BASRA, IRAQ



## ABOUT IOM

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) is committed to the principle that humane and orderly migration benefits migrants and society. As an intergovernmental organization, IOM acts with its partners in the international community to: assist in meeting the operational challenges of migration; advance understanding of migration issues; encourage social and economic development through migration; and uphold the human dignity and well-being of migrants.

The information contained in this report is for general information purposes only. Names and boundaries do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the International Organization for Migration (IOM). IOM Iraq endeavours to keep this information as accurate as possible but makes no claim – expressed or implied – on the completeness, accuracy and suitability of the information provided through this report.

© 2021 International Organization for Migration (IOM)

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise without the prior written permission of the publisher.

## ABOUT SOCIAL INQUIRY

Social Inquiry is an Iraq-based not-for-profit research institution focused on influencing policy and praxis that establishes civic trust and repairs social fabric within and between fragile communities, and communities and the state. Its research focuses on three thematic rubrics: (i) social cohesion and fragility, (ii) transitional justice and reconciliation, and (iii) post-conflict political economy, exploring intersecting political, social, psychological, economic, and historical dimensions within these themes.

This study is funded by the US State Department's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM)

© 2021 International Organisation for Migration (IOM)

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise without the prior written permission of the publisher.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary	4
Introduction	5
Research Aims and Organization	6
Methodology	6
Estimating the Size of the Migrant Population in Basra	7
Who Is Migrating?	8
Permanence of the Decision to Migrate	8
Where Do Migrants Live in the City and Why?	10
Livelihood Opportunities and the Economic Situation in Basra	11
A Look at Recruitment and Participation in Security Forces as a Livelihoods Option	13
Housing and Occupancy Rights in Basra	14
Risk of Informality: Large-Scale Evictions	16
Experiences of Exclusion in the City	17
Protection and Safety in Basra	18
How Do Security Issues Translate into People’s Feelings of Safety?	19
Overlapping Fragility	21
Final Considerations	23
Data Annex	24

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- This report draws on the results from data covering 802 residents of Basra City (710 local residents and 92 migrants within the last decade), across 49 streets, to identify the particular issues facing high-migration parts of the city that hinder migrants' ability to sustainably and peacefully integrate in an already fragile urban setting. Data collection was conducted in July and August 2021.
- The migrant population corresponds to 12 per cent of the city's total inhabitants, as estimated from the sample collected. Ninety-one per cent of migrant respondents are originally from rural areas in neighboring governorates (mostly Missan) or other districts of Basra governorate. The two largest drivers for migration, by far, are lack of economic opportunities (52%) and water scarcity (49%), which in rural areas both factors go hand by hand given the magnitude of environmental degradation and impact on rural livelihoods. Migration seems to be a permanent decision (as opposed to seasonal) given that selling land, livestock, and their house in the place of origin are the most common strategies sought to facilitate movement. Only 16 per cent of migrants report still owning farmland in their place of origin, compared to 56 per cent before displacement. In addition, in the vast majority of cases, the whole family migrated. Finally, a mapping of the location of migrant families indicates that they are mostly found not only in newly developed, former agricultural areas in the outskirts of the city, but also within old and degraded clusters in the city center.
- Results for livelihoods and domestic economic situation point to a scenario not much different from other migrant-recipient contexts. More than 90 per cent of both migrant and local households have at least one income earner, suggesting high rates of occupation. While this is positive, most of the employment among migrant families seems to be found in low-wage jobs in the informal sector, and working in businesses or workshops (mostly construction, transportation, and menial work in bazars). This leads to a finding that 53 per cent of the migrant households self-reportedly cannot afford enough food or at least basic items. Another 53 per cent do not have access to a financial safety net (e.g. assets, saving, or borrowing), which puts them in a vulnerability situation in the event of a shock. Access to better livelihood opportunities for many migrants might be also handicapped by the fact that more than 40 per cent of them are illiterate. This contrasts with a socio-economic situation for local households that mostly rely on government employment and report better affordability status and financial nets.
- In terms of housing and occupancy rights, informality is an issue shared by many households in the city, migrant or not. Results indicate that a significant part of the city lacks public infrastructure like street pavement, public lighting, or official water connections. In high-migration areas, it is also relatively common that households live in rudimentary housing (43% of them) or other more critical shelters (11% of them). The most critical indicator, however, is the formality of land and house ownership. In here, it is found that only 46 per cent of households in low-migration neighborhoods and 16 per cent in high-migration neighborhoods have a regular ownership situation characterized by purchased and registered private residential land. The rest of the households fall into a variety of irregular arrangements, mainly consisting of families building their house on public land without official permission. This situation is prone to large scale eviction by public authorities – as such, 37 per cent of the households in high-migration areas have reportedly been threatened with eviction. In these situations, affected households rely on informal actors such as tribes to mobilize and contest any attempt to clear the settlement. Finally, other rights issues beyond housing referred to access to public services and other administrative rights. In this regard, migrants tend to report higher levels of exclusion from these rights than local residents; however, migrants who live in high-migration areas report this at even higher rates than those in low-migration areas, thus pointing to structural, geographically localized issues rather than issues based on the nature of the individual.
- Perceptions and experiences of insecurity are relatively similar across residents, both locals and migrants. The main social issues and incidents are related to four large categories: tribal conflicts, unemployment, problems created by lack of services, and drugs and alcohol trafficking and abuse. This last one is seen with concern given its emerging magnitude in recent years. This situation translates into rather significant feelings of living in a weak environment in terms of security, with 31 per cent of residents and 43 per cent of migrants indicating that they are concerned about the level of crime in their neighborhood. Residents, however, maintain a high degree of personal safety, in that they tend not to fear that their person (or their family) will be exposed to suffer violence – 84 per cent of residents and 80 per cent of migrants agree that their personal safety is currently ensured, for example.

- An integrated analysis of these dynamics in Basra as a whole concludes that there is a high correlation between economic struggle, housing/occupancy rights vulnerability, and insecurity. These issues coexist and overlap in many parts of the city, further increasing its social fragility. For climate migrants arriving to the city, findings seem to also show that they tend to fall within this fragile fabric, clustering in poorer, less formal, and less safe areas of the city. Intervening in this context thus calls for system-wide and area-based actions. This is a challenging task taking into account that the social climate is similarly fragile and prone to eruption. For instance, more than two thirds of local residents and migrants alike currently feel marginalized or neglected. Confidence in public institutions is extremely low, with 74 per cent of residents indicating

they have little or no confidence in the local or provincial authorities. Confidence in informal actors, such as tribal or religious actors or civil society, is reported at only slightly higher rates.

- Finally, this report puts forward the need for a two-pronged approach that focuses on enhancing the adaptation capacity of recipient areas such as Basra (and other close-by urban areas) to an increasing population, at the same time as attention is kept on districts currently forcing families to migrate – mostly the rural, neglected hinterland that is the scenario of extreme environmental degradation, absence of diversified economic opportunities, and poor public infrastructure and provision.

## INTRODUCTION

Environmental degradation is increasingly and strongly felt in the southern governorates of Iraq. A gradual but consistent decrease of water flow and water quality over the last decades, and worsening in the last 10 years in particular, has meant that the agricultural sector, traditionally the main workforce employer in rural areas, is unable to guarantee sufficient and sustainable livelihoods for the communities living there.<sup>1</sup> A direct consequence of this maladaptation is the forced migration of rural populations, oftentimes towards nearby urban areas including Basra, Nassiriya, and Amara in search of better opportunities to sustain their lives.

This climate-induced migration is made even more difficult when considering the wider degradation in economic security and governance that both rural and urban populations of the south continue to face. In terms of economic security, the state has become less able to expand public employment and absorb unemployed youth into its payroll as it has traditionally done.<sup>2</sup> The crisis in the public sector, coupled with a weak private sector, works to downgrade people's economic prospects and increase their risk of falling into poverty. Linked to this and with respect to governance, people's anger over the absence of institutional responsiveness spilled into mass protests that were violently put down, leaving their root causes unaddressed, which may further entrench fragility and the potential for additional unrest.<sup>3</sup>

Given this, cities in the south of Iraq may not be well prepared to absorb this recent (and likely increasing) influx of population. Migrants are attempting to settle into complex new environments with potentially limited financial and social capital, which may impact their ability to access civil and administrative rights. These include access to employment and service provision, policing and/or formal dispute resolution, guarantees on property rights, and voice and agency, among others. Local residents may also face issues in accessing these rights as well. All of this, when combined, can further weaken urban dynamics in already struggling cities. Thus, understanding climate-induced migration patterns and the resultant dynamics in the communities in which they take place is a critical step toward seeking to staunch the fragility found both in the cities migrants move to and the places they come from, improving access to rights and durable solutions.

This trend and consequent dynamics is the focus of this report. The city of Basra serves as a critical case study to unpack the situation of migrants in fragile urban areas and identify potential interventions to mitigate their impacts as well as place a value on measures aimed at preventing drivers in places of origin. Basra is the largest urban area in the south, with considerable social, economic, and political importance, and it is historically known as a center for migration inflows in the region more generally.

1 Roger Guiu, *When Canals Run Dry: Displacement Triggered by Water Stress in the South of Iraq* (Geneva / Erbil: IDMC, Social Inquiry, NRC, 2020).

2 Ali Al-Mawlawi, *Public Payroll Expansion in Iraq: Causes and Consequences* (London: LSE Middle East Centre, 2019).

3 International Crisis Group, *Iraq's Tishreen Uprising: From Barricades to Ballot Box* (Baghdad / Brussels: ICG, 2021).

## RESEARCH AIMS AND ORGANIZATION

This research draws upon an original dataset collected among both migrants and long-term residents in Basra. It aims to identify the particular issues facing climate migration-heavy parts of the city that hinder migrants' ability to sustainably and peacefully integrate in fragile urban settings

– with particular attention paid to issues related to livelihoods and economic security, equality of rights (especially on housing), and protection/safety – by comparing conditions in different neighborhoods across the city as well as individual migrants and locals.

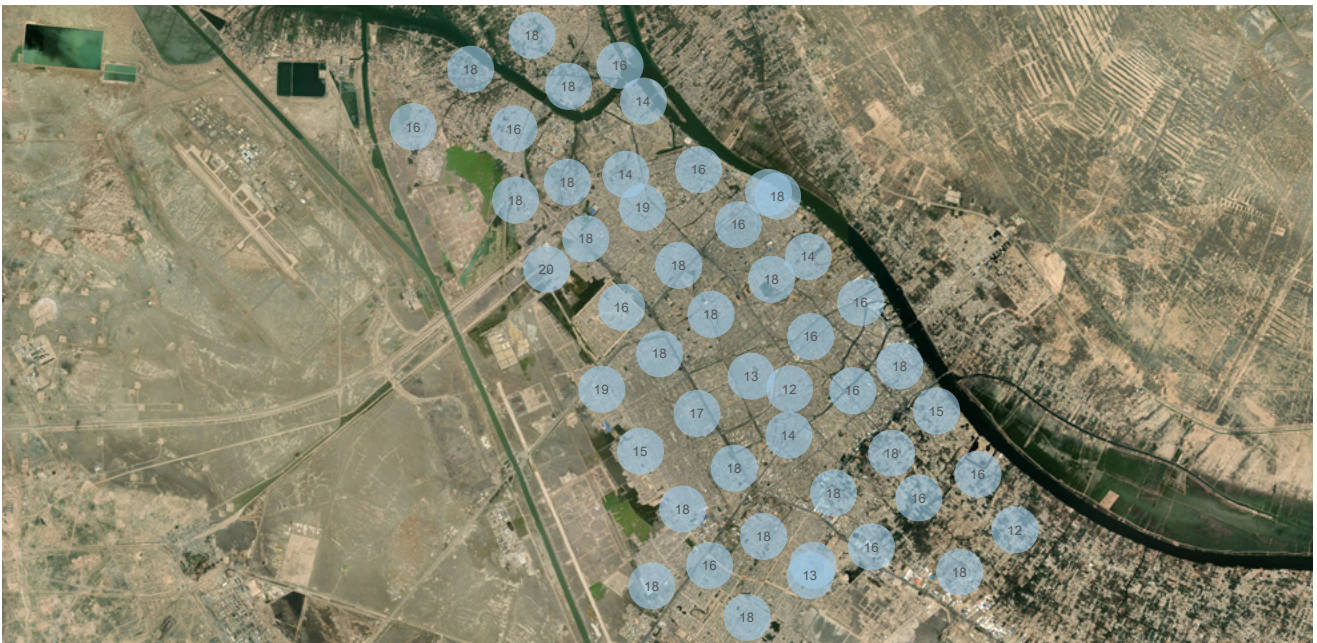
## METHODOLOGY

The research entailed conducting an original survey of 802 residents in the city of Basra, administered by IOM's field researchers with a gender-balanced local field team in July and August 2021.<sup>4</sup>

Sampling was organized by street and, within each street, all houses were surveyed in order to generate full representation of each segment. The aim of this configuration was to generate a multi-level analysis that included residents' personal and household characteristics as well as a characterization of the common environment in which they lived. As such, streets were selected utilizing a grid system (i.e., those streets on the map where the axis of the overlaid grid

crossed served as geographical points), as showed in Figure 1. This allowed for the coverage of streets across the whole urban landscape, ensuring a diversity of both individual and urban conditions. Within the sampled households, one individual was randomly selected to take part in the study without limiting participation to heads of household, thus generating a sample statistically representative of the overall city's population.

Figure 1. Distribution of streets sampled in Basra Center and respondents therein



4 The "boundaries" of the city of Basra considered for data collection included new neighborhoods that sprawled outside of the administrative demarcation of Basra Centre subdistrict and officially fall within other districts, such as Al-Hartha in the north and Abu al-Khaseeb in the south. These neighborhoods, for the purpose of this research, are considered organic extensions of Basra's urban fabric in spite of being in a different administrative jurisdiction.

In total, 49 streets were sampled for a final sample size of 802 respondents. The sample breakdown consists of 596 male respondents (74%) and 206 female respondents (26%). The bulk of respondents fall within the ages of 31 to 50 years (48%).

The survey tool inquired about topics along the following modules (in addition to demographics):

- Migration dynamics (only for respondents categorized as migrants, see below);
- Livelihoods and economic situation;
- Housing situation;
- Perceptions on governance and participation;
- Protection and safety;
- Street-level social cohesion;
- Intentions.

### ESTIMATING THE SIZE OF THE MIGRANT POPULATION IN BASRA

A specific question in the survey tool was used to categorize respondents either as local residents or as migrants. For the purposes of this study, a migrant household is one that has been living in the city of Basra for 10 years or less. The ten-year interval to define a migrant is justified by the fact that environmental degradation and climate impacts have increased significantly in that time frame until the present. As shown in Figure 2, 92 respondents fall in this category and are classified as migrants, while 710 respondents are classified as locals. Because the aim of the study was to generate a representative sample of the city's population, purposive sampling was not conducted. Thus, the sampling

strategy employed is valid for estimating the ratio of migrants in Basra. As such, it is estimated that 12 per cent of the current population arrived less than a decade ago.<sup>5</sup>

Figure 2. Categorization of respondents by time living in Basra

HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN LIVING IN BASRA (CITY)?	NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS	PERCENTAGE
I was born here	441	55%
More than 10 years	251	31%
Between 6 and 10 years	53	7%
Around 5 years	21	3%
Around 4 years	6	1%
Around 3 years	4	0%
Around 2 years	3	0%
Around 1 year or less	5	1%
No response	18	2%

Shaded respondents are considered migrants.

These 92 respondents categorized as migrants provide a statistical representation of this group with a 10 per cent margin of error at a 95 per cent confidence interval. Of this sample, six out of 10 are found to live on migration-heavy streets (i.e., >25% migrant families over total families); four out of 10 reside in streets where they represent a low percentage of the population therein (i.e., <25% migrant families over the total).

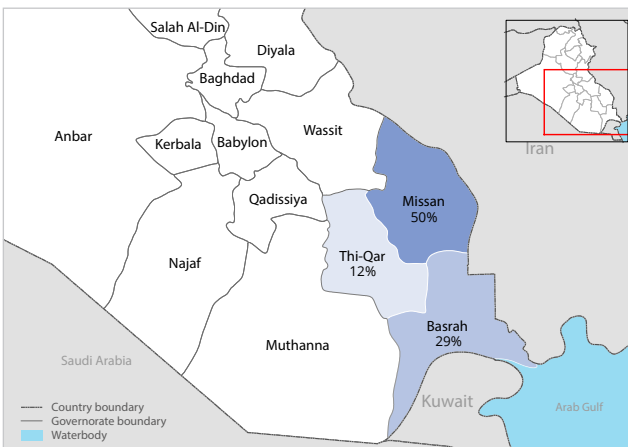
<sup>5</sup> At the same time, 251 respondents (or 31% of the total sample) are not originally from the city but settled there more than 10 years ago. For analysis purposes, they are not categorized as migrants here given the rationale stated above but, if they were, it would elevate the ratio of migrants to 43% of the total population of the city.

## WHO IS MIGRATING?

The average migrant to Basra City is characterized by being from rural parts of neighboring governorates and having had to sell their assets and rely on family members or tribal networks to move their whole families. Thus, migration is not seasonal or temporary.

Based on data from IOM's Displacement Tracking Matrix, there are few internally displaced people currently still in Basra who fled here because of the 2014 to 2017 Islamic State in Syria and the Levant (ISIL) conflict.<sup>6</sup> On the contrary, the vast majority of migrants are originally from the neighboring governorates and districts in the south. In particular, half of the migrant respondents are originally from Missan governorate (mostly Al-Maimouna district), with the remainder predominantly from other parts of Basra, and a smaller proportion from Thi-Qar governorate (Figure 3). From this sample, only 24 per cent have migrated from large cities like Amara or Nassiriya (the capitals of Missan and Thi-Qar respectively); rather, for the majority of migrants, villages and small towns are the most common locations of origin.

Figure 3. Main governorates of origin for the migrant respondents



As such, it is not surprising that the most cited drivers for migration are environmental reasons followed closely by economic ones, because in rural areas these two factors tend to go hand in hand (Figure 4). It is also notable that conflict and security drivers, which in the south are frequently

related to tribal tensions, do not feature as the top reasons for migration.<sup>7</sup>

Figure 4. Main reasons to migrate



Multi-select question. Only top 5 shown.

## PERMANENCE OF THE DECISION TO MIGRATE

There are a number of key indications that point to the fact that movement to Basra is not seasonal but permanent and one-way. First, while the majority of respondents used to receive all or part of their household income from agriculture pre-migration, currently only seven per cent still receive any revenue from agriculture in their places of origin, likely from gains from agricultural activities or going back-and-forth to farm and harvest.

In addition, only 16 per cent of the migrant households still own farmland or livestock in their place of origin, compared to 54 per cent that did prior to migrating (Figure 5). This selling off of assets is the most recurrent option for families

6 In the sample for this study, only two respondents fled from conflict in Anbar Governorate while one other respondent is a Syrian refugee. In addition, five respondents are from Baghdad and migrated for reasons not linked to conflict or insecurity.

7 Tribal tensions at 9 per cent were the sixth most cited reason for migration.



to be able to afford migration given how much environmental degradation has economically impacted agriculture-dependent households. In other words, they do not have savings to rely on for a move. This tracks with the fact that more than 40 per cent of the respondents indicated that

they sold land or livestock in order to facilitate their moving to Basra; 29 per cent sold their houses; and 13 per cent sold other assets (Figure 6). This is compared to only three per cent who reported using their savings.

Figure 5. Land and livestock ownership for migrant respondents before and after migrating

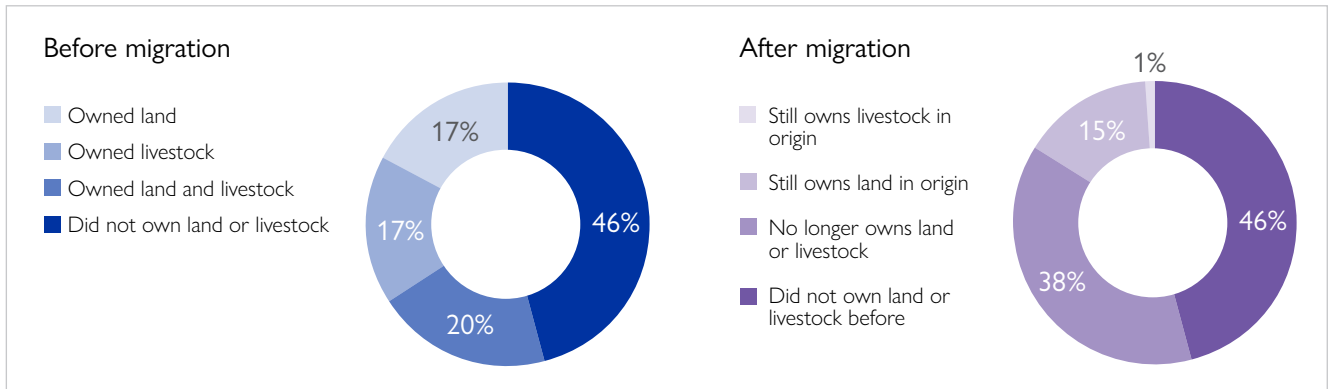


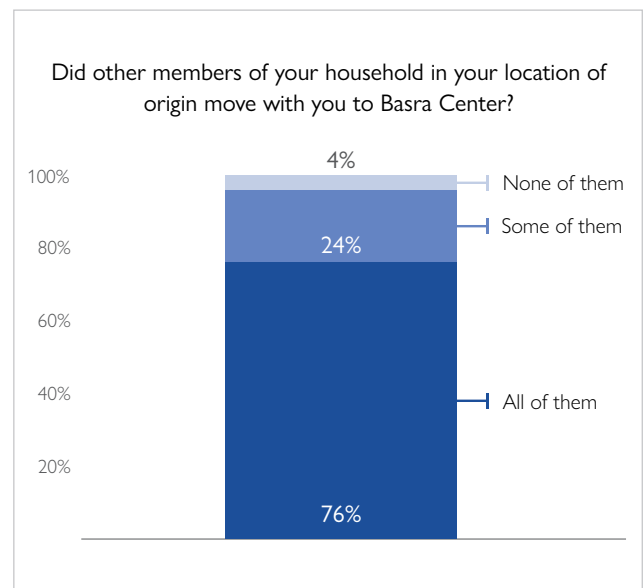
Figure 6. Preparation undertaken by migrant respondents

WHAT ACTION(S) DID YOU TAKE IN ORDER TO FACILITATE YOUR ARRIVAL TO BASRA CENTER?	%
Contacted family members or tribe members	37%
Sold livestock	34%
Sold house	29%
Sold land	16%
Borrowed money	15%
Sold other assets or equipment	13%
Secured a job before moving	11%
Used savings	3%
Nothing, just moved here	14%

Multi-select question.

Finally, the act of migrating tends to involve the entirety of the household, further underscoring the persistence of the move. In very few instances does only one individual of the family migrant to Basra to seek opportunities (Figure 7). The most frequent case is that all members eventually move. In addition, only three respondents out of the 92 in total indicated that they send money to their family in their place of origin in the form of remittances.

Figure 7. Portion of household members who migrate



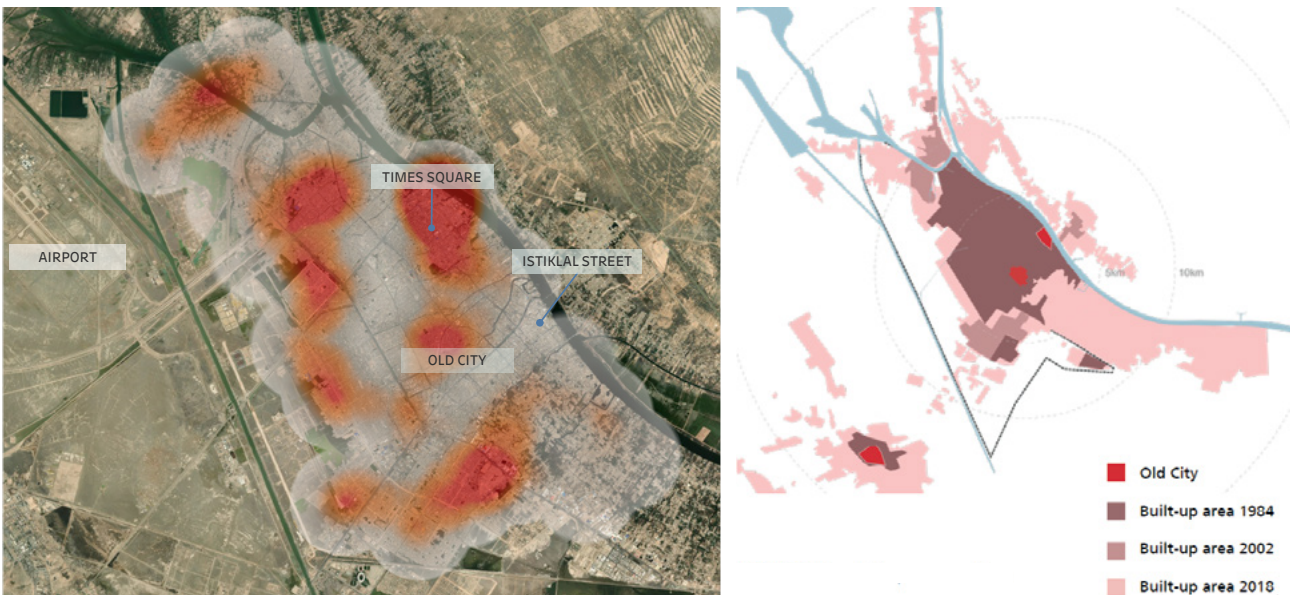
## WHERE DO MIGRANTS LIVE IN THE CITY AND WHY?

The data collected also provides information on the geographical presence of migrants in the city as a whole. Figure 8 presents a density map of the parts of the city where a higher number of migrant respondents are found (left) and contrasts it with a map of the city's built environment over time.<sup>8</sup> It shows that the migrant population tends to be found not only in newly developed, former agricultural areas on the outskirts of the city, but also within old and degraded clusters in the city center.

When asked why they chose to move to their particular street, migrants qualitatively pointed to two main reasons.

The first is linked to the presence of their respective tribal peers in the neighborhood. This aligns with findings shown in Figure 6 wherein 37 per cent of migrants report contacting family members or tribe members to facilitate their move. The second reason is that these areas tend to be easier to informally build a house in without much oversight (this will be discussed in more detail in subsequent sections). Part of the rationale for this stems from the fact that these families cannot afford to purchase housing through more regular means.

Figure 8. Heatmap showing the presence of migrants in Basra (left) and map of the urban build-up of Basra over time (right)



Areas in red correspond to higher presence of migrants in the neighborhood.

8 The second map is found in Barbar Mumtaz and Ivan Thung, Basra Urban Profile (Basra: UN-Habitat, 2020).

## LIVELIHOOD OPPORTUNITIES AND THE ECONOMIC SITUATION IN BASRA

When comparing livelihoods and the economic situation in Basra for both migrants and local residents alike, the findings do not present an unusual picture for migrant-recipient contexts. Opportunities for employment exist, but for migrants these tend to be limited to the informal sector, which yields lower gains and results in weaker financial security. This section also briefly examines recruitment and participation in security forces and armed groups as a livelihoods option.

The first indicator compared between migrants and locals is linked to (un)employment. In this regard, all but five migrant households (that is, 95% of them) reported to have at least one income earner among their members (Figure 9). This employment ratio is similar to that of local households, with only eight per cent of these households with no employment. The one noticeable difference is the fact that migrant households actually tend to have closer to two income earners, which is a higher percentage than local households.

Figure 9. Income earners in the household

IN THE LAST WEEK, HOW MANY PEOPLE IN YOUR HOUSEHOLD EARNED PAID INCOME?	LOCAL HHS	MIGRANT HHS
0	8%	5%
1	57%	48%
2	27%	40%
3	6%	7%
4 or more	2%	0%

This seems to indicate that the problem is not found in the lack of employment opportunities for migrants. The main challenge, instead, appears in the form of underemployment and in the stability of work. Most of the employment seems to be found in low-wage jobs in the informal sector. This is seen in the fact that the most common income is obtained from daily labor, informal commerce, and working in businesses or workshops (Figure 10). The scenario is substantially different for local residents. Income sources for locals are mainly found in government employment to which migrants

(especially if originally from outside the governorate) have limited access. Based on these results, it is estimated that 78 per cent of the migrant households rely on the private sector (which tends to be informal), compared to 41 per cent of the local households.

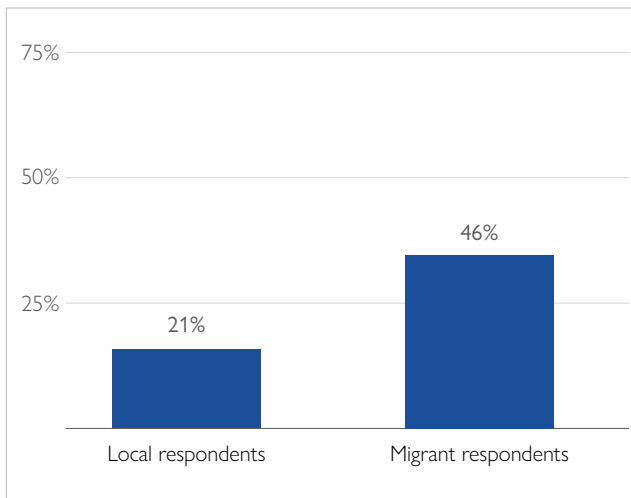
Figure 10. Income sources in the household

INCOME SOURCES AVAILABLE	LOCAL HHS	MIGRANT HHS
Government salary or pension	47%	15%
Salary from security forces	11%	4%
Paid job in a company	5%	3%
Revenues from business or workshop	22%	36%
Daily labor or informal commerce	27%	45%
Agriculture, livestock, or fishing	1%	8%
Income from renting property	1%	1%
Governmental social support	6%	12%
Family support	0%	1%
Charity	0%	0%
Savings	0%	0%
None	0%	0%

The most frequent economic activities where migrants find work in the private sector are the following three: construction (45% of the daily labor opportunities or jobs in business/workshops are reported in this activity), transportation mainly as truck drivers<sup>9</sup> (27%), and work in the city's bazars carrying goods or pushing carts (26%). The prominence of construction is rather obvious given the fact that the city nearly doubled its built environment in the last years.

Another challenge for migrants linked to livelihoods is the gap found in their educational outcomes as compared to that of locals. There is a high percentage of illiteracy among migrant respondents, with 46 per cent of them having not attended any schooling (Figure 11). This likely stems from decades of neglect in public infrastructure in rural areas, especially in the education sector. It does not necessarily equate to a lack of employable skills, but this lower educational bar may act as a barrier for higher paid jobs, including government employment. A key feature that needs additional monitoring is the extent to which children of migrant families are indeed completing the education cycle in the city and breaking with this legacy.

Figure 11. Percentage of respondents with no schooling



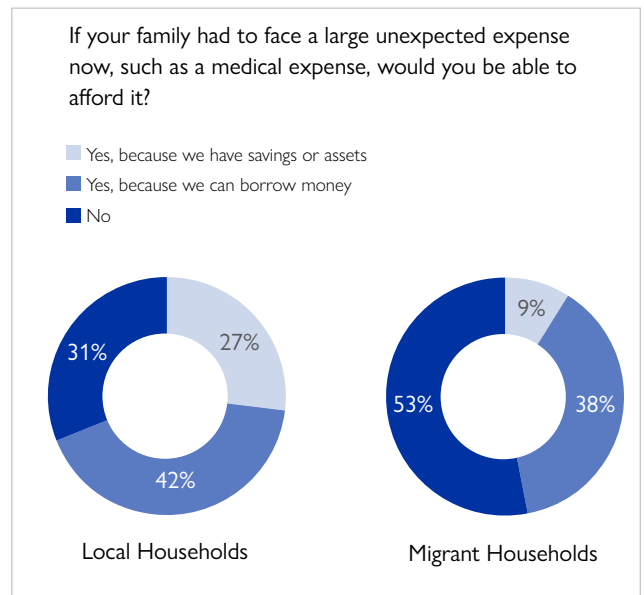
Finally, all these indicators combined seem to determine a household's financial security. Given the prevalence of informal employment among migrant households in spite of a higher number of income earners on average, they seem to present weaker financial security than local households. This is seen in self-reported affordability to purchase goods and spend money on needs, with the majority of migrant

respondents ranking their households in the lower tiers of purchasing and spending (Figure 12).<sup>10</sup> It is also seen in a more frequent absence of financial safety nets among migrant households compared to locals, with only 47 per cent of migrants indicating they have enough capital or they could tap into their social network to obtain resources to face unexpected expenses, as compared to 69 per cent of locals who report the same.

Figure 12. Self-reported levels of household affordability and purchasing power

	LOCAL HHS	MIGRANT HHS
Self-reported low affordability	2%	8%
2	23%	46%
3	40%	32%
4	28%	15%
Self-reported high affordability	7%	0%

Figure 13. Financial safety nets available



9 This is large and important economic activity in Basra given the traffic of goods from the nearby seaport (the only one in the country), the border with Iran (for imports), and the multiple oil production rigs in the governorate.

10 This indicator is generated through a standardized question that asks respondents to describe the purchasing power of their household currently, based on ranked categorical responses, such as "we do not have enough money even for food," "we have enough money for food and clothing, but not enough to buy expensive items," or "we can buy whatever we want."

This situation is not an extraordinary one when looked at from an overall or global perspective. The narrative here is similar to that observed in other migrant-recipient contexts, irrespective of whether in the Global North or South, where newcomers who have been forced to migrate tend to struggle economically.<sup>11</sup> This is frequently linked to skill suitability, availability of financial capital, or legal rights entitled to migrants. This gives space, in the case of Basra, to traditional livelihood-oriented interventions in the labor market and to promoting activities in key economic sectors.

### A LOOK AT RECRUITMENT AND PARTICIPATION IN SECURITY FORCES AS A LIVELIHOODS OPTION

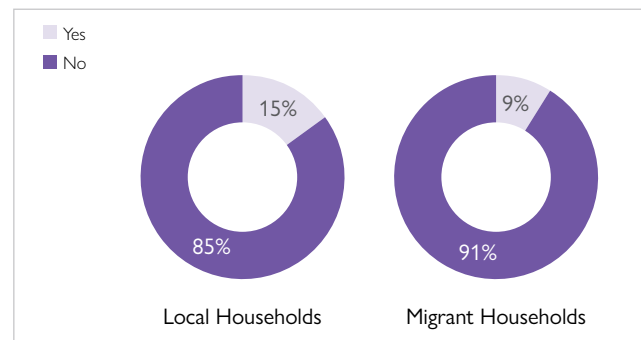
A topic that indirectly overlaps with unemployment and economic need is the drive towards enrolling into security forces or armed groups. This is relevant in Iraq, especially in the south, given that many groups emerged there post-2014 as a response to the ISIL conflict.<sup>12</sup> These groups gathered around the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) have different degrees of alignment with the government, but most of them share the fact that their traditional base and manpower largely comes from the southern governorates. For many households, recruitment into one of the groups may be a viable livelihoods option, even if it comes with safety and mental wellbeing risks for those recruited if deployed into conflict or if it poses broader threats to the rule of law and governance overall given the increasing militarization of society.

There are thus two elements to consider on this topic. The first one is on the prevalence of recruitment into security forces and armed groups – and whether the pool of migrants in Basra might constitute a source of manpower for these groups. In this sense, the higher recruitment rate is found among the local population rather than migrant households. As shown in Figure 14, 15 per cent of the local households have a member currently belonging to any security force or

armed group, which is in itself a relatively high percentage of the civilian participation. This ratio is significantly lower for the migrant households (9%).<sup>13</sup>

In terms of which forces or armed groups are more prevalent between migrants and locals, only one migrant household had a member in the groups belonging to the PMF Commission. The vast majority of cases were among the army as well as local police. Among local households, the most common option was the PMF groups; this is the case for 40 per cent of the households with a member in its security forces.

Figure 14. Households with a member in security forces or armed groups



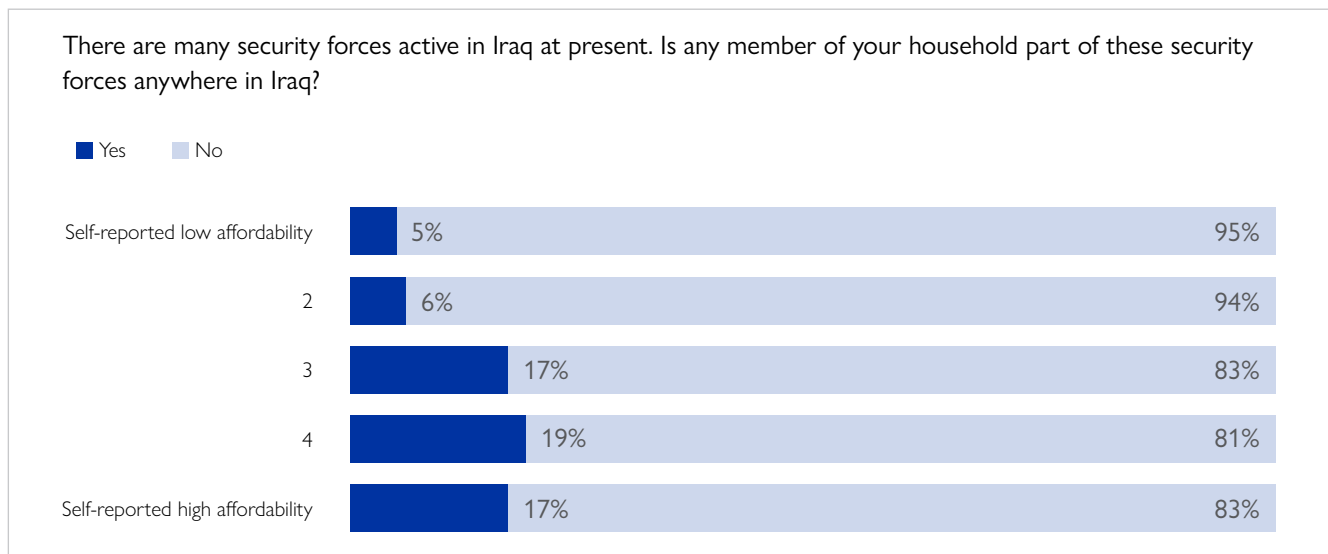
The second consideration refers to whether the most vulnerable families tend to recruit into security forces or armed groups in a higher degree than others, driven by need. By grouping households based on their self-reported affordability, results show that households that report higher socio-economic status tend to also report higher rates of recruitment (Figure 15). However, this information does not allow for discerning any causal relationship, that is, whether households were relatively poorer at the time of recruitment and the revenue from the armed group increased their status over time, or their better status enabled such recruitment in the first place.

11 See, for example, the case of Somalia in Hervé Nicolle, *Identifying Climate Adaptive Solutions to Displacement in Somalia* (Nairobi: IOM, UNEP, and Samuel Hall, 2021).

12 Mac Skelton and Zmkan Ali Saleem, *Living Among Hashd: Relations between Citizens and Security Actors in Five Iraqi Provinces* (Sulaymaniya: Institute of Regional and International Studies, 2021).

13 One key aspect not asked in the survey is whether this household member joined the security force or armed group before or after migrating. This missing element could better contextualize recruitment practices as well as the relation between recruitment in rural areas and migration.

Figure 15. Households with a member in security forces or armed groups (by self-reported affordability level)



## HOUSING AND OCCUPANCY RIGHTS IN BASRA

This section compares, first, the formality of housing and occupancy among residents of Basra, which is an aspect closely linked to urbanization trends and the inequalities that rise from them.

The analysis conducted here does not compare households, but rather compares the typology of streets based on the ratio of migrants residing there (low-migration areas vs. high-migration areas) in order to be able to discern different dynamics therein. Formality, or rather informality, is in fact an issue shared by many households in the city, migrant or not. Secondly, the section examines the risks brought on by informality, in the form of large-scale evictions and exclusion from access to public services and other rights for both groups.

Starting with the formality of living conditions, especially as it relates to housing and occupancy, this is broadly categorized here based on the following six concepts that measure both public provision as well as the private legal situation of a given street and the residences on that street:

- Water connection: official, unofficial, or inexistent.
- Electricity connection: official, unofficial, or inexistent.
- Street public lighting: fully, partial, or not at all.
- Street pavement: fully, partial, or not at all.

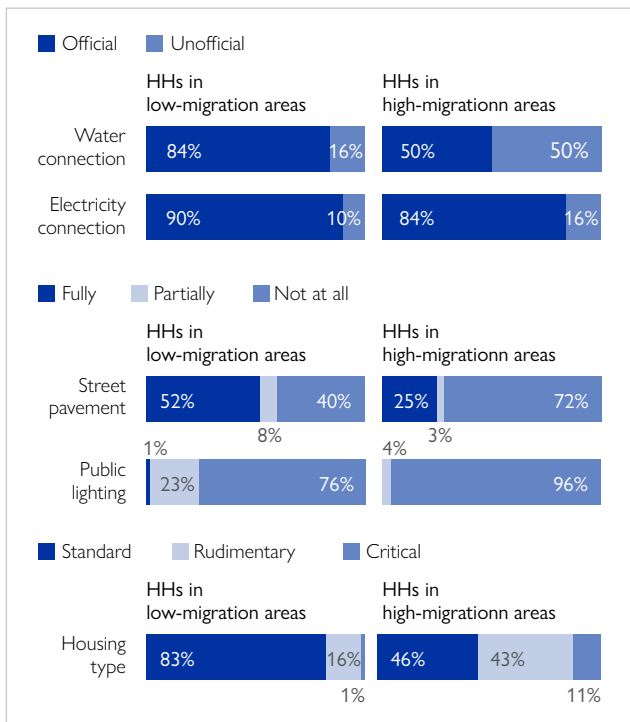
- Type of house structure, with different options categorized into standard, rudimentary, or critical housing.
- Land ownership status, covering a degree of possibilities from the most formal option (private residential land legally purchased and registered) to other less formal options including occupying agricultural or public land (further defined below).

With regards to the five first concepts, Figure 16 shows their disaggregation by low-migration and high-migration areas of the city. In general, areas that host a higher influx of migration tend to be worse-off and more informal as could be expected. Many issues linked to street infrastructure, however, are shared across the city by most neighborhoods (for instance, lighting or pavement). It is also noteworthy that 11 per cent of households in high-migration areas are currently living in critical housing, that is, a makeshift shelter or an unfinished building.

Linked to the type of housing, it is not common to find households renting their property. The percentage of households that pay rent stands at six per cent for local households and

nine per cent for migrant households.<sup>14</sup> Families either own or built the house they live in, formally or through irregular construction. This low rate of renting among migrants is in stark contrast to the comparable context of urban internally displaced populations still in Iraq where roughly 77 per cent rent their accommodation and do not resort to building their own houses in informal settlements.<sup>15</sup>

Figure 16. Living conditions for households by type of street



It is thus here, in the formality of land and house ownership, where the main issue arises for a rapidly urbanizing city like Basra. It is a critical factor for both local and migrant households alike. Figure 17 categorizes households based on different levels of ownership status. While the first option would be the most formal and secure one and the last corresponds to the least formal and secure, the other options show different arrangements (not necessarily ranked from more to less formal). The rapid population growth of the city led people to occupy and settle into land that is not legally set for urban or residential purposes. Even in low-migration

areas, more than half of the families live in some sort of informal or irregular situation. For those with irregular land tenure, the most common and least formal option is to settle on public land, having built there without official permission from authorities. Settling on public land is often done through the intercession of informal actors with links to local authorities and security forces. Other usual arrangements involve purchasing a piece of agricultural land from a private owner and building a house there even though it is not registered for residential use.

Figure 17. Land and house ownership status of households

WHAT IS THE OWNERSHIP STATUS OF THE LAND YOUR CURRENT HOUSE IS BUILT ON?	HHS IN LOW-MIGRATION AREAS	HHS IN HIGH-MIGRATION AREAS
(Most formal)		
Private residential land (purchased and registered)	46%	16%
Private residential land (not purchased)	4%	0%
Agricultural land (purchased or gifted)	16%	0%
Agricultural land (not purchased)	4%	0%
Public land (given to us officially by the government)	6%	0%
Public land (purchased or gifted)	3%	13%
Public land (built on it without official permission)	20%	72%

14 The average rent they paid is 400,000 Iraqi dinars (or approximately 280 U.S. dollars) per month.

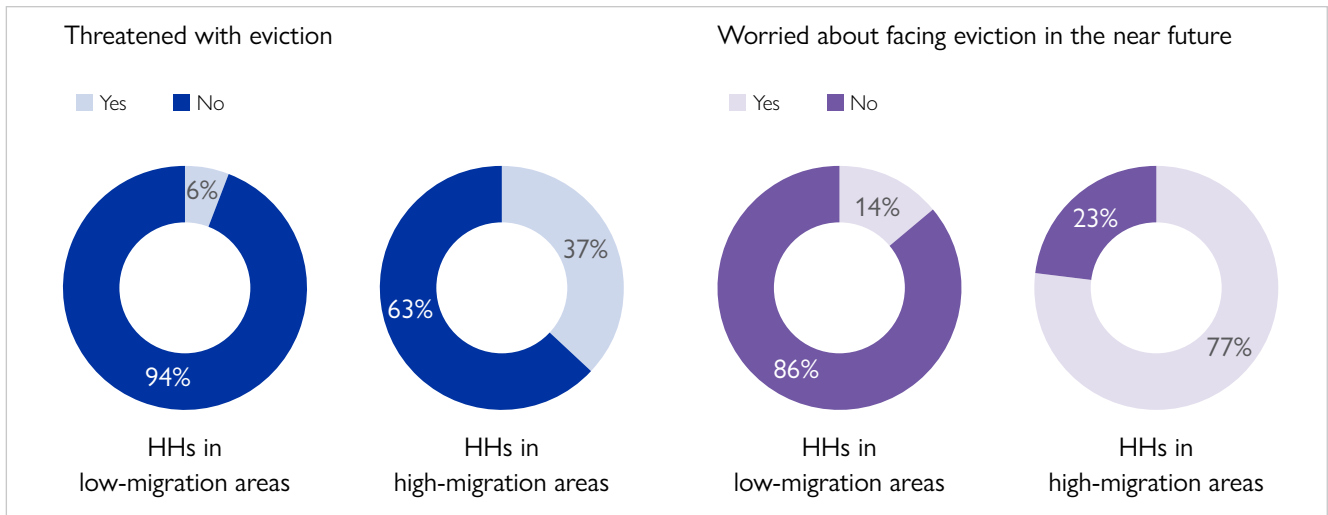
15 IOM, Returns Working Group, and Social Inquiry, Cities as Home: Understanding Belonging and Acceptance Among IDPs and Host Communities in Iraq (Erbil: IOM, RWG, and Social Inquiry, 2020).

### RISK OF INFORMALITY: LARGE-SCALE EVICTIONS

This prevalence of irregular or informal housing and land ownership inevitably feeds legal insecurity among residents. It is important to note that actual experiences of eviction were rarely reported, with only one per cent of respondents

overall indicating they have been evicted in the past. However, threats of eviction have taken place as reported by households especially in migrant-populated areas and concerns for future evictions are widespread (Figure 18).

Figure 18. Threat of eviction and concerns about facing eviction among households

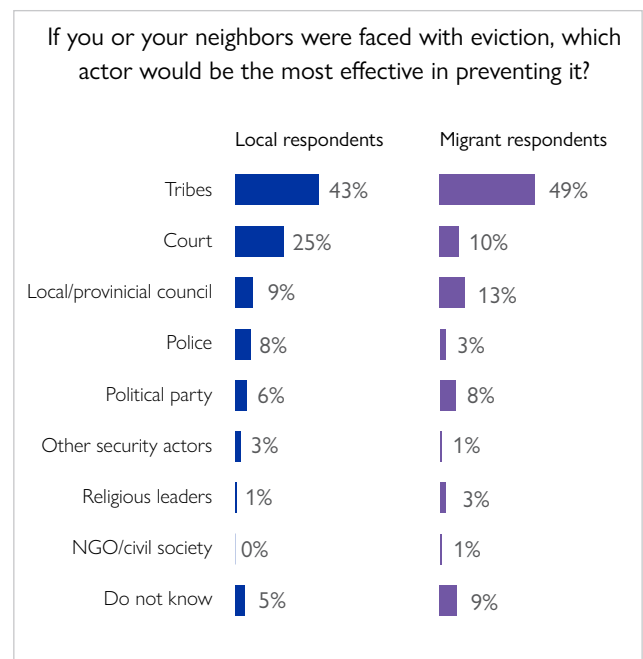


Given the scale of legal informality and the spread of eviction threats and concerns across the city, this situation does not relate to private issues between landlords and occupants, but it relates to a public issue involving the authorities. One frequently sought solution by authorities (not only in Iraq but elsewhere) for this informal urban sprawl tends to involve bulldozing and clearing the area of people, an action sanctioned on legal grounds.<sup>16</sup>

In front of these actions (or the threat of them) that pit affected city dwellers (both migrants and locals) against authorities, it is common that residents mobilize and seek support from informal actors. In particular, respondents tend to rely mainly on tribes to most effectively challenge the threat of eviction (Figure 19). Tribal leaders tend to have connections and linkages within both local governance and security configurations and, as such, tribes act as a powerful interest group. Courts or higher authorities such as the provincial council are less sought out for this purpose, in part because they may be the bodies issuing evictions in the first place. It should be noted, however, that local residents rely on these formal actors more than migrants do in this regard. Of note is that migrant and local respondents also qualitatively raised other options to prevent evictions including neighbors organizing themselves and demonstrating to fight

off attempts to remove them from their houses or destroy their settlements.

Figure 19. Most effective actor for preventing eviction



16 Adnan Abu Zeeb, "Iraqi Government Takes on Housing Crisis," Al-Monitor, June 25, 2021.

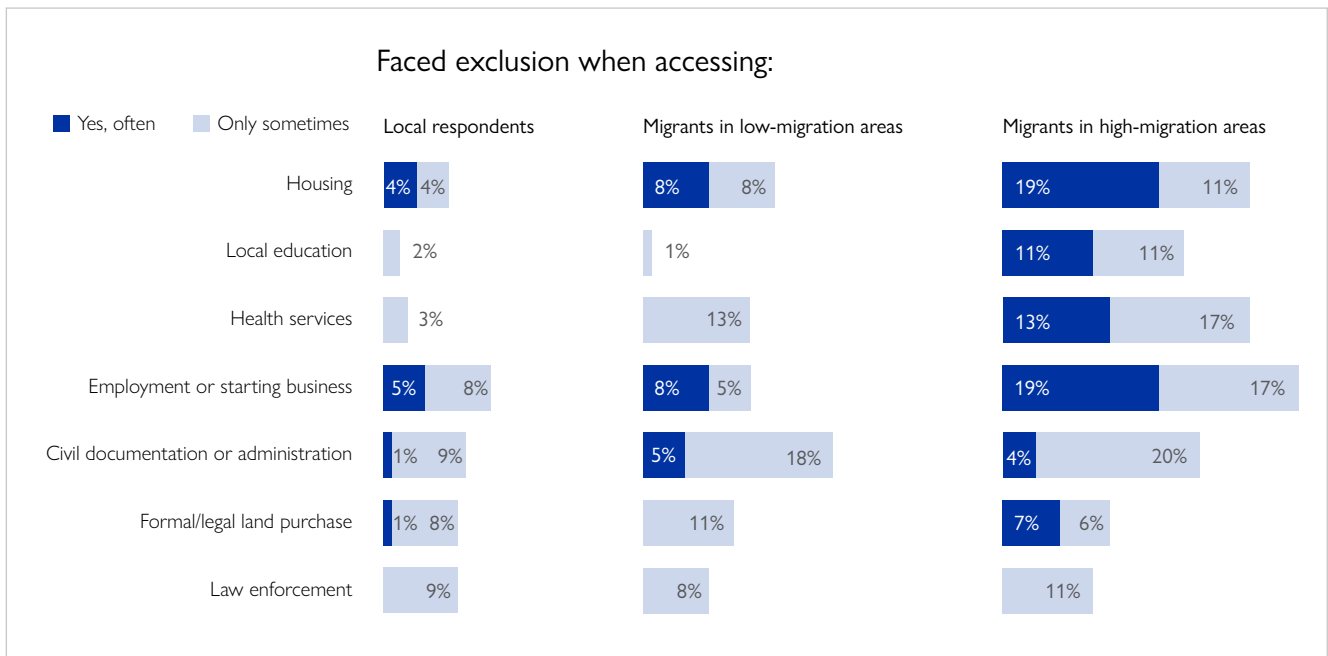


### EXPERIENCES OF EXCLUSION IN THE CITY

This research also considered personal experiences of exclusion among respondents when trying to avail themselves of basic services and rights. This topic covered multiple scenarios, from housing to public services, including protection rights (Figure 20). In all cases, the main areas of exclusion relate to housing and employment, which are issues explored above. The difference is found in the pervasiveness of these issues between groups. As could be expected, local residents report in significantly less frequency any exclusion.

Migrant experiences, on the other hand, depend heavily on where they live. This seems to point to geographically localized structural issues rather than based on the nature of the individual. Migrants in high-migration areas report significantly higher exclusion than those in other, likely more well-provisioned, areas. Thus, people may be moving to these areas because they are vulnerable and cannot access other parts of the city; at the same time, living in these enclaves tend to make them vulnerable as well.

Figure 20. Levels of exclusion experienced in accessing different services and rights



## PROTECTION AND SAFETY IN BASRA

Perceptions and experiences of insecurity are relatively common among residents, both locals and migrants alike. They point to the same social issues affecting the city currently and they report nearly the same type of incidents happening in their immediate environment, with a notable exception. The security issues reported, some of them structural (e.g., tribal tensions or unrest due to general neglect) and others emerging (e.g., drug sale and abuse), affect the whole of the urban fabric. This is underscored by the fact that, while people generally feel safe in their neighborhoods, they do acknowledge the relatively weak security environment around them.

In terms of social issues affecting Basra, there are four that dominate over the other 17 options presented to respondents. Results are shown in Figure 21 without separating between local residents and migrants given that there are no significant differences among them.

The main social issue pertains to tribal conflicts, with two of every three respondents highlighting it as a key ongoing problem. Tribal conflicts emerge mainly when disputes between individuals or families are not resolved through peaceful means (either through formal or customary processes), and parties in conflict rely on specific customary practices in the city that involve violence. While these practices have recently been deemed illegal, they persist regardless.<sup>17</sup>

Figure 21. Social issues perceived

BIGGEST SOCIAL ISSUES YOU PERCEIVE IN BASRA CENTER	%
Tribal conflicts	65%
Unemployment	43%
Problems created by lack of services	43%
Drug, alcohol abuse	38%
Crime and violence	16%
Political violence	12%
Public health	9%
Other 10 issues	...

Multi-select question, up to 3 selections allowed.

17 Mustafa Saadoon, "Tribal Disputes Cripple Iraq's Oil-Rich Basra," Amwaj Media, March 27, 2021.

Other issues pointed out by residents relate to unemployment, problems created by lack of services, and drugs or alcohol abuse. Given the taboo surrounding drug-related issues, it being mentioned among the top four answers indicates just how critical the magnitude and scale of the problem has become.<sup>18</sup> Far behind these four issues appear others linked with criminality, political violence, or public health.

A more geographically localized protection indicator is the number and type of security incidents that respondents have reported on their street or immediate surroundings (Figure

22). The three most frequent incidents reported (out of a list of 11) are tribal conflict, theft, and drug selling. No significant differences exist in this reporting between local residents and migrants. Some streets concentrate more incidents than others, but it is not linked to migration per se. However, it is worth noting the one instance where a difference is found between low- and high-migration streets: the latter are twice more likely to record drug selling activities than the former.

Lastly, for a significant number of respondents (but a minority nevertheless), no incident took place in their vicinity.

Figure 22. Local incidents reported

IN THE LAST 6 MONTHS, HAVE YOU HEARD ABOUT OR SEEN ANY OF THE FOLLOWING INCIDENTS TAKING PLACE IN YOUR STREET OR NEARBY?	
No incident	35%
Tribal conflict	35%
Theft	30%
Drug selling	15%
Verbal or physical harassment or intimidation	12%
Other 7 incidents	...

Multi-select question (except if “no incident”).

### HOW DO SECURITY ISSUES TRANSLATE INTO PEOPLE’S FEELINGS OF SAFETY?

Residents seem to feel their personal safety is not particularly threatened where they live, in the sense that they tend not to fear that their person (or their family) will be exposed to violence. This is highlighted in Figure 23 in which respondents mostly positively agreed about daily circumstances in their neighborhood, specifically that their safety is ensured and they are comfortable moving around the area day and night. Importantly, there is no difference in responses observed between men and women in this regard.

However, a larger proportion of residents seem to recognize that the security environment in which they live is rather

weak and that there are pockets of insecurity. The responses to the three questions in Figure 24, which refer to structural protection issues (crime, targeting by law enforcement, and presence of firearms) in their neighborhoods, point in this direction. A non-negligible proportion of respondents are concerned about these issues. There also appear to be some differences in perceptions between migrants and locals, with migrant respondents tending to report slightly worse security outcomes in their neighborhoods, related to levels of crime, unfair targeting by police or other security actors, and the high visibility of civilians with firearms.

18 See, for example, Alissa J. Rubin, “Iraq Faces a New Adversary: Crystal Meth,” New York Times, September 14, 2019.

Figure 23. Personal safety perceptions

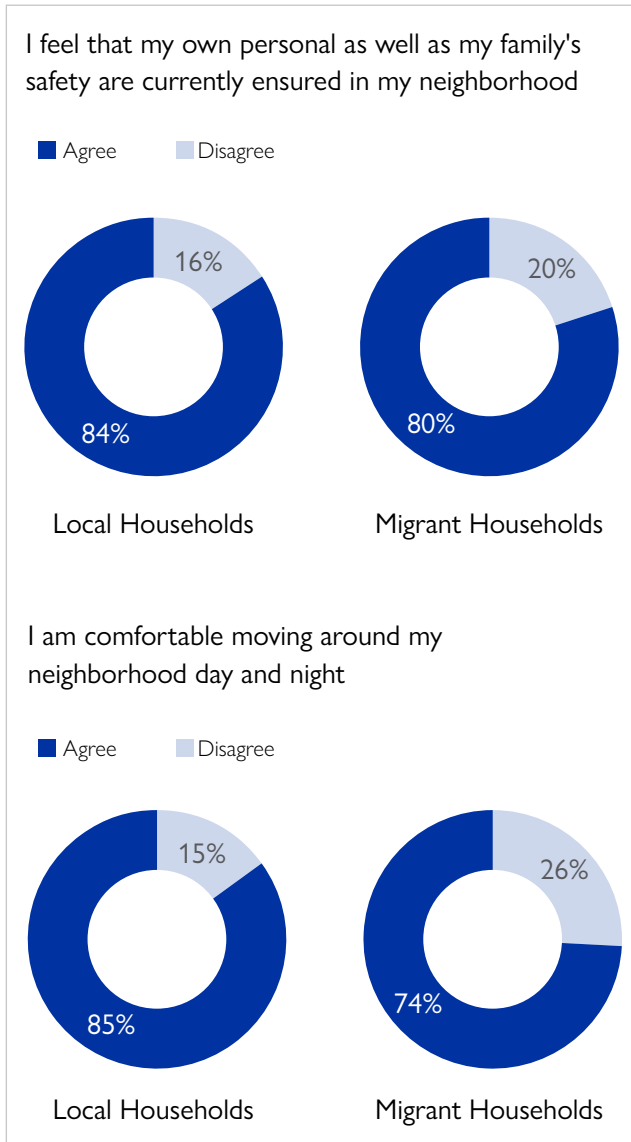
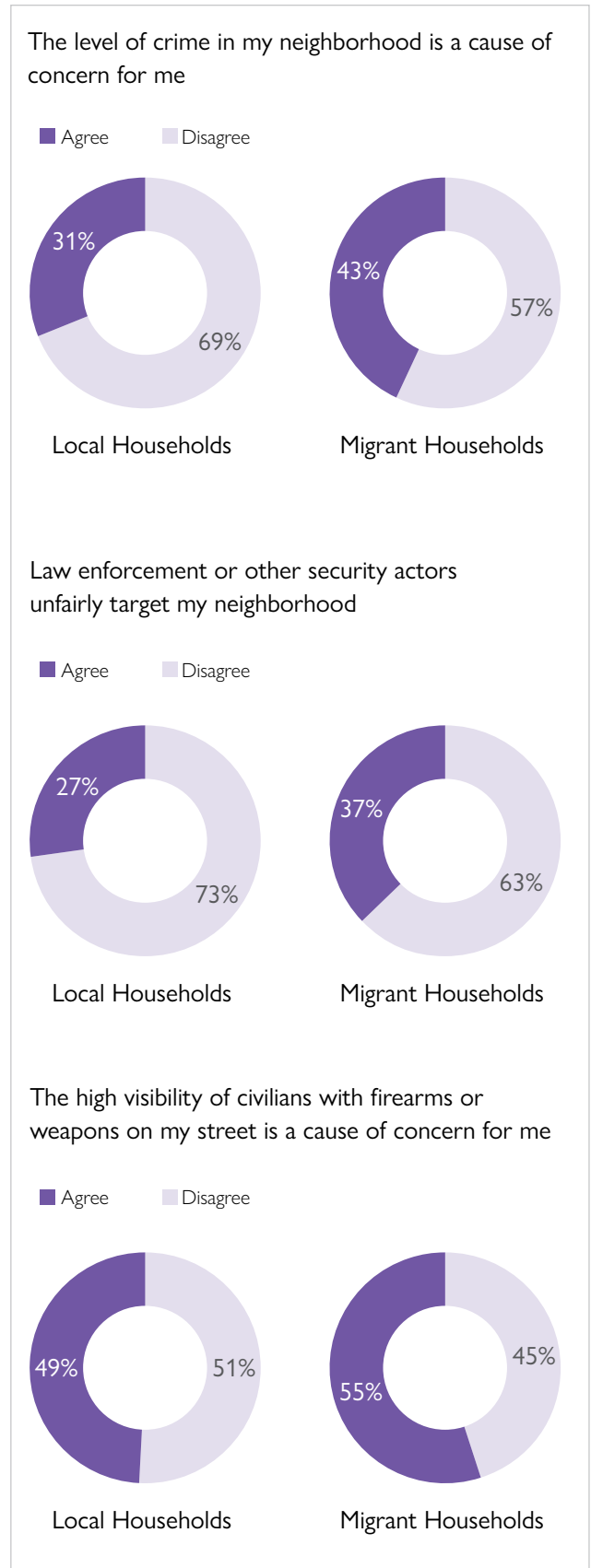


Figure 24. Safety perceptions of the surroundings



## OVERLAPPING FRAGILITY

One of the main lessons learned from exploring livelihoods and the economic situation, housing and occupancy rights, and protection and safety individually is that social fragility beckons more social fragility, and vulnerability similarly reinforces itself.

Where there is housing informality, there tends to also be economic and physical insecurity, and vice versa. This is seen by mapping the prevalence of the issues analyzed and observing that they tend to overlap through similar parts of the city (Figure 25).<sup>19</sup> This is a way to visualize that issues are indeed systemic and require an integrated vision and

approach to address. When it comes to climate-induced migration, findings seem to show that migrants tend to fall within this fragile fabric, clustering in poorer, less formal, and less safe areas of the city. At the same time, findings indicate that many of these issues are common for local residents as well (especially in the case of housing informality).

Figure 25. Heatmap of the prevalence of socio-economic conditions, housing, land, and property informality, and safety perceptions by street surveyed



Socio-economic (red=poorer)

HLP informality (red=less formal)

Safety perceptions (red=less safe)

However, intervening in an integrated manner within such a fragile and critical context is not an easy task. The current social climate is similarly fragile and prone to eruption given the limited, ineffectual (or willfully passive) institutional responses to grievances up until now. For instance, feelings of marginalization and neglect are extraordinarily high for local residents and migrants alike (Figure 26). This contributes to widening the gap between the community and the authorities. Trust and expectations of what public

institutions can bring forward is limited and rather negative (Figure 27). Informal actors such as tribal leaders enjoy some trust from the population, but only in moderate levels, with a large percentage of residents still distrusting of all actors or institutions. Such trends are worrying because if left unchecked, they have the potential to erode social cohesion at the community level as well.<sup>20</sup> This is crucial given the city's changing population and responses to increasing migration.

19 This mapping is generated by calculating a numerical index for each indicator based on aggregating responses to a number of related questions. Given that the design of this research follows a multi-level structure, this index by respondent is then aggregated at street level, which enables a geographical mapping of them.

20 Nadia Siddiqui, "Like A Father Who Doesn't Love His Children': Institutional Trust, State Neglect, and Prospects for Justice in Post-Conflict Iraq," Social Inquiry Research Brief (Erbil: Social Inquiry, 2021).

Figure 26. Feelings of marginalization and neglect among respondents

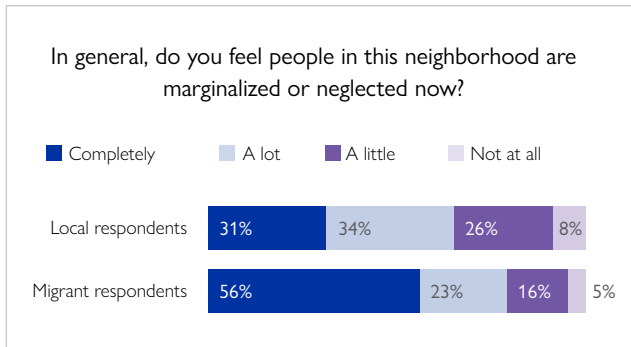


Figure 27. Levels of trust in formal and informal actors among respondents

% OF RESPONDENTS EXPRESSING POSITIVE TRUST IN:	
Basra provincial government	22%
Local civil administration	20%
Local police	47%
Security forces	58%
Tribal leaders	62%
Religious leaders	54%
Political parties	6%
Civil society	45%

In this regard, the public’s perceptions on migration are overwhelmingly negative. Nearly no local resident concedes any benefit from receiving migration (Figure 28). This is striking because in other migrant-recipient contexts, this process tends to be accompanied by some degree of acceptance and positive consideration for the changes brought on by migration.<sup>21</sup> The only silver lining observed here is in the fact that local residents’ rejection of migration is more related to the general functioning of their immediate system (economic opportunities, strain on services) rather than direct accusations against migrants in creating tensions, changing norms, or contributing to crime. To prevent this latter view from changing for the worse, the persistent and structural issues raised will need an inclusive solution for all living in the city considering that neither locals nor migrants plan to leave Basra (Figure 29) and, in the absence of appropriate and immediate action related to halting and reversing environmental degradation among others in rural areas, more people are likely to be moving in.

Figure 28. Perceptions of local residents regarding migration trends in Basra

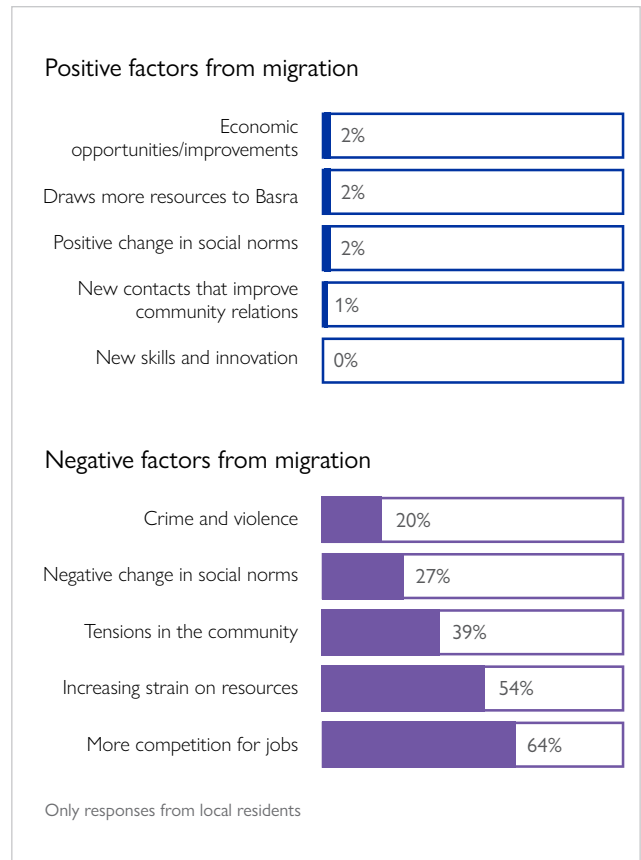


Figure 29. Movement intentions among respondents

WHAT IS THE LIKELIHOOD THAT YOU WILL REMAIN IN BASRA CENTER FOR THE FORESEEABLE FUTURE?	LOCAL RESPONDENTS	MIGRANT RESPONDENTS
Yes, for sure	66%	48%
Very likely	24%	24%
We are considering staying	5%	18%
Not sure	4%	8%
Not likely at all	1%	2%

21 See, Nicole, Identifying Climate Adaptive Solutions; and Ana Gonzalez-Barrera and Philip Connor, Around the World, More say Migrants are a Strength than a Burden (Washington, D.C.: Pew Research Center, 2019).

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Shortfalls in livelihoods and the economic situation, housing and occupancy rights, and protection and safety are interconnected issues inside a system called “Basra” that impact migrants (and also a significant part of the local resident population). They beget fragility and vulnerability and require both localized and broad-scale interventions to improve access to rights and staunch the potential for further upheaval.

This work thus puts into perspective the importance of interventions aimed at adaptation and mitigation when it comes to climate-induced migration into fragile areas, in particular in terms of keeping a dual geographical and a diverse topical focus:

- Enhancing the adaptation capacity of recipient areas such as Basra (and other close-by urban areas) to an increasing population becomes crucial. The situation highlighted in this report shows how, in the current circumstances, new arrivals tend to fall at the margins of the system in which a large proportion of the local population is already found. One crucial aspect relates to the informality of living conditions – with weak legal security around housing and land, for example, households tend to delay investing in their wellbeing and authorities tend to lag behind in providing services and protection. Improvements in this area as well as in expanding economic opportunities would contribute to reducing gaps within the community and between the people and the state.
- A focus on the rural areas of origin also needs to be maintained as it is important to mitigate the effects of emerging climate and the economically and institutionally challenging scenarios that drive migration in the first place as well. Such drivers are becoming increasingly more complex and, especially for environmental degradation, there might be no quick reversal in the near future. Mitigation thus requires enhancing rural population's capacity to sustain their wellbeing and livelihoods in places of origin – this does not only involve key interventions aimed at diversify economic capacities in these places, but also in reversing institutional neglect, that is, making the state more present and visible there in the form of public infrastructure and services.
- The fact that there is scarce data and quantitative baseline measurements for these populations and geographical areas, however, limits the capacity to design and prioritize impactful and targeted actions. This report provides one initial step to evaluate and quantify issues (with a focus on migration more than on general social fragility) in the main city in the south of Iraq. In order to address the issues highlighted systematically and holistically for all those affected also requires a wide scale evidence base of dynamics in the region – in both rural and urban areas alike. In order to support cities as they take people in and villages to keep them from depopulating, any profiling needs to extend not only to movement patterns but climate, governance, economics, and security, among others, as both push and pull areas are currently sources of fragility.

## DATA ANNEX

The table below provides a baseline for migrants and local residents in terms of selected key indicators in terms of livelihoods, formal rights, protection, and overall satisfaction as explored across the report.

INDICATORS ON ECONOMIC STATUS AND LIVELIHOODS	LOCAL RESIDENTS	MIGRANTS
% of HHs with no income earner	8%	5%
% of HHs that cannot afford enough food or at least basic items	25%	53%
% of HHs with no access to financial safety net	31%	53%
% of adult individuals who are illiterate	21%	45%
INDICATORS ON FORMAL RIGHTS	LOCAL RESIDENTS	MIGRANTS
% of HHs living in rudimentary or critical shelter	16%	54%
% of HHs with an irregular land ownership arrangement	54%	84%
% of HHs who have been threatened with eviction	7%	32%
% of HHs that faced exclusion in accessing services/administration	27%	45%
INDICATORS ON PROTECTION	LOCAL RESIDENTS	MIGRANTS
% of HHs that report at least one security incident in their street	65%	76%
% of HHs that feel their personal safety is not ensured	16%	20%
% of HHs that are concerned for the level of crime in their area	31%	43%
INDICATORS ON OVERALL SATISFACTION AND CONFIDENCE	LOCAL RESIDENTS	MIGRANTS
% of HHs that feel marginalized or neglected	65%	76%
% of HHs that have little or no confidence in authorities	74%	74%
% of HHs that have little or no confidence in police / security actors	35%	41%
% of HHs that have little or no confidence in tribal / religious actors	28%	22%
% of HHs that are unlikely to remain in Basra in near future	5%	10%



# IOM IRAQ

October 2021

 [iraq.iom.int](http://iraq.iom.int)

 [iomiraq@iom.int](mailto:iomiraq@iom.int)

UNAMI Compound (Diwan 2),  
International Zone,  
Baghdad / Iraq



@IOMIraq



© 2021 International Organization for Migration (IOM)

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise without the prior written permission of the publisher.