



# ENVIRONMENTAL MIGRATION IN SOUTHERN AND CENTRAL IRAQ

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ASSESSING ACCESS TO CIVIL AND IDENTITY  
DOCUMENTATION AND TENURE SECURITY



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Climate change and environmental degradation in Iraq is leading to the displacement of rural communities. Displaced individuals often move to urban centres, settling in informal areas with compromised living conditions. Irregular housing tenure is common, with environmental migrants facing insecurity in housing and limited access to rights. Additionally, they face resistance from local authorities and communities, who associate environmental migrants to criminal activities and negative labour market changes, leading to integration and social cohesion challenges. Environmental migrants often feel discriminated against and marginalized, contributing to tensions between host and migrant communities.

This assessment found that environmental migrants need legal assistance to access identity and civil documentation, as well as to increase their tenure security and overall access to House, Land and Property (HLP) rights. Most of the barriers hindering access to documentation and HLP rights, as well as the consequences for lacking such documents, are similar to those of internally displaced persons (IDPs) affected by the 2014–2017 conflict. Opaque processes, inaccessible institutions and prohibitive costs, alongside logistic issues such as lack of access to transportation services to visit relevant sites where civil documents are issued, can make securing core documentation nearly impossible for population affected by displacement. However, environmental migrants face challenges in recognition not only of their needs, but in some cases, of their status as IDPs.

However, unlike IDPs who were displaced after 2014 in areas affected by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) occupation, environmental migrants did not lose documents, nor did these get destroyed or confiscated. They also do not face issues related to security clearances to apply for documentation. While most participants to focus group discussions (FGDs) expressed having documents at the time of displacement, these expire and cannot be renewed. However, environmental migrants, particularly in Najaf, face particular issues regarding the official recognition as IDPs by the Ministry of Migration and Displacement (MoMD) as well as the access to housing cards, which become a barrier when trying to access documentation and increase tenure security. This is particularly challenging for parents trying to document newborns, with growing numbers of children who do not have access to identity documentation.

Environmental migrants in informal living conditions face tenure insecurity and eviction risks, particularly in private lands or those public lands allocated for construction and infrastructure. While IDPs relocating for agricultural activities have the potential for improved tenure security, this is contingent on the eligibility for housing cards or IDP status. Lack of information exposes environmental migrants, particularly women, to exploitation and fraud.

The assessment also identifies gender-specific challenges, emphasizing the need for legal assistance and protection services. Additionally, a gap is noted in available data concerning compensation schemes accessible to environmental migrants.



Photo 1: IOM Iraq 2023/Raber Aziz

The recommendations for programme design to address challenges faced by environmental migrants in accessing identity and civil documentation, as well as their HLP rights, are as follows:



1. Legal assistance and awareness: Implement, with the support of the donor community, targeted legal assistance programmes for environmental migrants, emphasizing awareness campaigns to address informational gaps, particularly focusing on women.



2. Support to access to documentation: Collaborate with authorities to simplify documentation processes, addressing issues of accessibility and cost. This includes the organization of mobile visits by bodies in charge of issuing documentation.



3. Special consideration for children: Develop interventions for children born to environmental migrant parents, advocating for their recognition and access to documentation.



4. HLP rights advocacy and support: Advocate for the government to suspend evictions in informal sites, prioritizing durable solutions and securing agricultural contracts for migrants for improved tenure security.



5. Information and anti-exploitation measures: Implement campaigns to educate migrants, especially women, about exploitation risks. Collaborate with authorities to disseminate reliable information and verify the legitimacy of contracts and property deeds.



6. Evidence base strengthening: Conduct research on compensation for migrants and assess access to social protection schemes.



7. Gender-based violence (GBV): Ensure accessible and inclusive GBV response, focusing on persons with disabilities and female-headed households. Conduct regular protection monitoring and safety audits.

Additionally, tailored recommendations for sampled Governorates include advocating for housing cards and IDP status in Najaf, supporting MoMD registration efforts in Dhi Qar and coordinating with Basra for housing cards and agricultural contract renewals in informal sites.



## INTRODUCTION AND OBJECTIVE

A significant number of people have been displaced to informal sites in the Central and Southern Governorates of Iraq due to environmental factors. Limited data exist on their legal needs beyond a basic understanding of tenure security. IOM conducted a legal needs assessment

to advance the evidence base on this emerging issue and develop understanding on the needs and vulnerabilities of environmental migrants specifically related to legal identity and civil documentation, as well as information needs regarding tenure security.



Photo 2: IOM Iraq 2023/Raber Aziz

## METHODOLOGY

A qualitative approach was used through FGDs and key informant interviews (KIIs). In addition, an extensive desk review was conducted. Purposive sampling was used for FGDs in order to include individuals affected by climate induced migration who were living in informal sites. Informal sites were selected based on population figures of IOM's Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) Master List 127 at October 2023. IOM includes displaced population in its definition of migration.

KIIs were conducted with local authorities from relevant ministries and State bodies of the sampled Governorates, as detailed below. Thematic analysis was conducted to draw out patterns in the data and key findings.

FGDs and KIIs were conducted by IOM Legal Assistance Programme staff. Gender-disaggregated data are provided in this assessment where variation was relevant. In total, IOM conducted 19 FGDs and 11 KIIs targeting overall 260 individuals.



### FGDS

Governorates	Number of FGDs	Male	Female
Najaf	7	54	29
Dhi Qar	6	48	14
Basra	6	89	15
Total	19	191	58

### KIIS

Governorates	Governorate Office	Gender
Najaf	Joint Coordination in the Governorate	Male
	Governorate Affairs	Male
	Najaf Agriculture	Male
	Immigration and Displacement office	Male
Dhi Qar	Governorate	Male
	Immigration and Displacement office	Male
	Agriculture	Male
Basra	Joint Coordination Monitoring Center	Male
	Director of Governorate Affairs	Male
	Basra Agriculture	Male
	Immigration and Displacement office	Male



Photo 3: IOM Iraq 2023/Hayder Hameed Al-Obaid



## BACKGROUND: CLIMATE CHANGE AND DISPLACEMENT IN IRAQ

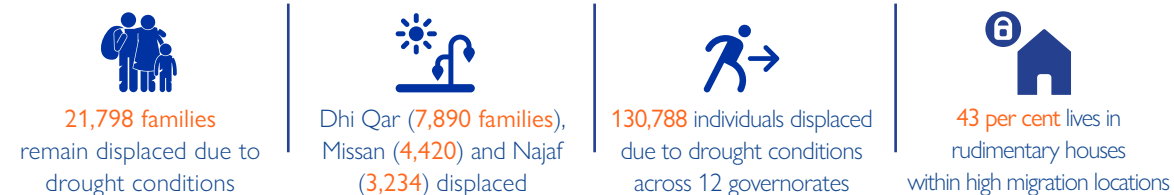
In Iraq, climate change and environmental degradation have increased pressure on rural communities, where the sweeping scale of environmental change is already forcing Iraqis to migrate to cope with increasingly challenging conditions. Drivers of environmental displacement from rural settings are many, and intersecting. Negative environmental events can negatively impact climate-sensitive livelihoods, reducing crop and fishing yields and capacity to feed livestock, leading to families abandoning agricultural, livestock and fishing livelihoods altogether. Climate change and environmental degradation can also make locations less habitable by impeding the ability of households to meet their most essential needs. Additionally, climate change and environmental degradation have increasingly interacted with social, political and economic factors to exacerbate drivers of community tension, conflict and fragility, and generate negative effects on peace, stability and security, which can drive displacement.



Photo 4: IOM Iraq 2023/Hero Akbar

IOM's DTM has been tracking climate-induced displacement across the central and southern regions of Iraq since June 2018.<sup>1</sup> As of 15 September 2023, 21,798 families (130,788 individuals) remain displaced due to drought conditions across 12 governorates with the southern governorates of Dhi Qar (7,890 families), Missan (4,420) and Najaf (3,234) having the highest number of climate-induced displaced persons (IOM, 2023a). Environmentally induced displacement in Iraq is often permanent and typically deployed as a final coping strategy, with households regularly selling key assets to finance migration and whole households often relocating rather than individual household members (IOM, 2021; IOM, 2023b).

Many rural community members displaced by environmental factors in Iraq move to urban centres, (IOM, 2023c) with environmental migrants typically moving into more informal areas such as former agricultural areas in the outskirts of the city, or within old and degraded clusters in the city centre. These areas are typically locations where access to essential services and safe housing are compromised and living conditions typically poorer. Research conducted by IOM in Basra found that locations with significant migrant populations had notably poorer access to water, electricity, paved streets, public lighting and standard housing. Regarding the latter, it was found that within high migration locations, 43 per cent lived in rudimentary houses, compared to 11 per cent in low migration areas (IOM, 2021).



<sup>1</sup> Drought, land degradation and increased salinity in important rivers and tributaries continues to place a strain on the agriculture, livestock herding and fishing industries, with many families unable to guarantee sufficient and sustainable livelihoods in rural areas. DTM tracking of climate-induced displacement aims to provide data on the number and location of vulnerable families forced to displace due to climatic and environmental factors. For more information.

Irregular or informal housing tenure is not uncommon in both host and displaced communities in Iraq's central and southern cities. Informal tenure means that the

*“the occupation of land and/or housing is either illegal, quasi-legal, tolerated or legitimized by customary or traditional laws, which can either be recognized or simply ignored by the authorities” (Durand-Lasserve, 2015).*

For the purpose of clarity, it is important to define what this research understands as land tenure, property rights, tenure security, tenure insecurity and evictions. These concepts guided the questions asked to FGD participants as well as authorities reached through KIs.

As defined by a 2008 UN Habitat report, land tenure can be understood as “the way land is held or owned by individuals and groups, or the set of relationships legally or customarily defined amongst people with respect to land. In other words, tenure reflects relationships between people and land directly, and between individuals and groups of people in their dealings in land.” The same report defines property rights as:

*“recognized interests in land or property vested in an individual or group and can apply separately to land or development on it.” This can be summarized by asserting that while “tenure relates to the means by which land is held, property rights relate to who can do what on a plot of land” (Durand-Lasserve, 2015).*

Tenure security is defined by UN Habitat (2004) as “an agreement between an individual or group to land and residential property, which is governed and regulated by a legal and administrative framework.” Ultimately, tenure security is meant to offer individuals protection from forced evictions. Forced evictions can be understood as the “permanent or temporary removal against their will of individuals, families and/or communities from the homes and/or land which they occupy, without the provision of, and access to, appropriate forms of legal or other protection.”

Irregular or informal housing tenure is not uncommon in both host and displaced communities in Iraq's central and southern cities. 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 constructing a house, even though it is not registered for residential use.

<sup>2</sup> Fieldnotes from IOM Rapid Assessment and Response Teams.

In this context, environmental migrants are more likely to have an insecure position of housing tenure. For example, again in Basra, it is found that only 46 per cent of households in low-migration neighbourhoods and 16 per cent in high-migration neighbourhoods 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 – 37 per cent of the households in high-migration areas have reportedly been threatened with eviction.

In this context of informality, environmental migrants often struggle to access civil and administrative rights. For example, when responding to eviction threats, affected households rely on informal actors such as tribes to mobilize and contest any attempt to clear the settlement, with their position of informality often not affording them access to formal legal channels. This lack of access to civil and administrative rights can also impede access to education, health and other public services. For example, in Basra, it was found that 46 per cent of migrant households do not have their children in school compared to 21 per cent of local households (IOM, 2021).

In a context of displacement into already fragile areas, environmental migrants are often seen to place additional pressure on municipal services and housing stock. They are also sometimes blamed by local authorities and communities for criminal activities and negative changes to the labour market (IOM, 2022a). These perceptions can generate pushback that impedes mobility. For example, when relocating, some families are prevented from entering other governorates by security and intelligence forces, constraining their ability to move freely and restricting migration to larger urban centres.<sup>2</sup> It can also contribute to an ‘us versus them’ divide (Schwartzstein, 2021).

Integration and social cohesion issues are also exacerbated by an often-cited conception that environmental migrants from rural areas such as Dhi Qar and Missan, where there are historically high levels of tribal violence, can transfer unresolved tribal grievances and security incidents into urban areas. These factors lead to environmental migrants regularly citing that they feel discriminated against by host communities, a factor that, when combined with previously mentioned inequities in access to services, is identified as leading to a broader sense of marginalisation among environmental migrants (IOM, 2022b).



## THE TOLL OF ENVIRONMENTAL DISPLACEMENT ON IDENTITY AND CIVIL DOCUMENTATION, AND TENURE SECURITY

The right to identity and civil documentation is an enabling right. Core documents enable displaced persons to exercise their rights, such as freedom of movement, access to social protection, formal employment, education, and due process and HLP.

Displacement caused by the conflict with ISIL between 2014 and 2017 had great impact on people's access to documentation. The conflict's effects have been widely documented by the humanitarian community. In its legal needs assessment of 2023, IOM found that across locations and type of population, lack of civil documentation remains prevalent (IOM, 2023d). Overall, more than half of the IDPs surveyed (65%) reported they or a family member missed civil documents. The majority of these (63%) expressed facing problems because they lack documentation. The most cited problems included the inability of children to attend school, movement restrictions, the inability to register births and difficulties accessing social welfare.

Moreover, many of the 2014–2017 IDPs still reside in informal sites, with low tenure security: in the same assessment IOM found that 36 per cent of IDPs cited fear eviction from their current housing.

However, this is not the only type of population whose displacement affected their access to identity and civil documentation or who suffer from precarious tenure security. People affected by climate-induced migration also see a negative impact in terms to their access to identity and civil documentation and are at risk of eviction. The section below highlights what these challenges are and provides a comparative analysis between 2014–2017 IDPs and environmental migrants.



Photo 5: IOM Iraq 2023/Hero Akbar

More than half of the IDPs surveyed (65%) reported they or a family member missed civil documents

The majority of these (63%) expressed facing problems because they lack documentation.

IOM found that 36 per cent of IDPs cited fear eviction from their current housing.

## CROSS-CUTTING FINDINGS

Environmental migrants need legal assistance to access identity and civil documentation, as well as to increase their tenure security and overall HLP rights. Most of the barriers hindering access to documentation and HLP rights, as well as the consequences for lacking such documents, are similar to those of IDPs affected by the 2014–2017 conflict. However, environmental migrants face challenges in recognition not only of their needs, but in some cases, of their status as IDPs. No organizations were working on provision of legal assistance in the informal sites sampled.

In its 2023 Legal Needs Assessment, IOM explored the needs of IDP and returnee populations who were affected by displacement between 2014 and 2017 in Anbar, Kirkuk and Ninewa. IOM found that opaque processes, inaccessible institutions and prohibitive costs, alongside logistics issues such as lack of access to transportation services to visit relevant sites where civil documents are issued, can make securing core documentation nearly impossible for population affected by displacement. Individuals expressed a lack of understanding regarding the application process for documentation, with women more frequently facing informational gaps compared to men. Moreover, women are also more likely to be unaware of their rights, particularly in the areas of family and HLP rights. **The findings below show that environmental migrants face similar challenges regarding access to documentation and that women are more likely to lack information on access to documentation and their overall rights.**

However, unlike IDPs who were displaced after 2014 in areas affected by ISIL's occupation, environmental migrants did not lose documents, nor did these get destroyed or confiscated. They also do not face issues related to security clearances to apply for documentation. **While most participants to FGDs expressed having documents at the time of displacement, these expire and cannot be renewed.**

For those children born to parents who were displaced outside their Governorate of origin and who are not recognized as IDPs by the MoMD, accessing documentation is challenging. **This is creating a new generation of children born during displacement who cannot be registered and therefore do not enjoy any kind of documentation.**

This situation was reported in Najaf, where environmental migrants relocated outside their Governorate of origin and are not officially recognized as IDPs, which in turn limits their access to renew documents. **IDP status or housing cards are necessary for individuals to apply for documents**

when they are outside their area of origin. As one FGD participant expressed:

*"I only have an expired National ID, and I am not able to obtain the new National Unified ID as instructed by authorities."*

Identity and civil documentation processes are often interlinked in Iraq. That is, in order to obtain one document, a person must have access to another. For example, if a child is not registered at birth, and a parent needs to make an application for proof of lineage in the Court to obtain documents for a child, then the Court will require:

1. The ID of applicants;
2. A copy of civil registration record (صورة قيد); and
3. A marriage certificate.

As concerns the copy of civil registration record, it can only be obtained from the Civil Affairs Directorate (CAD) where the person is registered. If a person has moved away from their local CAD (for example, an IDP), then they might need to travel a considerable distance to obtain their civil registration record. If the parent(s) do not have a marriage certificate, and they are simultaneously bringing an application for proof of marriage, they will each need to obtain a registration record.

This assessment also found that environmental migrants often relocate to informal sites. Data collected in this report suggests such informal living conditions negatively impact tenure security and expose people to risk of evictions across locations. Similar to the situation faced by 2014–2017 IDPs, those who reside informally in public land allocated for planning and construction of infrastructure, as well as in private lands, face the most acute risk of eviction. The possibility for HLP support is limited beyond advocacy with the Government to suspend or delay evictions while trying to achieve durable solutions, namely relocation to lands with guaranteed tenure security.

As a general rule, IDPs who relocate to lands allocated for agricultural activities have the possibility to improve tenure security through securing agricultural contracts. This is the case for individuals with such (IDP) official recognition and for those who relocated to areas within their governorate of origin and who are eligible for housing cards.



However, migrants who relocated outside their Governorate of origin and who did not receive official IDP status by the MoMD, namely in Najaf, are the most vulnerable to insecure tenure. Their ability to secure agricultural contracts is restricted, even if the land was initially designated for farming. This makes such type of population more vulnerable.

The lack of reliable information leaves environmental migrants, especially women, susceptible to exploitation and abuse. During data collection, cases were reported in which individuals unknowingly provided money, thinking they were acquiring valid agricultural contracts or property title deeds, only to discover later that they had been deceived. These instances highlight the vulnerability of such individuals to manipulation and fraudulent schemes.

As part of the data collection, women participants were asked gendered specific questions to understand their particular concerns and needs. Data suggest intersecting challenges faced by women and girls, including safety, education, legal rights, economic opportunities and access to basic services, underscoring the need for legal assistance and protection services to address their needs and promote their empowerment.

Lastly, this assessment found a gap in the available data and evidence concerning the compensation schemes accessible to environmental migrants.

The sections below will highlight the specific situation of environmental migrants regarding access to documentation and tenure security living in informal sites in three Governorates: Najaf, Dhi Qar and Basra.



Photo 6: IOM Iraq 2023/Raber Aziz

## FINDINGS SPECIFIC TO NAJAF

### ACCESS TO IDENTITY AND CIVIL DOCUMENTATION:

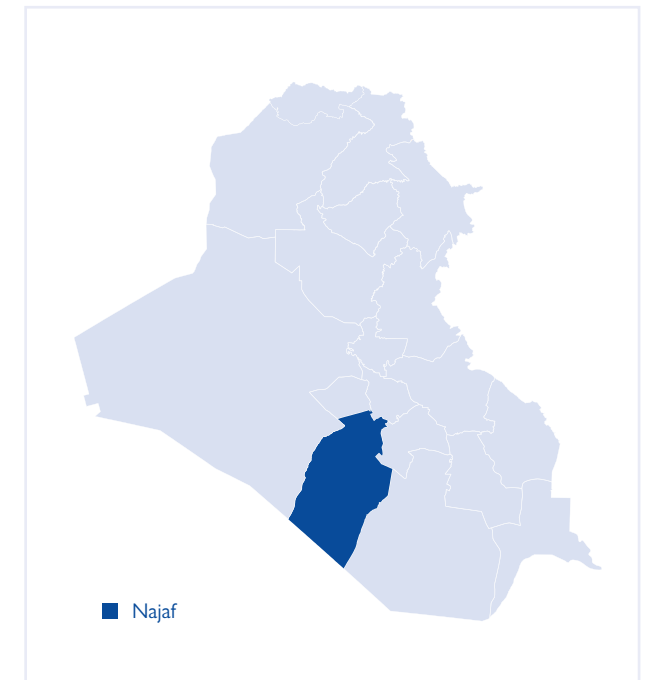
Environmental migrants living in informal sites in Najaf face challenges renewing existing documentation or issuing new documents for newly born children.

The two primary challenges encountered by individuals seeking access to documents are the high costs of legal fees and transportation, as well as the lack of housing cards. The issue of housing card is prevalent in Najaf. As one participant explained, "As sporadic workers in the (agricultural) fields, we get an income of up to 5,000 Iraqi dinars (IQD) per worked day. If I have to travel to my area of origin to process documents, this costs me up to IQD 50,000 in transportation fees alone, it is too much for people like us." Housing cards are a prerequisite to issue other type of documentation, including the new National Unified ID and Public Distribution System (PDS) cards. Alternatively, documents can be issued when individuals enjoy IDP status, necessitating special approvals from relevant ministries and authorities.

Participants to FGDs were unsure how to apply for housing cards and the few who had information described different and contradictory processes. In a KII, an official at the Directorate of Agriculture explained that the process to issue housing cards is complex, with requirements that make it virtually impossible for vulnerable individuals to access it. While in the past the process was easier, regulations changed in 2017.

Procedures to issue housing cards vary by governorate. In Najaf, one of the following specific requirements must be met to obtain a housing card:

- Possession of a residential tapu (Tapu No. 25) (سند ٢٥ - طابو سكني).
- If lacking a residential tapu, (سند ٢٥ - طابو) employment is required.
- Having first-degree family members who are martyrs (father or brother).
- Holding a rental agreement/contract along with a residential tapu (سند ٢٥ - طابو سكني).
- Being a widowed or divorced woman with one parent from Najaf.
- Individuals pursuing religious studies (طالب) (الحوزة/العلوم الدينية) may also be eligible, subject to specific procedures.



Notably, none of these requirements applied to residents of Najaf living in informal sites sampled during data collection, thus rendering them ineligible for housing cards. Additionally, these requirements, though long-standing, were not enforced until 2017, following the desertification crisis that prompted a surge in internally displaced persons, especially from Al-Nasriyah to Najaf. Prior to this, many obtained housing cards through:

- Endorsement from the Mukhtar (تأييد المختار)
- Possession of a rental agreement/contract with agricultural tapu (- ٢٥ طابو زراعي).
- Having children receiving their education in Najaf.

Furthermore, it is important to recognize that families residing in informal sites, excluded from civil and urban planning, are consequently deprived of essential services including food assistance, health, education, etc.



Regarding the housing card issuance process, it is noteworthy that the governorate does not hold sole decision-making authority. The governorate's responsibility lies in approving applications and forwarding them to the information office, (مكتب المعلومات) as mandated by The Unified National ID Law No. (3) of 2016, which oversees housing card issuance.

In this regard, a possible avenue to solve this issue is advocacy and engagement with the Council of Ministers in Baghdad to get exceptional approvals for the issuance of housing cards to these environmental migrants.

Access to social protection for climate-induced migrants is limited in the locations assessed. Specifically, renewing, adding family members and transferring the PDS card from their areas of origin to the areas of residency presented a significant challenge, particularly for families from Nasiriyah residing in Najaf. While a few managed to transfer their PDS cards, the vast majority could not as they cannot access housing cards in Najaf and travelling to their area of origin (AoO) is too expensive. The PDS is a universal food subsidy programme and a key pillar of non-contributory social protection in the country. However, even if they accessed PDS cards in AoO, this would not secure them assistance in Najaf as they would still have to travel to receive the in-kind assistance. Further assessment is required to understand access to other social protection schemes.

Women were more likely to lack information about the housing cards and many believed only a man could be the holder of such document, which is incorrect. This misunderstanding points at lower awareness level of women on their rights to documentation and entitlements.

In general, a woman is entitled to obtain a housing card under specific circumstances:

- Widowhood, supported by a death certificate for her husband.
- Divorce, supported by a divorce certificate stamped by the court.
- In the event of her husband's imprisonment, there should be (حجة حجر وقيومة) following which she may apply for a housing card.

Additionally, she must possess either a rental agreement/contract or a residential *tabo*, along with the requisite core documents.

## TENURE SECURITY

All environmental migrants in Najaf who took part in data collection believe they are at risk of eviction, with such risk contributing to their sense of uncertainty. Even while some purchased agricultural contracts from private owners, without residency cards or IDP status these will not be renewed.

Data show that insecure land tenure can contribute towards feelings of uncertainty across affected populations, with one participant capturing the sentiment, saying: "We expect to receive an eviction notice at any minute."

In the case of settling on public land without the required authorizations, construction work or planned construction activities from private companies or the government is usually the reason cited for eviction. In this sense, participants expressed concern about the possibility of being displaced from the area as there are rumors of plans to develop a commercial housing complex in their vicinity. However, people also raised concerns of evictions even if no construction work is planned to take place. A small part of participants had agricultural contracts that they bought and were transferred from private owners. However, all of those who held contracts after private transfer highlighted issues with the Department of Agriculture, which seems to have informed of non-renewal of agricultural contracts to informal sites' residents who do not hold housing cards.

FGD participants explained that the continuous fear of eviction and the challenges in getting identity and civil documentation have increased perceptions of discrimination, with one respondent noting: "We just want to be treated as other Iraqis in this Governorate". Amid a sense of prevailing fear, all participants in this data collection exercise insisted they cannot go back to their areas of origin and that they will not leave. As one young individual summarized: "This area has become our home now," alluding to the impact this tenure uncertainty has on their sense of belonging.

During a KII with an official of MoMD in Najaf, the interviewee explained that the reason environmental migrants are not protected in Najaf is because they are not officially considered displaced population by the Ministry, and therefore cannot benefit from the rights conferred by Law No. 21 of 2009.<sup>3</sup> This law protects IDPs against evictions, among other benefits including food assistance and the right to receive a document (bitaqa badila البتاقة البدلية) to receive this benefit. However, Law No. 21 – Article 2 includes as IDPs those who were displaced by "natural disasters" (كارثة طبيعية) (please see below). MoMD gives officially recognized IDPs a document that proves this (هوية نزوح – بطاقة نزوح).

"أولاً: النازجون العراقيون الذين أكرهوا أو اضطروا للهرب من منازلهم أو تركوا مكان إقامتهم المعتاد داخل العراق لتجنب آثار نزاع مسلح أو حالات عنف عام أو انتهاك الحقوق الإنسانية أو كارثة طبيعية أو بفعل الإنسان أو جراء تعسف السلطة أو بسبب مشاريع تطويرية"

*"Firstly: Iraqi displaced persons who were compelled or forced to flee their homes or left their usual places of residence within Iraq to avoid the effects of armed conflict, general violence, human rights violations, natural disasters, human actions, arbitrary authority, or due to development projects."*

If special approvals are given by the Council of Ministers to get housing cards, an official at the Directorate of Agriculture

expressed willingness to provide land parcels for agricultural use to informal site residents – which would significantly increase their tenure security. Alternatively, if these migrants are exceptionally considered IDPs by MoMD, they could receive IDP cards and enjoy a certain level of protection against evictions. In this case, if an eviction took place, they would likely be offered an alternative land to relocate to.

After the data collection exercise in 2023, IOM received anecdotal evidence that MoMD started registering some environmental migrants as IDPs. The criteria for such registration and the plan are unclear. Evidence suggests advocacy is required to ensure rights of all environmental migrants in this regard.



Photo 7: IOM Iraq 2023/Raber Aziz

3 [القانون رقم \(12\) لسنة 2009 قانون وزارة الهجرة والمهجرين](#) (Government of Iraq, 2009)



## FINDINGS SPECIFIC TO DHI QAR GOVERNORATE

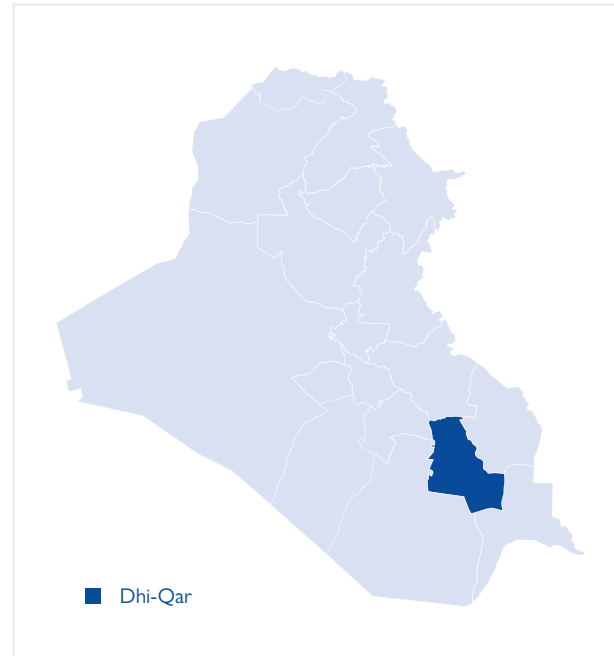
### ACCESS TO IDENTITY AND CIVIL DOCUMENTATION

Environmental migrants in Dhi Qar who took part in data collection face challenges accessing documentation, namely cost, distance and lack of knowledge on the processes. However, it is easier for people to apply for documents in Dhi Qar than in Najaf as most people do not need housing cards since they are originally from Dhi Qar (intra-governorate displacement). Findings suggest a need for enhanced advocacy with the central government to ensure enough resources are allocated to governorates that host or are anticipated to host large stocks of climate-displaced persons, to ensure the families aiming to be included in the PDS in their new locations of residence are adequately responded to, and to improve integration prospects.

As lack of housing cards or IDP status does not seem to be an issue in Dhi Qar, people can apply for PDS cards and receive assistance in their location of residence. Regardless, access to food rations was raised as an issue, with participants reporting that many individuals in their communities lacked PDS cards or not having updated them to their current family structure.

A government official raised the existence of complex cases that require tailored legal support, for example children born from Iraqi mothers married to foreigners. This official also stressed the lack of registration of marriage certificates in court as a major issue to document children, even when the father is Iraqi.

When conducting a KII at the governorate office, it was mentioned that the office does not have exact statistics on how many families from Dhi Qar relocated to other governorates, including Najaf and Basra. The interviewee continued to explain that even if PDS cards of Dhi Qar families were transferred to their current place of residence outside the Governorate, “this would put a lot of pressure on their host communities”, noting the importance of a comprehensive response that combines displaced persons’ access to the PDS card and social protection systems with programming that encourages integration and support to host communities as well. The same governorate official expressed interest in seeing IOM supporting advocacy efforts and starting direct legal assistance in informal sites. The issue of access to social protection systems, namely the issuance of the PDS card complimented by systems strengthening work, must be addressed in close coordination between Baghdad, Basra, Najaf and Dhi Qar and will require heightened efforts to support government coordination.



### TENURE SECURITY

Tenure security in Dhi Qar remains an issue with those residing in private land, or public lands susceptible to construction of public infrastructure. Risk of eviction seems to be lower for those living in agricultural lands as well as in plots owned by tribes. In Dhi Qar, people seem to need information dissemination on sale and purchase of property; lack of information exposes migrants, especially women, to be taken advantage of. Migrants in Dhi Qar express fear of progressive climate change inducing secondary displacement as more swathes of land are rendered useless.

As expressed under the section on access to documentation, families displaced within the borders of their governorate are more likely to have housing cards. In turn, this can facilitate securing agricultural contracts if they live on State-owned agricultural lands, which affords them a great level of tenure security and protection against evictions. Participants explained their interest in receiving legal support in securing agricultural contracts. However, a government official explained this does not solve all issues. While some certainty would be positive, many families fear climate change will continue and affect their newly allocated lands, rendering them useless. Some participants highlighted their interest in learning new skills to enhance agricultural adaptation strategies and working

within the community to increase resilience and address community-level vulnerabilities. Some also highlighted moving into urban areas and quitting agricultural work overall and receiving support to integrate into urban environments. However, above all is a need to support improve community cohesion outcomes and address perceived or actual marginalization of this demographic to support stronger integration outcomes.

Beyond the risk of eviction, participants also raised lack of information and services on sale/purchase of

property. As one woman explained: “I bought a house in an informal site to later discover the owner had sold it twice to different individuals.” This points to the need for enhanced awareness raising and information dissemination to mitigate the risks of people being taken advantage of because of their vulnerability or lack of understanding of laws around informal sites and HLP rights. This is particularly relevant for women, as data suggest they are more likely to lack information about applicable laws than men.



Photo 8: IOM Iraq 2022/Anjam Rasool



## FINDINGS SPECIFIC TO BASRA

### IDENTITY AND CIVIL DOCUMENTATION

Similar to Najaf and Dhi Qar, families in informal sites in Basra face difficulties in obtaining civil and identity documentation. Many have only birth certificates and struggle to get National Unified ID cards due to limited information, high transportation costs and legal fees. The absence of essential civil and identity documents means families miss out on basic services, including education for their children. Overall, the challenges are similar to those reported in Dhi-Qar, which is consistent with the type of population encountered: the majority of individuals sampled were originally from Basra and got internally displaced within the governorate.

### TENURE SECURITY

Informal sites sampled in Basra face imminent evictions due to ongoing reconstruction plans, causing widespread fear and anxiety among residents. In Al-Zubayr, the construction of a main road and a new school will displace up to 280 families. Construction plans are deemed irreversible according to Basra Joint Coordination and Crisis Management officials.

Participants highlighted the lack of renewal of agricultural contracts as a primary issue. Despite possessing legal documents, farmers struggle with outdated contracts requiring approval from various government entities that are ultimately rejected by authorities. As one participant said: "I have 100 hectares of land, yet I cannot plant on it!"

During a KII with the MoMD, it was revealed that over 1,000 families displaced due to drought are registered in Basra, emphasizing the importance of legal documents for protection against eviction. However, environmental migration seems to grow at a faster pace than the registrations take place.

Furthermore, some participants mentioned about difficulties related to housing cards, especially those who hold temporary ones. Previously, temporary housing cards were issued to all resident families in informal sites in Basra. However, this practice has currently been halted at the governor's decision. The primary requirement for obtaining a housing card now is either having a valid *tapu* or a rental agreement/contract.

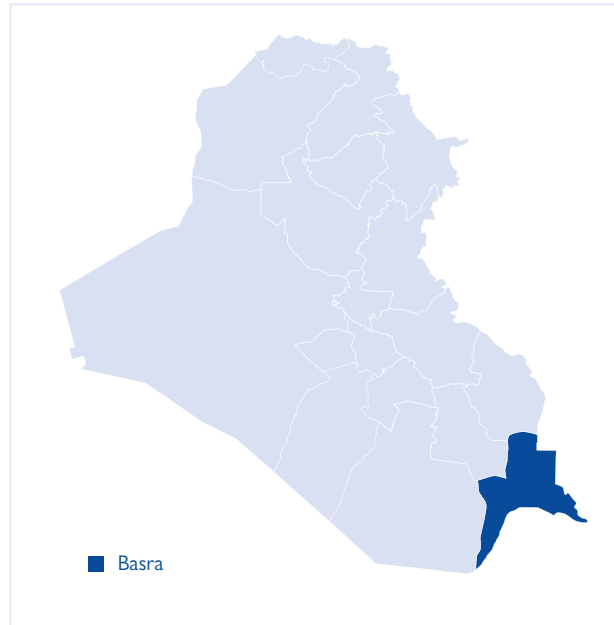


Photo 9: IOM Iraq 2023/Raber Aziz

## WOMEN AND GIRLS' SPECIFIC ISSUES

### PROTECTION RISKS FACED BY WOMEN AND GIRLS IN NAJAF AND DHI QAR GOVERNORATES

In Najaf and Dhi Qar, women and girls face numerous challenges, including issues related to safety, education, marriage, legal rights, employment and access to basic services. These challenges contribute to their sense of isolation, limited opportunities and vulnerability to various forms of violence and exploitation.

Various forms of GBV were highlighted in both locations. In Najaf, women expressed the need for safety and security within their homes, while in Dhi Qar, women highlighted street harassment in the community. In both situations, women reported a lack of support mechanisms and/or specialized GBV services in their communities.

Participants noted that girls' access to education is threatened by factors such as lack of nearby schools, inadequate transportation, early marriage and the conservative nature of the community that discourages mixed-gender education. Reportedly, only one school in Najaf is mixed-gender, and it accommodates over 800 students. In Dhi Qar, issues in accessing education include overburdened schools and a shortage of teachers. Therefore, girls in the community have limited educational and recreational opportunities and report feelings of isolation.

Girls in both locations are reportedly at risk of early marriage, often without proper registration. The lack of registration of marriages in court remains a concern among participants in Najaf, leading to unregistered children. This has a ripple effect because when underage girls then marry, the marriage is also unregistered, leaving them in a vulnerable position.

In Dhi Qar, the lack of employment opportunities leads to economic insecurity, with residents seeking initiatives for income generation. Women specifically request employment opportunities and small grants to initiate income-generating activities such as sewing projects. Participants also highlighted a lack of access to basic services in informal sites, such as safe water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) services in Najaf and a lack of access to clean water and psychological support in Dhi Qar. Participants expressed a sense of helplessness in addressing the range of issues they face, exacerbated by the absence of support from NGOs and civil society organizations and neglect from the Government in providing basic services and infrastructure.

Overall, both communities highlight the intersecting challenges faced by women and girls, including safety, education, legal rights, economic opportunities and access to basic services, underscoring the need for legal assistance and protection services to address their needs and promote their empowerment.



Photo 10: IOM Iraq 2023/Safa Al-Rubai'



## MOVING FORWARD

### CROSS-CUTTING RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the challenges faced by environmental migrants in accessing identity and civil documentation, as well as their tenure security and overall HLP rights, the following recommendations for programme design can be considered:



#### Legal assistance and awareness

- Establish, with the support of the donor community, legal assistance programmes specifically targeting environmental migrants to help them navigate documentation processes and understand their rights.
- Conduct awareness campaigns, with a special focus on women, to bridge informational gaps regarding application processes for documentation and HLP rights.



#### Documentation access support

- Collaborate with relevant authorities to streamline and simplify the documentation application process, addressing issues of opacity, inaccessibility and prohibitive costs. This aspect includes the organization of mobile visits by bodies in charge of issuance of documentation.



#### Special consideration for children

- Develop targeted interventions to address challenges faced by children born to environmental migrant parents, especially those outside their governorate of origin.



#### HLP rights advocacy and support

- Advocate with the government to suspend or delay evictions in informal sites, prioritizing durable solutions such as relocation to lands with guaranteed tenure security.
- Work towards securing agricultural contracts for environmental migrants, especially those outside their governorate of origin, to improve their tenure security.



#### Information and anti-exploitation measures

- Implement information campaigns to educate environmental migrants, particularly women, about potential exploitation risks and fraudulent schemes.
- Collaborate with local authorities and community leaders to disseminate reliable information and establish mechanisms to verify the legitimacy of agricultural contracts and property title deeds.



#### Evidence base strengthening

- Conduct further research to understand the types of compensation relevant for environmental migrants, the eligibility criteria and the effectiveness of these schemes in addressing the needs of the affected population.
- Develop an assessment to understand access to social protection schemes by environmental migrants, beyond the PDS.



#### Gender-based violence:

- Government and GBV service providers, with the support of donors, shall ensure accessible and inclusive GBV response including case management, referral and operation of women and girls' safe spaces.
- Attention shall be given to meaningful access of persons with disabilities and female-households to mitigate GBV risks. Regular protection monitoring as well as safety audits should be conducted to identify and respond to emerging concerns for women and girls.

### RECOMMENDATIONS TAILORED TO SAMPLED GOVERNORATES:

#### NAJAF

##### Conduct advocacy with the identified government stakeholders to

- Recognize all environmental migrants who relocated to Najaf as IDPs with right to protection from eviction and right to social protection.
- Secure exceptional approval to provide housing cards even if IDP status is not conferred.
- Extend support to ongoing registration efforts led by the MoMD. Many displaced families are in dire need to complete their IDP registrations, including assistance in accessing any missing documentation required for the process.

##### If IDP status is obtained:

- Obtain IDP cards.
- Obtain Bitaqā Badila to access the PDS.

##### If housing cards are obtained:

- Agree with the Department of Agriculture in Najaf to allocate land parcels with contracts for its exploitation.
- Obtain PDS cards and secure access to monthly food assistance for those IDPs having the PDS cards.

#### Dhi Qar

- Provide support to the MoMD in registering families due to staffing limitations
- While MoMD acknowledges the IDP status of these families, it is essential to register them and review their applications for official designation, ensuring they can access relevant services. Legal partners, with the support of the donor community, can assist by allocating additional human resources to streamline the registration process, particularly because of the high number of families in need.
- Enhance collaboration between Najaf and Dhi Qar governorates in identifying areas impacted by climate change and facilitating access to rights and services for individuals affected by environmental migration.

#### Basra

- Coordinate and advocate with the governorate for the provision of housing cards to families residing in informal sites, especially those with eviction orders.
- Coordinate with the Ministry of Agriculture to reach a solution and guarantee the renewal of agricultural contracts for environmental migrants.



Photo 11: IOM Iraq 2022/Hero Akbar



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