
RETURN PROCESS: HAWIGA, KIRKUK

Background¹

The return process in Iraq varies by governorate and district, depending on the local dynamics and context. The Returns Working Group (RWG) has been mapping these processes on a district level to inform advocacy and to assist partners who are involved in supporting IDPs to return to their areas of return. The return process entails a number of administrative steps where IDPs engage with various local authority counterparts, including the mayor, mukhtars, security actors and, where relevant, camp management.

Hawiga district has the highest number of returnees in Kirkuk but it is also believed to have the highest number of IDPs who are still in displacement. Of the 341,106 returnees in Kirkuk governorate, 162,744 individuals are from Hawiga and the remaining are from Kirkuk district and the other two districts of Daquq and Debis.² This return process mapping focuses on the procedures that IDPs must undergo should they wish to return to their areas of origin in Hawiga from locations outside of the district. Unlike in other areas, the process for return to Hawiga is uniform whether an IDP lives in camps or out of camp settings.

▪ Local context of Hawiga

Hawiga district is part of Kirkuk governorate and is located 55 km west of the city of Kirkuk. It is one of the four districts forming the governorate boundaries, alongside Kirkuk, Debis and Daquq districts. Hawiga is a rural area known for its seasonal contribution to Iraq's agricultural output. The majority of the population is Sunni Arab. Hawiga is home to several well-known tribes such as Ubeid, Juboor, Dulaim and Shammar. It was the last area in Iraq to be liberated from ISIL, following the Hawiga offensive between 20 September and 8 October 2017. According to DTM, 162,744 IDPs have returned to Hawiga as of June 2020, while 51,954 individuals from Hawiga are still in displacement in both camp and out of camp settings across Iraq. These IDPs from Hawiga make up more than half of the 100,026 IDPs in Kirkuk governorate.



¹ Information for this has been gathered through key informant interviews with local authorities and security actors in Hawiga and is valid as of July 2020.

² IOM DTM, Masterlist, June 2020.

Hawiga district has four sub-districts: Markaz Hawiga, Al Zab, Abbassi and Al Riyadh. The majority of IDPs, numbering 160,158 individuals, have returned to their habitual residence in Hawiga, while 2,118 individuals are in critical shelter and a few others live in rented accommodation. The security situation varies across the district. Markaz Hawiga, Al Zab and Abbassi have a somewhat stable security situation, which has allowed for the return of IDPs. The security situation in Al Riyadh is not as stable due to its proximity to Hamreen mountains, one of ISIL's key areas of operation. Consequently, return to this sub-district may be not be considered by IDPs or may be blocked by ISF, depending on the village and location. The federal police, local police and PMF cooperate to secure Hawiga. However, ISIL attacks have notably increased since April 2020, pushing various local tribes to announce a 'general standby' state to support the ISF in the area.

Before Return

▪ Applying for Security Clearance

IDPs wishing to return to Markaz Hawiga, from other districts within Kirkuk or from other governorates must first visit the office of the Hawiga Mayor. IDPs who are originally from one of the three sub-districts of Hawiga may visit the Mayor's office at the sub-district level, and not necessarily the Mayor's office in Hawiga center itself. The Mayor's office in the AoO is responsible for approving security clearance, after having received the required approvals from the ISF. The process takes approximately two weeks, unless an IDP family faces legal issues such as having names matching with wanted people or suspects. In such cases, additional time would be required to clear the names. All IDPs are eligible to obtain security clearance except for HHs perceived to be affiliated to ISIL. These HHs will either be denied security clearance or asked to provide a legal letter from the relevant court confirming that the HH has disowned or denounced their ISIL family member(s). Such cases mainly occur with widows and female headed HHs, whose male members had joined ISIL.

▪ Procedures

IDPs who return from other districts within Kirkuk or from other governorates must fill a return form obtained from the Mayor's office with information that include names of family members, number of the HH individuals, area of displacement, history of displacement, and so on. They are also required to provide copies of personal documents of every returning HH member (mainly the Iraqi ID or Jinsiyah), the residence card of the head of HH and the camp departure letter (if displaced in a formal camp) or a letter from the Mukhtar (if displaced out of camps), before submitting the documents to the security committee for vetting. The security committee sits in the Mayor's office and normally takes two weeks to process the application. If the application is approved by the security committee, the application will be sent to the Mayor for final approval and signature. Once this final approval is granted, the IDPs receive the approved application and may return to their AoO as soon as possible.

- The Security Committee

There are four different security actors that contribute to the crosschecking of data at the Mayor's office: The Intelligence Agency (Local Police), National Security Service (NSS), PMF and the Federal Police. The return application is checked by each actor independently on their respective computer databases to verify the IDP HH's information. This implies that the security database of criminals/ suspects and wanted people is not centralized and each security entity has its own list. Therefore, should the HH data match the criminal data of any of the four factions, the application is rejected immediately.

- Additional information

In cases where IDPs have a member employed in the ISF, the return form may be approved immediately, depending on the situation. Furthermore, IDPs receive all the necessary information about the process from security forces while applying for security clearance. Single females and female headed HHs with no perceived ISIL affiliation reportedly face no legal issues in applying for security clearance and in following up with the required procedures. However, HHs with perceived affiliation to ISIL and HHs with other legal issues will not be issued security clearance, and their legal cases will be handled in accordance with Iraq law.

The Return Process

IDPs may return to their AoO immediately after obtaining security clearance. Information about the security situation and basic services in the AoO is normally obtained from various sources such as local authorities, security forces, humanitarian partners, local mukhtars, relatives, etc. IDPs may also need further clarification about the documents required for movement through checkpoints, which they could request from local authorities and security forces at the AoO.

IDPs must present their approved security clearance document (return form), personal IDs of all HH members and a camp departure letter (for in-camp IDPs) or proof of displacement (for out of camp IDPs) at checkpoints during the return journey. IDPs reportedly spend a short amount of time at checkpoints and face few challenges. There are reportedly no local committees of mukhtars or community representatives in Hawiga supporting IDPs attempting to return, which is primarily due to the poor security situation in certain areas.

After Return

- Registration with the Local Government

Returnees are required to inform the local mukhtar of AoO about their return as soon as possible and must submit the approved return form and personal IDs to the security forces controlling the area to be formally registered as returnees. This registration is used to facilitate residency and free movement in Hawiga. The mukhtar, in turn, communicates with local authorities and security forces to update them on the return of the HH.



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Returnees may also close their displacement file at the MOMD office in Kirkuk and open a return file. Registration with MOMD is optional, but a returnee HH will not be eligible for a return grant of 1,500,000 IQD without documenting their return at the MOMD office. To do so, returnees are required to submit the return form confirming that they have returned, personal IDs, a stamp of the local mukhtar of the AoO and a camp departure letter (in case they have returned from a formal camp).