



UNHCR

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
Haut Commissariat des Nations Unies pour les réfugiés

**Needs Assessment of Recently Displaced
in Al-Chibayish District, Thi-Qar
Governorate**

February 2007

I. Background

It is estimated that over 1.8 million people are currently displaced within Iraq as of 11 February 2007,¹ 690,000 of whom were displaced after February 2006, following the bombing of the Al-Askari Shrine in Samarra. Sectarian violence has since escalated, alongside anti-state insurgency, counter-insurgency and crime, leading to widespread violence and insecurity throughout Iraq.

This report analyses the background and current situation of IDPs displaced to the district of Al-Chibayish, in Thi-Qar Governorate since February 2006. It focuses on assessing needs at the district level rather than the Governorate level, in an effort to better understand the needs of IDP communities, so that agencies can tailor assistance to specific needs identified.

Due to its relatively quiet security environment Thi-Qar Governorate has seen a steady movement of IDPs and returning refugees arriving in the Governorate since 2003. In 2006, this flow increased dramatically as families continued to relocate due to threats and violence. The majority of IDPs in Thi-Qar settled around the Governorate capital Nassiriyah, however a significant number of IDPs settled in the rural marsh district of Al-Chibayish. UNHCR implementing partners, with knowledge of the district indicated that IDPs in Al-Chibayish had specific needs that needed to be addressed and monitored further.

Governorates in Southern Iraq including Thi-Qar experienced neglect and persecution by the former regime, making them particularly vulnerable to widespread poverty. As yet, the influx of IDPs has not caused tension with the host community, however, the potential for conflict remains due to increased demands on public services that are already near breaking point. The real estate market, rental prices, the cost of basic food stuffs, and fuel have also increased dramatically making living conditions especially difficult.

II. Methodology of monitoring activities

Monitoring activities in Thi-Qar were undertaken by a UNHCR implementing partner who has managed assistance programmes in the district for a number of years. Monitoring was targeted at Al-Chibayish, a rural district in the Southern Marsh region, and an area known to have a high concentration of IDPs.

UNHCR's partner visited IDP locations/villages to assess conditions and monitor the target population, they also spoke to stakeholders with knowledge of the area. Monitors interviewed IDP households and asked detailed questions about their access to food, health care, education and water, as well as the cause of flight, their accommodation, and intentions. Monitoring was undertaken by implementing partner staff, who had all received training. Monitoring took place during November and December 2006, and over a six-week period.

The assessment is not a representative sample of the entire Governorate of Thi-Qar, but is an account of the identified needs of IDPs based in a rural and isolated district where many IDPs are residing.²

¹ See Cluster F, *Internally Displaced Persons in Iraq – Update 11 February 2007*.

² For information on the IDP situation in the whole Governorate, please see: IOM, *Emergency IDP Monitoring and Assessments*, 15 September 2006.

III. Analysis of UNHCR Monitoring Findings

a) Number and profile of IDP population in Al-Chibayish

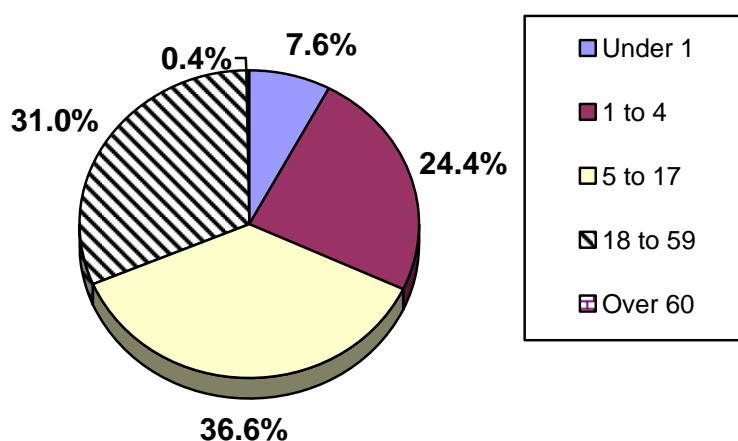
UNHCR monitored a sample of up to 419 households in Al-Chibayish district representing 3,457 individuals, with an average family size of 8 people. The size of the sample in this assessment varies depending on the number of IDP households that answered each question during the interview.

48.5% of the IDPs monitored were male, and 51.5% were female. The majority of household's were male-headed, however there was also a significant number of female-headed households (20%), representing a total of 82 families. These families are particularly vulnerable and in need of further attention due to their decreased capacity to access income, as well as their single status.

The age breakdown of IDPs living in Al-Chibayish is outlined in *Figure 1*. Although not a significant concern, the data reveals a fairly high proportion of IDPs under the age of four in comparison to other monitored districts. In fact, 30% of IDPs were listed as being under the age of four indicating a need for increased attention to be given to maternal and child-focused health services in the district, as well as to education.

For security reasons IDPs in Al-Chibayish did not reveal details of their religious background to monitors. However, it is known that IDPs in Al-Chibayish district are predominantly Arab and are mainly Shiite Muslims. They are also part of a more general displacement trend being witnessed in Iraq, where by IDPs flee to areas with a high concentration of people with a similar ethnic/religious background.

Figure 1: Age range of monitored IDP households
(Sample of 415 households who indicated their age range)

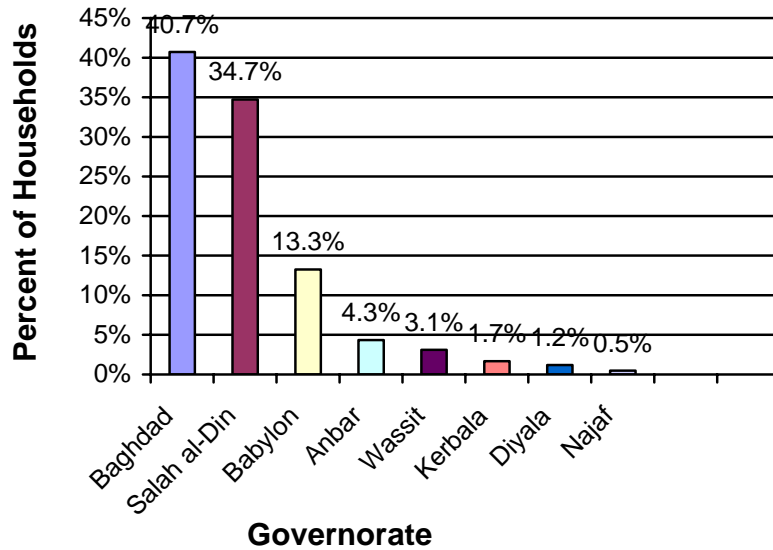


b) Place of residence prior to displacement and reason for flight

The majority of IDPs monitored by UNHCR in Al-Chibayish were most recently displaced from Governorates in central Iraq, predominantly from Baghdad (40.7%), Salah al Din (34.7%), and Babylon (13.3%) (*See Figure 2*). The highest percentage of IDPs in Al-Chibayish (18%) were

displaced from a single district called Mahmoudiya, a mixed district south of Baghdad which has experienced extremely high levels of violence and civilian fatalities. High numbers of IDPs were also displaced from districts in Salah al-Din, specifically Balad (14.9%) and Samarra (10.8%). Salah al Din is a Governorate that felt the full impact of the bombing of the Al-Askari Shrine in its city of Samarra, and as a result it has also seen a large exodus of residents.

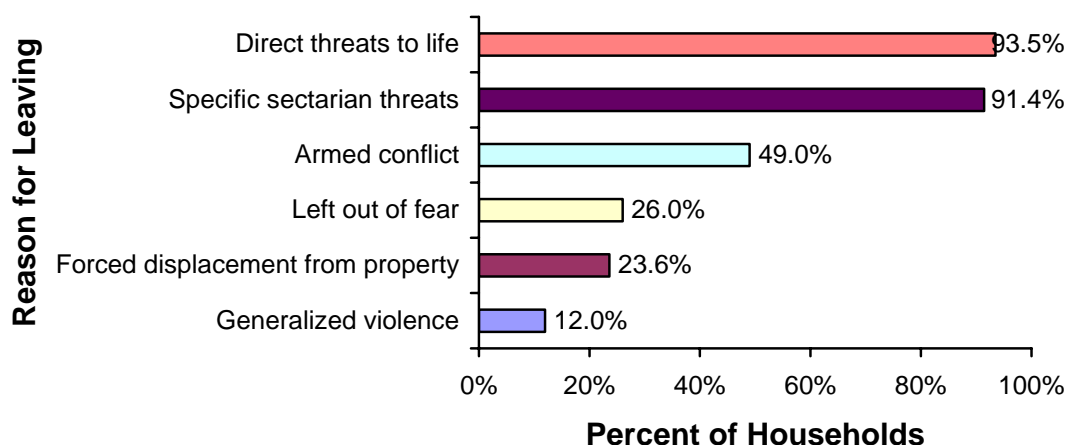
Figure 2: Governorate most recently displaced from
(Sample of 415 IDP households)



IDPs surveyed in Al-Chibayish said they fled their place of residence because of specific sectarian and direct threats to their lives, as well as a generalized fear of violence. 93.5% indicated that they had experienced direct threats to their lives, and 92.4% said they had experienced specific sectarian threats. The trauma of displacement and the impact of witnessing extreme violence prior to flight should not be underestimated. At present is no psycho-social care available for IDPs in Al-Chibayish, and extremely limited health care services (*see Section IV, Health*).

Figure 3: Reasons for leaving place of residence

(Sample of 292 IDP households. The values do not add up to 100% because households listed up to three reasons for leaving.)



c) Security and relationship with the host community

The improved security situation was one of the main factors that led IDPs to choose to reside in Al-Chibayish, in fact, all IDPs surveyed stated they felt safe in their current location. Relations with the host community in Al-Chibayish appear to be good, with 97.3% of IDPs reporting that they had been received well by the local community, this is thought to be due to existing tribal and familial ties in the area. Despite their most recent displacement being from Governorates in the centre of Iraq, the majority of IDPs indicated that they were now in their governorate of origin (it is likely that these IDPs [or their parents] were displaced from Thi-Qar because of persecution by the former regime and are now ‘returning’ in search of better security). However, as violence and displacement continues it is possible that the arrival of further IDPs in the district will cause tension and hostility, due to overcrowding and increased demands on public services.

100% of IDP households indicated that women were now less able to move around outside of the house than before 2003,³ and they also agreed that women’s freedom of movement was restricted. However, all households also stated that women felt safe in their current place of residence, and that women approached their families if they were concerned about safety.

d) Intentions

IDPs in Al-Chibayish did not outline what their exact intentions were, or whether they plan to settle or move to a third location, but many stated that they could not longer return to their property in their place of residence, therefore reducing the possibility of return.

³ This is in comparison to the place IDPs were residing in 2003.

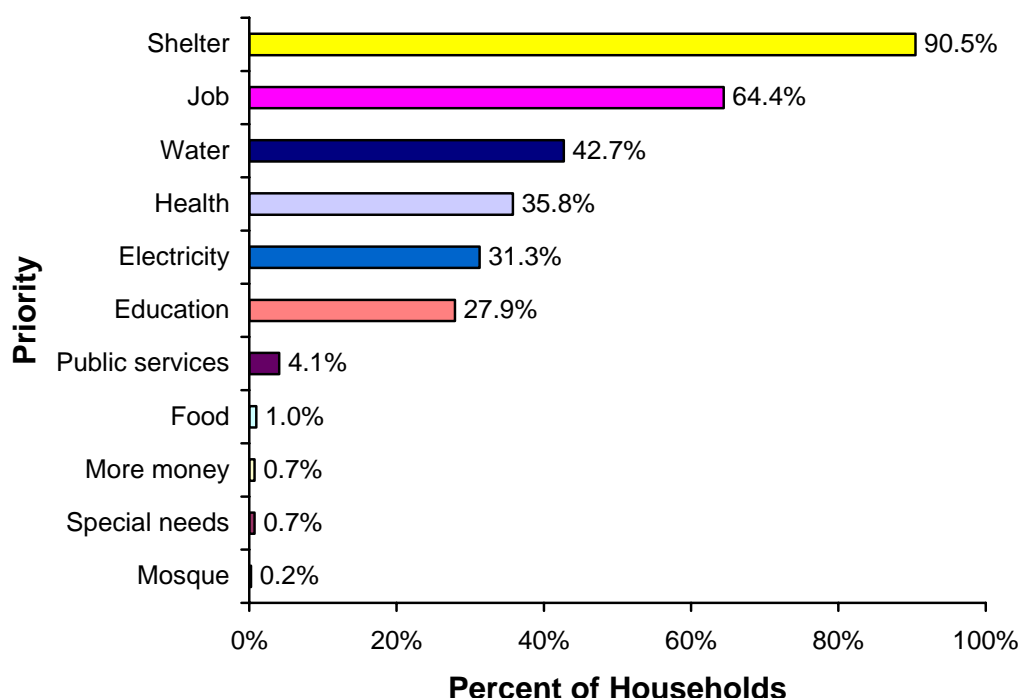
IV. Analysis of identified needs and priorities in Al-Chibayish

Priorities

This section analyses the situation and needs of IDPs in Al-Chibayish, and prioritises them in order of the needs identified by IDPs themselves. UNHCR monitoring asked IDPs to list what their top three priorities were, over 90% identified shelter as their main priority, followed by 64.4% who identified employment or work, 42.7% then identified water as their most important need above public services such as health (35.8%), electricity (31.3%) and education (27.9%).

Figure 3: Top three priorities of IDP households

(Sample of 419 IDP households. The values do not add up to 100% because households listed up to three priorities for assistance.)



a) Housing and shelter

Monitoring revealed that shelter was a top priority for IDPs in Al-Chibayish with over 90% of IDPs indicating it was their greatest need. Al-Chibayish is a district located in the vast Hammar Marsh area in Southern Iraq which prior to the drainage of the marshes by the former regime covered three quarters of Thi-Qar Governorate. The persecution of the Marsh Arabs including the drainage of the Marsh region and destruction of property has meant that the area has become an extremely difficult place to live, with little or no access to livelihoods and resources. It is these deprived areas with limited housing and shelter that IDPs have moved to along side many returning refugees.

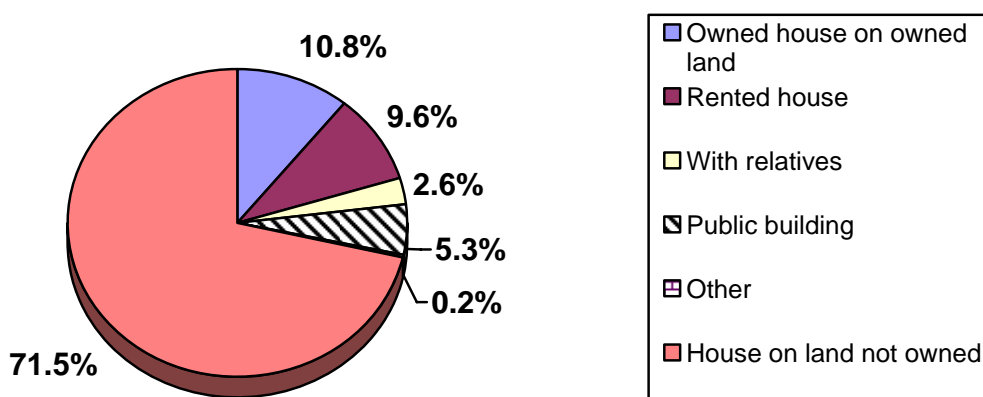
Out of 412 households 88.3% said they were living in rural areas, 10.4% in semi-rural locations, and 1.0% in urban areas. As mentioned adequate shelter options in these isolated

areas are limited, due to both a lack of resources and the increasing cost of building material and rental prices in the main towns. Most IDPs (71.5%) stated they lived in their own houses on land that was not owned (see Figure 4). More often than not these are temporary shelters (mud or reed huts) built on rural/government land, emphasizing the need to address the issue of sustainable housing for IDPs.

Only 10.8% of IDPs owned land in Al-Chibayish, the remaining were living in temporary accommodation, 9.6% were renting houses, 5.3% were living in public buildings, and 2% are living with relatives. Monitoring carried out by other agencies in the Governorate,⁴ also indicated that the majority of IDPs living in Nassiriyah and other main district towns are renting or living with host families.

Figure 4: Type of accommodation

(Sample of 417 IDP households)

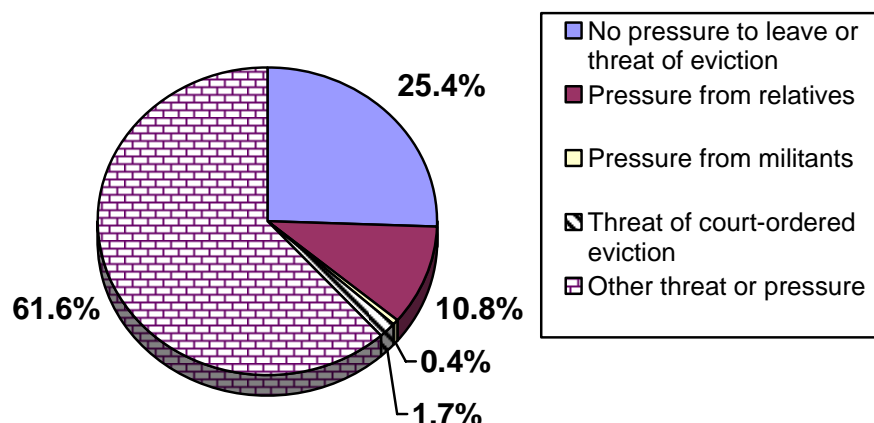


Implementing partners working in Al-Chibayish further indicate that the majority of IDP housing in the district is damaged or in poor condition, as well as being overcrowded. 84.9% said IDPs were living in accommodation that was somewhat overcrowded, and 8.7% said their accommodation was extremely overcrowded, and only 6.5 % said their household was not overcrowded.

IDPs are currently living in unsustainable and overcrowded housing, with over two thirds of IDPs saying they felt some form of pressure to leave their current place of settlement (see Figure 5). Moreover, 87.5% of IDPs surveyed said property owned in their former place of residence was now destroyed or unusable, 9.1% said property was occupied by government or militia, 0.1% said it was occupied/claimed by private citizens, and only 2.7% said they still had access to their property.

⁴ See, for example, reports produced by IOM.

Figure 5: Does the family currently face a threat of eviction or pressure to leave?
(Sample of 292 IDP households)



b) Employment and income

64% of monitored households indicated their greatest need after shelter was employment. Employment was also chosen by more IDPs as a priority over access to services, including water, electricity, health services, and education.

The fact that access to employment has been placed so highly is a reflection of the limited livelihood and employment opportunities available in Al-Chibayish. As a result, IDPs settling in rural areas in Thi-Qar like Al-Chibayish face major challenges in finding an income, and being able to provide for their families. Almost 95% (94.7%) of IDP households surveyed said their main source of income was through casual/irregular employment, and only 3.2% said that they had full time employment. IDPs living in such isolated locations are also often left out of income-generating programmes, and have reduced employment opportunities compared to those in urban areas. Up to half of IDPs surveyed said they had brought livestock and/or agricultural tools with them.

c) Access to services

Access and availability of services such as water, electricity, health and education services were all identified as needs that affected IDPs in Al-Chibayish, however, access to drinking water appears to be one of their greatest needs.

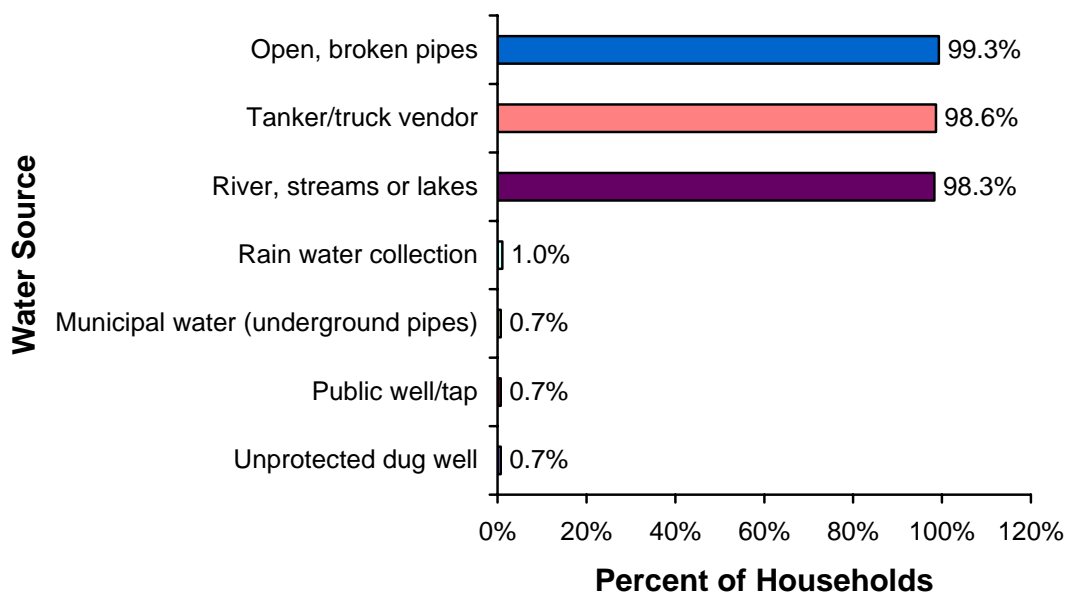
Water and sanitation

Water and sanitation systems have in general seen years of neglect in Thi-Qar, and are almost absent from many rural areas. While some urban areas have underground pipes and increased access to tankers, most families surveyed do not have a regular supply of clean drinking water. In rural areas, such as Al-Chibayish people often use water from rivers and streams causing health problems because of the high saline content and contamination from poor sanitation. The main water sources are salt water from the Euphrates River, and sweet water from the Al-Garaf River (a branch of the Tigris River).

When asked why their family did not drink clean drinking water, 89% said because of the distance to the water source, 8.1% said because it was of insufficient quality, and 2.6% said that drinking water was too expensive. There is a clear need for improved access to clean drinking water in Al-Chibayish, where due to distance nearly 90% of IDPs monitored cannot access drinking safe water. However, 99% of households had enough water for hygiene and all (100%) IDP households monitored said their families had access to toilets. Figure 6 lists the three main water sources available to IDPs surveyed in Al-Chibayish.

Figure 6: What are the main water sources?

(Sample of 288 IDP households. The values do not add up to 100% because households listed up to three water sources.)

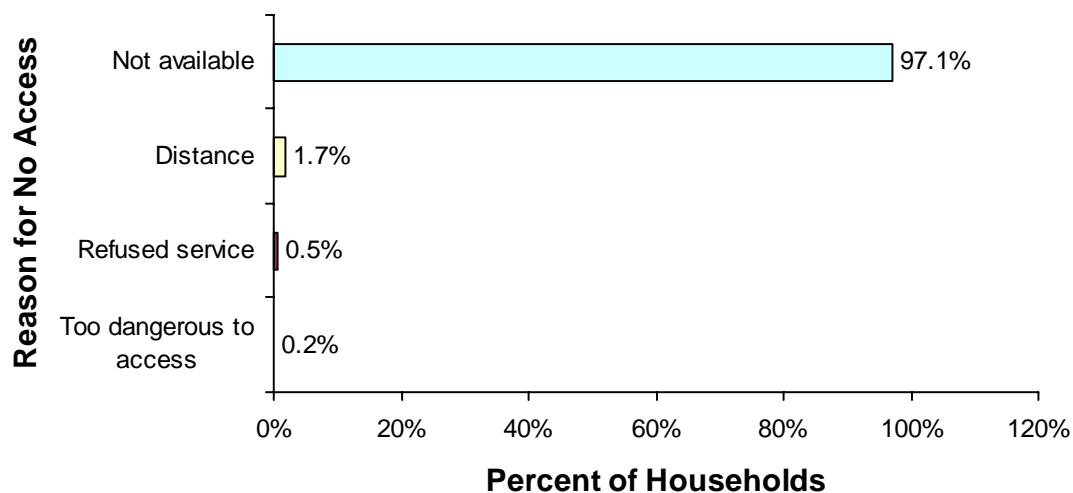


Health

UNHCR Monitoring has indicated an urgent need for health facilities to be made available to IDPs in Al-Chibayish. Although there is a small hospital in the district centre of Al-Chibayish, as well as in other towns in Thi-Qar, access to primary health facilities appears to be severely restricted for IDPs Al-Chibayish. Only 1% of IDPs (See Figure 7) stated they had access to health facilities and drugs needed in their village/town. When asked the reason why households did not have access to primary health care services, 97.1% said it was they were ‘not available’, 1.7% said distance, 0.5% said they were refused service and 0.2% said it because they were dangerous to access. **There are currently no out reach services to IDPs or host communities living in these areas, and only 1.4% of those surveyed said they had been visited by a health worker.** When asked to list their family’s main health problems 97.6 % of households said child health, 96.6% said malnutrition was a problem and 89.4% stated maternal health.

Figure 7: Reason's for lack of access to health facilities

(Sample of 419 IDP households)



Electricity and fuel

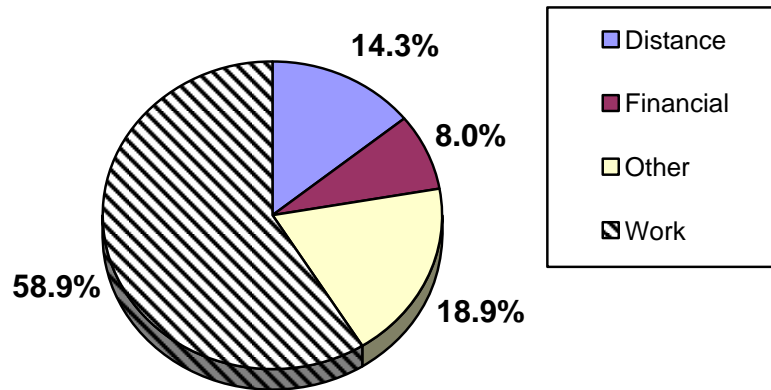
Electricity was selected as a top priority by 31.3% of IDP households, and reflects the limited availability of electricity in rural areas like Al-Chibayish. Each district town centre is said to have on average about 16 hours of electricity a day, while in rural areas there is often no access. All IDPs surveyed in Al-Chibayish said that they had no access to electricity. Of more concern is the fact that many of the same families were finding it difficult to access fuel for cooking and heating restricting their ability to perform the most basic tasks. While all families surveyed said they no access to fuel, some IDPs could access kerosene, benzene and propane.

Education

Monitoring indicates that education is a key concern for IDPs living in Al-Chibayish. A significant amount of children are not able to attend school for the reasons listed in Figure 8. Almost 60% of IDP households said that they had children who could not attend school because they needed to work, 18% said for other reasons, 14.3% said that they did not attend due to the distance, and 8% because of financial constraints. It is of particular concern that IDP children in Al-Chibayish are having to work (either in the home or outside) and therefore cannot attend school. It also reflects the desperate need for increased employment opportunities/income generation for adults, in order to reduce the need for children to work and provide income.

Children who are attending school have also faced problems enrolling in local schools since their displacement. In 2006, the Ministry of Education and UNHCR Legal Aid and Information Centres assisted IDP children to obtain documents so they could enrol in the correct school grade. Many IDP families did not bring school certificates with them when they fled their place of residence, making it difficult to determine the children's grade.

Figure 8: Reason for not attending school
(Out of 175 IDP households surveyed)



d) Access to food and assistance

All IDPs monitored by UNHCR in Al-Chibayish were able to transfer their Public Distribution System (PDS) food rations to their new location. However, all IDPs in Al-Chibayish also stated that they rely solely on PDS rations to feed their family (which is not always delivered in full quantity). However, LAIC's in Nassiriyah and Al-Chibayish have reported IDPs needing assistance when renewing other forms of documentation or transferring details. Although monitored IDPs said they had not received extra food assistance, 53% said they had received legal assistance, and 73.3% said they had received 'other' forms of assistance.