



**UNHCR**

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

# **Needs Assessment of Recently-Displaced in Amarah District, Missan Governorate**

**February 2007**

## **I. Background**

**It is estimated that over 1.8 million people are currently displaced within Iraq as of 11 February 2007,**<sup>1</sup> 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 situation and needs of IDPs who have been displaced to the district of Amarah, Missan Governorate since February 2006.** As part of an effort to better understand the needs of recently displaced IDPs, UNHCR undertook monitoring in specific districts across Southern Iraq known to be accommodating high numbers of IDPs.

The district of Amarah is one of six administrative districts in Missan, a Governorate that borders Iran to the East. The district of Amarah also accommodates the Governorate capital Amarah City. The city of Amarah is a predominantly urban, however, the Governorate of Missan is located in the poor and rural Marsh region of Southern Iraq. It has also witnessed continuous waves of displacement and return due to persecution by the former regime, and has received a significant number of IDPs and returning refugees since 2003.

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 Amarah were undertaken by a UNHCR implementing partner, who has assisted and monitored both returnees and IDPs in the Governorate for a number of years. Monitoring was targeted at Amarah, a district known to have a concentration of IDPs, and where UNHCR's implementing partner has provided assistance to the IDP population and hence developed positive relations.

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, and worked with the Legal Aid and Information Centre which they also operate. 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 and monitoring took place over a three month period from November 2006 to January 2007.

**The assessment is not a representative sample of the entire Governorate of Missan, but is an account of identified needs of IDPs based in a single district where UNHCR has been assisting IDPs.**<sup>2</sup>

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

<sup>2</sup> For information on the IDP situation in the whole Governorate, please see: IOM, *Emergency IDP Monitoring and Assessments*, 4 December 2006.

### III. Analysis of UNHCR monitoring findings

#### a) Number and profile of IDP population in Amarah

UNHCR monitored up to 204 households in the district of Amarah, representing a sample of 1,348 individuals. The size of the sample in this assessment varies depending on how many IDP households answered a specific question during the monitoring interview.

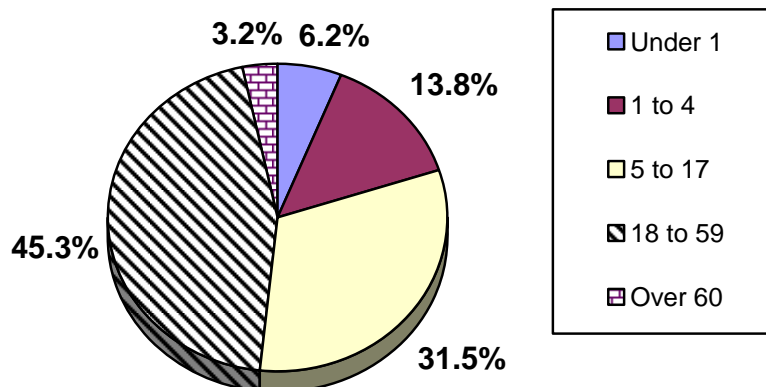
53% of surveyed households were male, and 47% were female. Only a small percentage (7.4%) of households described themselves as being female-headed, however, it is likely those 15 families face additional pressures and vulnerabilities because of their reduced ability to access income, and their single status.

Figure 1 shows the breakdown of IDPs by age group. Of the group monitored over half of IDPs are under the age of 18, placing obvious demands on existing child services, such as education and health services in Amara. Only 3.2% (representing 42 individuals) of the IDPs surveyed are over 60, however, 11.3% of households said that they had persons of old age in their households who were in need of additional support.

IDPs surveyed in Amara did not indicate their religious or ethnic background because of concerns about security, but monitors indicated the majority of those surveyed were Shiite Muslims. All IDPs monitored (100%) said they had been targeted because of belonging to a specific religion or sect.

**Figure 1: Age range of monitored IDP households**

(Sample of 204 IDP households which indicated their age range)



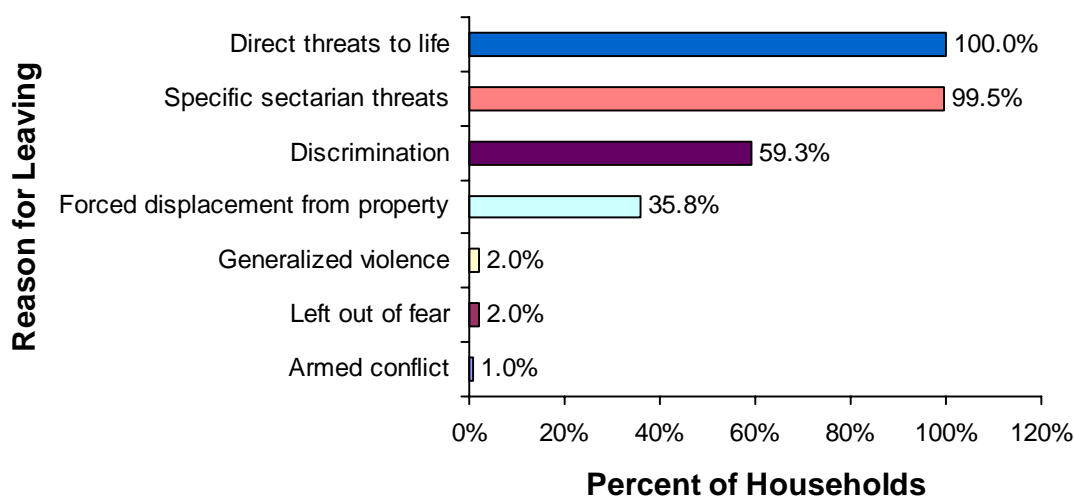
#### b) Place of residence prior to departure and reason for flight

Nearly all IDPs monitored in Amara were displaced from Baghdad (87.3%), and from its surrounding districts, the majority were from the districts of Karkh (36.8%), Al-Resafa (22.5%), and Abu Ghraib (12.3%) in Baghdad Governorate. The remaining IDPs were displaced from the Governorates of Diyala (7.4%), Kirkuk (2.0%), Salah Al-Din, (1.5%), Anbar (1.5%), and one household was from Babylon (0.5%).

IDPs monitored in Amarah appear to have experienced significant trauma and discrimination prior to their displacement (see Figure 2), with nearly all households stating they had received direct threats to life (100%), as well as specific sectarian threats (99.5%) causing them to flee.

**Of particular concern are the 35.8% of households who stated that they had been forcibly displaced from their property in their place of residence, severely limiting options for possible future return.** Nearly all IDPs (99.5%) said they had fled because of events that took place after the bombing of Al-Askari Shrine in Samarra.

**Figure 2: Reason for leaving place of residence**  
(Out of 204 IDP households)



### c) Security and relationship with the host community

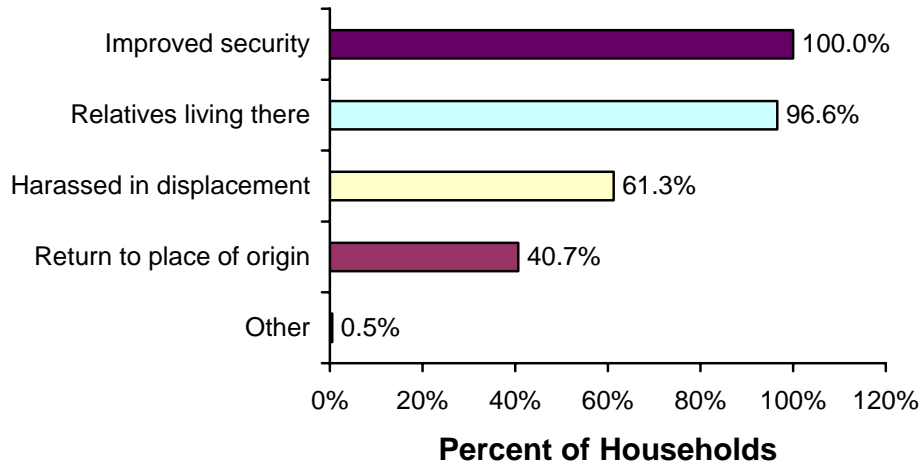
97.5% of IDPs monitored by UNHCR said that they felt safe in their current location, and nearly all IDPs (98.5%) reported that they were received well by the host community in Amarah. Despite the obvious pressure a new influx of people brings to a community, in regards to increased demands on services and overcrowding, hostilities do not appear to have increased. Figure 3 reveals some of the factors contributing to this good relationship, with 96% of IDPs surveyed saying they had relations living in Amarah, and 40% revealing it is their Governorate of origin or their relatives and so having familial or tribal ties there. All monitored IDPs said they had moved to their current location because of the improved security situation. 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.

Out of 204 surveyed families, 99.5% said that women and girls felt safe to move around outside the house. In contrast to districts in other monitored Governorates in the South, 36.3% of households in Amarah said that women were 'more able' to move around outside of the house than in 2003.<sup>3</sup> 41.2% said there had been no change in their ability to move, and only 22.5% said they were less able. In Al-Zubair district, for example, only 11% of households stated that women felt safe outside of the home, and over 70% said that women were less able to move outside the home since 2003.

<sup>3</sup> This is in comparison to the place IDPs were residing in 2003.

**Figure 3: Reason for moving to current location**

(Sample of 204 IDP households. The values do not add up to 100% because households listed up to three reasons for returning.)

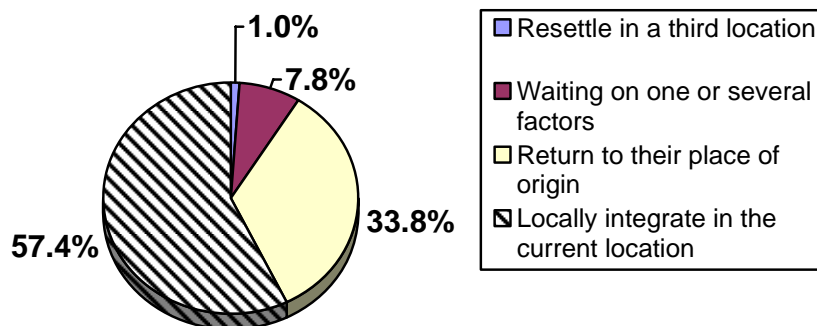


**d) Intentions**

The majority of IDPs (57.4%) monitored in Amarah (*see Figure 4*) indicated their intention to integrate in their current location, and this figure may rise with 7.8% of IDPs waiting for one or several factors to make a decision. 33.8% of IDPs are planning to return to their place of origin. However, nearly all IDPs (99%) said that they would not make a decision on moving until the security situation improves. Many households indicated they had also lost their property in their former place of residence, hence reducing options for return.

**Figure 4: IDP intentions**

(Sample of 204 IDP households which indicated their intentions)



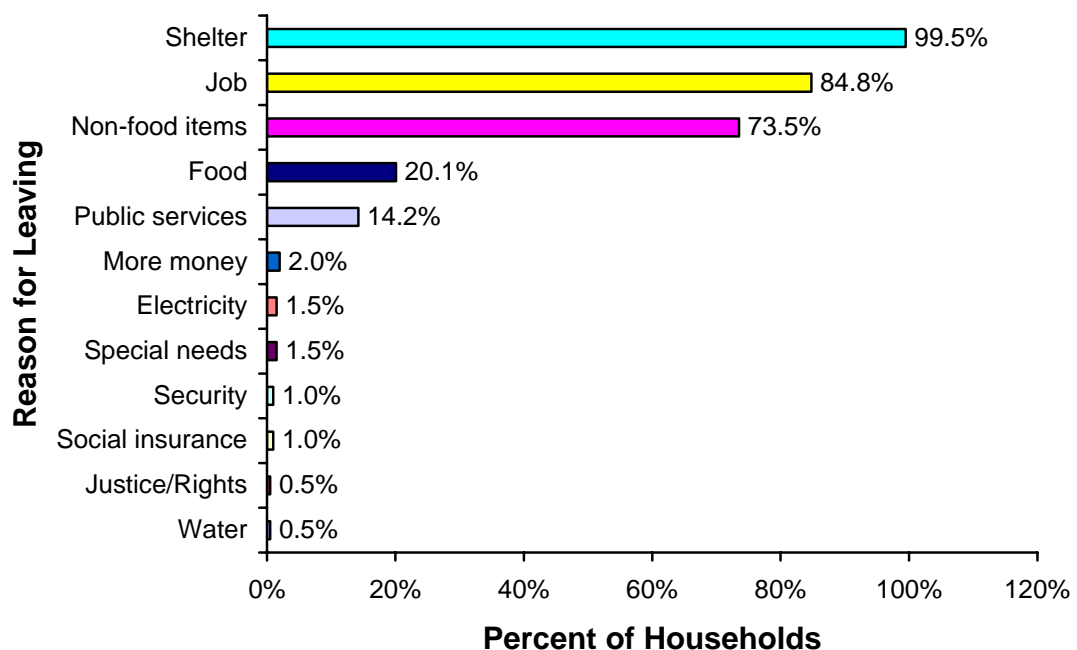
## IV. Analysis of identified needs and priorities in Amarah

### Priorities

This section analyses the situation and needs of IDPs in Amarah, and prioritises them in order of the needs identified by IDPs themselves. When asked to list their top three priorities, 99.5% of IDPs indicated shelter, 84.8% said employment, 73.5% said access to non-food items, 20% felt food assistance was most important, and 14.2% said access to public services was a top priority. Despite poor access to services in Amarah, in particular water and health, only a small amount of IDPs identified access to public services as a top priority. Overwhelmingly, as across all governorates monitored in the South, shelter was identified by IDPs as the greatest need, this is regardless of whether IDPs were renting, or have their own property or land.

### **Figure 5: IDP households top priorities**

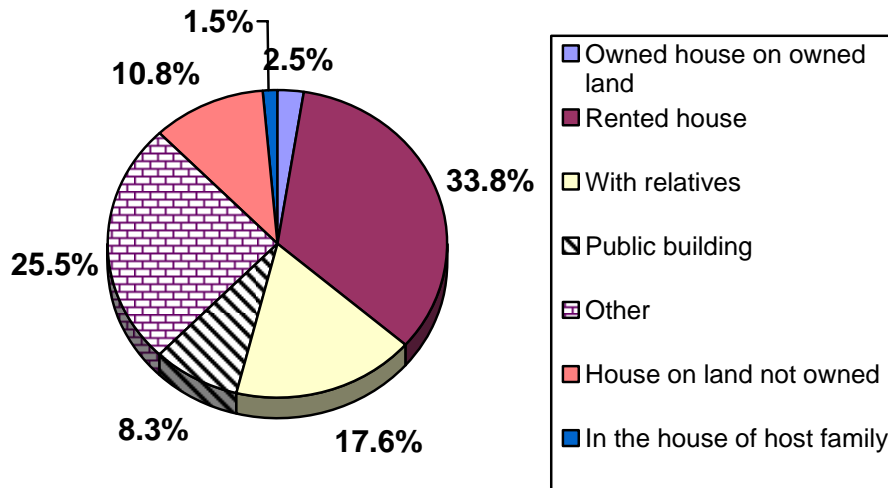
(Sample of 204 indicated their top three priorities. The values do not add up to 100% because households listed up to three priorities for assistance.)



#### a) Housing and shelter

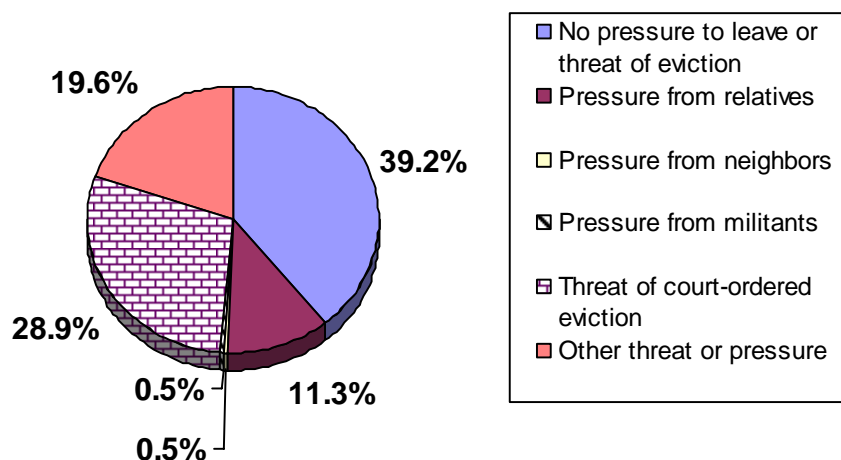
UNHCR monitoring revealed that shelter is a top priority for IDPs in Amarah, with over 90% of IDPs saying it was their greatest need. IDPs in Amarah describe themselves as living in both urban (47.1%) and semi-rural (52%) locations, while only 0.5% lived in a rural location, and one (0.5%) household was living in camp. While Amarah is the Governorate capital in Missan, it is a city that is not significantly built up, and many poor residents are situated on the outskirts of town what can be described as 'semi-rural' locations, where access to services are limited.

**Figure 6: Type of accommodation**  
 (Sample of 204 returnee households which indicated their housing type)



The figure above (see Figure 6) reveals the variety of ways in which IDPs are accommodated in Amarah. The majority of households are living in temporary accommodation, and only 1.5% of households own a house on land that is not being rented. A significant number (33.8%) of IDPs rent houses in Amarah, it is this influx of IDPs alongside the influx of returning refugees since 2003 that help to explain why rental process in Amarah are said to have increased so dramatically. As a result of high rental process many IDPs cannot afford to rent, and are either living with relatives (17.6%), in public buildings (8.3%), or on land that is not owned (10.8%). Furthermore, about 25.5% described their accommodation as ‘other’, it is believed that these IDPs are either living in simple shelters, brick or reed, and are probably living on government land with a high risk of eviction.

**Figure 7: Pressure to leave**  
 (Sample of 204 IDP households)



The majority of the households above have little or no ownership rights and an alarming number appear to be in a precarious and unsustainable housing situation. Nearly 30% are facing the threat of a court-ordered eviction, and 19.6% are facing pressure to leave because of other threats or pressure (likely to be linked to security and insufficient funds for rent or accommodation). 11.3% said they felt some pressure from relatives they are living with to leave their current place of residence.

Over 84.3% said property in their former place of residence is occupied by militia groups, 6.4% said it is unusable because of damage, 5.2% said they did not know what had happened to their property, and only 3.5% of IDPs said they could now access their property.

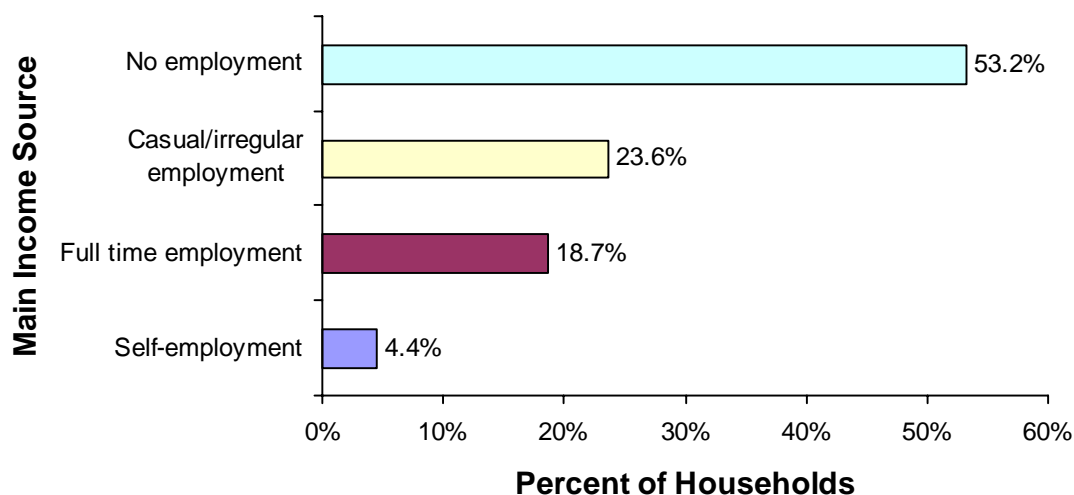
Moreover, while 99.4% of IDPs said that they had lost property since February 2006, most IDPs also said they had also lost property since 1968 but had not tried to reclaim it. 49.4% said this was because they did not know how, 21.8% said they had security concerns about the current occupant, 17.9% said they had little trust in the process, 9.6% lacked the correct documentation, and 1.3% had difficulties accessing CRRPD or a court. These IDPs face particular economic hardships in light of the fact that have lost property on a number of occasions due to their continued displacement.

### **b) Employment**

A high percentage of IDPs (84.8%) monitored in Amarah indicated that a job/employment was one of their greatest needs. Although the Governorate capital is based in Amarah district, it still has an extremely high unemployment rate and very few employment opportunities for IDPs. Of those IDPs monitored 53.2% said that they have no employment to support their household income, 23.6% relied on casual irregular employment, and only 18.7% had full time employment. Only 1% of households said that women had access to the labour market, making earning an income especially difficult for the 7.4% of households that are female-headed.

**Figure 6: Main source of income**

(Sample of 203 returnee households which indicated their main source of income)



**c) Non-food items**

In contrast to other monitored districts who did not indicate a need for non-food items, 73.5% of households in Amarah district saw them as a high priority. It is thought this need was identified due to lack of adequate housing in Amarah and a need for extra shelter material for IDPs living in very simple temporary shelters. 99.3% also indicated that they brought shelter equipment with them in preparation for displacement.

**d) Food assistance and access to food**

Up to 20% monitored IDPs indicated that food was a priority, and while most IDPs (77.9%) had been able to transfer their PDS details and were receiving them, over 20% have still not been able to access them. It is likely that the 20% of IDPs who indicated a need for food, are currently unable to access PDS, and are in great need of food assistance, especially in light of the fact that 80% of IDPs said they rely solely on PDS to feed their families. Of those not receiving their rations (45 households), 60% said that there was a delay in transferring their details, and 20% said they could not access the distribution point because of security. However, 87.7% of people did say there were receiving some form of extra food assistance from other organisations.

**e) Public Services**

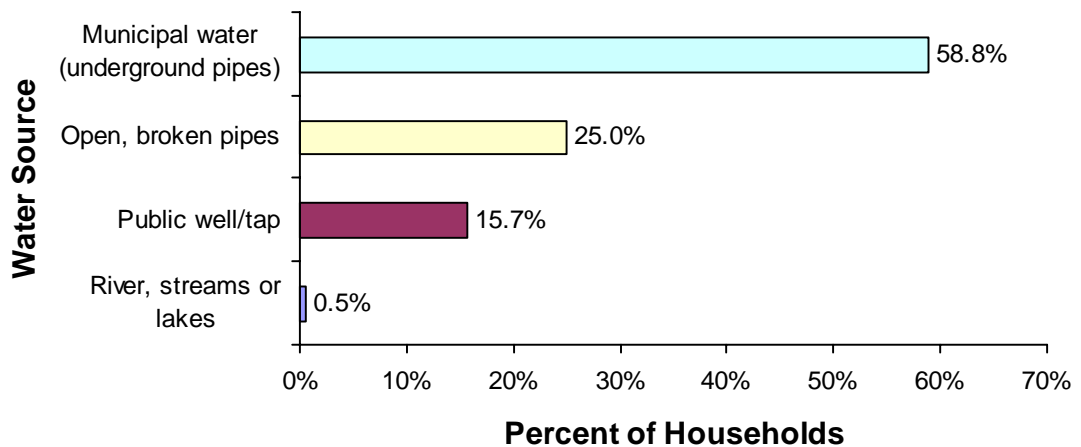
IDPs identified public services as being a priority in Amarah; however they did not indicate exactly what type of public service was their greatest priority. The section below outlines exactly what access to basic services IDPs in Amarah have.

**Water and sanitation**

Only 2% of households monitored by UNHCR said they had access to drinking water in their village/town, 91.6% of those who had no access said it was because clean drinking water was too expensive, 4.9% said they could not access due to distance, and 3.4% indicated ‘other’ reasons. Despite a real need for clean drinking water, households are able to access water for general use from municipal pipes, open broken pipes, public wells or taps, and rivers and streams.

**Figure 7: Main sources of water**

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



Although IDPs have access to a variety of water sources, it is still in limited supply and of poor quality. Households indicated that they do not have enough water for cooking (only 3.9%), or for hygiene purposes (only 3.9%), and while all families had access to toilets, nearly 60% (57.8%) were sharing toilet facilities with other families.

**Health**

IDPs in Amarah appear to have relatively good access to health facilities, with 80.8% of IDPs stating they have access to primary health facilities in their village. However, a significant number of health-related problems were highlighted by IDPs, and only 51% of IDPs had access to drugs that they needed. 93.7% said that children under 5 had received vaccinations that they needed.

A significant number of IDPs (37.3%) said that they were suffering from dysentery, and 42% said that members of their households were malnourished. Households monitored were especially concerned about child health (42.2%) as well as maternal health (27%), and only 40.2% stated that they no health problems.

**Electricity and fuel**

Access to electricity was identified as a concern for IDPs in Amarah, although not listed as one of their top three priorities. Despite the irregularity of electricity supply in Southern Iraq nearly all IDPs (96.1%) said they were receiving four or more hours per day, 0.5% between one and three hours, and only 3.4% said they received no electricity at all.

**Education**

Nearly all IDPs surveyed in Amarah have access to education, with 83.1% indicating that their children attended education facilities in their village. 60.6% of students attending school are male, and 39.4% are female, moreover, a 60%-40% split of male to female students appears to be replicated through all levels of education in primary, intermediate and secondary education. The majority of households were able to enroll at the correct school grade; however, some children are not attending school for reasons outlined in Figure 8.

**Figure 8: Reasons for not attending school**  
(Sample of 35 IDP households)

