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COI QUERY

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The target audience is caseworkers, COI researchers, policy makers, and decision making authorities. The answer was finalised on the 30 September 2020. Any event taking place after this date is not included in this answer.

¹ Network composed of specialised COI researchers and analysts from EU+ countries

COI QUERY RESPONSE

1. Background

The Yazidis are an ethno-religious community autochthonous to the north Iraq governorate of Ninewa. Their ancestral homeland is located 150 km west of Mosul, in the Ninewa Plains, predominantly concentrated around Sinjar mountain, and the district town of Sinjar (also known as Singal, or in Kurdish: Shengal) as well as Al-Shikhan district, the villages of Bahzani and Baashiqa near Mosul, and in Dohuk in Iraqi Kurdistan.² The native language of the Yazidis is the Kormanje dialect of Kurdish.³ Prior to the invasion of ISIL in 2014, the Yazidi community was estimated to range from 300 000 to between 550 000 and 700 000 members.⁴ The population of Yazidis in Sinjar prior to ISIL was estimated at 142 000.⁵ ISIL invasion of Sinjar district is estimated to have resulted in the mass-displacement of 360 000 Yazidis, Arab and Christians.⁶ According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), as of July 2020, 200 000 Yazidis remain displaced.⁷

The Yazidis identify first by religion and then by ethnicity.⁸ Yazidism is a syncretistic religion, pre-dating Islam; it is hereditary and follows tradition of oral transfer.⁹ Due to religion's oral transmission, Yazidis are not considered under Islam to be 'People of the Book'.¹⁰ This distinction exempts the Yazidis from "the protection of religious edicts that exhort Muslim believers not to kill 'people of the book' (which is understood to refer to religious faiths that follow a religious text, such as the Bible, the Torah, or the Koran)".¹¹ The principal deity of the Yazidis religion is a fallen angel, Melek Tawwus or Peacock Angel, who was forgiven and returned to heaven by God.¹² Alienated from the religious majority in Iraq, and due to the worship of Melek Tawwus that in the Judeo-Christian tradition equated Satan, Yazidis were labelled as heretics and devil worshipers.¹³ ISIL used this religious premise to perpetuate intentional, targeted mass killings, forced conversion, forced transfers of young children and sexually enslaving thousands of women and girls.¹⁴ In 2016, the UN Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic concluded that cumulative effects of crimes ISIL was committing against the Yazidis of Sinjar amounted to an ongoing genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity.¹⁵

² International Organization for Migration (IOM) Iraq, Rural areas in Ninewa – Legacies of conflict on rural economies and communities in Sinjar and Ninewa Plains, 28 November 2019, [url](#), p. 15; Al Arabiya, What you did not know about Iraq's Yazidi minority, 11 August 2014, [url](#)

³ IOM Iraq, Rural areas in Ninewa – Legacies of conflict on rural economies and communities in Sinjar and Ninewa Plains, 28 November 2019, [url](#), p. 12

⁴ Pew Research Center, Iraqi Yazidis: Hazy population numbers and a history of persecution, 12 August 2014, [url](#); Kurdistan24, Kurdistan PM praises Yazidi resilience on anniversary of genocide by ISIS, calls for support, 3 August 2020, [url](#)

⁵ IOM Iraq, Rural areas in Ninewa – Legacies of conflict on rural economies and communities in Sinjar and Ninewa Plains, 28 November 2019, [url](#), p. 14

⁶ Sinjar District Mayorship of Sinjar and KRG Ministry of Interior Joint Crisis Coordination Centre, Sinjar District – reconstruction and rehabilitation; critical stabilization projects and needs – strategic plan: 2017-2019, 8 August 2017, [url](#), p. 4

⁷ IOM, Six years after Yazidi genocide, investment in services in crucial for returning Yazidi families, 16 July 2020, [url](#)

⁸ IOM, Understanding ethno-religious groups in Iraq: Displacement and Return, February 2019, [url](#), p. 26

⁹ The Middle East Institute, Sebastian Maisel, Policy brief – Social change amidst terror and discrimination: Yazidis in the new Iraq, No. 18, August 2008, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁰ Yale MacMillan Center – Genocide Studies Program, Before it's too late - A report concerning the ongoing genocide and persecution endured by the Yazidis in Iraq, and their need for immediate protection, June 2019, [url](#), p. 5

¹¹ Yale MacMillan Center – Genocide Studies Program, Before it's too late - A report concerning the ongoing genocide and persecution endured by the Yazidis in Iraq, and their need for immediate protection, June 2019, [url](#), p. 5

¹² The Guardian, Who are the Yazidis and why is Isis hunting them?, 11 August 2014, [url](#)

¹³ The Middle East Institute, Sebastian Maisel, Policy brief – Social change amidst terror and discrimination: Yazidis in the new Iraq, No. 18, August 2008, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁴ UN Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, They Came to Destroy: ISIS Crimes against the Yazidis [A/HRC/32/CRP.1], 15 June 2016, [url](#), pp. 8-19

¹⁵ UN Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, They Came to Destroy: ISIS Crimes against the Yazidis [A/HRC/32/CRP.1], 15 June 2016, [url](#), pp. 31-32

1.1. Post-ISIL security context of the Yazidi community

In February and July 2019, the UN Security Council noted that despite ISIL's weakened position following territorial defeat in Iraq and diminished number of active fighters,¹⁶ its reconstituting and resurgence in the former areas of dominance could not yet be ruled out.¹⁷ At its peak from 2014-2017, ISIL controlled on the Iraqi side 610 km border from Anbar to Ninewa, while on the Syrian side "it controlled areas from south of Qamishli to Tanaf from 2012 to 2019".¹⁸ The Syrian-Iraqi border region served as a vital financial, training, logistical, transportation, military and coordination hub for ISIL's leadership and its military operations.¹⁹ This cross-border region was estimated to have been the source of 25 % of ISIL's human capital, consisting of "devotees, supporters, labourers and servants".²⁰ In 2014, ISIL formed Wilayat al Furat (Euphrates Province comprising: Albu Kamal and Hajin in Syria, and Qaim in Iraq), and in 2015 Wilayat al Jazirah (Jazira Province comprising: Sinjar, Zumar, Tal Afar, Tal Ubta, Hamdaniyah, Qayrawan, Shamal, Ayadhiyah, and Baaj). By clustering these cross-border territories, ISIL also merged regions that "tended to be old strongholds for jihadist groups and smugglers".²¹ Until present day, the remnants of ISIL's cross-border infrastructure, combined with weak border management, strong familiar and economic ties between tribes on both sides of the border, ISIL's sympathisers,²² and the existence of tunnels and smuggling networks render this cross-border region out of the Iraqi state control, and provide ISIL with "the ecosystem it needs to survive and restore its capabilities".²³ It is estimated that the population "in the areas adjacent to the borders in Iraq is roughly 800 000. Of those, 500 000 are Yazidis and Kurds and 300 000 are Sunni Arabs".²⁴ Lack of intra-communal reconciliation is another factor impeding the return of Yazidis to Sinjar, who claim that surrounding Sunni Arab villages were aiding ISIL.²⁵

As of 3 December 2019, Iraq conflict map outlined intensified ISIL attracts conducted south of Ninewa desert, Baaj.²⁶ Since December 2019, armed actions were conducted against ISIL by the following armed actors²⁷, and in the below areas of Ninewa governorate:

- Iraq Security Forces (ISF): eastern and western part of Mosul, the Ninewa Plains, Tal Afar and Baaj; Hadar, Kairouan all western areas in Ninewa to the borders with Syria west, and to the borders with Anbar southwest;

¹⁶ UN Security Council (UNSC), Eighth report of the Secretary-General on the threat posed by ISIL (Da'esh) to international peace and security and the range of United Nations efforts in support of Member States in countering the threat [S/2019/103], 1 February 2019, [url](#), p. 5; UN Security Council (UNSC), Report of the Secretary-General on the threat posed by ISIL (Da'esh) to international peace and security and the range of United Nations in support of Member States in countering the threat [S/2019/612], 31 July 2019, [url](#), p. 7

¹⁷ In July 2019, information provided by the UNSC member state estimated that "Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant - Khorasan" currently numbers between 2 500 and 4 000 fighters, including foreign terrorist fighters" - UNSC, Report of the Secretary-General on the threat posed by ISIL (Da'esh) to international peace and security and the range of United Nations in support of Member States in countering the threat [S/2019/612], 31 July 2019, [url](#), p. 7; US Department of Defense, Operation Inherent Resolve - Lead Inspector General report to the United States Congress, April 1, 2019 – June 30, 2019, [url](#), p. 15, p. 41

¹⁸ Center for Global Policy, Dr. Husham Al-Hashimi, ISIS on the Iraqi-Syrian border: thriving smuggling networks, 16 June 2020, [url](#)

¹⁹ Center for Global Policy, Dr. Husham Al-Hashimi, ISIS on the Iraqi-Syrian border: thriving smuggling networks, 16 June 2020, [url](#)

²⁰ Center for Global Policy, Dr. Husham Al-Hashimi, ISIS on the Iraqi-Syrian border: thriving smuggling networks, 16 June 2020, [url](#)

²¹ Center for Global Policy, Dr. Husham Al-Hashimi, ISIS on the Iraqi-Syrian border: thriving smuggling networks, 16 June 2020, [url](#)

²² "Iraqi authorities say more than 300 000 individuals with familial connections to ISIS live in camps spread out across at least 10 Iraqi governorates", Center for Global Policy, Dr. Husham Al-Hashimi, ISIS in Iraq: the challenge of reintegrating 'ISIS families', 7 July 2020, [url](#)

²³ Center for Global Policy, Dr. Husham Al-Hashimi, ISIS on the Iraqi-Syrian border: thriving smuggling networks, 16 June 2020, [url](#)

²⁴ Center for Global Policy, Dr. Husham Al-Hashimi, ISIS on the Iraqi-Syrian border: thriving smuggling networks, 16 June 2020, [url](#)

²⁵ Reuters, Anger and apprehension haunt ruined Sinjar, years after Islamic State ousted, 26 February 2019, [url](#)

²⁶ Center for Global Policy, Dr. Husham Al-Hashimi, ISIS in Iraq: 'Smoking the fox out of its den' strategy, 14 July 2020, [url](#)

²⁷ Lead Inspector General reporting to the US Congress on Operation Inherent Resolve, noted in the last quarterly report 2019, that due to political dispute between leads in Erbil and Baghdad, there is "a vacuum of governance with at least seven different armed actors operating in the area and no reliable government of Iraq staff to administer oversight and payments to local government employees", USDOD, Operation Inherent Resolve - Lead Inspector General report to the United States Congress, July 1, 2019 – October 25, 2019, [url](#), p. 63

- Peshmerga: Nawran, Bashiqa area, Zertik mountain, Fiadah sub-district;
- Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF): Tal Safuk, west South Baaj and Iraq-Syria order areas, Mosul city – west and southwest, west Ninewa – Al-Qayrawan, Zummar, Rabia, Al-Sikar, north-south and west Tal Afar, Tal Afar city, Ayathya, south and center Sinjar, Al-Zawiya, Tal Banat, Tal Qasab, Muhallabiyah, Ninewa plan area east Mosul, industrial district of Mosul, Qosh and Basheqa;
- Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) and affiliates: Kojo village – south of Sinjar.²⁸

According to February 2020 reports by the UN Security Council, the counter-ISIL coalition estimated number of ISIL fighters at 11,000 compared to 4,662 estimated by UNAMI. Accordingly, the discrepancy stems from “the difference in the classification of active fighters, logistics enablers and sympathizers”.²⁹

The above estimates of combatants are in stark contrast to the estimates provided in May 2020 by the late Dr. Husham Al-Hashimi, according to which approximately 350 ISIL combatants are concentrated on Ninewa-Salah al-Din border and an additional contingent of 350 fighters is spread-out in a triangle between the governorates of Ninewa, Anbar and Salah ad-Din.³⁰ Posthumous articles by Dr. Husham al-Hashimi published in July 2020, note the surge of terrorist incidents in the first half of 2020 in the northern Iraq, covering Ninewa, Tal Afar, Mosul, Dohuk, and in areas near liberated cities, which may indicate that remnants of ISIL have recovered from its losses in 2019.³¹

Targeted destruction of infrastructure and habitat

The Yazidis are a predominantly agricultural community whose main source of livelihood (i.e. estimated in 2018 to comprise nearly 70 % of household income)³² has been continually jeopardised by ISIL insurgency, and targeted destruction of “orchards by burning fields, chopping down trees and poisoning land as part of a campaign of collective punishment and economic warfare”.³³ ISIL destroyed 90 % of water infrastructure, having only within Sinune sub-district (Sinjar district) rendered 88 % of irrigation wells inoperable, and 60 % of greenhouse in Ninewa governorate completely destroyed, and 40 % almost unusable.³⁴ In June 2019, BAMF reported that 700 families fled to Mosul following crop fires near Sinjar.³⁵

²⁸ Center for Global Policy, Dr. Husham Al-Hashimi, ISIS in Iraq: ‘Smoking the fox out of its den’ strategy, 14 July 2020, [url](#)

²⁹ UNSC, Tenth report of the Secretary-General on the threat posed by ISIL (Da’esh) to international peace and security and the range of United Nations efforts in support of Member States in countering the threat [S/2020/95], 4 February 2020, [url](#), p. 2

³⁰ Center for Global Policy, Dr. Husham Al-Hashimi, ISIS 2020: New structures and leaders in Iraq revealed, 19 May 2020, [url](#)

³¹ Center for Global Policy, Dr. Husham Al-Hashimi, ISIS in Iraq: ‘Smoking the fox out of its den’ strategy, 14 July 2020, [url](#)

³² Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), Iraq – agriculture and livelihoods needs assessment in the newly liberated areas of Kirkuk, Ninewa and Salahadin, February 2016, [url](#), p. 6

³³ International Organization for Migration (IOM) Iraq, Rural areas in Ninewa – Legacies of conflict on rural economies and communities in Sinjar and Ninewa Plains, 28 November 2019, [url](#), p. 17; Al-Monitor Iraq, IS exploits disputed areas, sets Iraqi fields on fire, 29 May 2019, [url](#); In period between 8 May and 8 June 2019, the Iraqi government reported that 37,000 acres of cropland were burned in 270 separate incidents across governorates of Diyala, Kirkuk, Ninewa, and Salah ad Din. “Unconfirmed origins of the fires include natural causes, controlled burns escalating, and acts of terrorism”. US Department of Defense, Operation Inherent Resolve - Lead Inspector General report to the United States Congress, April 1, 2019 – June 30, 2019, [url](#), p. 59; Rudaw, Shingal fires spark Yazidi evacuation, threaten mass grave sites, 12 June 2019, [url](#); Kurdistan24, Economic Genocide: The incineration of Shingal’s grain fields, grazing lands, and mass graves, 6 July 2019, [url](#); Yazda, Yazda Documentation of the wildfires currently in Sinjar and recommendations to the authorities, 27 June 2019, [url](#)

³⁴ International Organization for Migration (IOM) Iraq, Rural areas in Ninewa – Legacies of conflict on rural economies and communities in Sinjar and Ninewa Plains, 28 November 2019, [url](#), pp. 15-17

³⁵ Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge (BAMF), Federal Office for Migration and Refugees, Group 62 – Information Centre Asylum and Migration - Briefing Notes, 17 June 2019, [url](#), p. 3

In August 2019, the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Iraq, reported that voluntary, dignified and sustainable return of Yazidis to their ancestral homeland is impeded by the destruction of housing infrastructure in Sinjar by ISIL, and the lack of ownership documentation.³⁶

Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) Ministry of Interior, Joint Crisis Coordination Centre estimated that 80 % of Yazidi families in Sinjar district lost all their livelihoods and assets during ISIL's reign.³⁷ According to the UNDP, ISIL destroyed up to "80 per cent of public infrastructure and 70 per cent of civilian homes in Sinjar City and surrounding areas".³⁸ ISIL's systematic and deliberate targeting and destruction of critical infrastructure (i.e. hospitals, power plants, electricity networks, schools, bridges, roads) and household infrastructure, combined with practice of booby-trapping Yazidi residences, and lack of vital services, continues to impede the safe return of internally displaced persons (IDPs), returnees, rehabilitation and reconstruction efforts.³⁹ In February 2020, UNMAS reported that the district of Sinjar continues to suffer from contamination of unexploded ammunition and IEDs deliberately left by ISIL.⁴⁰ According to the Norwegian People's Aid and Mines Advisory Group, more than five years after ISIL's destruction of the town of Sinjar, "much of the city remains uninhabitable".⁴¹

On 3 August 2020, the 6th anniversary of the Yazidi genocide, the mayor of Sinjar, Mahma Khalil, stated that 80 % of the areas populated by Yazidis in Ninewa governorate lack security from militant militias, vital service and support of the Government of Iraq (GoI) to rebuild infrastructure and facilitate a safe return of the displaced Yazidis.⁴²

Armed actors and targeting of Yazidis

Throughout 2019 and 2020, security-relevant incidents of ISIL's continued attacks in Ninewa governorate and Sinjar district continued occurring:

- 24 March 2019, three ISIL combatants detonated suicide vests during confrontation with Yazidi militia, Ezidkhan Protection Force (HPE);⁴³
- Throughout June 2019, rocket, mortar and IED assaults reported in Ninewa;⁴⁴
- 24 July 2019, 6 ISIL combatants were trying to infiltrate Golata village in Sinjar district when they were intercepted and killed by Peshmerga and the Yazidi Protection Units (YPS).⁴⁵ 6 July 2019, the Iraqi security forces commence a large-scale operation "Will of Victory" against ISIL also covering the north Ninewa;⁴⁶

³⁶ United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), Humanitarian Bulletin - Iraq, August 2019, [url](#)

³⁷ Sinjar District Mayorship of Sinjar and KRG Ministry of Interior Joint Crisis Coordination Centre, Sinjar District – reconstruction and rehabilitation; critical stabilization projects and needs – strategic plan: 2017-2019, 8 August 2017, [url](#), p. 4

³⁸ United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Iraq, Six years after Sinjar massacre, support and services are vital for returning Yazidis, 2 August 2020, [url](#)

³⁹ United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) Iraq, Mixed Yazidi teams in Sinjar - bringing women and men at the frontlines of clearance efforts in Iraq, [url](#); The Guardian, 'Yazidi women are strong': Iraq's female landmine clearance teams, 7 July 2020, [url](#)

⁴⁰ UNMAS Newsletter Iraq, February 2020, [url](#)

⁴¹ Norwegian People's Aid (NPA) and Mines Advisory Group (MAG), A persistent danger: unexploded ordnance in populated areas, February 2020, [url](#), p. 2

⁴² Kurdistan24, 80 percent of Yazidi territories are unsafe for the IDPs to return: official, 3 August 2020, [url](#); Al-Monitor, Six years after Yazidi massacre, US urged to take 'bolder action', 3 August 2020, [url](#)

⁴³ Kurdistan24, ISIS members detonate themselves during clash with Iraqi forces in Shingal, 24 March 2019, [url](#)

⁴⁴ BAMF, Group 62 – Information Centre Asylum and Migration - Briefing Notes, 24 June 2019, [url](#), p. 5

⁴⁵ Kurdistan24, Four ISIS militants killed in clash with Peshmerga, Ezidi forces in Shingal: Commander, 24 July 2019, [url](#)

⁴⁶ BAMF, Group 62 - Information Centre Asylum and Migration - Briefing Notes, 8 July 2019, [url](#), p. 4

- 14 April 2020, two Yazidi fighters from the YBS militia were killed and five were injured during an operation against ISIL, in a rural area surrounding Sinjar mountain.⁴⁷

In Sinjar, numerous armed forces that are perceived by Yazidis as foreign compete for influence in the region, including: “the Iraqi army, Iraqi federal police, Shia units of the PMF, the Yazidi PMF “Lalish Brigade” under the guidance of Iranian-linked Kata’ib al-Imam Ali, Yazidi Peshmerga forces under the command of Qassem Shesho, and the PKK-affiliated YBS, YJE and Asayisa Ezidixane”.⁴⁸ In September 2019, the commander of the Ezidkhan Protection Force (HPE), Haider Shesho, stated that multiple armed actors present in Sinjar “don’t coordinate, and run different checkpoints, which also makes people very afraid of returning”, and under such conditions “services for ordinary people cannot properly be brought back...without services, people cannot return”.⁴⁹

In April 2020, the German Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF) reported that Turkey “routinely carries out operations on the ground and in the air against the PKK in the Kurdistan-Iraq region (KRI), as well as in areas which are disputed between the KRI and Iraq’s central government, such as Shingal/Sinjar and Makhmour”.⁵⁰ In June 2020, Turkey launched joint air and ground operations (Claw-Eagle, 14 June and Claw-Tiger, 17 June), and during Operation Claw-Eagle delivering airstrikes on 81 suspected PKK installations, “spanning Iraqi Kurdistan from the western Yazidi-majority area of Mount Sinjar to the eastern Qandil Mountains on the Iraq-Iran border”.⁵¹

Yazidis leaders perceive the presence of PKK in Sinjar as unlawful and damaging to the return of IDPs.⁵² In July 2020, representatives of the Yazidi community protested again the presence of PKK in the region, demanding the Iraqi government and the international community to “expel the PKK from Shingal and to prevent them from turning Ezidi boys and girls into militants”.⁵³ Similarly, in its 2019 Human Rights Report on Iraq, the USDoS reported that recruitment and use of children in Sinjar continued by both PKK and YBS, estimating the number of children to be in the hundreds.⁵⁴

In February and July 2020, the UN Security Council reported that post-ISIL negotiations between the GoI and KRG to stabilize Sinjar by closing critical administrative and security gaps remains ongoing and issues unresolved.⁵⁵

Similarly, in February 2020, demonstrations were held in Ninewa against the presence of the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) militias, which are reported to prohibit return of IDPs, drive out local residents and “levy taxes and fees for the transport of goods to Mosul and the Kurdistan-Iraq region”.⁵⁶ PMF was established in 2014 to fight ISIL and it was formally merged into the Iraq Security Forces (ISF) in 2016. The Iraqi government has only limited control over individual militias comprising PMF.⁵⁷ In July 2020, the Chair and Vice-Chair of the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) reported that:

⁴⁷ Kurdistan24, 2 Yazidi fighters killed in blast during ISIS operation near Sinjar Mountain, 14 April 2020, [url](#)

⁴⁸ Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (KAS), Life after the Caliphate: human security challenges in Syria and Iraq, June 2020, [url](#), p. 12

⁴⁹ Daily Sabah, PKK terrorists prevent Yazidis from returning home, 10 July 2019, [url](#); The New Humanitarian, In Iraqi Kurdistan, reality bites as independence dream fades, 26 September 2019, [url](#)

⁵⁰ BAMF, Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration - Briefing Notes, 20 April 2020, [url](#), p. 6

⁵¹ The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), Turkey-PKK conflict: summer 2020, 26 June 2020, [url](#)

⁵² Kurdistan24, Safe zone in Syria poses security threat to Yazidis in Shingal: Mayor, 13 August 2019, [url](#)

⁵³ Kurdistan24, “Yezidi House asks Iraq, international community to oust PKK from Sinjar”, 27 July 2020, [url](#)

⁵⁴ US Department of State (USDoS), 2019 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Iraq, March 2020, [url](#), p. 23

⁵⁵ UNSC, Implementation of resolution 2470 (2019) Report of the Secretary-General [S/2020/363], 6 May 2020, [url](#), p. 13; UNSC, Implementation of resolution 2470 (2019) Report of the Secretary-General [S/2020/140], 21 February 2020, [url](#), p. 15

⁵⁶ BAMF, Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration - Briefing Notes, 10 February 2020, [url](#), p. 4

⁵⁷ BAMF, Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration - Briefing Notes, 16 March 2020, [url](#), p. 4

“In Iraq, the 50th Brigade of the Popular Mobilization Forces has been involved in extortion, illegal arrests, kidnappings, and detention of individuals without warrants, often targeting Christians, Yazidis, and other religious minorities returning to the Nineveh Plains and Sinjar”.⁵⁸

During 2019, some Yazidi leaders reported about physical abuse and verbal harassment by KRG Peshmerga and Asayish in KRG-controlled areas of Ninewa, and being caused by territorial disagreements rather than motivated by religious discrimination.⁵⁹

In 2019, according to the US Department of State, certain Yazidis were calling for a political agreement with the GoI to enable organisation of their own militias, to guarantee their own security, self-governance and future existence.⁶⁰ Similarly, in July 2019, the Yazidi spiritual leader Baba Chawesh, argued for greater involvement of the ISF, or organisation of 6 000 to 7 000 Yazidi policemen to provide security and enable safe return of IDPs.⁶¹ In August 2020, KRG Minister, Falah Mustafa, Senior Foreign Policy Advisor to the President of the Kurdistan Region, affirmed KRG’s support for “devolving power”, receptive of the US proposal of putting security into local and professional security forces, and “establishing a province in Sinjar for the people of Sinjar to manage their own affairs”.⁶²

1.2. Ninewa governorate and ability to secure livelihoods, law and order

IOM and UNHCR estimated that the takeover of Mosul by ISIL in June 2014, and the Ninewa Plains in March 2015, Sinjar and Tel Afar districts in August 2014,⁶³ led to a mass exodus and displacement of 500,000 Yazidis⁶⁴ that fled to the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), predominantly to Dohuk governorate.⁶⁵ Out of all the governorates in Iraq, ISIL maintained the longest presence in Ninewa.⁶⁶

In May 2019, UNHCR reported that Yazidis had trouble in accessing the public sector employment in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), which is “generally not open for non-Kurds from outside the region”.⁶⁷ According to UNFPA/IOM, the public sector in the KRI “employs nearly half of the working population and as much as 75% of working women”.⁶⁸ UNHCR noted that in addition to low education, missing documentation, and a lack of work experience outside construction and agriculture, Yazidis remain disadvantaged by widespread patronage and nepotism that play major role in securing employment.⁶⁹ The latter conditions have particularly adverse effects on IDP households, which reported to have to be “increasingly reliant on negative coping strategies in order to meet their basic needs, including incurring debts, child marriage and forced marriage, sending children to work and reducing food intake”.⁷⁰ The lack of employment and limited economic resources further exacerbate adverse consequences resulting in difficulties to access food, health services, shelter and education.⁷¹

⁵⁸ United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), Expand the list of sanctioned religious freedom violators, 20 July 2020, [url](#); Washington Examiner, Expand the list of sanctioned religious freedom violators, 20 July 2020, [url](#)

⁵⁹ USDoS, Iraq 2019 - International religious freedom report, June 2020, [url](#), p. 12

⁶⁰ USDoS, Iraq 2019 - International religious freedom report, June 2020, [url](#), p. 14

⁶¹ European External Action Service (EEAS), Yazidis in Iraq fear returning home, 7 July 2019, [url](#)

⁶² Kurdistan24, US: Militias need to leave Yazidi areas, 6 August 2020, [url](#)

⁶³ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), COI note on the situation of Yazidi IDPs in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, May 2019, [url](#), p. 1; IOM, Understanding ethno-religious groups in Iraq: displacement and return, February 2019, [url](#), p. 7

⁶⁴ IOM, Understanding ethno-religious groups in Iraq: displacement and return, February 2019, [url](#), p. 7

⁶⁵ UNHCR, COI note on the situation of Yazidi IDPs in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, May 2019, [url](#), p. 1

⁶⁶ United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) / Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), “Unearthing Atrocities: Mass Graves in territory formerly controlled by ISIL”, 6 November 2018, [url](#), p. 7

⁶⁷ UNHCR, COI note on the situation of Yazidi IDPs in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, May 2019, [url](#), p. 5

⁶⁸ United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) / IOM, Demographic survey: Kurdistan Region of Iraq, September 2018, [url](#), p. 4.

⁶⁹ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), COI note on the situation of Yazidi IDPs in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, May 2019, [url](#), p. 5

⁷⁰ UNHCR, COI note on the situation of Yazidi IDPs in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, May 2019, [url](#), pp. 5-6

⁷¹ UNHCR, COI note on the situation of Yazidi IDPs in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, May 2019, [url](#), pp. 6-7

Moreover, Yazidis are reported to “likely constitute Iraq’s poorest community, aside from the Iraqis of African descent in the south”.⁷²

The Yazidis perception of insecurity is manifold, and is further complicated by decades-long structural demographic engineering by the Baathist Arabisation of Yazidi lands between 1968 and 2003, and by the Kurdistan Regional Government’s (KRG) reversal of Arabisation by ‘Kurdicization’ of large parts of Ninewa governorate and particularly in Ninewa Plains, both post 2003 and 2014.⁷³ These periods are marked by forced displacements of thousands of Yazidis from their areas of origin to the south and north of Mount Sinjar, nationalisation and confiscation of their lands, and its redistribution to predominantly Sunni Arabs.⁷⁴ As a consequence of these policies, in 2015 UN Habitat estimated that “up to some 250 000 Yazidis may lack land tenure documents”.⁷⁵

US Department of State reported that according to some Yazidi sources, during 2019 only Yazidis who publically identify as Kurdish could obtain senior positions within KRI leadership, while those refusing to identify as Kurdish would experience difficulties in obtaining identity card or driving licence.⁷⁶ Yazidism as a faith and Yazidi as a religious group are recognised by GoI and KRG, with their denomination authorised to be stated on their identity cards.⁷⁷ KRG is reported to allow Yazidis observe their faith without interference or intimidation.⁷⁸

During 2019, US Department of State noted that all recognised religious minorities except Yazidis have “their own personal status courts responsible for handling marriage, divorce, and inheritance issues”.⁷⁹

1.3. Post-ISIL transitional justice

Following the visit to Iraq from 15-23 February 2020, the Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Internally Displaced Persons to the UN Human Rights Council reiterated that the crimes perpetrated by ISIL against the Yazidis amount to genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes.⁸⁰ In September 2019, KRG Department of Martyrs and Anfal Affairs issued a statement for expanded laws to punish genocide denial in KRG.⁸¹ In November 2019, Karim Asad Ahmad Khan, the Special Adviser and head of the UN Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Da’esh/ISIL (UNITAD) commended a draft law meant to enable Iraq to prosecute of crimes committed by ISIL as genocide, crimes against humanity or war crimes.⁸² During May 2020 address to UNSC, the head of UNITAD reported about continued engagement with the GoI to facilitate “the potential

⁷² UNHCR, COI note on the situation of Yazidi IDPs in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, May 2019, [url](#), p. 69

⁷³ IOM Iraq, Rural areas in Ninewa – Legacies of conflict on rural economies and communities in Sinjar and Ninewa Plains, 28 November 2019, [url](#), p. 15; Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES), Reclaiming home - The struggle for socially just housing, land and property rights in Syria, Iraq and Libya, 2019, [url](#), pp. 103-104

⁷⁴ FES, Reclaiming home - The struggle for socially just housing, land and property rights in Syria, Iraq and Libya, 2019, [url](#), pp. 103-104

⁷⁵ UN Habitat, Emerging land tenure issues among displaced Yazidis from Sinjar, Iraq – How chances of return may be further undermined by a discrimination policy dating back 40 years, November 2015, [url](#), p. 12

⁷⁶ USDoS, Iraq 2019 - International religious freedom report, June 2020, [url](#), p. 13

⁷⁷ USDoS, Iraq 2019 - International religious freedom report, June 2020, [url](#), pp. 5-7

⁷⁸ USDoS, Iraq 2019 - International religious freedom report, June 2020, [url](#), p. 14

⁷⁹ USDoS, Iraq 2019 - International religious freedom report, June 2020, [url](#), p. 5

⁸⁰ UN Human Rights Council, Visit to Iraq - Report of the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons [A/HRC/44/41/Add.1], 13 May 2020, [url](#), p. 7; UN Human Rights Council, “They came to destroy”: Isis crimes against the Yazidis’ [A/HRC/32/CRP.2], 15 June 2016, [url](#), p. 36; UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on the human rights situation in Iraq in the light of abuses committed by the so-called Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and associated groups [A/HRC/28/18], 27 March 2015, [url](#), p. 16

⁸¹ USDoS, Iraq 2019 - International religious freedom report, June 2020, [url](#), p. 17

⁸² UN News, Six years after genocide, international community must prioritize justice for Yazidi community, 3 August 2-2020, [url](#)

adoption of legislation allowing for the prosecution in Iraq of acts committed by ISIL as war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide”, which “is still before the Council of Representatives”.⁸³

On the 6th annual commemoration of the Yazidi genocide, held on 3 August 2020 (i.e. Yazidi Genocide Remembrance Day), international crimes remain uncoded by Iraqi law, and “Iraqi courts thus do not have jurisdiction over the crime of genocide, war crimes or crimes against humanity committed within its territory. Iraq is not signatory to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court”.⁸⁴ According to June 2019 Yale MacMillan Center’s report, irrespective of Iraq having ratified the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (1959), and the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (2011), there have not been any proceedings against any ISIL perpetrators of crimes against Yazidis since 2014.⁸⁵ In the period from January 2018 to October 2019, the Iraqi judiciary processed over 20 000 terrorism-related cases, with thousands pending processing as of January 2020.⁸⁶ In April 2020, reportedly “the first ever trial” against an ISIL suspect accused of genocide and murdering a Yazidi girl commenced in Frankfurt am Main (Germany).⁸⁷

In May 2019, the United Nations Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Da’esh/Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (UNITAD) reported to the UN Security Council that first of three initial areas for investigation are attacks committed by ISIL against the Yazidi community in the north-western district of Sinjar (Ninewa governorate) in August 2014. The first excavations of mass grave sites were done in the village of Kojo.⁸⁸ In November 2019, the UN Special Adviser and head of UNITAD reported that more than 160 perpetrators of massacres against Yazidis, particularly in Kojo and elsewhere, were identified, resulting in building of legal cases to be primarily persecuted by Iraqi domestic courts, but also other courts willing and able to hold ISIL members accountable.⁸⁹ In February 2020, GoI reported that 62 exhumed bodies were identified from mass graves in Kojo, with work continuing to formally identify and return the remaining victims to their families’.⁹⁰

UNITAD commended KRG for cooperation on an operational level involving investigative activities (i.e. transmission of evidentiary material and provision of access to detainees for conducting interviews) into the crimes committed against the Yazidi community in 2014.⁹¹ In May 2020, UNITAD reported

⁸³ UNSC, Letter dated 11 May 2020 from the Special Adviser and Head of the United Nations Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Da’esh/Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant addressed to the President of the Security Council [S/2020/386], 11 May 2020, [url](#), p. 13

⁸⁴ United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), Human Rights in the Administration of Justice in Iraq: Trials under the anti-terrorism laws and implications for justice, accountability and social cohesion in the aftermath of ISIL, January 2020, [url](#), p. 11

⁸⁵ Yale MacMillan Center – Genocide Studies Program, Before it’s too late -A report concerning the ongoing genocide and persecution endured by the Yazidis in Iraq, and their need for immediate protection, June 2019, [url](#), p. 16

⁸⁶ UNAMI, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), Human Rights in the Administration of Justice in Iraq: Trials under the anti-terrorism laws and implications for justice, accountability and social cohesion in the aftermath of ISIL, January 2020, [url](#), p. iv

⁸⁷ Just Security.org, First Yazidi genocide trial commences in Germany, 23 April 2020, [url](#); The Guardian, Alleged Isis member on trial in Germany for genocide and murder, 24 April 2020, [url](#)

⁸⁸ UNSC, Letter dated 17 May 2019 from the Special Adviser and Head of the United Nations Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Da’esh/Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant addressed to the President of the Security Council [S/2019/407], 17 May 2019, [url](#), p. 5; UN Security Council, Letter dated 11 May 2020 from the Special Adviser and Head of the United Nations Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Da’esh/Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant addressed to the President of the Security Council, [S/2020/386], 11 May 2020, [url](#), p. 8

⁸⁹ UNSC, 8675th meeting [S/ P V. 8 6 75], 26 November 2019, New York, [url](#), p. 3

⁹⁰ UN Security Council, Letter dated 11 May 2020 from the Special Adviser and Head of the United Nations Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Da’esh/Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant addressed to the President of the Security Council, [S/2020/386], 11 May 2020, [url](#), p. 8

⁹¹ UNSC, Letter dated 13 November 2019 from the Special Adviser and Head of the United Nations Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Da’esh/Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant addressed to the President of the Security Council [S/2019/878], 13 November 2019, [url](#), pp. 13-14

that through cooperation with the Iraqi judiciary it had obtained “2 million call data records from Iraqi telephone service providers for its investigation into crimes committed against the Yazidi community in Sinjar”.⁹² In June 2020, UNITAD reported that 344 ISIL perpetrators across 16 key crime scenes, have been identified in crimes committed against Yazidis in Sinjar.⁹³

1.4. Sexual and gender-based violence

On 7 April 2019, the Iraqi Presidency submitted to parliament the draft Yazidi Survivors Law.⁹⁴ The draft law recognises the crimes committed against Yazidi women by ISIL as genocide, and excludes the perpetrators and accomplices of the crimes of abduction and enslavement of female Yazidis from any general of special amnesty. Furthermore, the draft law provides for a national day of remembrance (i.e. 3 August), and stipulates provision of ethical and financial reparations (i.e. educational, housing, residential, safe accommodation, employment opportunities, reconstruction, physical and mental health-care) as means to facilitate female Yazidi survivors and their children rehabilitation and reintegration into society.⁹⁵ It has been reported that since July 2019, the budgetary allocations for financial reparations known as the survivors grants, have stalled.⁹⁶

According to the draft law, a General Directorate for the Affairs of Female Survivors is to be set up in Nineveh governorate, and shall be responsible for addressing the legal status of children born by female Yazidi survivors.⁹⁷ The draft law is pending adoption by the parliament, following amendment to include other minority groups and children born of rape.⁹⁸

In June 2020, the UN Secretary General reported that sexual violence against the members of the Yazidi members:

“...continues to be underreported owing to the fear of reprisals, stigma, the absence of services and ongoing security concerns. Displacement camps constitute sites of heightened risk, given the increased number of female-headed households and perceived affiliation with extremist groups. Humanitarian access to the camps has enabled survivors of sexual violence committed in previous years to seek support. For instance, 16 cases, including eight cases of forced marriage, six cases of rape and two cases of forced prostitution, which occurred in 2015 and 2016, were recently documented. Fourteen of these incidents were attributed to ISIL. Two were linked to the Iraqi security forces. The United Nations also verified five cases of sexual violence committed by ISIL affiliates in the Hawijah district of Kirkuk, their last stronghold in Iraq.”⁹⁹

⁹² UNSC, Letter dated 11 May 2020 from the Special Adviser and Head of the United Nations Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Da'esh/Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant addressed to the President of the Security Council, [S/2020/386], 11 May 2020, [url](#), p. 7

⁹³ UNSC, Letter dated 17 June 2020 from the President of the Security Council addressed to the Secretary-General and the Permanent Representatives of the members of the Security Council [S/2020/547], 23 June 2020, [url](#), p. 3

⁹⁴ Iraqi Presidency, The presidency submitted the Yazidi female survivors' law to parliament for review and approval on March 28, 2019, 7 April 2020, [url](#)

⁹⁵ Iraqi Presidency, The presidency submitted the Yazidi female survivors' law to parliament for review and approval on March 28, 2019, 7 April 2020, [url](#)

⁹⁶ UNSC, Conflict-related sexual violence - Report of the Secretary-General [S/2020/487], 3 June 2020, [url](#), p. 12

⁹⁷ Iraqi Presidency, The presidency submitted the Yazidi female survivors' law to parliament for review and approval on March 28, 2019, 7 April 2020, [url](#)

⁹⁸ UN Security Council, Conflict-related sexual violence - Report of the Secretary-General [S/2020/487], 3 June 2020, [url](#), p. 12

⁹⁹ UNSC, Conflict-related sexual violence - Report of the Secretary-General [S/2020/487], 3 June 2020, [url](#), pp. 11-12

From 2014 until June 2020, the Commission for Investigation and Gathering of Evidence of KRG recorded “more than 1 000 cases of conflict-related sexual violence, predominantly against Yazidi women and girls.”¹⁰⁰

In April 2019, the Head of the Yazidi Supreme Spiritual Council initially announced that Yazidi women previously enslaved by ISIL would be reintegrated into the Yazidi community.¹⁰¹ This announcement however did not provide for social inclusion and recognition of children born of sexual violence by ISIL men as Yazidis.¹⁰² This inconsistency in approach to social inclusion stems from the Yazidi religious law of intra-community marrying, whereby only children born of two Yazidi parents are recognized as belonging to the Yazidi community,¹⁰³ and where conversion (proselytism) to Yezidism is not possible.¹⁰⁴ Additional legal issues originate from the 2015 National Identity Card Law, according to which children with one Muslim parent (usually father)¹⁰⁵ or from mixed religion marriages are registered as Muslims.¹⁰⁶ In May 2020, the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons reported that female survivors and their children born in captivity or in areas previously dominated by ISIL face stigmatisation, and are at the risk of abandonment¹⁰⁷ and statelessness.¹⁰⁸ According to the USDoS 2019 Iraq – International Religious Freedom Report, Yazidi women that suffered repeated rape and after giving birth were forced to abandon children in orphanages in Syria or Iraq to be allowed to re-join Yazidi community, or were compelled to register children as Muslim and to convert to Islam themselves to obtain identification documents, and access governmental services. According to community sources, the estimated number of these children is in range of several dozen to several hundred.¹⁰⁹

In May 2019, UNICEF estimated that in Syria alone there are 29 000 foreign children, out of which 20 000 are from Iraq, while 9 000 are from 60 other countries, and an additional 1 000 children of foreign ISIL fighters were believed to be in Iraq at the time.¹¹⁰ It is estimated that most of these children were born in ISIL controlled territories, while the rest were forced, manipulated or had to join armed groups in order to survive. Moreover, Ninewa is one of governorates that have the highest number of conflict-affected children at risk.¹¹¹ Most probable risks these children face due to their vulnerabilities include: “discrimination in accessing civil documentation and essential services”, exposure to “psychological distress, violence at home, child labour, and sexual violence including child marriage”.¹¹²

¹⁰⁰ UNSC, Conflict-related sexual violence - Report of the Secretary-General [S/2020/487], 3 June 2020, [url](#), p. 11

¹⁰¹ UNSC, Conflict-related sexual violence - Report of the Secretary-General [S/2020/487], 3 June 2020, [url](#), p. 12

¹⁰² UNSC, Conflict-related sexual violence - Report of the Secretary-General [S/2020/487], 3 June 2020, [url](#), p. 12

¹⁰³ UN Human Rights Council, Visit to Iraq - Report of the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons [A/HRC/44/41/Add.1], 13 May 2020, [url](#), p. 11

¹⁰⁴ UN Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, “They came to destroy”: ISIS crimes against the Yazidis [A/HRC/32/CRP.1], 15 June 2016, 15 June 2016, [url](#), p. 6; The Guardian, Yazidi leaders to allow Isis rape survivors to return with children, 27 April 2019, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Yazidis to accept ISIL rape survivors, but not their children, 29 April 2019, [url](#)

¹⁰⁵ The Guardian, Yazidi leaders to allow Isis rape survivors to return with children, 27 April 2019, [url](#); Deutsche Welle, Yazidi women seek acceptance for children born of IS rape, 30 April 2019, [url](#)

¹⁰⁶ UK Home Office, Country Policy and Information Note - Iraq: Religious minorities, Version 2.0, October 2019, [url](#), p. 8

¹⁰⁷ UN Human Rights Council, Visit to Iraq - Report of the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons [A/HRC/44/41/Add.1], 13 May 2020, [url](#), pp. 11-12; Kurdistan24, Yezidi spiritual council revokes statement, will not accept children of ISIS rape victims, 27 April 2019, [url](#)

¹⁰⁸ USDoS, 2019 Country reports on human rights practices: Iraq, March 2020, [url](#); USDoS, Iraq 2018 Human rights report, 13 March 2019, [url](#), p. 40

¹⁰⁹ USDoS, Iraq 2019 - International religious freedom report, June 2020, [url](#), p. 11

¹¹⁰ United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF), Protect the rights of children of foreign fighters stranded in Syria and Iraq - Statement by UNICEF Executive Director Henrietta Fore, 21 May 2019, [url](#)

¹¹¹ UNHCR, 2019 Iraq - Humanitarian response plan – January-December 2019, February 2019, [url](#), p. 9

¹¹² UNHCR, 2019 Iraq - Humanitarian response plan – January-December 2019, February 2019, [url](#), p. 53

In 2019, USDoS reported that the GoI and KRG face challenges to address the physical and mental trauma of women that survived ISIL rule.¹¹³ Between April and August 2019, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) reported that 24 Yazidi patients attempted suicide in Sinuni (Sinjar district), six of whom died, with 46 % being below age of 18.¹¹⁴

On 2 March 2020, the first indictment for sexual violence committed by ISIL member and a death sentence was passed in a court in Baghdad, for the rape of a Yazidi woman.¹¹⁵

1.5. Missing, IDPs and returnees

According to the 2019 International Religious Freedom Report for Iraq, Yazidi leaders reported that between 400 000 to 500 000 Yazidis reside in the north Iraq, while 360 000 remain displaced.¹¹⁶ Following ISIL's territorial defeat in 2017, and the takeover of Mosul in July 2017, IOM in February 2019 estimated that Yazidis, Christians, Shabak Shias and Turkmen Shias comprise "around 22 % of Iraq's total IDP population" and only "2.7 % of returnees".¹¹⁷ According to IOM's face-to-face IDP and returnee households survey in February 2019, a sample size of Yazidi's population is predominantly located in the governorates of Ninewa (Sinjar, Tel Afar, Mosul, Tilkaif), and in Dahuk (Sumel and Zakho).¹¹⁸ At the time, half (49.6 %) of interviewed Yazidi IDPs were unemployed, and "with the highest percentage of members killed or missing (2 % of households compared to the 1.2 % average)".¹¹⁹ Furthermore, five out of ten Yazidis that were still in displacement, and four out of ten returnees were residing in displacement camps.¹²⁰ After safety concerns, Yazidi respondents cited access to better public services as the second (88 %) reason to remain displaced, with IOM noting that "these differences may be driven by location of displacement rather than identity".¹²¹ All interviewed Yazidi IDPs are displaced in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), which is deemed to have "better public services than the rest of Iraq".¹²² 15 % of Yazidi IDPs reported that "their community/religious leaders were discouraging return".¹²³ In long-term, 43 % of Yazidi IDPs wished to return to their areas of origin.¹²⁴ Furthermore, IOM February report states that 25 % of Yazidi returnees plan to migrate abroad, citing security concerns, fear of ISIL return,¹²⁵ distrust of their Arab neighbours and militia rules in their areas of origin, as the main reasons to permanently leave Iraq.¹²⁶

In October 2019, IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix reported 138 locations with no returns in Ninewa (138 locations), with dominant districts being Hatra (53 locations), Sinjar (24) and Al-Ba'a'j (24).¹²⁷ In November 2019, the Directorate of Yazidi Affairs of the Ministry of Endowment and Religious Affairs of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) reported statistics on missing members of the Yazidi community since 2014.¹²⁸

¹¹³ USDoS, 2019 Country reports on human rights practices: Iraq, March 2020, [url](#), p. 48

¹¹⁴ Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), MSF warns of mental health crisis among Yazidis in Iraq, 4 October 2019, [url](#); Al-Monitor – Iraq, Suicide rates increase within Iraq's Yazidi community, 15 May 2020, [url](#)

¹¹⁵ UNSC, Implementation of resolution 2470 (2019) – Report of the Secretary-General [S/2020/363], 6 May 2020, [url](#), p. 10

¹¹⁶ USDoS, Iraq 2019 - International religious freedom report, June 2020, [url](#), p. 4

¹¹⁷ IOM, Understanding ethno-religious groups in Iraq: displacement and return, February 2019, [url](#), p. 7

¹¹⁸ IOM, Understanding ethno-religious groups in Iraq: displacement and return, February 2019, [url](#), pp. 8-9

¹¹⁹ IOM, Understanding ethno-religious groups in Iraq: displacement and return, February 2019, [url](#), pp. 10-12

¹²⁰ IOM, Understanding ethno-religious groups in Iraq: displacement and return, February 2019, [url](#), p. 12

¹²¹ IOM, Understanding ethno-religious groups in Iraq: displacement and return, February 2019, [url](#), p. 17

¹²² IOM, Understanding ethno-religious groups in Iraq: displacement and return, February 2019, [url](#), p. 17

¹²³ IOM, Understanding ethno-religious groups in Iraq: displacement and return, February 2019, [url](#), p. 22

¹²⁴ IOM, Understanding ethno-religious groups in Iraq: displacement and return, February 2019, [url](#), p. 36

¹²⁵ IOM, Understanding ethno-religious groups in Iraq: displacement and return, February 2019, [url](#), p. 6, p. 32

¹²⁶ KAS, Life after the Caliphate: human security challenges in Syria and Iraq, June 2020, [url](#), p. 12

¹²⁷ IOM, Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) Round 112, September-October 2019, [url](#), p. 2

¹²⁸ UNSC, Conflict-related sexual violence - Report of the Secretary-General [S/2020/487], 3 June 2020, [url](#), p. 11



Civilians	Estimated	Gender composition
Abducted	6 417	1 197 women
Rescued/escaped from abductors	3 524	339 men
Remain missing	2 893	1 038 girls 950 boys

On the sixth annual commemoration of the Yazidi genocide, Yazda reported in August 2020 that estimated 3 000 Yazidis are still missing or thought to be in captivity.¹²⁹ USDoS reported that during 2019, the KRG continued efforts to support and fund the rescue of captured Yazidis, inside and outside of the country, and provide psychosocial support at a centre in Dohuk governorate.¹³⁰ As of 31 December 2019, according to IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM), 59% of IDPs in Iraq areas of origin are from Ninewa Governorate, mainly from Mosul (288 828 individuals), Sinjar (266 316) and Al-Ba'aj (113 436).¹³¹ In terms of return, Ninewa was placed first with 152 184 or 9 %; however its return rate was still low in proportion to its population remaining in displacement at the end of 2019, standing at only 68 %.¹³² In May-June 2020, IOM DTM noted that in terms of IDPs areas of origin, 60 % originate from Ninewa, with specifically 277 050 from Mosul, 265 518 from Sinjar and 114 426 from Al-Ba'aj. This IDPs case-load is reported to be driven by deteriorating "security situation, lack of services, and a shortage of employment opportunities".¹³³

In July 2020, IOM reported that Ninewa governorate is hosting the second highest population of returnees living in severe-conditions¹³⁴, totalling 173 628, and recoding the largest increase in number of returnees living in severe condition, totalling 108 558 with highest increases records in Telafar, Mosul and Al-Ba'aj.¹³⁵ The increase in these districts is reported to be due to different sources of violence, such as "ISIL attacks, acts of revenge, clashes between security forces, or ethno-religious-tribal tensions, worsening of the employment situation and changes in daily public life because of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) outbreak and ensuing lockdown".¹³⁶

During the reporting period from 8 June – 2 September 2020, and specific to the displacement and returns to Sinjar and Al-Ba'aj districts, IOM reported that 18 214 individuals have returned, out of which 91 % to Sinjar and 9 % to Al-Ba'aj. Out of 18 214 individuals, 68 % were identified as returnees and 32 % as out-of-camp IDPs. Out of the overall return population, 78 % arrived from camp settings and 22 % from out-of-camp settings. 80 % of returnees came from Dohuk governorate (i.e. mostly Zakho and Sumel districts), 19 % from Ninewa governorate (i.e. mostly Al-Shikhan district), and

¹²⁹ Yazda, The sixth annual commemoration of the Yazidi genocide: joint statement by Amal Clooney and Yazda, 2 August 2020, [url](#)

¹³⁰ USDoS, Iraq 2019 - International religious freedom report, June 2020, [url](#), p. 12-13; Al-Monitor – Iraq, Yazidis still negotiating return of kidnapped women, children, 6 July 2020, [url](#)

¹³¹ IOM, Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) – Master list report 113 – November-December 2019, [url](#), p. 3

¹³² IOM, Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) – Master list report 113 – November-December 2019, [url](#), p. 5

¹³³ IOM, Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM), Master list report 116 – May-June 2020, [url](#), p. 4

¹³⁴ "To measure the severity of conditions in each location of return, the Return Index is based on 16 indicators grouped into two scales: (i) livelihoods and basic services, and (ii) social cohesion and safety perceptions.", "The Return Index can be used for identifying hotspots and the main problematic areas in certain governorates, districts or subdistricts, using a combination of the severity score for at least one of the scales as well as the number of families living in the area." IOM, Return Index – Methodological overview – Iraq, May 2020, [url](#), p. 1, p. 3; "The scores of the severity index are grouped into three categories: low, medium and high (which also includes very high).", "Subdistricts are classified as 'hotspots' if they score highly in terms of severity on at least one of the two scales (either livelihoods and basic services, or safety and social cohesion) or if they score medium in terms of severity but also host relatively large numbers of returnees." IOM, Return Index – Findings round nine – Iraq, July 2020, [url](#), pp. 1-2

¹³⁵ IOM, Return Index – Findings round nine – Iraq, July 2020, [url](#), p. 1

¹³⁶ IOM, Return Index – Findings round nine – Iraq, July 2020, [url](#), p. 1

remaining 1 % of individuals coming from Erbil governorate (i.e. Erbil district) and Sulaimaniyah governorate (Sulaimaniyah district).¹³⁷

According to the KRG Ministry of Interior, Joint Crisis Coordination Centre, the number of IDPs in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), in the period from June 2019 to July 2020 remained almost unchanged. The main reasons for many Yazidis to remain in camps and not to return to their areas of origin are the lack of reconstruction, vital public services and sense of insecurity.¹³⁸ The composition of the IDPs has not changed from January 2019 to July 2020, with Yazidis continuing to comprise 30 % of all IDPs in KRI:

2019/2020	January 2019 ¹³⁹	June 2019 ¹⁴⁰	December 2019 ¹⁴¹	February 2020 ¹⁴²	July 2020 ¹⁴³
Governorates	Total IDPs				
Erbil	668 385	187 605	354 524	355 037	354 896
Duhok	379 316	387 316	217 796	217 637	208 530
Sulaymaniyah	189 476	188 356	215 047	215 032	172 865
TOTAL IDPs	1 237 177	763 277	787 367	787 705	736 291
IDP camps	No. of camps ; In camp ; % Non-camp ; %				
Erbil	7 ; 32 857 ; 3 % 635 528 ; 51 %	7 ; 32 676 ; 25 % N/A	6 ; 32 037 ; 45 % N/A	6 ; 32 550 ; 51 % N/A	6 ; 32 108 ; 48 % N/A
Duhok	17 ; 167 458 ; 14 % 211 380 ; 17 %	17 ; 165 588 ; 52 % N/A	17 ; 162 320 ; 28 % N/A	17 ; 162 191 ; 36 % N/A	16 ; 154 307 ; 29 % N/A
Slemani	5 ; 16 458 ; 1 % 173 018 ; 14 %	5 ; 15 338 ; 23 % N/A	5 ; 14 016 ; 27 % N/A	5 ; 14 001 ; 13 % N/A	5 ; 12 742 ; 23 % N/A
Total	29 ; 217 251 ; 18 % 1 019 926 ; 82 %	29 ; 213 602 ; N/A N/A	28 ; 208 373 ; N/A N/A	28 ; 208 742 ; N/A N/A	27 ; 199 157 ; N/A N/A
IDPs backgrounds					
IDPs backgrounds	January 2019	June 2019	December 2019	February 2020	July 2020
Arab Sunni	40 %	40 %	40 %	40 %	40 %
Yazidi	30 %	30 %	30 %	30 %	30 %
Kurdish / Kurds Muslims	13 %	13 %	13 %	13 %	13 %
Christians	7 %	7 %	7 %	7 %	7 %

¹³⁷ IOM, Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) Emergency Tracking, Displacement and returns to Sinjar and Al-Ba'aj districts - 8 June – 2 September 2020, 8 September 2020, [url](#), pp. 1-2

¹³⁸ USDoS, 2019 Country reports on human rights practices: Iraq, March 2020, [url](#), p. 37

¹³⁹ Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), Ministry of Interior – Joint Crisis Coordination Centre, Humanitarian Situational Report (SitRep) No. (1) for January 2019, 17 February 2019, [url](#); KRG, Ministry of Interior – Joint Crisis Coordination Centre, Registered IDPs and refugees in Kurdistan Region – Iraq for January 2019, 13 February 2019, [url](#)

¹⁴⁰ KRG, Ministry of Interior – Joint Crisis Coordination Centre, Humanitarian Situational Report (SitRep) No. (4) for June 2019, 23 July 2019, [url](#)

¹⁴¹ KRG, Ministry of Interior – Joint Crisis Coordination Centre, Humanitarian Situational Report (SitRep) No. (10) for December 2019, 12 January 2020, [url](#)

¹⁴² KRG, Ministry of Interior – Joint Crisis Coordination Centre, Humanitarian Situational Report (SitRep) No. (2-20) for February 2020, 24 February 2020, [url](#)

¹⁴³ KRG, Ministry of Interior – Joint Crisis Coordination Centre, Humanitarian Situational Report (SitRep) No. (7-20) for July 2020, 20 July 2020, [url](#)



Others (Turkman, Shiite Shabaks, Armenian, etc.)	10 %	10 %	10 %	10 %	10 %
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