

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

Bilagsnr.:	891
Land:	Irak
Kilde:	UNHCR
Titel:	Relevant COI for Assessments on the Availability of an Internal Flight or Relocation Alternative (IFA/IRA) for Yazidis in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KR-I)
Udgivet:	Marts 2016
Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet:	13. juni 2016

Relevant COI for Assessments on the Availability of an Internal Flight or Relocation Alternative (IFA/IRA) for Yazidis in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KR-I)

This document provides an overview of factual elements to be considered when assessing the availability of an Internal Flight Alternative or Relocation Alternative (IFA/IRA) in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KR-I) for an Iraqi national of Yazidi background, based on UNHCR information and publicly available sources. The document has been updated as of 3 March 2016. Given the volatility of the situation in Iraq as well as frequent changes to regulations and practices concerning the access to relatively safer areas, any consideration of an IFA/IRA needs to be made in light of up-to-date and relevant country of information.

I. Background

In August 2014, ISIS seized the districts of Sinjar, Tel Afar and the Ninewa Plains, leading to a mass exodus of Yazidis, Christians and other religious communities from these areas. Soon, reports began to surface regarding war crimes and serious human rights violations perpetrated by ISIS and associated armed groups. These included the systematic targeting of members of ethnic and religious minorities.¹ In August 2014, over 275,000 people from Mount Sinjar area - including a vast majority of Yazidis - were driven out of their homes, with the majority fleeing to the KR-I and particularly Dohuk governorate.²

The attacks by ISIS on the Yazidi population, which included mass executions of Yazidi men and boys over the age of 14, the abduction and enslavement of thousands of Yazidi women and girls and the forced recruitment of young boys,³ “pointed to the intent of ISIL to destroy the Yazidi as a group”, suggesting that ISIS may have perpetrated genocide.⁴ The European Parliament, on 4

¹ UN Assistance Mission to Iraq (UNAMI), *Report on the Protection of Civilians in the Armed Conflict in Iraq: 11 December 2014 – 30 April 2015*, 13 July 2015, <http://www.refworld.org/docid/55a4b83c4.html>, pp. 19-20; US Department of State, *2014 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices - Iraq*, 25 June 2015, <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/236812.pdf>, pp. 1-2, 7, 24, 26, 27-28, 29; 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*, 13 March 2015, A/HRC/28/18, <http://www.refworld.org/docid/550ad5814.html>, paras 16, 17-28.

² International Organization for Migration (IOM)/UN Habitat, *Launch of UN-Habitat Report*, 29 November 2015, <http://bit.ly/1RCQzRl>; IOM, *Displacement Tracking Matrix*, September 2014, <http://iomiraq.net/file/2392/download>, pp. 1, 4.

³ 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*, 13 March 2015, A/HRC/28/18, <http://www.refworld.org/docid/550ad5814.html>, paras 35-46. See also, Iraqi News, *800 Yazidi Children Are Training in ISIS Camps, Says Qaiada*, 7 January 2016, <http://www.iraqinews.com/iraq-war/146850/>; UN Security Council, *Children and Armed Conflict: Report of the Secretary-General*, 5 June 2015, A/69/926-S/2015/409, <http://www.refworld.org/docid/557abf904.html>; France 24, *Islamic State Group Turning Yazidi Boys into Jihadists*, 5 March 2015, <http://f24.my/1G1Pyh>.

⁴ “Members of ISIL may have perpetrated genocide against the Yazidi community by killing, causing serious bodily or mental harm and forcibly transferring members of the group, including children, in the context of a manifest pattern of conduct aimed at the destruction of the group”; 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*, 13 March 2015, A/HRC/28/18, <http://www.refworld.org/docid/550ad5814.html>, paras 17, 78. See also, UN Security Council,

February 2016, unanimously passed a resolution recognizing ISIS' systematic killing and persecution of religious minorities in Iraq and Syria as genocide.⁵ At the time of writing, the number of Yazidis in captivity was estimated by UNAMI at around 3,500, mostly women and children.⁶ Since Kurdish forces retook Sinjar in mid-November 2015, dozens of mass graves containing the remains of Yazidis have been found.⁷

Baba Sheikh, the religious leader of the Yazidi community in Iraq, issued a statement on 6 September 2014 welcoming women who had escaped ISIS captivity back into the community and stating that no one should harm them. On 6 February 2015, he reissued the appeal. These statements reportedly helped prevent Yazidi women from being negatively stigmatized and be subjected to harm in response to the sexual violence many were thought to have been subjected to.⁸ Nonetheless, there have been reports of suicides and attempted suicides amongst individuals following their release or escape from ISIS captivity.⁹ Many Yazidis suffer from trauma as a result of the massive violence, the loss/captivity of family members, ongoing displacement and economic hardship.¹⁰

Children and Armed Conflict: Report of the Secretary-General, 5 June 2015, A/69/926-S/2015/409, <http://www.refworld.org/docid/557abf904.html>, paras 7, 77.

⁵ Newsweek, *European Parliament Recognizes ISIS Killings of Religious Minorities as Genocide*, 4 February 2016, <http://nwk.ee/A1m2i>.

⁶ "ISIL continued to subject women and children to sexual violence, particularly in the form of sexual slavery. UNAMI/OHCHR continues to believe that the number of people currently being held in slavery by ISIL numbers approximately 3,500. Those being held are predominantly women and children and come primarily from the Yazidi community, but a number are also from other ethnic and religious minority communities. UNAMI/OHCHR continues to have grave concerns for the welfare and safety of those held in ISIL captivity." And further: "Official sources in the Yazidi community informed OHCHR/UNAMI HRO that 5,838 people had been abducted by ISIL from August 2014 - 3,192 women and 2,646 men. As of 29 October [2015], 2,258 had reportedly returned/escaped or were released - 311 men, 847 women, 533 girls, and 567 boys"; UNAMI, *Report on the Protection of Civilians in the Armed Conflict in Iraq: 1 May - 31 October 2015*, 11 January 2016, <http://www.refworld.org/docid/56a09a304.html>, pp. 17-18.

⁷ "Following the retaking of Sinjar, in Ninewa, by the Peshmerga on 13 November [2015], at least 8 new mass grave sites containing victims murdered by ISIL were discovered, bringing the total number of such graves discovered to date to at least 16. Government officials informed UNAMI that they had neither the resources nor the expertise to adequately protect or excavate these sites, with the possible loss or damage of forensic evidence and means of identification of the remains"; UN General Assembly, *Second Report of the Secretary-General Pursuant to Paragraph 7 of Resolution 2233 (2015)*, 26 January 2016, S/2016/77, <http://www.refworld.org/docid/56af0c454.html>, para. 50. See also, Associated Press, *UN: 16 Mass Graves Found after Iraq's Sinjar Freed from IS*, 4 December 2015, <http://bit.ly/1TBByuDe>; The Independent, *Mass Grave of Yazidi Women Discovered in Iraq after Sinjar Offensive*, 15 November 2015, <http://ind.pn/1j3aoUY>.

⁸ UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), *Yazidi Women Welcomed Back to the Faith*, 15 June 2015, <http://rfg.ee/N8Brc>; Human Rights Watch, *Iraq: ISIS Escapees Describe Systematic Rape*, 15 April 2015, <http://www.refworld.org/docid/5530fde4.html>.

⁹ "Suicide has also been common among Yazidi women whose lives were shattered after being kidnapped and sexually abused by ISIS"; International Rescue Committee, *Courageous Yazidi Woman Speaks Out after Escaping Violence in Iraq*, 4 August 2015, <https://www.rescue.org/ZuAy>. See also, NPR, *Amid Warnings of Ethnic Cleansing, a Yazidi Man's Suicide Resonates*, 15 November 2015, <http://bit.ly/1QmXQFO>; 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*, 13 March 2015, A/HRC/28/18, <http://www.refworld.org/docid/550ad5814.html>, para. 43.

¹⁰ UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)/UN Country Team, *Iraq Humanitarian Response Plan 2016*, December 2015, http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/final_iraq_2016_hrp.pdf, p. 7; Christian Science Monitor, *For Yazidis Traumatized by Islamic State Horrors, Few Mental Health Resources*, 7 October 2015, <http://fw.to/syK8RiK>; Pulitzer Center, *A Year After ISIS Rampage, Yazidis Still in Crisis*, 15 August 2015, <http://bit.ly/24wF0lQ>; Associated Press, *Iraq's Latest War Creates New Generation with Mental Trauma*, 15 May 2015, <http://sfg.ly/24wFN69>; 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-*

Despite the retaking of the town of Sinjar from ISIS by KDP Peshmerga as well as PKK and YPG fighters in November 2015,¹¹ very few Yazidis have returned as security remains a challenge and basic services are limited. The severity of the damage to Sinjar town, proximity to the front line, IED contamination, and total lack of services make returns unlikely in the near future.¹² Furthermore, areas south of Sinjar remain under control of ISIS, which continues to launch attacks in Sinjar town.¹³ ISIS positions near Sinjar remain a target for international coalition airstrikes.¹⁴ Approximately 1,500 families remain on Mount Sinjar, living in makeshift shelters or tents, and with limited access to basic services and livelihood opportunities.¹⁵ In addition to humanitarian needs, significant child protection issues have been reported, including early marriage and under-age recruitment.¹⁶

II. Considerations Relating to the Application of an Internal Flight or Relocation Alternative (IFA/IRA)

A detailed analytical framework for assessing the availability of an internal flight or relocation alternative (IFA/IRA), sometimes also referred to as internal protection alternative,¹⁷ is contained in the UNHCR *Guidelines on International Protection No. 4: "Internal Flight or Relocation Alternative" within the Context of Article 1A(2) of the 1951 Convention and/or 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees*.¹⁸

In light of massive new internal displacement coupled with a large-scale humanitarian crisis, mounting sectarian tensions and reported access restriction, particularly into the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, UNHCR does in principle not consider it appropriate for States to deny persons from Iraq

Called Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and Associated Groups, 13 March 2015, A/HRC/28/18, <http://www.refworld.org/docid/550ad5814.html>, para. 43.

¹¹ BBC, *Battle for Sinjar: IS-Held Town in Iraq 'Liberated'*, 13 November 2015, <http://bbc.in/1pk9DKX>.

¹² UNHCR information, March 2016. According to IOM and UN Habitat, "[A]bandoned Yazidi settlements were either systematically demolished or seized by ISIL fighters. Some 6,000 homes are thought to have been destroyed or burned down in the district of Sinjar alone"; IOM/UN Habitat, *Launch of UN-Habitat Report*, 29 November 2015, <http://bit.ly/1RCQzRI>. See also, AMAR, *Sinjar's Returnees Facing Serious Health Crisis*, 4 December 2015, <https://shar.es/1C6h6c>.

¹³ Reuters, *Kurds Say Investigating Suspected Islamic State Chemical Attack in Iraq*, 28 February 2016, <http://tmsnrt.rs/215MIUJ>; Institute for the Study of War, *Iraq Control of Terrain Map: February 9, 2016*, 9 February 2016, <http://bit.ly/1OHRUqC>.

¹⁴ US Department of Defense, *Coalition Strikes Hit ISIL Terrorists in Syria, Iraq*, 28 February 2016, <http://1.usa.gov/1TK7jb7>; Reuters, *U.S. Targets Islamic State with 19 Strikes in Iraq, Syria*, 22 February 2016, <http://reut.rs/1PRTwN8>.

¹⁵ See also, Middle East Eye, *Displaced Yazidis Still on Mount Sinjar Grapple with Harsh Conditions*, 10 June 2015, <http://bit.ly/1GyvRQw>.

¹⁶ According to the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), "[M]any children are recruited into armed groups, subjected to extreme violence, or are married early"; UNICEF, *Reaching Isolated Children on Sinjar Mountain*, 6 January 2016, <http://uni.cf/1Jym0vH>.

¹⁷ European Union, *Council Directive 2004/83/EC of 29 April 2004 on Minimum Standards for the Qualification and Status of Third Country Nationals or Stateless Persons as Refugees or as Persons Who Otherwise Need International Protection and the Content of the Protection Granted*, 19 April 2004, 2004/83/EC, <http://www.refworld.org/docid/4157e75e4.html>, Article 8; European Union, *Directive 2011/95/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council on standards for the qualification of third-country nationals or stateless persons as beneficiaries of international protection, for a uniform status for refugees or for persons eligible for subsidiary protection, and for the content of the protection granted (recast)*, 13 December 2011, <http://www.refworld.org/docid/4f06fa5e2.html>, Article 8.

¹⁸ UNHCR, *Guidelines on International Protection No. 4: "Internal Flight or Relocation Alternative" within the Context of Article 1A(2) of the 1951 Convention and/or 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees*, HCR/GIP/03/04, 23 July 2003, <http://www.refworld.org/docid/3f2791a44.html>.

international protection on the basis of the applicability of an internal flight or relocation alternative.¹⁹

If an IFA in the KR-I is however assessed in the case of a Yazidi applicant, UNHCR considers that the following country of origin information is relevant for the assessment of the relevance and reasonableness of the proposed IFA:

1. Elements to Be Considered in the ‘Relevance Analysis’

In the case of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, application of the ‘relevance test’ would require consideration of whether a) the area is practically, safely, and legally accessible to the individual, b) if the individual would be at risk of persecution by either a state or non-state agent (depending on the individual circumstances of the case), c) if the individuals would be exposed to any other risk of persecution or other serious harm in the area of relocation (unrelated to any individual experiences of past persecution, but related to the objective situation in the KR-I and perhaps certain elements of the profile).

Access to the KR-I may be very difficult for IDPs, depending on their ethnic or religious profile. The sponsorship requirement for persons of (both Sunni and Shi’ite) Arab, Turkmen or Shabak background has largely been abandoned as it had reportedly turned into a business for people who sold sponsorships to IDPs without relatives or contacts in the KR-I. UNHCR was informed that, since November 2014, the admission (by land) of Turkmen and Arab IDPs into the KR-I has largely been stopped, except for those who already possess residence documents. Members of minority groups, including Yazidis, appear generally to be admitted to the KR-I. Access to the KR-I does not follow a consistent pattern and policies and practices are subject to change. At the time of writing, Arab, Turkmen and Christian IDPs are generally only allowed to enter the KR-I through Erbil or Sulaymaniyah airports.²⁰

It has been noted that Yazidi IDPs, generally speaking, face less restrictions in the KR-I compared to IDPs of Arab or Turkmen ethnicity. For instance, while Yazidi IDPs and members of other minorities are permitted to retain their identity documents, Arab IDPs frequently see their identity documents confiscated, thus severely limiting their freedom of movement. Furthermore, Yazidi IDPs are not required to obtain residency permits in the KR-I. However, they are required to obtain a housing letter from their local *Asayish* if they want to rent a house in an urban area. This housing permit is also needed in order to register with the Ministry of Migration and Displacement (MoMD).²¹

The security situation in the Kurdistan Region remains relatively stable, with security forces remaining on high alert and imposing tightened security to prevent ISIS and associated groups from staging attacks. Armed clashes continue to occur between Kurdish forces and ISIS on the borders of the Kurdistan Region, and ISIS manages to launch attacks against mainly government and security installations in areas under *de facto*,²² and, to a much lesser extent, areas under *de*

¹⁹ UNHCR, *UNHCR Position on Returns to Iraq*, 27 October 2014, para. 27, <http://www.refworld.org/docid/544e4b3c4.html>.

²⁰ UNHCR information, March 2016.

²¹ Ibid.

²² During ISIS’ advances in 2014, the KRG has moved into and established *de facto* control in areas disputed between the Iraqi government and the KRG, namely in Ninewa, Kirkuk and Diyala governorates. In these areas, ISIS launches attacks against government and Peshmerga positions as well as civilian targets. For example, on 3 November 2015, at least two suicide bombers attacked the government building in the Peshmerga-controlled Dibis district in north-

jure control of the KRG.²³ In October 2015, week-long protests in different towns across Sulaymaniyah governorate reportedly turned violent and resulted in the killing of protestors and KDP officials, and the burning of KDP offices in Halabja, Kalar, and Qalat Dizah.²⁴

The current frontlines of conflict in northern Iraq (including Northern Mosul, Makhmour/Gwer battle front, Kirkuk and Sinjar) remain very close to the major strategic communication and administrative centers of Erbil, Dohuk and Sulaymaniyah. A breach of the frontline by ISIS would pose a very serious threat to the civilian population in the KR-I. Furthermore, the Kalak/Khabat area, which is approximately 30 km directly west of Erbil city has reportedly been subjected to multiple rocket attacks posing considerable concern to civilians in Erbil. This is also of particular concern for UNHCR as some refugee and IDP camps are located close to the current frontline.²⁵ On 24 July 2015, the Government of Turkey began to launch airstrikes against alleged positions of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) in the northern Governorates of Dohuk and Erbil, some of which reportedly resulted in civilian casualties and damage of civilian homes and infrastructure.²⁶

western Kirkuk governorate; ISW, *Iraq Situation Report: November 3 - 9, 2015*, 9 November 2015, <http://bit.ly/1SfuJIR>.

²³ Terrorist attacks within the Kurdistan Region occur less frequently than in other parts of Iraq.

- On 20 January 2016, Kurdish security forces reportedly arrested members of an ISIS-linked cell and confiscated explosives in Sulaymaniyah. The group was allegedly planning terrorist attacks in the KR-I; Ara News, *Iraqi Kurdistan Arrests ISIS-linked Terror Cell in Sulaymaniyah*, 20 January 2016, <http://aranews.net/2016/01/17770/>.
- In November 2015, there were reportedly two attacks in the Kurdistan Region, including a sticky bomb, which wounded a member of the Peshmerga in Sulaymaniyah, while a man fired on the Peshmerga Ministry building in Erbil; Musings on Iraq, *Violence Continues to Decline in Iraq*, Nov 2015, 7 December 2015, <http://bit.ly/1TxTudB>.
- On 18 October 2015, ISIS reportedly abducted at least 84 civilians from the Qaraj sub-district in the town of Makhmour inside Kurdish-held territory; EPIC, *Iraq Security and Humanitarian Monitor* 35, 15-22 October 2015, <http://bit.ly/1PBpmzM>.
- In late September 2015, KRG authorities (Ministry of Awqaf) reported that some 250 to 260 armed Kurds, who had joined ISIS, had been killed, while some 100 remain in ISIS' ranks. Furthermore, "about 100 armed Kurds left the ranks of the organization and returned to Kurdistan," and further: "Some of them are still currently detained by the security authorities; others have been evacuated after the completion of the investigations with them" See: Iraqi News, *Kurdistan Announces the Death of 250 Kurdish Militants within ISIS Ranks*, 30 September 2015, <http://bit.ly/1STBz4C>.
- On 17 April 2015, three persons were reportedly killed and several others injured in a car bombing outside the entrance of the heavily fortified US consulate in the Ankawa district of Erbil. ISIS reportedly claimed responsibility for the attack; Reuters, *Car Bomb Kills 3 outside US Consulate in Iraq's Kurdish Capital*, 18 April 2015, <http://reut.rs/1HkGYua>.
- On 20 November 2014, a suicide car bomber reportedly blew himself up outside the governor's office, killing five and wounding dozens. The attack was also claimed by ISIS; AFP, *ISIS Claims Suicide Bombings in Iraq's Erbil*, 21 November 2014, <http://ara.tv/yt3ub>.
- On 23 August 2014, a blast was reportedly caused by a magnet bomb attached to the bottom of a car, wounding at least two people; Financial Times, *Car Bomb Hits Kurdish Regional Capital Erbil*, 23 August 2015, <http://on.ft.com/1tEw1uE>.

In other incidents, Kurdish security forces were reportedly able to uncover and prevent the execution of planned attacks; Al-Monitor, *Islamic State Infiltrates Iraqi Kurdistan*, 4 June 2015, <http://almon.co/2g2b>; Financial Times, *Iraqi Kurds Fear Infiltration by ISIS*, 26 August 2015, <http://on.ft.com/VM034m>.

²⁴ International Business Times, *Kurds Rail against Government Corruption as Protests Turn Violent in Iraqi Kurdistan*, 16 October 2015, <http://ibt.uk/A006ORH>; Reuters, *Three Killed in Violent Unrest in Iraq's Kurdistan Region*, 10 October 2015, <http://reut.rs/1Zo7MCR>.

²⁵ UNHCR information, March 2016.

²⁶ According to Lama Fakihi, Senior Crisis Advisor at Amnesty International, who visited the area: "The recent attacks in Kandil maimed, killed, and displaced residents, destroying homes and terrifying locals in an area where no military targets appeared to be present"; Amnesty International, *Fresh Evidence of Casualties Underscores Need for*

According to media reports, tensions between Yazidi IDPs and local communities in Dohuk Governorate have at times led to threats, harassment, demonstrations, and violent incidents against Yazidi IDPs.²⁷ In March 2015, authorities in Dohuk have reportedly beaten up, arrested and detained dozens of Yazidi demonstrators, who demonstrated to highlight human rights abuses against their community in Iraq.²⁸

In Sulaymaniyah Governorate, there have been reported tensions between Yazidi and Arab IDPs, particularly in Arbat IDP camp. These tensions were the result of congestion and lack of services in the camp, Arab IDPs' perception that Yazidi IDPs were receiving disproportionate attention and aid, and the perception of Yazidi IDPs of discrimination in distribution and assistance from private donors. Following the opening of an additional camp (Ashti IDP camp) within the Governorate, to which most, if not all, Yazidis from Arbat IDP camp relocated to, UNHCR has not received reports of any further tensions. In other camps, there is a noticeable sense of mistrust between Yazidi and Muslim IDPs.²⁹

In May 2015, media reported about the stoning to death of a Yazidi man in Sulaymaniyah, allegedly on account of his religion; however, no further details are available.³⁰

2. Elements to Be Considered in the 'Reasonableness Analysis'

Impartial Investigation into Turkish Airstrikes in Kandil Mountains, 11 August 2015, <http://www.refworld.org/docid/55cb03184.html>. See also Iraqi News, *Turkish Warplanes Shell Kurdistan Workers' Party North of Duhok*, 10 February 2016, <http://bit.ly/1QDEoq9>; Iraqi News, *Turkish Warplanes Bomb Sites Belonging to PKK North of Dohuk*, 13 September 2015, <http://bit.ly/1KJOSSI>; New York Times, *Turkey Attacks Kurdish Militant Camps in Northern Iraq*, 25 July 2015, <http://nyti.ms/1JExpns>.

²⁷ "Dozens of Muslim Kurds gathered at the office of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (PKD – Liqa 1) on Monday afternoon with banners and Kurdish flags, accusing Yazidis in Shingal (Sinjar) of 'using violence against Kurdish Muslims'. The Yazidis had killed 'innocent, Kurdish Muslims' and 'were a threat to national security,' according to the demonstrators' tenor. In addition, Yazidis were said to have set mosques on fire. (...) Nevertheless – especially in the conservative coined Dohuk – there are strong resentments against the Yazidi minority which are not least supported by Kurdish Salafists and their hate speeches. In the city, Yazidi traders are partly not able to sell their products because they are considered as 'unclean' among conservative Muslims, as the secular leader Mir Tahsin Said Beg pointed out in an interview. Dr. Abdul Wahid, a lecturer at the Islamic Faculty in Sulaimani, labelled Yazidis already in 2013 as 'devil-worshippers' who were 'not Kurds but Arabs', calling them 'unclean' and 'kafir' (infidels)"; Ekurd Daily, *Muslim Kurds Demonstrate against Yazidis in Iraqi Kurdistan*, 25 November 2015, <http://bit.ly/1UtOSYW>. See also Ekurd Daily, *Some Kurdish Yazidis Leave Akre Refugee Camp after Clashes with Iraqi Muslim Kurds*, 27 September 2015, <http://bit.ly/1TKiXD0>.

²⁸ "According to a demonstrator interviewed by [UNAMI Human Rights Office] HRO, they were walking from Cham Mashko IDP camp towards Zakho city center (around 10 kilometers from the camp) and when they were getting close to the city centre, Police started beating them and arrested 63 demonstrators, taking them to the Police academy detention center. They were kept there until around 18:00 and then transferred to an Asayish building and kept there until around 14:00 of 24 March. According to a witness, they were handcuffed and blindfolded and then beaten with electric cables, kicked, and given electric shocks. Asayish officials asked the witness who the organisers of the demonstration were and accused him of being an ISIL's supporter. He was released the following day, after putting his thumb print on a piece of paper while blindfolded. HRO interviewed another demonstrator, who went towards Zakho city center from Persivi IDP camp. He reported that while they were walking towards Zakho, they were attacked by Sunni Kurds from a nearby village, who accused them of 'already having occupied their land and even of protesting now'. A scuffle broke out between Sunni Kurds and Yazidi demonstrators and the Police started beating and dispersing both groups. Ten Yazidi were wounded and taken to Zakho hospital; 25 Yazidi were arrested by Asayish and Police, (...)"; Information from UNAMI Human Rights Office, 26 March 2015. See also AINA News, *Kurdish Police Arrest Yazidi Demonstrators in Refugee Camps*, 26 March 2015, <http://bit.ly/1oVBDEK>.

²⁹ UNHCR information, March 2016.

³⁰ Ara News, *Yezidi Man Stoned to Death in Iraqi Kurdistan, Community Demands Justice*, 13 May 2015, <http://bit.ly/1oGU53N>.

Even if an IFA in the Kurdistan Region might be deemed relevant, as noted above, UNHCR considers that the ‘reasonableness test’ would generally not be met. Whether an IFA/IRA is “reasonable” must be determined on a case-by-case basis, taking into account the personal circumstances of the applicant, including the impact of any past persecution on the applicant.³¹ Other factors that must be taken into account include the safety and security situation in the proposed area of relocation; respect for human rights in that area, and the possibilities for economic survival,³² in order to evaluate whether the individual would be able to live a relatively normal life without undue hardship in the area of relocation, given his or her situation.

To assess the reasonableness of a proposed IFA/IRA in the KR-I, particular attention must be given to:

- a) The availability of traditional support mechanisms, provided by members of the applicant’s extended family;
- b) Access to shelter in the proposed area of relocation;
- c) The availability of basic infrastructure and access to essential services in the proposed area of relocation, such as sanitation, health care and education;
- d) The presence of livelihoods opportunities; and
- e) The scale of internal displacement in the proposed area of relocation.

a) Availability of Traditional Support Mechanisms, Provided by Members of the Applicant’s Extended Family

UNHCR’s *Guidelines on International Protection No. 4: “Internal Flight or Relocation Alternative” within the Context of Article 1A(2) of the 1951 Convention and/or 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees* state, at para. 29: “Conditions in the area [of proposed relocation] must be such that a relatively normal life can be led in the context of the country concerned. If, for instance, an individual would be without family links and unable to benefit from an informal safety net, relocation may not be reasonable, unless the person would otherwise be able to sustain a relatively normal life at more than just a minimum subsistence level.”

Whether an applicant would be able to rely on (extended) family members or another informal safety net in the proposed area of relocation needs to be assessed in each individual case. In relation to a proposed IFA to the KR-I, the prevailing humanitarian crisis and wider economic constraints affecting large segments of the population in the KR-I are relevant factors to be taken into account when assessing whether members of the applicant’s extended family or wider community are willing and able to provide genuine support to the applicant in practice. Where an IFA to the KR-I is proposed for Yazidi applicants, it should be noted that the majority of Yazidis present in the KR-I find themselves in a situation of internal displacement, in often precarious living conditions and with no or limited access to livelihood opportunities.

b) Access to Shelter

³¹ UNHCR, *Guidelines on International Protection No. 4: “Internal Flight or Relocation Alternative” within the Context of Article 1A(2) of the 1951 Convention and/or 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees*, HCR/GIP/03/04, 23 July 2003, <http://www.refworld.org/docid/3f2791a44.html>, paras 25-26.

³² UNHCR, *Guidelines on International Protection No. 4: “Internal Flight or Relocation Alternative” within the Context of Article 1A(2) of the 1951 Convention and/or 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees*, HCR/GIP/03/04, 23 July 2003, <http://www.refworld.org/docid/3f2791a44.html>, paras 24, 27-30.

The majority of IDPs in the KR-I live in rented houses or with host families. Pressure on the existing housing market is high, and rents have increased in light of heightened demand.³³ IDPs are reported to be forced to move between districts and shelters in search of cheaper housing.³⁴ Furthermore, available housing often does not provide adequate living conditions, as many are unfurnished, dilapidated and overcrowded.³⁵ Many IDPs have been displaced for over a year and their coping capacity is reportedly diminishing.³⁶ Many IDPs are thus increasingly unable to pay the increasing rents, putting them at risk of eviction and renewed displacement.³⁷ IDPs who cannot afford rent are seeking shelter in camps, however many camps are full and there are waiting lists to move into camps.³⁸

A relatively high number of IDPs (over 187,000), including many Yazidis, live in camps in the KR-I, particularly in Dohuk governorate.³⁹ As the camps were built by different actors, their standards of accommodation, facilities and provision of services vary greatly, with some camps not meeting minimum standards.⁴⁰ Furthermore, close to 109,000 IDPs are recorded as living in critical shelter arrangements such as informal settlements, religious buildings, schools and unfinished or abandoned buildings.⁴¹ Those living in critical shelter arrangements are often

³³ “Due to the presence of displaced people and the demand for housing, rent has increased as much as 20 per cent in Dahuk Governorate and 15 per cent in Erbil Governorate, where most of the Syrian refugees live”; Humanitarian Country Team, *Humanitarian Needs Overview 2016*, November 2015, http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/final_iraq_2016_hno.pdf, p. 24. See also, IRIN, *Rent to Tent and Back Again*, 12 October 2015, <http://bit.ly/1N8AaBG>; Economonitor, *MENA Real Estate: A Positive Outlook, Despite Current Challenges*, 4 August 2015, <http://bit.ly/1MW5T9I>; Rudaw, *Influx of Arrivals Pushes Erbil Rents to Record Highs*, 6 June 2015, <http://bit.ly/1TuWloc>.

³⁴ IOM, *Sulaymaniyah Governorate Profile May-August 2015*, 10 November 2015, <http://iomiraq.net/file/2241/download>, p. 2; IOM, *Erbil Governorate Profile May-August 2015*, 9 November 2015, <http://iomiraq.net/file/2224/download>, pp. 1, 2.

³⁵ IOM, *Dahuk Governorate Profile April – September 2015*, 10 November 2015, <http://iomiraq.net/file/2233/download>, p. 2; IOM, *Sulaymaniyah Governorate Profile May-August 2015*, 10 November 2015, <http://iomiraq.net/file/2241/download>, p. 2; IOM, *Erbil Governorate Profile May-August 2015*, 9 November 2015, <http://iomiraq.net/file/2224/download>, p. 2.

³⁶ IOM, *Sulaymaniyah Governorate Profile May-August 2015*, 10 November 2015, <http://iomiraq.net/file/2241/download>, p. 2; OCHA, *Iraq: Humanitarian Bulletin 1-15 October 2015*, 20 October 2015, <http://bit.ly/1NnbW6T>, p. 2.

³⁷ Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), *Iraq and the International Community Must Boost Protection of the Internally Displaced as Crisis Deepens – UN Expert*, 19 May 2015, <https://shar.es/1C6j0S>; Shelter and Camp Coordination/Camp Management Cluster (CCM), *Iraq Internal Displacement Crisis Assessment Report*, 10 September 2014, <http://bit.ly/1QRjUdD>.

³⁸ UNHCR, *IDP Operational Update, 1-31 October 2015*, 31 October 2015, <http://bit.ly/1IU0ZWR>, p. 4.

³⁹ In Dohuk, over 146,700 IDPs live in camps, in Erbil 18,200 and in Sulaymaniyah 22,000; IOM, *Displacement Tracking Matrix*, 18 February 2016, <http://iomiraq.net/file/5258/download>, p. 9.

⁴⁰ Amnesty International, *A Harsh Winter for Hundreds of Thousands Displaced in Kurdistan Region of Iraq*, 2 February 2015, <http://bit.ly/1QIipwj>. On the humanitarian conditions in camps in Dohuk governorate faced by Yazidi IDPs, see also Ekurd Daily, *Anger and Uncertainty at Yazidi Refugee Camp in Iraqi Kurdistan*, 7 August 2015, <http://bit.ly/1QnMkqg>; Al-Monitor, *One Year Later, Struggle Continues for Yazidis*, 6 August 2015, <http://bit.ly/21vCYTS>.

⁴¹ “A saturated absorptive capacity of the housing market and lack of financial resources have left many persons without adequate shelter, leaving families to find cover in public buildings such as schools, or in the open covered only by unfinished construction projects or bridges”; World Bank, *The Kurdistan Region of Iraq – Assessing the Economic and Social Impact of the Syrian Conflict and ISIS*, 2015, <http://bit.ly/1LtqRzb>, p. 14. Dohuk governorate recorded the highest number of IDPs in critical shelter arrangements, with over 17,500 IDPs living in informal settlements and 75,000 living in unfinished or abandoned buildings; IOM, *Displacement Tracking Matrix*, 18 February 2016, <http://iomiraq.net/file/5258/download>, p. 9.

deprived of access to adequate water, electricity and sanitation.⁴² The lack of adequate shelter has reportedly led to loss of lives due to adverse weather conditions.⁴³

c) Availability of Basic Infrastructure and Access to Essential Services

Both the KRG and the international humanitarian community are struggling to provide IDPs with adequate access to basic services given the large number of IDPs and the vast humanitarian needs in the Kurdistan Region, which is exacerbated by the limited availability of financial resources.⁴⁴ Iraq is facing a growing humanitarian crisis.⁴⁵ It is estimated that 10 million persons, or nearly a third of the population, are currently in need of humanitarian assistance across Iraq.⁴⁶ This

⁴² IOM, *Dahuk Governorate Profile April – September 2015*, 10 November 2015, <http://iomiraq.net/file/2233/download>, p. 2. “Like many displaced people in Iraq [in Dohuk governorate], Basma’s family lives in an unfinished building with no front walls to protect children from falling. There is no electricity or running water. Basma, her husband and their children must share the one-room space with four other Yazidi families; 46 adults and children crowd together to cook, eat, sleep, and play”; International Rescue Committee, *Courageous Yazidi Woman Speaks Out after Escaping Violence in Iraq*, 4 August 2015, <https://www.rescue.org/ZuAv>. “Many of the displaced in the Dohuk governorate live in precarious and dangerous places where they are exposed to the elements and have limited or no access to water and electricity. We visited large, unfinished buildings with no walls, windows, doors or bathrooms, but where hundreds of families now live in makeshift rooms with plastic partitions”; Amnesty International, *A Harsh Winter for Hundreds of Thousands Displaced in Kurdistan Region of Iraq*, 2 February 2015, <http://bit.ly/1QIjpwi>.

⁴³ “Temperatures continued to drop across Iraq as winter set in, with displaced families living in tents and unfinished building struggling to cope with heavy rains and cold. This is particularly challenging in the mountainous areas of Duhok and Sulaymaniyah in the KR-I, where the conditions remained challenging for the displaced, despite the assistance given by the international community”; UNHCR, *IDP Operational Update 1-31 December 2015*, 31 December 2015, <http://bit.ly/1LS2mXp>, p. 2. See also, IRIN, *Iraq’s Killer Weather*, 12 November 2015, <http://bit.ly/1NsMBWT>; IRIN, *Iraqi Kurdistan Nears Breaking Point*, 20 March 2015, <http://bit.ly/21vN5YI>; AINA News, *Rains Cause Flooding in Refugee Camps in Dohuk, Iraq*, 19 October 2014, <http://bit.ly/1QICXAH>.

⁴⁴ “The Government of Iraq and the Kurdistan Regional Government have played central roles in addressing the crisis, but will have few resources in the year ahead. The Government’s social protection floor, although under severe strain, has been crucial for supporting displaced families, many of whom receive cash grants, food parcels through the Public Distribution System (PDS), health care, education, and shelter. However, persistently low oil prices are crippling both governments. Public revenues have plummeted by more than 40 per cent; investment projects have been cancelled, operational costs are being reduced across all ministries in both the federal Government and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and payrolls have been delayed for months. Hundreds of thousands of workers are without jobs, including in the construction sector, a major source of employment in the KR-I”; OCHA/UN Country Team, *Iraq Humanitarian Response Plan 2016*, December 2015, http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/final_iraq_2016_hrp.pdf, p. 8. “Despite the best efforts of the government and the international community, a significant number of refugees and IDPs lack basic necessities such as health services, education, shelter, food, and social protection”; World Bank, *The Kurdistan Region of Iraq – Assessing the Economic and Social Impact of the Syrian Conflict and ISIS*, 2015, <http://bit.ly/1LtqRzb>, p. 45. “The pressure of hosting more than 1 million people displaced by militants from the group calling itself Islamic State (IS) on top of the 225,000 refugees from Syria is taking a devastating economic and social toll on Iraqi Kurdistan and increasing risks for the most vulnerable”; IRIN, *Iraqi Kurdistan Nears Breaking Point*, 20 March 2015, <http://bit.ly/21vN5YI>. An official from Dohuk province expressed that the province’s capacity to admit additional refugees and IDPs was exhausted; Kurdistan 24 News, *Duhok Governor: No Room for IDPs*, 23 January 2016, <http://bit.ly/1pkswxld>.

⁴⁵ “The humanitarian situation continued to deteriorate (...). [T]he conflict in Iraq has had profound humanitarian consequences. With conditions worsening, people are struggling to cope. At least 2 million people are entering their second year of displacement. Family savings are exhausted, increasing the demand for livelihood options, while incidents of social tension are increasing. There is an exponential deterioration in the condition of host communities, as families who have generously opened their homes to displaced relatives and neighbours are plunging rapidly into poverty”; UN General Assembly, *Second Report of the Secretary-General Pursuant to Paragraph 7 of Resolution 2233 (2015)*, 26 January 2016, S/2016/77, <http://www.refworld.org/docid/56af0c454.html>, paras 64-65.

⁴⁶ “Depending on the intensity of fighting and the scale of violence in the months ahead, 11 million Iraqis, perhaps even 12 to 13 million, may need some form of humanitarian assistance by the end of 2016”; OCHA/UN Country Team,

contrasts with only 7.3 million people that are currently targeted for assistance by humanitarian actors.⁴⁷ Given the scale and complexity of the humanitarian crisis, on 12 August 2014, the UN declared a “Level 3 Emergency” for Iraq, the highest-level emergency designation.⁴⁸

In the KR-I, where the population has increased by 30 per cent since 2014, a total of 1.33 million persons are estimated to be in need of humanitarian assistance.⁴⁹ Among those in need of humanitarian assistance are also members of the host communities,⁵⁰ who have generously received the large number of internally displaced, but who are likely to fall below the self-supporting threshold.⁵¹ Since October 2014, the debt burden has reportedly quadrupled in the KR-I as well as in the Diyala and Ninewa governorates. In numerous neighbourhoods, including in Dohuk, Erbil, Sulaymaniyah, families are reported to rely on negative, even irreversible coping strategies as they are increasingly unable to cover their basic needs. Food consumption within the most vulnerable families is reportedly declining and child labour and early marriage are on the rise.⁵²

Public services, including health, water and education, are reportedly overwhelmed, affecting both host communities and IDPs.⁵³ The vast majority of IDPs in the KR-I are in need of

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- Iraq Humanitarian Response Plan 2016, December 2015, http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/final_iraq_2016_hrp.pdf, p. 6.
- ⁴⁷ OCHA/UN Country Team, Iraq Humanitarian Response Plan 2016, December 2015, http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/final_iraq_2016_hrp.pdf, p. 2.
- ⁴⁸ UNAMI, UN Declares a 'Level 3 Emergency' for Iraq to Ensure More Effective Humanitarian Response, 19 August 2014, <http://www.refworld.org/docid/53f32334.html>.
- ⁴⁹ Including 0.65 million in Dohuk, 0.47 in Erbil, and 0.21 million in Sulaymaniyah governorates; OCHA/UN Country Team, Iraq Humanitarian Response Plan 2016, December 2015, http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/final_iraq_2016_hrp.pdf, p. 22. “The massive influx of IDPs into KRI created a humanitarian crisis and pushed to the limits the capacity of the regional government, the UN, and other donors to respond to the basic needs of the IDPs”; World Bank, *The Kurdistan Region of Iraq – Assessing the Economic and Social Impact of the Syrian Conflict and ISIS*, 2015, <http://bit.ly/1LtqRzb>, p. 62.
- ⁵⁰ Around 240,000 members of the host communities in the KR-I are estimated to be in need of humanitarian assistance, mostly in Dohuk; OCHA/UN Country Team, Iraq Humanitarian Response Plan 2016, December 2015, http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/final_iraq_2016_hrp.pdf, p. 22.
- ⁵¹ OCHA/UN Country Team, Iraq Humanitarian Response Plan 2016, December 2015, http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/final_iraq_2016_hrp.pdf, p. 6.
- ⁵² OCHA/UN Country Team, Iraq Humanitarian Response Plan 2016, December 2015, http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/final_iraq_2016_hrp.pdf, pp. 6-7; Humanitarian Country Team, *Humanitarian Needs Overview 2016*, November 2015, http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/final_iraq_2016_hno.pdf, p. 8.
- ⁵³ “The health system is over-subscribed, leading to serious concerns that a health emergency may erupt and quickly spread. More than 325,000 school-age children from displaced and refugee families are unable to access education and thousands of Kurdish families are worried that education levels are falling as resources dwindle. Although many displaced people have been able to secure shelter, more than 240,000 are living in abandoned, unfinished or public buildings. Their conditions are some of the worst in the region”; OCHA/UN Country Team, Iraq Humanitarian Response Plan 2016, December 2015, http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/final_iraq_2016_hrp.pdf, p. 23. “The growing inflow of Syrian refugees and internally displaced Iraqis into KRI in 2012–2014 has put significant pressures on the regional government and severely constrained the delivery of health, education, and social protection programs to the population. The standard of living has deteriorated, and a noticeable proportion of the population has fallen into poverty or is vulnerable to falling into poverty”; World Bank, *The Kurdistan Region of Iraq – Assessing the Economic and Social Impact of the Syrian Conflict and ISIS*, 2015, <http://bit.ly/1LtqRzb>, p. 7. “The scale of the influx has created significant competition for jobs, pushing down wages and household incomes across the board, while demand for water, electricity and waste management is outstripping supply”; IRIN, *Iraqi Kurdistan Nears Breaking Point*, 20 March 2015, <http://bit.ly/21vN5YI>. See also, The Economist, *Once Booming, the Statelet is now in Crisis*, 27 February 2016, <http://econ.st/1QmqS79>.

humanitarian assistance.⁵⁴ IDPs, who are likely to be cut off from their usual source of income and traditional social and other support networks, are particularly affected by the high living costs and weak service provision.⁵⁵ Loss of civil documentation remains another concern for IDPs across Iraq. Without civil documentation IDPs cannot access basic rights, services or employment and face restrictions on their freedom of movement.⁵⁶ In Iraq, civil status documentation is issued and renewed at the local civil status office in person's place of origin where the original records are maintained - a prospect that is not feasible for many at this current time. In response to the large-scale displacement since 2014, alternative civil status offices have been opened in various parts of the country. IDPs from Ninewa can approach the Ninewa Directorate of Nationality and Civil Status in Erbil, or offices in Sheikhan, Kabat (Kalak) and Zummar in Ninewa to apply for document recovery.⁵⁷

d) Livelihoods Opportunities and Food Security

Unemployment among IDPs is reportedly high and the majority does not have a regular income.⁵⁸ Particularly those residing in camps face difficulties to access the labour market as many camps are located outside urban areas.⁵⁹ Prospects to finding employment are dire for IDPs, as local communities have already been hard-hit by the prevailing economic crisis, related job losses and delays in salary payments.⁶⁰ A recent assessment conducted by the World Food Programme (WFP), Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) and REACH initiative found that the humanitarian situation of Iraqis displaced in the KR-I is worsening due to limited access to jobs and economic opportunities, forcing many to resort to negative coping mechanism to meet their

⁵⁴ An estimated 0.85 million IDPs in the KR-I are in need of humanitarian assistance (out of a total of 929,200 IDPs in the KR-I); OCHA/UN Country Team, *Iraq Humanitarian Response Plan 2016*, December 2015, http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/final_iraq_2016_hrp.pdf, p. 22.

⁵⁵ "(...) IDPs who flee their homes to KRI now are less likely to have host family support than those already in the region. The latest data indicate that IDPs who fled their homes in earlier stages of the conflict had family contacts inside KRI, whereas the newly displaced are less likely to have a support network in the region. Approximately 21 percent recently interviewed IDPs reportedly lack any form of support, and 77 percent planned to use personal savings. This lack of familial safety net results in a more immediate food insecurity for current and future IDPs than has been the case to date"; World Bank, *The Kurdistan Region of Iraq – Assessing the Economic and Social Impact of the Syrian Conflict and ISIS*, 2015, <http://bit.ly/1LtqRzb>, p. 69.

⁵⁶ UNHCR, *IDP Operational Update 1-31 December 2015*, 31 December 2015, <http://bit.ly/1LS2mXp>, p. 3.

⁵⁷ UNHCR information, March 2016.

⁵⁸ "Few displaced people [in Erbil] report earning an income; the overwhelming majority continue to rely on savings to survive"; OCHA/UN Country Team, *Iraq Humanitarian Response Plan 2016*, December 2015, http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/final_iraq_2016_hrp.pdf, p. 24. "(...) rates of unemployment were high and many IDP families in camps in particular had already exhausted their savings. The assessment warned that additional shocks could have an impact on their ability to afford enough food"; WFP/FAO/REACH Initiative, *WFP and FAO Concerned about Worsening Humanitarian Conditions of Displaced Iraqis in Kurdistan*, 27 November 2015, <https://shar.es/1C653f>; See also, IOM, *Sulaymaniyah Governorate Profile May-August 2015*, 10 November 2015, <http://iomiraq.net/file/2241/download>, p. 2; IOM, *Erbil Governorate Profile May-August 2015*, 9 November 2015, <http://iomiraq.net/file/2224/download>, p. 1.

⁵⁹ IOM, *Dahuk Governorate Profile April – September 2015*, 10 November 2015, <http://iomiraq.net/file/2233/download>, p. 2.

⁶⁰ "In recent months, faced with a crippling fiscal deficit, the [Kurdish] regional government has struggled to provide employment and basic public services for both resident communities and displaced families. The steep drop in oil revenue, driven by historically low prices, has led to a spike in public debt. Salaries are in arrears and all public investment projects have been halted. More than 150,000 workers employed on these projects are now without jobs. Recovering from the impact of the crisis is expected to take years, if not a generation"; OCHA/UN Country Team, *Iraq Humanitarian Response Plan 2016*, December 2015, http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/final_iraq_2016_hrp.pdf, p. 23. See also, NRT English, *Hundreds Forced to Scavenge Rubbish to Survive in Erbil*, 1 March 2016, <http://bit.ly/1RrrS7K>; IRIN, *Iraqi Kurdistan Nears Breaking Point*, 20 March 2015, <http://bit.ly/21vN5YI>.

basic food needs.⁶¹ Those who have an income are reportedly affected by plummeting income levels across the KR-I, which puts them at extreme risk of impoverishment.⁶²

Poverty has reportedly more than doubled in the KR-I in the past two years.⁶³ The displaced have been particularly hard-hit; although many have been struggling to survive on savings, personal resources are now exhausted, forcing hundreds of thousands of families to rely on outside assistance, and where this is inadequate, on negative coping strategies.⁶⁴ It is estimated that 85 per cent of IDPs in Iraq are indebted.⁶⁵ As a result of economic downturn and high unemployment, social tensions are reportedly on the rise. It is estimated that as many as 1.7 million people are likely to be impacted by social conflict in Iraq.⁶⁶

More than 765,000 persons in KR-I are estimated to require food assistance; however, the Public Distribution System (PDS) is reportedly not fully functioning and many IDP families reportedly do not have access to their food rations in the place of displacement.⁶⁷ Recent cutbacks in food vouchers are expected to further worsen food insecurity.⁶⁸

e) Internal Displacement

Iraq is facing a major displacement crisis as more than 3.32 million persons, nearly half of them children, have been forced to flee their homes in several big waves of displacement, and multiple

⁶¹ According to the rapid assessment, which surveyed IDPs living in and out of camps as well as local communities, high unemployment rates have driven displaced families to increasingly rely on negative coping mechanisms such as skipping meals, eating smaller portions and spending their savings, in order to meet their basic food needs; WFP/FAO/REACH Initiative, *WFP and FAO Concerned about Worsening Humanitarian Conditions of Displaced Iraqis in Kurdistan*, 27 November 2015, <https://shar.es/1C653f>.

⁶² OCHA/UN Country Team, *Iraq Humanitarian Response Plan 2016*, December 2015, http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/final_iraq_2016_hrp.pdf, p. 23.

⁶³ “Poverty is increasing, and social protection programs need support. The crises in Iraq and Syria have had a profound effect on the welfare of the people in KRI. As a result of the multiple crises, the poverty rate for KRI more than doubled, from 3.8 percent at the natural population growth rate in 2014 to 8.1 percent”; World Bank, *The Kurdistan Region of Iraq – Assessing the Economic and Social Impact of the Syrian Conflict and ISIS*, 2015, <http://bit.ly/1LtqRzb>, p. 7.

⁶⁴ OCHA/UN Country Team, *Iraq Humanitarian Response Plan 2016*, December 2015, http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/final_iraq_2016_hrp.pdf, p. 23.

⁶⁵ “The situation of displaced families remains dramatic. Spread across the country and living in more than 3,500 locations, 85 per cent of displaced people are in debt, most unpayable, locking families into generations of impoverishment and immiseration”; OCHA/UN Country Team, *Iraq Humanitarian Response Plan 2016*, December 2015, http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/final_iraq_2016_hrp.pdf, p. 7.

⁶⁶ OCHA/UN Country Team, *Iraq Humanitarian Response Plan 2016*, December 2015, http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/final_iraq_2016_hrp.pdf, p. 7. See also, IRIN, *Iraqi Kurdistan Nears Breaking Point*, 20 March 2015, <http://bit.ly/21vN5YI>.

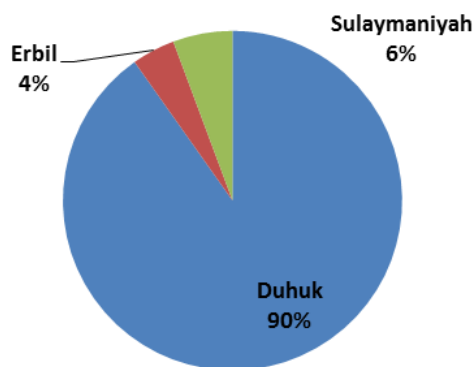
⁶⁷ “The PDS for subsidizing food staples, although operational, is not functioning optimally. Thus host communities, especially vulnerable groups within them, are also being directly impacted. (...) Most IDPs who had access to food distribution in their home governorates no longer have access to their PDS away from their established place of residence”; World Bank, *The Kurdistan Region of Iraq – Assessing the Economic and Social Impact of the Syrian Conflict and ISIS*, 2015, <http://bit.ly/1LtqRzb>, pp. 67-68. See also, OCHA/UN Country Team, *Iraq Humanitarian Response Plan 2016*, December 2015, http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/final_iraq_2016_hrp.pdf, p. 23.

⁶⁸ OCHA/UN Country Team, *Iraq Humanitarian Response Plan 2016*, December 2015, http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/final_iraq_2016_hrp.pdf, p. 24; UN News Centre, *UN Agencies Concerned about Worsening Humanitarian Conditions of Displaced Iraqis in Kurdistan*, 27 November 2015, <http://bit.ly/1TkkUI7>.

smaller ones since January 2014.⁶⁹ An additional 1.1 million people were already displaced from earlier conflict in 2006-2008.⁷⁰ Further new displacements, including into the KR-I, are expected in 2016.⁷¹

The KR-I hosts over 929,200 IDPs, or 28 per cent of the total IDP population,⁷² with the majority having sought refuge in Dohuk governorate.⁷³ In addition, the KR-I hosts some 200,000 IDPs, who arrived from previous waves of violence since 2003, as well as the large majority of the over 245,500 Syrian refugees, who have sought refuge in Iraq.⁷⁴ In the KR-I, one of every six residents is displaced and in some districts, the ratio is one in three.⁷⁵

In the KR-I, 90 per cent of Yazidi IDPs reside in Dohuk Governorate, with smaller numbers in the governorates of Sulaymaniyah and Erbil.⁷⁶ In addition, there are also 305 Yazidi refugees from Syria registered by UNHCR in the KR-I, the majority of which (60 per cent) also reside in Dohuk Governorate.⁷⁷



⁶⁹ From January 2014 to 4 February 2016, IOM's Data Tracking Matrix (DTM) identified 3,320,844 internally displaced individuals (553,474 families), dispersed across 105 districts and 3,698 locations in Iraq; IOM, *Displacement Tracking Matrix*, 18 February 2016, <http://iomiraq.net/file/5258/download>.

⁷⁰ OCHA/UN Country Team, *Iraq Humanitarian Response Plan 2016*, December 2015, http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/final_iraq_2016_hrp.pdf, p. 6.

⁷¹ "More than 500,000 people are expected to flee their homes during the year, the majority from towns and districts along the Mosul and Anbar corridors. Perhaps an additional 1 million will be impacted by the battle for Mosul"; OCHA/UN Country Team, *Iraq Humanitarian Response Plan 2016*, December 2015, http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/final_iraq_2016_hrp.pdf, p. 6. See also, Rudaw, *Iraqi Gov't Prepares for New Wave of Refugees after Mosul Offensive*, 1 March 2016, <https://shar.es/1CCyrK>.

⁷² The figure is not inclusive of populations currently displaced in the disputed bordering districts of Akre and Al-Shikhan (Ninewa governorate) and Kifri and Khanaqin (Diyala governorate); IOM, *Displacement Tracking Matrix*, 18 February 2016, <http://iomiraq.net/file/5258/download>, p. 2.

⁷³ Dohuk currently hosts over 404,000 IDPs (or 12 per cent of the total IDP population in Iraq), making it the governorate with the third largest IDP population in the country. Erbil governorate accounts for 360,000 IDPs (or 11 per cent of the total IDP population), and Sulaymaniyah hosts close to 27,400 IDPs (or 5 per cent of the total IDP population); IOM, *Displacement Tracking Matrix*, 18 February 2016, <http://iomiraq.net/file/5258/download>, pp. 2, 3.

⁷⁴ UNHCR, *Syria Regional Refugee Response – Iraq*, last updated 15 February 2016, <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/country.php?id=103>. See also, OCHA/UN Country Team, *Iraq Humanitarian Response Plan 2016*, December 2015, http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/final_iraq_2016_hrp.pdf, p. 24.

⁷⁵ OCHA/UN Country Team, *Iraq Humanitarian Response Plan 2016*, December 2015, http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/final_iraq_2016_hrp.pdf, p. 23. See also, Rudaw, *Official: IDPs Make Up 35 Percent of Kurdistan Region Population*, 20 October 2015, <http://bit.ly/1L1PvHo>.

⁷⁶ UNHCR figures, September 2015.

⁷⁷ UNHCR figures, September 2015.