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Displaced Christians in northern Iraq begin to return home - UN agency

The United Nations refugee agency reported today that some of the Christian families forced to flee their homes in northern Iraq last month are beginning to return to Mosul as the security situation in the city shows signs of improvement.

Early October saw a dramatic increase in violence against Christian communities in and around Iraq's second largest city, which led to some 2,200 families, or over 9,000 people, escaping the area for fear of threats and intimidation.

Iraqi security forces have recently strengthened their presence in the area, with up to 35,000 army and police personnel in Mosul city alone, resulting in a decline in the number of explosions and arbitrary killings.

The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) [noted](#) that Christian families began to return about a week ago with assurances from their Arab neighbours that security had improved in the city.

About a third of the 1,000 displaced families in the Hamdaniya district had returned to their homes in Mosul, out of concern for their job security or for educational reasons, according to a UNHCR press release issued today. Many also seem to be commuting to Mosul from villages up to 40 kilometres away.

Christians and other minorities - such as the Shebeks and Yezidis, who have also been uprooted in recent years - remain displaced, saying that they fear the uncertainty and political instability in the region, and have serious concerns over the general lack of law and order.

Although the Government has offered the displaced a cash grant of up to \$800 as an incentive to return home, many do not register for the funding for fear of exposure to hostility.

UNHCR and their partners have provided assistance in the form of blankets, mattresses, kerosene stoves, kitchen sets as well as clothing and hygiene kits to over 1,800 of the displaced families, many of whom have found refuge in churches and private homes and have been cared for by the local community.
