

مبادرة **NADIA's**  
نادية **INITIATIVE**

**REBUILDING AMID  
THE RUINS**

Status of Sinjar Report 2023



**GIWPS**

Georgetown Institute for  
Women, Peace and Security

# ABOUT NADIA'S INITIATIVE



Nadia's Initiative (NI) is on a mission to create a world where women are able to live peacefully, and where communities that have experienced trauma and suffering are supported and redeveloped. NI advocates – at the local, national, and international levels – for resources and policy changes needed to protect and support survivors of sexual violence and rebuild communities in crisis.

Since its inception in 2018, NI has earned the trust and recognition of governments, policy makers, activists, and advocates throughout the world as a leader in sustainable community-driven development and advocacy as it relates to women, peace, justice, and security. In a short time, NI has provided both regional and cultural expertise in Iraq in an effort to rebuild Sinjar and strengthen security in the region.

Sustainably rebuilding Sinjar means laying the foundations for the community to not only survive but thrive. In line with a grassroots approach to sustainable development, NI works with the local community and a variety of partners to design, support, and implement projects that promote the restoration and improvement of education, healthcare, livelihoods, WASH (water, sanitation, and hygiene), women's empowerment, and cultural preservation. All NI programs are community-driven and survivor-centric, aiming to foster long-term peacebuilding in the region and reduce the community's reliance on foreign aid.

## Acknowledgements

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## Photography

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*To protect the identities of those who participated in the research, all names have been withheld.*

For more information, please visit [www.nadiasinitiative.org](http://www.nadiasinitiative.org)

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## ACRONYMS

GOI	Government of Iraq
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IED	Improvised Explosive Device
IOM	International Organization for Migration
ISIS	The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
KRG	Kurdistan Regional Government
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NI	Nadia's Initiative
PKK	Kurdistan Workers Party
PTSD	Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
WASH	Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene
YPG	People's Protection Units

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

# REBUILDING AMID THE RUINS

### BACKGROUND

The year 2014 marked the beginning of a long struggle for the Yazidi ethno-religious minority in Iraq. At that time, the non-state actor known as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) began their campaign of genocide, which resulted in mass deaths, destruction, abductions, displacement, and sexualized violence. It is estimated that thousands of Yazidis were killed<sup>1</sup>, over 6,400 enslaved<sup>2</sup> and nearly 400,000 displaced<sup>3</sup>. In the years following the genocide, over 80 mass graves have been uncovered and testimonials of female survivors of sexual and gender-based violence have been met with calls for justice around the world.

Sinjar, the ancestral homeland of the Yazidis, was devastated by the occupation of ISIS and is yet to recover. Although liberated in 2017, Sinjar has lacked the development support necessary to facilitate a wide-scale return of the population. Over 200,000 Yazidis<sup>4</sup> remain internally displaced in camps in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, hesitant to return under the current circumstances. Without the restoration of basic services, such as healthcare and education, or rebuilding of Sinjar's devastated infrastructure and destroyed residences, much of the Yazidi population cannot return home.



Despite the challenges, 150,000 Yazidis<sup>5</sup> have returned to Sinjar with the hope that the region will recover.

The international community and those working to support the Yazidi population *must commit to long-term, community-driven programming* aimed at fostering peacebuilding in the region and reducing the community's reliance on foreign aid.

<sup>1</sup> Frontview Consulting. (2020). Quick Risk Assessment – Reconstruction – Iraq – Sinjar District.

<sup>2</sup> Garcia, P. (2020). Caught in the middle: the impact of security and political fragmentation on civilian protection in Sinjar. Center for Civilians in Conflict.

<sup>3</sup> IOM. (2021). Yazidi Survivors in Germany and Iraq's Reparation Programme: "I want for us to have a share in Iraq".

<sup>4</sup> More support needed for survivors of the Sinjar massacre. International Organization for Migration. (n.d.). Retrieved October 14, 2022, from <https://www.iom.int/news/more-support-needed-survivors-sinjar-massacre>.

<sup>5</sup> The Genocide. Nadia's Initiative. (n.d.). Retrieved October 14, 2022, from <https://www.nadiasinitiative.org/the-genocide>

Despite the challenges, 150,000 Yazidis<sup>5</sup> have returned to Sinjar with the hope that the region will recover. However, resources in Sinjar are limited, and reliance on aid programs leaves its future unpredictable. Comprehensive efforts to sustainably redevelop the area are required to support Yazidis currently living in Sinjar and to allow for the wide-scale return of those who remain displaced.



This report aims to describe both the short- and long-term needs of Yazidis in Sinjar and elaborate on solutions that can ensure sustainable redevelopment. Part I provides background on the present conditions, Part II presents the findings for each of the 8 aid sectors assessed for this report – shelter; infrastructure; water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH); health; education; livelihoods; protection; and gender-based violence – and Part III offers concluding thoughts and recommendations.

Ultimately, the report concludes that to improve the situation in Sinjar, aid efforts must be directed to move beyond immediate, short-term humanitarian interventions and soft support in the form of training and capacity building programs. The international community and those working to support the Yazidi population must commit to long-term, community-driven programming aimed at fostering peacebuilding in the region and reducing the community's reliance on foreign aid.





## SHELTER

By 2017, when ISIS had been militarily defeated and Sinjar liberated, up to 70% of civilian homes in and around Sinjar City and 80% of public infrastructure throughout the region had been destroyed. Residents of Sinjar cite a variety of needs for re-establishing sustainable resettlement, including cash support, building materials, and legal documentation to assert claims to their original homes. The present challenges to housing leave Yazidis at risk of continued displacement within their homeland, marking an unpredictable future for many.



## FINDINGS



**62%** of Yazidi residents of north Sinjar are optimistic that they will eventually transition back to their pre-genocide residences versus 24% of those in south Sinjar.



**80%** of Yazidi residents in north Sinjar cite affordability of building materials as the main limitation to transitioning to a permanent home. 55% of Yazidi residents of south Sinjar cite availability of building materials as the main limitation to transitioning to a permanent home.



**35%** of Yazidis currently in Sinjar remain displaced from their pre-genocide homes. Approximately 70% of surveyed men have been able to reclaim original residences versus 58% of surveyed women.



## RECOMMENDATIONS

- ✓ Increase efforts to rehabilitate residential structures for long-term and permanent use.
- ✓ Prioritize housing access for female-led.
- ✓ Prioritize efforts to rebuild homes in the south given higher levels of devastation.
- ✓ Prioritize provision of building materials to reconstruct homes across Sinjar.





# INFRASTRUCTURE



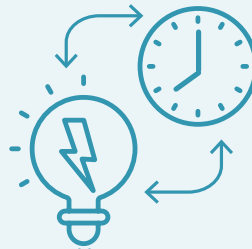
When ISIS destroyed essential infrastructure in Sinjar, they caused considerable damage to roads, electrical sites, health facilities, schools, and other public services. Sinjar requires extensive support to these sectors, especially to strengthen the current power grid and increase the availability of fuel. The unreliable electrical grid limits the capacities of health facilities and schools, and fuel is particularly important in the winter months when temperatures can drop below freezing and residential structures lack sufficient insulation from the cold.



## FINDINGS



Roads across Sinjar are in poor condition, non-existent and/or unpaved. This hinders development across most other sectors.



All respondents in north Sinjar and 80% of respondents in the south have access to electricity for an average of 2 to 5 hours per day. The remaining 20% of respondents in the south have slightly higher levels of access at about 6 to 10 hours per day



**90%** of Yazidis in the north and slightly more than 50% in the south limited availability of fuel (gas for vehicles, home heaters, generators, and other appliances). Where fuel is available, it is affordable to only 4% of respondents in the north and approximately 30% of respondents in the south.



## RECOMMENDATIONS

- ✓ Invest in wide-scale road rehabilitation projects in order to more effectively support other areas of development.
- ✓ Rehabilitate electrical power grids to provide widescale access and increase the number of hours/day that residents have electricity (including establishment of new transformers, rehabilitation of existing transformers, and providing generators)
- ✓ Advocate for increased fuel availability and affordability to improve transportation issues and power generators and heaters.
- ✓ Prioritize dissemination of heaters and heating oil for warmth in winter months



## WATER, SANITATION, AND HYGIENE

A lack of essential household services, particularly water and sanitation, significantly hinders the safe return of Yazidis. Access to clean water is difficult throughout Sinjar, which negatively impacts consistent school attendance (especially for girls), the health and safety of environments children play in, and the overall ability of individuals to maintain their personal hygiene. Overall, women in Sinjar experience the shortage of clean water more significantly than their male counterparts.



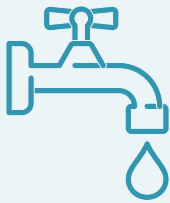
### FINDINGS



**65%** of respondents do not have access to *enough* water, while over 70% of respondents do not have consistent access to *clean* water.



**17%** of survey respondents attribute their dissatisfaction with their water supply to a combination of low supply and bad taste or smell of water.



When individuals were asked to list all challenges relating to water access in their communities, roughly 54% of individuals cite a combination of low supply, long wait times, and sporadic availability as major challenges to water access in the community.



**24%** of women and 73% of men state that water for personal hygiene is affordable.



### RECOMMENDATIONS

- ✓ Improve access to clean water through comprehensive water projects (addressing both access and quality standards) to meet the needs of the vast majority who cite this as a major concern.
- ✓ Prioritize population hubs for water access and water quality interventions.
- ✓ Improve planning of water distribution networks to ensure equitable access.



## HEALTHCARE

ISIS attacked the healthcare infrastructure in Sinjar by looting medical devices<sup>6</sup> and destroying Sinjar General Hospital and smaller medical centers in the region.<sup>7</sup> In 2020, 90% of villages and towns in Sinjar were suffering from a lack of healthcare services and there were only 3 qualified and functioning healthcare centers to serve an area of 72 villages.<sup>8</sup>

Survey data for this report found that healthcare in Sinjar is plagued by several constraints. Limited supplies, poor quality care, and troubled access hinder the healthcare sector across the entire region, and women are disproportionately impacted by limitations in accessing quality and specialized healthcare services.



### FINDINGS



**45%** of Yazidis across Sinjar have experienced being unable to access necessary medical care. In both north and south Sinjar, the primary reasons for the inability to access medical care are cost and lack of doctors.



**82%** of respondents highlight that the number of available medical professionals is insufficient.



**67%** of respondents are unable to purchase necessary medications.



**95%** of female respondents attribute their inability to receive medical attention to the lack of available doctors.

- Nearly 64% of respondents note that medical facilities do not have the necessary supplies and medications needed for the community.
- 77% of women and 58% of men experience lack of access to medical supplies.
- 51% of individuals who do have access to medical care do not believe that they receive good quality care. 77% of women do not feel they have access to good quality care compared to 26% of men.



### RECOMMENDATIONS

- ✓ Support primary healthcare centers and general hospitals to improve the quality of their care to prevent the need for residents to travel long distances to access medical care. This includes providing advanced training for current healthcare staff.
- ✓ Mobilize international pressure on the Government of Iraq (GOI) to adequately staff all healthcare facilities in Sinjar.
- ✓ Increase healthcare support in rural areas given the distance to existing general hospitals. This may include building or rehabilitating primary healthcare centers as well as furnishing and equipping them.
- ✓ Provide medical equipment and supplies to existing general hospitals and primary healthcare centers.
- ✓ Prioritize women's healthcare, including access to maternal and reproductive healthcare.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Aziz, Ammar. "Shingal (Sinjar) in Need of Doctors." Kirkuknow, 30 Apr. 2022, <https://www.kirkuknow.com/en/news/68014>.

<sup>8</sup> ACAPS. (2020). Iraq: the return to Sinjar. Retrieved from: [https://www.acaps.org/sites/acaps/files/products/files/20201120\\_acaps\\_briefing\\_note\\_sinjar\\_province\\_iraq.pdf](https://www.acaps.org/sites/acaps/files/products/files/20201120_acaps_briefing_note_sinjar_province_iraq.pdf).



## EDUCATION

The Iraqi education system has struggled for decades due to ongoing conflict and violence, and Sinjar's education sector has historically been neglected by consecutive Iraqi administrations. However, the situation in Sinjar post-2014 is particularly devastating. ISIS militants used school buildings as military bases, which were then targeted in air strikes. Teachers were forced to flee, and vast numbers of children remained out of school for prolonged periods of time. Since the violence abated, some school infrastructure has been rebuilt, but many of Sinjar's qualified teachers remain displaced and unable to resume their work.



### FINDINGS



**53%** of respondents in south Sinjar report that children can get to school safely, compared to 70% of respondents in the north. Respondents cite a number of factors as major obstacles to safe school access, including the presence of armed forces and active landmines.



Respondents cite several factors that decrease the quality of the educational offerings in Sinjar, including lack of electricity, school supplies, and qualified teachers.



**60%** of girls and 45% of boys have never been enrolled in school. Of those who do attend school, 48% of girls attend regularly compared to 57% of boys.

■ Of those who do attend school, none attend a full 5 days per week. 65% in the south and 35% in the north are in school 3 days per week. The remaining children (35% in the south and 65% in the north) attend school 1 to 2 days per week.

■ Of those who do attend school, 99% in the south and 86% in the north attend school 3 to 4 hours per day.



### RECOMMENDATIONS

- ✓ Mobilize international pressure on GOI to adequately staff schools and train teachers in Sinjar.
- ✓ Increase access to schools, especially in rural areas, either through increased rebuilding efforts of local schools or transportation programs.
- ✓ Prioritize security mechanisms for school children to reduce threats of injury and the potential for interaction with armed actors on the way to school.
- ✓ Further investigate the enrollment rates of eligible children, given the historically low enrollment rates and the disparate enrollment rates for girls versus boys.
- ✓ Undertake an overall assessment of education quality (supplies, teacher trainings, facilities, etc.) to buttress ongoing aid efforts to expand access.



## LIVELIHOODS

Before the genocide, most Yazidis relied on wheat and barley agriculture, as well as the large cement factory outside of Sinjar City, for their livelihoods. The genocide left these sectors and most others entirely decimated – agricultural lands were contaminated, farming structures and small businesses destroyed, and the cement factory was demolished in the crossfire. As a result, families are experiencing devastatingly high unemployment rates, little access to income, and increasing poverty rates and food insecurity.



### FINDINGS



**62%** of respondents note that not a single member of their family has consistent income each month, even if they are able to secure some support from governmental assistance or non-governmental organizations (NGOs).



**95%** of Yazidi women indicate that they would benefit from a small business loan. This number increases to 97% in female-led.



**52%** of this study's respondents indicate that their pre-2014 livelihoods were destroyed during the genocide.

- 65% of those living in north Sinjar and 26% of those in south Sinjar have been able to rebuild their livelihoods, but they remain unable to generate consistent income that is adequate for their household needs.
- Over 50% of respondents note that their household incomes are generally insufficient to meet their basic needs.
- Only 20% of respondents can claim that at least 1 household member has a job.
- 59% of male respondents feel that their income is mostly sufficient for their basic needs, whereas only 41% of women feel the same.
- 40% of all respondents consistently have enough food, 45% sometimes do, 12% rarely do, and 3% never do.
- 30% of all respondents have consistent access to healthy food, 40% sometimes do, 25% rarely do, and 5% never do.
- Nearly 88% of survey respondents note that no one in their household participates in a cash-for-work program despite half of the population being unable to meet basic needs.



### RECOMMENDATIONS

- ✓ Expand livelihoods programming to reach a wider section of the population.
- ✓ Pay specific attention to the livelihoods needs of women, especially women in female-led, in order to increase economic development and support social equity.
- ✓ Invest in women's livelihoods by supporting the creation of small business and rehabilitation of farmlands.
- ✓ Support the provision of quality food across Sinjar by investing in rehabilitating farmlands.

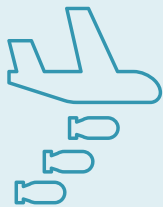


## PROTECTION

For Sinjar residents, safety and security remain elusive, despite the region's liberation from ISIS. Multiple political and armed groups continue to vie for influence and control, while airstrikes and international hostilities threaten the region's safety and stability. Finally, during the ISIS occupation, land mines were buried throughout the region, buildings were booby-trapped, and unexploded munitions were left behind as the group fled. These remnants remain scattered throughout Sinjar.



## FINDINGS



Approximately **70%** of respondents – 80% in the north compared to 59% in the south – report that airstrikes are a primary safety concern in their community.



Approximately **53%** of respondents – 85% in the south compared to 21% in the north – report that leftover munitions are a threat in their community.



Approximately **55%** of respondents – 87% in the south compared to 23% in the north – report that landmines are a threat in their community.



Approximately **49%** of respondents – 56% in the north and 45% in the south – report that armed groups are present in their community. 84% of all women, equally in the north and south, acknowledge that militarization is their current primary fear.



## RECOMMENDATIONS

- ✓ Mobilize international pressure to create, implement, and enforce agreements aimed at ensuring regional stability and security.
- ✓ Ensure meaningful Yazidi representation in diplomatic efforts to resolve regional disputes.
- ✓ Support a community-nominated candidate for mayor of Sinjar.
- ✓ Mobilize international pressure to de-mine all areas of Sinjar, focusing particularly in the south where fewer interventions have been made.
- ✓ Provide support for Yazidis to acquire proper documentation for such things as land ownership or government services.



# GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE



ISIS' targeted attacks on Yazidi women amount to one of the most atrocious examples of gender-based violence in recent history. While mass atrocities, genocides, and war all have devastating effects on the mental health of survivors, sexual violence survivors often struggle for decades to reclaim their psychological well-being and sense of safety. As a result, the need for psychosocial support for women returnees to Sinjar is immense and sorely lacking.

By targeting Yazidi women, ISIS impacted the norms of family composition in the region, as well as the well-being of future generations of Yazidis. In the majority of single-headed households, a woman is now primarily responsible for all aspects of the home. This increased burden of survival has profound impacts on her psychosocial well-being and that of her children who are also in dire need of psychosocial support. The long-term ramifications to future generations include the prevalence of child marriages across Sinjar.



## FINDINGS



**29%** of women report no access to psychological services and 25% report limited access. The needs are greatest in highly populated areas, where over 40% of women have zero access to services compared to 21% in semi-populated areas and 32% in rural communities.



Almost all surveyed women acknowledge that women in the community would benefit from psychological support and would take advantage of it if it were more readily available



**98%** of women note that community building activities and women's spaces, like the ones they experienced as part of data collection for this study, have an immensely positive impact.



**93%** of respondents in this study note that children in rural and semi-populated areas would benefit from access to psychological support, though services are nearly non-existent.

- 63% of women state that there is access to psychological support in the community and many mention short-term psychological interventions that they benefitted from in the past but wished had had a longer duration.
- Women indicate that seeking psychological support face challenges, and we should seek a culture where women are able to access support without stigma.
- 40% of women note that it has not been easy to re-integrate into the community and 14% are not sure that they belong in the community anymore.
- 88% of residents in rural communities, 96% in semi-populated communities, and 100% in highly populated communities report the presence of child marriage.



## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Invest in long-term psychosocial support and community healing processes, which include women and children.
- Support the development of women's spaces and centers that allow women to access the benefits of community and belonging without the embarrassment associated with seeking psychosocial support.
- Support and enhance cultural and religious activities, as part of the healing process.
- Support women's economic empowerment in order to bolster psychological well-being.
- Acknowledge the connection between women's access to livelihoods and their psychological well-being by investing in livelihoods programs specifically for women.
- Empower women to self-direct their own healing process.
- Expand psychosocial interventions to address the high rates of child marriage.
- Expand access to psychosocial care for children, especially former captives of ISIS.

# Part 1

# INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

## Introduction

In the early hours of August 3, 2014, ISIS invaded Sinjar, a region in northwestern Iraq, devastating communities, and displacing hundreds of thousands of people. Sinjar, homeland to the Yazidi ethno-religious minority, was overrun by militants in their effort to take control of the area and claim the land as part of their so-called caliphate. Their brutal incursion and occupation included mass killings, torture, and the enslavement of thousands in domestic servitude, labor camps, sexual slavery, and military training. ISIS initiated what several countries around the world and the United Nations Human Rights Council have deemed genocide against the Yazidi people.<sup>9</sup> The community continues to face the impact of these atrocities to this day.

Eight years on from the onset of crisis, Sinjar has been liberated, but the Yazidi community struggles to recover and rebuild. In 2017, the region became viable for stabilization and redevelopment after coalition forces declared the defeat of ISIS. However, since that time, only limited work has occurred. The lingering effects of conflict, a tense political environment, and growing local militias and other security threats have prohibited the region from receiving comprehensive redevelopment aid. For several years, aid agencies have been slow to operate in the region due to limited access and permissions from both the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and GOI, as well as the fragile circumstances created by newly established militia groups. Aid agencies have also diverted funds to other areas of Iraq, leaving Sinjar without the resources needed to recover.

Countries and Entities Declaring ISIS Crimes as Genocide
Office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights
Council of Europe
European Union
United States Department of State
United Kingdom
Canada
France
Scotland
Armenia
Iraq
Belgium
Netherlands

9. Abouzeid, R. (2018). When the weapons fall silent: reconciliation in Sinjar after ISIS. European Council on Foreign Relations.





Explosive remnants of war and improvised explosive devices (IEDs) have also obstructed development.<sup>10</sup> Since the area was liberated, ad hoc aid efforts have trickled in with minimal long-term planning or attention to the sustainability of programs. Redevelopment aid continues to work to address many of the immediate humanitarian concerns in Sinjar, but not enough has been accomplished to address the persistent underdevelopment in the region and

deep devastation left by ISIS. Such precarious circumstances in Sinjar have left it increasingly vulnerable to further conflict and violence and hinder the permanent resettlement of the Yazidi population.

Despite the fragile nature of Sinjar, returns to the region have steadily increased over the last few years. As the region has become stable and NGOs have worked to improve the situation in Sinjar, many Yazidis have made their way home, despite a lack of services and opportunities. According to UNDP, June 2020 signaled the start of a marked growth in returns of displaced families.<sup>11</sup> As reported by an IOM assessment, Yazidi returns in summer 2020 were almost 7 times higher than in the summer of the previous year.<sup>12</sup> Given the rapid increase, stabilization programming must be scaled to support the incoming population.

NI believes in the power of sustainable, survivor-centric redevelopment, and in the power of individuals and communities who come together to determine their priorities, then work hand-in-hand to develop solutions that address them.

Since its founding in 2018, NI has implemented more than 100 rehabilitation projects in Sinjar, positively impacting the lives of approximately 450,000 beneficiaries. These include 5 WASH (water, sanitation, and hygiene) restoration projects, 8 cultural preservation projects, 12 women's empowerment projects, 20 healthcare projects, 22 projects focused on employment and livelihood restoration, and 44 projects dedicated to expanding educational access.<sup>13</sup>

From the first project launched in Sinjar – aimed at providing tools, irrigation materials, seeds, and plants to restore 14 farms destroyed by ISIS – to today, supporting survivors to register for reparations, constructing the first-ever holistic care center for women and children in Sinjar, working with partner organizations to establish and expand a Survivors Voices Network, and rebuilding the clean water infrastructure in nine areas within the region, NI has continued to center the voices, opinions, and needs of survivors.<sup>14</sup>

With each new project, NI has expanded its capacity and impact on the ground in Sinjar. Despite all the progress made, the needs remain immense and ongoing assistance from the international community continues to be desperately needed. However, survivors must remain centrally involved in the decisions and outcomes that will enable them to rebuild their lives, sustain momentum, and shape their own futures.

To enhance the work of NI and other similar efforts, this report is intended to convey the redevelopment needs in Sinjar according to Yazidis residing in the region. It provides a

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10. Garcia, P. (2020). Caught in the middle: the impact of security and political fragmentation on civilian protection in Sinjar. Center for Civilians in Conflict.

11. UNDP. (2020). Six years after Sinjar massacre, support is vital for returning Yazidis.

12. IOM. (2020) Displacement and returns to Sinjar and al-Ba'aj districts.

13. All project details and outcomes outlined here were reported directly by NI.

14. *Ibid*

snapshot of the severity of needs across multiple sectors, including healthcare, education, livelihoods and food security, WASH, shelter, infrastructure, protection, and gender-based violence. Through comprehensive surveys, focus group discussions, and several interviews across north and south Sinjar (including in rural, semi-populated, and highly populated areas), data was collected to inform the work of aid agencies operating throughout the region. The findings convey broad needs and highlight the variation in such needs by geography and population demographic.

## Background

### Sinjar and the Yazidis

Located in the Ninewa Governorate, Sinjar is a region in northwestern Iraq near the borders of Turkey and Syria. The area has historically been one of the most diverse in the country, with several ethno-religious minorities calling it home. Prior to 2014, Yazidis comprised the majority of the population in Sinjar with some pre-genocide estimates at more than 400,000 people.<sup>15</sup> In addition, smaller populations of Shabaks and Christians maintained communities throughout Sinjar, where Kurds, Arabs, and Turkmen also resided. However, the coexistence of these many communities has suffered greatly after the genocide. In particular, tensions continue to increase between Yazidis and Arabs. At present, Sinjar has one of the lowest rates of IDP returns among conflict-affected areas in Iraq. According to an assessment conducted by the Center for Civilians in Conflict, 3 years after the area was completely retaken from ISIS, approximately 77% of the original population of Sinjar and neighboring Al-Baaj remained unable to return.<sup>16</sup> There are currently around 200,000 Yazidis that remain displaced. The region is home to a remarkable population of ethno-religious minorities in the Middle East, which are now displaced indefinitely. Their ongoing displacement increases security concerns in Sinjar<sup>17</sup> and puts the cultural preservation of vulnerable groups like Yazidis at risk.



### A Disputed Region

Prior to the 2014 genocide, Sinjar was officially under the authority of the GOI, administered as part of Ninewa province, of which Mosul is the capital. However, beginning in 2003, the KRG asserted de facto control after Saddam Hussein was removed from power in Baghdad.<sup>18</sup> Over the years, the KRG increased its military presence, established schools that supported Kurdish language and curricula, and appointed government officials with no open elections. Although authority in Sinjar was disputed by these competing governments, the region remained relatively stable from 2003 to 2014 with no active warfare. However,

incidents of violence did unfold, including a car bombing in 2007 that wounded or killed over 700 Yazidis. The bombing, a coordinated attack stemming from ethnic tensions between Yazidis and Sunni Muslims, was one of the deadliest insurgent attacks following the American invasion of Iraq.<sup>19</sup> Despite this tragedy, the region avoided wide-scale violence for more than a decade. Sinjar continued administratively under the GOI, but the KRG retained unofficial control until ISIS invaded in 2014. When ISIS invaded, the lack of a clear jurisdictional authority and security apparatus became overwhelmingly clear. The Kurdish military (known as the Peshmerga) and Iraqi forces that had previously been stationed in the

15. Garcia, P. (2020). Caught in the middle: the impact of security and political fragmentation on civilian protection in Sinjar. Center for Civilians in Conflict.

16. Ibid.

17. Without a return of the population to stabilize the region, various militias will continue to vie for power.

18. Ibid.

19. Watson, I. (2007, October 5). Yazidis Live Among Reminders of Deadly Attack. NPR.Org. <https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=14968025>.

region withdrew suddenly and without warning. Consequently, ISIS advanced throughout Sinjar with little to no resistance.

Following the defeat of ISIS, a power vacuum reemerged that remains unresolved. Competition between the GOI, the KRG, and the PKK and their proxies has been renewed and both parties maintain a military presence in the region.<sup>20</sup> In addition to the official Iraqi Security Forces directed by the GOI, popular mobilization units composed mostly of Shia Muslims have developed and act as a paramilitary group and extension of the federal government. The Peshmerga have also established checkpoints and bases throughout the region. The ongoing jurisdictional dispute has significantly inhibited the provision of aid to Sinjar and return of the Yazidi population.

Although Yazidis comprise the majority of the population in Sinjar, policies of the GOI have historically marginalized them. During Saddam Hussein's rule, processes of "Arabization" (*ta'rib*) meant Yazidis were removed from ancestral villages and consolidated into "collectives" or towns, facilitating greater numbers of Arabs to be resettled throughout the area. This process aimed to increase the prominence of Sunni Muslims and the Ba'ath Party through ethnic "dilution" and resulted in the displacement of hundreds of thousands of Kurds and other minorities in a movement to re-populate areas in Iraq. During this period, almost 100,000 Yazidis were deported from their mountain villages and coerced into relocating to 11 collective townships located along the base of Sinjar Mountain.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, at this time, Yazidis were forced to register as Arabs, despite their objections.<sup>22</sup> Yazidis have also struggled to gain proper documentation of identity and land ownership, limiting their ability to access the rights due to them.<sup>23</sup>

Over time, Yazidis have been subject to several discriminatory policies, resulting in their under-representation in government. Historically, Iraqi authorities have failed to include Yazidis in decision-making processes.<sup>24</sup> This issue began to improve following the Kurdish

uprising of 1991, which created momentum for change and made way for Yazidis to hold public office in the Kurdish government. Although Yazidis can hold office, the KRG does not reserve seats for them as they do for Christians, Turkmen, and Armenians. Instead, Yazidis must align themselves with Kurdish political parties to facilitate their representation in government.<sup>25</sup> According to the Yale Persecution Prevention Project, this leads to "problems with representation, especially when the aspirations of the Yazidi community are not in line with Kurdish political party objectives."<sup>26</sup>



Yazidis gained slightly further recognition after the fall of Saddam Hussein, when they were granted official protected status in the new constitution, approved by

national referendum in 2005.<sup>27</sup> The GOI now holds one seat in parliament for Yazidis.<sup>28</sup> Despite this minor increase in representation over the years, Yazidis still experience discriminatory policies; for instance, issues of identity cards and land ownership are ongoing. These issues

20. The situation has largely reverted back to 2003 circumstances, where the KRG has resumed de facto leadership while Sinjar remains administratively under the GOI.  
 21. Ibid.  
 22. Van den Toom, C. et al., (2016). Sinjar after ISIS: returning to disputed territory. PAX.  
 23. UN Habitat. (2015). Emerging Land Tenure Issues Among Displaced Yazidis from Sinjar, Iraq.  
 24. Yale Persecution Prevention Project. (2019). 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.  
 25. Ibid.  
 26. Ibid.  
 27. Van den Toom, C. et al., (2016). Sinjar after ISIS: returning to disputed territory. PAX.  
 28. Henne, P. and Hackett, C. (2014). Iraqi Yazidis: Hazy population numbers and a history of persecution.

receive minimal attention at provincial and national seats of governments, leaving many of the problems Yazidis face in Sinjar unresolved.

### Yazidi Women

ISIS' attack on Sinjar and the Yazidis centered around gender-based and sexual violence. Over 6,000 women were abducted for the express purpose of sexual slavery, rape, and forced marriages and pregnancies. Their children were enslaved and their boys were radicalized and indoctrinated into ISIS.<sup>29</sup>

The gendered component of ISIS' crimes speaks to the double marginalization of Yazidi women – first, as members of an unprotected ethnic group that has fallen through the jurisdictional cracks of several Iraqi administrations, and second, as women in a culture in which men primarily hold access to the economic sector and most forms of power.

Documents published by ISIS' Research and Fatwa department indicate that ISIS created an institutional protocol to abduct and gift Yazidi women and children as spoils of war. ISIS fighters transported the enslaved women and children to holding houses where they were

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*“No one remained in the area, and we had to leave the area quickly, I was sad because I couldn't defend our region, we were not armed. We couldn't do anything but escape to the mountain.”*

Pakiza Balankaz Mourad, a mother of six children

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physically inspected. Elderly women, unfit for sexual slavery or physical labor, were likely massacred – at least one exhumed mass grave in Sinjar has consisted of the bodies of elderly women.<sup>30</sup> Some of the younger women were gifted to multiple ISIS fighters; others were forcibly married to an ISIS fighter and forced to endure rape, pregnancies, and childbirth. Reports indicate that girls as young as 9 years old

were sold and traded in this manner. In addition to sexual slavery and forced marriage, the women and girls were forced to perform household duties and physical labor. Young children in ISIS captivity were forced to make bombs and explosive devices, as well as study Islam. Young boys were targeted for recruitment as ISIS fighters.

To date, a little more than half of the enslaved Yazidi women and girls have escaped or been rescued and returned to their families. Approximately 2,700 remain missing. Those who have returned are now either displaced in camps or have attempted to return to Sinjar, where many are unable to reclaim the homes they fled from in 2014. Many have returned to killed or missing family members, and now must serve as heads of households and are solely responsible for their children. Many returned to destroyed farmlands and have no way to support themselves and their children.

Throughout this report, data specific to the status of Yazidi women is highlighted in order to elucidate the experience of Yazidi women and their current needs, as they work to rebuild their lives in their homeland.

### Methodology

This report was designed to provide a comprehensive overview of the status of Sinjar. Multiple aid sectors were assessed to garner a picture of the needs in each of 8 key sectors, including healthcare, education, livelihoods, WASH, shelter, infrastructure, protection, and gender-based violence. A presentation of findings across all sectors is provided in this report and offers a detailed description of the obstacles presently hindering redevelopment.

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29. Much has been published about Yazidi women but 2 important works should be highlighted here: *The Beekeeper of Sinjar* by Dunya Mikhail and *The Last Girl* by Nadia Murad and Jenna Krajeski.

30. Daesh's Gender-based Crimes Against Yazidi Women and Girls include Genocide. (n.d.). <https://globaljusticecenter.net/files/CounterTerrorismTalkingPoints.4.7.2016.pdf>; *The Global Justice Center*.

To garner data, the research team utilized a multiphase sequential mixed-methods design. The project began with an exploratory approach using a series of interviews to inform the development of a comprehensive survey. Subsequently, further interviews were conducted as survey data uncovered important avenues for deeper investigation and to triangulate findings.

Participants in this research were selected in a variety of ways. Interviewees largely stemmed from a convenience sample. These Yazidis were interviewed with the participation of a translator. Utilizing a snowball approach, further interviews were garnered through the recommendation of initial interviewees. In total, 9 interviews were conducted. The participants were between 20 and 50 years old and included a mix of male (4) and female (5) respondents. Most had resided in Sinjar for at least 6 months.

Survey participants were selected using stratified sampling with participants stratified by community (400 total respondents, each representing 1 household, across 20 communities). The research team targeted markets and public spaces, as well as went door-to-door to collect responses. Due to gender sensitivities, female survey enumerators only interviewed females, while males only interviewed males. Given the even gender breakdown of the research team, both genders were well represented in research findings (200 female respondents + 199 male respondents + 1 undefined). Participants also displayed diversity with regards to age, with the highest percentage falling in the 26 to 35 years old category.

All survey respondents were over the age of 18 and those who took the survey were asked to answer for the household.<sup>31</sup> This allowed the research team to garner data on children, since participation was restricted to adults.<sup>32</sup>

Notably, of the 400 households surveyed, 25% were female-led, which are defined in this study as households where a woman is the primary person in charge of family affairs. The high number of female-led is likely a result of the genocide, which killed thousands of men and left many more missing. This finding prompted a final data collection phase to add a gendered lens to this study. This phase started with a survey targeting 100 Yazidi women in north and south Sinjar. Survey results were then used to develop 4 focus group discussions – 2 in the north and 2 in the south. Sampling for the final phase of data collection followed the methodology established in the first survey, but with a significantly smaller sample size.



31. Respondents included heads of households and non-heads of households. In some cases, women were interviewed in male-headed households, and men in female-led.

32. Given the circumstances in Sinjar and the timeframe available for this research, it was not possible to ensure child protection principles, and as such, responses by parents were accepted with regards to the needs of children.

The communities were selected for data collection in consultation with NI in order to include areas where they currently work, as well as areas that may be considered for future work. Communities were also selected to have a geographic representation of all of Sinjar, including areas in the north and south. Moreover, the research team valued understanding the differences in redevelopment in rural, semi-populated, and highly populated areas (see Table 1 below for definitions of community types). A breakdown of the communities surveyed with population statistics can be found in Table 2 below.

Table 1: Definition of Community Type<sup>33</sup>

Community	Population
Rural	1–1,499 people
Semi-populated	1,500–9,999 people
Highly populated	10,000+ people

Table 2: Locations of Data Collection Sites & Population

Southside	Population
Wardiya	1,950
Solagh	1,782
Hay Azadi	1,152
Hay Rojhalat	2,034
Hay Shudaa	2,628
Tel Qasab	2,538
Tel Banat	3,204
Rambosi	492
Hay Barbarosh	780
Raska Village	222
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>16,782</b>

Northside	# of people
Sinuni	25,585
Khanasor	15,904
Dugure	10,136
Duhola	9,002
Borek	18,781
Zorava	6,622
Gohbal	1,733
Hardan	742
Gormiz	185
Zirwa	224
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>88,914</b>

The period of data collection spanned from February 2021 to August 2022 (interviews, surveys, and focus group discussions). Several limitations were present in Sinjar at this time, including the COVID-19 pandemic and ongoing stability issues. Consequently, a variety of tools were used to facilitate the research. Electronic video communication platforms were required for interviews, which often included a third-party interpreter. Additionally, the survey was conducted using KoboToolbox, which allowed the research team in Iraq

33. Thresholds defined by consensus of Nadia’s Initiative ground team and research team since no present standards exist.

to upload data viewable in real time for the team abroad. Social distance protocols were followed, and the local research team was given sensitivity training as well as survey and data collection training, which included informed consent protocols prior to data collection.

Analysis of the work began with an identification of themes. An iterative process of coding was employed to draw out common issues and areas for deeper inquiry within the interview data. Quantitative data was analyzed using factor analysis and an analysis of individual questions by various characteristics of importance (including gender, geographic location, and community type). An ample amount of grey literature was also used to identify information gaps and check findings. Qualitative data was analyzed thematically via NVivo. Focus group discussions were transcribed and translated, and the texts were organized into the emerging themes and subthemes described in the findings in Part II.



## Part 2

# PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

**The following presentation of data offers an overview of needs according to Yazidis residing in Sinjar.**

Overall, the findings reveal a need for the extensive redevelopment of Sinjar and aid efforts that move beyond addressing the initial impact of the genocide. For the last 8 years, aid agencies have offered a humanitarian response addressing immediate lifesaving needs and “soft” support, such as capacity building and training programs. However, they have been slow to transition to more comprehensive redevelopment efforts that would support long-term resettlement and security in Sinjar. This has deterred some returns to the region, forcing many Yazidis to remain displaced in IDP camps or, when possible, to seek refuge abroad.





## SHELTER



Sinjar City 2017 Tomas Davidov / Shutterstock.com

UP TO  
**70%** CIVILIAN HOMES  
 DESTROYED  
**80%** OF PUBLIC  
 INFRASTRUCTURE  
 DESTROYED

On the morning of the genocide, thousands of Yazidis left their towns and villages desperate for safety elsewhere. Approximately 50,000 fled to the mountain ranges just north of Sinjar City with ISIS closing in on all sides. Hundreds of people, including infants and young children, died on Mount Sinjar while awaiting support.<sup>34</sup>

Thousands of others were intercepted by ISIS before reaching the mountain and were killed or abducted. ISIS fighters then occupied the abandoned towns and villages and either demolished them or used them as points of operation. In late 2014, armed forces started to fight ISIS' territorial expansion. International actors led by the United States provided military support in the form of airstrikes. By December 2017, when ISIS had been defeated and Sinjar liberated, the damage to homes and essential infrastructure was devastating. Up to 70% of civilian homes in and around Sinjar City and 80% of public infrastructure throughout Sinjar had been destroyed.<sup>35</sup>

The destruction of homes and infrastructure remains a significant barrier to the safe return of displaced Yazidis. A needs assessment conducted by Dorcas Aid International indicated that, as of 2020, 40% of all homes in Sinjar had been destroyed beyond repair, 25% of homes had reparable damage, 15% were in areas with ongoing violence, and 13% were in a general danger area (due to explosive ordinances, etc.).<sup>36</sup> Frontview Consulting's 2020 risk assessment found that 37% of displaced Yazidis had not returned home specifically due to damaged housing, yet aid organizations charged with reconstruction of homes in Sinjar were making very slow progress.<sup>37</sup>

34. U.N. Human Rights Council. (2016). They came to destroy: ISIS crimes against the Yazidis.

35. *More support needed for survivors of the Sinjar massacre*. International Organization for Migration. (n.d.). Retrieved October 14, 2022, from <https://www.iom.int/news/more-support-needed-survivors-sinjar-massacre>.

36. DORCAS. (2020). Returnees Initial Needs Assessment - Sinjar, Ninawa - June 2020.

37. Frontview Consulting. (2020). Quick Risk Assessment – Reconstruction – Iraq – Sinjar District.

**35% of Yazidi respondents remain displaced from their pre-genocide homes**

For displaced Yazidis to be able to return home safely, efforts to restore housing must be scaled up. Residents of Sinjar cite a variety of needs for re-establishing sustainable resettlement, including cash support, building materials, and legal documentation to assert claims to their original homes. The present challenges to housing leave Yazidis at risk for continued indefinite displacement within their homeland, marking an unpredictable future for many.

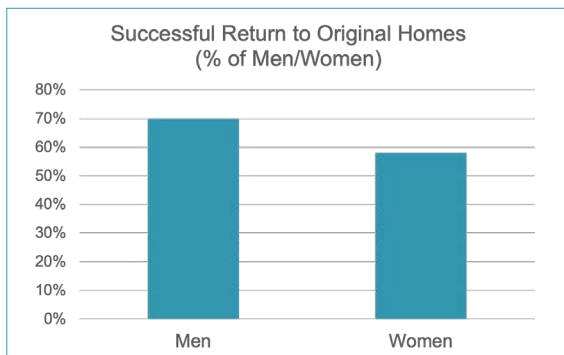
**Challenges to Returning to Original Homes**

**“Sinjar District is characterized by the lowest rate of return in the whole country. The average return rate in Iraq is 73%, while in the district it is around 34%.”** (U.N. Habitat, Sinjar Urban Profile)

According to the data for this report, over a third of surveyed households are displaced from their original homes. This is relatively consistent with other agency reports, including a study conducted by Dorcas Aid International, which found that approximately 40% of Yazidis in Sinjar were unable to reclaim their pre-genocide residence.<sup>38</sup> Many Yazidi families have been forced to find housing in any available deserted structure, creating a sense of transience and impermanence among those returning.

Women have faced greater challenges to returning to their original homes than men. Only 58% of women have been able to reclaim their original homes as opposed to over 70% of men. Many Yazidi women who lost their spouses in the genocide have joined extended family members rather than return home. Others cite that they face increased cultural and legal barriers to reclaiming their property and advocating for their rights to their original homes. This is particularly important given that 25% of households surveyed in this report are female headed.

Figure 1: Successful Return to Original Homes by Gender



Most Yazidis currently displaced in northern Sinjar are optimistic that they will eventually transition back to their pre-genocide residences (62%) while those living in southern Sinjar are far less optimistic (24%), which is likely due to the different levels of destruction and redevelopment efforts between the regions.

38. DORCAS. (2020). Returnees Initial Needs Assessment - Sinjar, Ninawa - June 2020.



### Struggles to Find Long-Term, Stable Residence

To ensure sustainable returns and minimize the chances of secondary displacement, Yazidis need to find longer-term and more permanent housing. Presently, 40% of those surveyed express uncertainty regarding their ability to access long-term housing solutions. When asked about the limitations to establishing permanent residence, Yazidis cite the affordability and availability of building supplies as significant barriers.

For residents of north Sinjar, building materials are available but costly. This is an improvement from 2015 when restrictive government policies inhibited the movement of supplies. Since then, the cache of building materials has grown and the informal blockade has largely been lifted, but the cost is out of reach for many Yazidis. Consequently, 81% of those surveyed in the north cite money to purchase supplies as the most important factor for rebuilding.

Comparatively, those in the south responded to the same question at a much lower rate. Only 40% of residents of south Sinjar believe that money can improve the situation, with the majority (55%) preferring to receive building materials directly, which are more difficult to access. Both affordability and availability of building supplies are key concerns that must be addressed to support efforts towards permanent resettlement in Sinjar.



# INFRASTRUCTURE



Nadia's Initiative

**80%** OF RESPONDENTS GET AN AVERAGE OF 2 TO 5 HOURS OF ELECTRICITY EACH DAY

**67%** OF RESPONDENTS CITE LIMITED AVAILABILITY OF FUEL

When ISIS destroyed essential infrastructure in Sinjar, they caused considerable damage to roads, electrical sites, health facilities, schools, and other public services. Sinjar requires extensive support to these sectors, especially to strengthen the current power grid and increase

the availability of fuel. The unreliable electrical grid limits the capacities of health facilities and schools. Fuel is particularly important for running heaters in the winter months, when temperatures can drop below freezing, and air conditioners in the summer months, when they can rise above 40°C (104°F).

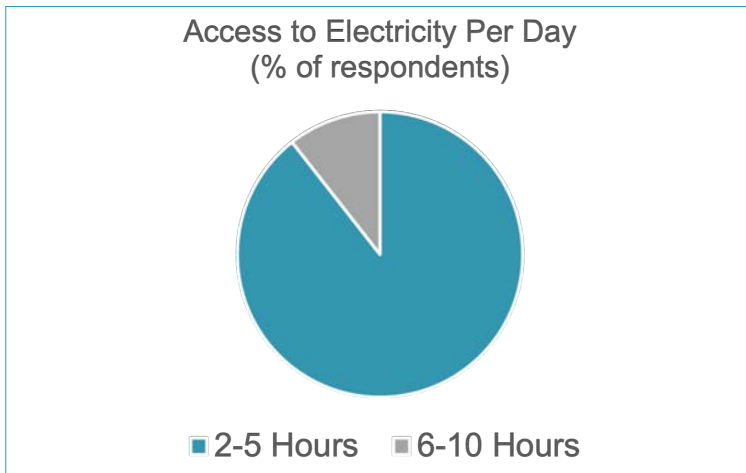
## Roads

Since January 2021, NI has, with support from USAID, been facilitating a series of workshops aimed at supporting communities across Sinjar to identify and prioritize current needs and self-direct rehabilitation projects. From January to July 2022, communities consistently reported that the roads in their villages and settlements were in poor condition, non-existent, and/or unpaved. Poor road conditions impact almost every other sector: they hinder safe travel to schools, negatively impact the development of livelihoods projects, restrict the growth of small businesses, slow down the provision of essential goods, and limit residents' access to one another. One community noted that when rain falls on their unpaved dirt roads, residents are unable to access the nearby health clinic. Throughout the workshops, community members consistently prioritized road rehabilitation efforts.

## Electricity

All respondents in north Sinjar and 80% of respondents in the south have access to electricity for an average of 2 to 5 hours per day. The remaining 20% of respondents in the south have slightly higher levels of access at about 6 to 10 hours per day. For most Yazidis, this is insufficient for daily activities. Approximately 33% of those surveyed have acquired power generators to try to offset the limited government provisions, but face challenges in accessing enough fuel to run them. Most Yazidis have no alternative option.

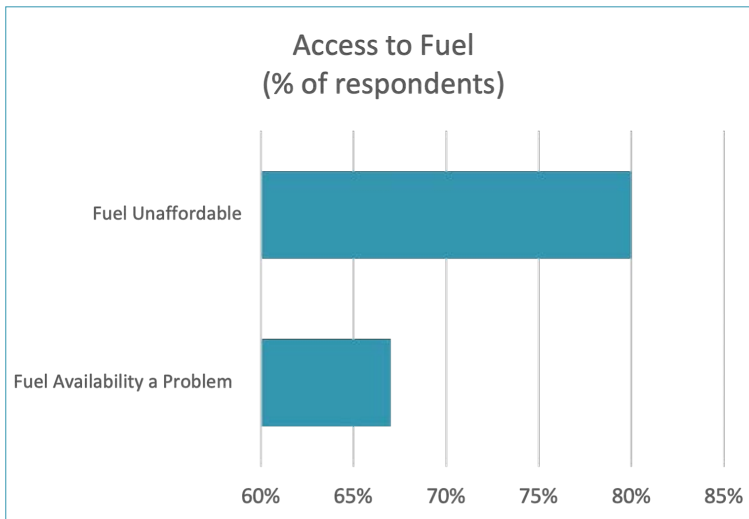
Figure 2: Access to Electricity per Day



### Fuel

Approximately 67% of respondents across Sinjar cite limited availability of fuel (gas for vehicles, home heaters, generators, and other appliances). This is true for 90% of the population in the north and slightly more than 50% of the population in the south. Where fuel is available, it is affordable to only 4% of respondents in the north and approximately 30% of respondents in the south.

Figure 3: Access to Fuel





## CASE STUDY

### 55-Year-Old Female, South Sinjar

I am 55 years old. I am from Kocho in south Sinjar. When it was captured by ISIS, we came here to Tel Qasab. My husband – who was so youthful – and 2 of my sons were killed. Now I live in someone else's house; I don't like the way it feels, and I dream of having my own house again all the time. I keep saying that the past cannot be undone. I would like to preserve what is left. I have thought thousands of nights about my missing family and have taken sleeping pills to help me sleep. Since I don't live in my own house, I'm unable to get any proper sleep at night. I see other people rebuilding their lives and it affects me a lot and makes me so upset. I thank God that 2 of my children survived, but my other 2 children and husband are gone.

We lived in Kadia Camp for 5 years where the living conditions were abysmal. Our land is in Kocho, and I didn't want to lose it, so I decided to go back. We went back to cultivate our land, which we did for 2 successive years; 1 was a productive year, but the other was unfruitful. Eventually, we had to burn our land because we did not have harvesters to harvest the crops on time.

Just yesterday we killed 5 scorpions here, and the heat is unbearable. Many people have wondered why I live in an unfinished building. I do the dishes outside and many people ask me why, and I tell them I don't have a basin. Three times a day I wash my dishes in the blistering heat of summer. We have been through a lot. Eight people from my family have been killed and are missing, and I know nothing about them. My mother-in-law died in Tel Afar; we had to leave her there and were only able to collect her remains after Tel Afar was liberated from ISIS. We have endured all of this. There are other people like me, but at least they have been able to bury their loved ones.

The villages south of Sinjar were annihilated although others were left intact. We know many other people like us going through untold miseries, but others did not get harmed and being displaced was much easier on them. Our houses were destroyed, men were killed and are still unburied, we got displaced. We cannot afford to rebuild our houses—our men have been building one small room for our artesian well but have not managed to get anyone to help them. Both of them are in the army and work in shifts with 10 days of work and 10 days off. It was very hard for them to find someone to plaster the walls.

All villagers would be happy to return and live in the same houses we used to live in. But now it is a village standing in ruin, surrounded by armed actors. It is full of animals now. No one wants to go back. I would not go back alone unless all villagers decide to go back together. I have some land near Hatimia village, and if I had enough money, I would build a small house there.

I miss everything about my old house. I especially miss Muhsin, my 17-year-old boy who was at school. He has been missing for 7 years now. I wish I had buried him or had seen some of his remains. I miss all of it; we had our own animals and property and our own harvester and tractors, and every year we had 4 full trucks of crops. Now we are deprived of all that, and all I can think of is my family.

There is nothing more difficult than getting gas, water, and electricity. We hardly have enough gas and water for ourselves. We stand on the road waving to the gas-distributing vehicles to

get a gas cylinder. We buy 2 gas cylinders for 14 USD, and it is enough for 1 month. We buy water from tank owners who bring us some drinkable water. I buy each tank for 7 USD. We have a well here, but the water is really saline, so we cannot drink it. It is hardly even used for bathing because of its foaminess. It is all salt. The electricity is so bad, we don't have a generator in our village. My sons bought a small gasoline-powered generator; sometimes we operate it, but no one can afford gasoline, so mostly we go without. We are suffering in this heat. My sons do get fuel for their car, but it is not easy because they must wait 2 days in long queues. Nothing in Iraq is easily obtainable.

I told you we lost all of our possessions: tractors, harvesters, trucks, and many other things. We cannot cultivate now. We don't have fuel for the vehicles. We are also away from our village of Kocho, as now we are living in Tel Qasab. When one lives away from their own land, it takes a lot of costly fuel to get there. We have to do something and get back on our feet.

I also don't have a single drop of oil. Last year, my nephew gave me his oil coupon and we managed to get a barrel of oil. The power keeps going off and on, but at night we have power from 10 pm until the morning. Power is what matters the most, but things are difficult because we don't have it. We cannot afford to buy generators. Sometimes we sleep in the tractor's tipping trailer. That is what our life is like.

With no power, our well could just fall apart and we can't do anything about it. All of our hard work will be in vain. ISIS destroyed our wells too; they damaged the pipes. We need more water, power, and other items. I have lived here for 3 years in an unfinished building. There are many mice and scorpions here, which worries me. I told you we killed 5 scorpions yesterday – this area is rife with them because we are surrounded by destroyed houses. We just want to rebuild our houses and know about our missing son.





## WATER, SANITATION AND HYGIENE (WASH)



Nadia's Initiative

**>65%** OF RESPONDENTS HAVE REPORTED NOT HAVING ENOUGH WATER

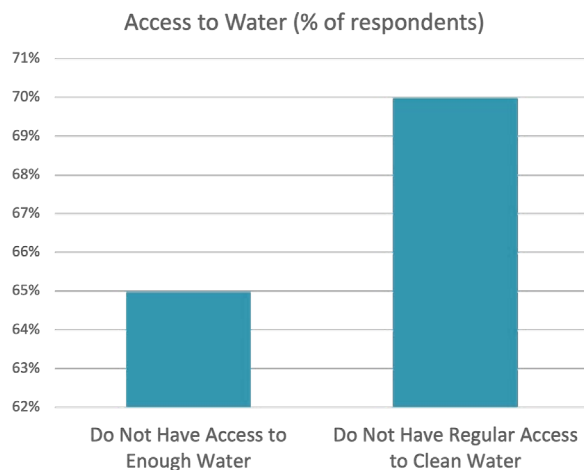
**>75%** OF RESPONDENTS DO NOT HAVE CONSISTENT ACCESS TO CLEAN WATER

A 2019 assessment conducted by Relief International for NI found that a lack of essential household services, particularly water and sanitation, significantly hinders the safe return of Yazidis.<sup>39</sup> Access to clean water is difficult throughout Sinjar, which negatively impacts consistent school attendance (especially for

girls), the health and safety of environments children play in, and the overall ability of individuals to maintain their personal hygiene. Overall, women in Sinjar experience the shortage of clean water more significantly than their male counterparts.

### Water Access and Quality

Survey data shows that over 65% of respondents do not have access to *enough* water, while over 70% of respondents do not have consistent access to *clean* water.



39. Nadia's Initiative. (2019). Situation Report on WASH in Sinjar District.





According to the Relief International report, some residents have built their own on-site wells to gain access to water, as illustrated in the case study above.<sup>40</sup> The wells typically reach the groundwater reserves around 15 to 25 meters below ground level. At such shallow depths, they are at risk of fecal contamination and high salinity levels from the deeper aquifers. In addition, most residents (73%) have no method for treating their water and therefore have no assurance of the water's quality.

The few effective water distribution systems that existed in Sinjar prior to the genocide have largely been destroyed. When individuals were asked to

list all challenges relating to water access in their communities, roughly 54% of individuals listed differing combinations of low supply, long wait times, and sporadic availability as major contributing factors. 17% of survey respondents attribute their dissatisfaction with their water supply to a combination of low supply and bad taste or smell of water.

### Sources of Water Access

Residents in Sinjar access water in a variety of ways. A large portion of respondents use boreholes (45%), followed by purchasing water at the store (19%), piped water taps (14%), and water trucks (14%). Boreholes are efficient methods for accessing water, but several were destroyed during the genocide and not enough exist now to meet the needs of the community. In Sinjar City, there are 16 boreholes to serve the population, but only 10 are functional.

Respondents in highly and semi-populated areas (77% and 60% respectively) use more than 1 water source to meet their needs, while only 17% of respondents in rural areas use a secondary water source. Most commonly, when residents need a secondary source, they purchase water at a store.

### Water for Hygienic Cleaning

Nearly half the people surveyed cite water for cleaning themselves as an important unmet need; the vast majority are women. While 73% of men report that water for personal hygiene is affordable, only 24% of women agree.

The gendered disparity in the experience of access to water is likely a result of the gendered distribution of labor in Sinjar. Women are the primary caretakers of children and the elderly and are responsible for the household's cooking and cleaning. As such, the high percentage of women claiming water is insufficient and unaffordable is a more realistic representation of the unmet household needs.

In addition to the gendered difference, there was also significant disparity by region and community type in this sector. Only 26% of those in highly populated areas, compared to 61% in semi-populated and 46% in rural areas, find water for personal hygiene affordable. It is viewed as more affordable in the south (64%) than the north (32%).

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40. Ibid.



# HEALTHCARE



Nadia's Initiative

**51%**

**OF INDIVIDUALS DO NOT BELIEVE THEY RECEIVE GOOD QUALITY CARE**

**65%**

**OF YAZIDIS ARE CONCERNED ABOUT HAVING FUTURE ACCESS TO HEALTHCARE**

The GOI has historically underfunded Iraq's healthcare system. In 2019, 2.5% of the national budget was allotted to the healthcare ministry, while 18% was earmarked for the security ministry and 13.5% for the oil ministry.<sup>41</sup> Sinjar's status as a disputed region limits its access to the inadequate healthcare funding made

available by the state. However, ISIS' attack on Sinjar crippled the region's medical system entirely. ISIS fighters looted medical devices<sup>42</sup> and destroyed Sinjar General Hospital and other medical centers in the region.<sup>43</sup> A report by ACAPS noted that in 2020, 90% of villages and towns in Sinjar were suffering from a lack of healthcare services and there were only 3 qualified and functioning healthcare centers to serve an area of 72 villages.<sup>44</sup>

Today, residents must travel long distances to access medical care. Some residents described having to drive more than 100 miles to major cities in other provinces, such as Duhok or Mosul, to access care. Traveling to these locations involves multiple hours of driving, and since public transportation is unavailable, many Yazidis must pay for private cars and taxis at high costs. An Intersos (2020) report found a lack of affordable transport to be 1 of the top 3 factors limiting healthcare.<sup>45</sup>

Survey data for this report found that healthcare in Sinjar is plagued by several constraints. Limited supplies, poor quality care, and troubled access hinder the healthcare sector across the entire region, and women are disproportionately impacted by limitations in accessing high-quality and specialized health services.

41. Aziz, Ammar. "Shingal (Sinjar) in Need of Doctors." Kirkuknow, 30 Apr. 2022, <https://www.kirkuknow.com/en/news/68014>.  
 42. National Endowment for Democracy / Youth Bridge. (2020). To promote civic engagement and improve governance in post-ISIS Sinjar.  
 43. Aziz, Ammar. "Shingal (Sinjar) in Need of Doctors." Kirkuknow, 30 Apr. 2022, <https://www.kirkuknow.com/en/news/68014>.  
 44. ACAPS. (2020). Iraq: the return to Sinjar. Retrieved from [https://www.acaps.org/sites/acaps/files/products/files/20201120\\_acaps\\_briefing\\_note\\_sinjar\\_province\\_iraq.pdf](https://www.acaps.org/sites/acaps/files/products/files/20201120_acaps_briefing_note_sinjar_province_iraq.pdf).  
 45. Intersos. (2020). Ninewa Governorate Health Facilities Assessment Report.

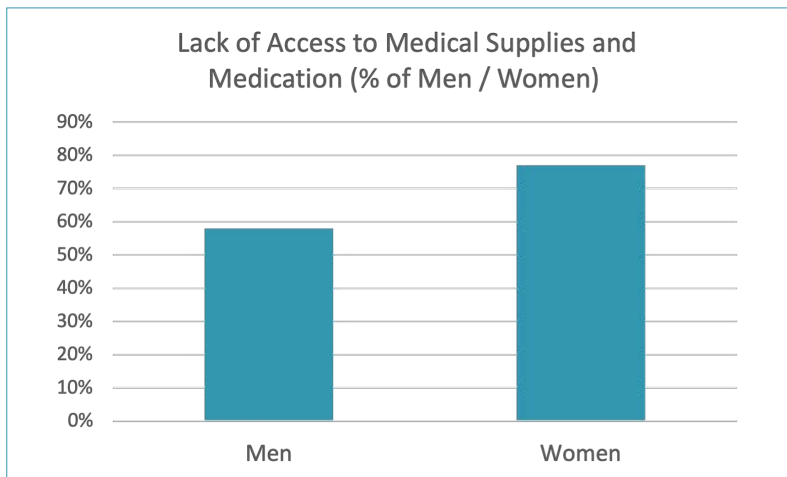
### Barriers to Accessing Medical Care

Medical facilities in Sinjar include hospitals, primary healthcare centers, and mobile medical units. Primary healthcare centers are the most prevalent and are typically effective at managing minor diagnoses of illness. While most Yazidis (92%) live within 10 kilometers of some kind of medical facility (ranging from commonly found small local clinics to rarely found hospitals), access to hospitals where more robust care is offered is limited. 45% of Yazidis across Sinjar have experienced needing medical care but being unable to access it. In both north and south Sinjar, the primary reasons for the inability to access medical care are cost and lack of doctors.

### Limited and Costly Supplies

Nearly 64% of respondents note that medical facilities do not have the necessary supplies and medications needed for the community and many respondents note that they can only access basic painkillers, such as ibuprofen and acetaminophen. Women experience the lack of access to medical supplies more acutely than men (77% for women and 58% for men), suggesting that medical supplies for women’s health (obstetrics and gynecology) are less available.

Figure 4: Lack of Access to Medical Supplies and Medication



Medical supplies and medications are costly and unaffordable for many Yazidis. Approximately 67% of respondents are unable to purchase necessary medications. 90% of respondents in rural areas state that medications and medical supplies are out of financial reach.

### Poor Quality Care

Across all of Sinjar, 51% of individuals who have access to medical care do not believe that they receive good quality care. This is more pronounced in the rural areas, and here too, experienced differently for female respondents, where 77% of them do not feel that they have access to good quality care, compared to 26% of male respondents.

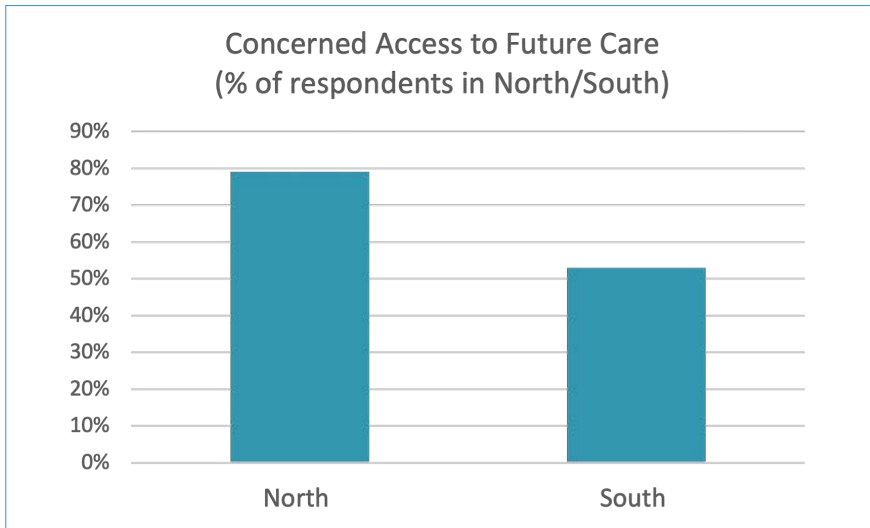
Most Yazidis note that access to quality medical care is limited by the availability and training of medical personnel. Across all community types, 82% of respondents highlight that the number of available medical professionals is insufficient. This is also more acutely experienced in the rural areas of Sinjar. A staggering 95% of female respondents attribute their inability to receive medical attention to the lack of available doctors.

These findings suggest that rural residents must travel longer distances to access quality medical care and that there are insufficient medical professionals trained in women’s health (gynecology, birth control, menopause health, etc.).

### A Dismal Outlook

Healthcare infrastructure has grown over the past several years with the support of aid agencies and the local government. However, in most instances, that support aims to rebuild medical facilities; the return and increase of qualified healthcare professionals and the resources needed to sustainably operate medical facilities remain neglected. Nearly 65% of Yazidis are concerned about having future access to healthcare – 79% in the north compared to 53% in the south. In addition, 87% of women are concerned for future access to healthcare, compared to 44% of men.

Figure 5: Concern about Access to Future Healthcare





## CASE STUDY

### 36-Year-Old Female, North Sinjar

**I am a 36-year-old female from Sinuni, north of Sinjar. Health services in Sinjar are generally very poor, and I think obstetrical delivery is the most critical healthcare challenge facing us here. The public hospitals are underequipped and don't have the necessary devices, and although there are other doctors, there is no obstetrician. This means that women suffer a lot and are forced to travel to Mosul or Duhok for delivery. There are no ultrasound tests or operating rooms here and the doctors say that they do not have blood. If delivery services were provided here, we would not feel forced to go to Mosul and Duhok.**

If we go to a doctor and they prescribe us medicine, it's often unavailable here and we must get it from pharmacies elsewhere. There is a general lack of medical equipment and medicines here. If someone has an emergency condition late in the evening, all they can get is some painkillers, such as pills or injections. In the morning they will be referred to Duhok or Mosul, where all the tests are run.

Nine years ago, before the genocide, due to lack of care, I had a miscarriage when I was 4 months pregnant. I went to see a doctor because I was bleeding and he suggested I go to Sinjar for further checks. They gave me an ultrasound and demanded that I go to Mosul or Duhok immediately. I decided not to go to Mosul, given the security situation, so we went to Duhok where I had an operation. Although I was in very critical condition, the doctor at Azadi hospital could not help me, as he wanted the senior doctor to see me.

The situation is still the same: 4 months ago, I had a joint infection, but there was no doctor here to treat my condition, so I went to Mosul for 3 months. Although I had a very good experience with the other children I conceived and did not need caesarean sections, this time I had to have surgery because of the infection in my joints, which was hard on my body, given the delivery. The doctors could not prescribe me medicine for my joint problems during pregnancy, so I had to suffer. They then told me that I would not be able to get pregnant again and that I needed a hysterectomy.

I am supposed to see my doctor in Duhok every month, but because I can't afford to, I go every 6 weeks instead. I have borrowed money from people I know, including 200,000 IQD (\$134) from someone in June. It costs 20,000 IQD (\$13) for a consultation, 25,000 IQD (\$17) for a basic ultrasound, and more than 33,000 IQD (\$22) for a colored ultrasound. An echocardiogram is 40,000 IQD (\$27). Duhok is 2.5 hours away by car and Mosul is 2 hours away. I used to commute via taxi, but now we have a car. However, it is still difficult to travel this long distance and fuel is expensive.

If someone in Sinjar can't afford to go to Mosul or Duhok, there are some doctors here. For example, there is an obstetrician in Sumeil. She once told me that I needed to undergo a surgery under general anesthesia, but I was forced to postpone the operation because I could not afford the cost. Once when I couldn't walk for 40 days, no doctor could help because of the lack of specialists here. We could not go to Duhok, so were forced to go to Mosul.

Sometimes the doctors make an incorrect diagnosis or prescribe the wrong medication. One doctor diagnosed me as having cysts and gave me medication for 3 months; however, it turned out that I was pregnant. This was the wrong medication to take while pregnant, but since she did not give me a pregnancy test, I took all of it. This caused me to have kidney problems, which were treated by a doctor in Mosul. The problems affected my fetus, with doctors reporting issues until 5 months old. The medication I bought, which proved to be the wrong treatment, cost me 33,000 IQD (\$22).

I am fearful of other situations happening to me as well. I know a woman who was 9 months pregnant; she was told by doctors here that all was ok with her pregnancy, but when she went to Zakho to deliver, the fetus was already dead. She had to have an operation.





## EDUCATION



Nadia's Initiative

**85%** OF RESPONDENTS IN SOUTH SINJAR INDICATE THE PRESENCE OF LAND MINES PREVENTS SAFE TRAVEL TO SCHOOL

**90%** OF RESPONDENTS INDICATE SCHOOLS DON'T HAVE REGULAR AND CONSISTENT POWER

Iraq is one of the weakest countries in the Middle East with regards to education, and Sinjar ranks among the lowest in educational achievement across all Iraqi provinces. The primary completion rate in Sinjar is approximately 68%, a steep decline from neighboring provinces in Kurdistan (e.g., Erbil

governorate averages 91%) and a moderate decline from other provinces in the southern and eastern areas of the country (e.g., Baghdad governorate averages 73%). Upper secondary completion is significantly lower, with Sinjar achieving a rate of 25%, the fourth lowest in Iraq.<sup>46</sup>

The Iraqi education system has struggled for decades due to ongoing conflict and violence, and Sinjar's education sector has historically been neglected by consecutive Iraqi administrations.

However, the situation in Sinjar post-2014 is particularly devastating. ISIS fighters used school buildings as military bases, which were then targeted in air strikes, teachers were forced to flee, and vast numbers of children remained out of school for prolonged periods of time. Since the violence abated, the GOI has provided no funding or rehabilitation support to the region's education system.<sup>47</sup> Some school infrastructure has been rebuilt by local and international NGOs, but many of Sinjar's qualified teachers remain displaced and unable to resume their work.

### Access to Education

Most families in Sinjar can access some kind of educational opportunity: populated areas report schools as widely available. However, rural families report access to education

46. UNICEF. (2020). Iraq Education Fact Sheet. Retrieved from [https://data.unicef.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/2020-IRAQ-Education-Factsheets\\_UNICEF\\_final.pdf](https://data.unicef.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/2020-IRAQ-Education-Factsheets_UNICEF_final.pdf).

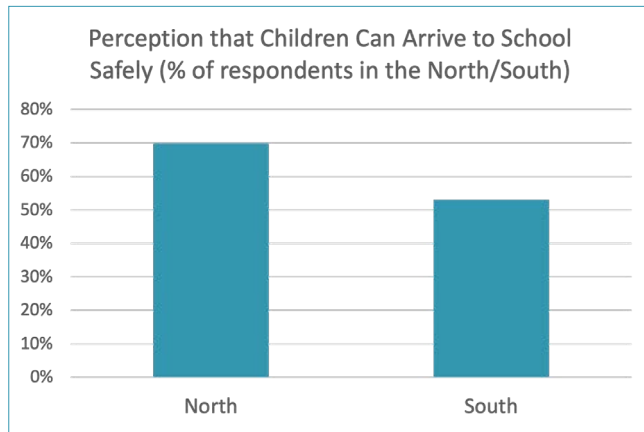
47. Westcott, T. (2018a, April 30). 'We have received nothing': Sinjar's only school pleads for help in post-IS Iraq. The Middle East Eye . <https://www.middleeasteye.net/fr/news/worst-school-sinjar-139676923>.

around 50% of the time.

*“My children attend school, but they don’t learn. The teachers aren’t trained, and they can only go a couple of days a week.”* (Father outside of Sinjar City)

Despite the relative availability of schools, travel to school remains hazardous. Only 53% of respondents in south Sinjar believe that children can get to school safely, compared to 70% of respondents in the north. This geographic discrepancy points to greater protection concerns for children in the south, though the threats to school children exist throughout the region.

Figure 6: Perception that Children Can Arrive to School Safely



The breakdown below describes the most common safety obstacles for school children, as reported by respondents who noted that it is not always safe for children to travel to school:

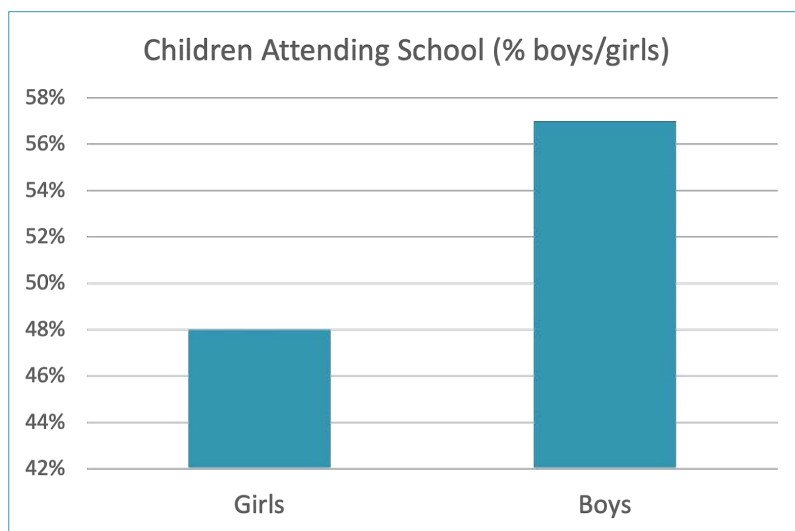
1. **Aggressive dogs:** Respondents across all of Sinjar (both north and south) note that aggressive dogs significantly prohibit safe travel to school (91% of residents in rural areas, 84% in semi-populated areas, and 82% in highly populated areas).
2. **Land mines:** 85% of respondents in south Sinjar and 29% of those in the north indicate that the presence of land mines prevents safe travel to school (64% of those in rural areas, 81% in semi-populated areas, 21% in highly populated areas).
3. **Armed groups:** 39% of residents in the north note that the presence of armed groups and local militias inhibits educational access, compared to 15% of those in the south.
4. **Attacks on girls and boys:** 31% of respondents in north Sinjar and 3% of those in the south report that attacks on their children are an obstacle to their safe travel to school.
5. **Cars/traffic:** 83% of respondents in the north and 63% of those in the south report that cars and traffic are an obstacle to safe school travel (45% in rural areas, 68% in semi-populated areas, and 87% in highly populated areas).



## School Attendance

In 2019, UNHCR estimated that only 65% to 75% of Yazidi children were in school.<sup>48</sup> According to data for this report, only half of the survey respondents indicate that their children attend school regularly: 48% of girls compared to 57% of boys.

Figure 7: Children Attending School by Gender



Most of the out-of-school children in Sinjar have never entered the formal education system: 45% of boys and 60% of girls have never been enrolled in school. Although girls are more at risk of never entering school, boys are more at risk of dropping out.

At the primary school level, boys drop out at a rate of 31% compared to 27% for girls, while at the secondary school level, boys drop out at a rate of 21% compared to 13% for girls.

Boys and girls dropped out for similar reasons:

- children must work or care for someone (8 respondents out of 38 for boys, 6 respondents out of 30 for girls);
- no school is available (7 respondents out of 38 for boys, 7 respondents out of 30 for girls);
- and distance to school (5 respondents out of 38 for boys, 7 respondents out of 30 for girls).

For children who are enrolled in school, attendance is often limited and irregular. Respondents in all surveyed locations note that children don't attend school 5 days per week.

- In highly populated areas, approximately 29% of children attend school 3 days per week, 38% attend 2 days per week, and 31% attend only 1 day per week.
- 73% of children in rural areas and 60% of children in semi-populated areas attend 3 days per week.
- In the south, 65% of children are in school 3 days per week compared to 35% of those in the north. Most children in both the north and south attend school for 4 hours per day (82% in the north and 63% in the south). In the south, 33% attend only 3 hours per day compared to 4% in the north.

48. Wendt, H. et al. (ND). Access barriers to higher education for Yazidi minority students in Iraq. Retrieved from [https://dhk-ev.de/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Yaz\\_Poster.pdf](https://dhk-ev.de/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Yaz_Poster.pdf).

Figure 8: Hours per Day Children Typically Attend School in Rural Areas

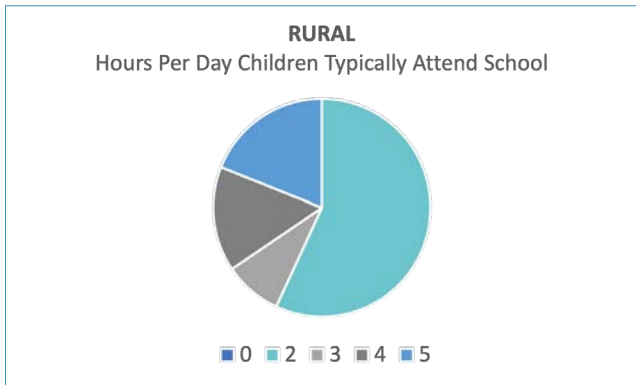


Figure 9: Hours per Day Children Typically Attend School in Semi-Populated Areas

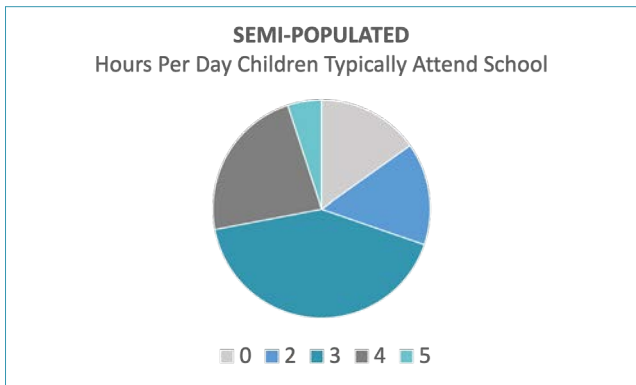


Figure 10: Hours per Day Children Typically Attend School in Highly Populated Areas

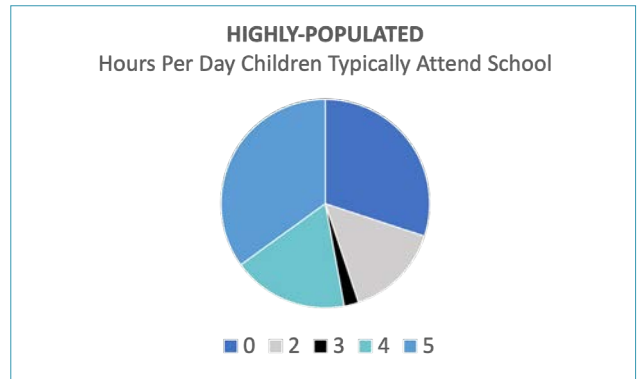
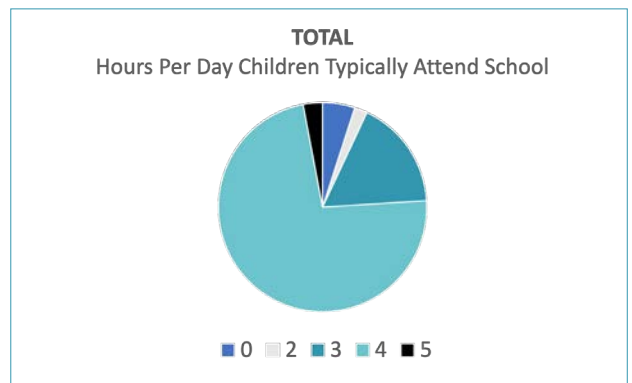


Figure 11: Hours per Day Children Typically Attend School across All Communities



## School Quality

Aid agencies have prioritized rebuilding school infrastructure, but the quality of educational offerings has not received the same attention. Schools in Sinjar lack important facilities, supplies, and a trained workforce of teachers.

The breakdown below demonstrates the factors that decrease the quality of the educational offerings in different communities across Sinjar.

6. **Electricity:** Electricity is a significant challenge in all areas. Only 10% of respondents indicate that schools have regular and consistent power. Those that live in the highly populated north have the least access to electricity.
7. **Supplies and resources:** Nearly 70% of respondents are dissatisfied with the allotment of books, pencils, paper, and other supplies for learning. The south is far more under-resourced, with only 8% of respondents receiving sufficient school supplies compared to more than 40% in the north.
8. **Schools show signs of warfare:** Approximately 27% of respondents across Sinjar note that schools in their area still show signs of warfare. The problem is more pervasive in the south, where 44% of schools still show signs of warfare compared to 16% in the north.
9. **Teachers:** Only 33% of the population agree that there are enough teachers to appropriately instruct students. The lack of teachers is most notable in highly populated areas with the most demand. Only 18% of respondents in these areas have a sufficient supply of teachers (compared with nearly 50% in rural and semi-populated areas).
10. **Toilet facilities:** 20% of respondents in the north note that schools in their community lack toilet facilities compared to 3% in the south. 38% of schools in highly populated areas, 15% in semi-populated areas, and 22% in rural areas lack adequate toilet facilities.
11. **Access to outdoor play spaces:** Nearly half of all respondents have no access to an outdoor play space for children. Communities in the north's highly populated areas suffer from the greatest lack of outdoor play spaces.
12. **Safety:** More than 70% of respondents agree that it is safe for their children to be in school. For those who consider it unsafe, the primary reason is the threat of armed groups visiting the schools. This is true for 35% of respondents in the south versus 18% in the north. Respondents in semi-populated and highly populated areas are concerned about the safety of children in schools due to the presence of armed groups (30% and 22% respectively compared to only 4% of respondents from rural areas).
13. **Perceptions on learning:** In rural and semi-populated areas, 35% and 40% respectively feel that children and youth receive an adequate education, while only 8% of those in highly populated areas agree.<sup>49</sup> Residents in the south are more likely to agree that children and youth receive an adequate education than those in the north (45% compared to 12%).
14. **Outlook for the future:** Across Sinjar, respondents have varying levels of confidence in the future availability of schools and teachers. Those in the north have more confidence in the future availability of the education system compared to those in the south (83% versus 59%). Most respondents in rural (87%) and highly populated (86%) areas are confident that schools and teachers will be available in the future, while only 60% of residents of semi-populated areas feel the same.

49. Survey respondents were asked their level of agreement with the statement, "Children learn sufficiently in school" and given the options, a) Strongly agree, b) Agree, c) Disagree, d) Strongly disagree, e) Not applicable.



## CASE STUDY

### 49-Year-Old Male, North Sinjar

**I'm 49 years old and I have 6 children. My youngest son was born in 2006 and my eldest son was born in 2004. I have a daughter older than both of them. Only my youngest son goes to school now. One of my children has never gone to school at all. My other son reached sixth grade and dropped out. No matter how hard I tried, I couldn't convince him to go back to school. If I somehow had a choice between him going to school or getting a free car, I would choose for him to go to school. It's so useful for them and I was going to rely on them.**

Before the genocide, my daughter was in third grade in secondary school, and she was doing well. When we escaped and lived in Zakho for 3 years, the school was far away, we had to pay for transportation, and our situation was worse, so she dropped out. When we came back here, there were no schools; when they did open a school, she was older than other students and decided not to go back. Previously, the thinking was that if girls go to school, they should stop after they reach sixth grade. But I love my daughter just as much as I love my sons. They are equal. I want my daughter to outachieve my sons.

School is held Sunday to Thursday from 8 am to 11 am. Some children face trouble on the way to school – it depends on how far away they live. Some households are only 500 meters away from a school, whereas in other locations schools are 5 km away. I went to Karsi and near the checkpoint I saw students waiting in the cold and the same happens in the heat of summer. If the roads were good and secure, it would be better, but instead there are many stray dogs on the way, which could attack and endanger children. I fear stray dogs. Boys are a bit more courageous than girls – if there are 5 dogs on the way to school, 2 boys can scare them away, but girls would not do so.

It's very difficult for my children to know how to spend their time while other children are at school. They are depressed. They lie down and use Facebook and sometimes help do the dishes. They sleep and sit in melancholy. There is a lot that they should have learned; for example, if they need to see a doctor in Mosul, they are like a blind person not knowing where to go. Educated people go to doctors and know what to do and where to go. For those who do go to school, I would say they get an OK education. If a student comes from an educated household, their family can help them, but for a family like mine, we don't have anyone to teach them.

I would like to tell everyone that has children to encourage them to go to school. Education is so beneficial; for example, if I were to go to a different city to see a doctor or anything else my educated child could help by reading the banners, understanding signage, and guiding me. School is very useful.



## LIVELIHOODS AND FOOD SECURITY



**52%** OF PRE-2014 LIVELIHOODS WERE DESTROYED

**60%** OF SINJARIS DON'T HAVE ENOUGH FOOD

Before ISIS' attacks on Sinjar, much of the region's population relied on wheat and barley agriculture, as well as the large cement factory outside of Sinjar City, for their livelihoods. The genocide left these sectors and most others entirely decimated – agricultural lands were contaminated, farming structures and small

businesses were destroyed, and the cement factory was demolished in the crossfire. As a result, families are experiencing devastatingly high unemployment rates, little access to income, and increasing poverty rates and food insecurity.

Several aid organizations have launched livelihoods programs in Sinjar to support redevelopment of income-generating activities.<sup>50</sup> Unfortunately, these efforts have been insufficient. Consequently, displaced Yazidis are forced to remain in camps, while returnees continue to struggle to find ways to support themselves and are at risk of displacement from homes, nutritional deficits, and poor access to vital services, such as water, electricity, and healthcare.

52% of this study's respondents indicate that their pre-2014 livelihoods were destroyed in the genocide. While some residents (65% of those living in north Sinjar and 26% of those in south Sinjar) have been able to rebuild their livelihoods, they remain unable to generate consistent income that is adequate for their household needs. In fact, over 50% of respondents note that their household incomes are generally insufficient to meet their basic needs. This number increases dramatically in rural areas, where the incomes of approximately 42% of residents never meet their needs. In addition, 62% of respondents note that not a single member of their family has consistent income each month, even if they are able to secure some support from governmental assistance or NGOs, and only 20% of respondents can claim that at least 1 household member has a job.

50. Yazda, CARE, Islamic Relief Services, Nadia's Initiative.

## Livelihood Needs of Yazidi Women

Yazidi women have been particularly and disproportionately impacted by barriers to livelihoods and income-generating opportunities in Sinjar. This is evidenced by the discrepancy between male and female respondents who feel that their household income is sufficient to meet their basic needs: 59% of male respondents feel that their income is mostly sufficient for their basic needs, whereas only 41% of women feel the same.

The difference between male and female responses is likely due to a complex set of realities. First, Yazidi women have historically been subjected to limitations experienced by women globally who are primarily assigned to the domestic spheres of their communities. This gendered division of labor results in vast inequalities between men and women, as well as barriers to women's access to both material resources and social resources, such as access to paid work, education and training, and ownership of productive capital. Moreover, women in these systems are also restricted from participating in the political and social policy sectors, which consequently diminishes opportunities for change at a policy level.<sup>51</sup> This historical reality is alluded to throughout this research but is particularly obvious in the education sector, where data shows that 60% of girls have never been enrolled in school compared to 45% of boys. This gendered discrepancy in school enrollment sets the stage for future gendered disparities in access to income.

Another relevant factor affecting Yazidi women is the traditional distribution of household income. Men and women in communities with a gendered division of labor often have unequal access to the household's financial resources. Women spend most of their time engaged in domestic and caregiving tasks which, although unpaid, are vital for the survival of the household. Men spend most of their time as paid earners with direct access to the household's financial resources and its distribution. This often means that the same amount of household income is experienced differently for men and women.

For Yazidi women returnees to Sinjar, these historical barriers are increased exponentially. The genocide left many Yazidi women widowed or with physically disabled husbands and, as a result, many are now the sole or primary breadwinners in their households. To add to their hardships, many have taken in orphaned children who lost their parents during or because of the genocide. These women face the pressure of generating income for their households despite the historical limitations on their access to the economic sector and employment opportunities, and in addition to the psychological and physical long-term ramifications of the genocide.

However, despite the extraordinarily difficult realities facing Yazidi women, there is no shortage of desire and will to engage in income-generating activities to improve their financial situations. In a survey specifically targeting Yazidi women, 95% of respondents

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***“She who has no husband... is destroyed. One keeps bottling up a lot of stuff. I... have to look after my children, go to the stores on my own, and do everything all by myself. It is a heavy burden.”***—Yazidi woman, head of household.

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indicated that they would benefit from a small business loan. This number increased to 97% in women-led households. More specifically, women cite 2 main income-generating opportunities that would be most useful to them. The first is agricultural and farming activities, which is a well-established form of livelihood that many women experienced

firsthand on family farms prior to the genocide. Women understand that farming capabilities in Sinjar are currently limited by lack of access to adequate water and other infrastructure needs, but many acknowledge that farming remains the most viable livelihood option, especially for illiterate women. The second most cited income-generating opportunity is small business ventures. Women who aspire to open a small business cite the importance

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51. Breen, Richard, and Lynn Prince Cooke. "The Persistence of the Gendered Division of Domestic Labour." *European Sociological Review*, vol. 21, no. 1, 2005, pp. 43–57. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3559583>. Accessed 19 8Sep. 2022.

of the flexibility a small business would afford them to attend to their children, while being able to earn a living. They also note that opening small businesses allows them to monetize skills they already have. The vast majority of these potential small business owners would open shops that provide seamstress services, hairdressing/beauty services for other women, and bakeries and sweetshops.

Perhaps the most devastating reality that women expressed was the negative impact that their impoverishment has on their psychological well-being. In every focus group discussion, the women described the despair of being unable to provide for their children and shame they experience when sending them to school without the necessary attire and supplies. They also acknowledge that their mental health and psychological well-being would be positively impacted by the distraction and connections with others that gainful employment could provide.

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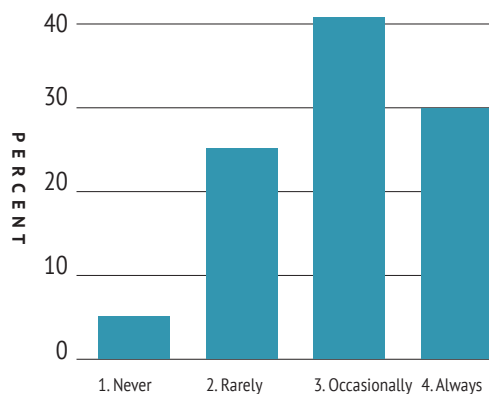
***“We all need to... do some work outside the home. This [current situation] makes us keep thinking and leads to the deterioration of our psychological well-being. We need help! There are families who are really poor and families with people with disabilities who can’t afford [to take care of them].”***

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### Insufficient Access to Food

Prior to 2014, household farms provided wheat, barley, olives, peppers, eggplants, tomatoes, oranges, and other fruits and vegetables both for household use and for commercial gain.<sup>52</sup> By destroying Sinjar’s agricultural lands, ISIS have both decimated a significant source of income and severely limited Yazidis’ access to high-quality healthy food. As a result, only 40% of respondents across north and south Sinjar consistently have enough food, 45% sometimes do, 12% rarely do, and 3% never do. When food is available, there are not always healthy options. Around 30% of respondents always have access to healthy food, 40% have occasional access to healthy food, 25% rarely have access, and 5% never have access. Rural communities suffer the greatest limitations in both categories.

Figure 12: Access to Food



The cost of food is overwhelmingly cited as the biggest inhibitor to food access. Approximately 95% of respondents are unable to afford sufficient and high-quality food. In addition, 59% of individuals express that when they consider their future, food insecurity is one of their concerns.

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52. Fox, T. (2019). Yazidi farmers return home to cultivate farmland after years in exile | The World from PRX. The World from PRX. <https://theworld.org/stories/2019-06-11/yazidi-farmers-return-home-cultivate-farmland-after-years-exile>.

## Insufficient Access to Essential Non-food Items

Aid agencies continue to distribute essential non-food items throughout Sinjar. These provisions often fulfill essential needs. When not acquired through an aid agency, residents must purchase items on their own.

The breakdown below illustrates the level of affordability of essential non-food items:

1. **Heaters, heating oil, and/or fuel:** Heaters, heating oil, and/or fuel during the winter months is largely unaffordable across Sinjar. Only 22% of residents in semi-populated areas, 13% in rural areas, and 6% in highly populated areas can afford these to some extent. When comparing the north and south, only 6% of respondents from the north indicate that heaters, heating oil, and/or fuel are affordable “to some extent,” compared to 25% of those in the south. More information about the affordability and accessibility of electricity and fuel is discussed in the section on infrastructure.
2. **Building materials:** Approximately 80% of all residents, across all community types in both north and south Sinjar, agree that building materials are not affordable. Access to building materials is essential to the construction of long-term housing for Yazidi returnees, as discussed in the section on shelter.
3. **Cooking tools (pots, pans, grates, bowls, etc.):** Less than 33% of residents in each of the community types and regions find cooking tools affordable.
4. **Hand soap:** Hand soap is affordable to less than 50% of respondents in each community type and even fewer in rural and highly populated areas. It is more affordable in the south than the north.
5. **Cleaning products:** Cleaning products are accessible and affordable to approximately 50% of all respondents.
6. **Toilet paper:** Toilet paper is relatively affordable across all 3 community types and in the north and south, with between 58% and 66% of the population in each finding it affordable to some extent.
7. **Feminine hygiene products:** Women in Sinjar were surveyed with regards to feminine hygiene products. Nearly 93% of respondents listed disposable pads as the main hygiene materials used by women in their household. However, 56% of surveyed women face challenges obtaining these essential products. This need is most pronounced in semi-populated and rural areas (72% of those from semi-populated and 64% of those from rural areas, compared to 22% of those from highly populated areas). Furthermore, 79% of respondents from south Sinjar experience barriers to accessing menstrual hygiene products, compared to 22% of individuals from the north. Across all community types, cost is the greatest barrier to accessing menstrual hygiene products.

## Limited Aid Support for Livelihoods

To improve access to livelihoods in Sinjar, some aid organizations have developed cash-for-work programs to support struggling families. These short-term interventions provide temporary work to assist vulnerable segments of the population. Beginning in 2016, the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (FAO) began offering these programs in Ninewa governorate. The German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ) has also offered these opportunities in areas liberated from ISIS. Unfortunately, these programs remain insufficient. Nearly 88% of survey respondents note that no one in their household participates in a cash-for-work program, despite half of the population being unable to meet basic needs. Of the 12% that had participated in the programs, most live in the north (81%) and are overwhelmingly from semi-populated areas (90%). Although these programs are intended to function as a short-term, stop-gap measure to gaining regular income, 97% of those surveyed are heavily dependent on this cash support for their survival.



Direct cash transfers are also a common intervention in delivering aid to the most at-risk communities. In Iraq, Oxfam, USAID, Mercy Corps, and several other organizations have offered this type of support. When respondents in Sinjar were assessed, the majority (83%) claimed that they had not received any cash transfers. Of those who had, the vast majority were in the south (84%) and lived in semi-populated areas (90%). Like cash-for-work programs, cash transfers are intended to be short-term interventions. However, 85% of those receiving cash assistance state that it is essential to their survival.



## CASE STUDY

### 26-Year-Old Female, North Sinjar

**Multiple organizations work here among us, including Nadia's Initiative, which is one of the organizations working the hardest. They have set up agricultural and business projects, providing services like water, which is benefitting us all. Although these projects are for the public interest, we are benefitting at a family level as well; for instance, if they install a water supply network in my village, the whole village benefits, but my family as an individual entity will also benefit from this service.**

A newly opened shop might only generate 10,000 IQD (7 USD), but perhaps this 10k means a lot to the shop owner. These projects help us look after our families. Here in our life in the eastern communities, nobody works and keeps the proceeds only for themselves; we all share it with the whole family. This work also helps improve our psychological well-being because the more we stay home without any work, the more our well-being deteriorates. This is especially true for us Yazidis after 2014. It takes our mind off the terrible experiences we had and upskills people while they are practicing a profession.

Money is the biggest challenge facing these projects. Although an organization may provide cash to us to set up a small business, later I have no way to continue developing my business. The selection of projects is another obstacle; if I chose to open a small business in a remote village, who would bother to come to my village to buy from me? They tell us that we only have 2 good options: either agriculture or animal husbandry. Mismanagement of businesses is another issue: if your business is too close to another one or if you don't know how to manage your business, other competitors might have an advantage over you. This can lead to the failure of a project. The other thing is that organizations help set up small businesses, but these small businesses do not grow into large ones because the large businesses keep growing too. I agree that these projects help people get back on their feet, but they are not adequate on their own.



## PROTECTION



**70%** OF RESPONDENTS SAY  
AIRSTRIKES ARE A PRIMARY  
SAFETY CONCERN

**49%** OF RESPONDENTS REPORT THAT  
ARMED GROUPS ARE PRESENT IN  
THEIR COMMUNITY

For Yazidis, safety and security remain elusive despite the region's liberation from ISIS. Though expelling ISIS from Sinjar removed the most obvious threat to the Yazidis, several risks are still present in the region.

Multiple political groups continue to vie for influence and control in Sinjar. The ruling government party, the Kurdistan Democratic Party, has increased the presence of the Peshmerga (its military unit) and supported the development of allied armed groups, such as the hundreds of troops organized and led by Yazidi leader, Qasim Shesho. The Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), a competing political party, has established militias as well. Yazidis have also developed their own militias, including the Sinjar Resistance Units and Sinjar Defense Units, that maintain checkpoints throughout the region.

As of 2020, over 10 different security actors are operating in an area of approximately 2,000 square miles, each with competing goals and interests.<sup>53</sup> The region has become heavily militarized by the several disparate armed groups. Some of these militias have been accused of attacks and extortion of the civilian population, and women in particular are at risk.<sup>54</sup> Moreover, the skirmishes between security actors pose a danger to civilians in the near vicinity, increasing distrust and instability.

Sinjar has also become vulnerable to international actors conducting airstrikes, crossing borders, and occupying the region. In particular, the military forces of the Republic of Turkey have engaged in warfare against the PKK, a Kurdish group they claim threatens the Turkish state.<sup>55</sup> A growing number of Syrian Kurds have also joined what's known as the "People's Protection Units" (YPG), affiliated with the PKK, and now contribute to the militarization

53. Garcia, P. (2020). Caught in the middle: the impact of security and political fragmentation on civilian protection in Sinjar. Center for Civilians in Conflict.

54. Ibid.

55. Center for Civilians in Conflict (June, 2020). Turkish Airstrikes Kill Five Civilians and Hinder Recovery in Northern Iraq after ISIS.

of the region. In 2021, the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom accused Turkey's operations of threatening Yazidis attempting to return home, but Turkey rejected the claims.<sup>56</sup> The airstrikes by Turkish forces have taken civilian lives and destroyed property in Sinjar, and consequently slowed resettlement.<sup>57</sup> The incursion of the Turkish PKK militia and national forces of Turkey have undermined stability and further convoluted security in Sinjar.

Beyond militarization, Sinjar is littered with dangerous remnants of war. During the occupation of ISIS, land mines were buried throughout the region, buildings were booby-trapped, and unexploded munitions were left behind as the group fled. In particular, several victim-activated IEDs were planted around public infrastructure (including schools, water plants, public buildings, and roads) or on private property.<sup>58</sup> The Mines Advisory Group (MAG), a British demining organization, has described the contamination as "extensive" and cites Iraq as the "most heavily mined country in the world."<sup>59</sup> MAG has worked primarily in northern Sinjar, but predicts the southern portion is likely more contaminated given the increased amount of time ISIS occupied the region. In collaboration with NI, MAG continues to grow its demining projects in the south, but immense work remains.

To better understand protection needs in Sinjar, Yazidi residents were surveyed on the threats to their safety and security. Their responses echo many of the threats reported on by international actors working in the region. These perspectives offer a nuanced view into the current lives of Yazidi residents and the often life-threatening dangers that require greater attention.

### Airstrikes

Approximately 70% of respondents – 80% in the north compared to 59% in the south – report that airstrikes are a primary safety concern in their community. This is true for 57% of respondents from rural areas, 59% of respondents living in semi-populated areas, and 89% of respondents living in highly populated areas.

### Landmines

Approximately 55% of respondents – 87% in the south compared to 23% in the north – state that landmines are a threat in their community. 38% of respondents in rural areas report that there is a danger of landmines in their community. This number jumps to 70% in semi-populated areas and falls to 27% in highly populated areas.

Women cite similar levels of fear of landmines. 53% of all Yazidi women (50% in the north and 56% in the south) state that landmines are one of their biggest current fears.

### Leftover Munitions

Approximately 53% of respondents – 85% in the south compared to 21% in the north – indicate that leftover munitions (i.e., explosive devices other than land mines, such as artillery shells, grenades, and mortars) are a threat in their community. 42% of rural respondents state that there are leftover munitions in their community, as do 69% of those in semi-populated areas and 23% in highly populated areas.

For the surveyed women, leftover munitions are also a concern. 39% of all Yazidi women respondents – 28% in the north compared to 50% in the south – list leftover munitions as one of their biggest current fears.

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56. Hürriyet Daily News. (ND). Turkey rejects US body's accusations on anti-terror ops.

57. Garcia, P. (2020). Caught in the middle: the impact of security and political fragmentation on civilian protection in Sinjar. Center for Civilians in Conflict.

58. Ibid.

59. Abouzeid, R. (2018). When the weapons fall silent: reconciliation in Sinjar after ISIS. European Council on Foreign Relations.

## Armed Groups

Approximately 49% of respondents (56% in the north and 45% in the south) report that armed groups are present in their community. 25% of rural respondents report that there are armed groups present in their communities, a number which jumps to 43% in semi-populated areas and 65% in highly populated areas.

## Militarization of Sinjar

Approximately 58% of respondents acknowledge militarization of Sinjar as a primary safety concern in their community. 38% of rural respondents name militarization as a primary safety concern, as do 62% in semi-populated areas and 54% in high populated areas. Although respondents in the north note the presence of armed groups at a higher frequency, respondents in the south are more fearful of militarization (66% compared to 49% in the north).

The surveyed women are particularly concerned about the increase in armed groups and militarization in their community. 84% of all women, equally in the north and south, acknowledge that militarization is one of their biggest current fears. Upon further exploration, it became evident that the women's primary concern is the impact of militarization and armed groups on their children. Specifically, women note that children can be injured in random crossfire between armed groups, and many can cite the names of neighbors who have lost children this way. In addition, many are aware of the "brainwashing" effect that militarized groups can have on their children. Many of the mothers agree that they are in a state of constant worry and are unable to sleep when their children are away from their homes.

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***"I worry about the safety of my children getting caught in the middle of fighting between these warring actors."***

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Women are acutely attuned to the many dangers that impact their children and the fact that any injuries suffered can become life-threatening, as they cannot afford medical treatment or easily access hospitals. They describe how they keep an escape kit with necessary documents and emergency items at hand, preparing for being forced to flee again at any time. They also note that the unstable situation prevents them from finalizing any needed construction on their homes. The discussion revealed that this vigilance is more pronounced for single or widowed women.

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***"Here is not safe and secure at all. The other night when clashes happened here, I could not sleep a minute all night. I was so worried and so were my children. Nothing here qualifies this as a habitable place."***

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## CASE STUDY

### 43-Year-Old Female, South Sinjar

**I am 43 years old and from the southern part of Sinjar. I do not feel safe and secure here. In fact, no one feels secure in Iraq – we can never rest assured in this country, because there are always wars. Shelling is what frightens me the most. I worry so much about the loss of life. Money and other things are recoverable, but once one loses the lives of their family members, they can never be restored. I worry about my family, as well as all Yazidis. They are scattered around the world now.**

I am always afraid that ISIS may return. This fear never leaves me. I think about it whenever there is a fight or battle. ISIS destroyed Yazidis, they spared no one. I worry most about my children. We mothers are the most vulnerable; we ask our children not to go out and we ask them to play safely. I ask them not to go out too much. Even if they are not mine, whenever children are outside it is risky. One should always advise them to be careful when they are outside because they could be in a shelling area.

When shelling happens, it petrifies my children and I pray that no one gets hurt. I am not worried about material damage. If souls are unhurt, losing material things is fine. We all worry indeed. We are afraid that we will be displaced again and will have to run away. We feel unstable and always ready to escape for our lives.

We need equipment to clear the area of mines and explosives. We are so worried about mines and explosives that when we returned here, we did not dare enter our homes. It is a very scary thing: you walk not knowing what is going to happen to you. The mines are not visible, anyone may step on them because they are hidden. Even if one is visible, someone might not know what it is and might step on it. There are children looking after their sheep out there, and some of them have already stepped on mines and lost their lives.

I am anxious because I feel like we Yazidis always pay a price. When ISIS attacked here, only we Yazidis fell victim. If there was security here, we would feel safe. I want to say that I am always afraid. People are afraid not only in Sinjar, but in all of Iraq.

## Documentation Concerns for Yazidis

In the aftermath of the genocide, key documents, such as identification cards and birth certificates, have become important items needed for registering into displacement camps, accessing welfare-like support, and enrolling children in school. However, many Yazidis left these documents behind during ISIS' attacks and many now struggle to successfully navigate Iraq's bureaucratic system to access basic services. Furthermore, the state and other agencies require additional documentation to qualify ISIS victims for certain payments and services.

### ID Cards and Birth Certificates

Most Yazidis have been able to re-acquire the ID cards lost when they fled Sinjar. However, birth certificates remain a problem. Given the distance to hospitals, many women opt for home births or deliver within smaller local clinics. To receive a birth certificate for a child, families sometimes must travel to far-away urban centers, which is not always easy or affordable. Consequently, the absence of birth certificates was high prior to the genocide and remains a challenge. Survey respondents note that more than 58% of both males and females living in the household do not possess a birth certificate. Data shows that the issue is most prevalent in rural and highly populated areas, indicating that over 70% of both men and women in these areas do not have this documentation (over 46% in semi-populated areas). Across the north and south there is a large discrepancy – approximately 38% of respondents in the south do not have birth certificates compared to 80% in the north.

### Land Deeds

Official documentation of land ownership has historically been a challenging obstacle for Yazidis but has grown especially problematic in the aftermath of the genocide, as families have been displaced and tried to reclaim their homes upon their return to Sinjar.

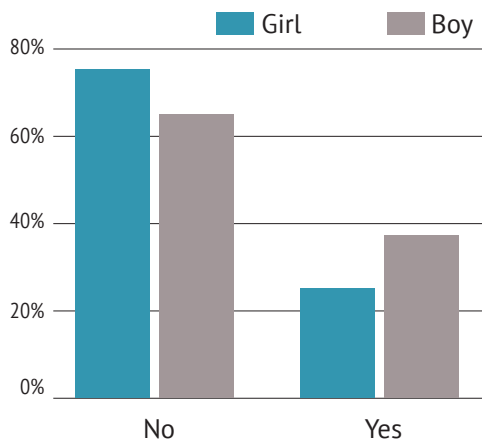
Data shows that access to land ownership and deeds in Sinjar exemplifies the gendered inequalities in the region and the degree to which these inequalities have been heightened by the genocide. An abysmal 2% of respondents report that women in their household possess land deeds compared to more than 23% of respondents reporting that men in their household possess land deeds.

### Education Documents

Education documents are essential in Iraq to show proof of grade completion. These documents allow students to move on to higher grades and complete their education.

Approximately 74% of respondents report that girls in their household lack education documentation, compared to 64% of respondents reporting the same issue for boys. Moreover, findings show that attention needs to be given to children living in female-led. Nearly 86% of these households state that their female children do not have these documents and 69% state that their male children do not have documents, compared with 70% and 62%, respectively, in male-headed households.

Figure 13: Missing Education Documents by Gender



### ISIS Survivor Documentation

Yazidi women who were abducted and enslaved by ISIS have been able to qualify for ongoing government support. This support comes in the form of a monthly stipend and survivors must qualify for it by registering with the government and acquiring appropriate documentation.<sup>60</sup>

According to respondents, roughly 5% are living with female ISIS survivors in their households. These same individuals were then asked if the women in their household had ISIS survivor documentation in their possession. Approximately 13% of respondents shared that female survivors in the household do not have documentation, which limits their ability to access support.



60. Prior to new legislation in 2019, it was known as the Bataqa program.



## GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE



**29%** OF WOMEN REPORT NO ACCESS TO PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES

**98%** OF WOMEN NOTE THAT BUILDING WOMEN'S SPACES WOULD HAVE A POSITIVE IMPACT

ISIS' targeted attacks on Yazidi women amount to one of the most atrocious examples of gender-based violence in current history. While mass atrocities, genocides, and war all have devastating effects on the mental health of survivors, sexual violence survivors often struggle for decades to reclaim their psychological well-being and

sense of safety. Some trauma responses even take on an intergenerational dimension, impacting future generations who did not experience the atrocities firsthand.

One of the most prevalent trauma responses in genocide survivors is post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). PTSD symptoms vary, but most studies cluster them in 3 to 5 groups of symptom types: intrusive thoughts, which replay scenarios from the traumatic event(s) in daydreams, sleeping dreams, and flashbacks; avoidance behaviors, such as the survivor's inability to be in or near people or places that remind them of the traumatic event; emotional numbing, such as dissociative conditions that prevent the survivor from accessing the full scale of emotions associated with the traumatic event; and anxious states, such as hypervigilance and hyper arousal that cause the survivor to be in a constant state of restlessness and correlate with sleeping and focus difficulties.<sup>61</sup>

Studies also show that trauma responses, including PTSD symptoms, have a gendered dimension. Historically, men have been those who are most exposed to traumatic events, but women are more likely to suffer from PTSD when they are exposed to trauma. The effects of PTSD also last 4 times as long in women as they do in men.<sup>62</sup> When the traumatic event includes sexual violence, the impact of the trauma is compounded in both males and females, but it is females who are most often targets of sexual violence.

61. Scher CD, McCreary DR, Asmundson GJ, Resick PA. The structure of post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms in three female trauma samples: a comparison of interview and self-report measures. *J Anxiety Disord.* 2008 Oct;22(7):1137-45. doi: 10.1016/j.janxdis.2007.11.012. Epub 2007 Dec 8. PMID: 18206346; PMCID: PMC2756737.

62. Breslau, N. "Outcomes of posttraumatic stress disorder." *The Journal of clinical psychiatry* vol. 62 Suppl 17 (2001): 55-9.



In the case of Yazidi genocide survivors, women and girls are uniquely disadvantaged. A 2021 study targeting Yazidi women who had resettled in Germany after the genocide explored the severity of their PTSD symptoms.<sup>63</sup> Most of the studied women had received extensive support and services in the form of psychological and medical treatment through the Baden-Württemberg Humanitarian Admission Program. Study findings showed that survivors “experience severe psychological symptoms for years, even when participating in a [program] that aims to reduce postmigration stressors and provides mental healthcare.”<sup>64</sup> More specifically, the study found high severity of PTSD symptoms even after 3 years of resettlement and even when most participants (73%) had received psychotherapeutic help. The study noted that symptoms of the studied Yazidi population were comparable to “Rwandan genocide survivors who experienced traumatic crisis during commemoration activities 16 years after the genocide.”<sup>65</sup>

Sadly, female survivors who have returned to Sinjar have far less access to trauma support than those in the Humanitarian Admission Program in Germany. Yazidi families that live with and care for female survivors<sup>66</sup> of ISIS enslavement attest to the low levels of psychological support available to them. More than 17% of respondents from rural areas, 6% of respondents in semi-populated areas, and 4% in highly populated areas live with survivors in their households. Residents in rural and semi-populated areas indicate that none of the survivors in their households have been able to access sufficient care to address their psychological needs; even in highly populated areas, only 7% have access to the care they need.

When surveying women directly (whether survivors of ISIS captivity or not), 29% report no access to psychological services and 25% report limited access. The needs are greatest in highly populated areas, where over 40% of women have zero access to services compared to 21% in semi-populated areas and 32% in rural communities. Almost all surveyed women acknowledge that women in the community would benefit from psychological support and would take advantage of it if it were more readily available.

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***“If you could support us [with] psychological sessions, please let me know. Spending one hour in a conversation like this means so much to me.”***

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The women also reiterated the current limitations to the provision and accessibility of trauma support. Only 63% of women state that there is access to psychological support in the community and many reminisce about the short-term psychological interventions that they benefitted from in the past but wished were longer. In addition, a significant minority of women (36%) indicate that seeking psychological support, even if it were more readily available, brings with it a sense of embarrassment. Almost all women (98%) note that community building activities and women’s spaces, like the ones they experienced as part of data collection for this study, have an immensely positive impact.

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***“Let me tell you the truth. If a sister like you talks to me, it is very relieving and much better than staying alone at home and thinking. I have dozens of times tried to commit suicide. I wished I had not been born, but for the sake of my children I give up on those thoughts. I am so uncomfortable.”***

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63. Denkinger JK, Rometsch C, Engelhardt M, et al. Longitudinal Changes in Posttraumatic Stress Disorder After Resettlement Among Yazidi Female Refugees Exposed to Violence. *JAMA Netw Open*. 2021;4(5):e2111120. doi:10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2021.11120.

64. Ibid.

65. Ibid.

66. “Survivors” are defined as females who survived abduction and enslavement by ISIS.

Despite the overwhelmingly high levels of trauma-related findings, the community itself offers significant buffers against the effects of trauma. Research suggests that the degree and rate of recovery from trauma is increased through strong social relationships, relational/community support, and a connection to a spiritual and religious life, and this has been reiterated in several studies in Sinjar.

Research conducted by the Netherlands Institute for the Study of Crime and Law Enforcement, in collaboration with NI, invited survivors to take photos of their hopes and wishes as well as of the “challenges they face in their lives as a result of their victimizing experiences.” After a 4-week period, the survivors were invited back to explain and categorize their photos. Many survivors noted that their return to their religious identity and the reconnection to their community serve as a main source of hope and joy. Survivors who were forced to convert to Islam and into marriages to ISIS militants cite that practicing their religion again is a reclamation of their religious and social identity. They included photos of Lalish Temple, the primary Yazidi temple located in the Kurdistan region of Iraq, and talked about being re-baptized there to signify their return to the religion. Many also reflected warmly on the acknowledgement from Baba Sheikh, the leader of the Yazidi religion, that they are in fact still Yazidis despite ISIS’ attempts to erase their identity.

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***“This is a photo of sacred Lalish. It reminds me of my strength and the strength of my community in facing the challenges and events that happened in 2014. It also reminds me of our defense of our religion.”***

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A smaller percentage of participants in the above-mentioned study expressed their desire to relocate outside of Iraq. For some, this was a result of feeling disconnected and marginalized from their communities after having been in captivity. For others, the experience of captivity has made them withdrawn and unable to integrate back into the society. One survivor expressed that she doesn’t like to attend weddings because she is reminded of how she was made a bride for ISIS members. Another noted that taking photos was a challenging task, as she spends the majority of her time alone at home. Data for this study also showed a significant minority of women who expressed a loss of connection in the social and relationship spaces. 40% of the surveyed women note that it has not been easy to re-integrate into the community and 14% are not sure that they belong in the community anymore. There is good reason to believe that these women are those who are most at risk for longer-term psychological health issues.

Those who have been able to build and maintain friendships and social relationships will benefit from them, as they work to counteract the aftermath of their trauma. In the photo study, survivors shared the sense of connection they experience when they celebrate each other’s return from captivity together. Women surveyed for this study acknowledge the positive impact of their connections to their neighbors.

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***“My neighbors asked who I was and why I was alone. I told them my story and asked them to check in on me and my children at night. They have taken me to the doctors several times. I consider my neighbor my brother.”***

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When ISIS targeted Yazidi women, they also impacted the norms of family composition in Sinjar. In some instances, female spouses are still missing or were killed, and men have remained the head of household. However, in the majority of single-headed

households, women are primarily responsible for all aspects of the home. 25% of surveyed households in this report were female-led. This statistic is far higher in the north, where 41% of households were headed by women, compared with 10% in the south. Discussions with the women revealed the difficulties of being both sole caregivers and primary breadwinners compounded with the lack of vital resources and support to be successful. This increased burden of survival has profound impacts on their psychosocial well-being.

Subsequently, the impact on Yazidi children has been significant. The children witnessed family and community members killed, abducted, and forced into domestic and sexual slavery. They have been targeted for radicalization, recruited into armed groups, and displaced far from their homeland. As a result, they have struggled immensely since the onset of the genocide and are still reeling from their experiences. Those who were initially displaced to camps could access psychological support from organizations operating there, but fewer resources are available to children residing outside of camps. A striking 93% of respondents in this study note that children in rural and semi-populated areas would benefit from access to psychological support, though services are nearly non-existent. 9% of respondents in highly populated areas note the presence of “child-friendly spaces,” where children can receive healing care through play.

Finally, the long-term ramifications to future generations include the prevalence of child marriages. UNHCR has documented that child marriages are one example of negative coping mechanisms frequently relied on by IDP households.<sup>67</sup> Data for this study supports this finding, with 88% of rural respondents reporting the presence of child marriage in their community. In semi-populated areas, 96% of respondents responded similarly, as did all respondents in highly populated areas.

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**88%**  
of residents in rural communities reported the presence of child marriage

**96%**  
of residents in semi-populated communities reported the presence of child marriage

**100%**  
of residents in highly populated communities reported the presence of child marriage

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67. UNHCR. (2019). COI Note on the Situation of Yazidi IDPs in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

## Part 3

# CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

**This report concludes that while ISIS was defeated in 2017, the effects of their violence still echo across Sinjar.**

Many Yazidis remain displaced, thousands are missing, and much of the region is still devastated. Increased and more targeted aid efforts are essential to protect the future of this ethno-religious minority, and to ensure their right to return home.

To accomplish this, aid organizations must prioritize comprehensive, long-term development interventions that aim to restore basic services to the region and address the root causes of instability and marginalization.

The below recommendations are based on the findings of this report and address both short- and long-term needs in Sinjar.



## SHELTER

### **Increase efforts to rehabilitate residential structures for long-term and permanent use.**

Unpredictable long-term housing plans leave many Yazidis with a sense of transience and at risk for secondary displacement. Permanent housing solutions are vital to strengthen the shelter sector in Sinjar.

### **Prioritize housing access for female-led.**

70% of men versus 58% of women have been able to return to their pre-genocide homes. Given the high number of female-led, organizations working on shelter solutions in Sinjar should address the housing needs of women.

### **Prioritize efforts to rebuild homes in the south given higher levels of devastation.**

62% of residents of north Sinjar are optimistic that they will eventually transition back to their pre-genocide residences versus 24% of those in south Sinjar. As such, the housing situation in Sinjar is more precarious in the south and aid funding should be dispersed accordingly.

### **Prioritize provision of building materials to reconstruct homes across Sinjar.**

80% of residents in north Sinjar cite *affordability* of building materials as the main limitation to transitioning to a permanent home. 55% of residents in south Sinjar cite the *availability* of building materials as the main limitation to transitioning to a permanent home. Both affordability and availability of building supplies must be addressed to allow for reconstruction of homes across the region.



## INFRASTRUCTURE

**Invest in wide-scale road rehabilitation projects to support other areas of development more effectively.** Residents across Sinjar consistently report that roads are in poor condition, non-existent, or unpaved. Investments must be made in road infrastructure to facilitate development across most other sectors.

### **Rehabilitate electrical power grids to provide wide-scale access and increase the number of hours per day that residents have electricity.**

The unreliable electrical grid limits the capacities of necessary facilities, such as healthcare centers and schools. In addition, most Yazidis have access to electricity for an average of 2 to 5 hours per day, which is insufficient for daily needs. To improve the provision of electricity, the power grid requires extensive rehabilitation.

**Advocate for increased fuel availability and affordability to improve transportation issues and power generators and heaters.**

90% of Yazidis in the north and about 50% in the south cite limited availability of fuel. Where fuel is available, it is affordable to only 4% of respondents in the north and approximately 30% of respondents in the south. The lack of available and affordable fuel limits access to gas for vehicles, home heaters, generators, and other necessary appliances.

**Prioritize dissemination of heaters and heating oil for warmth in winter months, as well as air conditioners for cooling in summer months.**

Fuel is particularly important in the winter when temperatures can drop below freezing and residential structures lack sufficient insulation from the cold.



## WATER, SANITATION, AND HYGIENE

**Improve access to clean water through comprehensive water projects.**

Over 65% of respondents do not have access to *enough* water, while over 70% of respondents do not have consistent access to *clean* water. As such, comprehensive water projects are required to ensure sustainable redevelopment of the region.

**Prioritize population hubs for water access and water quality interventions.**

Access to clean water is most limited in highly populated areas. As a result, communities of over 10,000 people need to be prioritized.

**Improve planning of water distribution networks to ensure equitable access.**

The few effective water distribution systems that existed in Sinjar prior to the genocide have largely been destroyed. Consequently, aid organizations must collaborate with local authorities to establish fair and equitable distribution methods.



## HEALTHCARE

**Support primary healthcare centers and general hospitals to improve the quality of their care to prevent the need for residents to travel long distances to access medical care.**

Almost 60% of respondents cite distance as a barrier to accessing medical care despite the prevalence of primary healthcare centers and local clinics in close vicinity. This indicates that most respondents seek medical care at hospitals, which are often further away. As such, support is needed to ensure quality of care in local clinics. This includes providing advanced training for current healthcare staff.

### **Mobilize international pressure on the GOI to adequately staff all healthcare facilities in Sinjar.**

Yazidi returnees to Sinjar are often forced to travel long distances in order to find the necessary medical staff. State intervention is required to ensure that relevant medical personnel are available across the region.

### **Increase healthcare support in rural areas given the distance to existing general hospitals.**

Respondents in rural areas must travel longer distances to medical facilities. As such, there is a need to build or rehabilitate primary healthcare centers, furnish, and equip them.

### **Provide medical equipment and supplies to existing general hospitals and primary healthcare centers.**

Yazidis note that hospitals and primary healthcare centers often lack equipment and supplies, forcing them to either forego the necessary treatment or travel long distances and pay high rates to access care elsewhere.

### **Prioritize women's healthcare, including access to maternal and reproductive healthcare.**

Women experience barriers to adequate healthcare at a much greater rate than men: 95% of female respondents cite the lack of available doctors as a main barrier to accessing care. This points to a need to further investigate the health concerns of women, and to prioritize services such as maternal and reproductive healthcare.



### **Mobilize international pressure on the GOI to adequately staff schools and train teachers in Sinjar.**

Since the violence in Sinjar abated, the GOI has provided no funding or rehabilitation support to the region's education system. Some school infrastructure has been rebuilt by local and international NGOs, but state intervention is required to train and credential teachers.

### **Increase access to schools, especially in rural areas, either through rebuilding local schools or providing transportation.**

Rural families report access to education around 50% of the time. To ensure equitable access across the region, school infrastructure must be rebuilt and transportation options improved in rural communities.

### **Prioritize security mechanisms for school children to reduce threats of injury and the potential for interaction with armed actors on the way to school.**

Factors such as landmines, armed groups, and aggressive dogs all prohibit safe travel to school. Thus, there is a need to develop security interventions to reduce threats of injury for school children.

**Further investigate the enrollment rates of eligible children, given the historically low enrollment rates and the disparate enrollment rates for girls versus boys.**

As consecutive Iraqi administrations have neglected Sinjar's education sector, school enrollment rates have historically been low. Today, only 48% of girls and 57% of boys attend school regularly; 60% of girls and 45% of boys have never gone to school. Further investigation is needed to understand the drivers behind the low enrollment rates with special attention to the gendered inequality.

**Undertake an overall assessment of education quality (supplies, teacher trainings, facilities, etc.) to buttress ongoing aid efforts to expand access.**

While international actors have prioritized construction of schools in Sinjar, less emphasis has been placed on providing important facilities, such as play areas, providing necessary school supplies, and ensuring adequate numbers of quality teachers. All of these limit the region's quality of education.



**Expand livelihoods programming to reach a wider section of the population.**

52% of respondents note that their pre-genocide livelihoods have been destroyed and many have not been able to re-establish incomes. Although some livelihoods projects have been launched in Sinjar, they need to be expanded to reach a wider swath of the population for redevelopment.

**Pay specific attention to the livelihoods needs of women, especially women in female-led, in order to increase economic development and support social equity.**

The genocide left many Yazidi women widowed or with physically disabled husbands and, as a result, many are now the sole or primary breadwinners in their households. 95% of all Yazidi women – including 97% of those in female-led – indicate that they would benefit from a small business loan. Aid agencies should pay specific attention to the self-identified livelihoods needs of women.

**Invest in women's livelihoods by supporting the creation of small business and rehabilitation of farmlands.**

Yazidi women cite two main income-generating opportunities that would be most useful to them. The first is agricultural and farming activities, which is a well-established form of livelihoods that many women experienced firsthand on family farms prior to the genocide. The second is small business ventures, which would offer an opportunity to attend to children while being able to earn a living. Aid agencies should pay specific attention to these self-selected livelihoods programs.

**Support the provision of quality food across Sinjar by investing in rehabilitating farmlands.**

As poverty levels increase, so too do the barriers to accessing quality food. Around 40% of all respondents only have occasional access to healthy food, and 25% rarely have access.





## PROTECTION

### **Mobilize international pressure to create, implement, and enforce agreements aimed at ensuring regional stability and security.**

Sinjar remains vulnerable to a host of internal and external threats, including the presence of landmines and leftover munitions, armed groups on the ground, and air strikes from international actors. International pressure must be mobilized to create and enforce sustainable agreements that ensure stability and security.

### **Ensure meaningful Yazidi representation in diplomatic efforts to resolve regional disputes.**

The jurisdictional dispute over Sinjar has historically been managed without input from Yazidis. This further entrenches their status as a marginalized and powerless group at risk for future displacement and violence. Meaningful Yazidi representation in regional disputes could work to offset this power imbalance.

### **Support a community-nominated candidate for mayor of Sinjar.**

Yazidis have historically been excluded from the political processes that govern their lives. Supporting a community-nominated candidate for mayor would make great strides towards including Yazidi voices in the governance of Sinjar.

### **Mobilize international pressure to de-mine Sinjar, focusing particularly in the south where fewer interventions have been made.**

87% of respondents in the south and 23% in the north report that landmines are a threat in their community. Land mines are also cited as one of the primary safety obstacles for children on their way to school. As such, international pressure must be mobilized to de-mine all of Sinjar, while paying special attention to the southern part of the region where the threat is greatest.

### **Provide support for Yazidis to acquire proper documentation for such things as land ownership or government services.**

Key documents are necessary for registering into displacement camps, accessing welfare-like support, and enrolling children in school. However, many Yazidis left these documents behind during ISIS' attack. Support is needed to ensure that Yazidis can obtain ID cards and birth certificates, education documents, land deeds, and ISIS survivor documentation.



## GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

### **Invest in long-term psychosocial support and community healing processes, which include women and children.**

Despite the severity of ISIS' attack on Yazidi women, access to psychosocial support has been limited. Most residents report that none of the survivors in their households have been able to access sufficient care to address their psychological needs. It is imperative that adequate psychosocial services be provided, especially for Yazidi women and children.

### **Support the development of women's spaces and centers that allow women to access the benefits of community and belonging without the embarrassment associated with seeking psychosocial support.**

98% of women note that community building activities and women's spaces have an immensely positive impact on their emotional well-being. 36% of women indicate that seeking psychosocial support can be embarrassing. Therefore, women's centers and community building activities are an important avenue for trauma healing outside of (and in addition to) formal psychosocial support.

### **Support and enhance cultural and religious activities, as part of the healing process.**

The degree and rate of recovery from trauma is increased through strong social relationships, relational/community support, and a connection to spiritual and religious life. However, 40% of the surveyed women note that it has not been easy to re-integrate into the community and 14% are not sure that they belong in the community anymore. Prioritizing cultural, traditional, and religious activities and rituals can work to enhance the sense of belonging.

### **Support women's economic empowerment in order to bolster psychological well-being.**

Yazidi women face the pressure of generating income for their households despite the historical limitations on their access to the economic sector and employment opportunities, and in addition to the psychological and physical long-term ramifications of the genocide. Opportunities for economic empowerment present a useful avenue to bolster psychological well-being.

### **Acknowledge the connection between women's access to livelihoods and their psychological well-being by investing in livelihoods programs specifically for women.**

Yazidi women consistently express the negative impact of their impoverishment on their psychological well-being. They also acknowledge that their mental health would be positively impacted by the distraction and connections with others that gainful employment could provide. Therefore, tailoring livelihoods projects around the needs of women provides both income-generating opportunities and psychological support.

### **Empower women to self-direct their own healing process.**

Yazidi women are best placed to direct their own healing process. Aid agencies should empower women to self-identify their needs and work to provide the tangible support to address them.

**Expand psychosocial interventions to address the high rates of child marriage.**

The long-term ramifications of the genocide include the prevalence of child marriages, which are reported by 88% of residents in rural communities, 96% in semi-populated communities, and 100% in highly populated communities. Psychosocial interventions should be expanded to address this phenomenon.

**Expand access to psychosocial care for children, especially former captives of ISIS.**

Respondents note that psychosocial services for children are available in the displacement camps, but are lacking in Sinjar. Yazidi children, especially former ISIS captives, will require comprehensive, long-term psychosocial support.



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