THE PROTECTION NEEDS OF MINORITIES FROM SYRIA AND IRAQ

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABBREVIATIONS

3RP – Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan
AI – Amnesty International
AINA – Assyrian International News Agency
CAT – Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment
CEDAW – Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CPED – International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance
CRC – Convention on the Rights of the Child
CRPD – Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
CRSV – conflict-related sexual violence
FGD - focus group discussion
GBV – gender-based violence
HRC – Human Rights Commission
HRW - Human Rights Watch
ICC – International Criminal Court
ICCPR – International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
ICERD – International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination
ICESCR – International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
ICL – international criminal law
ICMW – International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families
ICRC – International Committee of the Red Cross
IDP – internally displaced person
IHL – international humanitarian law
IHRL – international human rights law
IILHR – Institute for International Law and Human Rights
IOCC – International Orthodox Christian Charities
IOM – International Organization for Migration
IS – Islamic State
KDP – Kurdistan Democratic Party
KRG – Kurdish Regional Government
MRG – Minority Rights Group International
NCA – Norwegian Church Aid
PKK-YPG – Kurdistan Workers' Party People's Protection Units
R2P – The Responsibility to Protect
UDHR – Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UNFPA – UN Population Fund
UNHCR – United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNRWA – United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East
USCIRF – United States Commission on International Religious Freedom
WCC – World Council of Churches
YBŞ – Yezidi militia group partly established by PKK-YPG

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The whole population of Syria and Iraq is feeling the toll of the armed conflicts in their countries. This report complements the existing information base by improving understanding of the protection needs of religious and ethnic minority groups from Syria and Iraq, including those remaining in these countries and those who have fled to neighbouring countries.

This report is geared towards humanitarian actors, to help them refine and coordinate efforts to provide life-saving assistance and work towards sustainable long-term solutions for all Syrians and Iraqis. Similarly, the report aims to support Syria, Iraq, neighbouring countries and donors in their search for better humanitarian responses, and to inform the most appropriate approaches towards finding durable solutions for displaced minority communities from Syria and Iraq.

The analysis and findings stem from a review of primary and secondary sources, as well as two specially commissioned research studies, surveys and focus groups to gather the views of 4,000 displaced people and refugees from Syria and Iraq. Norwegian Church Aid (NCA) carried out the project, in partnership with the World Council of Churches (WCC) and with funding from the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

While many issues discussed in this report are common to minorities from Iraq and Syria, the two countries stand at different crossroads. In Iraq sectarian feelings have become deeply ingrained. Information collected for this study suggests Syria has not yet reached this point. Before Islamic State (IS) took control of territory there had already been significant migration of minorities from Iraq because of marginalisation and persecution. In this regard, the eventual defeat of IS alone will not solve these underlying dangers or ensure that minorities return to their place of origin. Especially in Iraq, the process of driving IS away sets in motion power struggles between larger sectarian groups – exactly the type of social tension that exacerbates the vulnerability of minorities. Ongoing internal politicking and unresolved problems of disputed territories further exacerbate the difficulties minorities face in returning to certain areas of Iraq.

Syria and Iraq both have a history of sectarianism and other factors that have influenced the course of their current conflicts. These conflicts in both countries have had an immense impact on their civilian populations, including mass displacement, trauma, death or injury of loved ones, sexual violence, exploitation and abuse,

ongoing insecurity and targeted persecution. These experiences have affected women, men, boys and girls differently, meaning that their needs vary.

The conflict experiences of Syrians and Iraqis from minority groups have been similarly diverse, both between and within different religious groups. Consequently, the humanitarian needs of people from minorities vary, as does how best to meet those needs.

Humanitarian responses need to take this diversity into account in order to meet the critical needs of people affected by the conflicts in Syria and Iraq and support them in a sustainable way. They cannot overlook people's inability to access assistance because of instability, fear or lack of trust in key actors. They must also address aid prioritisation and beneficiary criteria that may fuel resentment, discrimination and tensions by excluding some conflict-affected groups.

Both gender and age are now well-established concepts within the humanitarian sphere. Humanitarian agencies increasingly understand the differing needs and approaches required to support different age groups and genders. This report demonstrates that protecting minorities must also be considered as part of Syria and Iraq humanitarian response strategy, particularly through an age, gender and diversity (AGD)[1] approach.

Given the history of persecution and conflict experienced by religious minorities, future reconciliation and peaceful relationships between different faith groups requires dealing with the trauma and suffering of the past. It also requires facilitating and sharing positive and hopeful examples of coexistence and mutual support between people of different faiths.

The political, social and security dynamics in Syria and Iraq are highly complex. There is no single recommendation or solution that will resolve the multitude of issues facing religious and ethnic minority groups as well as those facing the majority populations. Nevertheless, the recommendations outlined below aim to provide a basis for tackling the humanitarian crises, enabling displaced people to return home and creating a positive future for minorities in Syria and Iraq. It is worth noting that a certain level of stability needs to be achieved for the long-term recommendations listed below to become actionable.

Short-term

1. Donors need to provide predictable and sufficient funding that is flexible and reaches the women, men, girls and boys most in need – including host communities – to avoid creating or exacerbating tensions. A one-size-fits-all funding approach and criteria can inadvertently result in excluding vulnerable groups. In the current crises in Syria and Iraq, humanitarian and development needs are intertwined. This may necessitate funding to enable relief and development assistance to be delivered simultaneously and designed to be mutually reinforcing.

2. Identify and account for diverse experiences in displacement – conflict-affected populations are not homogenous. In some instances, minority vulnerabilities and needs must be disaggregated in order to provide targeted and tailored assistance. The same applies to individual refugees and displaced persons – gender and age in particular are important characteristics to disaggregate in order to meet people's needs. Humanitarian actors need to equip themselves with assessment tools able to capture differences based on ethno-religious affiliation and how different vulnerabilities intersect.

3. Promote conflict-sensitive programming and 'a do no harm' approach to avoid exacerbating tensions.

4. Continue to provide mobile registration centres and responses for out-of-camp refugees and IDPs.

5. Support programmatic interventions to promote inter-community peacebuilding, relationship building and social cohesion, both as standalone initiatives and project components in sector-specific interventions. Actors representing the different local religious communities could be a central resource to draw on, as is an awareness of how religion has been used by some to escalate tensions and violence.

6. Support the provision of cultural-,age- and gender-sensitive psychosocial support services to ensure that survivors of traumatic events receive sufficient rehabilitation to reintegrate into society. Ensure that appropriate and effective referral mechanisms are accessible for women and girls. Identify culturally appropriate ways to increase awareness about how rape and other forms of sexual violence are used as a weapon of war, destroying individuals and families. Work with communities, traditional and religious leaders to build a shared understanding that rape is always the fault of the perpetrator and not the survivor. Consider the value and appropriateness of religious rituals to facilitate reintegration into the community and avoid the stigmatisation of children and adults affected by sexual violence. Moreover, integrate community-based psychosocial support into humanitarian responses to help women, men, boys and girls, families and communities heal.

7. When requested by displaced children and adults themselves, facilitate their movement and return to their home areas as soon as practicably possible once the areas have been freed and secured. Ensure that women are included and considered when planning and facilitating a return home, and that women support family decisions to return. Focusing on humanitarian assistance to displaced populations should not overshadow support for people returning home when that is an option. Prioritise female-headed households for return support if they chose to make that decision.

8. Use existing civil society structures trusted by local populations, including those of minority groups, to channel assistance. Deliver aid channelled to those structures in a conflict-sensitive and non-discriminatory way, in accordance with humanitarian principles and standards.

9. Hold local governments accountable for political tactics that harm minority populations, exacerbate the effects of the crises that have affected them or that inhibit them from returning to their home areas.

Short-/Long-term

1. Incorporate a gender-responsive transitional justice perspective into the current displacement response, while advocating for all cases of sexual violence to be addressed through criminal prosecution – ensuring that the wishes of sexual violence survivors are strictly adhered to. Support an international inquiry into genocide, war crimes, human rights abuses and atrocities, and ensure that sexual violence cases are prioritised in such inquiries. Facilitate the documentation of abuses, for possible future prosecutions.

2. Reconciliation can reduce tensions between residents and also the likelihood of widespread reprisal killings or further conflict. Promote communal reconciliation, particularly in areas where minorities have been directly targeted by armed actors and experienced hostilities from neighbouring communities. Take into account gender considerations when designing such efforts, as well as whether communities are ready for such efforts.

3. Facilitate the resumption of gender-sensitive livelihood activities, including the rehabilitation of civilian infrastructure and community facilities such as places of worship.

4. Make efforts to promote trust between conflict-affected communities and security forces responsible for their protection. Such security sector reform needs to address perceptions of wrongdoing and lack of accountability. Support security forces to include female staff members for community outreach, and facilitate reporting and requests for security among the female population.

5. Ensure that relevant education opportunities are provided to school-age girls and boys who have been displaced by violence or trapped in IS-held areas. This may include accelerated learning programmes, so that displaced children are not further disadvantaged. Educational programmes should address the language difficulties that some IDP and refugee children face in learning and integrate reconciliation, trust building, equal citizenship and religious tolerance. Ensure that education programmes for children from minority groups include their native language and maintain their cultural roots.

Nearly 30,000 people, mostly Yezidis live in the Kabarto I/II camps in the Kurdistan region. In almost each tent you can hear stories of persecution and escape.

6. Assist local and national legal institutions in initiating legitimate and gender-sensitive legal procedures to tackle the property expropriation and redistribution processes taking place in many areas, to limit a pattern of dispossession of religious minorities or reallocation of property along sectarian and ethnic lines.

7. Support community and faith leaders and initiatives that promote religious tolerance and encourage peaceful relations among religious groups. International organisations should assist Iraqis and Syrians in collecting, emphasising and underlining stories that outline attempts to preserve and rebuild bonds between majority and minority communities and express common future narratives. These stories should accompany rather than replace tales of persecution, and give the silent, moderate majority a voice.

Long-term

1. To reduce tensions and misunderstandings between communities and limit the likelihood of discrimination, promote education and curriculum reform to improve perceptions and understanding of religious minorities and their historical, cultural and religious significance. Diversity is an indicator of a society's quality. Through education, foster recognition of diversity as a positive attribute and respecting diversity as a way to build a more sustainable society. This is necessary to provide stability, overcome prejudice, build trust and establish conditions for shared life. Similarly, promote access to education for all – regardless of gender, ethnicity, religion or political affiliation – and disaffiliate education provision from political motivations or agendas.

2. Address democratic governance deficits, structural discrimination and cultures of impunity embedded in particular in Iraq before IS took over significant parts of territory in 2014. Train the judiciary, security forces and public servants in general, addressing degradation of minorities in the public discourse. Promote the implementation of appropriate constitutional provisions when they exist and, when necessary, revisions of the legal framework at all levels to promote equal citizenship. During such legal changes, facilitate an inclusive process that ensures wide participation among different segments of society (women, youths, academics, etc.)

Medya Ismail Qassim (2) was born on the Sinjar Mountain under siege by IS. Now she is an IDP in Dohuk.

INTRODUCTION

The current conflicts and crises in Syria and Iraq have affected the whole population in both countries. A number of assessments and research reports have been undertaken to analyse these situations and better understand protection needs among the population. This report aims to complement the existing information base by improving understanding of the protection needs of minority groups from Syria and Iraq. Its findings will be useful for humanitarian actors to refine efforts to provide relevant life-saving assistance and support sustainable long-term solutions for all groups in society. This report also aims to support Syria, Iraq, neighbouring countries and donors in their search for better approaches to strengthen and rebuild society and generate equal opportunities for all.

The analysis and findings stem from a desk review of primary and secondary sources and primary research specifically conducted for this report. The project has been carried out by NCA in partnership with WCC, with funding from the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The history of the Middle East in general, and of Syria and Iraq in particular, is complex. This report focuses on issues arising from the conflict in Syria that developed from public protests in early 2011, and from the conflict that followed the IS takeover of large segments of Iraqi territory in mid-2014. These conflicts have triggered humanitarian crises in both countries. These conflicts have affected the whole populations of Syria and Iraq, causing a huge loss of life, mass displacement, widespread destruction and notable attacks against civilians, including members of religious and ethnic minorities – raising concerns about future cultural and social diversity.

There are three reasons for including a longer-term perspective on protection needs in this report:

- To bridge the much-criticised conceptual and programming gap between humanitarian and development assistance, acknowledging that different groups and geographical contexts need different approaches.
- To recognise that the immediate violence perpetrated against minority groups has long-term impacts on their resilience and vulnerability, as well as their ongoing protection needs and future existence.
- To acknowledge that the conflicts and current dynamics in Syria and Iraq cannot be understood without considering the human rights deficits that preceded them.

Structure

This report begins with a discussion of the concept of 'minorities', how it is perceived by conflict-affected groups from Syria and Iraq and how the term is used here.

Chapter 2 describes the demographic composition of Syria and Iraq and provides a brief account of key events in the recent history of both countries. It then examines sectarianism and discrimination patterns before the current conflicts broke out, then analyses the conflicts and their effects on the majority and minority populations. This includes insights into how religion – and, in some cases, also ethnicity – have been used as political tools and influence the ongoing conflicts.

Chapter 3 looks at the humanitarian consequences of armed conflict in Syria and Iraq and responses by humanitarian actors. It focuses on how diverse the needs of conflict-affected people are, and ultimately how well the humanitarian system is positioned to respond to those needs.

Chapter 4 then explores the perspectives of Syrian and Iraqi minorities and the majority group on the possibility of the return and resettlement of displaced people, and reconciliation between groups. It maps out similarities and differences between and among minority groups, and between minorities and the majority community, to better understand the opportunities and challenges for short- and long-term support strategies.

Finally, Chapter 5 summarises the key findings of this report. It discusses whether there are trends in the protection needs of minority groups and whether they need to be addressed differently from those of majority communities. The report ends by providing a set of recommendations for different actors.

Methodology

The analysis in this report is based on a review of primary and secondary sources, as well as new research. A desk study of available information on the impact of conflict in Iraq and Syria on vulnerable groups was carried out between December 2015 and January 2016. This study specifically focused on minorities – and their immediate and long-term protection needs, providing a foundation for primary data collection. Two research papers were also commissioned to inform the study – one on conflict dynamics and institutional processes and another on security conditions for minority communities in northern Iraq.

NCA and local partners then conducted focus group discussions[2] among refugees and IDPs from Syria and Iraq. These took place in Syria, the Kurdistan region, Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey and Norway. They were complemented by key informant interviews with humanitarian actors. All of these primary sources have been anonymised and any sensitive information that could identify them has been changed. In total, the study has gathered the views of some 4,000 people (approximately 55% men, 45% women).

In cooperation with local partners, NCA conducted three surveys in the Kurdistan region, Syria and Lebanon between April and June 2016. NCA and partners used their relevant projects and networks to reach the main target population. They reached: 933 respondents in the Kurdistan region (Duhok governorate); 602 respondents in Lebanon (Beirut, Bekka, Mount Lebanon and North Lebanon governorates); and 2,007 respondents in Syria (Aleppo, Hama, Homs, rural Damascus, the municipality of Damascus, Daraa, Al Hasakah, Latakia, Sweida and Tartus governorates). This convenience sampling at group level was then combined with a random selection of individual respondents within households.

All questionnaires were completed by respondents from religious minority and majority groups, for comparison. Except for a portion of questionnaires administered electronically in the Kurdistan region, trained interviewers employed a paper-based questionnaire. Results were then electronically recorded by partner staff for analysis by NCA, primarily via regression models that simultaneously analysed the effect of a number of variables (gender, education level, religious affiliation, place of origin, etc.) on a particular outcome.

Data collection for this study also included a rapid assessment by a local partner in Lebanon conducted in October 2016. This canvassed views from 10 women survivors of gender-based violence (GBV) and conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) aged 21–36 and eight case workers in different locations in Lebanon, to assess how religious affiliation intersects with GBV and CRSV vulnerabilities and support services.

Logistical constraints mean it was not possible to conduct focus group discussions and surveys in the same level of detail in all areas of Syria and Iraq or their neighbouring countries. Despite this challenge, the findings of this study complement those gathered by other organisations.

Analysis of information from different sources made it possible to triangulate findings to ensure that the conclusions are as accurate as possible and reflect subtle nuances. Care has been taken to provide credible statistical information. The report has been through a rigorous validation process that involved international and regional experts, and national and international staff, working in protection and humanitarian assistance in Syria, Iraq and neighbouring countries. Furthermore, preliminary findings were discussed with Syrians and Iraqis from majority and minority communities, to corroborate, reject or further investigate them.

As with all pieces of research, there are the usual caveats about the constraints and limitations of the research process. Conflict and violent upheaval always limits the gathering of accurate information to understand the contemporary situation. This is because access to some areas is limited, lack of trust and fear of repercussions mean that many people are reluctant to talk freely, and because informants and their accounts of events are influenced by traumatic experiences. The surveys included a question on current income. However, it seems that there was little consistency across respondents with respect to a) whether the income was their individual or household income, b) how many individuals relied on this income, and c) whether respondents were citing all income or just earned wages. Additionally, some interviewers felt that respondents might be citing lower incomes in the hope that it would allow them to receive more aid. As a result, income data has not been used in subsequent analysis.

In general, there is limited data about minorities and their status.[3] Even before the civil war in Syria and the rise of IS in Iraq, there was no accurate census data that provided a breakdown of these countries' populations' religious and ethnic composition. The conflicts have precipitated mass movements of people, changing the demographic ratios in Iraq and Syria. Similarly, the demographics and movement patterns of religious and ethnic minorities can be politicized, also nowadays in the context of the Syria and Iraq crises.

CHAPTER 1 – THE CONCEPT OF MINORITIES IN IRAQ AND SYRIA

"'Minority' could indicate second-class citizens. But internationally it's accepted, and there are laws within the UN system regarding the rights of minorities, thus it's alright to use the term."

Male Shaback representative,
Erbil, Kurdistan region, Iraq, September 2016

"We are very annoyed with being called a 'minority' – that means we can be ignored. Our roots here are deeper than the ones [of people] who have become a majority here recently. Here in northern Iraq are the roots of Christianity. If you go one layer deep in the ground, you will find churches and crosses. If [you dig] deeper, there will be our Mesopotamian fathers."

Christian religious leader,
Erbil, Kurdistan region, Iraq, September 2016

Minorities: A difficult protection concept

No internationally agreed definition determines which groups constitute 'minorities'. In general, minorities are defined as "*groups differing […] in race, religion or ethnic background from the majority of a population*".[4] The UN Minorities Declaration adopted in 1992 refers to minorities as groups based on national, ethnic, cultural, religious or linguistic identity, and asserts that states should protect their existence.[5] Any useful definition must include both *objective* factors – such as the existence of a shared ethnicity, language or religion – and *subjective* factors, including the fact that individuals must self-identify as members of a minority.

A considerable challenge when dealing with religious minorities in the Middle East is that categories of religious distinctiveness or separate religious identities sometimes overlap with ethnic identities. While some religious minorities are also identified as ethnic groups (such as Assyrians and sometimes Yezidis), others are not (such as Shia Muslims).The mosaic of ethno-religious groups in the Middle East therefore largely defies a stringent definition of religious minorities.

In addition, the term 'minority' is contextual and relative, so social groups categorised as minorities at the national level might be geographically concentrated and constitute a majority at the sub-national level. In the broader Middle East, the Shia Muslim community is a minority. But there is broad consensus that in Iraq it is the largest religious group, while the Muslim Sunnis constitute a minority. In the Iraqi Nineveh Province, however, Shia Arabs are a minority while Sunni Arabs are the Muslim majority, yet in a specific local community the relationship may shift yet again. Similar 'alternations' can be found in Syria, where religious minorities may be the majority in one region, but only have confessional brethren in small enclaves, villages or areas in other provinces.

Moreover, 'minorities' is not a label that social groups in Syria and Iraq are comfortable with.[6] Objections to using the term revolve around the following:[7]
- It is a source of vulnerability, indicating weakness or less value than the majority.
- It shapes power relations and undermines a language of unity around citizenship.
- For some groups, the concept overshadows their historical roots as indigenous peoples or descendants from ancient Mesopotamian peoples.

Since 'minorities' is a term anchored in human rights frameworks, many groups accept its use in the international discourse and debates abroad, while calling for caution and reflection when using it in their homeland. In Iraq and Syria, because of the implications that concepts have in shaping current realities and future alternatives for society, there is a noteworthy preference for employing a term like 'social component' (المكون الاجتماعي in Arabic), or 'the components of the people' (مكونات الشعب), referring to all the different groups that make up the population.[8]

Definition of minorities in this report

While acknowledging both the lack of clarity and challenges associated with it, in this report the term 'minorities' is used for analytical purposes, to refer to ethnic and religious groups different from what constitutes the numerical majority. As far as possible, the study is sensitive to differences and similarities between groups (the majority and minorities, and between different religious minorities) as well as within sub-groups (based on sex, age, etc.). Overviews of the different religious and ethnic minority groups in Iraq and Syria are provided on pages 12 and 18, respectively.

CHAPTER 2 – THE SOCIAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND TO CONFLICT IN SYRIA AND IRAQ

"Before the war there were no problems, we were like brothers, very close to Muslim neighbours and friends."
Christian female Syrian refugee,
Beirut, Lebanon, February 2016

"I lived with my neighbours for 40 years, and all of a sudden they pointed at me with their weapons."
Christian male Iraqi refugee,
Amman, Jordan, June 2016

"People in Kobani were butchered, and not only by Daesh [IS] but by their neighbours."
Syrian female Kurdish refugee,
Beirut, Lebanon, February 2016

The collapse of the Ottoman Empire at the end of the First World War gave European powers an opportunity to expand into the Middle East. The Sykes-Picot Agreement, negotiated between Britain and France, led to the creation of modern-day Syria and Iraq. It was the first time that these geographical entities had existed as states governed from the capitals of Damascus and Baghdad, respectively. The creation of these states based on artificial borders, which primarily served the interests of the colonisers, caused dissent among the populations and the ruling elites, whose traditional positions were usurped. Those leading each country faced the challenge of governing and maintaining control of a single entity that was uncomfortable within its own borders and rife with ethnic, religious and social divisions.

Despite being neighbours and sharing some historical, religious and cultural identities, the relationship between Iraq and Syria has been poor for much of the two states' existence. For example, Syria was one of the few Arab states to support Iran during the Iran-Iraq War and Syria allowed Allied forces to launch attacks on Iraq from Syrian territory during the First Gulf War.

There are numerous *similarities* between the situation facing religious minorities in Iraq and Syria. Ba'thism, a particular doctrine of Arab nationalism, has been an important political ideology in both countries. It emerged in Damascus in the 1940s and promoted pan-Arabism, socialism and a preference for a strong state with protection and freedom of religious practice. Conversely, Ba'thism could not accommodate non-Arab ethnic minorities with the same inclusivity offered to those who identified as Arab. Constructing the state's national identity on a framework that championed a single ethnic identity disenfranchised certain religious minorities who happened not to identify as Arab.

Furthermore, Iraq and Syria are both geographically positioned between two major faultlines in the region (Sunni-Shia and Arab-Kurd). However, there are also distinct *differences* between Iraq and Syria with respect to the current challenges faced by their minorities. Most importantly, the Iraqi state has gone through a slow disintegration over decades, exacerbated by the US invasion in 2003.

This chapter provides an introduction to the demographic composition of Syria and Iraq and key events in the recent history of both countries. It outlines sectarian and discrimination patterns before the current conflicts broke out, and provides an analysis of the current conflicts and their effects on the majority and minority populations.

The population of Iraq[9]

The predominately Muslim population is comprised of three large groups – Sunni Arab, Shia Arab and Sunni Kurd. Southern Iraq is predominantly Shia, and the centre, west and north are mainly Sunni. The cities of Baghdad and Basra are mixed. Kurds form the majority of the population in the north and north-west of the country.

Many of Iraq's religious minorities live in the north, including Christians and Yezidis. The Assyrian Christians who constitute the most populous Christian group in Iraq speak their own languages and do not necessarily identify as Arab. Consequently, they regard themselves, and are regarded by others, as a distinct ethnic group. The Yezidis are predominantly Kurdish speaking, with homelands in Iraq and the Kurdistan region of Iraq. Since 2003, much of the Yezidi homeland of Sinjar has been under the control of the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG), although it officially remains under the jurisdiction of the central government of Iraq. While many Yezidis are willing to identify as Kurds, they see themselves as a distinct ethnic group. Other ethnic minorities in Iraq include Turkmen, Shabaks, Kaka'i Armenians, Shia Muslim Kurds, Afro Iraqis and Roma.

Christian leaders in Iraq estimate that, as of November 2016, there are fewer than 250,000 Christians remaining in the country.[10] The Christian population has declined steadily over the last 10 years from a pre-2003 estimate of around 700,000 to 290,000 (2014), to the current estimated population.[11] Approximately 67% of Iraqi Christians are Chaldean Catholics (eastern rite of the Catholic Church), and nearly 20% are members of the Assyrian Church of the East. The rest are Syriac Orthodox, Syriac Catholic, Armenian Catholic, Armenian Orthodox, Anglican or other Protestants. Only 50 Evangelical Christian families reportedly remain in Iraq, down from approximately 5,000 in 2013.[12]

The Shabaks, most of whom are Shia, number somewhere around 250,000 in Iraq. Leaders report a Yezidi community of approximately 500,000, most of whom reside in the north.[13] Estimates of the size of the Sabean-Mandean community in Iraq vary. According to Sabean-Mandean leaders, no more than 5,000 remain in the country, mainly in the south with small pockets in the Kurdistan region and Baghdad. Baha'i leaders report fewer than 1,000 members, spread throughout the country in small groups. According to Kaka'i (also known as 'Yarsani') activists, their community has approximately 200,000 members, located mainly in villages south-east of Kirkuk, in Diyala and Erbil in the north, and in Karbala.[14]

Table 1 summaries key information about the different religious and ethnic groups in Iraq. All figures are estimates since there has not been any recent census or other reliable demographic study on which to base figures, and recent widespread displacement and migration complicates the picture even further.

Table 1: Main religious and ethnic groups in present-day Iraq

Majority[15]	Population 2016[16]	Religion/denomination	Location
Shia	55–60% of total population	Shia Muslim	Mainly southern Iraq and Baghdad
Large minority[17]	**Population**	**Religion/denomination**	**Location**
Arab Sunni	20–25% of total population	Sunni Muslim	Centre, west and north Iraq
Kurds	17% of total population	Mostly Sunni Muslim	North and north-west Iraq
Minority[18]	**Population**	**Religion/denomination**	**Location**
Turkmen	600,000–2 million	Approximately 60% Sunni Large minority Shia	Concentrated in the north – Tel Afar, Kirkuk, Erbil, Salahuddin, Diyala, Baghdad, Kut Significant displacement after 2014
Christians	250,000	Main denominations: - The Chaldean Catholic Church - The Assyrian Church of the East - The Syriac Catholic Church - The Syriac Orthodox Church of Antioch - The Armenian Orthodox Church - Other Christian churches	Historically, Christians had large numbers in the Nineveh Plains and Kurdistan, as well as Baghdad Repeatedly forced into displacement and migration since 1961, with a new unprecedented wave of displacement since 2014
Yezidi	500,000	Yezidism	Pre-2014 located in Sinjar, Sheikan Ba'shiiqah and Bahzan in Nineveh governorate and in the district of Semele in Dohuk governorate Since 2014, a majority displaced into and around Dohuk and Erbil
Kaka'i (Ahl-e-Haqq)	Estimated as fewer than 200,000	Kaka'i, also called 'followers of Yarsanism'	Historically lived around Kirkuk, Majority displaced to the Kurdistan region after 2014
Shabak	250,000	Most identify as Shia Muslim and the rest as Sunni Muslim	Scattered populations throughout Nineveh Plains, the city of Mosul and villages north and east of Mosul Most displaced to the Kurdistan region after 2014
Faili Kurd	1 million	Shia Muslim	Along the Iran-Iraq border
Sabean-Mandean	5,000	Sabean-Mandean	Historically, around the Tigris and Euphrates, mostly in Baghdad and the southern governorates Almost all displaced to the Kurdistan region since 2003, in a process intensified after 2014
Baha'i	Fewer than 1,000	Baha'i	Scattered in the big cities
Afro Iraqis	1,500–2,000	Most are Shia	Originally, descendants of East African migrants who came to Iraq after the birth of Islam Mainly in south Iraq
Roma (Kawliyah and Qaraj)	50,000–200,000	Mostly Sunni and Shia Muslim	Isolated villages in south Iraq and out-skirts of Baghdad, Mosul and Basra Suffered significant displacement since 2003 and 2014

The Kheder family had to flee when IS attacked Sinjar. They now live as IDPs in a camp outside of Dohuk.

Background to the current conflict in Iraq

In its almost 100-year history, the people of Iraq have not had a stable, pluralist democratic system under which the rights of different ethnic and religious groups could be protected and access to power can be negotiated and shared. Instead, religion and ethnicity have been used to determine status, power and rights, and deliberately marginalise certain groups.

Iraq's first three decades were turbulent – dominated by the British, and powerful individuals relying on the British and their own personal networks, to maintain power. The British appointed Faisal, son of Sharif Hussain of Mecca, as King of Iraq. He demanded the inclusion of Kurdistan in Iraq, so there would be a sizeable Sunni minority population to balance the majority Shia. Between 1945 and 1958, more than 20 different central government cabinets governed Iraq.

Ba'thism initially failed to gain traction in Iraq because it did not immediately appeal to the large Shia and Kurdish populations. Following a military coup in 1958, which overthrew the monarchy, and then Saddam Hussein's regime from 1979–2003, Ba'thism became the dominant political ideology in the country. Initially non-confessional and ideologically pan-Arab, Saddam Hussein's Ba'athist regime became increasingly family- and tribal Sunni-dominated, particularly with the Iran-Iraq War in the 1980s, and it pursued genocidal and suppressive policies towards the Kurds, Shia Muslims, and other ethnic and religious minorities.[19] These policies have had a determining role in steering the sectarian and political landscapes up to the present time.

Arabisation programme
This programme resulted in the forced displacement of Kurds, Turkmen, Shabaks, Assyrians and Yezidis from their land and property, destruction of a lot of the documentation proving minority ownership and the reallocation of land and property to Arabs. The Yezidi were among those forced to move from their homes and relocated to collectivised villages in other areas, abandoning the use of their language and acquiring a new Arabised identity. The Assyrians were obliged to choose between Arab or Kurdish nationality in the 1977, 1987 and 1997 national censuses. Those who insisted on identifying as Assyrian were struck off the list or arbitrarily registered as Arab or Kurd.[20] To encourage minorities to identify as Arab, Decree 199 in 2001 outlined the right of every Iraqi to change their ethnic identity to an Arab one.[21] After 1991, in a process that accelerated after 2003, these forcibly displaced groups returned to their land, resulting in tensions with the Arab population, particularly over the control of oil-rich Kirkuk.[22]

The Kurdistan region
Ever since the creation of Iraq, the Kurdish population has sought some kind of autonomous region and been in political and armed conflict with state authorities, which have largely rejected the idea of Kurdish autonomy. Kurdish uprisings in the 1960s and 1970s led to forced displacement of Kurds. Although Saddam Hussein allowed Kurds some autonomy in the 1970s, Kurdish forces were defeated in 1975. Ali Hassan al-Majid, a cousin of Saddam Hussein, was tasked with leading the 1988 Anfal Campaign, a series of attacks in which 180,000 men, women and children were killed including 5,000 in the chemical weapons attack on Halabja.[23] The end of the First Gulf War in March 1991 precipitated a Kurdish uprising. Saddam Hussein initially repelled this, and an estimated 1.5 million Kurds fled to the Turkish and Iranian borders. Kurds eventually received international protection – an autonomous zone was created in 1992, governed by the KRG.

Shahed (6) and Faras (8) Alkholid live in a refugee settlement in Bar Elias with their grandmother Minawar Horani. Their mother and father were killed by barrel bombs in Syria.

Despite economic blockades and ongoing violence in Iraq, the Kurdish-controlled region has achieved economic growth and remained relatively peaceful. Since the US-led 2003 invasion, Kurds have taken the opportunity to strengthen their position and extend control over disputed areas. With the establishment of the KRG, the process of Arabisation has been reversing by expelling Arabs from various areas of the Kurdish region and pressuring religious minorities to identify as Kurds. With the upsurge in violence and the seizure of Iraqi territory by IS in 2014, many religious minorities – including Christians and Yezidis – have sought, and been allowed, refuge in the KRG controlled areas. This migration tendency had begun earlier – Sabean-Mandeans, for example, had previously been displaced from southern Iraq to the Kurdistan region after the fall of Saddam Hussein in 2003. The KRG and the population of the Kurdistan region are acknowledged by many as having saved lives and provided safe havens for hundreds of thousands of displaced Iraqis. However, many people among the minority groups in Kurdish-controlled areas feel they are part in some political game, in which the KRG works to obtain political, economic and military support from the international community by presenting itself as the protector of displaced Iraqis and minority groups.[24]

Disputed territories
Following the ousting of Saddam Hussein in 2003, Sinjar, the Nineveh Plains and other territories along the Kurdistan region's legal borders became part of the so-called 'disputed territories'. Both Iraq's central government and the KRG claim the right to govern these areas for historical reasons. The KRG claims that the territories along its borders with the rest of Iraq (in the provinces of Nineveh, Kirkuk Salahaddin and Diyala)

form part of historical Kurdistan. Another incentive for the KRG to incorporate these disputed territories into its region is to create a wider buffer zone between it and the rest of Iraq, following decades of mistreatment and marginalisation of Iraqi Kurds by successive governments in Baghdad.

Article 140 of Iraq's 2005 Constitution sets out a mechanism to resolve the status of the disputed territories, whereby a referendum would determine local communities' wish to be part of the KR of federal Iraq. The Iraqi authorities ultimately failed to implement Article 140. A key obstacle for the government has been the requirement for areas previously 'Arabised' to be 'normalised' – meaning that communities who were forcibly removed would receive the necessary support to return.

Discrimination and sectarian violence in Iraq

Iraq has been described as a country with 'high' government restrictions on religion in four Pew Forum index reports in a row, from 2009–2013. In 2014, this rose to 'very high'.[25] Much of the structural discrimination against minorities is rooted in laws and policies that were promulgated during Saddam Hussein's regime and have permeated government mechanisms and structures. These include the army, police and judiciary – institutions that have been accused of corruption, ethnic or religious favouritism and prejudice against women.[26]

The 2005 Constitution recognises Islam as the official religion of the state but also recognises that the country

is religiously and ethnically diverse. According to Article 4 of the Constitution, Iraqis have the right to be educated in their mother tongue, which includes Arabic, Kurdish, Turkmen, Syriac and Sabean-Mandean, and the right to use these as official languages in regions where they are the predominant mother tongue. Although the 2005 Iraqi Constitution guarantees the rights of minorities, including the right to freedom of worship, some argue that minorities have been discriminated against by central and local government in all areas of life, including access to public services, employment and property ownership.[27]

Post-Hussein civil conflict has made all Iraqis vulnerable to violence – attacks often serve the purpose of instilling fear among targeted minority communities and acts of retaliation that further inflame conflict. Minorities have being disproportionately affected by violence. Between 2003 and 2007, the number of civilian deaths from violence in Nineveh Province was, on average, approximately 11% of the total civilian deaths from violence in Iraq. Between 2008 and 2013, this percentage rose to around 26%.[28]

Between 2003 and 2015, three-quarters of Iraq's Christians were driven from their homes or killed.[29] The Iraqi Ministry for Migration and Displacement estimated in 2009 that nearly half of religious minority communities had left the country since 2003. Christians were partly at risk because their faith was associated with the West and the multinational force in Iraq. Earning a living by serving as translators for US forces made Yezidis suspiciously regarded as collaborators by many Arabs.[30]

According to findings from a 2016 survey led by NCA on the perceptions and experiences of religious minorities displaced in the Kurdistan Region, residents of Mosul were the most likely to report experiencing insults before the IS occupation (74%), compared with about 25% in other areas. Accounts by IDPs from different minority communities (Shabaks, Kaka'i, Christians, Turkmen and Shias) and their religious leaders confirmed the increasing hostile conditions that non-Sunni Muslims have experienced in Mosul since 2003.

In the words of a member of the Kaka'i community from Mosul displaced in the Kurdistan region, *"We never lived a single day without harassment from Muslims – from the early days of our lives"*.[31] Shabaks spoke of constant provocations and acts of retaliation for public statements made by Shabaks elsewhere, or even revenge for killings in southern Iraq.[32] According to a Chaldean religious leader, between 2003 and 2014 at least 2,000 Christian families moved from Mosul to Erbil in the Kurdistan region, because of threats and harassment.[33] Seventeen per cent of respondents to the same survey felt the need to hide their religion – 24% in the case of Yezidis. Groups of Christians reported living in constant fear and being defenceless, and women from religious minority groups felt obliged to conform to Islamic dress codes because of fear of being harassed or abducted and raped.[34]

The largest-scale attack on minority communities prior to 2014 was a 2007 incident involving multiple vehicle bombs in two Yezidi villages, which killed between 400 and 800 members of the Yezidi community.[35] The Caldean Syriac Assyrian Popular Council reported in July 2016 that at least 60 attacks were perpetrated on churches between 2003 and 2013, most notably involving car bombs and other explosive devices. One of the most high-profile attacks targeting Christian areas in Baghdad occurred in 2010, on the Our Lady of Deliverance Church. Several militants attacked the church using small arms and suicide vests; more than 50 people were killed. From January 2007 to February 2008, the Sabean-Mandean community in Iraq suffered 42 killings, 46 kidnappings, 10 threats and 21 attacks, a disproportionately high amount. [36]

Many Sabean-Mandean experienced threats by Islamists to leave the country or be killed. In many cases, families were forced to sell everything to pay ransoms for kidnapped relatives. In some cases, the killing was carried out despite despite the ransom being paid. Some killings were reportedly to terrorise the families rather than for money.[37] Similarly, kidnapping for ransom has been one of the biggest problems Assyrians have been facing. Six abductions were reported in 2011, five of them in Kirkuk.[38]

In 2003–2014, the main type of violent acts against minority groups involved:
• destruction and defacement of religious buildings.
• mass murder of congregations gathered in and around religious buildings.
• abduction and murder of religious and civic leaders and individuals, including children, targeted because of the perception that certain minority groups are wealthier than the rest of the population and could pay ransoms.
• threats to leave houses and apartments and subsequent confiscation of property by individuals or militia groups.
• forced conversion to Islam using tactics such as death threats, rape and forced marriage.

Women from religious minority groups have suffered from threats, harassment and sexual violence because of their double condition of belonging to a certain religious or ethnic group and for being women. Rapes of Sabean-Mandean women could go unpunished because of some people's belief that the rape of an 'unbeliever' is acceptable, and even constitutes an act of purification.[39]

Minorities have also enjoyed a lesser sense of protection by Iraqi security forces – impunity for attacks on minority groups has been rampant.[40] According to some Kaka'i people, no violent attacks on their community have been prosecuted and punished since 2003.[41] Christians in the Kurdistan region also recounted attacks and looting of their shops in 2011, incited by an imam during Friday prayers in Zakho, and impunity for the attackers ever since.[42] For women with a minority religious background, access to justice is even more difficult due to discrimination against minorities in the police and judiciary.[43]

Islamic State and the impact of current conflict on minorities

IS's origins go all the way back to 1999 and Abu Musad Al-Zarqawi, and later al-Qaida in Iraq, which gained strength after the US occupation of Iraq. A merger among several Sunni Islamist groups in 2006 took place and shortly after this umbrella group took the name Islamic State of Iraq. Under the leadership of Abu Bakhr al-Baghdadi from 2010, the group's original goal was establishing a 'caliphate' in Sunni areas of the country. It later expanded its ambitions and became IS in Iraq and the Levant in 2013, as it became involved in the Syrian conflict.

In June 2014, IS made enormous territorial gains in the four Iraqi regions of Anbar, Nineveh, Salahuddin and Diyala, essentially moving north from Arab areas into the Kurdish sphere. At this time, the middle territories that IS sought to control were still home to religious minorities. However, certain religious minorities have no place at all in the extremist ideology and religiously 'pure' society envisioned by IS, based on a radical and literal interpretation of the Quran. Nevertheless, the apparently wide support lent to IS from other Iraqis in 2014 appears to be based not so much on the group's religious fervour and hatred for minorities, as in what the group had to offer, as outlined below.

- *The economic dimension*. IS was offering weapons, money and logistics in situations where the resources of Sunni Arabs in Iraq were dwindling. IS affirmed itself in a situation that was already very tense because of the tug of war between Erbil and Baghdad since 2012, caused, among other things, by the question of control of oil revenues and petroleum resources south of the Kurdistan Region. IS moved in to reclaim these wells for Sunni Arabs.

- *The political dimension*. The Shia-dominated political elite in Bagdad, and the executive power, regained strength in parliamentary elections in spring 2013 and again in 2014, prompting the re-election of Nuri al-Maliki for a third term. This was in effect unconstitutional under the standards of the Iraqi 2005 Constitution. IS affirmed itself as a Sunni Arab alternative, and was able to secure tactical alliances with tribes and political forces in Anbar and the surrounding provinces. In early June 2014, this led to Sunni militias declaring an unwillingness to fight IS until Nuri al-Maliki was removed.

- *The religious minority dimension.* In January 2014, the Iraqi government proclaimed that four districts were being considered for administrative reform that would elevate them to provinces. Under this scheme, the Nineveh Plains would secure an Assyrian-Christian province, Talafar would secure Turkmen, Tuz Khurmato would be a mosaic of minorities (but also have a Turkmen majority),[44] and restive Sunni Arab Falluja would be separated from the rest of Anbar. This would entail an administrative break-up, and establishment of new minority provinces in, some buffer zones between Sunni Arab Iraq and Kurdish areas.

The Nineveh Plains proposal in particular was seen as a way to finally make the province a 'safe haven for Assyrians', work that had been going on for more than a decade. A separate province would provide more self-government for Assyrians, economic transfer from Baghdad and increased political representation in Baghdad. From a Sunni Arab perspective, the change would do the opposite. The Nineveh Provincial Council responded by threatening to declare the province a federal region if the decision on Talafar and Nineveh Plains was implemented. So did the Salahuddin and Anbar Provincial governments. So while the religious minorities perceived this as a victory in the quest for higher levels of self-rule, economic strength and protection, the Kurds viewed it as a way to halt legitimate Kurdish territorial ambitions, while the Sunni Arabs perceived it as yet another move by Baghdad to dispossess them. This is why many Sunnis chose to accept the IS offer of a tactical alliance in spring 2014.

In June 2014, following large-scale offensives in Iraq, IS seized control of Mosul, Talafar and most of the Nineveh Plains, and attempted to capture Tuz Khurmato. The IS conquest of these areas was seen by some as a move provoked by Baghdad, by abusing the 'protection of *other* minorities' argument to further marginalise Sunni Arabs. As the Iraqi security forces collapsed, Kurdish armed forces (*peshmergas*) moved into other disputed areas, enlarging their territorial control by approximately 40%.[45] Later that year, IS was driven out of Tuz Khurmato by Kurdish *pershmergas*. More than 700 Sunni Arab residents of Tuz Khurmato have reportedly since joined IS.[46] Shia Turkmen fighters aligned with the popular mobilisation forces (predominantly Shia militias) have also reportedly abducted and tortured some 150 Sunni Arabs from the Tuz Khurmato area, killing between eight and 34 of them.[47] As of November 2016, a three-sided conflict is taking place in these areas. While IS has taken advantage of this conflict to increase its 'room for manoeuvre', the conflict has been particularly devastating for religious minorities who do not fit into any of these warring factions.

The Iraqi security forces were largely Shia-dominated (70%) in 2014. They disintegrated and proved incapable or unwilling to protect religious minorities facing the IS advance. The Kurdish *peshmerga* also partly failed in this. Some religious minority groups responded by organising their own militias and protection forces. The Assyrian Democratic Movement established the Nineveh Plains Protection Unit, and localised protection groups included Dwekh Nawsha (self sacrifice) for Christians and the Kaka'i Al Zuraifani Militia.[48] Religious minorities were directly targeted for conquest by IS to secure influence for the Kurds and were not sufficiently protected by Baghdad.

The proclamation of the IS Caliphate in June 2014, however, brought the pressure and persecution of religious minorities in IS-controlled areas to an entirely new level, both in terms of scope and impact. The new Caliph Ibrahim (Abu Bakr al-Bagdadi) made clear his intent to lead the Sunni Muslim Umma into a new phase of expansion and the re-establishment of a Sunni (Arab) empire. Previously mainly tactical attacks against religious minorities became a strategic goal for the Caliphate, loaded with religious symbolism, political posturing and promises to reclaim disputed territories for Sunni Arab Iraqis.

The language, symbols, rituals, propaganda and ideology of IS in 2014 was unquestionably couched in religious terms, increasingly gained religious meaning and made the situation of religious minorities dramatically more precarious. However, the underlying power struggles and the reason for its widespread support and brutal expansion into minority areas are based in economic, political and identitarian grievances rather than intrinsic hatred directed against religious minorities.

In the interpretation of IS, the Quran commands that other groups have a choice of either leaving its areas of control or accepting its authority and subjecting to its rules without question. People who remain must either convert to Islam and become integrated members of the community and faith, or they may preserve their religion if it is an accepted religion under Islam. In this case, they pay a special tax in return for IS protection and the right to perform their religion. This social status of *dhimmi* introduces a set of rights and obligations that differ from those of Muslims. Only 'people of the book' (*ahl al-*

kitab) are accepted into *dhimmitude* by IS. These include Christians, Jews and certain other monotheist sects that follow the Bible, such as the Sabeans.[49] Whether the Sabean-Mandeans of Iraq belong to the Sabeans, and hence *ahl al-kitab*, or whether they are counted among the *mushrikun* (such as Yezidis) has been a subject of scholarly controversy for centuries, among Sunni and Shia scholars alike.[50] Similarly, IS considers Shia Muslims to be heretic and prohibits Shia practices such as worship at the graves of venerated people.

Although IS has reportedly allowed Christians to remain in some areas it controls if they convert or pay a 'tax', its militants have targeted Christians. IS's English language publication *Dabiq* lists numerous restrictions beyond taxation on Christians in its territory, and states that it is permissible to kill Christians who violate these rules and to seize their property.[51] In Mosul, IS militants marked the homes of Christian families with '*Nasarah*' and gave them until 19 July 2014 to leave the city, pay a tax and convert to Islam or face execution. IS confiscated all their property as Christian families fled the city, and those who departed received no compensation.[52] Almost at the same time, IS seemed to fully remove the tax option for Christians and issued a statement that the Christians had to convert or leave Mosul.[53]

Yezidis fall outside the *ahl al-kitab* category. While 'recognised minorities' theoretically face three options during IS offensives – conversion, subjection to *dhimmitude* or death, Yezidi men were only offered two – conversion or death. IS has justified its taking of slaves and their treatment, including sexual exploitation, on religious grounds.[54] Yezidi women were offered the 'choice' between conversion to Islam (and subsequent marriage to IS fighters) or to be sold as slaves in accordance with the IS interpretation of sharia rules on enemy females and children captured in war.

On 3 August 2014, IS begun targeting Yezidi settlements in Sinjar district. On the same day, *peshmerga* fighters in the area began to withdraw, while reportedly reassuring the local population of their safety. The IS attacks resulted in tens of thousands of Yezidis fleeing to Mount Sinjar for safety. After days of siege, Kurdistan Workers' Party People's Protection Unit (PKK-YPG) fighters crossed from Syria and opened a corridor, allowing many Yezidis to flee. The PKK-YPG and a local Yezidi militia group they helped to establish (YBŞ) were the major forces defending Sinjar until December 2014, when the *peshmerga* regained control of the north side of Sinjar.

Thousands of Yezidi men, women and children were killed or abducted. The women and girls were separated from the men and sold as domestic or sex slaves. They were moved between Syria and Iraq, raped repeatedly, beaten, verbally abused, incarcerated and denied food. Children were separated from their parents, and women and children were forced to convert to Islam.[55] In Kocho, Iraq, at least 700 Yezidi males were killed in August 2014. Men who refused to convert were taken to a farm and shot by IS fighters acting upon direct orders received via telephone.[56] In January 2016, 35 suspected mass graves of Yezidis in Sinjar were identified.[57]

The offensive against the Yezidis has been qualitatively different from that against other religious minorities – they have been exterminated as a policy objective. Several international fact-finding missions have subsequently indicated that some of the acts undertaken by IS in Iraq in 2014 may amount to genocide in the strict legal sense.[58] In February 2016, the European Parliament called upon the UN to refer IS abuses against civilians to the International Criminal Court (ICC) and for IS abuses against religious minorities to be considered as genocide.[59] The next month, the US Congress passed a resolution labelling actions perpetrated by IS against Christians, Yezidis and other religious and ethnic minorities in Iraq and Syria as war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide.[60] In June 2016, UN investigations similarly concluded that IS had committed genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes against Yezidis in Iraq and Syria.[61]

IS has destroyed homes, shrines and other buildings belonging to ethnic and religious minorities.[62] It established a unit specifically tasked with selecting and destroying prominent targets (Shia mosques, Christian churches and shrines).[63] It has destroyed notable archaeological and cultural heritage sites, including libraries and places of worship (see Annex II for examples). It has also looted museums and historical sites such as Palmyra in Syria, to raise revenue from the sale of antiquities. Estimates about how much income IS generates in this way vary, but it is widely agreed that it is in the hundreds of millions of US dollars. Many experts believe that IS is storing most of these looted items to sell at a later date. Current international regulations on selling antiquities are insufficient to stop this illegal trade.[64]

Minorities have also been exposed to abuses by other armed actors. Abuses committed by the Iraqi security forces and pro-government militias include shelling civilians and civilian infrastructure, abducting residents of recaptured areas and denying civilians access to safer areas at checkpoints.[65] In its efforts to regain control, the Government of Iraq has been supported by the popular mobilisation units, which are predominately Shia and have been accused of using child soldiers and committing serious human rights abuses against Sunnis. In areas under IS control, the Government of Iraq and its supporters have killed and injured civilians, mainly Sunnis, in indiscriminate airstrikes, hitting mosques and hospitals. In areas recaptured from IS, there have been reports of extra-judicial killings by government-affiliated forces.[66]

Anecdotal evidence suggests that armed groups associated with persecuted minorities also engage in attacks on civilians. One episode cited by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) apparently took place in January 2015. Reportedly, a Yezidi armed group[67] attacked Sunni Arabs in two villages north of Sinjar – Al-Sibaya and al-Jeri. Some 20 people were shot dead, including children, women and elderly people, and the villages were burned and looted. Around 17 people were abducted and the inhabitants of both villages were displaced. Reports of such incidents risk triggering further retaliatory attacks.

The population of Syria

The population size and demographic composition of Syria can only be estimated. Before 2011, there were around 23 million people living in the country. Estimates in 2015 suggested that Sunnis constitute 74% of the population and are present throughout the country. Other Muslim groups, including Alawites, Ismailis and Shia, together make up an estimated 13% of the population. The Druze account for around 3% of the population and various Christian groups constitute around 8%.[68]

The majority of Syrian Christians adhere to Eastern and Oriental orthodoxy although there are also Catholic and Protestant churches in the country. Most Christians in Syria identify themselves with Arabic culture. The majority live in and around Damascus, Aleppo, Homs, Hama and Latakia, although significant numbers live in the Al-Hassakah governorate in the north-east of the country.[69] The majority of Alawites live in the mountainous areas of the coastal Latakia governorate, but they have a significant presence in the cities of Latakia, Tartous, Homs and Damascus. Many of the Druze live in the rugged Jabal al-Arab region in the southern governorate of Suweida, where they constitute the vast majority of the local population. There is also a Yezidi population of approximately 80,000, primarily in the north-east and Aleppo, but the government does not recognise these people as belonging to a faith distinct from Islam. The few remaining Jews in Syria (100-200) are concentrated in Damascus and Aleppo. While Sunni Arabs are predominant in the eastern provinces, Kurds dominate in the north and Alawites to the west, many religious minorities are mostly located in the centre of Syria, in the most populous areas around Aleppo in the north and Damascus in the south.

In addition, Syria has hosted 1.5–2 million Iraqi refugees who fled following the US-led invasion and subsequent violence, and more than half a million Palestinian refugees displaced after the creation of the state of Israel in 1948.

Table 2 summaries the different religious and ethnic groups in Syria in 2016. As in the case of Iraq, these figures are estimates since there has not been any recent census or reliable demographic study on which to base them. Recent widespread displacement and migration are also further complicating the picture.

Table 2: Main religious and ethnic groups in present-day Syria			
Majority[70]	**Population 2016**[71]	**Religion**	**Location**
Sunnis	74% of the population	Sunni Muslim	Predominantly in the eastern provinces
Minority	**Population**	**Religion**	**Location**
Alawites	Approximately 11% of the population	Shia Muslim/Alawite[72]	North-west coastal region, Damascus, Homs and Hama
Druze	About 3% of the population	Muwahhideen	Jebel Druze on south-west border with Jordan, Golan, four villages south of Damascus, 14 villages north of Aleppo in Idleb Province
Ismailis	2%	Shia Muslim	Mostly east of Hama
Christians	Around 1,4 million[73]	Main Christian denominations: - The Greek Orthodox Church of Antioch - The Greek Catholic Church - The Syriac Orthodox Church of Antioch - The Syriac Catholic Church of Antioch - The Armenian Church - Other Christian churches	All over Syria, mainly in large cities (Damascus, Aleppo, Homs, Hama), also in the coastal area (Latakia, Tartous), in the mountains, in Huran and in the north (Quamishli, Deir el-Zor)
Circassians	50,000–100,000	Predominantly Sunni Muslim	Concentrated in Harwan Province
Turkmen	500,000–3 million	Mostly Sunni Muslim	Aleppo, Damascus and Hama
Kurds	Approximately 10–15% of the population	Mostly Sunni Muslim	North of Aleppo and around the Turkish border About 10–15% live on the outskirts of Damascus
Yezidis	Fewer than 80,000	Yezidism	North-eastern- and Kurd-Dagh areas
Jews	100–200	Judaism	Damascus and Aleppo
Palestinian refugees[74]	450,000	Mostly Sunni Muslim	Around 30% live in official camps, the rest are settled throughout the country

Background to the current conflict in Syria

Under the Ottomans, Sunni Muslims were the privileged community in Syria. The French saw themselves as the protector of religious minorities – the Maronites, Alawites, Druze and Ismailis – and toyed with the idea of creating separate states for minority groups. It was under the French that Alawites began to emerge from their rural highlands and enjoy a certain amount of autonomy. Along with other minorities, whom the French deemed 'reliable', the Alawites joined the *Troupe spéciales du Levant* (Levant special forces), establishing the Alawites military tradition. At the time of Syrian independence in 1946, the Alawites were well-placed in the military, an institution that few Sunnis had joined.[75]

The Ba'th Party became popular in Syria during the 1950s and 1960s. It appealed to Alawites and other religious minorities because its promotion of pan-Arabism meant that minorities could be integrated into the state as Arab Syrian citizens rather than being seen as members of a particular confession. Minorities were divided – some continued to argue for separate states but this claim almost disappeared when Ba'thism became the dominant ideology. As the Ba'th Party gained more parliamentary seats, it allied itself with powerful military elements. This enabled more Alawites to move into senior political and military positions so that by the time Hafez al-Assad came to power, the Alawites were well established in Syria's military, security and political apparatus. Since 1970, Hafez al-Assad and his son, Bashar al-Assad, who succeeded his father in 2000, have consolidated this position.

The Assad regime, with a religious minority as a power base, has been able to dominate the whole of Syria. The main pillars of the regime include the close family circle, the military and various security and intelligence services ultimately led by a family member or trusted person from the same community. The regime also controlled the business elite, which became dependent on good relations with the country's leaders for its wealth. The Assad regime applied the same policy to religious institutions. Its largest opposition to the regime was Islamist, represented by the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood throughout the 1970s. This force was violently crushed in Hama in 1982, weakening Islamist political aspirations in the country.

The current armed conflicts in Syria began in 2011 when popular reform movements swept through the Middle East and northern Africa, leading to demonstrations seeking political and economic change from the authoritarian regime of Bashar al-Assad. Syria descended into fully-fledged civil war in 2012, after the regime's violent response to the demonstrations caused the majority of casualties and destruction to date.[76] This led to the popular uprising becoming militarised, and gradually mostly Islamised, with radical armed Islamic groups occupying and controlling large parts of the country.

Since then, Syria has become the scene of many disputes, as the instability of the region and the involvement of global and regional powers has played out inside, and across, its borders. At its core, the current armed conflict is between Assad's government forces and opposition militias, the government and IS, and IS and other militias vying for territory. The variety of religious identities in the country, combined with the government being dominated by the Alawite minority, contribute to the particular dynamics of this conflict, as different religious groups align with different factions in the civil war. With the 2013 arrival in Syria of IS from Iraq, the sectarian dimensions of the conflict have intensified. In addition, Syria has become the theatre of two significant challenges: the influx of foreign fighters seeking to join various parties in the war, and global involvement in multiple power struggles between both regional and international influences. While the former has increased the brutality of the war in Syria, the latter has prevented any realistic prospect for its swift resolution.

Discrimination and sectarian violence in Syria prior to 2011

Pew Forum's index catalogued Syria as a country with 'high' government restrictions on religion in its first two reports in 2009 and 2011, and 'very high' in the following one in 2012. In the 2009 and 2012 Pew Forum's social hostility indexes, a measure to gauge hostilities both between and within religious groups,[77] Syria scored 'high'. Sunni representatives strongly claim that there is a history of structural discrimination against Sunnis inside Syria.[78] This is in sharp contrast with responses to a 2016 NCA-led survey inside Syria, which found evidence of generally widespread religious tolerance among people prior to the 2011 crisis. The vast majority of respondents to that survey (93%) said that insults or attacks to do with someone's religion were not common before the crisis, with 74.8% saying that they almost never happened.[79] Non-Alawite Shiites were most likely to report that insults were fairly or very common (14%), followed by Syriac Catholics (11%) and Evangelical Christians (10%). Intolerance was most commonly reported in Al-raqqa (19%), municipal Damascus (15%), rural Damascus (13%) and Al Hasakah (9%). Only 3% of respondents (70) felt they needed to hide their religion: Evangelical Christians (6%), Maronites (4%) and Shiites (4%).[80]

Overall, Syrians – irrespective of their religious denomination and walks of life –reported religious respect prior to 2011.[81] However, there is anecdotal evidence from focus group discussions of underlying divisions and religious segregation. This includes different sports clubs for Muslim and non-Muslim members, which engaged in fights, and personal experiences of harassment – although, in some cases this could be more related to socio-economic and educational differences and the rural-urban divide than to religious affiliation. Whatever latent feelings of confessionalism existed, there is a degree of agreement among Syrians that the armed struggle and war stirred sectarianism,[82] as described by a young Christian Syrian: "*Before the war, there was the feeling of confessionalism but maybe it was hidden. People would try to figure out who you were by asking your name ('is it a Christian name?') or where you came from. After the war broke [out], there was blunt and open questioning.*"[83]

The impact of the current conflict on minorities in Syria

Although the Assad regime argued that the 2011 uprising was initiated by Jihadists and targeted Sunnis as unrest grew, the initial protests were rooted in social discontent and demands for human rights for all Syrians, as well as a legacy of grievances among certain groups.[84] Findings from a 2015 survey of Syrians by an opposition-affiliated NGO pointed out near-consensus among Sunni respondents in supporting the 2011 opposition demonstrations, whereas Alawites' and Shias' answers highlighted positions against them. More than half of Christian respondents and the largest proportion of Murshidis (an Alawite break-away group) supported the demonstrations (48.4%), whereas a considerable proportion of Druze and Ismaili respondents opposed them. The perception of sectarian discrimination as the main reason for the anti-regime demonstrations in 2011 was higher among Islamists than secular respondents, as well as among those with lower incomes and lower education levels.[85]

In 2011, early in the Syrian conflict, some Christians complained about the regime's attempts to link this minority religious community to political support of the regime. The regime sponsored and facilitated pro-government demonstrations in Christian areas of Damascus. This diluted the narrative that Alawites formed the main base of the regime, since Christians and Druze were apparently backing the regime. Opposition members, on the other hand, tended to highlight these pro-regime demonstrations as evidence of the regime's attempts to stoke sectarianism to justify its crackdown. When Assad security forces targeted Christian and Alawite anti-regime activists, many opposition members interpreted this as a sectarian response, as minorities opposing the regime undermined its claim that it was fighting 'Sunni extremists'.[86]

The Assad regime and the opposition in Syria have both sought the support of religious minorities to prove or illustrate the sectarian nature of their adversaries, to broaden their base and the legitimacy of their struggle and to delegitimise the enemy's position. Even in 2012, early on in the conflict, there were credible reports of ethnic cleansing of mixed neighbourhoods in Homs. Sunni Muslim civilians were massacred in villages located in majority Alawite areas, such as Houla and Qubair. This prompted revenge massacres in Alawite villages, such as in Aqrab and Hatla.[87] When a UN report released in December 2012 stated that the conflict in Syria had "*become overtly sectarian in nature*" between mostly Alawite government forces, militias and other Shia groups fighting primarily against Sunni-dominated rebel groups, both opposition and government forces forcefully denied the claim.[88] During 2013, opposition forces increasingly attacked Syrian Shias, and more specifically the Alawites, through sieges, shelling and destroying their religious centres.[89] In 2014, it was obvious that the level of 'religious hostilities' in Syria was on the rise.[90]

Simultaneously, a number of outside actors entering Syria were stoking the sectarian nature of the civil war – including the Lebanese Shia Muslim militia Hezbollah, Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards and Shia fighters from Iraq, all in support of Assad.[91] The mutual declaration of war between Shia Hezbollah and the Iraqi Sunni Muslim group IS in the summer of 2013 increased Sunni-Shia tensions in Syria. The influx of a large number of Sunni Muslim foreign fighters into the opposition, and the proliferation of Shia militias from neighbouring countries on the side of the regime (particularly after the call to *jihad* – holy war – against IS by Ali al-Sistani in the summer of 2014) has to some extent imported the sectarian Sunni-Shia divide from Lebanon and Iraq into the Syrian conflict.

In several areas, members of religious minorities in Syria have been forced to choose sides in the escalating political conflict between larger sectarian groups. In situations of non-international armed conflict or where non-state armed groups exercise control, minorities have been exposed to additional risks – they may be targeted because they are either associated with another non-state armed group or the state.[92] Some religious minorities' position in the political conflict, supporting the regime and the Syrian state for their own protection, has produced a high percentage of minorities (like Alawites) in the regime's armed forces – and suffering a disproportionately large number of casualties.[93] Religious minority groups in Syria have also been subject to varying degrees of military conscription, ranging from social pressure to threats of imprisonment.

The Syrian regime implicitly refers to its broad sectarian basis as a way to gain legitimacy, leading to tendencies to extend attribution for the regime's acts to Christians and other Shia sects. Alawite and Shia youth have reported Sunni colleagues threatening them in schools and universities due to their religious affiliations and perceived support for the government.[94] The type of explicit and visible distancing from regime policies required to counter this pattern of attribution would in all likelihood expose a religious minority to government reprisals. Religious minorities that do not choose sides in the Syrian conflict are subject to pressure, suspicion, allegations of collusion and violent attacks.[95]

The conflict parties are also waging a war of misinformation and propaganda, to gain the allegiance of minorities. Rumours of violent acts and manipulated facts are being spread by traditional and social media, as well as word of mouth, to increase minorities' feelings of being targeted, fear of vulnerability, and thus their inclination to seek protection.

"*I lived in a suburb of Damascus, where Christians were lower in numbers [than] Muslims. Christians respected the Muslims and their celebrations, and they also respected us, our celebrations. This was one of the first suburbs uprising and the oppression was terrible, with constant shelling. One day, our Muslim neighbours warned 256 Christian families when al Nusra was coming and took us to a safer area in Damascus. Later on, our church was put on fire by al Nusra and the same group published it on the Internet, stating that is was destroyed from bombing by the regime.*" Christian woman from Damascus, Beirut, September 2016

Such rumours also serve to signify religious minorities' support for one side in the civil war. There have been unconfirmed reports that the Assad regime's Facebook and Twitter accounts displayed pictures of Christians celebrating the opposition defeat and deaths in Aleppo.[96] Knowledgeable Christians from Aleppo were not aware of such actions and denied the veracity of this claim – if such reports exist on social media, they may include manipulated imagery of end of summer celebrations.[97]

Religious minorities who dwell in the border areas

This five years old Yezidi girl has just been released from IS captivity. The extended family is taking care of her and her brother. There is no information about their parents. They do not remember their mother tongue, they only speak the language of their captors – Arabic.

where IS and other major Sunni Arab armed groups have attempted to capture land from the regime, particularly in the province and city of Homs, have been disproportionately affected by attempts to drive them away. IS has directly targeted minorities in Syria for extermination, as in Iraq. An episode that indicates IS's intent to exterminate took place in Al-Taliliyah (Al-Hasakah, Syria) on 29 May 2014, when IS attacked a village that used to contain a Yezidi community. The village had been taken over by IDPs, most of whom were women and children from Al-Safira near Aleppo. IS fighters – mainly foreign fighters who did not speak Arabic and so could not understand the protestations of those they were killing – believed their victims to be Yezidi Kurds. The executions halted when an Iraqi IS fighter arrived and confirmed to his fellow fighters that the civilians were Sunni Arabs.[98]

On 23 February 2015, IS attacked the Assyrian villages in Khabour region and held more than 250 people (men, women, children, old and young) hostages for more than a year. The Assyrian Church of the East mobilised its financial resources under the leadership of the Syrian diocesan bishop Mar Aprem. After complicated negotiations and paying an undisclosed sum of US dollars in ransom, the church secured the release of more than 240 of these people. During this process, IS killed three hostages and broadcast the killings online. IS control of Khabour and fighting to regain the region, in addition to other factors, led to the near-eradication of Assyrian Church of the East members in Khabour. Out of more than 15,000, just a couple of hundred people, mostly old people, stayed. Others headed to Lebanon to be settled in diaspora countries – thousands have already managed to be resettled.

In Al-raqqa, attacks on Shia Husaynias and homes caused mass displacement, while other Shias converted in order to survive. The destruction of the Uwais Al-Qarni Shia Mosque and the desecration of seventh-century tombs on 31 May 2014 were carried out as part of an assault against Shias in the area. Sunni mosques constructed around the tombs or shrines of religious figures have been considered idolatrous and also destroyed by IS.[99]

Language used in the Syrian conflict may be intrinsically sectarian, stir up tensions and reopen old wounds. In July 2016, opposition groups announced the Ibrahim al-Youssef-offensive to break the Syrian government's siege in Aleppo. The offensive was named after a captain at the Aleppo Artillery Academy, who in June 1979 led an attack that killed 32 Alawite students and wounded 54. A common anti-Alawite (and anti-regime) slogan is a unifying motto for a diverse set of armed groups involved in it: 'unified against the regime'.

In October 2015, as Russian airstrikes in opposition-held areas of northern Syria were intensifying, the head of the Al-Nusra Front, Abu Mohammad al-Joulani, called for indiscriminate attacks on Alawite villages in Syria, saying: "*There is no choice but to escalate the battle and to target Alawite towns and villages in Latakia*". While the direct targets were Alawites, the objective was to pressure Assad and the Russians to ease the bombing. In other words, Alawite villages were serving as hostages because they represented an accessible way to get at the Alawite Assad. In 2015, a case was made before the UN Human Rights Council for the protection of Alawites (notably Alawite civilians on Ansari Jebel in north-east Syria), on account of high levels of animosity towards them because of the regime's Alawite links and the high proportion of Alawites in the officer corps.[100] These acts are all war crimes under international law – because they directly target civilians, are reprisals against civilians and involve hostage-taking.[101] However, they are primarily driven by sectarian hatred.

CHAPTER 3 – THE HUMANITARIAN CONTEXTS IN SYRIA AND IRAQ

" Refugees come from different backgrounds. One must study the community to understand their needs."
Christian male, local NGO worker,
Erbil, Kurdistan region, September 2016.

" One day our landlord attacked me, he was carrying a gun, and we had to run for our lives. We couldn't tell anyone for fear of the consequences."
Young female Syrian refugee,
Beirut, Lebanon, February 2016.

More than six years in, the conflict in Syria has become the worst humanitarian crisis since the Second World War and continues to take a heavy toll on the Syrian population. As of September 2016, some 13.5 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance and protection inside Syria, where more than 6.1 million people are internally displaced.[102] In the first six months of 2016, 900,000 people were displaced – an average of 5,000 per day.[103] As of August 2016, more than 10 million Iraqis required some form of humanitarian assistance, including 3.4 million internally displaced people, many of whom had been displaced two or three times. Between January and August 2016, more than 280,000 Iraqi people were displaced.[104] Neighbouring countries are hosting more than 4.7 million registered Syrian refugees[105] and over 238,000 Iraqi refugees.[106]

The region-wide response to this humanitarian crisis is directed by the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (3RP), which brings together the governments of Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey and Egypt, UN agencies, inter-governmental organisations, and local and international NGOs. The 2016–2017 3RP relies on more than 200 partners to deliver its regional sector strategies to support resilience (protection, food security, education, health and nutrition, basic needs, shelter, water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), livelihood and social cohesion).[107] In Iraq, the 3RP is complemented by a 2016 Humanitarian Response Plan targeting populations in critical need throughout the country, with five strategic objectives (reach as many people in need as possible; give options to families to live in Iraq with dignity; support voluntary, safe and dignified returns; bridge critical social protection gaps; and help people brutalised by violence to cope and recover from trauma).[108]

This section investigates the humanitarian needs of conflict-affected Syrian and Iraq populations and on-the-ground responses by humanitarian actors. The focus of interest is on how similar or differentiated these needs are among different population groups and how well the humanitarian response system is geared towards those different needs.

Humanitarian needs in Syria

The effects of the prolonged war on the Syrian population have been overwhelming. According to the UN, more than two-thirds of the Syrian population has no consistent access to safe water, more than half of public healthcare facilities are either closed or only partially functioning,

Most urgent need by region - Syria (%)

■ Primary health assistance ■ Secondary health assistance ■ Food items ■ Housing ■ Other

Region	Primary health assistance	Secondary health assistance	Food items	Housing	Other
Damascus (rural)	36,8	3,8	14,3	34,6	10,5
Homs	29,4	17,4	19,4	16,4	17,4
Tartus	36,4	11,1	26,2	14,1	12,1
Aleppo	37,5	17,0	22,2	2,8	20,5
Damascus	23,4	3,7	13,5	49,5	9,9
Daraa	24,1	11,7	45,9	4,5	13,8
Hama	17,1	35,7	32,9	—	14,3
Al Hasakah	23,9	2,0	48,2	11,9	13,9
Latakia	15,1	2,2	13,8	56,0	12,9

and more than 11 million people require health assistance as a result of the armed conflict. Moreover, 6.7 million people are unable to obtain the basic foods required to meet their needs, 2.4 million Syrians lack access to adequate shelter and four out of five people in Syria live in poverty.[109]

According to an NCA survey conducted inside Syria, location within the country is a significant factor in people's access to services. However, health assistance, food and housing are the three most important needs throughout the entire country, reflecting priority needs identified by the UN (see Figure 1, Syria 2016) for a geographic breakdown[110]). Food items remain the most critical need across the country, and was identified by 80.4% of respondents as their most urgent need. Responses to this question reflected no statistically significant difference based on religious affiliation.

The fact that the most urgent, life-threatening needs do not vary between religious majority and minority groups is backed up by discussions with Syrians[111] as well as an analysis of self-reported data collected by a Syrian faith-based organisation as part of its needs assessment and registration process. In Damascus, the top three most urgent needs ('serious problem') are the same for both Christian Syrians and other Syrians, ranked in the same order: 1. 'income or livelihood'; 2. 'keep clean'; 3. 'food'. The similarities in priorities between these religious groups continue for the most of the 26-item scale. 'Place to live in' stands out, however, as a difference between the two groups, as it is nine positions lower for Christian Syrians than for others. There are also smaller differences on 'protection from violence for women in your community' and 'alcohol or drug abuse in your community', both of which rank four places higher in terms of importance for Christians than others.[112]

A comprehensive assessment of the current impact of GBV throughout Syria, coordinated by the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) Global Protection Cluster in 2016, found that domestic violence, child marriage, sexual harassment and sexual violence are threats that affect women and girls across Syria. The existence of polygamy, temporary marriages and the vulnerability of female-headed households (divorcees, widows and households with a temporary male absence due to conscription, detention or emigration) also came out in the assessment. Household-level intra-family violence identified by the assessment is creating a vicious circle of violence in the community (men towards women, mothers towards children, children towards each other, etc.).

Changing employment roles were another pattern identified by the UNFPA, with the conflict empowering women to enter paid employment. Women and girls have faced additional movement restrictions linked to several factors – insecurity, rules imposed by extremist groups, lack of documentation, cultural norms, fear of outsiders and self-imposed restrictions because of fear of violence. The same assessment found that women are more likely to report difficulties in accessing aid, particularly widows, female divorcees and wives of detainees.[113] In spite of evidence suggesting differences along religious lines,[114] the assessment lacks the granularity to highlight key findings on how women, men, girls and boys with different ethnic and religious background are facing these vulnerabilities.
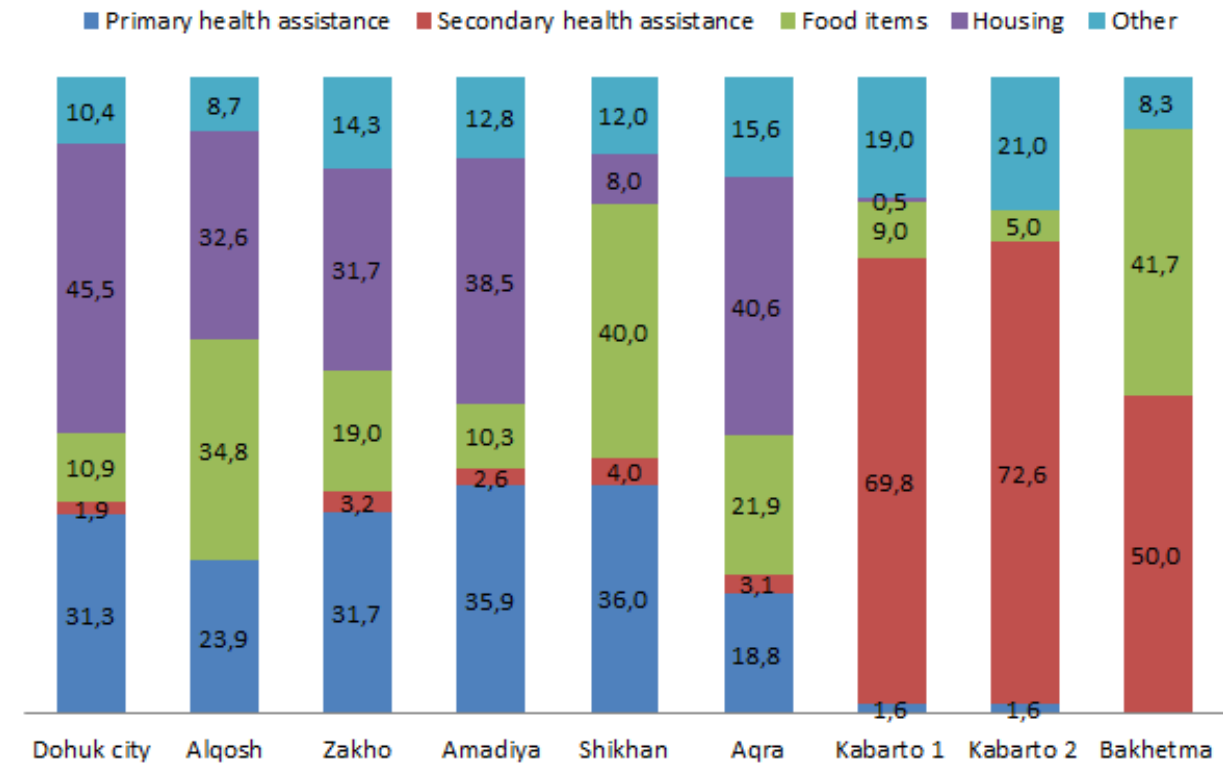
Humanitarian needs in Iraq

From January 2014 to August 2016, more than 3.3 million Iraqis were displaced – with the Kurdistan region hosting almost 1 million of these people. According to estimates by the KRG, the population of the region increased by 28% due to the influx of IDPs.[115] Dahuk governorate in the Kurdistan region hosts almost 400,000 IDPs, of whom 99% are from Nineveh governorate. The spread of IS across northern Iraq can clearly be seen in the timing of displacement, with the majority of IDPs (82%) displaced in August 2014. In terms of shelter arrangements, 38% of the IDP population is housed in camps, 22% in critical shelter arrangements and 41% in private settings.[116] Some 62,300 people were displaced in surrounding areas between March and October 2016, and the military offensive to retake Mosul threatens to produce one of the largest human-made displacement crises of recent times.[117] According to a UN prognosis, and depending on how the Mosul crisis evolves, as many as 12–13 million people in Iraq may require some form of humanitarian assistance by the end of 2016.[118]

NCA's survey in Dohuk governorate in March–May 2016, among a group predominantly comprising Christians (51%) and Yezidi (37%),[119] shows a uniformly critical view of their current living conditions – with 71% describing them as 'poor' and 24% as 'fair'. Respondents living in camps were significantly more likely to describe this situation negatively than those living outside camps. This effect is not due just to the camps themselves, but stems primarily from the fact that camp residents have both lower income and employment levels, affecting respondents' current living situations. Only 19% of camp residents were employed, compared to 25% of non-camp residents.[120]

More than half of respondents (54%) judged their current living situation to be worse than their living conditions six months previously (33% said they were a lot worse) and only 9% noted any improvement in the previous six months.[121] People's location within northern Iraq is a significant factor when it comes to accessing services (see Figure 2, Iraq 2016). For example, in the camps (Karbato 1&2 and Bakhetma) secondary healthcare was by far the most urgent need, whereas in non-camp areas respondents stated that primary healthcare, housing and food items were more urgent.

Most urgent need by region - Kurdistan region (%)

Legend: ■ Primary health assistance ■ Secondary health assistance ■ Food items ■ Housing ■ Other

Region	Primary health assistance	Secondary health assistance	Food items	Housing	Other
Dohuk city	31,3	1,9	10,9	45,5	10,4
Alqosh	23,9		34,8	32,6	8,7
Zakho	31,7	3,2	19,0	31,7	14,3
Amadiya	35,9	2,6	10,3	38,5	12,8
Shikhan	36,0	4,0	40,0	8,0	12,0
Aqra	18,8	3,1	21,9	40,6	15,6
Kabarto 1	1,6	69,8	9,0	0,5	19,0
Kabarto 2	1,6	72,6	5,0		21,0
Bakhetma		50,0	41,7		8,3

Representatives from minority groups in Iraq confirmed that the main, basic needs are the same among groups, although there are some differences in the degree of vulnerability between minority groups. For example, Christian community leaders stated that Yezidis are in greater need than Christians, and also more neglected.[122] Current expectations among members of religious minorities are linked to their standards of community and family life before the crisis. There is also a correlation between the satisfaction of needs and the existence of community structures and self-organisation, an area in which Christians have a higher mobilisation capacity and other groups are significantly weaker.[123] In the words of a Yezidi representative: *"We do not have official institutions nor representatives in international fora as Christians do. Christians have churches and networks, Shias get support from their communities in Iran. We just wait for help from international organisations. And when all of this help comes, Yezidis are getting only 'the ear of the camel'."*[124]

As in Syria, evidence from the Kurdistan region confirms the intuitive assumption that people's basic needs in a humanitarian crisis are the same, irrespective of ethno-religious background. However, people's religious background, conflict experience and pre-2014 discrimination generate a distinctive set of needs that require a different type of approach. For religious minorities in Iraq, this is especially evident in terms of educational needs and experiences of CRSV.

In Iraq, it is widely recognised that education provision is inadequate. Equipment and school buildings have been largely destroyed and the education on offer has not been adapted to meet the needs of children traumatised by violence or who have missed extended periods of schooling.[125] Children who have been displaced to the Kurdistan region are facing particular difficulties. The educational environment differs from what they are used to and lessons are conducted in Kurdish rather than Arabic. Language barriers[126] and high school official examination validation procedures are also preventing students who have been displaced to the north from attending university. It has been reported that Christians and Yezidis are among those struggling to adapt to the education system in the Kurdistan region.[127] On top of that, minority groups speak of how non-Muslim Iraqis are being described in teaching materials in discriminatory and derogatory ways, and of education being politicised.

The level of protection and services in Iraq directed at women exposed to violence during conflict remains poor.[128] IS's sexual violence, including rape committed against Yezidi women and girls, has been widely reported. To a lesser extent, IS sexual violence against Christian, Turkmen Shia and Arab Sunni and Shia women and girls has also been documented. During captivity by IS, the mental and psychological health of victims deteriorates as they are kept in inhumane conditions with no concern for their basic needs. A reintegration process that considers the cultural and religious tradition of the Yezidis has proven effective in bringing some of these women and girls back into society (see text box on page 25). Other groups and religious minorities, like Turkmen, are showing interest in learning from that process.[129]

This Yezidi woman is participating in a program in the Lalish temple among other women who have survived and managed to flee from IS enslavement.

Best practice: Reintegrating enslaved Yezidi women into society
NCA's partner organisation Yazda, in cooperation with the Yezidi religious leadership in Lalish (a Yezidi holy place outside Dohuk) has developed a reintegration process for women survivors of IS captivity.

At the beginning of the reintegration programme, these women visit Lalish for a few days, receive counselling and undergo cleansing rituals, before being publicly welcomed back to the Yezidi community by the clergy in Lalish. Clergy members also publicly state that the women are in no way responsible for what happened to them, and that they should be received back into their families and communities without any resentment or prejudice.

In September 2016 alone, Yazda took 38 women survivors to Lalish. To Yazda's knowledge, no woman who has undergone this process has been rejected by her family. Some female survivors in Iraq have taken their lives after their return to freedom, but this has not been the case for Yezidi women supported by this programme.

14 years old Madeline got a mental shock when she and her family got caught in a crossfire in Daraa in Syria, and became paralyzed. Her father Mohammad is carrying her around.

Modes of expressing distress – how women, men, girls and boys explain and make sense of their health symptoms and how they seek help – are culture-specific, rooted in religion and social norms.[130] In Iraq, women's and girls' religious and ethnic background are critical factors in understanding and meeting the needs of GBV and CRSV survivors. For example, trust in service providers is necessary for them to come forward, and in some instances women feel more comfortable receiving support from case workers from the same faith. For example, the Baghdad Women Association enables Shia women to support Shia female survivors, as it is perceived that only Shia women can fully understand the hardship they have endured. Furthermore, it is believed that this group will only attend counselling provided by Shia women due to higher levels of trust and family acceptance of going to the centre. If counselling or training does not reflect these sensitivities, few women will access and benefit from it. Sensitivities to women's family and community culture are also important in supporting survivors of GBV and rape as issues around privacy, domestic habits and tradition sometimes differs – failing to take these into account could prevent women from accessing the support they need.[131]

The interplay of service needs and religious background is arguably no less strong for Syrian women and girl survivors of these crimes. One GBV survivor now in Lebanon illustrates this point well: "*People used to advise me to seek help from [the] Sheikh, as they thought I was haunted by evil spirits*."[132] GBV and CRSV survivors and case workers in Lebanon state that Syrian and Iraqi survivors' religious affiliations intersect with their vulnerabilities and available services in different ways. For example, the legal protection order issued by the civil court (based on Law 293) contradicts the custody age regulated by religious courts. Employment opportunities[133] and referrals to social and economic service providers are also affected by religious background. A quarter (25%) of women interviewed for a GBV and CRSV rapid assessment conducted for this study indicated that their religious affiliation (and their nationalities) negatively affected their access to services. Two out of three women indicated that they could not access services due to religious beliefs that hinder their mobility, as they need a male figure – *Mahram* – to accompany them in public. Moreover, they indicated that they would be reluctant to access services provided by international NGOs. Similarly, 20% of the women interviewed in Beirut and Mount Lebanon indicated that they approach religious institutions for either academic assistance (for children) or religious lessons.[134]

In spite of existing vulnerability differences based on ethnic and religious background and their relevance in meeting women and girls' protection needs, GBV and CRSV assessments are not always sensitive to these issues, nor directly tackling them.[135] Many humanitarian organisations do not currently consider ethnic and religious affiliation, and the significance of people's ethnic and religious background is overlooked in the way information is gathered. The same is true for the types of services provided, which prevents some people from accessing them – for example, awareness activities with refugee and host communities through public puppet or music shows may be a successful approach in some contexts but it not suitable for a village in Lebanon with a predominantly radical Islamic ideology.[136]

Humanitarian needs in neighbouring countries

In a focus group discussion in Akkar in North Lebanon, Syrian Sunni representatives expressed that Lebanon's failure to recognise Syrians fleeing the war at home as formal refugees complicates their lives. They remain in Lebanon with an unclear status, without the rights of formal refugees. They believed that if they were fully recognised and treated as refugees, their situation would be much more dignified and bearable until they could return to Syria.

According to findings from a survey among Syrian and Iraqi refugees coordinated by NCA, employment is a substantial challenge for many refugees in Lebanon – 65% of respondents were unemployed. Just over half (54%) of respondents ranked adequate and affordable housing as their most urgent unmet need and one-third (33%) needed primary health assistance most critically. These were the two most important needs among Syrians and Iraqis refugees throughout the country, though housing was needed more critically in the Beqa'a Valley and North Lebanon.[137]

The priorities for all refugees in Turkey interviewed for this study were shelter (housing) and food. Education, psychosocial support and employment opportunities have been sorely neglected for all groups of displaced Syrians and Iraqis in Turkey. Indeed, none of the refugee families in Turkey interviewed for this study have children who attend school, with the exception of some attendance at Sunday classes for children attending church.

Similarly to some IDPs in the Kurdistan region of Iraq, Syrian children in Lebanon are struggling with language. In Syria, the curriculum is taught in Arabic whereas in Lebanon, despite it being an Arabic-speaking country, many subjects are taught in English or French. In Turkey, Syrian children are faced with education delivered in Turkish.[138]

The government of Turkey recognises the Christian minority but does not recognise the Alevi community. Subsequently, Alevis in Turkey do not receive any state support and Alevi networks can only provide limited humanitarian assistance to refugees like Alawites from Syria. Many Alawite refugees in Turkey are located in Istanbul, are homeless and live in parks.[139] Where possible, an Alevi association supports them with bathing facilities, food, diapers and some money but is unable to offer them housing or further support due to its own limited financial resources. According to the representative from this organization interviewed, schools do not accept Alawite children. In the words of a Syrian Christian refugee woman, *"Christians are more privileged than Muslims – you won't find a Christian begging, for example, because the Church will help them"*.[140] The same cannot be said for the Alawite community. Yezidi in Turkey are also in a very vulnerable position, not benefiting from temporary protection as refugees and depending on aid provided by individuals, charities and NGOs.[141]

Aid registration levels among minority groups

Two years into the unrest and conflict in Syria, less than 1% of each minority community (Christian, Alawite, Ismaili, Mandean and Yezidi) was registered in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan or Lebanon.[142] Evidence suggests that Christians and Alawites who fled from Syria to Lebanon or Jordan in 2013 did not register with UNHCR, the UN refugee agency.[143] Similarly, research from 2014 shows that Syrian Christian and Druze refugees in Jordan often chose not to register with UNHCR.[144] Sectarian tensions and fears of reprisals were behind these refugees avoiding registration, along with the fact that the refugees had the means to cover some of their own needs.[145] Another reason for under-registration that clearly emerged from discussions with Christian refugees and IDPs from Syria and Iraq was less concerned with possible consequences and more with the act of registration itself: a sense of pride that made them less inclined to register as refugees.[146]

However, unsurprisingly this initial reluctance lessens as the severity of needs aggravates. As time goes by and the conflict and experience of displacement further erodes refugees' social or economic assets, the urgent need for assistance overrides other considerations. The vast majority of respondents to a survey conducted by NCA in Lebanon in 2016 (80%) were registered with, or had submitted their names to, UNHCR.[147] Of those *not* registered with UNHCR, 43% said it was because UNHCR stopped registering refugees, 19% because they did not know how to register, and 18% because they did not think it was useful. Almost half (49%) of all Syrian and Iraqi respondents were registered with an organisation other than UNHCR, including local charities, NGOs, churches and the government.

In the Kurdistan region of Iraq, 98% of the sample was registered with the Kurdistan regional authorities. Almost all (99%) of respondents were registered with an organisation other than the Kurdish authorities, to complement the support they could provide: 54% were registered with an NGO, 49% with a UN agency, 48% with a church organisation and 3% with a charity.[148]

Significant reasons for Syrian refugees surveyed in Lebanon *not* being registered with UNHCR included being Armenian Orthodox (59%) or Greek Orthodox (57%). While these findings should be taken with caution, as they could be the result of the survey design, reasons behind this could relate to these religious minorities having a sufficiently strong community support network in Lebanon. Reports indicate that Armenian Orthodox refugees can, and do, access services and support upon their arrival in Lebanon from locally active Armenian churches and Armenian NGOs, making the need to register with UNHCR to access services less acute. Similarly, resettlement through UNHCR is likely to be less necessary for Armenians, as their desire to return to Syria is higher than among other groups[149] and they have the option to flee to Armenia, a country with a strong connection and welcoming policy towards this group.[150]

Inside Syria, 83% of the respondents to a similar survey conducted by NCA were registered with at least one aid organisation. Controlling for a number of variables, respondents who were least likely to be registered with an aid organisation included Alawites, university graduates, current residents of metropolitan Damascus and Sweida, as well as younger respondents. Socio-economic status, as measured by pre-conflict profession, did not affect registration. Overall, registration status decreased in line with additional education (90% of respondents with no formal education were registered with an aid agency, versus 75% with a university degree).

Among respondents in Syria who had registered with an organisation, 64% were registered with only one organisation, 34% with two organisations and 1% (21 respondents) with three or more organisations. One-third (33%) of registered respondents were registered with an NGO and 71% with a church. Respondents who registered with a church were more likely to rely solely on its support as it was the only organisation with which they were registered. Church registration was significantly higher for residents of Daraa (89%), al Hasakah (82%) and Aleppo (75%), and lower for residents of Latakia (39%), Sweida (18%) and Hama (10%), though these variations could be due to sampling strategies in these governorates. Age, employment, socio-economic and marital statuses were not significant factors in church registration. However, respondents with a university degree were significantly less likely to register with church organisations.

NGO registration in Syria was highest among Muslim respondents (54%),[151] compared to 24% of Christian respondents. This underscores the abovementioned reluctance by many Christians to publicly ask for assistance – especially because, before the crisis, many of them were more likely to be aid donors rather than recipients.[152] However, this could also be the result of real or perceived discrimination by certain NGOs against non-Muslims.[153] The relatively low level of Christians registered with NGOs contrasts with their registration rates for aid from church organisations. Among Christian respondents, registration with church aid providers was highest among Syriac Orthodox people (85%), Evangelicals (79%) and Syriac Catholics (70%), highlighting these groups' preference for this type of humanitarian aid channel.

Christian faith-based organisations in Syria provide aid based on humanitarian principles, to both Muslim and non-Muslim populations. As of September 2016, a Christian faith-based humanitarian organisation in Syria has among its registered beneficiaries 33,800 Muslim families and 8,781 Christian families from Syria, as well as 2,094 Muslim refugee families and 194 Christian refugee families and 22 Sabean-Mandean families from Iraq.[154] Registration with, and humanitarian delivery rates from, these organisations demonstrate trust for churches among the local population, independent of religion.

Church-based humanitarian organisations in Syria are frequently criticised by both other church-based institutions and Christian representatives for not helping the Christian communities more. These critics see the majority of the humanitarian support provided by these organisations being distributed to needy people who are not Christians, and also state that it is very difficult for non-Muslims to access support distributed through mosques. In response, church-based aid organisations maintain that their mandate is to provide support based on people's needs rather than their faith, in accordance with humanitarian principles. This approach is also based on the tradition of churches in Syria.

In spite of this criticism, Christians affected by conflict in Syria do have a support network in their churches. Trust and a sense of belonging make it easier for them to approach churches and related organisations to register for, and receive, humanitarian aid. The felt humiliation of some having to stand in line in public to await assistance vanishes when such assistance is provided in a sensitive way in the safe space of a church.

For Syrian and Iraqi Christian refugees, there is strong evidence that churches in countries like Jordan or Lebanon are their main point of contact and critical support when they arrive and throughout their stay. Although the majority of displaced people already have an established local contact before entering a new country, churches in host countries have developed their own informal 'referral system', redirecting Christians to the church of a particular denomination.[155] Nevertheless, there have been experiences of discrimination *between* and *within* Christian religious groups. Some groups report that they have been more excluded from services and assistance than members of other Christian groups, suggesting that certain religious leaders and organisations prioritize refugees from their own denomination.[156]

The impact of aid criteria and priorities on minority groups

Some Christian organisations providing humanitarian assistance believe the beneficiary criteria imposed by donors is a barrier to supporting religious minorities. One of the restrictions most commonly cited is family size. Syrian Christian families comprise, on average, four members, while the average Muslim family size is significantly higher – approximately 5.5 by some accounts.[157] This discrepancy is also clear from results of the NCA-conducted survey in Syria, where the average number of dependant children for a Muslim family was 2.4, whereas for a non-Muslim family it was 1.1. It has been reported that the vulnerability and beneficiary criteria applied by some donors prioritises families of more than four members, and government programmes may have similar shortcomings. It has been reported the cash assistance from the Government of Iraq is 1 million Iraqi dinar (around 800 US dollars) per family, regardless of its size, despite the fact that Yezidi families average 10 members.[158]

Similarly, some donors funding projects in Syria earmarked their financial assistance for displaced populations only, entirely excluding affected host communities. According to a Syrian Christian-based organisation, non-displaced Christian families are also badly affected by the conflict. These requirements have resulted in widespread complaints by Christian conflict-affected populations in Syria, and Christian refugees in neighbouring countries, about being marginalised in the delivery of humanitarian assistance.

Allocating assistance by nationality is also mentioned as an excluding factor that, when applied on the ground, leaves some population groups more vulnerable and generates tensions between different groups. In Lebanon, this approach has been denounced by a Christian-based organisation that serves refugees from Iraq and Syria,

Valentina is a refugee from Khabour in Syria. For one year she was a captive of IS. She now teaches and activates refugee children in an Assyrian Church in Lebanon.

as well as Lebanese people in a deprived area of Mount Lebanon. The organisation reports that funds allocated for providing assistance to Syrians are a source of tension between Syrians and Iraqis, as well as with members of the Lebanese host community.[159] Christian Iraqi refugees in Jordan also complain about being discriminated against in favour of Syrian refugees.[160]

In Turkey, according to a Syriac Orthodox Church representative, the church cannot support Iraqi refugees due to limited resources and the need to prioritise Syrian Christians. They cite two reasons for this. Firstly, donations from Turkish church members are often earmarked for Syrians. Secondly, the media and political focus has been on Syria, neglecting the 'Iraqi case', placing external pressure and expectations on the church to care for Syrians. This is not to say that Iraqi Christians were entirely neglected – they were able to attend and participate in church activities, access essential social support, and upon their initial arrival a few years earlier, received temporary accommodation. However, these Iraqi refugees are now primarily self-supporting, materially and financially. For example, although the Syrian Christian refugees interviewed were housed together and had all their expenses covered, Iraqi Christians were paying rent and other expenses from their savings or earnings from the little work they could find.[161]

Displacement and feelings of insecurity among minority groups

Due to sectarian tensions, harassment and intimidation, religious minorities tend to avoid mixed IDP and refugee camps. According to Yezidi representatives, some 200 displaced Yezidi families left IDP camps in the Kurdistan region because of humiliation and hate speech. Now, these families live in unfinished buildings around Erbil and lack assistance.[162] Yezidi refugees are reluctant to be settled in Syrian refugee camps run by the Turkish government as they fear others in the camps may be close to IS militants.[163] Similarly, Alawite refugees avoid Sunni-majority camps in southern Turkey.[164] Kaka'i hosted in the Kurdistan region also refer to feelings of insecurity and harassment as reasons for avoiding IDP camps.[165] Syrian Christian and Druze refugees in Jordan often avoid formal refugee camps, instead seeking lodging in urban centres – often living in monasteries, clustered housing or makeshift camps. In such settings, religious minorities experience isolation, stigmatisation and (perceived or real) discrimination in accessing humanitarian aid and assistance.[166]

Overall, IDP respondents to NCA's 2016 survey in the Kurdistan Region were positive about their safety situation; 70% of respondents reported feeling 'safe' or 'very safe' in their present location. However, levels of perceived safety varied significantly by location: residents in Alqosh (46% felt 'safe') and Kabarto 2 – an IDP camp – (42%) felt significantly *less* safe than residents of other locations, especially Zakho (97%), Dohuk City (95%) and Amadiya (90%).[167] A large majority of Christians (85%) reported feeling safe, a percentage very close to that of Muslims (80%). A significantly lower percentage of Yezidis reported feeling safe (48%).

Olivia kisses a picture of her father who was killed by IS in Tel Hermes in Syria. She and her two sisters and mother are now waiting for resettlement to Australia.

In general, respondents to a similar 2016 survey conducted by NCA in Lebanon were positive about their safety situation; 86% of respondents reported feeling either 'safe' or 'very safe' in their present location. However, respondents in Mount Lebanon reported significantly lower levels of perceived safety – with nearly a quarter (24%) reporting feeling unsafe compared to 5% in the Bekka Valley and 1% in North Lebanon. Overall, Sunnis felt slightly safer than members of other religious denominations, but this effect is less important than the effect of geographic location in Lebanon. These differences are in part due to regulations that some, but not all, municipalities have placed on refugee movement. Two-thirds of respondents (66%) reported that they could move freely in their current area, 9% reported that they could not, and another 25% reported only being somewhat free to move. Of those reporting restricted ability to move freely, more than 60% lived in Mount Lebanon.

In Turkey, while no Christian refugees interviewed for this study shared direct experiences of religious persecution or discrimination, some expressed caution about wearing visible signs of religious identity in public spaces. One Syrian Christian woman explained: *"It is not because they [local, Turkish Muslims] will physically attack us or try and hurt us. But because we do not know the language and there are cultural differences, maybe we won't know what they are saying. If they look at us funny then, you know, they may treat us differently. It's better not to wear one [a cross]"*.[168]

In contrast, members of the Alawite community have faced direct discrimination. For instance, when they were identified in camps in the south of Turkey, violence broke out between refugees forcing them to leave camps and stay in urban centres without housing and support. Outside the camps, they try to hide their religion as much as they can.[169]

CHAPTER 4 – PROSPECTS FOR THE FUTURE

"The problem is not rebuilding houses, but rebuilding mentally to live together peacefully."
Yezidi woman representative, Erbil, Kurdistan region, Iraq, September 2016

"Christians are not only part of the history of this land, but also need to be part of its future."
Chaldean male religious leader, Erbil, Kurdistan region, Iraq, September 2016

"Going back to do what? Besides the fact that our houses are destroyed, people there are destroyed too. Reconciliation and healing is a long process [that] many of us are not ready to go through. The Syria we knew no longer exists."
Young male Christian Syrian refugee, Beirut, Lebanon, February 2016

Although minorities from Syria and Iraq have some shared humanitarian experiences, there is a stark contrast between different groups' experiences of discrimination and conflict. These different experiences have left an imprint on individuals and communities, which influence how they see their future. For example, the precarious situation of minorities in Iraq has persisted for a decade longer than in Syria. And minority groups in Syria and Iraq who have been intentionally targeted for extinction or permanent displacement have a significantly different experience from other minorities.

This chapter explores the perspectives of Syrian and Iraqi minority groups on the possibility of their return, resettlement, reintegration and reconciliation in their home areas. It maps similarities and differences between and among those groups, and between minorities and the majority community, to better understand the opportunities and hindrances for effective short- and long-term support strategies.

Factors influencing displaced people's return

The causes of their displacement shape refugees' feelings, hopes and plans for returning to their home country or area. Many Syrian Christian refugees involved in research for this study said they would like to go back to Syria if the war ends.[170] The most common reasons for wanting to return were attachments to their country, the fact that their homes and occupations are in Syria, and the difficulties of life outside their own country. Those surveyed by NCA in Lebanon noted that differences between religious groups have intensified, to the extent that they may now be irreconcilable and make life back at home difficult. However, Iraqi Christian refugees surveyed were adamant that there would be no possibility of returning, even in the absence of IS. The sense of their sudden betrayal by Muslim neighbours and friends – and the trauma that minority communities have suffered, and continue to suffer, in Iraq – means that minorities who fled to neighbouring countries had few plans to return.[171]

For refugees in Lebanon, lack of security and loss of homes and jobs were the most commonly cited reasons for *not* wanting to return.[172] When insecurity escalates and families from a minority group start leaving an area,

this leads to distortions in the housing market. Other minorities try to sell their properties and leave as well but in the absence of buyers from the same community, members of the majority community can push the price down.[173] Assyrians from Al-Hassakah reported on land confiscation by the Kurds,[174] and there are unconfirmed reports by Assyrians of having to sell their real estate because of pressure from Kurds.[175]

Destruction or loss of housing, land or property, including documentation, is also a factor hindering return in Iraq.[176] Yezidis and Christians had been selling their houses in Mosul for minimum prices,[177] closing the door to return. Recognising this fact and its negative impact for Mosul, a Sunni Muslim religious leader in the Kurdistan region encouraged minorities to have a long-term perspective on returning home: *"Victims are to have courage and patience. Maybe this generation will not need these properties, but the next generation of Christians will."* However, in the face of their suffering, Christian leaders found it hard to ask Christians leaving Mosul to have the strength to return.[178]

In Sinjar, no Yezidi ownership of houses or lands is registered, complicating both selling and reclaiming property. As result of the Arabisation phase, Arabs held titles to their homes in this area, while Yezidis did not.[179] In cultures where customary land tenure is prevalent, such as that of the Yezidis, the particular situation of women must be considered when planning the return of displaced communities. According to Yezidi tradition, inheritances are habitually divided equally among a deceased man's sons (or brothers and male cousins if he has no sons) – daughters and wives do not receive a share. This is even more of an issue because it is far from uncommon to find women-headed Yezidi households as a result of armed persecution.[180]

For IDPs in the Kurdistan region, security is paramount. Some 59% of respondents to the NCA survey said that the total defeat of IS would be the most important factor in deciding to return home and 26% said they would require security guarantees from a trusted security actor. Reconstruction of homes and clearing mines and explosives were the other most important factors cited by these respondents.

A wide spectrum of IDPs want security provisions from a trusted actor. Many minority group research participants felt betrayed by the Iraqi federal authorities for their inexplicable military withdrawal from Mosul, and for the federal authorities' failure to mount any meaningful military, protection or humanitarian effort in response to the crisis.[181] Yezidi representatives expressed similar sentiments with regard to the *peshmerga*. They believe these forces withdrew from Yezidi-populated areas while providing misleading information about the life-threatening danger ahead and refusing to give Yezidis weapons for their own defence.[182]

Some Yezidi families have returned to villages in Sinjar district on the northern side of Mount Sinjar that have been retaken by Kurdish forces. According to a Yezidi organisation, most communities in that area were inhabited by Yezidi farmers. Returnee farmers have begun planting and are supporting many IDPs from the mountain's south side who have taken shelter there but received little or no aid from NGOs or governments.[183]

On the southern side of Sinjar Mountain, only the city of Sinjar has been retaken from IS – most Yezidi villages remain under IS control, though this could change soon with the potential liberation of the Mosul area from IS forces. However, most Yezidis have not returned to Sinjar city. The reasons for this are disputed, with interviewees mentioning the security situation, mass destruction of the city, lack of trust in the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) forces as security providers, and political disputes between the KDP and YBŞ as factors that have prevented resettlement. Many Yezidis have joined the YBŞ or other independent militias, and have established a Self-Administrative Council to develop local governance because they no longer trust KDP hegemony in the area. Areas in Sinjar to the west of Sinune village and towards the border with Syria are reportedly under the control of these Yezidi militias, while areas to the east are under KDP control.[184] In connection to those political disputes, Yezidi research participants denounced the unofficial economic blockade in Sinjar, where only small amounts of food for immediate consumption can be brought in,[185] and resettlement and rehabilitation is hampered.

As indicated by Kaka'i, Shaback, Yezidi and Christian respondents, another requirement for minorities before considering a return home is legislative and constitutional guarantees. In theory, the Iraqi Constitution caters to religious minorities, providing them with guarantees of political representation, administrative rights and rights linked to religious freedom. Yet some minorities expressed concern that these rights are not mentioned explicitly in the text, and questioned whether references to Islam as the official religion of Iraq and a foundation for its legislation may at some point be used to overrule other rights provided in the constitution.[186] The problem of the Iraqi Constitution has been enforceability. While the constitution acknowledges the multi-religious and multi-ethnic nature of Iraq, state entities have not implemented its provisions in response to the increasing vulnerability of religious minorities.

Similarly, certain groups of refugees face their own barriers to returning to their countries. Many Syrian Christian men[187] fled the country to avoid military service in the army, which prevents them from returning to government-controlled areas unless certain guarantees are given.

Sunnis and Armenian Orthodox refugees in Lebanon were the only denominations surveyed by NCA where more than 30% of respondents indicated a desire to return (33% and 42%, respectively). This is consistent with qualitative findings from interviews conducted for this study. Although Sunnis have lost as much property, and been as victimised, as other religious groups, the perception is that they are more focused on going back, and may not share Shias' fears about security and stigmatisation after their return, as they are more confident of being accepted in the communities they fled. As for Armenian Orthodox refugees, a possible dissatisfaction with resettlement options could explain their desire of some to return to their home areas. Armenian Orthodox are described as a strong, community-based group that wants to remain together, and they are a relatively large group compared with other Christian settlements.[188]

Deciding whether to resettle or flee

Differences between Syrians and Iraqis are also notable in their desire to emigrate. Two-thirds (67%) of Iraqi IDP respondents currently living in the Kurdistan region reported that they intended to emigrate to another country at some point.[189] In Syria, those longing to leave the country represent one-third (31%) of the surveyed population.[190] For refugees, the trends are similar but intensified: in Lebanon, virtually all Iraqi refugees (98%) and more than two-thirds of Syrian respondents (78%) surveyed by NCA wanted to emigrate.[191]

The desire to leave their country of origin is significantly higher among religious minorities, especially Christians. In Syria, 35% of Christians and 8% of Muslims surveyed wanted to emigrate;[192] In the Kurdistan region, 65% of Christians wanted to leave, in contrast with 12% of Muslims. The desire to leave the Kurdistan region is strongest among Yezidis (85% of Yezidi respondents). This percentage is higher than, but not far from, the estimate of a Yezidi organisation: "*If there would be [the] opportunity tomorrow, more than 75% of Yezidis would leave Iraq as they do not see [a] safe future here.*"[193]

According to statistics from the local Chaldean Archdiocese, 3,000 Chaldean families left Erbil in the Kurdistan region between June 2014 and June 2015.[194] The relatively high emigration rates of Christians from Iraq and Syria can be attributed to push and pull factors. Whereas push factors largely apply to religious minority and majority groups alike, some minority groups were specifically targeted for violence or driven out because of their religious identity. Pull factors have been particularly significant for Christians. Unlike some other groups, Christians can count on networks abroad. Furthermore, there is an impression among Syrian and Iraqi Christians across the region that some countries welcome Christian refugees, making it easier to integrate there and not be viewed as a threat by host communities.[195]

Survey data highlights two factors that *decreased* a respondent's desire to emigrate – being older and being Muslim. In Syria, Alawite respondents and those residing in the municipality of Damascus or Latakia were less likely to want to leave, possibly due to their higher levels of support for the Assad government and greater sense of safety.[196]

Kaka'i representatives interviewed for this study reported low emigration rates, but this seems to be more the result of challenges in the emigration process than a lack of desire to emigrate. These informants stated that, since others wrongly perceive them as Muslim – including those responsible for emigration applications – they are not deemed as vulnerable as they really are. They believe that their harassment and lack of acceptance by Muslims and IS are not considered in their plea for emigration.[197]

Some minority groups directly targeted by Islamic militant groups, and those who have lost their lands, often see resettlement abroad as their only way out and flee *en masse*. Some groups' current experience of prosecution and displacement needs to be viewed through the lens of historic massacres, displacement and self-preservation. The prospect of return among such groups that have strong collective memories are minimal or non-existent. The Assyrian community is a case in point: some 8,000 women, men and children from this community have come to Lebanon as refugees since the start of the Syrian crisis.[198] Once settled with assistance from their

church, the main priority for this community was to initiate emigration to a third country.[199] In September 2016, 185 people (45 families) in an Assyrian parish on the outskirts of Beirut planned to travel to Australia; another 90 people had confirmed emigration plans and tickets to leave the country in October. According to the church, practically all Assyrian refugees apply to an embassy for resettlement, most commonly through private sponsorship programmes.[200]

Minority groups' perspectives on reconciliation

There is stark contrast between the way that Iraqis and Syrians see the possibility of reconciliation and coexistence with their fellow nationals following the conflict. In general, Iraqis' sense of hope on this matter is significantly weaker than that of Syrians.

There are also differences between minorities from the same country, most likely as a result of different conflict experiences. In the Kurdistan region, respondents' attitudes are markedly different between camp and non-camp residents. Christians who live outside the camps, were far more optimistic than other groups on the possibility of treating each other fairly in the future and forgiving the past.[201] Yezidis were more pessimistic than Muslims and Christians in all of their assessments, particularly in their ability to forgive the past and trust others in the future.[202] Among Yezidis, women were more negative than men about the prospect of reconciliation with Muslim neighbours.[203] There is little doubt that this contrast is related to the targeting of Yezidis in the conflict, and the extreme violence and suffering that Yezidi women and girls have endured. Resentment of the security forces tasked to protect them, and with some Muslim neighbours who allegedly supported and collaborated with IS, runs deep among Yezidis.

When considering the possibility of reconciliation and coexistence with fellow Syrians following the conflict, Syrian IDPs were particularly sceptical, possibly reflecting the extreme disruption and dislocation they have experienced. In particular, IDPs were more pessimistic when considering the possibility of avoiding future war and respecting each other's religion. Non-Muslims were significantly more sceptical about whether various groups would be able to treat each other fairly in future.[204] While Syrians overall tended not to have a positive view of the future, those from Daraa and Al Hasakah were particularly pessimistic.[205] This was confirmed in three sets of discussions in Lebanon with different groups of Assyrians refugees from Al Hasakah.[206]

For Iraqi religious minorities from the Nineveh Plains, the idea of returning home runs in parallel with advances in the truth-seeking process. This process has been strengthened by official declarations that IS abuses against minorities constituted genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes. However, different Yezidi groups believe these declarations have yet to produce concrete changes on the ground.[207] There is widespread support among the Yezidi community for bringing their case to the International Court of Justice. However, many people lack an understanding of how this process works and what sort of timeline it would follow.[208] The fact that Iraq is not party to the Rome Statute, which established the ICC, is the main roadblock in this process.

Positive efforts by the KRG to collect testimonies to ensure international recognition of violations against Yezidis are received with skepticism by the community, as they are being linked with the 1988 Anfal Campaign and thus perceived by minorities as part of some strategy to establish Kurdish dominance over Sinjar.[209] There is no trust among Yezidis in Iraqi courts ability to deliver transitional justice – they perceive the Iraqi justice system to be closely tied to political parties and affiliations and unable to hold perpetrators with high social or political standing to account. For transitional justice to proceed, evidence of crimes committed against minorities needs to be researched and preserved. Beyond paving the way for criminal prosecution, truth-finding efforts are crucial for enabling individuals and families to bring closure, and for communities to heal.

Minority research participants from Iraq also linked the prospects of reconciliation – and thus of returning home – to combating both prejudices against minorities and the ideology of radical Islam. There is a degree of consensus among minorities in describing educational materials that portray non-Islamic Iraqis in a way that makes them seem second-class citizens, and even dehumanises them. According to research participants, this happens in both regular schools and in Muslim education centres, even in the Kurdistan region.[210] Similarly, the media and Muslim religious leaders have a role to play in shutting down radicalism, condemning extremism and disseminating messages of respect and unity among Iraqis of different faiths.[211]

Both Haroun and Kevork are Syrian refugees in Lebanon, coming from Damascus and Aleppo.

CHAPTER 5 – FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

While many issues discussed in this report are common to minorities from Iraq and Syria, the two countries stand at different crossroads. In Iraq sectarian feelings have become deeply ingrained. Information collected for this study suggests Syria has not yet reached this point. Before IS took control of territory there had already been significant migration of minorities from Iraq because of marginalisation and persecution. In this regard, the eventual defeat of IS alone will not solve these underlying dangers or ensure that minorities return to their place of origin. Especially in Iraq, the process of driving IS away sets in motion power struggles between larger sectarian groups – exactly the type of social tension that exacerbates the vulnerability of religious minorities. Ongoing internal politicking and unresolved problems of disputed territories further exacerbate the difficulties minorities in returning to certain areas of Iraq.

The impacts of the conflicts in Syria and Iraq have been, and continue to be, immense. Provision of shelter, food, water and healthcare are critical humanitarian needs for majority and minority groups alike. Civilians have been displaced on a massive scale, and many more have been traumatised by the conflict and violence, loss or injury of loved ones, sexual violence, exploitation and abuse, ongoing insecurity and persecution. The conflict and displacement have affected women, men, boys and girls differently, meaning that their needs vary. Humanitarian responses need to take this into account.

It is important to recognise the diversity and range of experiences among refugee and IDP communities belonging to, or affiliating with, religious minority groups. The ways in which religious identities, affiliations and networks have influenced people's displacement experiences differ significantly between and among groups as well as among individuals. There are nuanced differences between groups' humanitarian needs and how best to meet those needs, in terms of the nature, targeting and delivery of assistance. Those differences also reflect whether a minority group has been directly targeted during the conflict, its past experience of persecution and discrimination, its level of political power or influence and its beliefs and cultural norms.

Humanitarian agencies have not always been able to grasp the needs of the various groups affected by the conflicts in Syria and Iraq. Problems caused by insecurity in refugee/displacement camps and people's inability to access assistance because of fear, lack of confidence or other barriers has sometimes been overlooked. In some cases, aid prioritisation and beneficiary criteria have inadvertently resulted in excluding certain groups, providing breeding ground for resentment, discrimination and tensions between groups.

Both gender and age are now well-established concepts within the humanitarian sphere. Humanitarian agencies increasingly understand the differing needs and approaches required to support different age groups and genders. This report demonstrates that protecting religious minorities must also be considered as part of Syria and Iraq humanitarian response strategy, particularly through an age, gender and diversity (AGD)[212] approach.

Given the history of persecution and conflict experienced by religious minorities, future reconciliation and peaceful relationships between different faith groups requires dealing with the trauma and suffering of the past. It also requires facilitating and sharing positive and hopeful examples of coexistence and mutual support between people of different faiths.

Recommendations

The political, social and security dynamics in Syria and Iraq are highly complex. There is no single recommendation or solution that will resolve the multitude of issues facing religious and ethnic minority groups as well as those facing the majority populations. Nevertheless, the recommendations outlined below aim to provide a basis for tackling the humanitarian crises, enabling displaced people to return home and creating a positive future for religious minorities in Syria and Iraq. It is worth noting that a certain level of stability needs to be achieved for the long-term recommendations listed below to become actionable.

Short-term

1. Donors need to provide predictable and sufficient funding that is flexible and reaches the women, men, girls and boys most in need – including host communities – to avoid creating or exacerbating tensions. A one-size-fits-all funding approach and criteria can inadvertently result in excluding vulnerable groups. In the current crises in Syria and Iraq, humanitarian and development needs are intertwined. This may necessitate funding to enable relief and development assistance to be delivered simultaneously and designed to be mutually reinforcing.

2. Identify and account for diverse experiences in displacement – conflict-affected populations are not homogenous. In some instances, minority vulnerabilities and needs must be disaggregated in order to provide targeted and tailored assistance. The same applies to individual refugees and displaced persons – gender and age in particular are important characteristics to disaggregate in order to meet people's needs. Humanitarian actors need to equip themselves with assessment tools able to capture differences based on ethno-religious affiliation and how different vulnerabilities intersect.

3. Promote conflict-sensitive programming and 'a do no harm' approach to avoid exacerbating tensions.

4. Continue to provide mobile registration centres and responses for out-of-camp refugees and IDPs.

5. Support programmatic interventions to promote inter-community peacebuilding, relationship building and social cohesion, both as standalone initiatives and project components in sector-specific interventions. Actors representing the different local religious communities could be a central resource to draw on, as is an awareness of how religion has been used by some to escalate tensions and violence.

6. Support the provision of cultural-, age- and gender-sensitive psychosocial support services to ensure that survivors of traumatic events receive sufficient rehabilitation to reintegrate into society. Ensure that appropriate and effective referral mechanisms are accessible for women and girls. Identify culturally appropriate ways to increase awareness about how rape and other forms of sexual violence are used as a weapon of war, destroying individuals and families. Work with communities, traditional and religious leaders to build a shared understanding that rape is always the fault of the perpetrator and not the survivor. Consider the value and appropriateness of religious rituals to facilitate reintegration into the community and avoid the stigmatisation of children and adults affected by sexual violence. Moreover, integrate community-based psychosocial support into humanitarian responses to help women, men, boys and girls, families and communities heal.

7. When requested by displaced children and adults themselves, facilitate their movement and return to their home areas as soon as practicably possible once the areas have been freed and secured. Ensure that women are included and considered when planning and facilitating a return home, and that women support family decisions to return. Focusing on humanitarian assistance to displaced populations should not overshadow support for people returning home when that is an option. Prioritise female-headed households for return support if they chose to make that decision.

8. Use existing civil society structures trusted by local populations, including those of minority groups, to channel assistance. Deliver aid channelled to those structures in a conflict-sensitive and non-discriminatory way, in accordance with humanitarian principles and standards.

9. Hold local governments accountable for political tactics that harm minority populations, exacerbate the effects of the crises that have affected them or that inhibit them from returning to their home areas.

Short-/Long-term

1. Incorporate a gender-responsive transitional justice perspective into the current displacement response, while advocating for all cases of sexual violence to be addressed through criminal prosecution – ensuring that the wishes of sexual violence survivors are strictly adhered to. Support an international inquiry into genocide, war crimes, human rights abuses and atrocities, and ensure that sexual violence cases are prioritised in such inquiries. Facilitate the documentation of abuses, for possible future prosecutions.

2. Reconciliation can reduce tensions between residents and also the likelihood of widespread reprisal killings or further conflict. Promote communal reconciliation, particularly in areas where minorities have been directly targeted by armed actors and experienced hostilities from neighbouring communities. Take into account gender considerations when designing such efforts, as well as whether communities are ready for such efforts.

3. Facilitate the resumption of gender-sensitive livelihood activities, including the rehabilitation of civilian infrastructure and community facilities such as places of worship.

4. Make efforts to promote trust between conflict-affected communities and security forces responsible for their protection. Such security sector reform needs to address perceptions of wrongdoing and lack of accountability. Support security forces to include female staff members for community outreach, and facilitate reporting and requests for security among the female population.

An Assyrian Church outside of Beirut provides a safe space and education for refugee children.

5. Ensure that relevant education opportunities are provided to school-age girls and boys who have been displaced by violence or trapped in IS-held areas. This may include accelerated learning programmes, so that displaced children are not further disadvantaged. Educational programmes should address the language difficulties that some IDP and refugee children face in learning, and integrate reconciliation, trust building, equal citizenship and religious tolerance. Ensure that education programmes for children from minority groups include their native language and maintain their cultural roots.

6. Assist local and national legal institutions in initiating legitimate and gender-sensitive legal procedures to tackle the property expropriation and redistribution processes taking place in many areas, to limit a pattern of dispossession of religious minorities or reallocation of property along sectarian and ethnic lines.

7. Support community and faith leaders and initiatives that promote religious tolerance and encourage peaceful relations among religious groups. International organisations should assist Iraqis and Syrians in collecting, emphasising and underlining stories that outline attempts to preserve and rebuild bonds between majority and minority communities and express common future narratives. These stories should accompany rather than replace tales of persecution, and give the silent, moderate majority a voice.

Long-term
1. To reduce tensions and misunderstandings between communities and limit the likelihood of discrimination, promote education and curriculum reform to improve perceptions and understanding of religious minorities and their historical, cultural and religious significance. Diversity is an indicator of a society's quality. Through education, foster recognition of diversity as a positive attribute and respecting diversity as a way to build a more sustainable society. This is necessary to provide stability, overcome prejudice, build trust and establish conditions for shared life. Similarly, promote access to education for all – regardless of gender, ethnicity, religion or political affiliation – and disaffiliate education provision from political motivations or agendas.

2. Address democratic governance deficits, addressing structural discrimination and cultures of impunity embedded in particular in Iraq before IS took over significant parts of territory in 2014. Train the judiciary, security forces and public servants in general, addressing degradation of minorities in the public discourse. Promote the implementation of appropriate constitutional provisions when they exist and, when necessary, revisions of the legal framework at all levels to promote equal citizenship. During such legal changes, facilitate an inclusive process that ensures wide participation among different segments of society (women, youths, academics, etc.)

ANNEX I: THE LEGAL PROTECTION FRAMEWORK FOR MINORITIES

Various instruments in international humanitarian law (IHL) and international human rights law (IHRL) protect the rights of minorities in peacetime and during violent conflict. This annex is an overview of the key legislation and principles forming the protection framework for religious and ethnic minorities and other vulnerable groups affected by the conflicts in Syria and Iraq. It also identifies gaps, shortcoming and ambiguities in the existing framework and highlights challenges to applying the protection framework in practice.

International humanitarian law

The 1907 Hague Convention, four 1949 Geneva Conventions and the Additional 1977 Protocols form the core of IHL. The fourth Geneva Convention specifically relates to the protection of civilians during conflict.[213] It requires parties to the conflict to distinguish between civilians and combatants, to spare the civilian population and civilian property, and prohibits excessive and disproportionate use of military force. The four Geneva Conventions, but not the Additional Protocols, have been universally ratified and are therefore universally applicable. IHL obliges conflict parties to ensure that all people, without discrimination, receive necessary provisions, and stipulates that conflicting parties must cooperate with humanitarian operations. Civilians must be treated humanely at all times during conflict, and their physical and mental health must be protected. They must have access to humanitarian assistance, healthcare, be protected from further violence and treated with dignity. Civilians must also be able to access their political, religious and judicial rights and their starvation is forbidden. Furthermore, the destruction and appropriation of civilian property not justified by military necessity is prohibited.[214]

- Non-discrimination is a core principle of IHL, under which all protected people "*shall be treated with the same consideration by parties to the conflict, without distinction based on race, religion, sex or political opinion*".[215] However, IHL includes provisions for protecting women and children specifically. Among these are the protection of women against any attack on their honour such as rape, indecent assault end enforced prostitution.[216] "*Pregnant women and mothers of children under the age of seven who are living in a neutral country shall benefit from any preferential treatment accorded to the nationals of that country*".[217] Similarly, expectant mothers, mothers of children under seven and children under 15 in occupied countries are entitled to any special benefits accorded to them prior to the occupation.[218]

- Women who have been detained by occupying powers have a right to be accommodated separately from men, and to be supervised and searched by women rather than men. If women have been detained with other members of their family, the family unit should be kept together.[219] Under Protocol II of the Fourth Geneva Convention, there are similar provisions to protect women in non-international conflicts.[220] IHL dictates that women who are pregnant or have dependant infants and have been arrested, detained or interned for reasons related to armed conflict should have their cases considered as quickly as possible.[221] Expectant mothers who have been detained are entitled to additional food and access to appropriate treatment. In international armed conflict, it has not been possible to prohibit the use of the death penalty for pregnant women and the mothers of young children although IHL recommends avoiding the death penalty in such cases.[222] In non-international armed conflict, however, the death penalty is prohibited for pregnant women and all of mothers of young children.[223] Women who are not part of the armed conflict are accorded special protection against hostilities, which includes access to appropriate medical care and release from besieged areas to access medical care.[224]

- IHL includes protection against child labour and the use of children in conflict. Children under 15 who have been or orphaned or separated from their families as a result of conflict should receive 'maintenance' payments, access to education and the ability to practise their religion.[225]

Although many provisions of IHL are now accepted as customary law – general rules by which all states are bound – the nature of contemporary conflict can make it difficult to distinguish between civilians and combatants. The nature of this conflict also makes it difficult to monitor IHL, which is increasingly violated by parties to conflict.[226] Applying IHL in conflicts involving non-state actors is more complex than in armed conflicts between two states. Article 3, which is common to all the Geneva Conventions, applies to non-international armed conflicts, whether between a state and a non-state armed group or between non-state armed groups, of which there are many in Syria and Iraq. Non-state armed groups must fulfil certain criteria including having a certain level of organisation and, under Article 1 of Protocol II, being able to control part of a territory. Vité argues that this is likely to result in many armed conflicts being covered by Common Article 3 but not Additional Protocol II.[227]

Recently, IHL norms on women, peace and security have been developed. Significant developments in this area include the following UN Security Council resolutions: 1325 on how women are affected by conflicts and their right to protection and participation in peacebuilding; and 1820, recognising CRSV as a tactic of war.

Responsibility to Protect

The Responsibility to Protect (R2P) is a non-legally binding commitment that was endorsed by UN member states in 2009. It recognises that:

- individual states have the primary responsibility to protect their own populations from genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes and ethnic cleansing, and incitement to them; the international community has a responsibility to encourage and assist states in fulfilling this responsibility

- the international community has a responsibility to use appropriate diplomatic, humanitarian and other means to protect populations from these crimes

- if a state is manifestly failing to protect its populations, the international community must be prepared to take collective action to protect populations, in accordance with the UN Charter

Despite extensive debates, there are still uncertainties over the meaning and implementation of R2P and concerns over how to achieve a balance between the sovereignty of individual states and the protection of civilians when decisions about whether to invoke R2P will inevitably be driven by political agendas.[228]

International criminal law

International criminal law (ICL) comes into force when there are serious violations of IHL, including crimes against humanity, preventing access to humanitarian assistance, acts of genocide and war crimes. ICL covers domestic and international conflicts, and an individual can be held accountable for breeches of it.

Violations of ICL can be investigated and tried by the ICC. Neither Iraq nor Syria is a signatory to the ICC, which means that its jurisdiction could only be extended to these countries if the UN Security Council refers the situation to the court. Human rights organisations argue that the ICC should be given the authority to investigate violations of ICL in Syria and Iraq.[229]

International human rights law[230]

Unlike IHL, which applies only during armed conflict, IHRL applies during peacetime, although some of its provisions may be suspended during armed conflict.[231] The 1984 International Bill of Human Rights consists of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR),[232] the 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), and the 1996 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and its two Optional Protocols.

There are nine core human rights treaties, including the ICESCR and ICCPR. The others are:[233]
- International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD) (1965)
- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) (1979)
- Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT) (1984)
- Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) (1989)
- International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families (ICMW) (1990)
- International Convention for the Protection of All

Persons from Enforced Disappearance (CPED) (2006)
- Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) (2006)

In addition, there are numerous universal human rights instruments, which address the following issues:
- Right of self-determination
- Rights of indigenous peoples and minorities
- Prevention of discrimination
- Rights of women
- Rights of children
- Rights of older people
- Rights of people with disabilities
- Human rights in the administration of justice, and protection of people subjected to detention or imprisonment
- Social welfare, progress and development
- Promotion and protection of human rights
- Marriage
- Rights to health
- Rights to work and to fair conduct of employment
- Freedom of association
- Slavery, slavery-like practice and forced labour
- Rights of migrants
- Nationality, statelessness, asylum and refugees
- War crimes and crimes against humanity, including genocide[234]
- Humanitarian law

IHRL, established by treaty or custom, outlines the obligations and duties of states to fulfil and protect the rights of the people under their jurisdiction. This includes the right to life, freedom from torture and freedom of movement, as well as economic and social rights such as those to food, housing, clothing, health, livelihood and an adequate standard of living. In short, IHRL "*enables individuals and groups to claim certain behaviour or benefit from government*."[235] Although there is no specific IHRL provision for access to humanitarian assistance, it has been argued that the right to life means a right to a minimum level of assistance, and that the guarantee of social and economic rights enables individuals to claim a right to humanitarian assistance.[236] IHRL also provides the basis for protection and treatment of IDPs.

Refugee law

The main instruments for international refugee protection are the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1967 Protocol. Refugees are people who are outside their country of nationality, and are unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin, "*owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion*".[237] Protection provided by the convention applies to all refugees, regardless of their religion, race, country of origin, sex, age, disability or sexuality – and no refugees can be expelled or forced to return to their country of origin against their will.[238] According to the convention, refugees should have access to courts, primary education, work, and legal documentation including travel documents. The principle of 'non-refoulement' is central to the convention, meaning that refugees and asylum seekers cannot be forcibly returned to an area where they are likely to be persecuted.

Most Arab countries have not ratified the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol. There are regional agreements covering the rights of refugees but these have never really been implemented: the Declaration on the Protection of Refugees and Displaced Persons in

the Arab World was adopted in November 1992; and the Arab Convention on Regulating the Status of Refugees in the Arab Countries was adopted by the League of Arab States in 1994. Furthermore, many Arab countries lack domestic laws governing the status of refugees.[239]

As refugees have to be in fear of 'persecution', which is not explicitly defined,[240] conflict-affected populations do not automatically have refugee status. Where conflicts have sectarian dimensions, it is more likely that refugee law will be triggered. However, refugees are still protected by IHL and IHRL, which may provide more protection than refugee law as they are binding for all parties to a conflict. People with refugee status come under the mandate of UNHCR for protection, humanitarian assistance and basic needs. UNHCR and other organisations aim to meet the longer-term needs of refugees when a situation becomes protracted.

Refugee law does *not* apply to IDPs or economic migrants. However, people may choose, or be forced, to move at different stages so it is increasingly challenging to distinguish between refugees, IDPs, forced migrants and economic migrants.[241] As these categories become more fluid and overlap, it is more difficult to determine people's needs and rights for assistance and protection. IHL offers protection against forced displacement, the seizure of property and belongings, and during displacement. Under IHRL, refugees' and IDPs' right to freedom of movement is protected. This includes freedom of movement within the country in which they are legally resident, freedom to leave any country and the right to return to their own country.

Palestinians form a unique refugee group governed by their own international laws and in receipt of assistance from their own refugee agency, the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). Unlike UNHCR, which operates worldwide, UNRWA operates only in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, Lebanon, Jordan and Syria. Palestinians displaced from Syria who flee to a country where UNRWA operates, such as Jordan or Lebanon, can seek assistance from UNRWA but not automatically from UNHCR, which is prevented from assisting refugees in receipt of assistance from another UN agency. The legal status of Palestinian refugees in Turkey and Egypt is ambiguous because they do not automatically come under the UNHCR mandate.[242] As Palestinians do not come under the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1967 Protocol, their rights to protection and representation are not as strong as those of other refugee groups.[243]

Internal displacement and the law

IDPs are people who have for some reason been forced to leave and remain away from their homes but remain within the borders of their own country. Refugee law does not cover them because they have not crossed an international border. The primary responsibility for promoting and protecting the rights of, and providing humanitarian assistance to, IDPs lies with national authorities. IDPs retain all the rights they had before they were displaced, but they usually find it more difficult to access those rights following displacement. The Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement (1998) are based on international standards developed from human rights law and human rights instruments to provide protection and assistance to IDPs. These principles collect, in one place, the standards that apply to IDPs and the obligations of states and humanitarian agencies to assist and protect

IDPs. Although the Guiding Principles are non-binding, the human rights laws and instruments on which they are based are legally binding.[244]

According to Iraq's National Policy on Displacement: "*No person will be arbitrarily or unlawfully forced to remain within a certain territory, area or region, nor shall he or she be made to leave a certain land, area or region*". IDPs are guaranteed their rights to property ownership, and to compensation if their property is destroyed – rights that must be respected by the government and its security services.[245] In contrast, the Syrian government has refused to recognise IDPs, instead referring to "*people who have left their homes*", meaning that aid agencies have to balance need against semantics in order to support IDPs in Syria.[246]

Statelessness and the law

The UN General Assembly adopted the Convention Relating to the Status of Stateless Persons in 1954. It was designed to protect and guarantee the rights of those who did not come under the 1951 Refugee Convention. A stateless person is defined by the convention as someone who "*is not considered as a national by any state under the operation of its law*"[247] and has the same rights as citizens to freedom of religion and education of their children. For other rights, stateless people are entitled to the same treatment as other non-nationals, including the right to employment, housing and freedom of association. States hosting stateless people are required to allow freedom of movement and to provide identity and travel documents. States that are party to the Convention Relating to the Status of Stateless Persons cannot expel stateless people and should facilitate their 'assimilation and naturalisation'.

The 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness is designed to prevent cases of statelessness arising. The convention fulfils Article 15 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states that everyone has a right to a nationality. To prevent statelessness, states are required to give citizenship to children who are born on their territory or who are born abroad but whose parents are their nationals. States are also prohibited from withdrawing citizenship from a national if this would result in statelessness, and to avoid making people stateless if territories are transferred into the control of another party.

UNHCR is mandated to identify, prevent and reduce statelessness and protect stateless people. In November 2014, it launched an action plan to end statelessness by 2024. This includes encouraging more states to become parties to the two conventions on statelessness and to eradicate gender discrimination in nationality laws. As of September 2016, there were 89 state parties to the 1954 Convention and 68 to the 1961 Convention on Statelessness. With the exception of Turkey, which is a state party to the 1954 Convention on Statelessness, none of the other countries in the region affected by the conflicts in Iraq and Syria are party to either of the conventions on statelessness.[248]

The rights of minorities

Minorities have the same rights to protection as other civilians under IHL, and the same civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights as other individuals and groups under IHRL. Specific references to minorities in IHRL include Article 27 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which protects the rights of ethnic, religious and national minorities to practise their culture and religion and use their language within their own group. State parties to the ICESCR in 2009 guarantee non-discrimination in the exercise of each economic, social and cultural right enshrined in the covenant.

In addition, there are specific instruments designed to protect minorities and their rights. Under the UN Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities, adopted by consensus in 1992, states are supposed to safeguard minority rights by ensuring their survival and existence, promoting and protecting their identity, guaranteeing equality and non-discrimination, and enabling effective and meaningful participation in society. The International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1965, covers the rights of all people to enjoy civil, political, economic and social rights, without discrimination on grounds of race, colour, descent or national or ethnic origin. Furthermore, the UN Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities "*provides a comprehensive, although non-binding, framework for protecting the rights of minorities*".[249]

Despite these international provisions for protecting minority rights, there is no internationally agreed definition of what constitutes a minority group (for more information on this, see page 10). The Minorities Declaration (1992) refers to a minority as a group with a national, ethnic, cultural, religious or linguistic identity. A state does not have the final authority to determine which groups under its sovereignty constitute minority groups. It is generally accepted that minorities are in a non-dominant position, but this is not a fixed state. The term 'minority' is contextual and relative – minority groups can change over time or within and between countries and sub-national regions. In addition, people may not find it comfortable or necessary to identify themselves as part of a minority or may be reluctant to identify themselves as such for fear of discrimination.[250]

Unfortunately, there is a lack of understanding of protection for, and protection obligations towards, minority groups. Consequently, many minority groups do not recognise the benefits of IHRL.

The international framework for protection consists of IHL and IHRL based on treaty or custom. Aspects of IHL and IHRL that have entered customary law are legally binding – state parties to treaties must abide by them. Principles and guidelines, sometimes referred to as 'soft law', also provide some protection for people in humanitarian crises.[251]

Syria and Iraq are bound by the 1907 Hague Convention, the Geneva Conventions and Additional Protocol I. The states affected by the conflicts in Syria and Iraq are parties to the following core treaties of IHRL (see table below). [252]

Refugees are protected by the 1951 convention and its 1967 Protocol, but not all countries in the region are signatories to them, and the terminology for determining who qualifies as a refugee is open to interpretation. As previously noted, Palestinians are an anomaly in refugee law and can consequently fall outside the protection framework. Although the Guiding Principles for IDPs are rooted in the international legal framework, IDPs are not specifically protected in law and Syria has refused to recognise IDPs. The conventions providing protection against statelessness have few state parties at present, although UNHCR has an action plan to address this. The rights of minority groups are protected in law but there is no agreed definition of minorities and the understanding of their rights and protection needs is not well understood, presenting many challenges.

Essentially, the effective use of IHL and IHRL in conflict situations relies on the ability and willingness of parties to the conflict to implement them. In conflicts involving non-state armed groups, the command and control of combatants and understanding of obligations under IHL can be weak – actors may be unaware of their obligations or choose to ignore them. At the same time, political concerns can make the international community reluctant to act, and therefore refrain from declaring genocide or invoking R2P. Monitoring the implementation of IHL and IHRL requires on-the-ground access to gather first-hand evidence.

	Egypt	Iraq	Jordan	Lebanon	Syria	Turkey
ICESR	State party	State party	State party	State party	State party	State party
ICCPR	State party	State party	State party	State party	State party	State party
ICERD	State party	State party	State party	State party	State party	State party
CEDAW	State party	State party	State party	State party	State party	State party
CAT	State party	State party	State party	State party	State party	State party
CRC	State party	State party	State party	State party	State party	State party
ICMW	State party	No action	No action	No action	State party	State party
CPED	No action	State party	No action	Signatory	No action	No action
CRPD	State party	State party	State party	Signatory	State party	State party

ANNEX II: RELIGIOUS AND CULTURAL SITES DESTROYED BY ISLAMIC STATE IN MOSUL

This list outlines Christian buildings in Mosul known to have been destroyed or converted up to September 2016 by IS.[253]

Syriac Catholic Church:
- Syrian Catholic Diocese – Maidan area.
- The Old Church of the Immaculate – Maidan (The church goes back to the eighth century AD)
- The New Church of the Immaculate – Maidan
- Church of Mar (Saint) Toma – Khazraj
- Museum of Mar (Saint) Toma – Khazraj
- Church of Our Lady of the Annunciation – Muhandiseen
- Church of the Virgin of Fatima – Faisaliah
- Our Lady of Deliverance Chapel – Shifaa
- The House of the Young Sisters of Jesus – Ras Al-Kour
- Archbishop's Palace Chapel – Dawasa

Syriac Orthodox Church:
- Syrian Orthodox Archdiocese – Shurta
- The Antiquarian Church of Saint Ahodeeni – Bab AlJadeed
- Mar (Saint) Toma Church and cemetery (the old Bishopric) – Khazraj
- Church of The Immaculate (Castle) – Maidan
- Church of The Immaculate – Shifaa
- Mar (Saint) Aprim Church – Shurta
- St. Joseph Church – The New Mosul

Holy Apostolic Catholic Assyrian Church of the East:
- Diocese of the Assyrian Church of the East – Noor
- Assyrian Church of the East, Dawasa
- Church of the Virgin Mary (old rite) – Wihda

Chaldean Church of Babylon:
- Chaldean Diocese – Shurta
- Miskinta Church – Mayassa

- The Antiquarian Church of Shimon al-Safa – Mayassa
- Church of Mar (Saint) Buthyoon – Shahar Al-Souq
- Church of St. Ephrem, Wady Al-Ain
- Church of St. Paul – Majmooaa Al-Thaqafiya
- The Old Church of the Immaculate (with the bombed archdiocese) – Shifaa
- Church of the Holy Spirit – Bakir
- Church of the Virgin Mary – Drakziliya
- Ancient Church of Saint Isaiah and Cemetery – Ras AlKour
- Mother of Aid Church – Dawasa
- The Antiquarian Church of St. George – Khazraj
- St. George Monastery (with cemetery) – Arab
- Monastery of Al-Nasir (Victory) – Arab
- Convent of the Chaldean Nuns – Mayassa
- Monastery of St. Michael – Hawi Church
- The Antiquarian Monastery of St. Elijah – Ghazlany

Armenian Orthodox Church:
- Armenian Church – Maidan
- The New Armenian Church – Wihda

Evangelical Presbyterian Church:
- Evangelical Presbyterian Church – Mayassa

Latin Church:
- Latin Church and Monastery of the Dominican Fathers and Convent of Katrina Siena Nuns – Sa'a
- Convent of the Dominican Sisters – Mosul Al-Jadeed
- Convent of the Dominican Sisters (Al-Kilma Monastery) – Majmooaa Al-Thaqafiya
- House of Qasada Al-Rasouliya (Apostolic Aim/Institute of St. John the Beloved)

ANNEX III: OVERVIEW OF FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS

Location	Month (2016)	# of women	#of men	Age range	Group	
Beirut, Lebanon	February	2	4	18–45	Syrians	Christian
Beirut, Lebanon	February	7	11	18–30	Syrian refugees	Christian
Beirut, Lebanon	February	19	4	18–60	Syrian and Iraqi refugees	Christian and Muslim
Beirut, Lebanon	February	19	0	18–60	Syrian refugees	Muslim
Dohuk, Kurdistan Region, Iraq	March	-	7	18-60	IDP community leaders	Yezidi
Dohuk, Kurdistan Region, Iraq	March	-	5	18-60	IDP community leaders	Muslim
Bekaa, Lebanon	April	11	3	18–45	Syrian refugees	Christian
North Lebanon	April	13	2	18–60+	Iraqi refugees	Christian
North Lebanon	April	15	0	18–60+	Syrian refugees	Christian
Aleppo, Syria	April	6	6	46–60+	IDPs and host community	Christian
Aleppo, Syria	April	4	5	18-30	IDPs and host community	Christian
Al-Qamishli, Syria	April	8	8	18-60	IDPs and host community	Christian
Christian Valley, Syria	April	6	7	18-60	IDPs and host community	Christian
Damascus, Syria	April	9	3	18-60	IDPs and host community	Christian
Daraa, Syria	April	4	8	18-60	IDPs and host community	Christian
Hassake, Syria	April	4	8	18-60	IDPs and host community	Christian
Homs, Syria	April	5	7	18-60+	Host community	Christian
Mahardah, Syria	April	16	3	18-60+	Host community	Christian
Mahardah, Syria	April	15	2	18-60+	IDPs and host community	Christian
Ås, Norway	April	3	1	18-60	Syrian refugees	Muslim
Oslo, Norway	April	4	3	18-60	Syrian refugees	Christian
Oslo, Norway	April	1	2	46-60	Iraqi refugees	Christian
Sandefjord, Norway	April	1	3	18-60	Iraqi refugees	Yezidi
Sandefjord, Norway	April	1	3	18-60	Iraqi refugees	Yezidi
Oslo, Norway	April	3	3	46-60	Iraqi refugees	Christian
Amman, Jordan	June	8	0	18–60	Syrian refugees	Muslim
Amman, Jordan	June	0	10	18–60	Iraqi refugees	Muslim
Amman, Jordan	June	7	0	18–60	Iraqi refugees	Christian
Amman, Jordan	June	0	9	18–60+	Syrian refugees	Christian
Istanbul, Turkey	June	8	6	18-60	Syrian refugees	Christian
Istanbul, Turkey	June	13	5	18-60	Iraqi refugees	Christian
Erbil, Kurdistan Region, Iraq	September	2	6	18-60	IDPs and community leaders	Yezidi
Erbil, Kurdistan Region, Iraq	September	2	5	18-60	IDPs and politicians	Turkemen Shia and Sunni
Erbil, Kurdistan Region, Iraq	September	0	8	18-60	Religious Leaders	Muslim, Sunni
Erbil, Kurdistan Region Iraq	September	6	3	18-60	NGO representatives	-
Erbil, Kurdistan Region, Iraq	September	2	5	18-60	IDPs and community leaders	Kaka'i
Erbil, Kurdistan Region, Iraq	September	2	4	18-60	IDPs and community leaders	Shaback, Shia and Sunni
Erbil, Kurdistan Region, Iraq	September	2	4	18-60	IDPs and community leaders	Sabean-Mandean
Erbil, Kurdistan Region, Iraq	September	2	4	18-60	Human Rights activits	Christian
Erbil, Kurdistan Region, Iraq	September	-	4	18-60	IDPs and community leaders	Sabean-Mandean
Beirut, Lebanon	September	-	3	18-60	Syrian refugees and community leaders	Druze, Muwahhideen
Akkar, Lebanon	September	1	4	18-60	Syrian refugees	Muslim
Beirut, Lebanon	September	2	5	18-60	Lebanese Church representatives	Christian
Beirut, Lebanon	September	11	9	18-60+	Syrian refugees and Lebanese church leaders	Christian

Vanessa and other refugee school children are returning home after school.

ENDNOTES

[1] See Global Protection Cluster (2016) *Working Together for Protection*: http://www. globalprotectioncluster.org/en/areas-of-responsibility/ age-gender-diversity.html (accessed 14 November 2016).

[2] See Annex III.

[3] Wilton Park (13–15 January 2016) *Protecting the Rights of Ethnic and Religious Minorities: Global Challenges*.

[4] *Webster's Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary of the English Language* (1994) Random House.

[5] UN (1992) *Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities*. New York: UN General Assembly Resolution 47/135.

. For an overview of the international provisions for protecting minority rights, see Annex I.

[6] Wilton Park (2016); FGDs and interviews in the Kurdistan region and Lebanon, Sep. 2016.

[7] FGDs and interviews in the Kurdistan region and Lebanon, August and September 2016. A few members from these communities also added a theological reason: it is a pejorative term reflecting the fact that God creates all people equal. But it appears from FGDs that this is a marginal concern.

[8] The term is used in the Constitution of Iraq adopted in 2015.

[9] While efforts have been made to cross-check demographic information, its accuracy is hampered by the absence of reliable sources, sensitivities around data on minority groups, and the pace and scope of movement of populations as a result of the ongoing conflicts and subsequent humanitarian crises.

[10] US State Department (2015) *International Religious Freedom Report for 2015 – Iraq*. US Department of State, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor.

[11] IILHR et al. (2015) *Between the Millstones: The State of Iraq's Minorities Since the Fall of Mosul*. Brussels, Belgium: IILHR, p4; Puttick, M (2014) *From Crisis to Catastrophe: The Situation of Minorities in Iraq*. London: MRG and Ceasefire Centre for Civilian Rights, p5, cross-checked against figures from religious institutions in the region.

[12] USCIRF (2013) *Annual Report 2013*, p88.

[13] US State Department (2015).

[14] Congressional Research Service (2016) Iraq: Politics and Governance; MRG website accessed on 16 June 2016

[15] University of Texas at Austin (2003) *Map of Iraq*. General Libraries, cited in International Crisis Group (2013) *Make or Break: Iraq's Sunnis and the State.* Middle East Report 144, p4.

[16] Estimates of the total 2016 population in Iraq range from 29–37 million. To calculate the relative size of different groups, the estimate by the Minority Rights Group (33 million) is used here.

[17] University of Texas at Austin (2003).

[18] Unless otherwise stated, information on minorities in Iraq is based on information on the MRG website accessed on 16 June 2016 and cross-checked against information gathered from religious institutions in the region.

[19] Puttick (2014); Sceats, S (2005) *The Trial of Saddam Hussein*. Chatam House. IL BP 05/02.

[20] Preti, T (2007) *Assimilation, Exodus, Eradication: Iraq's Minority Communities since 2003*. London: MRG.

[21] MRG (undated) *World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples: Turkey – Assyrians*. minorityrights. org/minorities/assyrians (accessed 16 June 2016).

[22] HRW (2004) *Claims in Conflict: Reversing Ethnic Cleansing in Northern Iraq* https://www.hrw.org/report/2004/08/02/claims-conflict/reversing-ethnic-cleansing-northern-iraq (accessed 23 August 2016); AINA (undated) 'Assyrian Human Rights Report', *AINA* http://www.aina.org/reports/ahrr.htm (accessed 1 November 2016).

[23] MRG (undated) *World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples: Azerbaijan – Kurds* minorityrights. org/minorities/kurds (accessed 16 June 2016).

[24] Interviews conducted by NCA in the Kurdistan region, Iraq, February 2016.

[25] Pew Research Center (2009, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014) *Restrictions in Religion*. The Government Restrictions Index "*measures government laws, policies and actions that restrict religious beliefs and practices – i.e. efforts by governments to ban particular faiths, prohibit conversions, limit preaching or give preferential treatment to one or more religious groups*".

[26] Lalani, M (2010) *Still Targeted: Continued Persecution of Iraq's Minorities*. MRG.

[27] Pichon, E (2015) *Minorities in Iraq: Pushed to the Brink of Existence*. Briefing, European Parliamentary Research Services, European Parliament.

[28] Iraq Body Count Database. https://www.iraqbodycount.org/database/ (accessed 14 November 2016).

[29] Fraser, G (16 June 2015) 'A Cross to Bear: The Vanishing Christians of the Middle East', *The Guardian* http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jun/16/christians-middle-east-religion-islamic-state-linda-dorigo-andrea-milluzzi (accessed 14 November 2016).

[30] FGD with Yezidi representatives, NCA, Erbil, Kurdistan region, Iraq, September 2016.

[31] FGD with Kaka'i representatives, NCA, Erbil, Kurdistan region, Iraq, September 2016.

[32] FGD with Shabhak representatives, NCA, Erbil, Kurdistan region, Iraq, September 2016.

[33] Interviewed by NCA, Erbil , the Kurdistan region, Iraq, September 2016.

[34] FGD with Iraqi refugees and displaced people conducted for NCA in Amman, Jordan (June 2016) and the Kurdistan region, Iraq (February and September 2016); Preti (2007), p23.

[35] See: *Al Jazeera* (24 October 2010) 'How suicide bombings shattered Iraq. The secret files catalogue thousands of suicide attacks' *Al Jazeera* http://www.aljazeera.com/secretiraqfiles/2010/10/20101022161025428625.html (accessed 14 November 2016) and *Reuters* (9 September 2007) 'Mastermind of Iraq Yazidi attack killed: US military' *Reuters* http://www.reuters.com/article/us-iraq-yazidis-idUSL0930932320070909 (accessed 14 November 2016).

[36] See: Shadid, A (1 November 2010) 'Church Attack Seen as Strike at Iraq's Core' *The New York Times* http://www.nytimes.com/2010/11/02/world/middleeast/02iraq.html?_r=0 (accessed 14 November 2016). Lalani (2010).

[37] Lalani (2010).

[38] Assyrian Council of Europe (2011) *The Exodus from Iraq*. *Human Rights Report on Assyrians in Iraq*.

[39] Society for Threatened People (2006) *Mandaeans in Iraq*. https://www.gfbv.de/en/news/mandaeans-in-iraq-729/ (accessed 2 November 2016); Preti (2007), p22.

[40] Kikoler, N (2015) *Our Generation is Gone: The Islamic State's Targeting of Iraqi Minorities in Ninewa*. Bearing Witness Trip Report, New York: Simon Skjodt Center for the Prevention of Genocide, p8.

[41] FGD with Kaka'i representatives, Erbil, Kurdistan region, Iraq, September 2016.

[42] Interview with a Christian key informant from the Kurdistan region, October 2016.

[43] Preti (2007), p22.

[44] See: http://www.alsumaria.tv/news/91141/مجلس-الوزراء-يوافق-على-تحويل-قضاء-طوزخرماتو/ar and *AL Monitor* (November 2010) 'Statements on forming new Iraqi provinces cause uproar' *AL Monitor* http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2014/01/iraq-statements-new-provinces-dispute.html#ixzz4Q0s1ynLl

 http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2014/01/iraq-statements-new-provinces-dispute.html#ixzz4IACrhBcg (accessed 14 November 2016).

[45] Dodge, T (2015) 'The Future of Iraq and the Fight Against ISIS'. Presentation at the International Institute for Strategic Studies.

[46] See: *K24* (6 January 2016) 'Kurdistan: 700 Tuz Khurmatu Citizens Joined IS' *K24*

 http://www.kurdistan24.net/en/news/07362ca1-96c4-453e-855b-1af0d443bd73/700-Tuz-Khurmatu-citizens-joined-IS (accessed 14 November 2016).

[47] HRW (2015) *Iraqi Kurdistan: Arabs Displaced, Cordoned Off, Detained: Harsh Restrictions in Northern Iraq While Kurds Move Freely*.

[48] IILHR et al. (2015)

[49] As classified by Abu Hanifah. See also Friedman, Y (2010) *The Nusayri-Alawis, An introduction to the Religion, History and Identity of the Leading Minority in Syria*. Brill, 85.

[50] The Shia Ayatollah Hakim is reported to have passed a fatwa in 2003 concluding that the Sabean-Mandeans were not *ahl al-kitab*, and would therefore be classified as *mushrikun*.

51 Break the cross. Dabiq. Issue 15 Shawwal 1437, p63. http://www.clarionproject.org (accessed 28 September 2016).

52 US State Department (2014) *2014 Human Rights Report: Iraq*. US Department of State, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor.

53 IS statement, 17 July 2014. Focus group in Erbil, Kurdistan region, Iraq, September 2016.

54 Slave-girls or prostitutes? Dabiq. Issue 9, Shaaban 1436, pp44–48 http://www.clarionproject.org (accessed 28 September 2016).

55 IILHR et al. (2016) *No Way Home: Iraq's Minorities on the Verge of Disappearance*s, p18.

56 UNHCR (13 March 2015) Report on the human rights situation in Iraq in the light of abuses committed by the so-called Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and associated groups. UN Doc. A/HRC/28/18.

57 Yazda (28 January 2016) *Mass graves of Yezidis killed by the Islamic States or Affiliates on or after August 3 2014*.

58 Human Rights Council (HRC) (2014), UN Permanent Commission of Inquiry for Syria "Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic – Rule of Terror: Living under ISIS in Syria." 19 November 2014., paragraph 57; UNHCR (2015).

59 European Parliament (4 February 2016) *Systematic Mass Murder of Minorities by ISIS*. European Parliament Resolution (2016/2529(RSP)), P8_TA-PROV(2016)0051.

60 See:114th Congress (2015-2016) 'Resolution 75 – Expressing the sense of Congress that the atrocities perpetrated by ISIL against religious and ethnic minorities in Iraq and Syria include war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide'

 https://www.congress.gov/bill/114th-congress/house-concurrent-resolution/75/text (accessed 23 August 2016).

61 Human Rights Council (HRC) (2016a)UN Permanent Commission of Inquiry for Syria "Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic" .15 June 2016

62 Amnesty International (2016) *Amnesty International Report 2015/2016: The State of the World's Human Rights*; European Parliament (2016); HRC (2016)a; IILHR et al. (2016).

63 See: https://www.gatestoneinstitute.org/4973/destruction-middle-east-antiquities (accessed 18 October 2016).

64 Mellen, R (11 April 2015) 'ISIS is Making Millions From the Art Market. Here's How Congress Wants to Stop That', *Huffington Post* http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/islamic-state-smuggling-bill_us_56324969e4b0c66bae5b5c4d (accessed 12 July 2016); Yoon, S (29 June 2015) 'Islamic State is Selling Looted Art Online for Needed Cash', Bloomberg http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2015-06-28/isis-has-new-cash-cow-art-loot-it-s-peddling-on-ebay-facebook (accessed 12 July 2016).

65 HRW (2015) *After Liberation Came Destruction: Iraqi Militias and the Aftermath of Amerli*.

66 Amnesty International (2016).

67 HRC (2015) *Alawites, a Religious Minority in Syria, a Community in Danger of Extermination*. HRC. New York: UN General Assembly, paragraph 60.

68 US State Department, (2015), Syria, "International Religious Freedom Report for 2015".

69 US State Department (2015), Syria.

70 Unless otherwise stated, information is based on the MRG website minorityrights.org (accessed 16 June 2016).

71 Estimates of the total 2016 population in Syria range from 18–25 million. This overview uses the Minority Rights Group estimate – 19 million.

72 The Alawites split from Shia Islam in ninth-century Iraq and are branded as a heterodox movement by the Sunnis and most Shias. Dolan, PT (undated) *The Alawites: An Ethnographic Analysis*; Goldsmith, L (16 April 2012) 'Alawites for Assad. Why the Syrian Sect Backs the Regime', *Foreign Affairs*.

73 8% in 2011 (1.7 million). Around 300,000 of these people have left since war started.

74 UNRWA (2016) *The Syria Crisis* http://www.unrwa.org/syria-crisis#Syria-Crisis-and-Palestine-refugees (accessed 16 June 2016).

75 Lesch, DW (2012) *Syria: the fall of the House of Assad*. Padstow: Yale University Press.

76 ICRC (August 2012) *Syria, ICRC and Syrian Arab Red Crescent Maintain Aid Effort Amid Increased Fighting*. UN General Assembly (August 2012) *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic*. UN Doc. A/HRC/21/50.

77 Mob or sectarian violence, crimes motivated by religious bias, physical conflict over religious conversions, harassment over attire for religious reasons, and other religion-related intimidation and violence, including terrorism and war.

78 Meeting with Syrian civil society, Geneva, May 2016.

79 Percentages are very close to those from a similar survey conducted by NCA in Lebanon. To the same question, 93% of Syrians said that insults or attacks to do with someone's religion were not common prior to the crisis, with 75% saying that they almost never happened. These findings should be read with caution, though: the current war and displacement experience has undoubtedly affected people's recollection of events in the past. At the same time, people might be reluctant to speak about this kind of discrimination due to prolonged regime-led practices of suppression.

80 However, religious denomination was not statistically significant in predicting a respondent's need to hide their religion. Once again, the percentage is almost identical to that from the survey NCA carried out in Lebanon, in which only 3% of Syrians – mostly Armenian and Greek Orthodox though this was not statistically significant – reported feeling that they needed to hide their religious affiliation.

81 FGDs conducted for NCA in Syria and Lebanon, February to April 2016. Caution should be exercised in interpreting this, as present opinions are tainted by recent experiences and the current situation.

82 FGDs conducted for NCA in Lebanon, February to April 2016.

83 FGDs with Christian youths from Syria in Beirut, Lebanon, February 2016.

84 ICG (2011), cited by Cockburn, P (2015) *The Rise of Islamic State: ISIS and the New Sunni Revolution*. London and New York: Verso, p83; FGDs conducted for NCA 2016.

85 The Day After (2016) *Syrian Opinions and Attitudes Towards Sectarianism in Syria*. Survey study. Fieldwork conducted 23 June and 7 September 2015 among 2,498 respondents,1,424 men and 1,074 women.

86 US State Department (2011) *International Religious Freedom Report for 2011.* US Department of State, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, p7.

87 Thomson, Al (14 December 2012) 'Was There a Massacre in the Syrian Town of Aqrab? Alex Thomson's View'. Channel 4 https://www.channel4.com/news/by/alex-thomson/blogs/happened-syrian-town-aqrab ; *The Huffington Post* (9 December 2013) 'Report: Extremists Shoot Dead Women, Children And Elderly Men In Syrian Village', http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/09/12/syria-massacre-nusra-front_n_3912376.html

88 UN report (December 2012).

89 UN Permanent Commission of Inquiry for Syria (2013) Fifth Report, June 2013.

90 Pew Research Center (2014) *Religious Hostilities Reach Six-Year High*. Pew Research Center Religion & Public Life Project. http://www.pewforum.org/2014/01/14/religious-hostilities-reach-six-year-high/ (accessed 14 November 2016).

91 Jasser, Z (June 2013) *Religious Minorities in Syria: Caught in the Middle*. Expert statement, for Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights, and International Organizations and the Subcommittee on the Middle East and North Africa. US Commission on International Religious Freedom, p5.

92 Forum on minority issues (seventh session, 25–26 November 2014) *Preventing and addressing violence and atrocity crimes targeted against minorities*. Contribution of the UN Network on Racial discrimination and Protection of Minorities, paragraph 14.

93 Some estimates are as high as 70,000 Alawite soldiers killed, 120,000 wounded and 10,000 unaccounted for. Stratfor (June 2015) *Tartus, the Mother of Martyrs* https://www.stratfor.com/analysis/tartus-mother-martyrs (accessed 14 November 2016)

94 US Religious Freedom Report (2015).

95 UN General Assembly (August 2015) *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic*. A/HRC/30/48.

96 FGD conducted by NCA, Beirut, Lebanon, September 2016.

97 FGD conducted by NCA, Beirut, Lebanon, September 2016.

98 HRC (2014), paragraph 37.

99 HRC (2014), paragraph 29.

100 HRC (2015).

101 Geneva Conventions common article 3, Additional Protocol II article 13(3) and the Rome Statute of the International Court article 8(2) c–e.

102 UNOCHA (30 September 2016) *Syrian Arab Republic: Humanitarian Snapshot* http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/SYR_HumSnap_A4L_September2016_161010_EN.pdf (accessed 14 November 2016).

103 UNOCHA (2016) *Humanitarian Response Plan Monitoring Report*, January–June 2016 http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/2016_pmr_summary_syria_160830.pdf (accessed 14 November 2016).

104 UNOCHA (9 August 2016) *Iraq: Humanitarian Snapshot* https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/operations/iraq/infographic/iraq-humanitarian-snapshot-9-august-2016 (accessed 14 November 2016).

105 UNOCHA (30 September 2016).

106 UNHCR (2016) *Iraq: Mosul Situation Flash Update. Iraqis Registered with UNHCR in Egypt, GCC, Iran, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and Turkey as of 31 August 2016.*

107 See: http://www.3rpsyriacrisis.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/3RP-Regional-Overview-2016-2017.pdf

108 UNHCR (2016) 2016 Humanitarian Response Plan – Iraq. http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/final_iraq_2016_hrp.pdf (accessed 14 November 2016).

http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/final_iraq_2016_hrp.pdf

109 UNOCHA (2016).

110 The needs in some of these areas (e.g. Aleppo) are likely to have changed significantly since data collection during April and May 2016.

111 FGDs conducted by NCA, Beirut, Lebanon, February and September 2016.

112 Syrian faith-based humanitarian organisation registration data.

113 UN Population Fund, Protection Cluster (2016) *Whole of Syria Gender-Based Violence Area of Responsibility – Voices: Assessment Findings of the Humanitarian Needs Overview 2017*.

114 FGDs with Syrians in Beirut, Lebanon, September 2016; interview with a faith-based organisation operating in Syria, November 2016.

115 UN (April 2016) *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons on his mission to Iraq*. A/HRC/32/35/Add.1., p16.

116 IOM (15 September 2016) *Displacement Tracking Matrix*. Data from IOM tallies with responses to a survey conducted by NCA in the Dohuk governorate, between March and May 2016: 87.8% of respondents left their home in August 2014 as a result of IS's Sinjar offensive. An additional 11.5% departed in June and July 2014, with the fall of Mosul.

117 UNHCR (2016).

118 UNOCHA (20 July 2016) *Iraq: Mosul Flash Appeal*. http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/mosul_flash_appeal_final_web.pdf (accessed 14 November 2016).

119 Total n=933. Christians: 477; Muslim (unspecified): 99; Yezidi: 351; Unspecified religious affiliation: 6;

Roughly half of the respondents (48.9%) resided in IDP camps.

[120] Age, previous living conditions and marital status did not play a significant role, nor did a respondent's previous experience with religiously based insults. Women living in the camps were slightly more positive in their assessment, when controlling for other factors. As educational level increased, so did respondents' assessment of their living situation, though this is partially due to correlations with employment and income. Unsurprisingly, an increase in access to services is also associated with a more positive evaluation of current conditions.

[121] Taking into account a variety of factors such as current location, area of origin, age, sex, education, socio-economic status and previous experience with religiously based insults, income was the only variable to have a significant effect. Even this positive effect was quite minor, suggesting that other factors were important in how respondents evaluated their comparative living conditions.

[122] FGDs conducted by NCA with Chaldean representatives and Christian organisations. Erbil, Kurdistan region, Iraq, September 2016.

[123] FGDs with Christian representatives from different denominations. Erbil, Kurdistan Region, Iraq, September 2016.

[124] FGDs with Yezidi representatives. Erbil, Kurdistan region, Iraq, September 2016.

[125] MRG (2016).

[126] In the case of Yezidis from Sinjar, Kurdish is the native language and Arabic has been the language used in education for many.

[127] IILHR et al. (2016).

[128] Rasheed, AJ (2015) *Social-type Violence in the Ongoing Struggle in Iraq and Methods of Reporting it.* Baghdad Women's Association, p39.

[129] FGDs with two Yezidi groups and Turkmen. Erbil, Kurdistan region, Iraq, September 2016.

[130] Hassan et al (2015) Culture, Context and the Mental Health and Psychosocial Wellbeing of Syrians: A Review for Mental Health and Psychosocial Support staff working with Syrians Affected by Armed Conflict. UNHCR.

[131] Interview with Baghdad Women Association. November 2016.

[132] GBV and CRSV rapid assessment, October 2016.

[133] A woman shared the following testimony: *"Even if I'm veiled, I didn't have this problem [of religious background being a barrier to accessing necessary services] until lately. I was applying for a job as a cleaner and my feeling is that I was refused because of my veil – but it is just a feeling."*

[134] GBV and CRSV rapid assessment, October 2016.

[135] However, the desk study found a UNHCR-commissioned study sensitive to religious background that is worth mentioning. Hassan et al. (2015) *Culture, Context and the Mental Health and Psychosocial Wellbeing of Syrians: A Review for Mental Health and Psychosocial Support staff Working With Syrians Affected by Armed Conflict*. This technical review of secondary sources involved providing individual or group counselling, psychotherapy and/or psychiatric

treatment to Syrians, to complement more generic guidance. It is not in itself an assessment or a methodology.

[136] Interviews with the Baghdad Women's Association and a Lebanese local organisation working on GBV and CRSV.

[137] During April and May 2016, interviews were conducted with 602 respondents living in Beirut, Bekka, Mount Lebanon and North Lebanon. Syrians made up 74% of the total sample and Christians 83%. Women comprised 35% of the sample. This study involved convenience sampling at group level combined with a random selection of individual respondents within the household.

[138] Birchall, J (2016) *Gender, Age and Migration: An Extended Briefing*. Institute of Development Studies.

[139] Focus groups and interviews in Turkey, June, 2016; See: http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2013/12/syrian-refugees-seek-shelter-cold-istanbul.html; https://www.ft.com/content/c48a545e-35b1-11e3-952b-00144feab7de

[140] Focus groups and interviews in Turkey, June, 2016.

[141] AINA (October 2016) *Turkey Won't Give Official Status to Yazidi Asylum Seekers*.

[142] Jasser (2013), pp4–7.

[143] Jasser (2013), p6.

[144] Eghdamian, K (2015) *Religious Minority Experiences of Displacement: Initial Lessons Learnt From Syrian Christian and Syrian Druze Refugees in Jordan*. Policy brief, University College London Migration Research Unit.

[145] Jasser (2013); Eghdamian (2015).

[146] FGDs conducted by NCA with Christian Orthodox people from Syria (Beirut, Lebanon, February and September 2016), and Protestants (Beirut, Lebanon, September 2016).

[147] UNHCR stopped registering refugees in Lebanon in 2015.

[148] These organisations include the International Organization for Migration, NCA, the Red Crescent, the Red Cross, World Food Program and Qandil.

[149] NCA survey, Lebanon, 2016.

[150] Interviews with key informants in Lebanon, September and November 2016.

[151] Average, including Alawites. Shia Muslims, 64%; Sunni Muslims, 54%; Alawites, 45%.

[152] Discussions with a Christian-based local organisation providing humanitarian assistance in Syria.

[153] Three different NCA focus groups discussions with Christians from Syria reported this in September 2016.

[154] Faith-based humanitarian actor registration data.

[155] FGDs with Assyrians. Beirut, Lebanon, September 2016.

[156] FGDs and interviews in Turkey, June, 2016. FGDs with a group of Syrians. Beirut, Lebanon, September 2016.

[157] Syrian faith-based humanitarian organisation statistics; Interview with a representative from an international NGO operating in Syria.

158 IILHR et al. (2016), p28.

159 FGDs conducted by NCA, Beirut, Lebanon, February and September 2016.

160 FGDs with Christian Iraqi refugees, Amman, Jordan, June 2016.

161 FGDs and interviews conducted for NCA in Istanbul, Turkey, June 2016.

162 FGD with Yezidi representatives, Erbil, Kurdistan region, Iraq, September 2016.

163 VOA (October 2016) *Displaced by Islamic State, Yazidis Find Harsh Conditions in Turkey*.

164 See: *AL Monitor* (2 December 2013) 'Syrian refugees in Istanbul sent from pillar to post' *AL Monitor* http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2013/12/syrian-refugees-seek-shelter-cold-istanbul.html#ixzz4Q0uljv2P (accessed 14 November 2016); *Financial Times* (October 2013) 'Syria crisis: Refugees highlight Turkey's sectarian tension' https://www.ft.com/content/c48a545e-35b1-11e3-952b-00144feab7de (accessed 14 November 2016).

165 FGD with Kaka'i representatives, Erbil, Kurdistan region, Iraq, September 2016.

166 Eghdamian, K (2015).

167 There is no significant variation based on age, sex, marital status, income, area of origin, employment status, length of time in current location or number of dependent children. Feelings of safety increase with educational level, but – when taking into account other demographic factors such as income – this effect is only significant for people with a secondary education.

168 FGDs and interviews conducted for NCA, Istanbul, Turkey, June 2016.

169 FGDs and interviews conducted for NCA, Istanbul, Turkey, June 2016.

170 FGDs in Turkey and Lebanon, May and February 2016; NCA Survey in Lebanon May 2016.

171 FGDs in Amman, Jordan, June 2016.

172 NCA Survey in Lebanon, 2016. Similar reasons have been put forward in FGDs with Syrians.

173 FGD with Syrians, Beirut, Lebanon. February 2016.

174 AINA (2 November 2015) 'Assyrians, Armenians in Syria Protest Kurdish Confiscation of Property', *AINA* http://www.aina.org/news/20151102170051.htm (accessed 14 November 2016).

175 FGD in Beirut, Lebanon, September 2016.

176 UN Habitat, 2015, Emerging Land Tenure Issues among Displaced Yazidis from Sinjar, Iraq.

177 FGDs in Dohuk, Kurdistan region, September 2016

178 Interview with a Christian religious leader, Erbil, Kurdistan region, Iraq, September 2016.

179 Interview with Yazda, Duhok, Kurdistan region, Iraq, September 2016.

180 UN Habitat (2015) *Emerging Land Tenure Issues among Displaced Yazidis from Sinjar, Iraq*, p23.

181 Interviews conducted by WCC in Erbil and Duhok, Kurdistan region, Iraq, August 2014; interviews conducted by NCA in Duhok, Kurdistan region, Iraq, February and September 2016.

182 Interviews conducted by NCA in Duhok, Kurdistan region, February and September 2016; Pax (2016) *Sinjar After ISIS. Returning to Disputed Territory*.

183 Yazda (2016) *Report on Humanitarian Aid and Development Opportunities in Sinjar: Caring for IDPs while Rebuilding and Facilitating Returns*. Report version 1.3, 8 January 2016, p2.

184 Interviews and FGDs in Erbil and Dohuk, Kurdistan region, Iraq, August and September 2016.

185 Interviews and FGDs in Erbil and Dohuk, Kurdistan region, Iraq, August and September 2016.

186 Focus group discussion in Kurdistan region, Iraq, September 2016.

187 FGDs with Christian refugees, Beirut, Lebanon, February 2016.

188 Interview with key informants in Lebanon, September 2016.

189 NCA survey, Iraq, 2016.

190 NCA survey, Syria, 2016

191 NCA survey, Lebanon, 2016.

192 NCA survey, Syria, 2016..

193 NCA meeting with Yazda, Dohuk, Kurdistan Region, Iraq, September 2016.

194 Chaldean Archdiocese of Erbil (2015) *Christian 'IDPs' in Erbil Today.*

195 FGDs conducted by NCA.

196 NCA surveys in Iraq and Syria, 2016.

197 FGD with Kaka'i representatives, Erbil, Kurdistan region, Iraq, September 2016.

198 Estimates from January 2016 based on the records and statistics of the Archbishopric reported in a need assessments conducted by IOCC.

199 FGDs with Assyrians conducted by NCA, Bekaa and Beirut, Lebanon, December 2015 and September 2016.

200 FGD with Assyrians conducted by NCA, Beirut, Lebanon, September 2016.

201 NCA location , Lebanon, survey 2016

202 NCA Kurdistan Region, Iraq survey 2016

203 Pax (2016), p22.

204 This was observed in both the survey carried out in Lebanon and the study conducted inside Syria.

205 NCA Lebanon survey, 2016.

206 FGDs with Assyrians in Bekka (December 2015) and Beirut (February and September 2016).

207 FGD with Yezidi representatives,Erbil, Kurdistan region, September 2016; Email correspondence with a Yezidi organisation, October 2016.

208 Email correspondence with an organisation working with Yezidi people, October 2016.

209 Pax (2016), p26. According to a key informant to this study, for the first year of the crisis, until the international conversation changed, KRG officials only referred to what happened to Yazidis as 'a Kurdish genocide'. However, this testimony could not be verified with other sources.

210 FGDs and interviews with Christians, Mandeans and

Yezidis, Kurdistan region, September 2016.

[211] FGDs in the Kurdistan region, September 2016.

[212] Global Protection Cluster (2016).

[213] IHL also includes; the 1954 Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, plus its two protocols; the 1972 Biological Weapons Convention; 1980 Conventional Weapons Convention and its five protocols; the 1993 Chemical Weapons Convention; the 1997 Ottawa Convention on anti-personnel mines; the 2000 Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict.

[214] First Geneva Convention, Article 50; Second Geneva Convention, Article 51; Fourth Geneva Convention, Article 147.

[215] Common article 3, Fourth Geneva Convention, Article 27.

[216] Fourth Geneva Convention, Article 27, paragraph 2; First Protocol, Articles 75 and 76.

[217] Fourth Geneva Convention, Article 28.

[218] Fourth Geneva Convention, Article 50.

[219] Fourth Geneva Convention, Articles 58 and 97; First Protocol, Article 25, paragraph 5.

[220] Protocol II, Article 5, paragraph 2a.

[221] Protocol I, Article 76, paragraph 2.

[222] Protocol I, Article 6, paragraph 5.

[223] Protocol II, Article 6, paragraph 2.

[224] Protocol I, Articles 8 and 17.

[225] Fourth Geneva Convention, Article 24.

[226] Elissan, J (2016), cited in Afanasieva, D (22 May 2016) 'UN Says World Must Stand up for Widely Flouted Humanitarian Law', *Reuters* http://www.reuters.com/article/us-humanitarian-summit-idUSKCN0YD0PT (accessed 17 June 2016).

[227] Vité (2009) in Haider, H (2013) *International legal frameworks for humanitarian action: Topic guide*. Birmingham, UK: Governance and Social Development Resource Centre, University of Birmingham, p17; ICRC (2015).

[228] Welsh, J (2009) *Implementing the Responsibility to Protect*. Policy Brief 1/2009, Oxford Institute for Ethics, Law and Armed Conflict, University of Oxford.

[229] HRW (2013) *Syria and the International Criminal Court: Questions and Answers*; HRW (2016).

[230] Regional instruments include: the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (1950); the American Declaration of the Rights and Duties of Man (1948) and the Convention on Human Rights (1969); and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (1981).

[231] ICRC (2004) *What is International Humanitarian Law?*, Advisory Service on International Humanitarian Law, ICRC.

[232] See: http://www.ohchr.org/EN/UDHR/Pages/Resources.aspx (accessed 23 September 2016).

[233] See: OCHR (undated) *The Core International Human Rights Instruments and their monitoring bodies* http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CoreInstruments.aspx for details of the treaties and their Optional Protocols (accessed 23 September 2016).

[234] The Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (CPPCS) (1948) prohibits killings and other acts "*committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group*".

[235] Haider (2013), p13.

[236] Haider (2013).

[237] Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (1951), Article 1.

[238] UNHCR (2010) *Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees*.

[239] Sadek, G (2013) *Legal Status of Refugees: Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, and Iraq*. Law Library of Congress.

[240] Chimni, BS (ed.) (2000) *International Refugee Law: a reader*. New Delhi: Thousand Oaks, London: Sage Publications.

[241] Birchall (2016).

[242] *Middle East Monitor* (23 June 2016) 'Palestinians of Syria: Refugees Once More', *Middle East Monitor* https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20160623-the-further-displacement-of-palestinian-refugees/ (accessed 23 July 2016); Clementi, A (2015) 'No Way Out: The Second Nakba of Palestinian Refugees from Syria Escaping to Turkey', *Badil*, Issue 57.

[243] Akram, SM (8 April 2000) 'Reinterpreting Palestinian Refugee Rights Under International Law, and a Framework for Durable Solutions'. Paper presented at *The Right of Return: Palestinian Refugees and the Prospects for a Durable peace*, international conference, Boston.

[244] UN (1998) *Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement*. E/CN.4/1998/53/Add.2

[245] Iraqi Ministry of Displacement and Migration (2008) *National Policy on Displacement,* section 6.9.

[246] IDCM (2014).

[247] The Convention Relating to the Status of Stateless Persons (1954), Article 1.

[248] UN Treaty Collection. See: https://treaties.un.org/Pages/Treaties.aspx?id=5&subid=A&clang=_en (accessed 27 September 2016).

[249] Wilton Park (2016).

[250] Wilton Park (2016).

[251] ICRC (2003) *International Humanitarian Law and International Human Rights Law: similarities and differences*; ICRC (2004).

[252] OHCHR (undated). *Status of Ratification* http://indicators.ohchr.org (accessed 27 September 2016).

[253] AINA (2014) 'All 45 Christian Institutions in Mosul Destroyed or Occupied by ISIS', *AINA* http://www.aina.org/news/20140729100528.htm (accessed 29 July 2016).

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