

# YAZIDI DISPLACEMENT AND MIGRATION FROM IRAQ

TRENDS, DRIVERS, AND VULNERABILITIES



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report analyses trends, drivers, and protection risks related to internal displacement and migration of Yazidis to Türkiye, and onwards to Europe, using a mixed-method approach.

In 2014, the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) committed a genocide, as well as multiple crimes against humanity and war crimes, against the Yazidis. Yazidis were displaced, largely from Sinjar district in Ninewa Governorate, to Duhok Governorate in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. Almost a decade later, approximately 200,000 Yazidis remain displaced and return conditions in Sinjar continue to be precarious.

Focus group discussions (FGDs) conducted in Iraq with Yazidi youth uncover various drivers behind their migration. Participants express a desire to find better economic prospects and safety abroad due to a lack of job opportunities and perceived lack of safety and security in areas of displacement and return. Overall, due to a lack of, and barriers to access, existing regular migration pathways, and despite acknowledging the risks of irregular migration,

Yazidi youth persist in attempting migration, fuelled by the hope of reaching Europe.

Yazidis have reportedly crossed the border from Iraq to Türkiye with 598 Yazidis crossing over from May to November 2023, with their intended final destination being the European Union. Yazidi migrants may enter the European Union through irregular routes and subsequently attempt to remain undetected or seek to obtain regular status, for example by requesting asylum. The two countries that received the most asylum applications from Iraqi nationals were Germany, followed by Greece, with a rejection rate of 70 and 9 per cent respectively. Despite the varying outcomes, the overall trend in 2023 indicates an increase in the first-time recognition rate for the protection of Iraqi nationals seeking asylum in the European Union.

Based on the research findings, this document offers seven recommendations to address challenges in areas of displacement, return and along the migration journey.



## INTRODUCTION

This report analyses migration patterns, drivers and vulnerabilities related to internal displacement and migration of Yazidis. Many Yazidi youth from camps for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Duhok Governorate and Sinjar District (within Ninewa Governorate) have been migrating from Iraq to Türkiye in the hope of reaching European

Union countries (often Germany via Greece). This migration trend started in 2022<sup>1</sup> and spiked again in the summer of 2023. These migration patterns are analysed within the historical context of conflict and displacement, as well as current challenges to achieving durable solutions for Yazidis.

### METHODOLOGY

Initially, a desk review was conducted for relevant data, reports and social media mentions of Yazidi migration from Iraq to Türkiye, including information provided by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) Türkiye and IOM Greece.

In terms of qualitative data, four FGDs were conducted by the IOM Iraq Protection Division in October 2023: two FGDs with Yazidi IDPs aged 16–18 years in Khanke Camp (6 males and 6 females) and two FGDs with Yazidi IDPs aged 16–18 years in Sharya camp (8 males and 6 females). Participants were selected through purposive sampling to reflect the knowledge of members of the community. The data was thematically analysed.

In terms of quantitative data, DTM Iraq Flow Monitoring data and DTM Master List data were key sources used (detailed in Annex A).



<sup>1</sup> Due to an observed increase in outflows of Yazidi individuals from the Ibrahim Al-Khalil border crossing point between Iraq and Türkiye, the IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) in Iraq launched an emergency tracking tool from August to December 2022.

# YAZIDI DISPLACEMENT AND MIGRATION PATTERNS

## HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

In August 2014, ISIL seized the districts of Sinjar, Tel Afar and the Ninewa Plains; The ISIL attack on Sinjar encountered minimal resistance from the Iraqi/ Kurdish security forces, leading to their withdrawal from the area.<sup>2</sup> According to the UN Human Rights Council, ISIL committed genocide as well as multiple crimes against humanity and war crimes against the Yazidis.<sup>3</sup> This genocide has been recognized by the United Nations,<sup>4</sup> the European Union,<sup>5</sup> Council of Europe,<sup>6</sup> United Kingdom Parliament,<sup>7</sup> the Belgian Parliament,<sup>8</sup> the Netherlands Parliament<sup>9</sup> and German Regional Courts.<sup>10</sup>

Estimates from various sources indicate that between 2,000 and 5,500 Yazidis have lost their lives, and approximately 6,386 Yazidi women and children were abducted by ISIL since August 3, 2014.<sup>11</sup> Cases of executions, torture, amputations, ethno-sectarian attacks, sexual violence and rape as well as children forced recruitment have been extensively documented extensively.<sup>12</sup> As of August 2023, most Yazidi abductees have been liberated, although around 1,277 individuals still remain in captivity.<sup>13</sup> Some women who survived captivity and sexual violence now face the challenging dilemma of

caring for children born out of rape. These children, born in the aftermath of such atrocities, have been met with rejection by the community. Mothers are left with the choice of either leaving their children in orphanages or living outside their communities. Over 200 mass graves, containing the remains of thousands, have been discovered in areas once controlled by ISIL,<sup>14</sup> but only around 70 of these graves have undergone excavation to date.

The mass displacement of Yazidis, Christians, and other religious communities resulted in an estimated 350,000 to 450,000 Yazidis being uprooted from the Sinjar district in Ninewa governorate. The primary destination for most of these displaced was the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), specifically in Duhok Governorate, while others sought refuge in Türkiye to escape ISIL attacks.<sup>15</sup>

Hundreds of survivors of ISIL captivity, primarily woman, have left Iraq through official resettlement programs facilitated by governments of Germany,<sup>16</sup> Australia, the United States of America, Canada and Netherlands.

2 International Crisis Group. *Winning the Post-Isis Battle for Iraq in Sinjar* Brussels, ICG, 20 February 2018).

3 United Nations Human Rights Council. Thirty-second session, agenda item 4 on Human rights situation that require the Council's attention "*They came to destroy*": *ISIS Crimes against Yazidis* (A/HRC/32/CRP.2 of 15 June 2016).

4 United Nations News. "*ISIL crimes against Yazidis constitute genocide, UN investigation team finds*" *UN News*, New York, (10 May 2021).

5 European Parliament. Resolution on *The systematic mass murder of religious minorities by the so-called 'ISIS/Daesh'* (2016/2529(RSP) of 4 February 2016).

6 Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. *Foreign Fighters in Syria and Iraq*, Assembly Debate on 17 January 2016.

7 United Kingdom Parliament (2023). "*UK acknowledges Yazidi genocide by Daesh/Islamic State*", *Insight*, London (9 August 2023).

8 Rudaw. "*Belgian Parliament Unanimously Recognizes Yezidi Genocide*", *Rudaw*, Erbil (15 July 2021).

9 MedyaNews. "*Dutch Parliament officially recognizes the 'Yazidi Genocide'*", *MedyaNews*, (7 July 2021).

10 Venis, Jennifer, "*Justice for the Yazidis*", (London, International Bar Association, 27 September 2022).

11 OHCHR and UNAMI. *A Call for Accountability and Protection: Yezidi Survivors of Atrocities Committed by ISIL*, (n.p., OHCHR and UNAMI, August 2016).

12 Information retrieved from the official website of the United Nations Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Daesh/ISIL, section *Our Mandate*.

13 The Presidency of the Kurdistan Region – Iraq. *President Nechirvan Barzani: There must be a swift and practical solution to the situation of the Yezidis*, (Erbil, Presidency of the Kurdistan Region – Iraq, 3 August 2023).

14 Information retrieved from the official website of the United Nations Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Daesh/ISIL, Section *Our Mandate*.

15 Ibid.

16 IOM, "*Yazidi Survivors in Germany and Iraq's Reparation Programme: 'I want for us to have a share in Iraq'*", (Baghdad, IOM, 20 May 2021).

To investigate the genocide and other international crimes committed against the Yazidi and other minority groups, the United Nations Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Daesh/ISIL (UNITAD) was established in 2017.<sup>17</sup> However, Iraqi authorities have yet to enact the necessary legislation for prosecuting the genocide and crimes against humanity perpetrated. Ongoing prosecutions, conducted under the Anti-Terror legislation, have faced significant shortcomings, including the lack of victim participation and limited awareness of the process within affected communities.<sup>18</sup>

In March 2021, the Iraqi Council of Representatives passed the Yazidi Female Survivor's Law (YSL) in recognition of the genocide and with the aim of providing reparations to survivors. This law grants reparations to Yazidi victims through a monthly income, a parcel of land and access to health care, livelihood and education.<sup>19</sup> Despite challenges in the application of the law,<sup>20</sup> according to Iraq's Directorate of Survivors Affairs and the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, 1,052 survivors have received compensations through the YSL as of September 2023.<sup>21</sup> These measures represent a positive step establishing an administrative reparation programme aimed at ensuring survivors' right to reparation.



Duhok, 9 March 2022. © IOM 2022

- 17 Information retrieved from the official website of the United Nations Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Daesh/ISIL. Section [Our Mandate](#).
- 18 UNAMI and OHCHR. *Human Rights in the Administration of Justice in Iraq. Trials under the Anti-Terrorism Laws and Implications for Justice, Accountability and Social Cohesion in the Aftermath of ISIL* (Baghdad, UNAMI and OHCHR, January 2020).
- 19 Venis, Jennifer, "Justice for the Yazidis".
- 20 Human Rights Watch. "Iraq: Flawed Implementation of Yazidi Compensation Law. Remove Requirement for Survivors to File a Criminal Complaint", (New York, Human Rights Watch, 14 April 2023).
- 21 Coalition for Just Reparations. [Third C4JR YSL Newsletter](#), (Erbil, Coalition for Just Reparations, 1 November 2023).

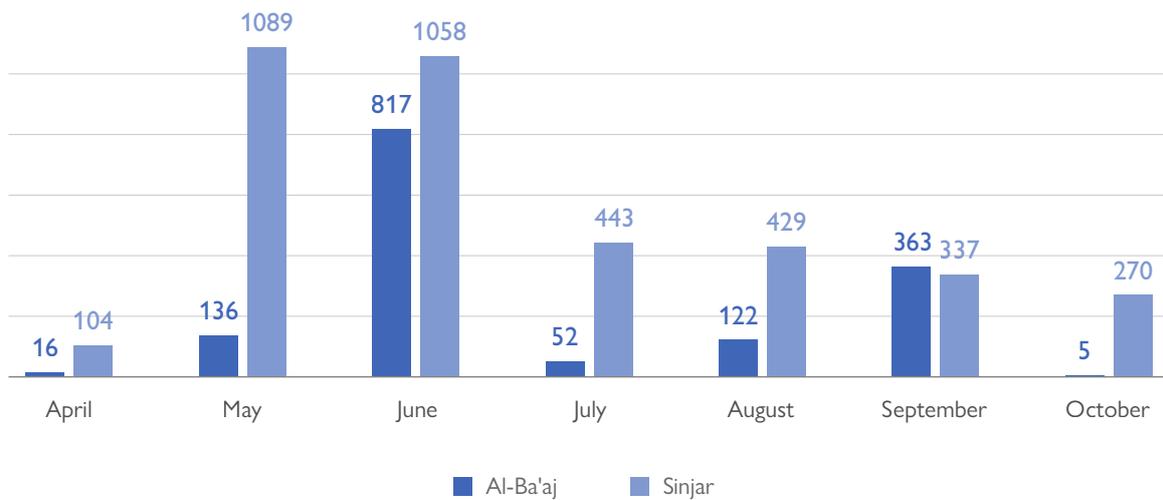
## INTERNAL DISPLACEMENT

According to DTM’s Master List report (Round 130),<sup>22</sup> 203,330 Yazidis are still in displacement in Iraq, with the majority living in camps, located mainly in Duhok (64%) and Ninewa (32%) governorates.

The Yazidi population originate mainly from Ninewa governorate, specifically Al Qahtaniya subdistrict

located in Al Ba’aj district and Al Shamal, Markaz Sinjar and Qaerrawan sub-districts in Sinjar district. The return rate to both Sinjar (42%) and Al Ba’aj (37%) districts are the lowest across the governorate of Ninewa, with only two in five affected people returning to the districts.

Figure 1. Yazidi arrivals to Sinjar and Al Ba’aj districts (April-October 2023)



Between April and October 2023, 5,241 Yazidis (1,009 households) returned to Sinjar (3,730 individuals, 717 households) and Al Ba’aj (1,511 individuals, 292 households) districts. Prior to return, the most reported locations of last displacement were Duhok (86%), Ninewa (13%), Erbil (1% and Sulaymaniyah (1%) where Yazidis lived in camps (87%). This increase in returns to Sinjar district can be attributed to hate speech targeting the Yazidi community, fuelled by heightened tension, social media disinformation and the circulation of videoclips advocating armed attacks against the Yazidi community in camps.<sup>23</sup>

As of August 2023, a total of 126,186 IDPs have made the journey back to Sinjar<sup>24</sup> primarily through spontaneous and self-facilitated movements. In a few cases, the Iraq’s Ministry of Migration and Displacement provided transportation support for these returns. Additionally, a smaller proportion, comprising 595 households by November 2023,

received assistance to return from Duhok camps and Sinjar Mountain informal sites to Sinjar and Qahtaniya through the IOM-facilitated Voluntary Movement Program.

In January 2024, the Iraqi Council of Ministers announced the closure of the remaining 23 IDPs camps in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq by June 30; This decision is likely to significantly impact durable solutions and might represent an additional push factor for migration, especially for Yazidis still in displacement.

22 IOM. DTM Master List Data Round 130, May to August 2023. Data set (accessed on 13 December 2023).

23 DTM, Emergency Tracking, Arrivals in Sinjar and Al-Ba’aj districts, April–November 2023, data set (accessed on 13 December 2023).

24 IOM Iraq. *What comes after* (Baghdad, IOM, 2022).

## CHALLENGES TO RETURN

In October 2020, both the Federal Government of Iraq and the Kurdistan Region of Iraq formally endorsed the Sinjar Agreement, which is aimed at establishing effective governance and political institutions to facilitate the sustainable return of displaced Yazidis. However, political disagreements have impeded the allocation of funds and obstructed the formation of a joint committee between the Iraqi Federal Government and the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. These obstacles have hindered positive developments in creating conducive conditions for the return of displaced Yazidis.<sup>25</sup>

Prior to the ISIL conflict, Sinjar's economy relied heavily on agriculture, factories and commerce, but much of these economic activities have been disrupted due to widespread infrastructure damage. In Sinjar, ISIL's destruction has left approximately 80 per cent of public infrastructure and 70 per cent of civilian houses in ruins. This devastation has created significant challenges for returning residents, who now grapple with a lack of basic services, of adequate shelters and housing, with land and property (HLP) issues, and with diminished livelihood opportunities.<sup>26</sup>

**The return conditions in Sinjar remain exceptionally precarious, with 88 per cent of returnees living in severe conditions.** This challenging environment not only affects those who have returned but also hampers the prospect of other IDPs returning to the area. In addition, many households find themselves in situations of secondary displacement, having left camps or out-of-camp locations and struggling to secure durable solutions in their areas of origin.<sup>27</sup> Ongoing efforts are in place to support the return and sustainable reintegration of Yazidis into their original communities within the broader framework of transitional justice.

Issues related to governance and legitimate authority in Sinjar, coupled with efforts to enhance security, stability and access to basic services, constitute essential prerequisites for fostering sustainable returns in Sinjar. In addition, fear and trauma associated with their area of origin lingers for Yazidis. Many, particularly youth, view migration as a viable path forward. In the absence of accessible regular migration channels, many are compelled to resort to irregular migration methods.



Sinjar, 9 March 2022. © IOM 2022

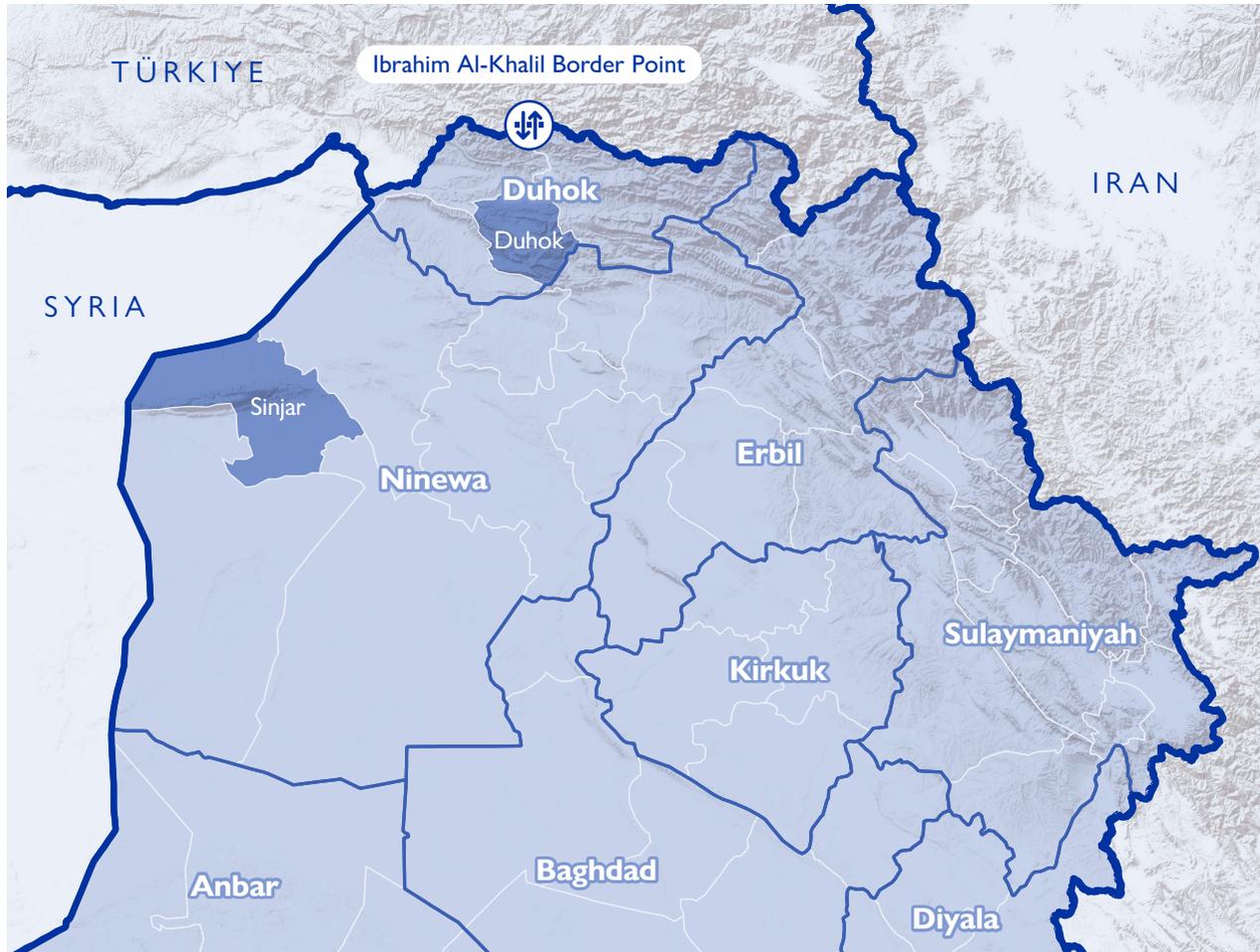
25 Iraq Durable Solutions, *Sinjar Plan of Action (2021–2024)* (Iraq Durable Solutions, n.p., 2021).

26 IOM Iraq. *What comes after* (Baghdad, IOM, 2022).

27 Iraq Durable Solutions, *Sinjar Plan of Action (2021–2024)*.

## MIGRATION TRENDS: IRAQ TO TÜRKIYE

Map 1. Ibrahim Al Khalil border point



According to Iraq DTM, from May to November 2023, 598 Yazidis (406 males and 192 females, mainly from Duhok and Ninewa governorates) crossed the Ibrahim Al-Khaleel border crossing into Türkiye,<sup>28</sup> with the intended final destination being a European country (the Netherlands, Greece and Germany).<sup>29</sup>

From Iraq, the journey of many irregular migrants,<sup>30</sup> including Yazidis, is fraught with challenges and protection risks throughout the migration process,

encompassing harsh conditions, apprehension and deportations, with subsequent bans on re-entry of countries of destination or transit. Regardless of their status, migrants are entitled to the respect, protection and fulfilment of their human rights. Moreover, migrants who may not have had the option of regular migration pathways include refugees, victims of trafficking or unaccompanied migrant children; States are therefore obligated to protect their rights.<sup>31</sup>

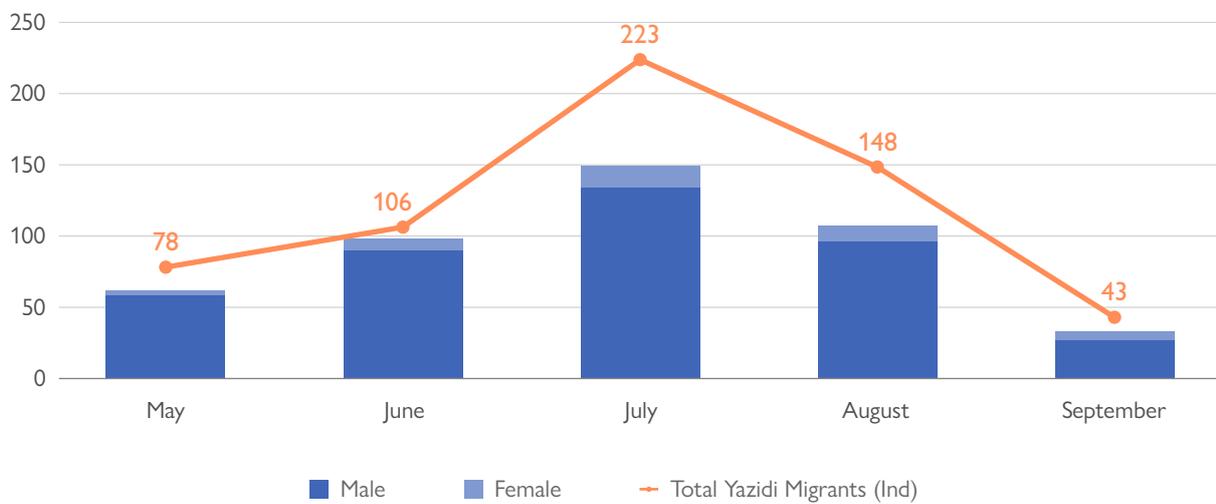
28 DTM Iraq, Flow Monitoring Round 13 data set, Yazidi outflows, June–August 2023.

29 Iraqi nationals are able to travel to Türkiye with an e-visa which is valid for 30 days stay in Türkiye, within a 180-day period. Therefore, the crossing to Türkiye may be legal/regular, but the onward stay and/or journey may not be.

30 Irregular migration is defined as the movement of persons that takes place outside the laws, regulations or international agreements governing the entry into or exit from the State of origin, transit or destination. A migrant in an irregular situation is a person who moves or has moved across an international border and is not authorized to enter or to stay in a State pursuant to the law of that State and to international agreements to which that State is a party. See [here](#) for more details.

31 IOM, *Glossary of Migration*, International Migration Law, No. 34 (Geneva, IOM, 2019).

Figure 2. Yazidi outflows in Ibrahim Al Khalil border point (May to September 2023)



Between 24 August and 31 December 2022, IOM DTM recorded 4,631 Yazidis having departed from Iraq.<sup>32</sup> Consistent with previous patterns, the migration surge in 2023 has been notably pronounced during the summer and spring seasons, with a decrease in movements recorded during the colder months. In contrast, from March 2022 to August 2023, a total of 6,923 Iraqis crossed the Ibrahim Al-Khaleel border crossing, with 1,672 Iraqis crossing from May to August 2023. Consequently, Yazidis constitute a significant proportion of Iraqis recorded by the DTM teams as crossing the border from Iraq into Türkiye.<sup>33</sup>

DTM data further shows that Yazidis are at heightened risk of arrest at the borders between Türkiye and Greece, and between Türkiye and Bulgaria. According to DTM Iraq data collected between 1 January and 26 October 2023, 1,207 Yazidis have been deported from Türkiye.<sup>34</sup> Notably, some of these deportees received official bans from the Government of Türkiye, restricting their re-entry into Türkiye for a period of five years. Additionally, a portion of the deportees experienced periods of incarceration before being repatriated.<sup>35</sup>

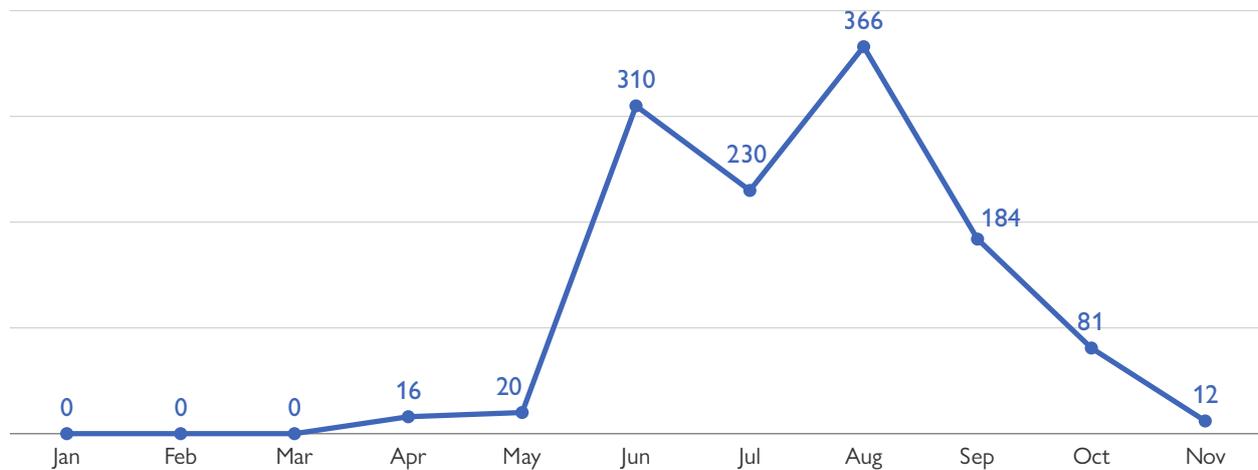
32 Data is collected through IOM’s enumerators, composed of four staff members (3 males, 1 female) deployed in the incoming and outgoing flows in the border crossing, five days per week (weekdays only) from 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. The data’s reliability is influenced by the fact that most deportation cases and Yazidi outflow occur at night, a time when DTM monitors are not operating; therefore, the data may be indicative but constrained. Source: DTM Iraq, *Emergency Tracking Tool for Cross-Border Monitoring*. [Data set]. (Baghdad, IOM, 2022).

33 DTM Iraq, Flow monitoring data set, March 2022–August 2023.

34 DTM Iraq, *Yazidis outflow from Iraq to Turkey through Ibrahim Al-Khaleel* [Data set] (Baghdad, IOM, 2023). Note that the number does not necessarily imply the total number of Yazidi deportees as it represents deportees recorded between 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. during working days.

35 These bans are likely to be imposed due to overstaying visas and/or violating the terms of the original visa. Information retrieved from the official website of the Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Interior Presidency of Migration Management, [Entry to Turkey](#).

Figure 3. Yazidi deportations through Ibrahim Al Khalil border point (January to November 2023)



Those currently residing in Türkiye are predominantly located in the provinces of Mardin, Diyarbakır, Batman, Şanlıurfa, and Gaziantep.<sup>36</sup> Based on DTM Türkiye's observations, Yazidis in Türkiye face protection risks including a lack of access to legal documentation in Türkiye, lack of access to basic services including public healthcare and inability to enrol children in school. In addition, Yazidis are often unable to obtain permission to work due to their legal status in Türkiye and face difficulties in obtaining travel permission even for medical reasons.

Upon arriving in Türkiye, Yazidis endeavour to continue their journey towards Europe. Specifically, for Yazidis crossing the border in both 2022 and 2023, **the primary envisaged destinations include Greece, Germany, and the Netherlands.**<sup>37</sup>

## JOURNEY TO EUROPE

The journey to Greece from Türkiye may be made via land or sea. For Yazidis in Türkiye, Edirne and Kırklareli provinces are the main locations for

irregular crossing through land borders, and İzmir province is usually the main departure point for sea crossings.<sup>38</sup> The journey is difficult as migrants can find themselves in overcrowded and inadequate temporary shelters, lacking access to basic needs such as food, clean water and sanitation facilities.<sup>39</sup>

Reports of certain incidents have fuelled fears among Iraqis of conditions at the Greece-Türkiye borders.<sup>40</sup> The main concerns are related to fundamental rights protection at the sea and land borders between Greece and Türkiye – as also stressed by relevant actors –<sup>41</sup> calling for a protection-sensitive approach to border management. Indicatively, needs have been identified in terms of reporting relevant incidents at the border, streamlining necessary safeguards in registration procedures of vulnerable groups and ensuring a gender-sensitive approach across activities.

In terms of process, once migrants enter Greece, they are registered and then referred to accommodation sites in mainland Greece. Previously, Yazidis were placed in accommodation sites of Serres located in Northern Greece. As Serres reached full capacity,

36 DTM Türkiye. *Brief Information about Yazidi Migrants from Iraq* (Ankara, IOM, 2023).

37 DTM Iraq. *Deportees from Turkey to Iraq through Ibrahim Al-Khaleel*, dataset (accessed on 15 November 2023).

38 DTM Türkiye. *Brief Information about Iraqi Movements in Türkiye* (Ankara, IOM, 2023).

39 Alarabiya News. "Nearly 120 Yazidis stranded outside Greek camp". *Alarabiya News*, Dubai (6 September 2022).

40 IOM. "IOM concerned about increasing deaths on Greece-Türkiye border" (Geneva, IOM, 2022).

41 See for instance, the following reports: Committee against Torture, "Concluding observations on the seventh periodic report of Greece" (CAT/C/GRC/CO/7, September 2019); Council of Europe, Commissioner for Human Rights, "Pushed beyond the limits: Four areas for urgent action to end human rights violations at Europe's borders" (April 2022); The Agency, Consultative Forum on Fundamental Rights, Ninth Annual Report, 2021; The Agency, The Fundamental Rights Officer Annual Report, 2021.

the registration process has shifted to the site of Kleidi which was reactivated. Upon reaching the accommodation site, individuals receive official documentation in the form of a note by the police issued by the local police station. Subsequently, they are directed to proceed with the submission of their asylum application.<sup>42</sup>

## ASYLUM APPLICATIONS

Yazidis who arrive in Europe through sea or land routes have the right to remain in the European Union until their asylum claims applications are processed in line with the European Union's law and regulations.<sup>43</sup>

According to German Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF) data, in 2022, Iraq was the fourth most frequent country of origin of asylum applicants in Germany, with 15,175 first-time applicants in 2022, of which 24 per cent were Yazidis (3,614 first-time applicants).<sup>44</sup> In 2022, 22,185 decisions were made on Iraqi asylum applicants, of which 11,949 were rejected (53.9%).<sup>45</sup> As reported in media outlets, according to a freedom of information request, in 2022, the BAMF rejected 2,420 of 4,706 Yazidi asylum applications.<sup>46</sup> Accordingly, numerous Yazidis are likely to be returned to Iraq in accordance with a proposed European Union-Iraq non-binding instrument on return and readmission.<sup>47</sup> **Based on European Union asylum application statistics, as of September 2023, Germany topped the list with 8,515 applications; however, an ethnicity breakdown is not available of these applicants. Greece ranked second in the number of asylum applications submitted by Iraqis, reporting 2,985 cases.** Notably, Greece and Germany had rejection rates of 9 per cent and 70 per cent, respectively, highlighting the contrasting outcomes of these applications.<sup>48</sup> Following closely, Sweden,

Belgium and Italy reported the next highest numbers of applications after Germany and Greece, with 900, 555 and 450 applications, respectively. Italy stood out with the highest acceptance rate among these three countries, approving 375 out of 450 applications, resulting in an acceptance rate of 83 per cent.

Despite the varying outcomes, the overall trend in 2023 indicates an increase in the first-time recognition rate for the protection of Iraqi nationals seeking asylum in the European Union.<sup>49</sup>



42 IOM Greece, information provided in November 2022.

43 European Commission. Migration and Home Affairs. [Migration and asylum](#) (Brussels, European Commission, 2024).

44 Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge. [Das Bundesamt in Zahlen 2022. Asyl.](#) (2022).

45 Ibid.

46 InfoMigrants. [“Yazidis continue hunger strike and protect in Berlin”](#). *InfoMigrants*, 19 November 2023.

47 Council of the European Union. [A non-binding instrument on return and readmission between the EU and Iraq](#). (Brussels, Council of the European Union, 4 October 2023).

48 Eurostat, Asylum: Decisions on applications and resettlement, [Statistics | Eurostat \(europa.eu\)](#), 2024.

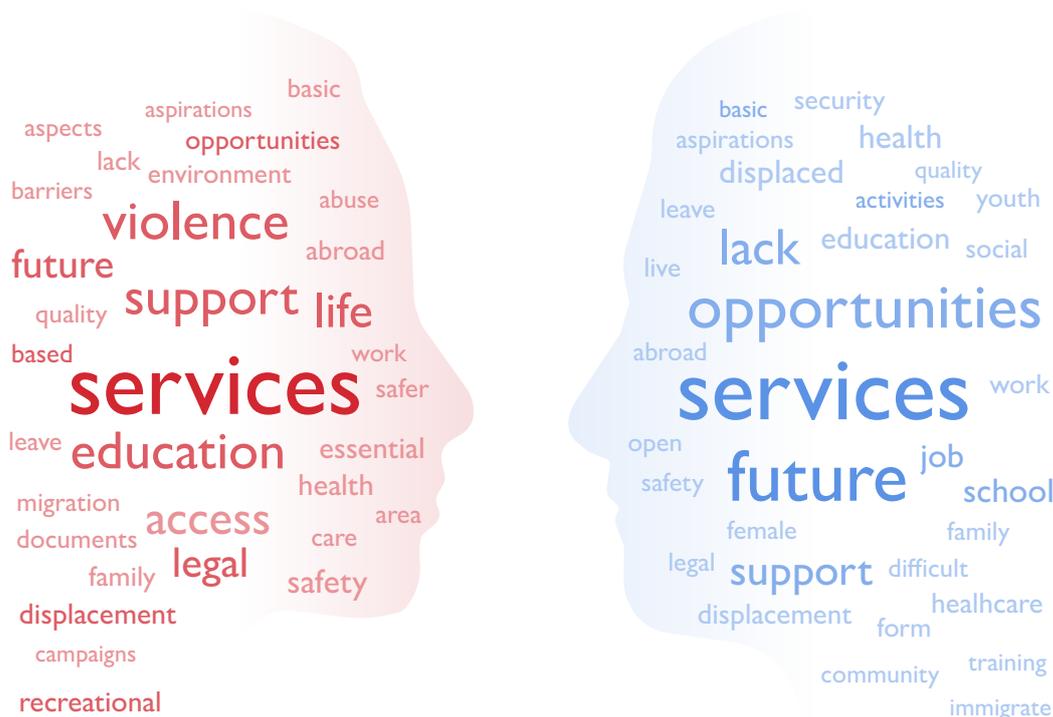
49 European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA), [Key figures on international protection in EU+ countries](#) (Brussels, EUAA).

## DRIVERS AND VULNERABILITIES

To better understand drivers of migration and vulnerabilities faced by Yazidis, FGD were conducted with youth<sup>50</sup> in the displacement sites of Sharya and Khanke, which are frequent areas from which Yazidi

individuals and groups have been found to move internationally. FGD participants expressed a desire to emigrate, whether regularly or irregularly, seeking better economic and safety conditions.

Figure 4. Visual word frequency of reasons for emigrating abroad, female youth (left) and male youth (right)



### JOURNEY AND DESTINATION

Participants viewed regular migration pathways, such as applying for asylum or obtaining visas for study or work, as difficult to attain, especially compared to a few years ago. They therefore largely did not view regular migration, specifically to Europe, as an option.

“ We hope one day the borders are open again and European countries accept displaced Yazidi people so we can migrate safely.

– Male participant, Sharya

However, in the current context, they were keen on moving outside Iraq despite being aware of the risks in doing so irregularly.

“ I have tried to migrate to Europe through Türkiye, Greece, and Belarus. I have failed twice and police at the border beat me a lot and took all my belongings but I will try again. I am currently working so I can collect enough money and try again.

– Male participant, Sharya

50 In the Iraqi Civil Code, a child is defined as every human being below the age of 18 years. The Juvenile Welfare Act No. 76 of 1983 places children in the following categories, by age group: (1) A “youngster” is a person under nine years of age; (2) A “juvenile” is a person over 9 but under 18 years of age; (3) A juvenile is designated as a “preadolescent” if he is over 9 but under 15 years of age; (4) A juvenile is designated as an “adolescent” if he is over 15 but under 18 years of age. The age of majority, which is set at 18 years in Iraqi law, is consistent with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

“ We all have aspirations to leave Iraq whenever the opportunity arises [...] but financial constraints limit our ability to do as it is quite costly.

– Male Participant, Khanke

Many male participants were working and saving money to fund their journey. According to Flow Monitoring DTM data, from June to August 2023, among those who received help to arrange the journey, 13 per cent of incoming travellers and 32 per cent of outgoing travellers relied on the services of brokers or smugglers.<sup>51</sup>

One male participant in Khanke mentioned that some community members have attempted to move seven times unsuccessfully so far. A female participant in Sharya camp confirmed camp residents were able to differentiate between regular and irregular migration pathways **and that they would be more likely to resort to regular means if there was support to do so, as they feared smugglers who put their lives at risk.** Consequently, it is likely that youth, especially women, would be receptive to receiving information on regular pathways including asylum procedures and family reunification.

Participants were aware of a range of obstacles and risks associated with migration, including risks of abuse, exploitation and violence, food insecurity and dangers linked to land routes. Despite this knowledge, they expressed the willingness and desire to migrate to Europe:

“ We are well aware of the challenges we may encounter, including rejection, possible setbacks, or even being sent back. Nevertheless, we persist and remain hopeful for eventual success.

– Male Participant, Khanke

From FGD data it appears that girls were likely to migrate collectively with their families, whereas young men were eager to move even if they were alone. Female participants said it is very difficult for them to take this journey due to its physical challenges. **In some situations, participants said families send unaccompanied children first** to later attempt family reunification at the destination, which in turn places additional burdens on younger members of the family.

## SOCIAL INFLUENCE

Social connections play a significant role in shaping the aspirations and decisions of internally displaced Yazidis. The choices made by one person within the community often influence others to follow a similar path.

“ When one individual decides to venture beyond the borders of Iraq, it often sparks a desire in their friends to follow suit, driven by curiosity and the hope for a better life abroad.

– Female Participant, Khanke

**Specifically, male participants in Sharya said they had relatives living outside Iraq, which was an influencing factor in their decision to migrate to Europe.**

Based on social influence, these destinations are likely to follow pre-existing destinations for Iraqi refugees and migrants. The European Commission's Migration Profile for Iraq shows that 1,679,000 Iraqis have legally emigrated. This represents 4.4 per cent of the Iraqi population. Of these migrants, 1,457,800 are in the European Union, accounting for 27.3 per cent of all Iraqi migrants. As for refugees, 362,500 left Iraq (1% of the population), and 204,300 of them (56.4%) are now in the European Union. Most Iraqi refugees moved to Germany (130,640), followed by Turkey (37,319), Jordan (34,037), Iran (28,268) and Syria (16,325).<sup>52</sup>

## CONDITIONS DURING DISPLACEMENT AND IN AREAS OF ORIGIN

Conditions during displacement and in areas of origin are also drivers of migration, as FGD participants described. Due to economic reasons and overall conditions in areas of displacement and origin, Yazidi youth are keen to emigrate.

“ There is no future, jobs, or safety and security in our area of origin, so we aspire to go abroad one day. That is the reason for our desire to relocate.

– Male Participant, Khanke

51 DTM, Cross-Border Monitoring Report, September 2023.

52 European Commission, KCMD, Migration Profile: Iraq, 2019.

Participants noted that displacement has led to living in cramped spaces, lack of food and water, and insufficient access to and availability of basic services, creating dire living conditions.

“ Each day it become clearer that we should migrate [...] our families support our decision and want to migrate as well since they can't live this miserable life any more than just depends on organisations and charity. We want to live, to work, to have proper work, to have proper education without fear of any war or another displacement.

– Male Participant, Sharya

As emerged in the FGDs, for girls, the harsh realities of displacement, including limited access to education and economic opportunities, often leads to negative coping mechanisms including early marriage.

“ We don't see any future improvement regarding our personal hopes. To improve our lives, we have to think of migration (outside Iraq).

– Female participant, Sharya

In areas of origin, participants said they have limited access to health care, and many cannot afford essential health-care costs. The lack of access to education and vocational training opportunities continues from camps to areas of origin and hampers personal development and growth as well as sustainable income generating opportunities. Many displaced youths said they are unable to attend school in areas of origin due to a lack of schools and are eager to leave Iraq to access higher-quality education and therefore have better career prospects.

In addition, participants found that displaced Yazidis often face discrimination and find it difficult to integrate into host communities due to their forced displacement from their original environment. In their view, due to years of forced displacement, difficulties in finding stable livelihoods and rebuilding their lives are compounded. Female participants said that displaced young women face considerable economic challenges, with limited job opportunities available to them in areas of origin. Many resort to low-paying work in orchards and agricultural labour. However, in their view, these opportunities are often insufficient to secure a stable livelihood, leading to aspirations for better economic prospects outside Iraq.



Recreational activity in Khanke Camp, 9 October 2023. © IOM 2023

## RECOMMENDATIONS

**Government including national and local authorities** should strengthen the implementation of inclusive and effective strategies to enhance safety and stability in Sinjar and support the attainment of durable solutions to displacement. Yazidis in displacement sites should be supported to pursue their intentions to return or relocate in a safe and dignified manner.

**Government and service providers, with the support of donors**, should address the high levels of destruction within Sinjar district specifically by investing in housing, education, livelihood opportunities and provision of basic services. In addition, the provision of protection services led by local actors needs to be strengthened through tailored and coordinated capacity-building under relevant coordination forums. This will ensure service provision is present and accessible for residents and the returning population. Through the use of the Sinjar Plan of Action, donors, government and organizations can and should identify priority interventions to support progress towards solutions.

**Government and service providers, with the support of donors**, should prioritize educational and livelihood opportunities in displacement camps and areas of return to provide viable employment for Yazidi youth, especially for girls, and reduce the likelihood of resorting to negative coping mechanisms.

**Government and service providers, with the support of donors**, should improve infrastructure and access to basic services such as health care,

MHPSS services, clean water and electricity in areas of origin in Sinjar District and Qahtaniya subdistrict to reduce push factors for irregular migration and support returns and sustainable reintegration. In addition, efforts to combat exploitation of adolescents must be strengthened through protection and gender-based violence actors in relevant locations.

**Government and service providers** should conduct awareness campaigns on risks of irregular migration, including trafficking in persons, and regular migration pathways targeting Yazidi communities, community leaders and youth. These campaigns can be conducted **in collaboration with relevant embassies** to ensure information is provided in a collaborative manner.

**Government** should improve coordination mechanisms internally to combat smuggling networks and prevent exploitation, and externally with neighbouring countries to ensure migrants' rights are respected, especially by border authorities. In addition, immediate support, such as MHPSS services, should be provided by Government and service providers in case of deportation, especially at border crossings.

**Multi-stakeholder** efforts should be made to expand and enhance regular migration pathways by making existing and new regular pathways accessible and inclusive. This will enable more individuals to benefit from opportunities for development and protection outside of their countries of birth.

## ANNEX A

DTM Iraq Flow Monitoring data and DTM Master List data were sources of quantitative data as explained below:

DTM Iraq Flow monitoring data were collected at border crossing points with neighbouring countries – the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Syrian Arab Republic and the Republic of Türkiye (Türkiye) – to better understand migration movements in the Middle East. Cross-border monitoring is designed to capture and describe migration flows. Data displayed in this report were collected employing two approaches: a headcount of all travellers entering or exiting Iraq, and a survey of randomly selected travellers. Further details on the cross-border monitoring survey methodology, selection of respondents and border crossing points are available in the [Methodological Overview](#) on the DTM website. However, it is important to note that the flow monitoring points (FMPs) utilized in the DTM Iraq data collection are primarily situated at land borders, which may lead to the under-reporting of migration flows. Consequently, migration that occurs through unmonitored or alternative routes may not be fully accounted for in the data. Despite this limitation, the data still provides valuable insights, offering a general understanding of migration patterns and trends.

The DTM Iraq Master List is carried out at the location level (including camps, sites, villages and

neighbourhoods) with the IDP or/and returnee population(s). It collects data on IDPs in around 3,000 locations across 105 districts in 18 governorates and data on returnees in around 2,000 locations across 38 districts in 8 governorates. IOM's Rapid Assessment and Response Teams (RARTs) collect data through interviews with key informants utilizing a large, well-established network of over 9,500 key informants that includes community leaders, mukhtars, local authorities and security forces. Additional information is gathered from government registration data and partner agencies. IOM RARTs collect Master List data continuously and report it every four months. However, limited access due to security issues and other operational constraints can affect information-gathering activities. The variation in displacement figures observed between different reporting periods, in addition to true variation of the population figures, may be influenced by other factors such as the continuous identification of previously displaced groups and the inclusion of data on secondary displacements within Iraq. The displaced populations are identified through a process of collection, verification, triangulation and validation of data. IOM continues to closely coordinate with federal, regional and local authorities to maintain a shared and accurate understanding of displacement across Iraq.

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