POVERTY & PRECARITY

A COMPARISON OF FEMALE- AND MALE-HEADED HOUSEHOLDS IN DISTRICTS OF RETURN

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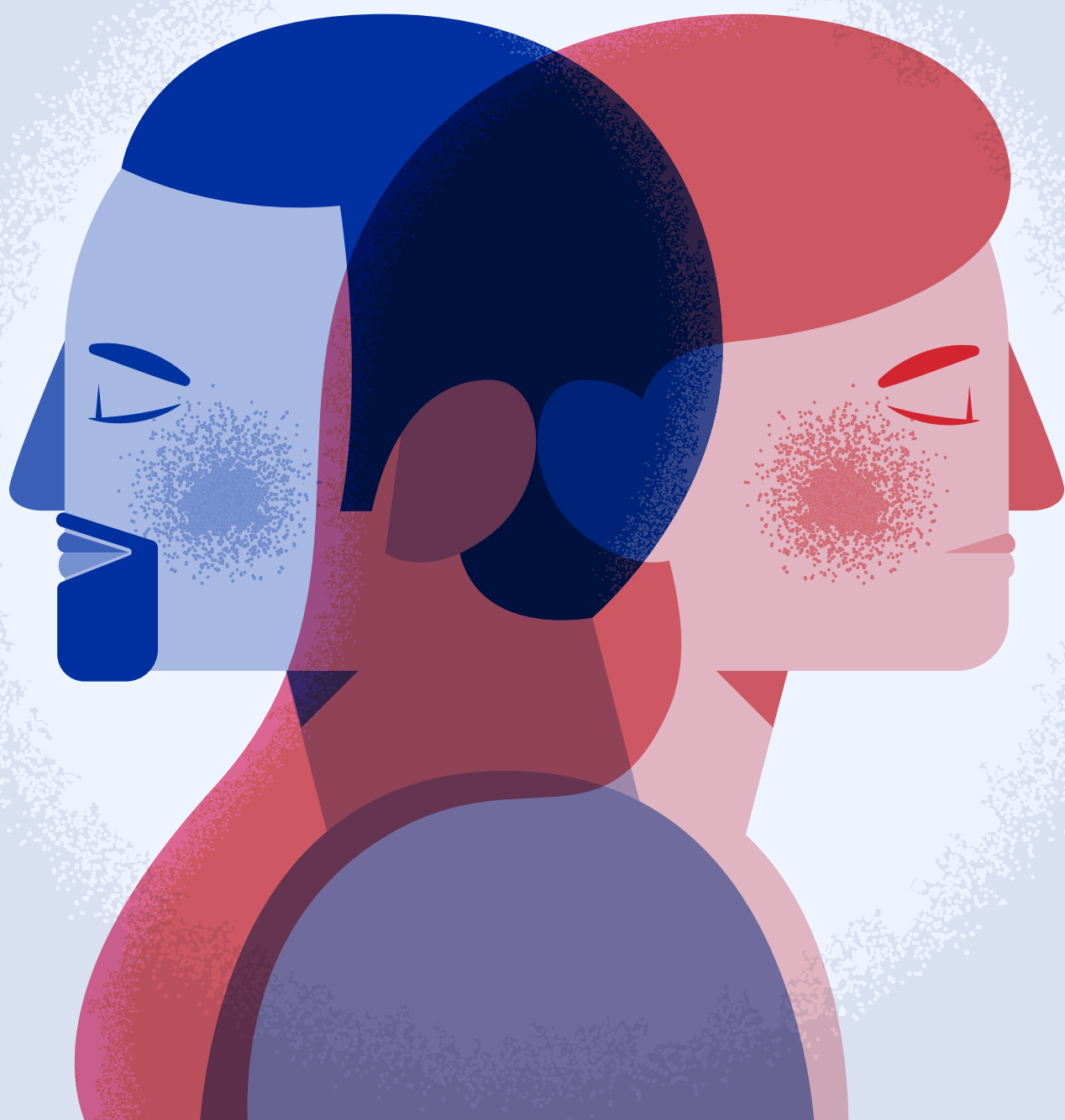
ABOUT IOM

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ABOUT SOCIAL INQUIRY

Social Inquiry is an Iraq-based not-for-profit research institution focused on influencing policy and praxis that establishes civic trust and repairs social fabric within and between fragile communities, and communities and the state. Its research focuses on three thematic rubrics: (i) social cohesion and fragility, (ii) transitional justice and reconciliation, and (iii) post- conflict political economy, exploring intersecting political, social, psychological, economic, and historical dimensions within these themes.

Within the top 14 districts of return in Iraq in the aftermath of the ISIL conflict, conditions and perceptions related to reintegration of internally displaced persons (IDPs) do not appear to vary significantly between women and men or between younger and older respondents. [1]Rather, the gender of the head of household is a more critical factor, influencing reintegration outcomes from household living conditions to individual perceptions. Female-headed households, as could be expected, tended to show relatively worse outcomes.

Among a statistically representative survey of returnee households across these 14 districts conducted in the spring of 2022, approximately %16 are female-headed. They are found predominantly in Hawija, Shirqat, Telafar, and Tikrit districts. Table 1 depicts the gender breakdown of respondents, whether they are heads of household or not, and the type of household they are part of. It shows that data collection was not limited to heads of household only. Rather any individual over the age of 18 could participate for their household to ensure gender and age representation for the sample.

Table 1. Breakdown of respondent gender, role in household, and typology of household

How would you describe the purchasing power of your household?	Female-headed households	Male-headed households
We do not have enough money even for food	18%	3%
We have enough money for food, but not enough to buy clothes and shoes as needed	44%	23%
We have enough money for food and clothing, but not enough to buy expensive items if we had to (such as a refrigerator or television)	27%	48%
We can buy some expensive items, such as a refrigerator or television, but we cannot buy everything we want	9%	20%
We can buy whatever we want	2%	4%
Total	100%	100%

The analysis here details the differences in household-level characteristics in terms of conflict experiences, housing, and socio-economic situations. It also examines the individual perceptions of their respective heads of household on safety, security, and social cohesion, and what implications these differences have on durable reintegration.

This brief is part of a larger research project, Reimaging Reintegration, carried out by IOM Iraq and Social Inquiry, that explores the sustainability of returns across 14 districts hosting the largest shares of returnees in the country. These are, in descending order of returns, Mosul, Ramadi, Falluja, Telafar, Tikrit, Heet, Hawija, Hamdaniya, Shirqat, Kirkuk, Baiji, Sinjar, Khanaqin, and Balad. The findings presented here are drawn from an original household survey and roster of 2,260 returnee respondents in these districts collected between March and April 2022.

The survey included a household module (applicable to the overall household situation), a personal module (gathering perceptions of the respondent), and a roster module (collecting personal characteristics of each household member), covering topics related to demographics, displacement and conflict history, safety and security, adequate standards of living, livelihoods and economic conditions, housing condition/restitution and tenure security, civil documentation, social cohesion and public participation, and remedies and justice.

The outputs of this project also include an analysis of sustainable reintegration in districts of return and another brief on the impacts of conflict, climate change and the economy on agriculture in districts of return.

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[1] The overall gender distribution achieved in the data collection from which this analysis is drawn is 1,758 male respondents (%63) and 1,045 female respondents (%37), which allows for the application of weights to carry out an unbiased analysis.
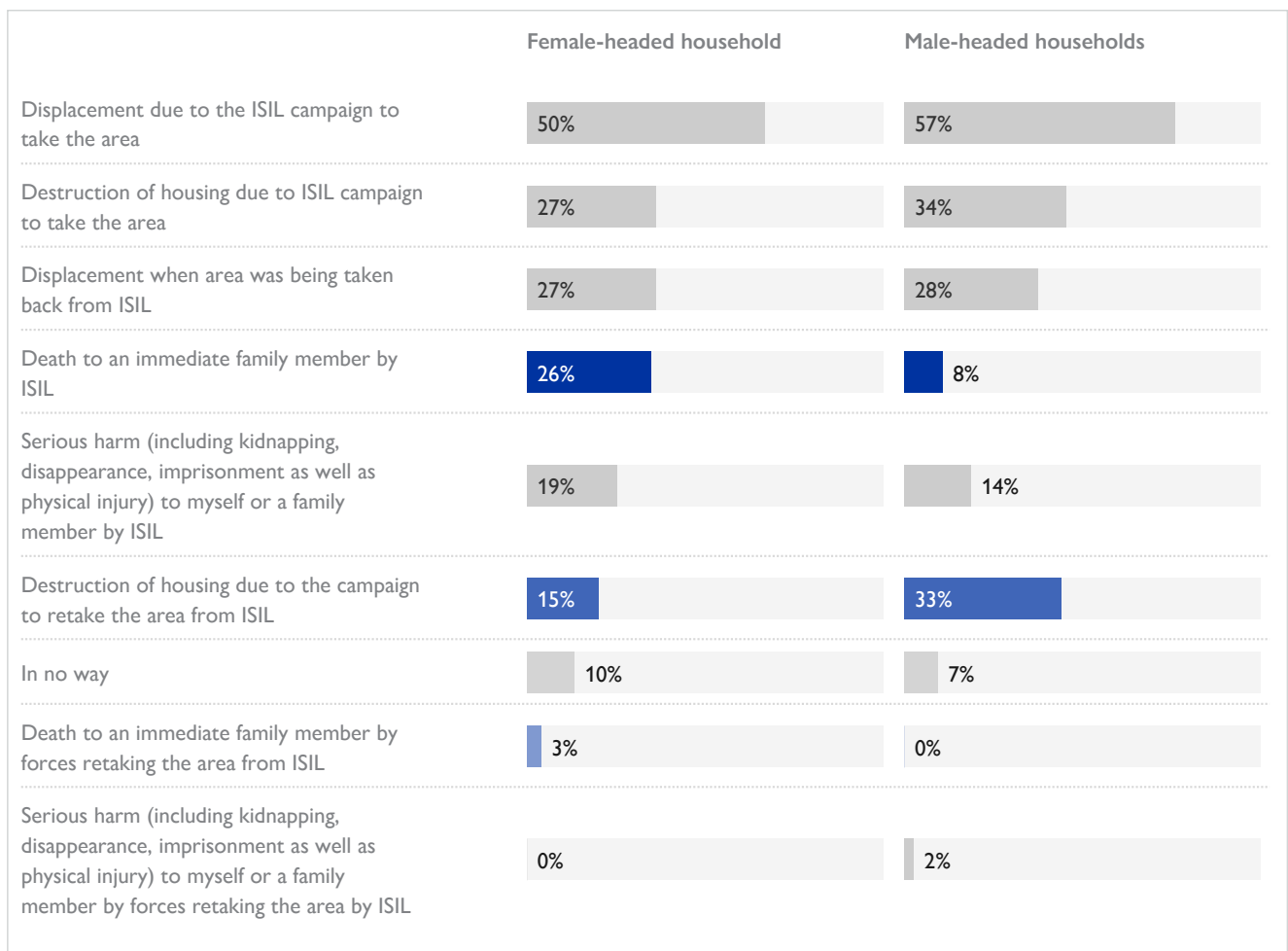
CONFLICT EXPERIENCES AND LOSSES

One particularly critical difference between households emerges in their experiences of violence and loss because of the conflict. One in four female-headed households reported the deaths of immediate family members primarily by ISIL (%26) or, to a lesser extent, by forces retaking areas from ISIL (%3) than male-headed households (%8 in total). This particular loss, likely of husbands, fathers, brothers, or older sons, implies that many of these households are female-headed precisely as a direct consequence of the conflict. In addition to the psychological effects these households may experience because of having lost a loved one to violence and conflict, it also seems to contribute to their more precarious outcomes related to housing, socio-economic situation, and perceptions of safety, security, and social cohesion, as will be described in the subsequent sections. The only other substantive difference in reported conflict losses between households relates to

house destruction due to military operations, where male-headed households tend to report this in higher proportion (%33 versus %15)—though residential destruction caused by ISIL is similar across households.

Finally, overall conflict-related displacement and return movements among male- and female-headed households are relatively similar and follow the same general pattern. Families primarily displaced in 2014 and 2015, with a smaller subset of households doing so between 2016 and 2017, during the last stages of the effort to retake ISIL-controlled areas. Most households returned to their places of origin in 2017, with smaller proportions coming back before this period in 2016 and after this period in 2018 and to a much lesser extent in 2019 and 2020.

Figure 1. Household return movements

	Female-headed household	Male-headed households
Displacement due to the ISIL campaign to take the area	50%	57%
Destruction of housing due to ISIL campaign to take the area	27%	34%
Displacement when area was being taken back from ISIL	27%	28%
Death to an immediate family member by ISIL	26%	8%
Serious harm (including kidnapping, disappearance, imprisonment as well as physical injury) to myself or a family member by ISIL	19%	14%
Destruction of housing due to the campaign to retake the area from ISIL	15%	33%
In no way	10%	7%
Death to an immediate family member by forces retaking the area from ISIL	3%	0%
Serious harm (including kidnapping, disappearance, imprisonment as well as physical injury) to myself or a family member by forces retaking the area by ISIL	0%	2%

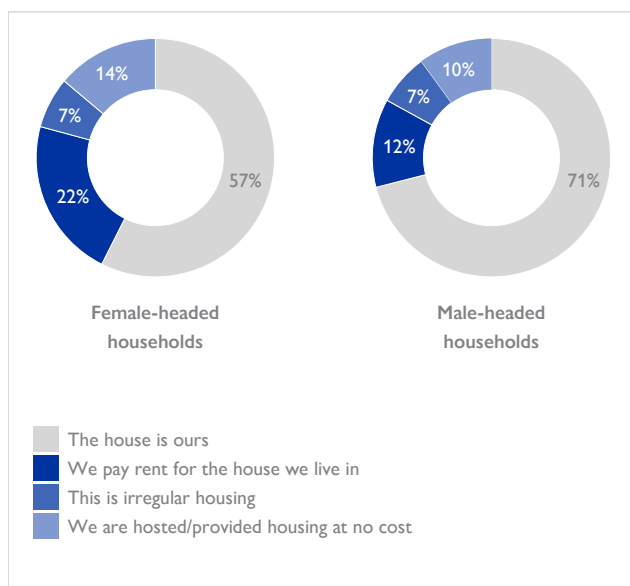## HOUSING AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC SITUATION ON RETURN

The majority of male- and female-headed households own their homes and live in the same homes now as before the conflict. Female-headed households appear to experience greater housing precarity, as reflected by the larger shares paying rent or, to a much lesser extent, being hosted than male-headed households (Figure 2). On the other hand, male and female-headed households reside in irregular housing at the same rate.

Figure 2. Tenure status of current housing

Female-headed households	Male-headed households

- The house is ours
- We pay rent for the house we live in
- This is irregular housing
- We are hosted/provided housing at no cost

That female-headed households pay rent likely further contributes to their weaker financial stability and security. This is reflected in their reduced purchasing power and in their less stable sources of income than male-headed households. With regard to the former indicator, over half of all female-headed households are either unable to make ends meet or are barely able to do so (Table 1). The majority of male-headed households, on the other hand, can cover their basic needs and, in around a quarter of cases, can alsoafford expensive items.
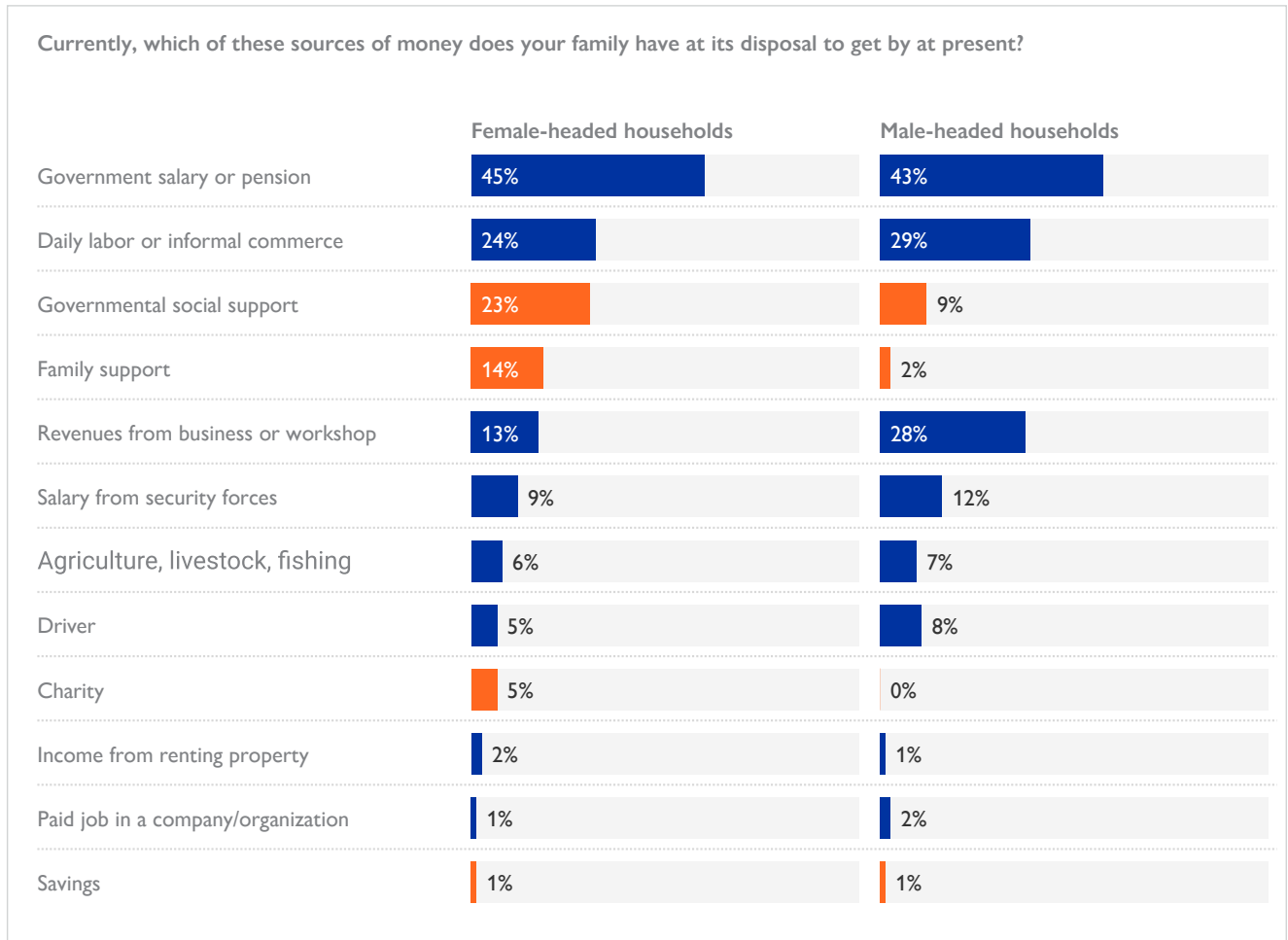
Table 1. Self-reported household purchasing power

How would you describe the purchasing power of your household?	Female-headed households	Male-headed households
We do not have enough money even for food	18%	3%
We have enough money for food, but not enough to buy clothes and shoes as needed	44%	23%
We have enough money for food and clothing, but not enough to buy expensive items if we had to (such as a refrigerator or television)	27%	48%
We can buy some expensive items, such as a refrigerator or television, but we cannot buy everything we want	9%	20%
We can buy whatever we want	2%	4%
Total	100%	100%

This vast difference in purchasing power is likely attributable to the types of revenue that female-headed households earn to cover expenses. While a plurality of both female- and male-headed households rely on income from government employment or pensions, female-headed households tend to have less revenue from business than male-headed households. More critically, female-headed households rely on public and informal safety nets at almost four times the rate of male-headed households (highlighted red in Figure 3).

Figure 3. Current sources of household revenue

Currently, which of these sources of money does your family have at its disposal to get by at present?

	Female-headed households	Male-headed households
Government salary or pension	45%	43%
Daily labor or informal commerce	24%	29%
Governmental social support	23%	9%
Family support	14%	2%
Revenues from business or workshop	13%	28%
Salary from security forces	9%	12%
Agriculture, livestock, fishing	6%	7%
Driver	5%	8%
Charity	5%	0%
Income from renting property	2%	1%
Paid job in a company/organization	1%	2%
Savings	1%	1%

Note: Multiple responses permitted.

Despite these considerable differences in household revenue and income sources, both female- and male-headed households report the same barriers to accessing livelihoods in similar shares. The main barrier to livelihoods across households and districts of return was the lack of jobs altogether rather than any form of reported discrimination. These economic differences also do not factor into households' views on the potential for prosperity. In general, the feeling that future generations will live more comfortably than the current generation is moderately low.

Finally, female- and male-headed households also report similar rates of access to and satisfaction with public utilities, healthcare, and education. With respect to education, female- and male-headed households in which school aged children (6 to 17 years old) reside have roughly the same rates of school enrollment to one another.
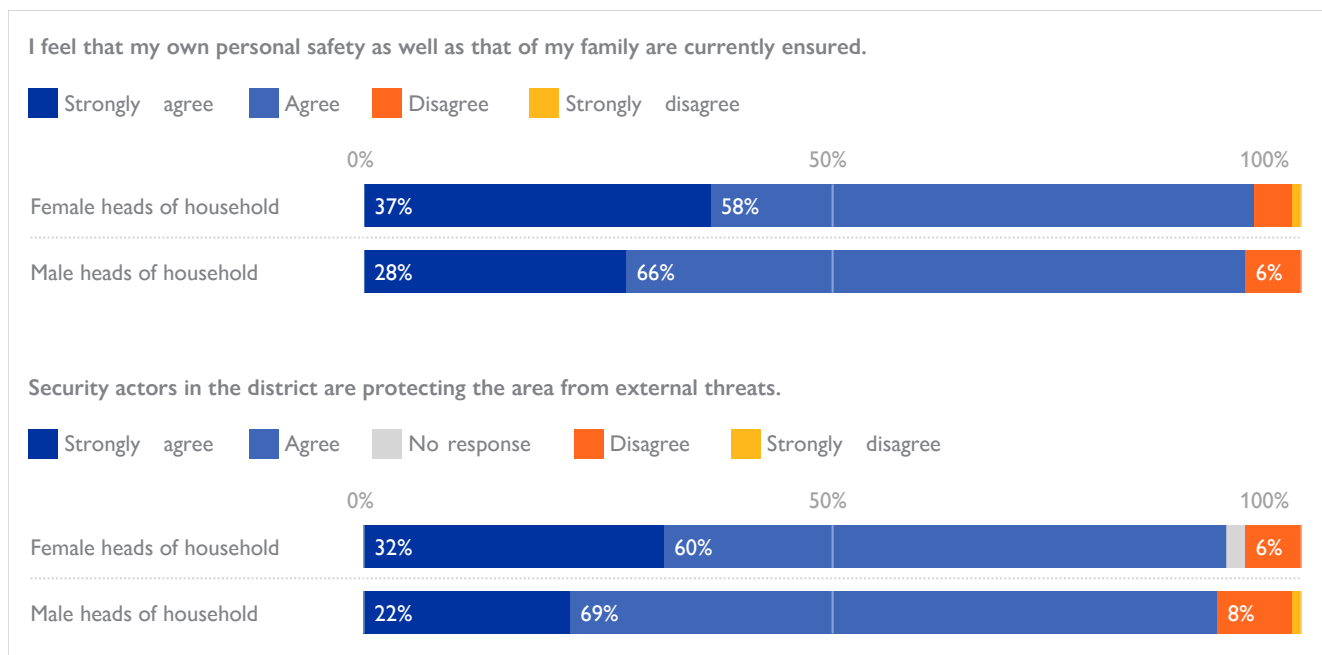
SAFETY, SECURITY AND SOCIAL COHESION ON RETURN

The factors explored here related to safety, security, and social cohesion are more subjective than those described above. They focus on a respondent's individual perceptions rather than more concrete household characteristics. As such, the findings presented here explore the similarities and differences in responses given by the heads of household only, who comprise %60 of the total sample. In other words, female-headed households include responses given by women who are heads of household and male-headed households include responses from the men who are heading them. This is to ensure unbiased analysis of the differences in the typology of households. It is also worth noting again that differences in responses based on the gender of the respondent alone did not yield significant differences in the indicators described below.

In considering personal safety and district security, returnee heads of household overall report similarly positive views (Figure 4). Nearly all female and male heads of household indicate that they and their families feel safe in their neighborhoods or villages and believe that security actors protect their areas from external threats. Additionally, these respondents did not report significant restrictions in their freedom of movement imposed by authorities.
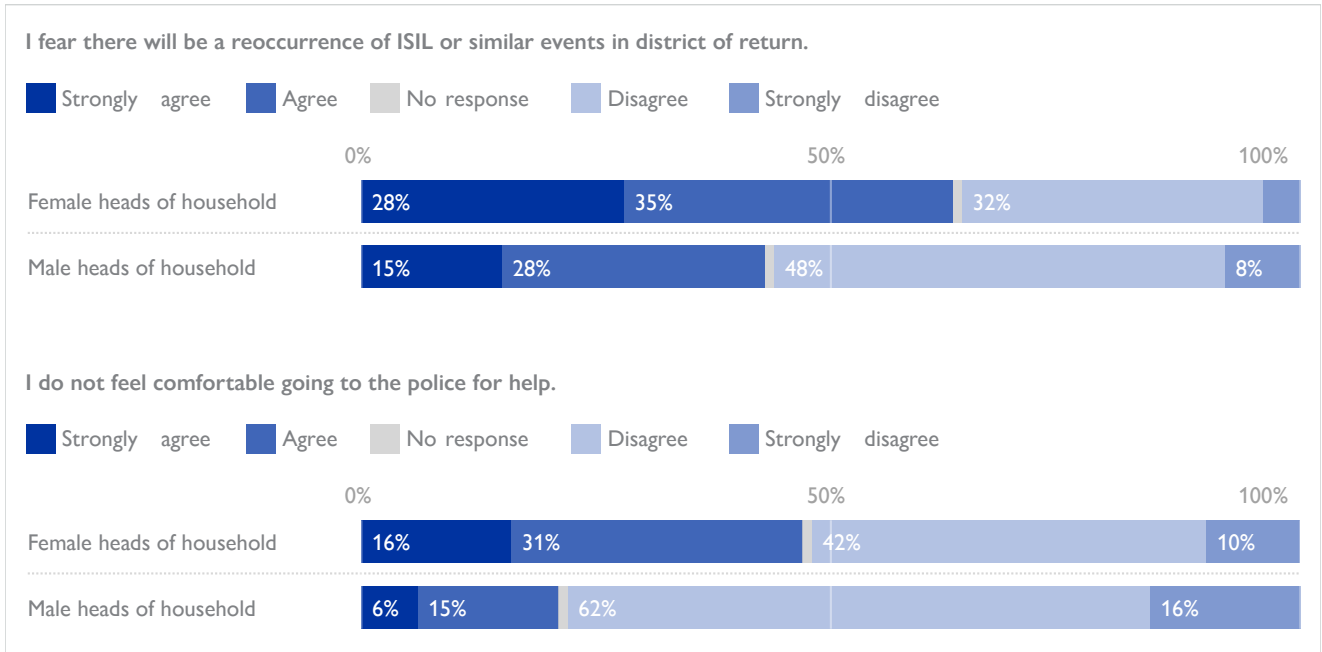
Figure 4. Heads of household similarities in safety and security perceptions

I feel that my own personal safety as well as that of my family are currently ensured.

Legend: ■ Strongly agree ■ Agree ■ Disagree ■ Strongly disagree

	0%	50%	100%
Female heads of household	37%	58%	
Male heads of household	28%	66%	6%

Security actors in the district are protecting the area from external threats.

Legend: ■ Strongly agree ■ Agree ▨ No response ■ Disagree ■ Strongly disagree

	0%	50%	100%
Female heads of household	32%	60%	6%
Male heads of household	22%	69%	8%

Gender differences appear, however, when examining the potential for future violence and in seeking help for addressing a crime or threat. As illustrated in Figure 5, female heads of household tend to be more concerned about the possible recurrence of ISIL or similar events (%63) male heads of household (%43). More than twice as many female heads of household were uncomfortable in seeking help from the police for a safety or security concern.

Figure 5. Heads of household differences in safety and security perceptions

I fear there will be a reoccurrence of ISIL or similar events in district of return.

■ Strongly agree ■ Agree ■ No response ■ Disagree ■ Strongly disagree

	0%	50%	100%

Female heads of household: 28% | 35% | 32%

Male heads of household: 15% | 28% | 48% | 8%

I do not feel comfortable going to the police for help.

■ Strongly agree ■ Agree ■ No response ■ Disagree ■ Strongly disagree

	0%	50%	100%

Female heads of household: 16% | 31% | 42% | 10%
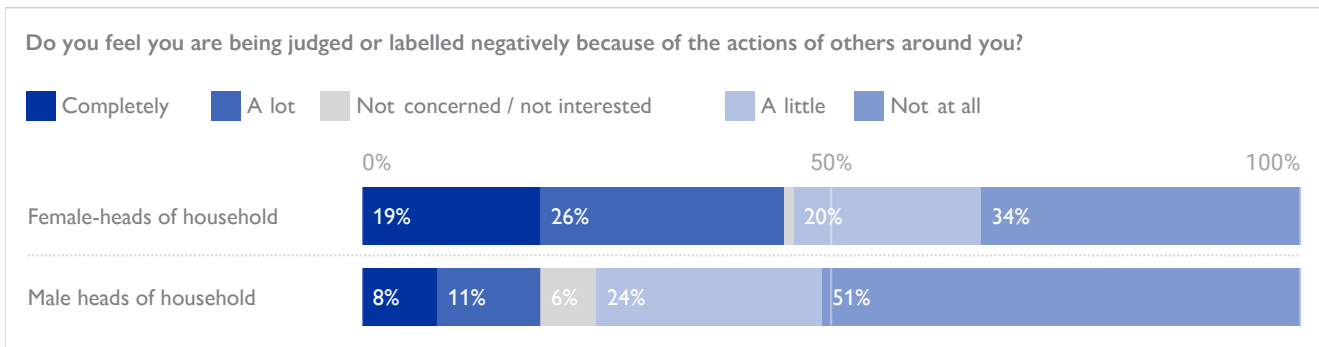
Male heads of household: 6% | 15% | 62% | 16%

These differences may reflect heads of households' perceptions of their relationships with their wider community and institutions. How they feel others view them is likely a factor in how certain they are that violence will recur or that law enforcement would be of help to them. This is seen more clearly in examining heads of households' self-reported views of social cohesion.

Male and female heads of household tend to report relatively high levels of trust in others within their wider communities. At the same time, however, more than twice as many female heads of household report feeling negatively judged or labelled by others as compared to their male counterparts (Figure 6). It is difficult to say precisely why these heads of household feel this way, but it likely relates to several inter-related factors including societal norms and conflict dynamics (including the potential for perceived ISIL affiliation). No specific institutional or socio-economic discrimination is reported in any great number – both in general, and in comparison to male-headed households. Hence, the judgement felt by female heads of household may be more related to inter-personal relationships and networks. Female heads of households' social networks have may shrunk post-conflict, meaning they may now be subject to isolation and potentially less comfort in seeking the company of neighbors or help from localized actors including the police. This is a concern as an individual's collective social environment on return is directly correlated to their mental health and psychosocial wellbeing; *negative social environments contribute to lower mental health and psychosocial outcomes.*[2]

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[2] Nadia Siddiqui, Streets Tell Stories: The Effects of Neighborhood Social Environment on Mental Health and Psychosocial Wellbeing in the Aftermath of Conflict (The Hague: Cordaid, 2021).

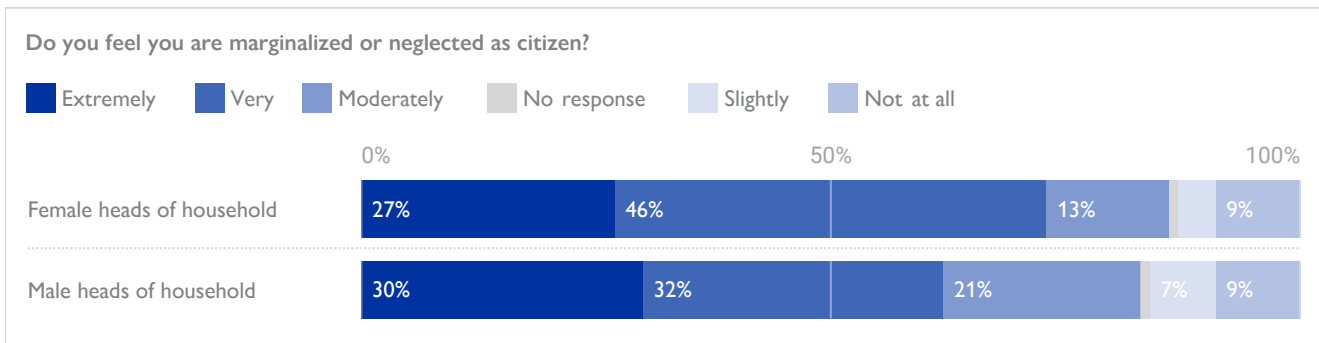Figure 6. Perceptions of collective blame by household

Do you feel you are being judged or labelled negatively because of the actions of others around you?

Legend: ■ Completely   ■ A lot   ▢ Not concerned / not interested   ▢ A little   ▢ Not at all

	0%		50%	100%
Female-heads of household	19%	26%	20%	34%
Male heads of household	8%	11%	6% 24%	51%

IMPLICATIONS FOR SUSTAINABLE REINTEGRATION

The findings above highlight both the material and social precarity female-headed households and female heads of household in districts of return experience. Given these conditions, it is perhaps not surprising that female heads of household tend to indicate feeling particularly marginalized as citizens, though it should be noted that male heads of household report considerably high levels of marginalization as well (Figure 7). Both attribute feelings of marginalization primarily to the central government. Following this, male heads of household feel marginalized by local authorities (%56) and the international community including the UN and NGOs (%32), while female heads of household place the international community (%37) ahead of local authorities (%32) in this regard.
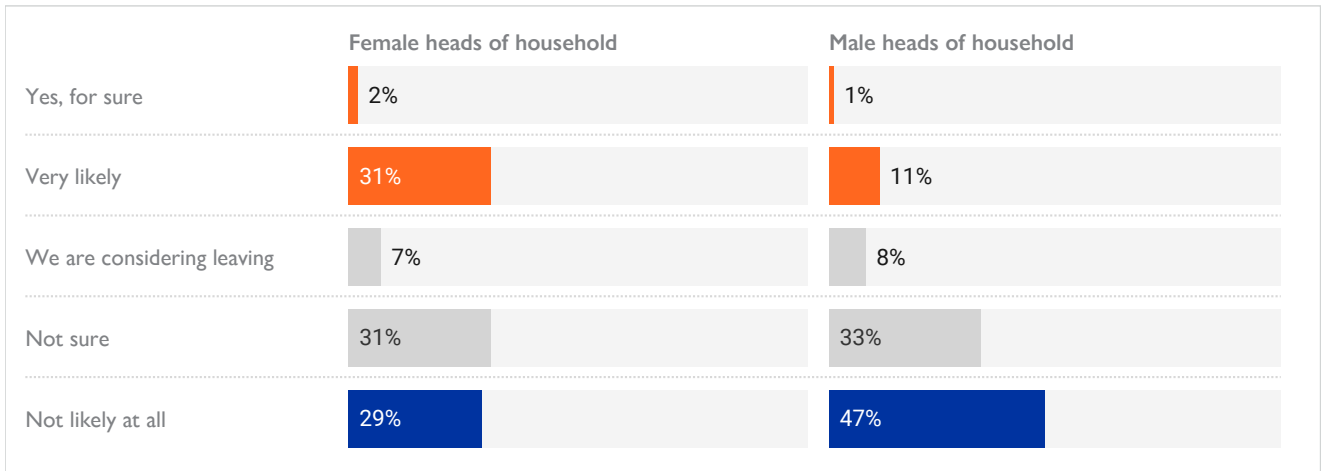
Figure 7. Levels of marginalization by household type

Do you feel you are marginalized or neglected as citizen?

Legend: ■ Extremely   ■ Very   ▢ Moderately   ▢ No response   ▢ Slightly   ▢ Not at all

	0%		50%	100%
Female heads of household	27%	46%	13%	9%
Male heads of household	30%	32%	21%	7% 9%

This high level of marginalization among female heads of household coupled with their more negative material conditions and social perceptions have implications for long-term reintegration, as well as the sustainability of return movements in the first place. With respect to the latter measure, places of origin do not appear as conducive for female-headed households to remain should the status quo continue (Figure 8). Female heads of household are considerably more likely to feel they must move again.

Figure 8. Likelihood of having no option but to migrate or move again in the foreseeable future due to conditions in return location

	Female heads of household	Male heads of household
Yes, for sure	2%	1%
Very likely	31%	11%
We are considering leaving	7%	8%
Not sure	31%	33%
Not likely at all	29%	47%

Improving conditions so that female-headed households can at least match male-headed households in districts of return will involve not only economic intervention, but also social reintegration programming to better incorporate these households into society and reduce the stigma attached to them. This can include expanded access to safety nets and psychosocial care as well as community and institutional sensitization and facilitated engagement with others. These are components of existing programming to support the facilitated voluntary return of still displaced households[3]; this should be expanded to encompass households who have returned on their own accord but continue to have difficulties in getting by and in re-engaging with the residents around them. These efforts would be further bolstered by work to address unresolved grievances that the wider returnee community may still have as well.[4] Given the scope of need, many conflict-affected communities note that it is the state that would have and should have the capacity to address them[5]—and that this is what they are looking for to help in reducing their feelings of marginalization in the aftermath of conflict.

[3] Iraq Durable Solutions and IOM, Iraq Durable Solutions Toolkit Vol. 1 Facilitated Voluntary Returns (Baghdad: IOM, 2021).

[4] UNAMI, 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, 2020).

[5] Nadia Siddiqui and Khogir W. Mohammed, Movements before Mechanisms: Community Grievances and Windows of Opportunity for Restorative Justice in a Transitional Justice Context Summary Findings (Erbil: Social Inquiry, 2022).

IOM IRAQ

iraq.iom.int

iomiraq@iom.int

UNAMI Compound (Diwan 2),
International Zone,
Baghdad / Iraq

@IOMIraq