Conflict Analysis
Sinjar and Hawija, Iraq | 2019

building peaceful futures

Acknowledgements

Recommended citation:

Building Peaceful Futures. (2019). Conflict Analysis Sinjar and Hawija, Iraq.
Erbil: Building Peaceful Futures.

building peaceful futures

Save the Children   NRC NORWEGIAN REFUGEE COUNCIL   care   HANDICAP INTERNATIONAL

Contents

Executive summary

This conflict analysis has been prepared for the Building Peaceful Futures Consortium to support the implementing partners and other stakeholders to promote conflict sensitive interventions.

Iraq in has a long history of conflict, most recently as a result of the civil and international war against the IS. Large areas of the country were taken by the group, which led to the widespread destruction of infrastructure and livelihoods; physical, mental, and emotional trauma experienced by affected populations; and increasing distrust between community groups who used to live side by side.

Sinjar and Hawija are among the districts most affected by the recent conflict and score high on the humanitarian needs overall severity index in Iraq[1]. Sinjar, and particularly its Yazidi population, was specifically targeted by the IS, with tens of thousands of people killed, abducted and displaced by the fighting. Infrastructure that was underdeveloped before the war was largely destroyed during the conflict, and reconstruction has been slow despite the promises and commitments made by the international community and the Government of Iraq (GoI). Trust has eroded between community groups, particularly between the Yazidis and Sunni Arabs. The Yazidi population fears and distrusts the Sunni Arabs due to their real or perceived affiliations to the IS, while the Sunni Arab families fear retaliation and are experiencing increased marginalisation, which portends a future risk of radicalisation and support for new insurgencies.

Hawija was one of the last districts to be retaken from the IS, and still suffers from regular attacks and security issues. Due to access constraints and few humanitarian agencies present, there is a lack of information and available research to understand local dynamics. During the recent conflict, Hawija was one of the strongholds of the IS, with many local Sunni Arab tribes joining the IS militias. However, despite some Sunni Arab tribes pledging allegiance to the group, other tribes in Hawija joined the fight against the IS, and the district and communities suffered as a result of the IS rule. Given Hawija's status as the last vestige of the group's territory in Iraq, Hawija continues to be marginalised because of its reputation as an extremist stronghold. This creates an enabling environment for extremist groups to prey on vulnerable and disenfranchised community members.

The conflict against the IS is only the latest event in a country with long history of war, oppression and power struggles. Each new conflict introduces an additional set of issues, and in some cases, grievances go back decades or more, and have become inherited rather than directly experienced.

Another layer of complexity is added by Ninewa and Kirkuk's status as disputed territories, with both the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and the GoI claiming them as a part of their administration. The lack of a functioning government at the governorate level makes it harder to address some of the root causes of the conflict, as for example the housing, land and property (HLP) issues require political and administrative decisions, and continuous political disputes make it harder to address security and service delivery needs. The governments' inability to provide effective governance undermines both government-community relations and intra-community relations.

Despite the issues outlined, there are opportunities to build social cohesion within these communities, with the population largely stating their exhaustion from the continued violence and their desire to create a more peaceful society. There have also been promising developments in public rhetoric at the national level, for example, during the 2018 elections, where the discourse moved from sectarian language to local development issues. In Hawija, the surveys and interviews showed a certain level of optimism, with the majority of interviewees stating that they believe that reconciliation is possible. While reconciliation is by and large still seen in terms of tribal leaders and other traditional actors, the inclusion of women, people with disabilities, and other frequently marginalised groups will also be crucial for sustainable social cohesion efforts.

Approach and Methodology

This report is a combined effort of several contributors. For the primary data collection, 1028 people (512 in Sinjar and 516 in Hawija) were consulted through surveys, in addition to 40 qualitative interviews (23 for Sinjar, 17 for Hawija), and 12 focus group discussions (6 in each location). Particular attention was paid to inclusion in terms of age, gender, disability and diversity (e.g. ethnicity and tribe). Furthermore, the data was complemented by further interviews conducted in Dohuk and Erbil, as well as longer-term research and the local knowledge of the contributors.

The results are not necessarily statistically representative in terms of population or the geographical coverage of Sinjar and Hawija districts. Ensuring a representative sample was limited by security and access issues, as well as the lack of any recent census data from the two districts. Moreover, women and people with disabilities were given greater emphasis to ensure that their voices were heard. Therefore, the findings of the interviews are indicative of the population's perceptions and attitudes in the two locations, rather than statistically representative.

While the report provides important insights into the views of conflict affected communities, it should also be noted that this approach has its limitations. For example, government representatives have not been interviewed for the report.

Furthermore, the report mainly concentrates on the impact that the latest conflict with the Islamic State (IS) had on social cohesion in Sinjar and Hawija and does not extensively review the impact of the previous conflicts in Iraq generally, or in the two districts specifically.

Where specific references are not given, the information and analysis are based on the fieldwork conducted in Sinjar and Hawija in December 2018, as well as the expertise and knowledge of the contributors involved in the drafting of this the report.

Summary of the key findings

Increasing polarisation

As trust has eroded between community groups, the communities are becoming increasingly polarised. The issues between Yazidis and Sunni Arabs in Sinjar is an obvious example of polarisation between community groups, however a similar split is noticeable within the community groups. For example, suspicion over IS affiliation has resulted in high levels of distrust in the predominantly homogenous population of Hawija.

Risks of radicalisation

As polarisation in the community increases, Sunni Arabs have become increasingly vilified as a community group, which threatens their social, economic and political inclusion. These generalisations however ignore many Sunni Arab tribes' and individuals' participation in the fight against the IS. The marginalisation and social exclusion create new experiences of injustice for the excluded community groups, which, in turn, provides fertile ground for the IS (or its future equivalent) to recruit and grow.

Need for recognition and justice

The Yazidi community in Sinjar feel that their plight has not been properly acknowledged by the Sunni Arabs, whereas many Sunni Arabs who fought against the IS feel that their efforts have not been recognised. Both sides' need for acknowledgement is understandable but can also stand in the way of meaningful dialogue. There are demands for justice to ensure accountability and compensation, however there is little shared understanding or agreement about how justice should be served.

The ruins of Mosul's Old City, Ninewa Governorate, which was heavily bombed in the battle to retake the city from Islamic State control.
Photo: Claire Thomas/Save the Children

Unmet needs on the ground

The general lack of infrastructure and service provision remain among the biggest barriers to the return of families to Sinjar and Hawija. The lack of equitable access to services has also become a divisive factor among the communities in both districts. Destruction in the cities and villages is widespread, with issues particularly around physical infrastructure; essential water, sanitisation and health (WASH) services; healthcare; and livelihoods. This is particularly difficult for people with disabilities, for whom the lack of access to services often makes the difference between an impairment and a disability, and who are often excluded from decision-making structures and community spaces. Another major factor discouraging people from returning is the poor security situation, driven by armed actors, attacks by the IS cells, and distrust between community groups.

Opportunities for change

Displacement to Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps and larger population centres such as Dohuk and Erbil has increased the exposure of the communities in Sinjar and Hawija to different customs and created opportunities for community members to rethink the roles of women and youth in the society. Young people are generally more open to new ideas, while the older generation and traditional leaders have been slower to embrace change.

Opportunities for building social cohesion

In Hawija, there was a certain optimism around reconciliation opportunities and most interviewees felt that the conditions for working towards social cohesion were in place. In Sinjar, many interviewees felt it was still too early for proper inter-community reconciliation as the community groups are still largely fearful of each other. However, there are opportunities to take small steps towards social cohesion and peaceful coexistence, for example through intra-community dialogue. It was noted that some of the key issues, such as disputes over HLP issues require political solutions.

Recommendations

1. Improved living conditions and service delivery

The communities in Sinjar and Hawija stated improved living conditions and security as their most immediate and critical needs, and that returns are not likely to increase before these key needs are addressed, at least for essential WASH facilities, health services, education, and security. This will take concerted efforts from the local and national governments, the NGO community and donors to ensure that these services are available and accessible for all community members.

To ensure the conflict sensitivity of the interventions, emphasis should be placed on impartial and transparent needs-based selection of beneficiaries and geographic target areas. This also requires attempts to engage in areas with poor security, where needs are often the largest. Unequitable access to aid was identified as a point of contestation in the communities assessed for this report. Sound project management practices, such as effective and conflict sensitive communications and complaints and feedback response systems are critical. Similarly, it is important to be conflict sensitive regarding how and through whom access to the communities is secured.

2. Building trust and social cohesion in the communities

While improving the living conditions in the two districts will go a long way to improving people's lives, the communities are not likely to heal unless trust within and between the community groups is improved. Lack of trust was identified as a key issue to be addressed to enable and foster social cohesion within the population, as well as to improve security in the two districts. The widening polarisation also threatens exclusion of some community groups and provides the enabling environment needed for radical and extremist organisations to recruit adherents.

Supporting trust building and peaceful coexistence between different community groups in Sinjar and Hawija needs to be consistent and gradual. Fast solutions are not possible, considering the trauma experienced by affected communities. The interviewees noted there are opportunities to involve local tribal and religious leaders in these trust-building efforts. Strengthening the rule of law in these districts will also support this aim.

3. Addressing root causes of the conflict

Many of the root causes of the conflicts in the two areas require political solutions. For example, the HLP issues remain one of the key points of contestation in both Sinjar and Hawija and will continue to cause issues within the communities unless the government engages in finding sustainable solutions in a constructive and consultative way. Similarly, issues concerning political representation, power sharing, access to resources, and presence of non-state security actors can be addressed if community buy-in is ensured by engaging all community groups through consultative processes. Any changes should be gradual, well thought through and widely communicated, as any rash moves are likely to be detrimental to peace in these areas.

> **The international community, the UN, the NGO community and donors must support these sustainable solutions through concentrated advocacy efforts, funding for social cohesion initiatives and support to the relevant government actors.**

Socio-political situation and conflict in Sinjar

Socio-political situation and conflict in Sinjar

Society and politics

Community Groups in Sinjar

Sinjar's population is predominantly Yazidi, an ethnic and religious minority group living in Kurdish areas of Iraq, Syria and Turkey. There are also Sunni Arabs, Shia Arabs and Kurds living in the Sinjar.[2] Sinjar was one of the areas most affected by the conflict with the IS, and the Yazidi community was particularly targeted, with an estimated 3,100 Yazidis killed, 6,400 abducted across Iraq, and approximately 2,900 still missing[3].

Raising sectarianism in Iraq since the fall of Saddam Hussein in 2003 caused societal tensions in Sinjar, with several terror attacks targeting Yazidis before the conflict with the IS commenced in 2014. The IS exacerbated these divisions as many Sunni Arabs from Sinjar joined the IS. The Yazidi community was taken by surprise as their neighbours, employers, and friends turned on them: "we have been working with them and for them for so many years...families have known each other since our grandfathers' [generation], and they gave us to the IS."[4] The Yazidi community recognises that some Sunni Arab tribes did not support nor join the IS, and that some tribes (notably part of Shummar tribe in Rabe'a village) fought against the IS as a part of the Sunni Peshmerga and the Sunni Popular Mobilisation Units (PMUs). However, general distrust has polarised relations between Yazidis and the majority of Sunni Arabs in Sinjar, rather than just the Sunni Arabs affiliated with the IS.

As a result, the remaining Sunni Arab communities, residing in villages on the edges of the city, have effectively been marginalised by the rest of Sinjar's society. Sunni Arabs cannot easily travel to the city to access services, to go to work or use the properties some of them own in the city centre. There are also reports of Shia-led PMUs installing Shia families into previously Sunni-Arab majority villages and allowing these families to take advantage of local welfare benefits, prioritising them over their Sunni Arab counterparts.[5] Furthermore, there are tensions within the Sunni Arab community, caused by suspicions over affiliation with the IS.

Relations between the Yazidi and the Kurdish communities are largely congenial, although they are at times affected by Kurdish politics. Most Yazidis interviewed for the research indicated they do not mind Shia Kurds returning to the district, but there were some concerns among Yazidis over the increased presence of Shia in Sinjar[6], which has been visible in the community, for example through construction of Shia mosques and other religious buildings as well as large public celebrations to mark Shia holidays. The Yazidi community's distrust of Shia was noted with dismay by a few of the Shia interviewees, who said they felt that the Yazidi community "treated them as if they were IS".

There are also divisions within the Yazidi community itself, with disagreements over political affiliation, political parties, and the spiritual leadership, which in August 2019 resulted in the election of two parallel spiritual leaderships for the first time in Yazidi history. Traditionally, a strict 'class system' is part of the Yazidi culture. "There are three categories within the Yazidis – from the bottom to the top these are the Pir, Mreed, and the Sheikh," one interviewee explained. "The Mreed have to marry Mreed, and the same applies to all three." Even though the system is still in place, the war with IS has changed the situation, bringing the community closer together. Currently, Yazidis pay somewhat less attention to the class system than they did before the conflict according to the research conducted for this report, at least in terms of friendships and other interaction, if not necessarily marriage. However, while parts of the Yazidi community have become more liberal and secular as a result of displacement, migration, and exposure to new ideas, others have reacted to change caused by the IS conflict and the subsequent displacement by stricter adherence to religious and traditional customs.

Governance in Sinjar and Ninewa

The political situation in Sinjar is complicated by Ninewa's status as a disputed region, with both the GoI and the KRG claiming control over the territory. As a result, governance structures are disjointed. Sinjar has two mayors, one in Sinjar, and one in Dohuk, both with different support bases. The population is divided, even within the community groups. For example, some of the Yazidis support the old, Dohuk-based mayor, while others support the new, Baghdad-backed leader. There is also a local council supported by the PMUs/YBS, however their appointment was not seen as consultative and the council is therefore considered illegitimate by the population.

There are few government offices operating in the district and they are limited in what they can do. Several directorates, including the residency and civil status directorates and the land registry do not function in Sinjar, and alternative directorates are far away and often overcrowded. The nearest courts are in Sinuni (approximately one hour away from Sinjar City), and these are only open on certain days each week. Obtaining civil documents that are needed to access services and government support is often difficult, particularly for families suspected of IS affiliation (including children).

HLP issues are complex in Sinjar for several reasons. For example, hundreds of thousands of Yazidis were forcibly relocated from their land in Sinjar as part of Saddam Hussein's demographic policies during the 1970s. Yazidis were denied the right to register the assigned plots in their names, even in new towns where they were transferred. This practise continued after the fall of

A young displaced man overlooks the informal settlement camps in Sinjar Mountain where he and his family have fled.
Photo: Kimberley Gardiner/Save the Children

the Saddam Hussein's regime in 2003. This requires a political solution, however the political impasse between the KRG and the GoI regarding the 'disputed areas', in which Sinjar falls, complicates the situation. According to Article 140 of the GoI's Constitution, both displaced Arabs and Kurds should be given compensation and a chance to resettle in their old homes. However, interpretation of how this should be implemented has been highly fraught, and only intensified after the conflict with the IS.

The political infighting has a direct impact on the communities, and many respondents believe that political parties obstruct peace efforts. "Political parties make divisions within the communities and between them", noted one of the interviewees. Some respondents also noted that some of the political actors benefit from the chaos, engaging in illegal trade and therefore have little interest in improving the situation.

Among the Yazidis, there is a general distrust against the government, owing to years of political and economic marginalisation before and during the Saddam Hussein's reign. The links between the governments post-2003 and the Yazidis have been steadily improving, and Yazidi political actors have tried to increase their participation in national politics for example through the establishment of a Yazidi coalition. The GoI has attempted to acknowledge the war crimes Yazidi communities were subjected to during the conflict with the IS through the introduction of a draft law to provide welfare and reparations to the Yazidi community and other survivors of the IS[7]. However, many Yazidis feel that the GoI is still not doing enough to address the situation either politically or in terms of service provision or security, nor does the GoI ensure that Sunni returnees are sufficiently vetted and cleared. According to one elderly interviewee, "the Iraqi government is not serious about punishing those who committed these crimes, they are helping them return to Sinjar".

Perceptions on reconciliation and social cohesion

There is a distinct sense that the people of Sinjar are tired of conflict. However, the interviewees gave little hope of immediate prospects for peace in Sinjar. Of those interviewed, 64% stated that they did not trust people from other ethnic and religious groups living in the area, 67% did not see any possibility for strengthening these relationships, and 45% of the interviewees did not see reconciliation as possible[8]. Some interviewees noted that tensions were bad enough to escalate from any trigger. Many Yazidi interviewees felt that it was still too early for reconciliation, or for social cohesion programs to have a great impact. "They want us to make peace with them", one informant said. "They blame us for not making peace with them. We are the minority. They look at us as if we don't want peace and reconciliation, but at the same time they don't want to confess they did anything wrong".

Nearly half of the interviewees saw the GoI as best placed to lead reconciliation efforts, followed by political parties, tribal and religious leaders, and elders. Similarly, the rule of law and justice were seen as vital for reconciliation efforts, with many respondents believing that punishment of the IS fighters and compensation to the victims was fundamental in the way forward. Many noted that different levels of affiliation should be considered. While several respondents noted that anyone with no blood on their hands should be allowed to return to Sinjar, many interviewees indicated that there was little trust in the current systems for determining who was IS affiliated and who was not. Generally, weak government was seen as one of the main issues preventing effective reconciliation, and the political impasse over key political decisions (for example around HLP issues) added to people feeling insecure about the future.

Somewhat surprisingly, considering the conservative nature of the society and women's limited involvement in politics, 69% of those surveyed thought that women should be involved in the peacebuilding processes, and many interviewees said that women can have a positive role in building relationships. However, other interviewees indicated the role foreseen for women was often limited.

There have been several projects in Sinjar to support social cohesion, for example through establishing and supporting several different local peace structures.

Women in the society

Position of women

Sinjar is a very traditional society and the patriarchal system controls all aspects of life. Yazidi women have slightly more freedom in terms of movement and dress than many Arab women have, however this does not usually translate to improved access to education or jobs, or the ability to engage in local politics. Women do not have a prominent role in society except at home as wives, mothers and daughters. Traditionally, women do not own land or property, even in the case of inheritance. While women working outside of their homes is somewhat more commonplace than in Hawija, it is still not accepted by many in the society and working in governmental institutions is seen as the men's realm[9].

Many male interviewees accounted women's limited involvement in employment and local politics to women's capacity rather than the culture, saying that "women should prove themselves" and that "they are not qualified enough [to participate in the decision making and public life] and had better just stay at home". This creates a vicious cycle, where women cannot obtain economic independence as illiteracy and lack of education restricts their job opportunities, and men feel that women's limited participation in the economy and local politics is an indication of their incapability to contribute to public life. These issues were raised by interviewees that work in women's affairs and with NGOs.

Women and girls have a limited freedom of mobility, because of cultural traditions and fears over women's safety. There have been issues with sexual harassment, including by members of armed groups, and in some of the border towns, armed groups (YPG and YBJ[10]) have reportedly recruited girls to join the armed groups. As a result, families often deprioritise their daughters' education, sending their boys to school and keeping girls at home.

The conflict with the IS and the subsequent waves of displacement have opened doors for a change in the role of women in the Yazidi community. The families who have lived in different areas, particularly in larger cities such as Erbil or Dohuk, have been exposed to different ways of life for women with regards to receiving an education and working outside the home. Attitudinal change is particularly noticeable among younger female and male Yazidis in Sinjar[11]. Many families lost all of their male relatives in the conflict with the IS, forcing women to assume a larger role as heads of households. The prominent female Yazidi MP, Vian Dakhil, is an example that women can assume leadership positions in federal politics, although this is not yet reflected in local politics. Over half of the community members who participated in the survey stated they supported women's involvement in decision-making processes, with an additional 25% supporting "partial participation"[12].

However, while younger Yazidis in Sinjar are positive about women and youth having a larger role in the society and acknowledge that the current system marginalises women; elders as well as tribal and religious leaders are slower to embrace change, and often want to preserve the traditional roles of women.

Sexual and Gender-Based Violence

The Yazidi community was disproportionately affected by systematic sexual and gender- based violence (SGBV) during the conflict with the IS, with thousands of women abducted and enslaved by IS adherents. Across Iraq there is a stigma against the survivors of sexual violence, and while is not usually discussed, the sheer magnitude of the issue has forced the community to try to come to terms with its collective trauma. In April 2019, the Yazidi Supreme Spiritual Leader stated that the community would welcome back "all its Yazidi women and children". Local uproar and the stigma around IS affiliation forced this to be amended to encompass only Yazidi women and children kidnapped and abducted by the IS, but not the children born out of rape by IS fighters. This stems from distrust around IS affiliation, as well as Yazidi religious traditions where marriage between Yazidis and non- Yazidis is not recognised to keep the community "pure". This has left some women who gave birth as a result of rape by their captors unable to return to their communities unless they abandon their children[13]. The situation has not been helped by a detrimental Iraqi law that does not recognise children as Yazidi, unless both parents are Yazidi. As elsewhere, IS affiliation also complicates these women's ability to obtain civic documents for themselves and their children, and access services and government support.

Sexual violence during the war has had a significant psychosocial impact on women and the community. However, there are few, if any, psychosocial support services available for children, women or other members of the community in Sinjar. "I am still living in fear of what happened to us when the IS attacked us. There is not enough psychological support offered to women, especially in Sinjar". According to some of the interviewees, the number of suicides and mental health issues among the victims of sexual violence are on the rise, although this is difficult to confirm due to lack of reliable statistics[14].

There is also a dire lack of services for victims of SGBV. Some of the interviewees noted that while some NGOs conduct SGBV awareness campaigns, these are not useful unless the issue regarding the lack of SGBV services is addressed.

The installation of water filters at a household level are critical for families to return to their homes and access safe drinking water.
Photo: Kimberley Gardiner/Save the Children

Many school aged children become carers to their younger siblings.
Photo: Kimberley Gardiner/Save the Children

Marginalisation of People with Disabilities

People with disabilities remain perhaps the most marginalised group in Sinjar according to the community members interviewed for this report. As elsewhere in Iraq, there is a social stigma against disability, resulting in community members with a disability being excluded from society and even being kept indoors so that they are 'out of sight'. Interviewees noted that government support was lacking, as was access to basic services, specialised services and even basic equipment needed by some of the people with disabilities. Many interviewees felt that the needs and interests of people with disabilities are not taken into consideration by society.

For children, disability usually prohibits access to education according to the respondents, largely because of the shame associated with having a disability. One interviewee with a disability told how they were going to school, just to be turned away by the teacher, who said "the school is not for people like you". Lack of accessible facilities in school also makes attendance harder for children with disabilities, and as poor families can usually not afford to send all their children to school, they tend to favour children without disabilities, who are perceived as 'healthy', especially boys without disabilities[15]. Some people with disabilities that were interviewed for this research also noted the need for opportunities to engage within communities with both other persons with disabilities and people of their own age more generally. Some of the comments regarding the chances of the people with disabilities to change the situation were rather bleak: "They can only dream about a better situation, but in reality, they can't do anything to change it"[16].

The interviewees did not differentiate between impairments present from birth, or impairments that were acquired later, for example through war injuries, or whether marginalisation depends on how the impairment was acquired. However, respondents noted that impairments resulting from old age did not result in the same kind of stigma, particularly for people who have children and grandchildren to take care of them.
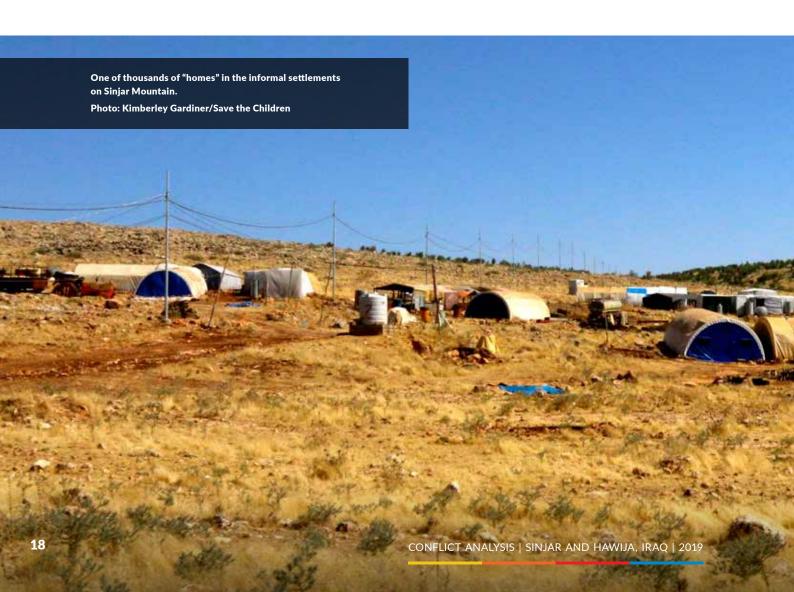
Security

Security actors in Sinjar

Sinjar has several armed groups with varying alliances present in the district. At the time of the research conducted in Sinjar, the PMUs were the most influential security actor, with several Yazidi and Shia PMUs present across the district[17] in addition to several Iraqi Army divisions; the police, Iraq National Security Service (INSS); and a few Kurdish Peshmerga units. The YBS (Sinjar Resistance Units) is the largest Yazidi armed group, with backing from YPG (People's Protection Units), and who in 2019 increased their cooperation with the PMUs who provide them with support and salaries. There has been talk about the need to resolve the status of the non- state armed groups, but in practice, this has not been easy [18].

The relationship between the different armed groups and the community is similarly complicated, particularly among the internally divided Yazidi community. While many Yazidi interviewees noted they are grateful of the presence of Yazidi armed groups, others indicated they support the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) more than the non-state-affiliated armed groups. Many Yazidis interviewed stated that they were abandoned by all major security partners during the conflict with the IS. As observed while conducting research for this report, support for the ISF has been growing, although a lot of suspicion remains, partly due to ethnic tensions between the predominantly Shia ISF and PMUs, and the largely Yazidi population.

While Sinjar is safer than Hawija when measured by the number of attacks and incidents, the sheer number of security actors makes the situation in Sinjar volatile and unpredictable. The relationship between the armed groups has at times been tense, particularly between ISF and YBS. The clashes between the two in March 2019, started by an apparently insignificant checkpoint incident, demonstrate how politically charged and fluid the security situation is. There have also been tensions between YBS/YPG and the KRG and the GoI, who accuse them of links to the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK)[19]. The PKK presence in the area has at times also led to Turkish Military shelling of Sinjar to drive the PKK out of these areas.

The presence of multiple security actors and the power struggles between them subject the population to restricted freedom of movement due to the various and ever-changing checkpoints; a variety of administrative and security controls and procedures (which often contradict each other); occasional demands of bribes; and general human insecurity[20]. There have also been reports of some security

One of thousands of "homes" in the informal settlements on Sinjar Mountain.
Photo: Kimberley Gardiner/Save the Children

actors participating in different illegal activities, with drugs, weapons, and basic food supplies smuggled across the Syrian border[21]. Community support to these activities varies, with some seeing the illegal activity as a threat to security in Sinjar, while others, particularly those who get their livelihoods from the smuggling, see it more positively.

There are some IS units suspected to be present in or nearby Sinjar. There have been few attacks since the area was retaken apart from a few confrontations occurred in July 2019. The widespread arson attacks in summer 2019 were also largely blamed on and claimed by the IS as revenge against Yazidis and Sunni Arabs who had not supported the IS. Others suspected that the arson attacks may also have been used opportunistically for private revenge, with the IS being a convenient scapegoat[22].

Security as a deterrent for IDPs to return to Sinjar

Return rates to Sinjar remain extremely low. According to the interviewees, security was a major reason for people to not return to Sinjar, with security concerns referring both to violence between the armed groups and/or fear of direct violence from other community groups. Generally, each of the community groups want to see returns increase for their own community group, but other groups' increased presence was viewed warily by all ethno-sectarian groups residing in Sinjar.

The suspicion over actual or perceived IS affiliation makes returning to Sinjar particularly difficult for Sunni Arab families. There is a significant number of female-led Sunni Arab households attempting to return to their areas of origin, mostly made up of women whose husbands have been killed or imprisoned during the war.[23] Yazidis are reluctant to engage with the Sunni Arab communities, and are, through word of mouth and social media, actively trying to discourage their return. A small number of revenge attacks against Sunni Arab returnees have also been reported.

Return is further complicated by the security clearances required by the government to ensure returnees do not have links to the IS, with processes that constantly change and include several government levels requiring different documents. According to the interviews conducted for this research, communities often do not trust these clearances, which creates tensions between returnees and the Yazidis, as well as within the Sunni Arab communities.

Infrastructure, services, and livelihoods

The massacre of the Yazidi population by the IS has received considerable attention from the international community and Iraqi political leadership alike, however despite the promises, the reconstruction of Sinjar has been slow. Much of the already underdeveloped infrastructure that was damaged or destroyed during the conflict is still in need of rehabilitation, four years after the IS was driven out of Sinjar. Lack of infrastructure and service delivery was seen as a major obstacle to returning to Sinjar.

WASH

Issues relating to WASH already existed before the conflict with the IS, and the lack of services was mentioned as one of the main concerns by the interviewees in rural and urban areas of Sinjar. This includes poor water and sanitation infrastructure, with community members often having to buy drinking water from water trucks. Sanitation and water storage is similarly underdeveloped, particularly in the rural areas. WASH needs are particularly dire in the rural communities. As many villages do not have proper water networks, people dig wells on their own properties, however the water is often contaminated and not safe for consumption.

Education

The majority of schools in Sinjar were destroyed or damaged by the IS. Of those that remain, many lack basic sanitation facilities and have to rely on volunteer student teachers, as schools' have trouble attracting and retaining qualified staff to remote and unstable areas such as Sinjar. As the volunteer teachers are not on the state payroll, they charge each child approximately 5000 IQD per month to attend school, which makes it difficult for the poorest families to send all their children to school[24]. The increased cost of education and insecurity disproportionately affects girls, as families tend to prioritise boys' education and are reluctant to let their daughters walk long distances to the few remaining functioning schools that are often far, as they are considered to be vulnerable to abuse, attacks and perceived reputational damage. "Usually they pay [school fees] for boys and not for girls, and since most of the schools are far, girls are more at risk, and this can be used as an excuse to not send them to school"[25]. In addition, schools are generally not inclusive of children with disabilities, and families often prioritise their children without disabilities to attend school.

In Sinjar, there is also the additional confusion caused by the governmental split, as Kurdish schools are under the mandate of the Dohuk Education Directorate, while schools with curriculum in Arabic fall under the Directorate of Education in Ninewa. Most people resort to the school closest to them for practical reasons, but the children may not always speak the language that their nearby school uses.

The rehabilitation of water and sanitation systems in schools has allowed children to return to school.
Photo: Kimberley Gardiner/Save the Children

Healthcare

Healthcare services are inadequate, with the only functioning hospital in Sinjar town lacking an emergency room and an operating theatre. Sexual, reproductive and maternal health services are insufficient or non-existent, as are psychosocial and mental health services, and services for victims of SGBV. The services are further affected by regular power cuts. There is also a chronic lack of basic medicines, as well as devices such as wheelchairs and crutches required by some people with disabilities. As is often the case in remote and insecure areas, the Department of Health DoH has trouble finding qualified healthcare staff to operate the existing services.[26]

For specialised care, community members have to travel long distances to Tel Afar, Mosul or Dohuk, sometimes through unsafe areas and almost always with a higher cost than they can afford. This is particularly difficult for people with disabilities, and the people with disabilities who receive welfare support from the government can end up using all of their monthly allowance on one trip to Dohuk.[27]

Livelihoods

Both women and men in Sinjar mentioned poverty and unemployment as the biggest issues affecting their lives. With few functioning services and the continued closure of many of Sinjar's directorates, many civil servants have had to either move away for employment or find other work locally. Agriculture is a significant source of livelihood, but lack of clarity over land ownership, periodic droughts (for example the 2018 drought), and the widespread destruction of infrastructure (including crop silos and other storage facilities) have impeded the recovery of the agricultural sector. Climate change is expected to exacerbate issues arising from droughts and extreme weather conditions. Furthermore, the 2019 incidents of arson (crop burning) in agricultural areas throughout Iraq, including Sinjar, has put an additional burden on communities which are reliant on agriculture for their livelihoods[28].

Some interviewees noted that unemployment among men is detrimental to peace in the area, as the lack of other job opportunities has prompted many men to join armed groups. "Men have a lot of free time, and no money, so they make problems", one female interviewee noted.

The NGO community has responded to these needs to a degree, however, livelihoods programs in Sinjar are limited and cash for work interventions have limited reach and sustainability. NGO jobs are coveted, but generally only serve the relatively educated and often require language skills that the most vulnerable in the community may not have. There are also risks of NGOs causing a brain drain, when they draw the qualified candidates away from their old jobs in the public sector.[29]

Women's employment is relatively uncommon, due to both the lack of opportunities and cultural norms. According to some of the women interviewed in Sinjar, many of the political actors use "women's empowerment" as a slogan to get support from the international community, but this does not necessarily translate into any action.

The lack of community reconstruction impacts negatively on livelihoods.
Photo: Kimberley Gardiner/Save the Children

Socio-political situation and conflict in Hawija

Socio-political situation and conflict in Hawija

Society and politics

Tribal system and local governance

Before the war with the IS, Hawija, like the rest of Kirkuk Governorate, was a mixture of Arabs, Kurds, Turkmen and Christians (Chaldeans and Assyrians) living in the district, albeit with a large Sunni Arab majority. After IS rule, Hawija has become notably homogenous, with the current population comprising almost entirely of Sunni Arabs. Some of the minorities like Christians had moved out before the conflict with the IS started, as the rise of fundamentalism in Hawija made them feel unsafe.

Hawija is a tribal society, with tribal relations controlling daily life and, to a large degree, local politics. The most influential tribe in Hawija is the Al Jubbour tribe, who largely control the economy and politics[30]. Other larger tribes include Al Bo Assaf and Al Obeid tribes, in addition to several smaller tribes. Tribal leaders are normally included in any negotiations the parties are not able to resolve amicably on their own, be it a dispute over trade, negotiations of diyeh (blood money), or HLP disputes. They would typically also have a strong role in the negotiations for arranged marriages.

The local government is supported by Mukhtars[31], however Sheikhs and other tribal leaders also wield power and influence in local elections. Mukhtars have been directly targeted by the IS, with known cases of assassinations and disappearances. This has caused several of the Mukhtars and their families to flee to the nearby Kirkuk City and further contributed to the tribes' access to power, as the power vacuum left by the Mukhtars is filled by the stronger tribes and their affiliates. During the rule of the IS, the tribal leaders had somewhat more leeway than Mukhtars because they do not have an automatic connection with the government, however, there have been cases of harassment and even assassination targeting tribal leaders who did not pledge allegiance to the IS.[32]

The role of the tribal system is still changing after the conflict with the IS, although it is still difficult to say which way this will develop. On one hand, the conflict with the IS disrupted the tribal system, and particularly some tribes and tribal leaders with perceived IS affiliation lost support and respect from within. Conversely, distrust in the government systems have made the tribes' position stronger in some instances, as people who do not trust the government or the security apparatus seek safety from their kin.

Kirkuk has been one of the most controversial of the disputed regions in Iraq, owing to its large oil deposits and high revenue potential. There has been long standing poli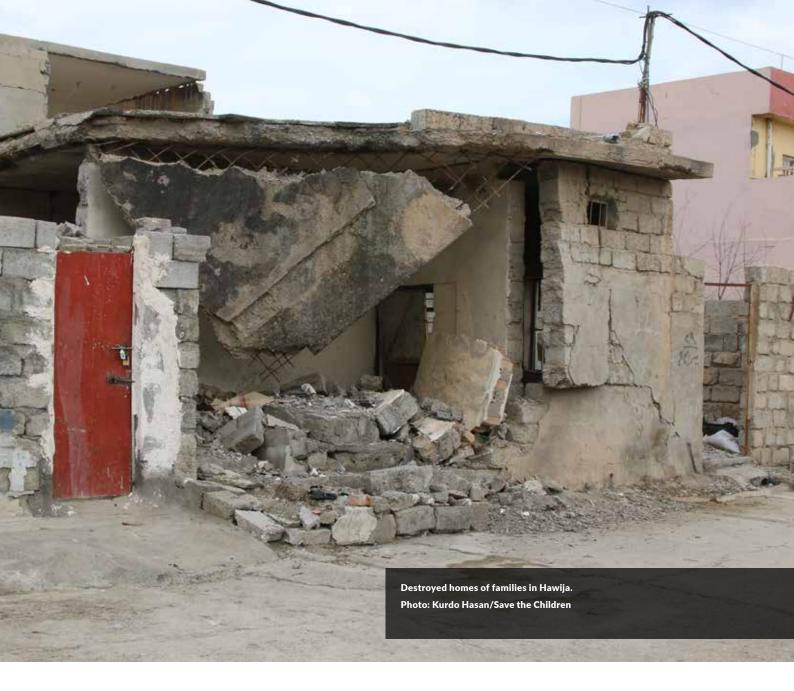tical wrangling between GoI and the Kurdish parties (the PUK and the PDK) over the appointment of the Kirkuk governor[33]. The governorate-level council has been effectively frozen and has not approved budgets or projects since October 2017. While the governorate-level politics are not likely to have a direct impact on power sharing in Hawija - even though the current Governor is the Hawija Mayor's cousin, as the Mayor's position relies more on the powerful Al Jubbour tribe than his family connections - resolving the stalemate would help to improve the functioning of the local government in Hawija and ensure the approval of sufficient budget to improve service delivery in Hawija. This could improve the community's trust of the government through increased accountability.

Historical grievances

Many Sunni Arabs in Iraq have argued that with the dominance of Shia Arab politicians since 2003, they have been excluded from post-conflict processes and marginalised from the post-war political landscape. In 2013, anti-government protests in Hawija were met with force by security forces, with approximately more than 40 people killed and at least 150 people wounded. The grievances of the Sunni Arabs, including real and perceived marginalisation from politics, lack of social services, and unemployment were among the reasons leading to the rise of the IS, as well as Al Qaida before them.

Hawija has a reputation for extremism since before the fall of Saddam Hussein, with the Muslim Brotherhood and political Islam having established a foothold in Hawija since the 1970s. Since 2003, Hawija has paid for this through heavy security and marginalisation from service provision and economic opportunities, which has further disenfranchised the local communities and created a fertile ground for extremist organisations to recruit and grow.

Risk for future radicalisation remains, as community members in Hawija continue to feel side-lined by the Shia- dominated political and economic system in Iraq. Hawija was one of the districts most affected by the conflict with the IS and while several people in Hawija fought with the IS, many also fought against them, and do not feel this is given the respect it deserves. Other research has suggested that social exclusion of certain community groups and labelling them as supporters of terrorism can contribute to radicalisation, as people feel they have limited choices, and that they are not accepted by the community or the state structures[34].

Destroyed homes of families in Hawija.
Photo: Kurdo Hasan/Save the Children

Conflict and social cohesion in Hawija

According to the interviews conducted in Hawija for this research, conflicts in Hawija usually stem from disputes around power and control of resources and are often within rather than between tribes. After the area was retaken, IS affiliation became another major point of contestation. While some tribes and sub-tribes have had more IS members than others, IS affiliation was often also a private ideological choice and did not automatically relate to belonging to a specific tribe or sub-tribe.

Unequal access to resources has also caused tensions between the tribes and within the community. Many of the interviewees felt that the local government actors try to steer humanitarian and development support to the neighbourhoods and villages where their relatives and tribes live, and that those who do not belong to the most powerful tribes are marginalised from local politics,

access to services, and employment opportunities, and may also have difficulties in accessing government support (e.g. for widows and people with disabilities). Of note, tribal affiliations were seen to be used for nepotism particularly in the government, whereas the Sheikh-led tribal system was perceived as relatively less corrupt.

Although the positive impact of NGO support in rehabilitating destroyed infrastructure and services and support vulnerable groups was acknowledged, humanitarian support had also become a cause for conflict within the community due to NGOs' general preference to work in areas with easier access and better security. This was seen to cause further marginalisation of other areas that are less safe or more remote and led to accusations of tribalism and nepotism. Areas with more families with perceived IS affiliation tend to be almost entirely ignored, and many of the interviewees named IS affiliated families as the most marginalised group in Hawija.

HLP disputes have also been identified as a source of conflict. Tensions over property are not new however have become more complex with multiple conflicts and subsequent overlapping claims. For example, many properties were forcibly taken by Al Qaida and the IS, and not always returned to their original owners. In addition, during the IS occupation, formal registration of land sales was suspended by the GoI, to safeguard private property purported to be 'sold' by the IS. However, many vulnerable people did informally sell properties anyway, with some disputing these sales later, wishing to return to their properties[35]. Finally, the interviewees noted that other powerful actors, including tribal leaders and military groups, have opportunistically used the conflict to confiscate or occupy property. Victims include families with perceived IS affiliation, and female-headed households with limited ability to negotiate with male community members[36]. These issues are not likely to be resolved easily or quickly.

Despite security concerns and dire trust issues within the community, the interviews conducted in Hawija did provide a sense of optimism and hope. Only 9% of the respondents felt that reconciliation was impossible. Tribal leaders were identified as the main actors to lead these efforts, followed by government representatives and religious leaders. Having a common ethnic background was mentioned as one of the unifying factors, even though the power struggles between the tribes somewhat undermine this unity [37].

Even though women have not traditionally had a strong public role in the society, over half of the respondents indicated they would support women's involvement in the peacebuilding processes. However, interviews suggested this participation was usually seen as limited[38].

The previous efforts in the area of social cohesion/ reconciliation in Hawija were linked to a local peace committee project in 2017, which also resulted in an agreement on the code of conduct for local tribes.

Children play a game of football using makeshift goalposts amongst bombed-out houses in Hawija.
Photo: Kurdo Hasan/Save the Children

Women in the society

Position of Women

Women do not usually participate in decision-making in Hawija due to the norms of the traditional tribal society. Older women sometimes gain a level of power and control within their households and can have a strong say in issues such as arranged marriages, but even in these cases, their influence stays strictly within the domestic sphere. Compared to Sinjar, the women interviewed in Hawija were more outspoken around the issues concerning women, partly because Hawija has not been as isolated from the rest of the country as Sinjar.

A notable number of community members participating in the survey stated that they support women's participation in decision-making processes. Of those interviewed, 48% of the respondents stated they support women's involvement in decision-making, with a further 24% stating partial support. This sentiment has not necessarily translated to women's wider participation in public life, and the interviewees indicated that there are different views over what women's involvement practically translates to[39].

According to the interviewees, the main barrier faced by women in Hawija is the lack of economic opportunities. Women are generally not expected to work outside their homes or family farms, which decreases women's economic freedom and can leave female-headed households in a bind. "I had the opportunity to work with local NGOs in a different village", one female interviewee in Hawija said, "and although we are from an educated family, I was prevented from this opportunity because women and girls lack freedom of mobility due to cultural context and instability".

IS affiliated families and women from minority tribes have reportedly had particular difficulty in obtaining civic documentation from the local and federal government authorities, or to access welfare under the social affairs law that provides widowed women with a small amount of support from the government[40]. The interviewees noted that widows are particularly vulnerable to poverty and often have to rely on charity to survive, and that it would be difficult for a woman alone to arrange government support or civic documents, as this would usually be considered a male role.

The patriarchal culture, combined with frequent security issues and poor service delivery, also means girls' education is often deprioritised, particularly when the functioning schools are far from the area where they live. "I was prevented from going to school," a female interviewee stated, "because there are no schools near my house, and the mentality of people prevented me from attending schools that are far away". Child marriage is common and often prevents girls from continuing their education. Marriages are generally arranged, with women having limited to no choice over whom they marry.

Sexual and Gender-Based Violence

In Hawija, as in other areas that were under IS control, there are several women who were (voluntarily or otherwise) married to IS fighters. As opposed to the Yazidi community in Sinjar, the children of IS fighters or affiliates are not shunned on account of their fathers' religion, and in Hawija there have reportedly not been demands by the society for the women to abandon their children. Nevertheless, the social stigma around IS affiliation still exists, resulting in marginalisation of families suspected of IS affiliation returning to Hawija.

Incidences of SGBV have not ended with the conflict, and there are concerning reports of the sexual abuse of women, particularly those from IS affiliated families, by the security forces and armed groups[41]. According to the interviews undertaken in Hawija, child marriage has also increased after the conflict, as a result of economic hardships, poor security, and the rise of the tribal mentality, with arranged marriage used as a way of resolving conflicts between tribes.

The female interviewees mentioned domestic gender-based violence (GBV) as a significant and ongoing issue in Hawija, noting that it had worsened after the conflict with the IS. However, in the absence of GBV service providers, women's opportunities to tackle the problem are limited. According to Iraqi law, the victim of abuse must make the claim to the police, but in the patriarchal tribal society, women usually do not report abuse. "Many women are not educated, and they have no idea about their rights, as they are always home and there are no NGOs working in awareness raising in women's rights issue. As a result, women become victims of illiteracy, domestic violence and oppression".

The cultural and traditional stigma against survivors of sexual violence, as well as the culture of silence, makes it difficult for the female survivors of the IS and other survivors of SGBV to continue their lives normally, and to address the trauma that they have experienced.

Marginalisation of People with Disabilities

People with disabilities are in a vulnerable situation, with government support lacking and a subsequent absence of many basic services such as education and healthcare. People with disabilities requiring specialised services usually have to travel to Kirkuk City, with the travel often difficult, time consuming and expensive. In the local government, there is no representation of people with disabilities to push for their agenda and to ensure government takes their needs and concerns into consideration.

There are few opportunities for people with disabilities for recreation or to socially engage with other people of their age, and stigma around disability makes it difficult for people to participate in the life of their communities. Lack of financial security and the social stigma around disability has led many people with disabilities virtually excluded from education and healthcare services, and when these are available children with disabilities are often kept out of schools. "It's heart-breaking", the mother of a youth with disability said. "I just want to see him get out of the house. I always suffer and feel sorry for him, he is alone most of the time, feeling bored".

A woman with a disability interviewed for this report noted that families force girls with disabilities to marry in order to get rid of them, "as we are a burden on them". This may put girls with disabilities at an additional risk of child marriage, although it should be noted that at the time of data collection, child marriage was a common practice in Hawija and affected girls both with and without disabilities[42].

Inclusive education will ensure that children with disabilities are not further marginalized post conflict.
Photo: Kimberley Gardiner/Save the Children

of damaging the electricity grid and starting fires in agricultural lands. However, the field research indicated that community members also exploit the security situation for their own interest, and according to one informant, "the contractors often pay money to terrorist groups to destroy the projects that were built after the liberation, in order to receive more money from the government to work on the same project again".

General security relations within Hawija remain weak between the government security actors and civilians, owing to historical grievances of the Sunni Arabs and ethnic tensions between the predominantly Sunni population and the largely Shia security forces. This is not helped by the fact that the federal police generally retreat from the population centres to the security outposts as early as 2pm due to frequent IS attacks against the ISF, leaving the towns and villages vulnerable and unprotected. Citizens follow a self-imposed curfew that usually starts between 2pm and 5pm, and it is common for men in the family to keep watch on the roofs of the buildings during the night. Civilian armament remains extremely high, necessitated by communities' need to take care of their own security during the afternoon and night. Armed groups are reported to have attacked the city from time to time to conduct revenge attacks and kidnappings[43].

Moreover, relations between the ISF and local communities are hampered by concerning reports of ongoing sexual exploitation of women (particularly from IS affiliated families) by the security forces in Hawija and in the camps, as well as corruption and other illegal activity on the main checkpoints between Kirkuk and Hawija[44].

Similarly to Sinjar, Hawija was affected by the incidents of arson (crop burning) in agricultural areas in summer of 2019. There are varying views as to who started the fires, with some blaming the IS targeting locals and tribes who had not supported them, others blaming accidents or criminality, while others suspecting that arson was used for private revenge, with the IS being a convenient scapegoat[45].

Weak public security remains a critical problem in Hawija, and more than 40% of the respondents in Hawija felt they had none or limited freedom of movement. According to the field research conducted for this report, security is also one of the main obstacles for IDPs to return to Hawija, with more than 60% of the interviewees considering instability and the poor security situation as deterrents from returning to their areas of origin in Hawija..

Security

Hawija's security landscape is less complex when compared to Sinjar. The Federal Police is the main security actor, in addition to a few Sunni and Shia PMUs. Tribes are also a notable security actor in Hawija, with influence over Sunni PMUs and tribal armed groups working as a part of the Sunni PMUs.

Nevertheless, security in Hawija remains precarious, with frequent IED attacks against security forces on the main roads leading to Hawija, as well as targeted assassinations of local Mukhtars and tribal leaders. These security incidents are generally blamed on the IS, with several IS cells believed to still exist in the mountains that surround Hawija City from its northern and southern borders. The IS has also been suspected

Infrastructure, services and livelihoods

Infrastructure in Hawija was catastrophically affected by the war with the IS, with homes, schools and hospitals destroyed, wells bombed, and large areas of the district still contaminated by the mines the IS left in their wake when they retreated. During the field research for this report, lack of infrastructure and services was identified as a major deterrent for IDPs to return to Hawija. Rural communities are more vulnerable than the city, as they must travel longer distances to access services, and the poor security situation limits their movements.

WASH

The interviewees mentioned the lack of sufficient WASH services as one of the main concerns in both rural and urban areas in Hawija. The infrastructure is poor, and water is often available only in certain neighbourhoods or streets, and sometimes accessible only once or twice a week due to destroyed pipelines and inefficient water distribution networks. As a result, community members must fetch water from the neighbourhoods where it is available or buy it for a high price from water trucks, with poor storage conditions increasing the risks for water-borne diseases. Sanitation is similarly underdeveloped, particularly in the rural areas.

Education

The IS demolished dozens of schools and left many of those remaining in urgent need for repair and lacking basic sanitation facilities. As in Sinjar, qualified teachers are often not available, with some villages only having one qualified teacher. The schools are usually run by volunteer student teachers, who charge each child a small sum to attend school, as they are not paid by the government. As a result, the poorest families cannot afford to send all their children to school, and often prioritise boys both due to cultural norms and because long journeys to school on foot are seen to be safer for boys than girls. Children with disabilities were also generally excluded from education[46].

Healthcare

With most of the physical infrastructure of healthcare centres and hospitals destroyed, there is only one hospital in Hawija, in addition to three healthcare centres, of which only one is operational. There are no maternal health services, treatment for chronic diseases, or psychological care available[47]. There is also a perpetual lack of basic medicines, and services are further affected by regular power cuts and the lack of qualified staff. Like Sinjar, this is particularly difficult for people with disabilities, both because lack of access to basic healthcare services due to the stigma of going into public spaces, as well as a lack of available of specialised services needed by some people with disabilities. For specialised care, community members have to travel to Kirkuk City. Apart from the long distance, travel is further complicated by the poor security situation and the high price of travelling to Kirkuk, particularly in case of people needing specialised transportation systems due to having a disability.

Livelihoods

There are limited job opportunities available in Hawija, and according to both male and female interviewees, unemployment and poverty were among the biggest problems that the community members are facing. This was particularly felt by respondents from smaller or less powerful tribes, where tribal connections could not be used to find employment[48]. Furthermore, the incidents of crop burning in summer of 2019 put an additional burden on people getting their livelihoods from agriculture.

The public sector has difficulties retaining qualified staff, and there is a dire shortage of trained teachers, doctors and nurses. Some interviewees noted that teachers and doctors who have moved away from Hawija have found work with NGOs in Kirkuk City and nearby IDP camps, expressing no intention of returning.

A lone man cycles down a deserted street in Hawija.
Photo: Kurdo Hasan/Save the Children

Findings of the conflict analysis

Findings of the conflict analysis

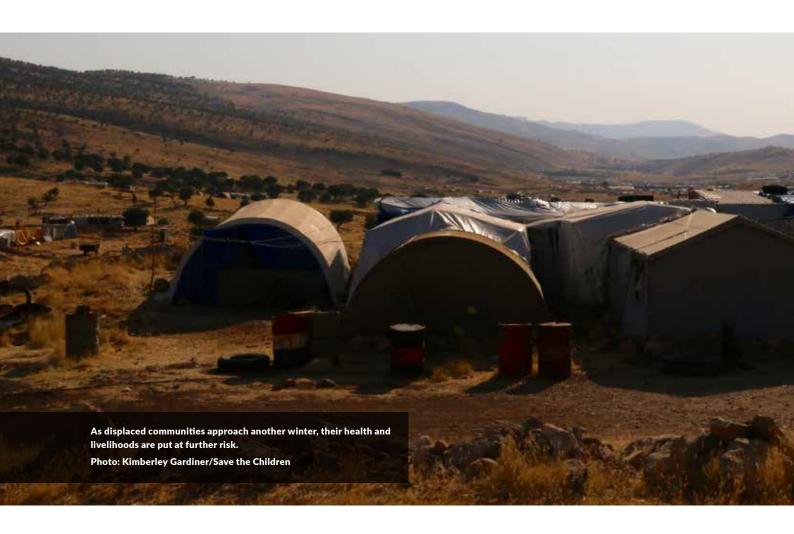### Widening polarisation within the community

The various conflicts since the 1980s and forced and self-imposed displacement have led to the polarisation of the society. Previously mixed neighbourhoods, villages, cities and districts have become increasingly ethnically homogenous, as people try to stay closer to their own community groups to feel safer. This is particularly visible in Sinjar, where the Yazidi and Sunni Arab communities have become practically separate, Sunni Arabs generally reside in villages around the edges of Sinjar town, and cannot use their properties in the town centre. While not all of these divisions are new, they have intensified after the most recent conflict.

Polarisation is also visible within the ethnic and religious communities. In the predominantly Sunni Arab district of Hawija, suspicion of IS affiliation has resulted in the erosion of trust between community members despite the population's ostensible homogeneity. This is further complicated by the fact that IS affiliation is difficult to determine based on external factors in Hawija, as it has sometimes been linked to a community members'

(sub)tribe or other times to the individuals' ideology. In Sinjar, there are similar divisions within the Sunni Arab community over suspected links to the IS. Connections to the IS have also affected intra-family relations in the Yazidi community, where the return of female victims of the IS is welcomed, however the children born out of rape by the IS are not. In addition, the Yazidi community is divided over politics, spiritual leadership, and the way of interpreting the Yazidi religion and cultural traditions.

Generalisations and social exclusion increase the risk of radicalisation

As polarisation within the community has increased, Sunni Arabs have become vilified. Selective security is applied to groups seen as potentially IS affiliated, and villages and areas consisting predominantly of representatives of these groups are under-prioritised in terms of service provision and social welfare. This kind of 'victor's justice' threatens to lead to the social, economic and political exclusion of the targeted group.

As displaced communities approach another winter, their health and livelihoods are put at further risk.
Photo: Kimberley Gardiner/Save the Children

It is to be noted that many of these generalisations do not work. While many Yazidis in Sinjar maintain that all Sunni Arabs are terrorists, there were also many Sunni Arabs in Sinjar who fought against the IS. There are also others who 'co-existed' with the IS, often as they did not feel they had any other choice to survive, but who did not participate in the fighting. The same applies to Hawija, where the links between tribes, sub- tribes, and IS affiliation are inconsistent. For the Sunni Arabs who were victims of the IS or fought against them, the explicit or implied categorisation of Sunni Arabs as IS supporters seems particularly unjust.

As experiences of injustice and social exclusion of these community groups increases, this creates opportunities for the IS (or its future equivalent) to recruit and grow, as the IS and other extremist groups may be viewed as attractive, or potentially even the only option left.

Need for recognition and justice

The communities and individuals who suffered at the hands of the IS are demanding justice to ensure the perpetrators are held accountable and that suffering of the victims is recognised and compensated for. Many

interviewees in both districts, but particularly in Sinjar, noted the need for the rule of law and the justice system to be a core component of reconciliation process.

However, there is little shared understanding on how this should be realised. The situation is complicated by the magnitude of the conflict with the IS, the varied levels of affiliation people in the affected areas had, the communities' distrust of the justice system, as well as the generalisations around the role of certain community groups. The perception of the governments' weakness and inability to uphold security in Sinjar and Hawija adds to the problem, and processes for determining IS affiliation are not always trusted by the communities or seen as transparent. The issue of returns and the impending closure of the IDP camps in Iraq adds to the pressure to find quick solutions for complex situations.

In Sinjar, the Yazidi interviewees felt that most Sunni Arabs do not talk about the conflict, acknowledge what happened, or take responsibility for their role in it. At the same time, the Sunni Arabs who fought against the IS or were victims of the IS noted they want to explain to communities that they were not part of the IS, feeling demands to recognise what happened labels them as IS supporters.

Needs on the ground

Lack of infrastructure and service provision remains one of the biggest drivers preventing the return of families to Sinjar and Hawija. Destruction in the cities and villages is widespread, with issues particularly around physical infrastructure, essential WASH services (with rehabilitation of water networks mentioned as a priority need in both districts), and healthcare, including much-needed psychosocial services and physical rehabilitation. The lack of affordable local transportation has further hampered access to services. The interviewees also mentioned the need for education services and livelihoods opportunities for both men and women.

The lack of equitable access to services has become a divisive factor among the communities in both Sinjar and Hawija. In Hawija, government representatives have been suspected of co-opting all projects to areas with their own tribesmen, and access to NGO projects have become a point of tension within communities. In Sinjar, support is sometimes seen in terms of a zero-sum game between the Yazidis and Sunni Arabs.

The conflict and the following collapse of services have had a devastating impact on the vulnerability of people with disabilities, as lack of access to both basic and specialised service provision often makes the difference between impairment and disability. Specialised services needed by some people with disabilities, such as assistive devices, are generally not available or only available in major cities, which incurs a high cost to access. The situation has always been dire for people with disabilities in both districts, with access to basic services hindered by several factors,

including community and service provider attitudes, stigma, physical inaccessibility of infrastructure, and lack of involvement of people with disabilities in community decision making or local governance. The situation has worsened after conflict, due to the destruction of facilities, the increase in the number of people with disabilities, and the increased lack of qualified staff working in the public sector.

Significant security issues also remain in both districts. The governments will need to increase its efforts to ensure physical safety and security in Sinjar and Hawija. This includes protecting the communities against the remaining IS cells and criminal activity, however it is equally as important that building trust is recognised as an essential part of security. This refers to the need to build trust between the ISF and communities and also among the communities, as the growing distrust between community groups have made community members fear that peaceful co-existence might not be feasible.

Opportunities for change

Traditionally, both communities have strict social hierarchies that are typically led by older men, with women, youth and people with disabilities having a limited role in community decision making. As families have had to flee from the conflict and relocate to IDP camps, informal settlements and larger cities, the previously relatively isolated communities have been exposed to new ways of thinking and viewing gender roles. In turn, this has created opportunities to improve the position of women, as studying and working outside the home is more accepted in the Kurdish Region of Iraq than how it has traditionally been in Sinjar and Hawija. The larger cities have also given women and girls greater opportunities to study and work, as access to schools is easier, and employment opportunities and NGO livelihoods programs are more readily available.

While the younger generation is open to new ideas, the traditional and religious systems and leaders have been slower to embrace change. In Hawija, the tribal system continues to have a lot of power and any change is likely to be slow and gradual. In the Yazidi community in Sinjar, the community is more divided, with one part

of community putting less emphasis on some of the traditions, and youth and women requesting increased access to decision making. At the same time, other parts of the Yazidi community have become more conservative and protective of old customs and traditions.

Opportunities for building social cohesion

The interviewees indicated an optimism around the opportunities for reconciliation processes in Hawija, with two thirds of the respondents stating that the conditions for working towards social cohesion were in place. Despite the tribal society, the Sunni Arab population in Hawija considered shared ethnicity and shared background a commonality that could be built on.

In Sinjar, many interviewees felt that it was still too early for meaningful inter-community reconciliation as the community groups are still fearful of each other and unwilling to engage in dialogue. This refers mostly to the issues between the Yazidi and Sunni Arab communities. However, while it may be too early to face all the trauma caused by the conflict with the IS, there are opportunities for taking smaller steps towards social cohesion and peaceful coexistence, for example through intra-community dialogue.

Some of the root causes of the multiple conflicts experienced in Hawija and Sinjar require political solutions. One example is HLP rights, which have been a continuous source of conflict since before Saddam Hussein's demographic policies. Sustainable solutions are not possible without consultative and informed political processes. Other issues include political representation, power sharing, and access to resources. Addressing these issues is complicated by the dispute over Ninewa and Kirkuk's governance arrangements. At the same time, the local and national governments must direct efforts into improving government accountability and building trust between the communities and the governments.
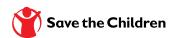
End Notes

1 See the 2019 Iraq Humanitarian Response Plan: https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/documents/files/iraq_2019_hrp_26_02_20 19final_english.pdf

2 The migration patterns change constantly; for updated figures on people residing in the area, see IOM DTM (displacement Tracking Matrix).

3 Abduction figures are according to the Office for the Rescue of Yazidi Abductees in August 2019. Some studies put number of Yazidis killed by the IS at around 3100, with an additional 6800 died of starvation or injuries during the IS siege; see e.g. https://journals.plos.org/plosmedicine/article?id=10.1371/journal.pmed.1002297. Estimates vary and are difficult to verify; at the time of writing the report, mass graves were still being found, providing more information on numbers of people killed by the IS.

4 Interview conducted in Sinjar in December 2018

5 Interview with local expert, Dohuk, April 2019; interview with journalist and former political advisor, Erbil, April 2019.

6 Many of the Shia are a part of the PMU factions who have provided security in Sinjar after it was retaken from the IS. The PMUs are predominantly Shia, although to ensure community acceptance, Yazidi PMU units were also later introduced. Interviews carried out for this report suggest that there have also been other Shia families moving to Sinjar after the conflict with the IS.

7 The draft law was not yet ready at time of writing the report. During the drafting, there have been several concerns notably around finding the right balance for acknowledging issues faced by certain community groups, without overlooking others. In the fieldwork conducted for this report, the Yazidi interviewees were not convinced it would make a big difference in practice.

8 Of those interviewed, 37% saw reconciliation as possible, 18% partially possible. It is to be noted that no formal definition of reconciliation was used in the community interviews, and interviewee's definitions of the concept may vary.

9 Surveys and interviews conducted in Sinjar, December 2018.

10 Armed groups present in Sinjar.

11 Interview with INGO staffer, Erbil, April 2019; surveys and interviews in Sinjar, December 2018.

12 Surveys and interviews in Sinjar, December 2018.

13 Some have refused to return without their children, with numbers suggested to be in hundreds during data collection for this report in Sinjar in December 2018. Some women had also reportedly left their children with their captors' families to be able to return to their areas of origin. Surveys and interviews in Sinjar, December 2018; interview with a local NGO specialised in working with victims of SGBV, Erbil, April 2019.

14 Data collected in Sinjar in December 2018; interview with local expert specialised in psychosocial support and post-conflict recovery in Erbil, April 2019.

15 According to Handicap International's study "Barriers to Education in Ninewa and Anbar governorates" (Oct 2018), there is also a perception that people with disabilities should be in special schools for people with disabilities, with trained staff and teachers not available in regular schools, as children with disabilities are often perceived as "not healthy". https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/assessments/barriers_to_education_in_ne newa_and_anbar.pdf

16 Interview of a woman with a disability, conducted in Sinjar in December 2018.

17 There are also few Sunni PMUs in the south end of Sinjar district, but these are too few and close to the edges of the district to make them a significant security actor in Sinjar.

18 The nationalisation law in 2017 was expanded through the PM's legislation in June 2019, bringing the PMUs under government control, separate from the army. In practice, this had not resulted in any concrete changes at the time of writing this report.

19 With the GoI, these tensions are also related to the control of the border area.

20 Surveys and interviews conducted in Sinjar in December 2018; interview with local security expert, Erbil April 2019.

21 Surveys and interviews conducted in Sinjar in December 2018; interview with local security expert, Erbil, April and September 2019. The magnitude of the illegal activities is hard to verify.

22 Interview with security experts in Erbil, April and August 2019. Elsewhere, terrorist groups have been suggested to at times take responsibility for attacks carried out by others. See e.g. Studies in Conflict & Terrorism, 37:422–439, 2014, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/261875119_Lying_About_Terrorism

23 Interview with UN FAO, Erbil, April 2019.

24 Surveys and interviews conducted in Sinjar in December 2019

25 Surveys and interviews conducted in Sinjar in December 2019

26 Surveys and interviews conducted in Sinjar in December 2018; interviews with local consultants and experts, Dohuk, April 2019.

27 During the data collection, some people in Sinjar crossed the border into Syria to access services, as this was cheaper and a shorter distance from Sinjar town. At the time of the interviews, a single trip from Sinjar to Dohuk was estimated to cost up to 200,000 IQD, while crossing to Syria cost around 10,000 IQD. YPG facilitated the trips to Syria mainly to Yazidis crossing to parts of Syria administered by the Syrian Kurdish security forces. The border has however since been closed. Interview with a security expert, Erbil, April 2019.

28 There are varying views as to who has started these arsons, with some blaming the IS, others criminality or private revenge. 29 Interview with local health worker, Dohuk, April 2019..

30 E.g., the mayor of Hawija is from the Al Jubbour tribe, as is the governor of Kirkuk, who is incidentally also the mayor's cousin.

31 Mukhtar is the elected head of a village or a neighbourhood. Mukhtars are elected to the position for life, usually by the community, and receive a small honorarium from the government for their services.

32 Surveys and interviews conducted in Hawija in December 2018.

33 Kirkuk governorate was under Kurdish rule briefly in 2014-2017. In 2017, Baghdad removed the KRG-instated governor and replaced him with the previous deputy governor, who is seen as illegitimate by the KRG government.

34 For example, see Front. Psychol., 21 December 2018, https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2018.02462; Critical Studies on Terrorism, vol. 12/2019, issue 2, https://doi.org/10.1080/17539153.2018.1496781.

35 NRC, Reconstructing Justice in Post-conflict Iraq: Customary Justice and HLP in Anbar and Ninewa, 2018. Not available online.

36 NRC HLP Assessment, 2019. Not available online.

37 66% of community members participating in the surveys believed reconciliation was possible, and 24% that it is partially possible. It is to be noted that no formal definition of reconciliation was used in the community interviews, and interviewee's definitions of the concept may vary.

38 53% of the community members participating in the surveys supported women's involvement in the peacebuilding processes; 14% supported their involvement partially, 26% were not sure and only some 6% did not support their involvement. Surveys and interviews conducted in Hawija in December 2018.

39 Surveys and Interviews conducted in Hawija in December 2018.

40 Surveys and interviews conducted in Hawija in December 2018; interview with INGO staffer, Erbil, April 2019. The Personal Status Law and requirements related to obtaining civic documents make it particularly difficult for women who were abducted by the IS to get documents for their children.

41 Surveys and interviews conducted in Hawija in December 2018; interview with INGO staff, Erbil, April 2019.

42 Surveys and interviews conducted in Hawija in December 2018.

43 Surveys and interviews conducted in Hawija in December 2018; interview with local security expert, Erbil, April 2019.

44 Surveys and interviews conducted in Hawija in December 2018.

45 Terrorist groups have been suggested to at times take responsibility for attacks carried out by others. See e.g. Studies in Conflict & Terrorism, 37:422–439, 2014, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/261875119_Lying_About_Terrorism

46 Surveys and interviews conducted in Hawija in December 2018. At the time, the interviewees estimated about 70 schools had been demolished and another 200-300 in urgent need for repair.

47 Hawija Area Based Assessment conducted together by the BPF consortium and Reach in November 2018.

48 Surveys and interviews conducted in Hawija in December 2018.