# Rapid Overview of Areas of Return (ROAR): Sinjar and Surrounding Areas

Ninewa Governorate, Iraq - May 2018

FOR HUMANITARIAN PURPOSES ONLY



RWG Iraq

**Returns Working Group** 



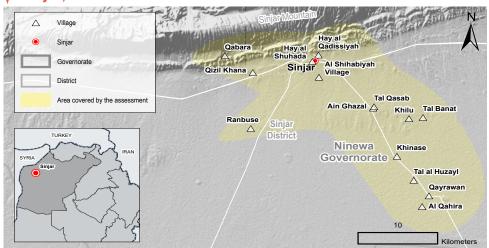
### **Overview**

Sinjar occupies a strategic position in the west of Ninewa governorate, located 50 kilometers (km) east of the border with Syria, 120 km west of Mosul and around 120 km south-west of Dahuk governorate in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI). Sinjar mountain, a 100-km long ridge located directly north of Sinjar town, divides the area into northern and southern sectors. The area's inhabitants are mostly Yazidi and Muslim. Prior to 2014, the population of Sinjar district was reported to be 237,073 indivduals.

In November 2015 the forces of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) established control of the area, forcing out the group known as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) that had held Sinjar since August 2014.<sup>4</sup> Over two years later, in October 2017, governance control changed again when Iraqi Security Force (ISF) took over.<sup>5</sup> Since the area was retaken from ISIL in November 2015, an estimated 6,000 families had returned to Sinjar town at the end of February 2018.<sup>6</sup> The vast majority of returnees are reported to be Yazidis.<sup>7</sup>

The area north of the mountain is mostly accessible to humanitarian actors. This part of the district suffered less damage during the recent crisis, making it more viable for returns. The area south of the mountain around Sinjar town is more heavily damaged and less accessible. As a result, there is less information on this part of Sinjar publicly available. In May 2018 REACH, in collaboration with the Returns Working Group, launched a Rapid Overview of Areas of Return (ROAR) assessment in Sinjar town and surrounding areas to inform recovery. The ROAR assessment looks at the motivations behind return, along with the current situation related to protection issues, livelihoods and the provision of services to identify priority areas of return based on needs.

# Sinjar, Ninewa Governorate



# **Key Findings**

#### **Displacement and Return, Protection Concerns**

- The main reason given by returnee KIs for coming back to the area was a perceived improvement to safety and a desire to return to land or property. For key informants (KIs) who remain in displacement, their main reasons for not returning were the lack of services in their area of origin and safety concerns due to social tensions. IDP KIs who identified as Muslim mentioned that they were unwilling to return, due to fear of reprisals from community members or local security actors.
- KIs perceived parts of Sinjar town to have been cleared of explosive hazards (mines/bombs/improvised explosive devices). However, surrounding villages, especially those located to the south of the town, had reportedly not been cleared. Most returnee KIs reported feeling safe in their current areas; however, they expressed an anxiety about the future and a desire as a community to be responsible for their own protection, which is currently provided by exogenous actors.
- There is no functioning office to obtain or renew identity and other civil documentation. For this, residents must travel to Mosul or Dahuk. There is also reportedly no functioning public court in the area. The damage or destruction of property was a widely reported issue.

#### Livelihoods

• There are reportedly very few livelihood opportunities in the area, with only limited public-sector work available in Sinjar town. In the period before ISIL, the area was heavily reliant on agriculture, but due to the fear of contamination from explosive hazards, low rainfall and a lack of machinery, the land is largely not being used.

#### **Access to Basic Services**

- In Sinjar town, two schools are reportedly functioning, and most children are attending classes. However, there is a shortage of educational materials and teachers, resulting in oversized classes. In the surrounding area, some children are not attending school due to the costs involved and the distances they would have to travel.
- There reportedly is a hospital, but only part of the hospital building is currently functioning and staff can only provide basic diagnoses and prescriptions. For more complex medical cases, residents must travel to Telafar, Mosul, Dahuk or Sinuni – although this is prohibitively expensive for most.
- Large parts of the town have reportedly been reconnected to the electricity grid, which
  provides free power for much of the day. The water network remains non-functional,
  however, and residents are relying on trucked water from nearby springs.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup>PAX, "Sinjar After Isis: Returning to Disputed Territory", June 2016

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup>The area also has Kurdish and Christian populations.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> IAU and OCHA, "Ninewa Governorate Profile", March 2009.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> BBC, "The Battle For Sinjar: IS Held Town in Iraq Liberated", November 2016.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> The Guardian, "Iraqi forces drive Kurdish fighters out of town of Sinjar", October 2017.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Iraq Protection Cluster, "Ninewa returns Profile February", February 2018.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Iraq Protection Cluster, "Ninewa returns Profile February", February 2018.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> Iraq Protection Cluster, "Ninewa returns Profile March", March 2018.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> A recent report provided detailed information on re-development needs in the area: Nardia's Initiative, "In the Aftermath of Genocide: Report on the Status of Sinjar", 2018.

### Methodology

REACH Initiative (REACH) enumerators collected data from 24 male key informants (KIs), including 6 returnee residents, 12 residents who remain in displacement and 6 expert Kls who had specialist knowledge in one of the sectors covered by the assessment (see Table 1). In some cases, the same KI was classed as an expert in more than one subject area. Among Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), eight KIs identified as Muslim, while the remaining four identified as Yazidi. Among returnees, all KIs identified as Yazidi. Respondents were identified through existing REACH KI networks. Data collection took place between 7 and 10 May 2018 through remote telephone interviews.

#### Limitations

Findings should be interpreted as indicative rather than statistically generalisable to the assessed area. Furthermore, KIs often provided estimates rather than exact figures, which should also be taken into consideration when interpreting the findings.

Table 1: Number and profession of expert KIs

SME type	Number	Profession		
Protection	2	Community leader and a local official		
Livelihoods	3	Community leader, government worker and local official		
Education	3	Community leader and two teachers		
Healthcare	2	Community leader and one healthcare worker		
Water	2	Community leader and local government worker		
Electricity	1	Community leader		
Waste Disposal	1	Community leader		

### **Movement Intentions**

#### **Historical Overview and Current Trends**

The most recent displacement from Sinjar began abruptly on 3 August 2014, as ISIL established control in the area. At the time, around 200,000 residents reportedly fled from Siniar town and surrounding villages, with around 130,000 individuals becoming trapped on Sinjar mountain to the north of the town. On 4 August, a safe corridor was established by KRG forces, which allowed residents to come down from the mountain and head north to the Syrian border. Most of those who were stranded on the mountain escaped via this corridor between 9-13 August 2014.10 Around 125,000 residents displaced to Dahuk governorate in the KRI, while others chose to remain in Syria (around 13,000) in Nowruz camp or displaced to Turkey (around 12,000). A small minority, estimated to be around 5.000, remained on the mountain because they were unwilling or unable to leave. 11

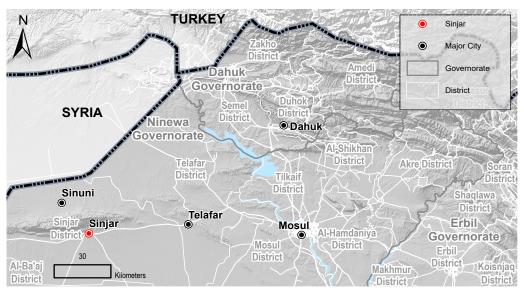
During the recent crisis, Sinjar town and surrounding areas sustained significant damage and became heavily contaminated with explosive hazards. 12 Members of the Yazidi community who were not able to escape also faced human rights abuses, including systematic killing, kidnapping and sexual enslavement.<sup>13</sup> ISIL's occupation of the town was marked by a sustained attempt to eradicate Yazidi culture, including the destruction of property and cultural sites. 14

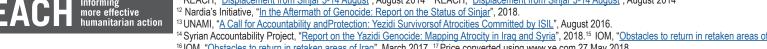
Once KRG forces had re-established control in late 2015, they worked to clear parts of the town of explosive hazards. Returns began in January 2016 to areas deemed safe. 15 One expert KI interviewed for this assessment stated that around 20% of Sinjar town's population before 2014 had returned to the area. However, many villages near to the town, especially those to the south, have not seen any returns, reportedly due to the continued contamination by explosive hazards.

The vast majority of those who have returned to the area were reported to be Yazidi, with the Muslim population generally said to have not returned. 16 The findings from this assessment indicate challenges to social cohesion in the area, which deter Muslim community members from returning.

In terms of the routes residents utilize to return to the area, returnee KIs reported that they had previously travelled on the road south from Dahuk to Sinjar, which took around four hours. For those who rented vehicles, these rentals reportedly cost between 118,499 and 237,000 IQD (100 and 200 USD respectively), 18 depending on the size of the family and the amount of possessions they needed to transport. Since control of the area changed in October 2017, this road has been closed and returnees must now travel back to the area via Mosul.

Map 2: Sinjar in relation to Sinuni, Telafar, Mosul and Dahuk





<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>©</sup> REACH, "Displacement from Sinjar 3-14 August", August 2014 <sup>11</sup> REACH, "Displacement from Sinjar 3-14 August", August 2014

<sup>14</sup> Syrian Accountability Project. "Report on the Yazidi Genocide: Mapping Atrocity in Iraq and Syria", 2018. 15 IOM, "Obstacles to return in retaken areas of Iraq", March 2017.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> IOM, "Obstacles to return in retaken areas of Irag", March 2017. <sup>17</sup> Price converted using www.xe.com 27 May 2018.

### Why are residents not returning?

IDP KIs were asked what factors caused them to remain in displacement. The most frequently reported were the lack of services in their area of origin (11 of 12 Kls) and safety concerns due to social tensions (9 of 12 KIs). Regarding the latter, all Muslim KIs mentioned that they were unwilling to return, either due to fear of reprisals from the community members or local security actors. Other factors were the lack of livelihoods opportunities in the area of origin (8 of 12 KIs) and damaged, destroyed or stolen property (7 of 12 Kls), with three Kls indicating that their houses had been destroyed as a result of the recent crisis.

Additional reported factors included perceived contamination by explosive hazards (4 of 12 Kls), the situation in their IDP camps being better than in their area of origin (3 of 12 KIs) and not having enough money to return (2 of 12 Kls). In terms of contamination by explosive hazards, Kls indicated that their villages had not been cleared, and therefore they could not return. With regards to IDP camps being preferable to their areas of origin, KIs indicated that camps were safe and that they had access to services, including education and healthcare.

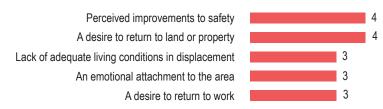
Figure 1: Reasons reported by IDP KIs (12 in total) for not returning to their area of origin<sup>18</sup>



### Why are residents returning?

Returnee KIs were asked what factors had led them to return. The most common responses were perceived improvements in the security situation and a desire to return to land or property (both reported by 4 of 6 Kls). For the former, two Kls noted that KRG forces being in control of the area (2015-2017) made them feel safe. Other factors incentivizing return included lack of adequate living conditions in the site of displacement, an emotional attachment to the land and the desire to return to work (all reported by 3 of 6). In terms of inadequate living conditions, KIs reported that their sites of displacement - either on Sinjar mountain or camps in Dohuk governorate - were extremely hot in the summer and cold in the winter, giving them more reason to return. In terms of emotional attachment, returnee KIs spoke of a strong sense of belonging to Sinjar, due to its spiritual significance in Yazidi culture.

Figure 2: Reasons reported by returnee KIs (6 in total) for coming back to their area of origin<sup>18</sup>



### How are residents getting information?

In terms of what information influenced the decision to either remain in displacement or return to their areas of origin, the most common source cited among both IDPs and returnees was telephone calls with friends or family living in the area. The second most common source of information was visits to the area, either by the KI themselves or by a friend or family member. Other sources mentioned by KIs were speaking to security actors in Sinjar, along with using news or social media to receive updates on the situation.

Table 2: Reported sources of information on their area of origin among IDP and returnee Kls<sup>18</sup>

Information Source	IDP (12 total)	Returnee (6 total)	All (18 total)
Family/Friends in AoO	6	4	10
Visits to AoO by KI or relatives	6	2	8
Other IDPs in camp of displacement	0	2	2
News or social media	2	0	2

# **Protection Concerns: Safety, Freedom of Movement and Legal Issues**

## **Perceptions of Safety**

Returnee KIs and KIs knowledgeable about safety perceived that parts of Sinjar town and the areas north of the town had been cleared of explosive hazards to make them safe enough to return. This clearance was reportedly carried out initially by KRG forces with support being provided later by an International Non-Government Organization (INGO). Surrounding villages, however, especially those located to the south of the town, had reportedly not been cleared. 19 KIs who were knowledgeable about the safety context reported that more than 20 settlements remained heavily contaminated, including Tal Banat, Qajok, Rambuse, Gerza, Sabahiya and Ain Ghazal. These villages reportedly remained largely uninhabited as residents had not returned. One returnee KI reported that an IDP who had displaced from the area visited a nearby village recently to check on their property and was killed by an explosive hazard.



<sup>18</sup> KIs could provide more than one answer. For returnee KIs, these were the sources of information used prior to returning.



<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> Nardia's Initiative, "In the Aftermath of Genocide: Report on the Status of Sinjar", 2018.

- Most returnee KIs reported feeling safe in their current areas due to the number of security
  actors. However, they also expressed concerns about future stability. KIs referred to past
  events such as ISIL's takeover of the area in August 2014 –and said that their safety is
  not guaranteed in the long term and that the situation can change suddenly. Linked to this,
  returnee KIs noted feeling a lack of autonomy over security matters in their area, which are
  overseen by exogenous groups.
- A KI knowledgeable about the safety situation spoke of a collective trauma within the community, arising from the human rights violations during the recent crisis, and the need for more support for those who have lost family members or suffered abuses.

#### Freedom of Movement

- KIs reported that they could move freely within Sinjar town. However, they said they avoided
  the area south of the town due to concerns about contamination from explosive hazards.
- In terms of access, residents could travel to the area north of Sinjar on the other side of the mountain, and east to Telafar and Mosul, but the road between Sinjar and Dahuk was reportedly closed, with residents having to travel to Mosul to access Dahuk. Some KIs indicated that they avoid Ba'aj due to safety concerns and that travelling through Mosul causes distress for some among Yazidi community members.<sup>20</sup>
- Returnee and IDP KIs indicated that Muslim residents faced hostility from the community
  when visiting the area and were therefore reluctant to do so. A returnee KI noted that on a
  number of occasions Muslim residents passing through Sinjar on their way to Qayrawan,
  located to the south of the town, were accosted by local residents and told not to return.

# **Legal Issues**

- As the area has been under the control of both the KRG and Government of Iraq (GoI) over the past few years, there is currently reported to be split jurisdiction between Dahuk in the KRI and Mosul, the capital of Ninewa governorate, in GoI controlled territory.
- There were said to be no offices for obtaining or replacing legal documentation in the area. According to an expert KI, in order to obtain or renew ID cards, passports or food ration cards, residents must go to an office in Mosul, but to renew civil documentation, such as birth, marriage or death certificates, residents must go to an office in Dahuk. Some returnee KIs also reported that camp authorities helped them to replace lost documentation while they were displaced.
- Many residents reportedly lost identity and other civil documentation during the recent
  crisis. Kls said that people from the area had to flee in 2014 with little warning, meaning
  that many left their paperwork behind. Due to the costs involved and the distances they
  would have to travel, residents were said to not be obtaining or replacing documentation.
  Three returnee Kls reported that new-born children were not being registered in the area.

- There was reportedly no functioning court in the area. Kls reported having to travel to Dahuk to access legal services.
- KIs reported widespread damage and destruction to property in Sinjar town, with around 50-60% of buildings reportedly damaged. There was also said to have been widespread looting of furniture and household appliances.

### Improvements Suggested by KIs

Expert KIs stated that they needed more support from the government in order to help local authorities address legal issues and provide compensation to the population for their material losses. Alongside this, expert KIs expressed a need for mechanisms set up to redress human rights abuses that occurred during the recent crisis.

#### Livelihoods

- There were reportedly very few livelihood opportunities in the town and surrounding areas. In the pre-2014 period, the opportunities available in the area were reportedly agriculture (including growing crops and sheep farming), public sector employment and small business ownership. Before 2014 there was also said to be some industry located in Sinjar town, including a cement factory that employed several hundred people.
- Currently, there was said to be work with armed groups available, as well as some public-sector jobs, work in small businesses that have re-opened and daily labour. Residents were also leaving to find work in cities in the KRI, such as Dahuk, Erbil or Sulaymaniyah, and then sending money back to their families. Other reported forms of income were selling food products as street vendors or selling scrap metal collected from damaged or destroyed buildings.
- KIs reported that emergency livelihoods projects have been implemented in the town by INGOs, including a project spanning several weeks in which residents were hired as daily labourers to clear the streets.
- In the past the area was said to be heavily reliant on agriculture, especially in surrounding villages. However, due to the fear of contamination the land was generally not being recultivated or used for grazing. In addition, returnee and expert KIs said that it had been a particularly poor year for rainfall, resulting in a lack of water for agricultural purposes. Pumps, generators and tractors have also reportedly been damaged or stolen. Finally, returnee KIs said that that there was a lack of money to purchase materials necessary for restarting agricultural livelihoods.



- To cope with limited livelihoods opportunities, KIs reported that vulnerable community members are receiving financial and in-kind support from others, as the community is said to be close-knit
- Lastly, KIs indicated that only those with the financial ability to pay for travel and restart
  their lives in their area of origin were likely to have returned, while those without savings or
  other means of coping without an income were likely to have remained in camps.

#### Improvements Suggested by KIs

Expert KIs indicated a need for repair and reconstruction of buildings so that businesses and industry could reopen, which would create more jobs in the town. Expert KIs stated that the land needed to be decontaminated and support needed to be provided to replace damaged or stolen agricultural equipment.

### **Basic Services: Education and Healthcare**

### **Education**

- Before 2014 there were said to have been sufficient teachers and schools, with a school located in each neighbourhood of Sinjar town and in some of the surrounding villages.
- Currently, two schools were reportedly functioning in the vicinity, one teaching in Kurdish
  and one teaching in Arabic. Both were reported to be operating as primary and secondary
  schools. There was reportedly no high school in the area.
- An expert KI reported that the education authority was preparing to open more schools in the area in the near future as they expect an influx of returns once the current school year ends, as currently children are attending school in displacement.
- Most children were reportedly attending school, but some were not due to the distances they have to travel and the associated cost. Kls reported that there was a school bus transporting children located further away, which was said to cost between 15,000 25,000 IQD (13 21 USD) per month,<sup>21</sup> but that some residents could not afford this. One returnee Kl in a village located west of Sinjar town reported that they were not sending their children to school as the nearest Kurdish-language school was too far away.
- Functioning schools in the town are reportedly facing a shortage of qualified teachers, since most teachers have not yet returned to the area. The lack of teachers, combined with a lack of classroom space, was said to be causing overcrowding. One expert KI said that the Kurdish-language school contained more than four times as many students as it did before 2014.
- Returnee and expert KIs also reported that there was a shortage of educational equipment such as textbooks and stationery, with students and teachers providing their own supplies.

 Not all teachers were said to be receiving their salaries from the Education Ministry in Baghdad or in the KRI. Some were reportedly working on a voluntary basis, while others were being paid by the community.

### Improvements Suggested by KIs

Expert KIs reported that they need new educational materials, such as textbooks and notebooks, more teachers to return and damaged facilities to be repaired. In addition, they said that more transport needs to be provided so that children are able to travel to schools from surrounding villages.

### Healthcare

- In the period before ISIL, the area reportedly had a newly-built hospital and several clinics.
- Currently, there was reported to be a partially functioning hospital that was being used to provide basic medical services. According to expert KIs most of the hospital building was destroyed and only a few rooms were usable.<sup>22</sup>
- Expert KIs reported that there were medical staff, including doctors, working at the hospital who were able to provide basic diagnoses and prescriptions. It was reported to cost patients 3,000 IQD for a consultation.<sup>23</sup> An international and local NGO were said to be providing support with healthcare in the town, including providing staff. There was reportedly no Emergency Room and no ambulance, meaning that emergency care was not available to residents in the area.
- For all other cases, residents must travel to facilities in Telafar, Mosul, Dahuk, or Sinuni (located to the north of Sinjar mountain). The combined cost of medical fees and travel was said to prevent many residents from accessing appropriate healthcare.
- One expert and three returnee KIs reported that women had died from complications related to pregnancy and childbirth because of the lack of easily accessible maternity care services, although it was not reported how many women this has affected.
- Only basic medicines, such as painkillers, were said to be available in the area. These
  medicines are delivered from Mosul or the KRI, and as a result are more expensive. Many
  residents are unable to afford these available medicines.

### Improvements Suggested by KIs

Expert KIs suggested that medical facilities needed to be rebuilt and repaired. They also reported needing more medical staff along with equipment for medical services and affordable medicines.



<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> Price converted using www.xe.com 27 May 2018.

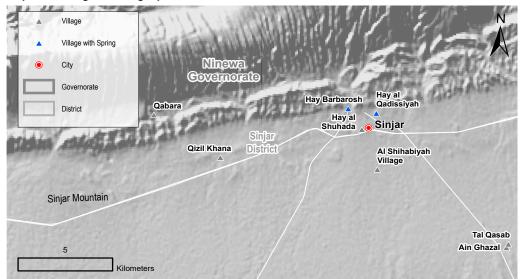




<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup>This is supported in IRIN, "Irag's Yazidis return to a healthcare crisis", March 2018.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup> This is supported in IRIN, "Irag's Yazidis return to a healthcare crisis", March 2018.

#### Map 3: Drinking water origin points



# **Basic Utility Services: Water, Electricity and Waste Disposal**

#### Water

- In the period before ISIL there was reportedly a pipe network which brought water from springs in Hay Barbarosh, to the north of Sinjar town on the slopes of the mountain.
- Currently, drinking water was said to be brought on trucks by the municipality from the same location, as the pipe network was not functioning.
- An expert KI said that drinking water was also coming from additional wells in Hay al Qadissiyah (see Map 3). Support to help set up and manage these drinking water sources was reportedly provided by several INGOs.
- Drinking water from trucks is reportedly being brought for free to residents in certain parts
  of the town, but many residents were said to be paying for the drinking water. Reports of
  price varied, between 1,000 and 5,000 IQD (1 4 USD)<sup>24</sup> for a 1,000-litre tank.
- Residents living in villages near Sinjar town namely Qizil Khana and Qabara were reported to be drinking water from nearby wells rather than relying on water trucking.
- There were no reports of residents becoming ill due to unclean drinking water.

The water network was reportedly heavily damaged during the recent crisis. Equipment was also looted. Expert KIs reported that support had been provided to try and fix the network, but that it remained non-functional. They did not provide further details.

### Improvements Suggested by KIs

Expert KIs suggested that the pipe network needs to be rehabilitated and that pumps, generators and transportation vehicles needed to be replaced.

### **Electricity**

- Earlier in 2018, parts of the electricity network were reportedly repaired by the government. This electricity was said to be free and available for up-to 24 hours a day. Kls reported that the transformers were fixed in the town, but that many residents had to connect their own houses to the network, which can be costly.
- Prior to the restoration of the electricity grid, residents were relying on generators. An
  expert KI reported that power from these generators was available for around seven hours
  per day at a cost of 5,000 IQD (4 USD)<sup>25</sup> per ampere. Currently, returnee KIs reported that
  they did not need to use generators.
- KIs spoke positively of electricity services and one KI reported that the situation is better now than in the period before ISIL. However, there remains significant damage to infrastructure, especially to poles and wires.

### Improvements Suggested by KIs

Expert KIs indicated that the rest of the electricity network needs to be repaired, including fixing or replacing the cables, the poles and generators.









# **Waste Disposal Services**

- In the period before ISIL, KIs reported that there was regular and frequent waste removal services, with sufficient staff to carry out the work.
- Currently, in Sinjar town there was reported to be waste collection services, although the
  frequency of collection varied from several times per week to every twenty days. This
  service was said to be provided by the municipality with support from armed groups active
  in the area. The waste is taken to a dumping ground located 2-4 km north of the town.
- In outlying areas there were reportedly no waste collection services. In these areas, residents were reported to be removing waste themselves and disposing of it in the vicinity.

#### Improvements Suggested by KIs

One Expert KI suggested that they need more staff and vehicles to collect waste.

#### About REACH

REACH facilitates the development of information tools and products that enhance the capacity of aid actors to make evidence-based decisions in emergency, recovery and development contexts. All REACH activities are conducted through inter-agency aid coordination mechanisms.

All our reports, maps and factsheets are available on the REACH resource centre. For more information, visit our website at www.reach-initiative.org, follow us on Twitter: @REACH\_info and Facebook: www.facebook.com/IMPACT.init or write to geneva@reach-initiative.org

#### About the Returns Working Group (RWG) Iraq

The Returns Working Group (RWG) is an operational and multi- stakeholder platform on returns, which was established in line with Strategic Objective 3 of the 2016 Iraq HRP "to support voluntary, safe and dignified return" of IDPs; to monitor and report on conditions in return areas, and determine to what extent durable solutions have been achieved- or progress made- for returnees.

The key objective of the group is to establish coherence of information, data and analysis, strengthen coordination and advocacy, give guidance on activities related to the key areas, and enhance complementary action among its partners with the overall goal of supporting and reinforcing the national response to Iraq's coming reintegration challenge.



