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Dire situation for returnees to Sinjar and Yathrib

June 2024



- The briefing is based on (1) focus group discussions with returnees, (2) field observations, (3) meetings with local Mayors and Mukhtars, (4) insights from engagements with key international stakeholders.
- It focuses on returnees to Yathrib in Salah al-Din and villages surrounding Sinjar as these are the two areas DRC works which are seeing the greatest number of returns.
- In Yathrib, all IDPs spoken to had returned from Ashti camp. Whilst in Sinjar people had returned with IOM assistance from Essian, Kabarto, Mamarsham and Zakho camps in Duhok.
- All stated return statistics are as of last update on 6 June 2024.
- This briefing is intended to provide insights into some returnees' experiences, rather than offering a comprehensive assessment for all returnees.

- 85,000 IDPs from Sinjar across camps in Erbil and Duhok, as well as a small number in Sulaymaniyah.
- 776 families have departed camps in Duhok including 513 who self-organised their returns, and 263 who returned with assistance from IOM.
- More than 4,700 people have left camps in Sulaymaniyah since January, with around 95% reportedly returning to their areas of origin.
- Yathrib, Dujail and Balad are seeing the majority of returns in Salah al-Din.
- The majority of IDPs from Salah al-Din in displacement camps reside in Ashti camp, making up 97% of the camp's 8,900 population.
- Camps in Sulymaniah are expected to close, with Tazade already closed and Ashti expected to close soon.

Those departing from Duhok camps were made aware of three pathways and stated four key reasons for return:

1. Pressure.
2. A reduction of services in camps such as electricity.
3. Assurance of support from aid organisations in AoO.
4. The settlement grant.

*Multiple returnees were told by government officials once they departed the camp they would no longer be considered IDPs.

Those departing Ashti camp stated:

1. They were given 2 choices, return home with government support or integrate with no support.
2. They feel misled by Government who promised access to services in Yathrib.
3. A community leader reported being asked to tell IDPs in camps that there were services in Yathrib, upon the promise that if more people return, they would provide more services.

VOLUNTARY RETURNS

“We were lied to, we returned because we were promised services and help rebuilding our homes. There is nothing.” – Male returnee, Yathrib

“I lied to them; I told them there were services because I was told that if more people came back, we would get the services.” – Community Leader, Yathrib, tasked with calling IDPs in the camps

“They said we could go anywhere in Iraq, but that we must leave the camp.” – Female returnee, Sinjar



SHELTER, SINJAR

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Most returnees are cohabiting with extended family. Some people are living in tents on their land or the land of relatives.

There are a substantial number of homes being built in villages surrounding Sinjar.

There is a sincere lack of trust towards the government, most people do not expect any compensation from Law no. 20.

“Only people with good contacts in government get the money quickly. Only a few Yeizidi families get the money, mostly it goes to Sunni and Shia Arabs.” – Male returnee, Sinjar

“What difference does it make if we apply for it [compensation scheme], the outcome is the same, you get nothing.” – Female returnee, Sinjar



SHELTER, YATHRIB

An estimated 80% of houses in Yathrib are damaged or destroyed.

Makeshift camps are scattered throughout Yathrib, with the newly returned host community allowing others to live on their land.

There were very, very few signs of reconstruction of new homes.

“I have a ten-day old baby; our tent is so hot, our situation is hell.” – Male returnee, Yathrib

“They said, ‘why did you not apply ten years ago? You are too late, go home.’” – Male returnee, Yathrib



SERVICES, SINJAR

“The water is so dirty we cannot even wash our hands with it.” – Female returnee, Sinjar

Some individuals report that because their homes were constructed without permission, they have been informed that they will not be connected to the water supply

Electricity remains a concern with most people relying on costly generators.

No returnees reported issues accessing schools, with most children returning to KRI for exams.



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SERVICES, YATHRIB

“We have spent years living in tents, now we are still in tents but without any support or services.” – Male returnee, Yathrib

“Why are you asking about education? We don’t have homes or water.” – Male returnee, Yathrib

Electricity remains a concern with most people relying on costly generators.

Reportedly, no returnee children have been able to access education upon return.



LIVELIHOODS, SINJAR AND YATHRIB

In both locations access to income generating opportunities is a pressing concern.

Many farms in Sinjar previously lacked water irrigation systems, something people now view and essential. In Yathrib, most of these systems have been destroyed.

Destroyed farms and high costs of essentials such as livestock and seeds are preventing people restarting agricultural activities.

In Sinjar, female headed households report that their sons must now earn an income as they are unable to.



FUTURE INTENTIONS, SINJAR AND YATHRIB

Without immediate support, many returnees in both locations may face secondary displacement, with a strong preference for relocating to KRI where there is sufficient access to services and livelihood opportunities.

In Sinjar, reportedly some individuals have already returned to KRI to work and save money to rebuild their homes.



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1. Prevent encouraging IDPs to return to areas of origin that are not yet rehabilitated and that cannot provide for basic needs.
2. Continue service provision in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq for IDPs whose areas of origin remain unsuitable for return.
3. Urgently supply temporary provisions, including water, shelter, and temporary schools, to meet the basic needs of those who have already returned to Yathrib, Sinjar and other areas.
4. Streamline the application procedure and expedite the distribution of compensation grants for destroyed housing to enable people to rebuild their homes.
5. Commence rehabilitating and extending essential services to ensure IDPs can live in dignity and rebuild their lives after nearly 10 years of displacement.
6. Assist communities to restart farms, business and other income generating activities.



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