

3.3.2 Situation of returnees

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As of 31 December 2024, the returnees population in Iraq stood at 4 897 128,1204 increasing to 5.1 million of returned IDPs as of 10 April 2025.1205 Since 2021, the Iraqi government has accelerated repatriation efforts, particularly for individuals from Al-Hol and Rawj camps in northeast Syria.1206 The pace of the return process further accelerated since January 2025, in light of the recent developments in Syria, notably the takeover of Damascus by a coalition of armed groups led by Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) in December 2024.1207 In 2024, around 34 % of IDPs left camps in the KRI. Between January and April 2025, 421 families (1 810 individuals) returned, mainly to Ninewa, Salah Al-Din, and Erbil governorates,1208 with the majority of returnees being children and female-headed households.1209

Returnees faced limited access to services,1210 scarce livelihood opportunities,1211 and security issues, as some had to return in areas impacted by intra-group violence or areas controlled by multiple security actors.1212 Returnees, particularly women, girls, persons with disabilities and marginalised groups often face stigma and harassment,1213 exposing them to negative coping mechanisms,1214 such as exploitation, gender-based violence, trafficking, economic hardship and renewed displacement due to lack of legal identity documents.1215 (See section 2.6 on Women and Girls; see section 2.7 on Children).

Reintegration is also hindered by damaged infrastructure,1216 landmines and ERW continuing to endanger civilians and impede their movement and livelihoods,1217 as well as insufficient social services.1218 Lack of farming land1219 due to climate change1220 also influenced return decisions. Water scarcity caused tensions,1221 reducing economic stability and hindering durable solutions.1222

The delayed return of Yazidi IDPs is largely due to lack of security,1223 political and legal challenges, including the ‘stalled’ implementation of the Sinjar Agreement between the KRG and the federal Government. Consequently, around 100 000 Yazidis from Sinjar remained displaced and living in precarious conditions,1224 many of them in the KRI.1225 In Sinjar, armed groups such as the PKK and PMF compete for control over military, economic, and political power, turning the area into a ‘transnational conflict hub’ and impeding returns.1226 Many returnees in Sinjar face harsh prospects due to destroyed homes, damaged infrastructure, and the presence of multiple armed groups.1227

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