



Caught Between Two Choices: International Protection or Migration?

Nineveh Center for Research & Development:

Survey of Minorities in Iraq, September 2014

Preamble

Between September 12 – 23, 2014, the Nineveh Center for Research & Development (NCRD) conducted a field study aimed at assessing the opinions of the Internally Displaced People (IDPs) from members of the minority communities of Iraq. Specifically, Yazidis and Christians (including Chaldeans, Syriacs, Assyrians) in the Dohuk and Arbil Governorates were surveyed.

These populations were directly targeted by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) upon its control of the Nineveh Governorate and parts of Anbar, Diyala, Kirkuk and Salah Al-din in June of 2014. Due to the attacks against them, these communities and other minority groups (including Turkmen, Shabaks, and Kakai's) abandoned their homes in Sinjar, Nineveh Plains, and Mosul.

The following is a summary of the main findings of the survey.

Methodology

- 1) The survey included one question with five options (attached is a copy of the survey).
- 2) The displaced people were interviewed individually and in private (not as families).
- 3) The interviews were conducted by ten (10) teams, consisting of one to two interviewers, divided between the Governorates of Dohuk and Arbil. The teams were pre-trained proper interviewing techniques and methodology .
- 4) A few forms were filled out by the interviewers themselves. They were taught on proper ways to pose the questions and complete the survey form .
- 5) The teams visited the different areas where the IDPs were housed. These sites included schools, churches, unfinished buildings, educational and sports centers, tents, bridges and trees, in rented houses and on main roads.

Areas of Work

Refugee sites in Dohuk and Arbil Governorates.

In the Dohuk Governorate:

Christians:

- City of Dohuk: St. Georges Church/Broshki, St. Peter and Paul Church/Police region, Assyrian Cultural Centre, the Chaldean Center for culture and Arts, Sunharib Sports Club, Assyrian Aid Society
- Town of Aqra: Villages of Bnasoor and Noohawa, several villages of Nahla Plain and several villages of Sappna. In Simmel (Shewz Village) and in Zakho (Village of Deraboon)

Yezidis:

- City of Dohuk: various schools and unfinished buildings, under a bridge on the road to Sarsing, at the Dohuk Bazar, Lalish Centre, and the United Kurdistan Women Center
- Outside the City of Dohuk: Khanak Complex, Sharia Complex, Shewz Village, Deraboon Camp, and some residing on the roadside between Dohuk and Amadiya, as well as a few villages in the Nahla Plains

Arbil Governorate:

- City of Ankawa: Anawa: High School, ChaldoAssyrian Student and Youth Union Center, Dam-El Nursery, Bney-Nahrain Entity Office, Mart Shmoon Church, Ur Syrian School, First and Third Harsham areas, Ishtar School, St. John Church and several private residences

Areas of Expulsion

The IDPs were expelled from the following areas:

Christians:

- The City of Mosul
- From Two Districts: Alhamdaniya, Telkif and Basheeqa sub-district in the Nineveh Plains (Qaraqoosh, Bartilla, Karamlis, Basheeqa & Bahzane, Tellkaif, Battnaya, Tellusquf, Alqush, Peeroozawa, Karanjuk, Mergi, Sharafiya and monastery of Two martyrs Behnam and Sara)

Yezidis:

- Basheeqa & Bahzane.
- Sanjar City (including Seepy sheikh Khidr, Tall Azir, Tall Qasab, Soolagh, Ramboosi, Duhla, Kohbal, Bork, Karza-rik, Cora Abdo, Do Kari, Hardan, Zoor Ava, Senooni, Karsheek, Khana Soor, Alwardiya and a few others).

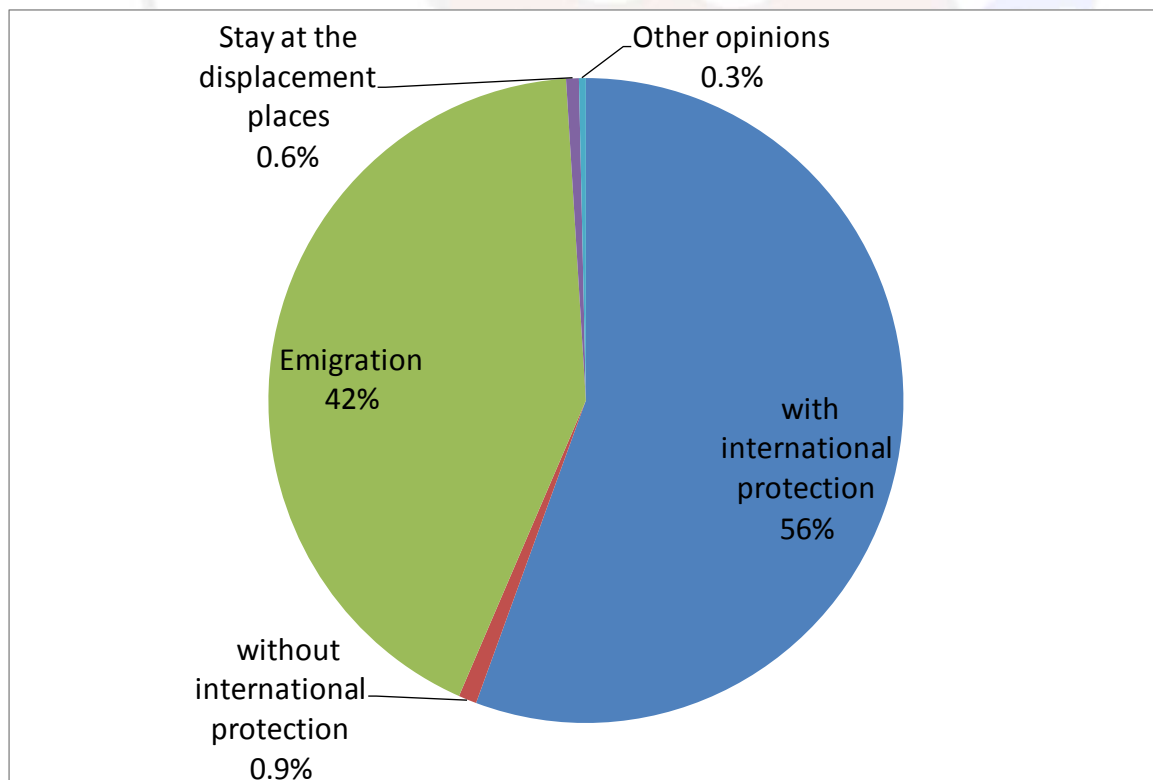
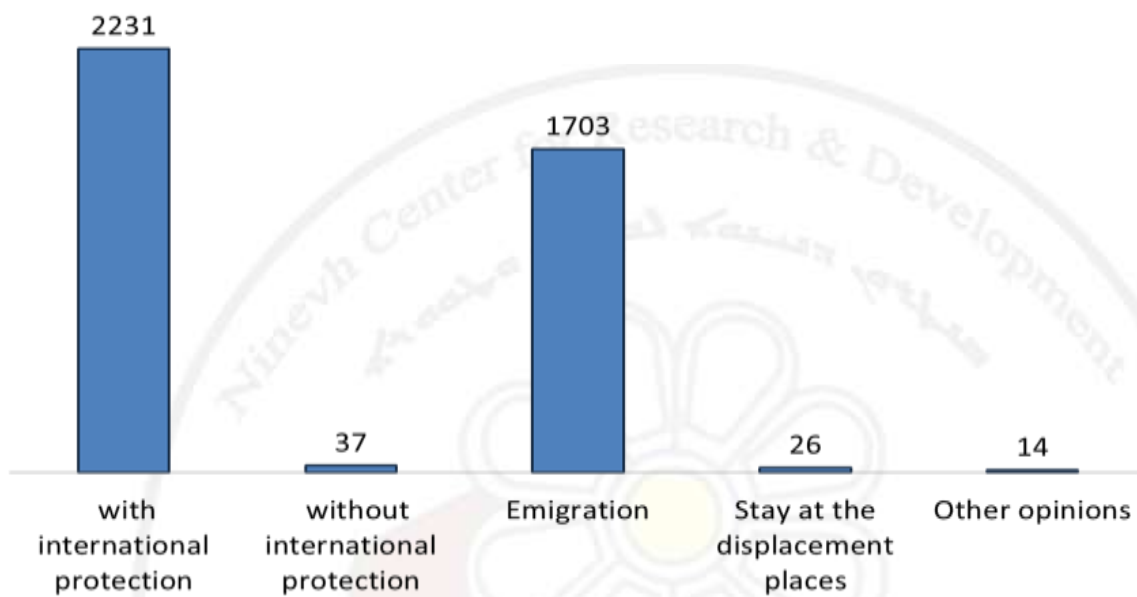
The Sample

NCRD interviewed 4,011 men and women aged 18 and above. In total, 2,737 forms were completed Dohuk Governorate (1,864 Yezidis and 873 Christians) and 1,274 persons were interviewed in the City of Ankawa in the Arbil Governorate (1,188 Christians and 87 Yezidis).

Findings

Of the 4,011 respondents:

- 56 % preferred to go back to their areas under international protection.
- 42 % preferred to migrate to another country (whether collective, family or individual migration).
- 1 % preferred to go back to their areas without international protection.
- < 1 % preferred to stay in the area to which they fled.
- < 1 % chose “other” or provided another option.



Further Analysis

The majority of those who chose to “go back to their areas under international protection” stated:

- Without an internationally protected area, respondents made clear they would not return to their homes. The chance at migration, especially collective migration, was widely agreed upon to be the “best solution.” Additionally, they felt “without international protection there is no hope for us .”
- Respondents stated their preference to “go back with international protection” granting continuous security in their areas, and should be compensated for their losses.

A majority of the Yezidi respondents in Sinjar emphasized the option to “go back under international protection” and not to live among any Arabs or Muslims, whom they preferred be moved “far away”. The respondents expressed that they “cannot live among [Arabs/Muslims], as they kidnapped our daughters and sisters. They betrayed us”.

Many of those who chose “migration to other countries” added “international protection will never exist,” “no matter how disastrous our conditions are, the interest of the powerful nations is more important [than our interest],” and that “Iraq is longer an appropriate place for Christians, Yezidis or any other minority population.” One Yezidi respondent emphasized “migration is best” and that this situation is not a new one for minorities :

“We have never witnessed a house built by a Yezidi grandfather inherited by his grandson, and no son remained in his father’s house; this has been going on for 7 generations” he added “we the Yezidis are not more than 500 people in comparison of one billion Sunni Muslims, we, therefore can do nothing”.

A Christian woman, who chose “migration to a foreign country,” asked “how can we accept being constantly humiliated?” Many Christians who chose “migration” (and specifically, “collective migration”) explained “if our destiny is certainly to migrate, then it’s better to be a collective migration, so we can preserve a homogenous Christian society, preserve our values and traditions, and our language and heritage”.

Some of those who expressed their desire to go back to their area without international protection insisted it was important to return to their original lands. Among the few who desired to settle in the areas to which they fled, some emphasized the importance of improving their living conditions, access to jobs, schooling, housing, and other necessities. Without these things, this pool of respondents would rather migrate. Most of the 14 respondents who preferred “other/provide another option” answered they would prefer to return with protection by the members of their own communities (i.e., no international actors involved).

It was clear from the interviews that most of the IDP families tried to live together with their extended family. This appeared to have some effect on their collective opinions. For example, the Lalish Cultural and Social Centre building housed more than 360 Yezidi families, or about 2,000 people. The interviews were conducted during the morning hours and demonstrated the desire to either go back to their original homes with international protection or to completely migrate to a foreign country. However, it was clearly noted that among those interviewed during this period, returning to their homes under protection was more favorable .

Of the IDPs interviewed in the afternoon, virtually all answered that collective migration outside Iraq was the most favorable option. They remarked “why bother surveying anyone else? You can fill out their forms here because their answer will be the same.” When asked to elaborate, they responded “everyone on this floor is just one family, and we’re all of the same opinion. We have discussed this in advance. There are 166 people on this floor from related families and we have the same opinion”.

From the conversation with this group, it was obvious that the male heads of the families had a clear influence in the decision of their families. These IDPs had come to the conclusion that conditions in Iraq will never improve, citing examples from history and the more recent attacks against their communities by ISIS. One elderly man said “if I have only one month to live and ten days have already passed, then I would prefer to live the remaining twenty days in peace and security. We are tired of persecution. How long would international protection even last?” he asked. He continued, “We know that migration is difficult and we don’t even have money for that. But as Yezidis, we have nothing left here”.

It was rare to find families that had escaped without the death or kidnapping of at least one family member.

At the Kashkawa School in the Nahla Plains, it was clear that the majority preferred to return to their original homes under international protection. There were a few exceptions; young people and women expressed their desire to migrate abroad. Another group of people gathered at the school entrance answered, “There are 23 Yezidi families here, and we discuss these things among ourselves. We hate the thought of leaving our houses, despite recent events, and leave our belongings behind for others to take. On the other hand we have decided that we will not go back to our areas, no matter what they tell us, without international protection”.

At the Alwa Complex in Dohuk City, 113 families from different villages were interviewed, and similar responses were given. Many of them had had family killed or kidnapped. Most respondents expressed their preference to return to their indigenous areas under international protection, with the extra condition that Arabs be expelled from those areas. They pointed to a young girl who had just learned that, after having been missing for some time, her father’s body had been found .

The results from the surveys of the Christians in Ankawa demonstrated a preference to “collectively migrate to a foreign country” from one respondent pool, whereas the results of the other team demonstrated a preference to “return to [their] areas under international protection”.

The conclusion drawn from these results is that there is a clear lack of trust these minority populations have in their security. Migration is difficult to achieve. However, in reality, most of the IDPs prefer to migrate, and have no hope in their future in Iraq .

Final Notes:

1. The original plan was to interview 5,000 respondents, but administrative obstacles prevented the team from achieving that goal. Wanting to reach this goal caused a delay in issuing this report .
2. We expect that the ratio between those declared their desire to “return to the area with international protection” and the choice of “migration” may have changed in favor of those who chose “migration” after a month and half of completion of this survey. This is because of loss of confidence and hope among the expelled minorities, as of possibilities to get a positive change in

their condition, especially after passing all this time without seeing any signs showing any improvement in their tragic situations. And this is confirmed by the increasing immigration of the individuals and families that are heading for Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey on their way to the Diaspora as a result of lack of confidence and hope concerning the liberation of their areas. Thus, every day passing without liberating these areas and bringing back the displaced to their homes and without having any intentions to deal with their conditions will have a negative effect on their confidence and increasing the immigrants' percentage.

3. The survey was conducted with the help of the Assyrian Universal Alliance (AUA) – American Chapter.

