RETURN AS SOCIAL INTERACTION:

NETWORKS AND PERCEPTIONS AMONG YEZIDI AND CHRISTIAN IDPs FROM NINEWA GOVERNORATE

COMPARATIVE REPORT
WAVES 1, 2, & 3
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMMARY

In order to more systematically and robustly understand internally displaced persons' (IDPs) return decision-making in the aftermath of the ISIL conflict, this research explores the effects that perceptions and social networks have on the resolution of displacement over time among Christian and Yezidi IDP populations from Ninewa Governorate residing in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. The study is designed and conducted by Social Inquiry in collaboration with Heartland Alliance International (HAI).

This is a quantitative panel data study that tracked 248 participants (out of an initial 317) over three waves of data collection, who were originally IDPs from Sinjar and Hamdaniya districts in Ninewa Governorate. These districts are targeted by HAI's Safe Return program. The study sample included Yezidi (215) and Christian (33) participants. Data collection spanned 20 months, with Wave One taking place in December 2019 and January 2020, Wave Two in April and May 2021, and Wave Three in September 2021. The relatively large gap between the first two waves is attributable to the COVID-19 pandemic and the restrictions in place in Iraq. For Wave One, data was collected in-person from the participants; all subsequent waves were conducted over the phone by the same team of field researchers.

The main research objective is to explore the relationship between participants' return decision-making (and behavior) and two key elements: a) their perceptions of conditions in place of origin vis-à-vis place of displacement, measured through a score calculated over 28 items; and b) their social networks, analyzed through mapping their information networks (from whom IDPs directly hear information regarding place of origin) and their discussion networks (with whom IDPs discuss decision-making around resolving displacement). Statistical analysis was used to determine whether and how perceptions and networks influence returns over time.

Actual return behavior was captured through data collection in Waves Two and Three and, by the end of this study, 70 of the remaining 248 participants (28%) had returned to their places of origin, while the rest stayed in displacement. The overwhelming majority of those who returned are Yezidi participants, indicating a relatively mobile Yezidi population and a highly immobile Christian one. A critical finding revealed through comparing the participants' stated movement intentions at the beginning of the study against their actual movement behaviors by the end of it is that the two indicators do not seem to be correlated with each other. In other words, the participants who returned by Wave Three did not have particularly strong inclination to return at the outset of the study. The wide majority indicated wishing to remain in displacement in the immediate-term and preferred to migrate abroad in the longer-term.

Individual perceptions of participants' places of origin and current places of displacement were measured through five dimensions: wellbeing and services, responsiveness of institutions, physical safety and security, relationship between groups, and justice and accountability. A score was constructed using a 28-item framework for each participant, ranging from 0 (very negative perception of the location) to 10 (very positive perception). Consistent across waves is that IDP participants in general score their places of displacement as better across all dimensions than their places of origin and that the scores themselves do not vary much over time. Even so, perceived conditions of origin matter for return behavior and conditions in displacement do not. IDP participants with relatively higher perception scores of their places of origin are more likely to have returned by Wave Three, while high perception scores of displacement location do not necessarily

translate into a greater desire to stay displaced where they are, return, or move elsewhere. Further analysis illustrates however that even if place of origin and place of displacement perception scores eventually become the same, more than half of IDP participants would remain unwilling to return, indicating that people are sensitive to conditions in origin, but they may be looking for life there to be considerably better before changing their behaviors. Some factors that have a bearing on how participants view their place of origin include whether they are aware of NGO programming there.

The mapping of IDP participants' social networks uncovered a particularly widespread, open, and diverse network overall, especially in relation to discussion networks across Waves One and Three with participants on average naming the same numbers of information and discussion alters each of these times. Furthermore, young people (i.e., individuals under 40 years of age) seem to play a critical role overall in participants' networks, not only as arbiters of information, but as counterparts for discussion as well, this held true across waves as well. While the size, structure, and age characteristics of social networks remained relatively constant over time, what did change was who specifically populated the networks. The particular individuals that participants talk to about resolving displacement and receive information on place of origin changed between Waves One and Three. These individuals, by Wave Three, while remaining relatively young, tended to be returnees themselves in the place of origin and had less close relationships to the participant though they knew each other prior to displacement.

Specific social network characteristics captured in Wave One are highly correlated with participant return by Wave Three. Those who returned had more alters advising them to return at the outset (and alters that had themselves more positive views of origin) than those who remained displaced. Thus, the more alters a participant has that share the same message, the more reinforced the message becomes in the network and to participants themselves. Further to this, a critical factor in return movement is having a direct information network at all at the outset. Those participants who returned had more information alters than those that did not. While information networks tend to be smaller than discussion networks, having direct, more proactive contact with information (as opposed to more passive or broadcast sources) mattered for return over time. These findings are especially pertinent to participants in very closed networks where all members know each other, as it is more likely that they will be sharing and discussing the same information, but also holds for those in more loosely connected networks as well to which most participants in the study belong.

Taken together, these findings provide evidence that all these elements, namely return movements, perceptions of origin, and social network configuration, are indeed correlated with each other. This still does not however disentangle to what extent there is, if at all, a causality relation between them and the direction of this relationship. Regardless of directionality, perceptions of origin, having information alters, and being provided with more homogenous advice are better predictors of return than stated immediate-term or long-term intentions alone. And irrespective of these factors, the return rate captured in this study is still relatively low, indicating that it takes a considerable effort to get those displaced for this long to actually return.

Finally, while perceptions remained relatively constant over time, social networks seemed to change. The networks mapped here after conflict and amid a global pandemic evolve and while the people in them may be different, their size and shape remain underscoring the ability of displaced participants to rebuild or reconstitute social capital amid significant upheaval and potential loss. This resilience should not be taken for granted or underestimated in understanding the resolution of displacement over time.

1. INTRODUCTION

The pathways that internally displaced persons (IDPs) take toward resolving their displacement are often complex and circuitous, tangling together their desires about where to live with what they believe is actually feasible in the midst of uncertainty. This complexity is seen in the displacement context of Iraq where violent conflict and prolonged upheaval have given way to general instability, making it more difficult for families to determine whether it would be best to return home, integrate locally, or resettle elsewhere.

Recent research of IDPs in Iraq displaced by the ISIL conflict reveals that even seemingly "straightforward" economic decision-making related to displacement is anything but simple. It usually involves pondering a confluence of structural and individual considerations that span local geographies.[1] In other words, IDPs seem to make decisions by taking into account their own circumstances, their places of origin, their current locations, and the potential for living elsewhere. These factors often include economic prospects, housing, public service provision, institutional response, security, social cohesion matters, and lastly, possibility for accountability, redress, and guarantees of non-repetition for the events and violations that led to their displacement.[2]

Untangling all of these strands to understand what matter in return decision-making may help in better aligning interventions to IDPs' own intentions for resolving their displacement in the immediate to long-term. They may also contribute to assisting communities where the displaced currently live and are from overall.

At the same time, because of the gravity involved in the resolution of displacement for most IDP families, studies of this decision-making that do not also account for IDPs' social networks could produce myopic observations about the facts that impact them. Post-conflict decisions around returning to place of origin are shaped by perceptions which come from soliciting high quality information about current conditions in these locations and, as with many major life decisions, discussing them with others. Both activities are fundamentally social network processes.

Another reason to study the social networks of IDPs is more pragmatic. Social networks in places that experience violent conflict, in particular civil war, often experience significant changes.[3] The implication is that IDPs are likely working to resolve their displacement within a radically altered social context, not just in terms of their location of displacement but also in terms of the social ties they are willing and able to activate for this purpose. In the most extreme case, conflict creates significant gaps in pre-conflict social networks, requiring other network members to adapt by forming new relationships and/or taking on new roles.[4] As a result, few assumptions can be made about IDPs' current social networks based on those that existed (or that which could be reasonably inferred existed) prior to the conflict. Thus, it is imperative to

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[1] Social Inquiry, IOM, and the Returns Working Group, *When Affordability Matters: The Political Economy and Economic Decision-Making of Iraqi IDPs* (Erbil: IOM, 2019).

[2] These factors in places of origin seem to contribute to protracting displacement in Iraq, see Social Inquiry, IOM, and the Returns Working Group, *Reasons to Remain: Categorizing Protracted Displacement in Iraq* (Erbil: IOM, 2018). They are also the basis for Heartland Alliance International's Safe Return programming in IDP areas of origin, where implementation is focused on livelihoods, physical and mental health, access to justice, and increased responsiveness of local institutions.

[3] Elisabeth Jean Wood, "The Social Processes of Civil War: The Wartime Transformation of Social Networks," *Annual Review of Political Science 11* no. 1 (2008): 539-61.

[4] Sarah Elizabeth Parkinson, "Organizing Rebellion: Rethinking High-Risk Mobilization and Social Networks in War," *American Political Science Review 107* no. 3 (2013): 418-32.

study IDPs' current social networks to understand current (as opposed to past) social supports and related patterns of seeking out social support, including information and discussion.

Taking all of this into account, this research, designed and conducted by Social Inquiry in collaboration with Heartland Alliance International (HAI), seeks to more systematically and robustly understand IDP return decision-making in the aftermath of the ISIL conflict, by exploring the effects perceptions and social networks have on the resolution of displacement among displaced Christian and Yezidi populations in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

This report presents the findings from three waves of data collection, giving in-depth insight into IDP perceptions, social networks, and return behavior over time.

2. METHODOLOGY

Study Design

This research is a quantitative panel data study, which tracked the same participants over three waves of data collection. All participants were displaced at the beginning of the study and some of them ended up returning to their place of origin in between the 20 months that this study span. The panel data design, thus, allows exploring the idea that IDP decision-making about returning or not may be shaped over time based on evolving perceptions and conditions in their places of origin and displacement as well as their own interactions and engagements with their social networks, which themselves may also change over time.

Participants are members of the Yezidi and Christian communities originally from Sinjar and Hamdaniya, the two districts in Iraq targeted by HAI's Safe Return program. The research is thus embedded within HAI's program dynamics.

In addition to tracking return decision-making (or actual return movement) among participants, this study builds its research questions around the relationship between resolving displacement and two key elements as follows (see also Figure 1):

- Participants' perceptions of conditions in place of origin vis-à-vis place of displacement, measured through a 28-item framework that identifies structural differences between places and tracks changes over time.

- Participants' social networks, analyzed through mapping over time their information networks (from whom IDPs directly hear information regarding their places of origin) and their discussion networks (with whom IDPs discuss decision-making around resolving their displacement).

Participants were recruited at the start of the first wave while in displacement and surveyed three separate times, with this report consisting of results for the entire study at its completion.

Selection of areas and recruitment of study participants in Wave One

The recruitment and sampling strategy for this study is guided primarily by HAI's Safe Return project. Specifically, because project implementation targets Yezidi and Christian populations that returned to Ninewa Governorate (specifically in Sinjar district, Hamdaniya Center, Bartella, and Bashiqa subdistricts), this research focused on their IDP counterparts. Thus, participants were recruited among the Yezidi and Christian populations that were displaced in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq at the beginning of the study.

In total, 317 households were enrolled in the study at the outset in December 2019: 255 Yezidi participants and 62 Christian participants. This proportion between both identity groups reflects the relatively larger size of Yezidi IDPs from Sinjar district than Christian IDPs from Hamdaniya district and Bashiqa subdistrict (35,879 households estimated in the first group and 553 households for the second, as per IOM'S Displacement Tracking Matrix data of 2019). Participants were divided as in Table 1 per geographical area (the sample distribution per location took into account the relative proportion over the total number of Yezidi and Christian IDPs).

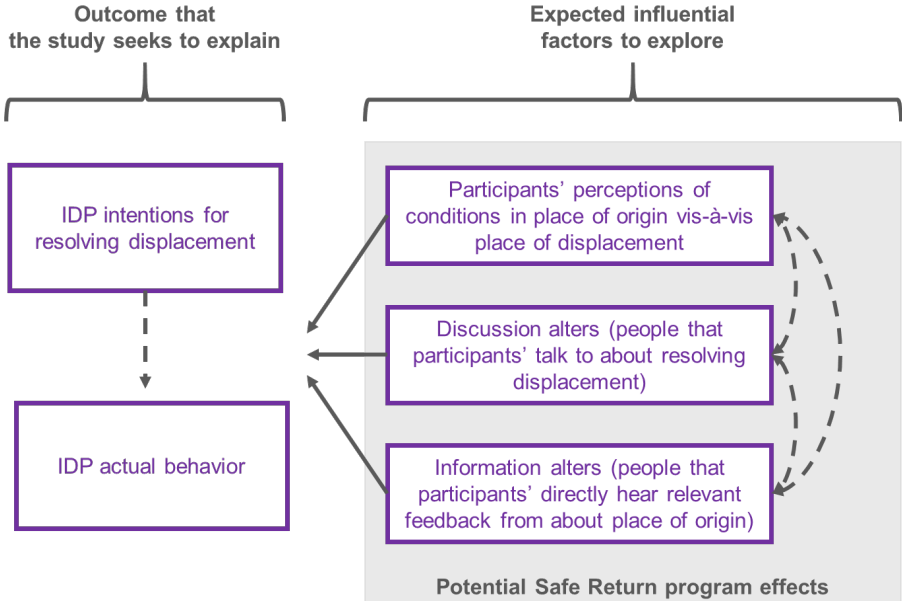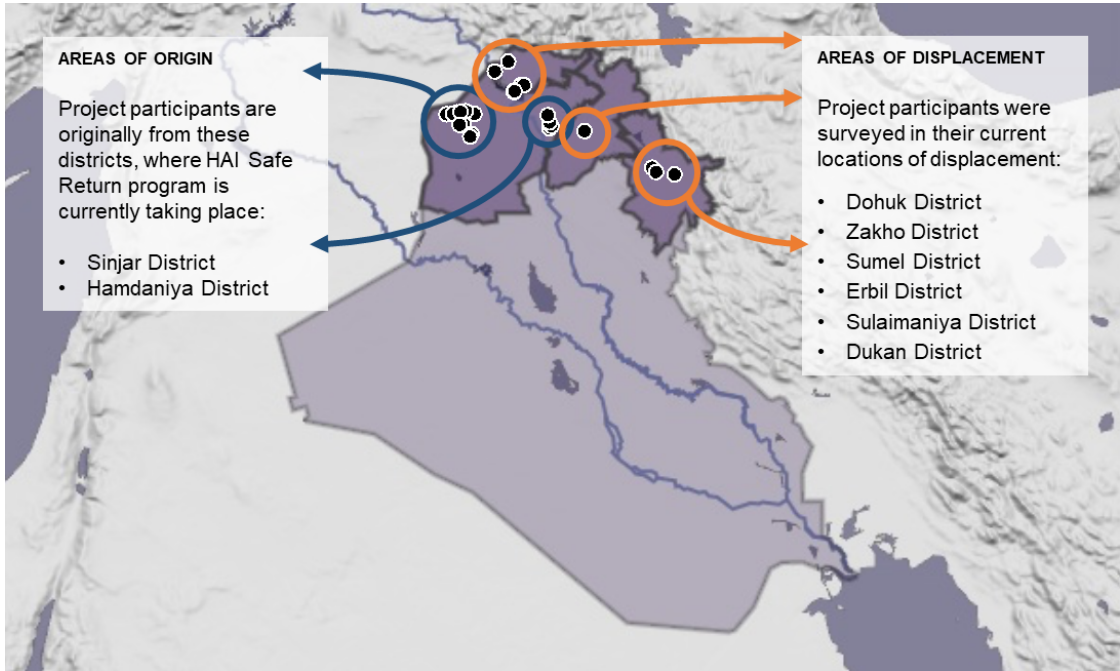**Figure 1. Analytical framework on dynamics around decision-making in displacement**

Figure 2. Districts of origin and displacement of study participants

Table 1. Study locations and recruited participants by identity group at the start of Wave One

| Population group	Subdistricts	Locations targeted to recruit participants	Study participants
Yezidi IDPs	Sumel Center (Duhok Governorate)	Kabarto, Khanke, Qasr Yazidin	109
	Fayda (Duhok Governorate)	Shariya	41
	Zakho Center (Duhok Governorate)	Chamishko	41
	Batel (Duhok Governorate)	Bajit Kandala 1 & 2	39
	Sitak (Sulaimaniya Governorate)	Rural farms	14
	Piramagroon (Sulaimaniya Governorate)	Rural farms	11
Christian IDPs	Ankawa (Erbil Governorate)	Ankawa Center	62
Total			**317**

Three field teams (one per governorate) went through target neighborhoods or camps and randomly selected IDPs to enroll in the study. Teams were formed to match the religious and linguistic background of potential participants. Identification of households was done through the random walk method, distributing the sampling points evenly across the location. The field teams reported a 90% positive response rate from the IDPs approached for participation. Because the focus of the study is on household decision-making, field teams targeted either adult heads of household or their spouses for recruitment. This has the added benefit of more easily being able to interview the same individual within the household for subsequent waves of data collection. Participation in the study required written informed consent which included an explanation of the study and data protection protocols and usage.[5]

Data collection in Waves One, Two, and Three

This study spanned 20 months, with Wave One taking place in December 2019 and January 2020, Wave Two in April and May 2021, and Wave Three in September 2021. The relatively large gap between the first two waves is attributable to the COVID-19 pandemic and the restrictions in place in Iraq (see limitations below for further reference). Participants were tracked between waves through regular phone text messaging. For Wave One, data was collected in-person from the participants; all subsequent waves were conducted over the phone by the same team of field researchers.

It is expected in panel data studies to experience attrition in the number of participants across waves. In this case, from the 317 participants in Wave One, a total of 248 were still enrolled in the study in Wave Three (Figure 3). The loss of 69 study participants yields a 22% attrition rate.

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[5] Specifically, enumerators discussed verbally and shared in writing with potential IDP participants that: 1) all participation is voluntary and confidential; 2) they do not have to answer any questions that they do not want to; 3) they can withdraw from the study at any time and that any identifying information will be deleted from the database; 4) any personally identifiable information they provide about themselves or others is strictly confidential, will not be shared with anyone, and any answers they provide in the survey will not be linked to them personally in analysis and reporting; 5) survey data will be collected on tablets, but information is uploaded to a secure, password protected server and deleted from tablets each day and the database itself is password protected and accessible only to Social Inquiry researchers outside the area of study; and 6) they will be contacted by text message by the enumerator every two months to check in ahead of the two subsequent waves of data collection (respondents received 5,000 Iraqi dinar worth of phone credit after the survey to offset the cost of follow-up text messages).

Figure 3. Study participants surveyed in each wave of data collection
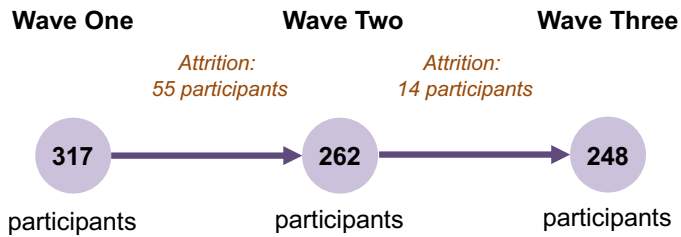
Except for Wave Two, fieldwork consisted of two stages: a survey conducted on the study participants and a survey conducted on their social network:[6]

- The survey on study participants contained questions on household characteristics, displacement experience, intentions and desires for resolving displacement, perceptions of places of origin and displacement, and, finally, indicators on their social networks, including *alters* (i.e., individuals identified by participants within their network). As part of this social network component, the survey included one "name generator" to collect the names and demographic characteristics of the participants' alters within their information network (i.e., up to five individuals from whom participants directly hear relevant information about their places of origin) and another "name generator" for their discussion network (i.e., up to five individual from whom participants seriously discuss their displacement situation and what to do about it).[7]

- The second stage of data collection aimed to complete the social network analysis and implied an additional second survey conducted on the alters named in the discussion network. Alters were reached over the phone on behalf of the participant(s) that referred them. This alter survey included demographic questions as well as questions on their views and perceptions about the district of origin of the participant(s) who referred them. In addition, these respondents were also asked a "name generator" for their own information network (i.e., up to five individuals from whom they directly hear relevant information about the participant's place of origin).

Most questions were consistent across waves to allow comparability over time, but some topics were adapted depending on whether participants were still displaced or eventually returned to their place of origin.

Data integration

To allow for an integrated analysis of all the data elements collected over the study duration, data pertinent to participants and their social network was pooled in one single dataset. This implied integrating personal data and names, in order to effectively map the individuals forming the participants' social networks overall and the ties between them across waves. This integration consisted of merging the different names generated (study participants, information alters, discussion alters and their own information alters) and identifying repeated names across networks. In total, the full network generated in the study comprises 4,121 names.

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[6] Wave Two did not include a social network survey due to time limitations.

[7] For more on the empirical basis of social network tool design including number of alters to collect implemented here, see Ronald S. Burt, "Network Items and the General Social Survey," *Social Networks 6* no. 4 (1984): 293-339; and Jennifer Merluzzi and Ronald S. Burt, "How Many Names are Enough? Identifying Network Effects with the Least Set of Listed Contacts," *Social Networks 35* (2013): 331-337.

Names that belonged to the same person were coded and grouped together. This step was conducted by a dedicated team of researchers following internal data protection protocols set up for this study. As a result of the overall process, the final dataset used for analysis did not contain any person's name or phone numbers, with names substituted by numerical codes identifying each unique individual. Overall, the 4,121 names derived into 3,215 unique individuals when accounting for duplicate names repeated by many participants and/or repeated across waves.

Data analysis

The analysis and results presented in this study are derived from the three waves of data as specified in each section. Given the study design characteristics and the attrition of participants, the following caveats apply for analysis:

- When a participant returned to their place of origin between waves, it was assumed that their displacement trajectory had come to an ostensible end, as defined by the study. As such, returnee participants were still tracked in subsequent rounds (for example, to ensure that they did not displace again) but they were not surveyed as extensively as participants that remained displaced. Most figures in this report differentiate between IDP participants and returnee participants where relevant.
- Data on the 69 participants that left the study between Waves One and Three was not included in the analysis or results presented in the report. Findings are focused exclusively on the 248 participants that remained until the end of the study. This permits a cleaner and more straightforward comparison of behavior between waves.
- Finally, specific analysis of the differences between identity groups (that is, between Yezidi and Christian participants) is only given when they point to aspects that can only be understood from that lens. This partial analysis by identity comes with caveats as the number of Christians left in the study by Wave Three is relatively low (33 compared to the 62 that were initially recruited) and its statistical representativeness is substantially limited. As such, most of the results are provided jointly for both identity groups.

Limitations

The COVID-19 pandemic and ensuing public health measures to prevent its spread began during this study and impacted its timing and method of data collection. The second and third waves of data collection took place much later and temporally farther away from the first wave than originally designed and these last two waves themselves were closer in time than originally designed. The first wave of data collection ended right before movement restrictions and lockdown measures came into place in Iraq because of COVID-19. These restrictions lasted for a significant portion of 2020 and made planning fieldwork safely, particularly within the displacement camps where the majority of study participants live, a challenge. Continuing public health concerns and greater restrictions and administrative difficulties in accessing displacement camps necessitated having to shift away from in-person data collection to conducting surveys by phone for the second and third waves once it was possible to do so.

The large temporal gap in waves, particularly in such an eventful year, as well as the shift to phone surveys may reduce the reliability of the data and comparability across waves. To mitigate this as much as possible, the field teams remained in contact with study participants via regular text message follow-up as indicated

above. This helped in building trust and retaining participants in the study and better ensuring reliability of data over time.

Another limitation of the study relates to the low number of Christian IDPs in the sample. This comes down to issues in locating them. Despite IOM DTM projections, there are very few Christian IDPs from Hamdaniya Center, Bartella, or Bashiqa in Dohuk Governorate. In both Erbil and Dohuk, contacts and local neighborhood authorities indicated that Christian IDPs have mostly returned to their places of origin. The team was able to meet the sampling number for Erbil Governorate at the outset, however their higher attrition over time limits the ability to make comparisons between Yezidi and Christian participants over time. Furthermore, because heads of household were targeted, the gender balance is tilted in favor of male respondents even though women comprise a portion of the sample. Given the panel design of the study, tracking the same individuals over time, additional participants were not added across waves of data collection.

A final limitation relates to how widely the findings can be generalized for the IDP population from Sinjar and Hamdaniya districts overall which include Sunni Arab and Shabak communities. Because the data is focused on a representative Christian and Yezidi IDP and returnee sample, the findings can be generalized to these communities. It is not possible however to know if these findings are unique to Christian and Yezidi IDPs or if they also hold true for other communities displaced from these same areas. In order to understand differences and similarities between these groups, follow-up studies with these other IDP communities is needed. This was not possible for this study given time and geographic constraints, as the bulk of these other IDP populations are more spread across the country. Such work however is critical to best understand the needs of all vulnerable communities in Sinjar and Hamdaniya districts, including those often overlooked within the emerging narratives of victimization and need in the aftermath of the ISIL conflict.

3. THE CONTEXTS SOME LEFT BEHIND AND OTHERS RETURNED TO

Before delving into findings in detail, it is useful to first ground them in a general understanding of a) how people from Sinjar district and Hamdaniya Center and Bartella subdistricts experienced the ISIL conflict as well as their displacement and return patterns and b) the general landscape of these areas of origin to date, across a number of dimensions.

ISIL conflict

ISIL captured Sinjar district in the summer of 2014, carrying out grave, large-scale human rights violations primarily against the Yezidi population; the violations including extrajudicial killings, kidnapping, trafficking, and sexual violence as well as widespread destruction was most prominently experienced by communities within Sinjar Center and Qayrawan subdistricts.[8] ISIL also targeted those Sunni populations attempting to flee at this time.[9] Security forces as well as externally supported armed groups (PKK/YPG) retook Sinjar Center and Sinuni subdistricts in mid-2015; Qayrawan subdistrict was retaken later in mid-2017. Hamdaniya Center and Bartella subdistricts also fell to ISIL in the summer of 2014, as the armed group moved through Sinjar to Mosul City, and then onward to the Ninewa Plains. ISIL wreaked large-scale damaged and destruction to infrastructure, housing, and religious/cultural sites in these subdistricts.[10] The Christian and Shabak populations residing here, also targeted by ISIL violence, bore slightly less of the brunt of severe human rights violations as most managed to flee ahead of the armed groups advance in 2014. Security forces retook Hamdaniya Center and Bartella from ISIL in late 2016.

Displacement and return[11]

Two distinct displacement patterns emerged among the two largest ethno-religious groups in Sinjar district at the onset of the ISIL conflict: the overwhelming majority of Yezidis (and a small subset of Sunni Arabs) displaced between June and August 2014 with the emergence of ISIL in the district and into the Kurdistan Region of Iraq; while the bulk of the Sunni Arab population displaced into Mosul or Syria between September 2014 and mid-2015 as military operations commenced to push the armed group out.[12] Return patterns are similarly differentiated not only by identity group but location in the district as well. Yezidis began returning to Sinuni in mid-2015, while returns to Sinjar Center began in earnest the following year and those to Qayrawan began after 2017. A number of dynamics in 2020 and 2021 further spurred additional Yezidi returns, this included concerns over COVID-19 transmission in camps and economic strain in displacement due to lockdowns; deteriorating camp conditions in Dohuk;[13] and the institution of return grants for displaced Yezidis who wished to return to Sinjar. The Federal Government of Iraq's

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[8] Social Inquiry, "Scenarios of Fragility in Northern Ninewa," (Erbil: Social Inquiry, 2017); and Azam Ahmed, "Betrayal of Ezidis Stokes Iraqi Fears of Return to 2006 Sectarian Horrors," *New York Times*, August 26, 2014.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Kareem Shaheen, "ISIL Destroys Historic Christian and Muslim Shrines in Northern Iraq," *The Guardian*, March 20, 2015; Erica Gaston, "After ISIL: Qaraqosh, Hamdaniya District" (Berlin: GPPi, 2017); Social Inquiry, IOM, and the Returns Working Group, "The Physical and Social Dimensions of Housing in Conflict-Affected Areas," Return Index Thematic Series Briefing 1 (Erbil: IOM, 2019).

[11] Yezidi and Christian displaced populations also sought asylum abroad, primarily in Europe throughout this time. The return dynamics described here reflect that of the population still in the country.

[12] Social Inquiry and Welthungerhilfe, "Sinjar District Situation Analysis," (internal report, 2018).

[13] This included numerous fires in the camps due to faulty electrical wiring, see, for example, Louisa Loveluck and Mustafa Salim, "Fire Burns Through Yazidi Displacement Camp Seven Years after ISIS Genocide," *Washington Post*, June 4, 2021.

October 2020 announcement that it would close all IDP camps in its territories by the end of the year further precipitated the return of Sunni Arab families to Sinjar district, specifically to Sinuni and Qayrawan subdistricts, as the camps they were residing in began closing. Even so, the majority of the Yezidi population still remains displaced and Sunni Arab populations from the district for the most part also remain displaced, often blocked from return. Displacement and return movements of Hamdaniya Center and Bartella's main population groups is more straightforward than Sinjar district over all. Christians and Shabak populations displaced predominantly to the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, with Shabak communities also fleeing to predominantly Shia southern governorates of the country in the summer of 2014. Return to these two subdistricts by both population groups began in the second half of 2017. Most recent figures indicate that all locations in these subdistricts that experienced displacement now have most or all of their pre-conflict Christian and Shabak populations still in the country back.[14]

Wellbeing and services

Sinjar district and Hamdaniya Center and Bartella subdistricts have faced historic marginalization and development neglect and as such, their fragility pre-dates the ISIL conflict. Data from 2012 indicate that these areas have some of the highest rates of insecurity, poverty, and perceived corruption in institutions as compared to the rest of Iraq.[15] Since the official end of the conflict, physical conditions in Sinjar district and Hamdaniya Center and Bartella subdistricts vary for those who have returned. Sinjar district overall has some of the most severe living conditions as compared to other conflict-affected areas, particularly in relation to residential destruction, access to employment, recovery of agriculture and/or businesses, incorporation of public sector employees, and public water provision. The situation in Qayrawan subdistrict, where fewer displaced households have returned, is particularly dire across these dimensions, with access to primary health care also reportedly limited.[16] Reported living conditions in Hamdaniya Center and Bartella subdistricts by contrast are considerably better, though the areas still struggle with poor public water provision, limited access to primary health care, and low reincorporation of public sector employees.[17] House destruction is also still relatively acute in Hamdaniya Center in particular.[18]

Governance and institutions

Sinjar Center, Sinuni, Qayrawan, Hamdaniya Center, and Bartella subdistricts comprise a portion of the territories that are disputed between the Federal Government of Iraq and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). While the areas are currently under the control of the Federal Government of Iraq, their disputed status is an ongoing point of contention that requires further negotiation between the Baghdad and Erbil governments. The local authorities and communities therein are also split in terms of their support for one side, the other, or neither. This dynamic continues to play itself out in the wake of the October 2020 Sinjar Agreement brokered by the Baghdad and Erbil governments to resolve issues of governance, security provision, and returns, among others, in the district, where residents have mixed views on what if any change this will bring.[19] This political agreement seems to have had very little input from

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[14] IOM Return Index dataset Round 13.
[15] Iraq Household Socio-Economic Survey, database by the Organization of Statistics and Information Technology and the Kurdistan Regional Statistics Office in coordination with the World Bank, 2012; World Bank, "The Unfulfilled Promise of Oil and Growth: Poverty, Inclusion and Welfare in Iraq, 2007-2012," (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 2012).
[16] Ibid.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Ibid.
[19] Social Inquiry and United States Institute of Peace, Ninewa Conflict and Stabilization Monitoring Framework Round 5.

Sinjar district officials or residents and has so far enabled KRG aligned political actors to retake some of the administrative positions in Sinjar and Mosul that they had lost after October 2017. Beyond this, recognized national minority populations in general have not had and still struggle for adequate political representation in Baghdad and Erbil governments, with local administrations and the public sector contested between the various ethno-religious communities residing there. This is reflected again in Yezidi, Christian, and Shabak residents' mixed views of Iraq's new electoral law, coming into force ahead of the October 2021 national elections, which created smaller electoral units and their relatively dim view of elections bringing positive change regardless.

Physical safety and security

Sinjar district and Hamdaniya Center and Bartella subdistricts experienced high levels of insecurity as well as extremist violence after 2003 and through the ISIL conflict. In the aftermath of this, given the differing conflict dynamics, the security concerns for each are particularly localized, however, day to day safety is reportedly relatively stable for communities, and issues tend to relate more to underlying political dimensions and the general existential uncertainty/fragility of these respective contexts for their populations.[20] In Sinjar district, the proliferation of security actors and other armed groups currently in place (and the potential for clashes between them) are of major concern for its population, as are concerns over revenge attacks, ethno-religious and tribal tensions, ISIL attacks, the potential for forced recruitment into armed groups, and episodes of arson.[21] These concerns are further compounded by cross-border movements of armed groups coming from neighboring Syria and retaliatory airstrikes against them in parts of the district. Turkish airstrikes against armed group positions in Sinjar district and Dohuk Governorate taking place in 2019 ramped up further throughout 2020 and 2021, when Turkey launched its air and land campaign (Claw Eagle / Claw Tiger) against the group.[22] The greater presence of Turkish actors operating in these areas as a result of its military presence, have become a cause for concern for residents and local authorities alike in both Sinjar and Dohuk.[23] For Hamdaniya Center and Bartella subdistricts, security concerns are primarily linked to the presence of multiple security actors in the area.[24]

Relationship between groups

Yezidi and Sunni Arab populations in Sinjar district have historically maintained socio-economic and cultural ties. These are now completely cut-off as a result of the mass violence and violation of the conflict, with community-level interaction between groups limited to non-existent since the retaking of the district. Sunni Arab populations have effectively been blocked from return to much of the district given the various security configurations in charge, with retaliatory action taken against this population during and after military actions.[25] A shift in security actors in 2018 and IDP camp closures in 2020 enabled some Sunni Arab families to return to villages around Sinuni, however, their movements in general in the area and across the district are significantly restricted. It is no surprise then than concerns over revenge and

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[20] Ibid.; and Saad Salloum, "Barriers to Return for Ethno-Religious Minorities in Iraq: Identity Politics and Political Patronage Among Ezidi and Christian Communities from Ninewa Governorate," (Erbil: IOM, 2020).

[21] See, for example, IOM Return Index dataset Round 13; Social Inquiry, "Scenarios of Fragility," Social Inquiry and WHH, "Sinjar District Situational Analysis," and Tom Wescott, "Crop Fires Hit Newly Returned Iraqis Hard," *The New Humanitarian*, July 8, 2019.

[22] Zhelwan Z. Wali, "Turkey Launches Air Offensive Targeting Suspected PKK Locations in Northern Iraq," *Rudaw*, June 15, 2021.

[23] Amberin Zaman, "Turkish Airstrikes Claim Yazidi Lives in Iraq's Sinjar," *Al-Monitor*, August 18, 2021; and Karwan Faidhi Dri, "Kurdistan Areas Deforested by Turkey Used to be so Dense One Could Barely See the Sky: Witnesses," *Rudaw*, June 1, 2021.

[24] IOM Return Index dataset Round 13; Gaston, "After ISIL."

[25] Human Rights Watch, "Yezidi Fighters Allegedly Execute Civilians," *Human Rights Watch*, December 27, 2017.

community tensions are predominate as noted above, with Sunni Arabs particularly concerned about violence against them.[26] In Hamdaniya Center and Bartella subdistricts, strained relations exist at the community level between Christians and Shabaks, the two predominant groups in the area. This stems less from the ISIL conflict, in which both communities were targeted, but from changes post-2003 when Shabak communities moved into the majority Christian subdistricts from Mosul City and surrounding Arab mixed villages as a result of sectarian violence. This movement is seen by some as a government planned, political attempt at "Shia-ization" of Christian areas, and by others as a "natural" tendency of any targeted group, fleeing violence and seeking safer, better resourced areas to live.[27] Pope Francis' visit to Iraq in March 2021, which included stops in Hamdaniya Center subdistrict and Erbil Governorate, focused on promoting a message of coexistence between different ethno-religious communities and of the return of Christian families to Ninewa Governorate.

Justice and accountability

Given the scale of violations that have occurred in these areas to date, it is perhaps unsurprising that their populations have deep grievances that remain. For communities in and from Sinjar district, these relate most prominently to what happened during and after the ISIL conflict. For Yezidi communities, their demands include knowing the whereabouts of the remaining missing Yezidi women and children, the exhumation of all mass graves, and an international judicial investigation into the events of 2014. Some efforts in this regard have haltingly begun and gained some momentum over 2020 and 2021. In March 2020, for the first time in the country, a trial went forward against an ISIL suspect in which a Yezidi survivor (or any victim of the conflict for that matter), gave testimony in open court and confronted her attacker.[28] This trial was notable as well because it was also the first time the charge of rape was added to a terrorism case and addressed by the court. One year later in March 2021, the Iraqi Parliament passed the Yezidi Survivors Law, providing a reparations framework for Yezidi, Christian, Turkmen, and Shabak survivors of ISIL crimes that would entail financial payment as well as access to education, psychosocial care, and housing and land.[29] Early 2021 also saw the first return and reburial of remains exhumed from mass graves in Sinjar, following their documentation and identification in Baghdad.[30]

Sunni Arab communities also seek redress for violations and collective blame perpetrated against them as well. Any processes by which these issues are grappled with will likely also need to address underlying and growing inter- and intra-group political, security, and social concerns as well.[31] Because of the sensitivities regarding these topics, efforts in this direction remain nascent. Within Hamdaniya Center and Bartella subdistricts, ISIL conflict violations are an issue affecting the population in general. However, among the two predominant communities in the subdistrict, grievances relate less to this last conflict than to subsequent changes within the security configuration and governance of these areas in its aftermath, and to pre-existing tensions and inter-group competition in political, social, and economic spheres.[32] Various initiatives and proposals have been attempted since 2003 to present in seeking to address these concerns, again with so far limited results.

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[26] United States Institute of Peace Conflict and Stabilization Monitoring Framework Round 5.

[27] Dave van Zoonen and Khogir Wirya, "The Shabaks: Perceptions of Reconciliation and Conflict," (Erbil: MERI, 2017).

[28] Alissa J. Rubin, "She Faced Her ISIS Rapist in Court, then Watched Him Sentenced to Death," *New York Times*, March 2, 2020.

[29] Nicolette Waldman, "Iraq's Reparation Law for Yezidi Survivors is a Positive Step," *Al-Jazeera*, June 28, 2021.

[30] Jane Arraf, "Years After a Massacre, Yazidis Bury Their Loved Ones," *New York Times*, February 7, 2021.

[31] International Crisis Group, "A Way Forward for Sinjar" *International Crisis Group*, December 14, 2018.

[32] Social Inquiry, IOM, and RWG, "The Growing Role of Reconciliation."

4. PARTICIPANT MOVEMENTS OVER THREE WAVES

Displacement and return

Given the panel design of this study, it is possible not only to capture IDP movement intentions over time, but their actual movement behavior as well. As such, at the end of Wave Three, 70 of the remaining 248 study participants returned to their districts of origin (Figure 4). Sixty of these participants returned in Wave Two and 10 in Wave Three. The rest of the 184 participants remained in displacement – this includes one participant who went back to their displacement location between Waves Two and Three after having originally returned.

Figure 4. Participants' movements between waves
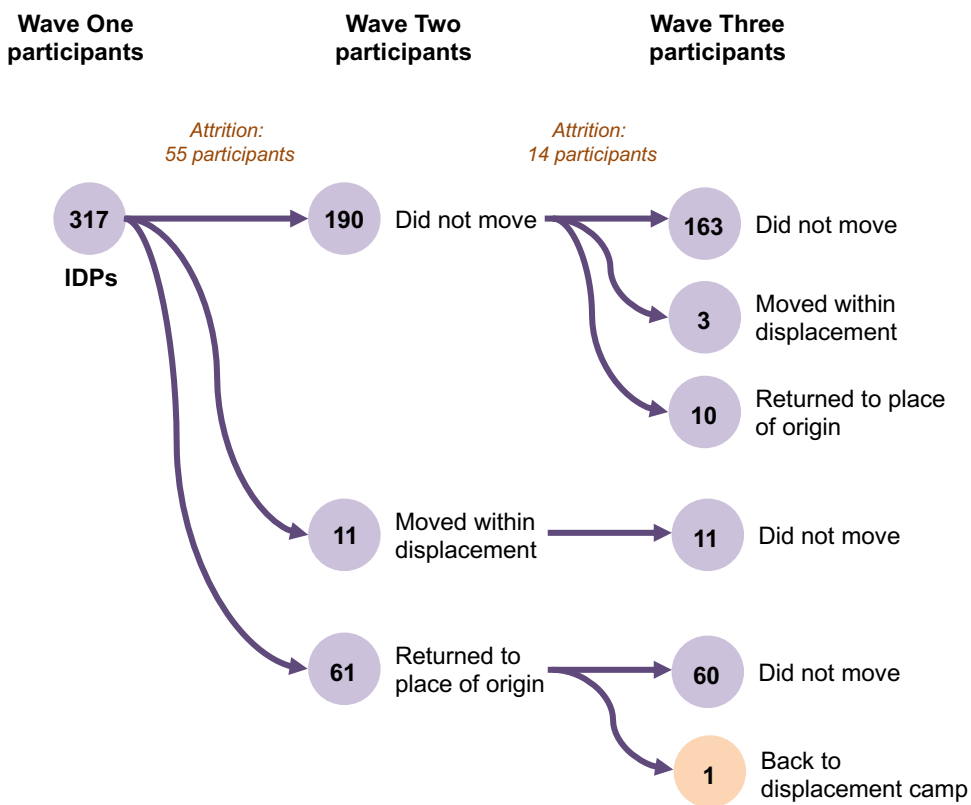
In terms of the ethno-religious breakdown of study participant movements, 67 of those who returned are Yezidis who went back to Sinjar district and three are Christians going back to Hamdaniya district. This indicates a relatively mobile Yezidi population as these changes in location imply that 1 of every 3 Yezidi participants left in the study returned between waves (32%) and a highly immobile Christian population (only three out of 33 have returned).

Those labeled as "moved within displacement" in the figure refer to participants who moved to a different location in displacement within the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. Participants generally moved to different locations within the same district of displacement – for example, from one part of Erbil to another, or from

the Khanke town to inside the nearby Bajid Kandala displacement camp. In practical terms, these participants are still categorized as IDPs.

Insight on the geography of returns

With respect to where participants move, the breakdown of returns per subdistrict of origin shows uneven dynamics. The largest proportion of returnee participants (33%) went back to Sinuni subdistrict in Sinjar between Waves One and Three – this is also the subdistrict of origin for the large majority of study participants overall. Of note is that the remaining subdistricts where Yezidi participants are originally from (Sinjar Center, Qayrawan, and Qahtaniya) all show rates of return, albeit relatively small, while only Hamdaniya Center recorded participant returns of the Christian participant areas of origin (Table 2). Linked to this, most return movements occurred from Dohuk Governorate, where the majority of participants are clustered and reside in camps, to Sinjar district (Table 3). It is within this subgroup of IDPs in camps that the rate of return is highest: 33% of returns, compared to 17% for those in non-camp locations (Table 4).

It is important to note that "return to district of origin," as specified in Figure 4, does not always imply that the participants returned to their exact locations of origin. In 10 cases, participants went back to a different location within their district of origin than the one they initially displaced from in 2014. The overwhelming majority of these cases (nine of 10) are Yezidi participants who are originally from villages considerably farther away from the larger urban centers in Sinjar district – these villages include Khanisur and Sibaya in Sinuni subdistrict, Tal Qassab and Tal Banat in Qayrawan subdistrict, and others village falling inside Ba'aj district. All these villages were particularly conflict-affected and are still relatively unsafe and/or have higher levels of residential and infrastructure destruction as compared to other locations in the district. The majority of participants in this condition by Wave Three are primarily residing in Sinjar Center and they tend not to consider their displacement situation fully resolved yet, likely because they expect to be able to go back to their specific villages of origin at some point.

Table 2. Participant return rates by subdistricts of origin

District of origin	Subdistrict of origin	Participants that remained displaced	Participants that returned to origin	Total
Sinjar	Sinjar Center	16	5	21
		76%	24%	100%
	Sinuni	101	51	152
		66%	33%	100%
	Qayrawan	25	8	33
		76%	24%	100%
Ba'aj	Qahtaniya	4	3	7
		57%	43%	100%
Hamdaniya	Hamdaniya Center	22	3	25
		88%	12%	100%
	Bartella	8	0	8
		100%	0%	100%
Mosul	Bashiqa	2	0	2
		100%	0%	100%
Total		**178**	**70**	**248**
		72%	**28%**	**100%**

Table 3. Participant return rates by governorate of displacement

Governorate of displacement	District of displacement	Participants that remained displaced	Participants that returned to origin	Total
Dohuk	Dohuk	2	0	2
		100%	0%	100%
	Sumel	88	35	123
		72%	28%	100%
	Zakho	42	25	67
		62%	37%	100%
	Sheikhan	4	0	4
		100%	0%	100%
Sulaimaniya	Sulaimaniya	7	6	13
		54%	46%	100%
	Dukan	5	1	6
		83%	17%	100%
Erbil	Erbil	30	3	33
		91%	9%	100%
Total		**178**	**70**	**248**
		72%	**28%**	**100%**

Table 4. Participant return rate by type of displacement location

Type of displacement location	Participants that remained displaced	Participants that returned to origin	Total
Camp location	109	55	164
	66%	33%	100%
Non-camp location	69	15	84
	82%	18%	100%
Total	**178**	**70**	**248**
	72%	**28%**	**100%**

Do intentions and preferences in Wave One indicate actual returns by Wave Three?

Since Wave One, participants have been asked about their immediate movement intentions as well as long-term preference for remaining in displacement location or returning. The short answer as to whether participants' initial stated intentions on how to resolve their displacement are correlated to their actual behavior over a year and a half later for Wave Three is no. Table 5 below summarizes the results of this comparison. The original movement plans of the majority of current participant returnees were either to remain in displacement (top table for immediate intentions) or migrate out of the country (bottom table for long term preferences) – significantly less than half of this subgroup preferred to return to their place of origin at that stage. While the participants' plans and expectations collected in early 2020 were likely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and other contextual factors, these findings also indicate that stated intentions on their own are not particularly good proxies for movement behavior among displaced populations. Subsequent analysis presented in this report offer potential alternative proxies for predicting return behaviors.

Table 5. Participant rate of return by stated movement intentions and preferences in Wave One

Movement intentions in next 6 months as stated in Wave One	Participants that remained displaced	Participants that returned to origin
Remain in district of displacement	86	28
	48%	40%
Return to district of origin	41	20
	23%	29%
Move to another location in Iraq	1	0
	1%	0%
Move abroad	32	16
	18%	23%
Do not know, waiting to decide	18	6
	10%	9%
Total	**178**	**70**
	100%	**100%**
Preferred location to live in for the foreseeable future	**Participants that remained displaced**	**Participants that returned to origin**
District of displacement	46	10
	26%	14%
District of origin	67	27
	38%	39%
Abroad	65	33
	37%	47%
Total	**178**	**70**
	100%	**100%**

An insight into reasons for return across Waves Two and Three

Participants who returned to Sinjar and Hamdaniya districts between Wave One and Waves Two or Three were asked to qualitatively state their reasons for doing so. For nearly half of these participants, their reason for return had mainly to do with livelihoods in place of origin. This involves either their reincorporation into their previous jobs (especially for people working in the public sector) or their finding new opportunities as daily laborers, employees in companies and non-profit organizations, or opening a trade. Following this reason, participants also reported returning due to poor living conditions in displacement camps in Dohuk Governorate, in particular. Many participants in this study reside in camps and some have grown weary of enduring what they perceive as tough living conditions therein, particularly given COVID-19 and numerous instances of fire causing serious destruction to tents. Indeed, as noted above, the rate of return is higher among participants who are in camps than their non-camp counterparts. Finally, the third most common reason for return relates to a perceived improvement in living conditions in origin, with participants especially pointing to an improvement in stability and security back home. This change in perception of place of origin is particularly critical to return movement as will be explored in detail in subsequent sections below.

Although it is difficult to evaluate the success and sustainability of these returns, subjective responses from the survey provide some insights. Nearly 72% of returnee participants reported that their reintegration back into their district of origin was easy ("very easy" for 29% and "somewhat easy" for 43%) (Table 6). The reported ease of reintegration seems correlated with the participant's stated reason for return, as would be expected. Those participants who stated that they returned for work or because of perceived security and

stability improvements in origin reported reintegration as easy while those who returned because of deteriorating conditions in displacement noted having more difficulty in reintegrating when back.

Table 6. Returnee participants' perceptions on ease of reintegration

	Number of returned participants	%
Very easy	20	29%
Somewhat easy	30	43%
Somewhat difficult	11	15%
Very difficult	9	13%
Total	**70**	**100%**

Another potential window into the sustainability of these returns is the fact that returnee participants, by and large, reported that they would only displace again because of any significant deterioration in security conditions in their places of origin. Further untangling this, participants pointed specifically to fears of a repetition of the events that took place in 2014 with the emergence of ISIL in their districts. Some participants also pointed to more recent dynamics that may cause them to leave again, including fears of clashes between security forces or, in the case of Sinjar, increasing political instability due to its disputed status between the Baghdad and Erbil governments.

Unsuccessful returns

The total number of returns over the three waves could have been higher were it not for a subset of participants who attempted to go back to their places of origin at some point but, for a number of reasons, could not sustain the return or never took action to do so. As reported in Table 7, 5% of the 178 participants that are still displaced did attempt to return but displaced again at some point. In addition, 37% made consistent plans for return that they eventually abandoned. While it is not known at what period of time these attempts and plans were made, the overall percentage of abandoned return attempts as perceived by respondents is significant enough to highlight as an important dynamic in movement patterns.

Table 7. Rate of IDP participant return attempts

	Number of displaced participants in Wave Three	%
We returned and stayed for some time but had to leave again	9	5%
We made preparations to return but we did not go back in the end	65	37%
No attempt of returning	104	58%
Total	**178**	**100%**

Furthermore, it is worth noting that no subdistrict in particular show higher rates of *unsuccessful* returns than others. However, it is the case that most households that went through these experiences tend to be originally from small, relatively isolated villages rather than larger towns like district or subdistrict capitals. The main reasons participants gave for why their return attempts were not successful are also consistent across places and types of households. They range from inability to find new livelihood opportunities to

poor living conditions due to house destruction and lack of service restoration in their place of origin (Box 1).

Box 1. Reasons for unsuccessful returns

"We returned but we found out that there are no jobs, no life, and our house is partially damaged. We cannot fix it so we came back to Sitak again." (IDP in Tasluja, Sulaimaniya Governorate, from Khanisur, Sinjar District)

"We returned and we tried to rent a new house there, but we saw there are no jobs and my sons could not find work there, so we came back." (IDP in Ainkawa, Erbil Governorate, from Hamdaniya Center, Hamdaniya District)

"It was very difficult to return. We displaced again because of the failure in providing services." (IDP in Shariya Camp, Dohuk Governorate, from Hatin, Sinjar District)

"A week after we returned, we went back to displacement due to the difficulty in living there and the insecurity we felt." (IDP in Kabarto Camp, Dohuk Governorate, from Hardan, Sinjar District)

"We came back [to displacement] because the head of the family is ill and doctors were not be available in the area we are from." (IDP in Bajid Kandala, Dohuk Governorate, from Borek, Sinjar District)

5. COMPARATIVE PERCEPTIONS OF LIVING CONDITIONS AND RETURN MOVEMENTS

A framework to measure participants' perceptions of their places of origin and displacement

While the main aim of interventions, including the Safe Returns program, implemented in conflict-affected areas is to improve the material and social conditions for residents to be able to sustainably stay there, it is also hoped that improvements in conditions may also encourage those still displaced to come back as well. The key assumption in this is that the post-conflict state of IDPs' places of origin in terms of living conditions represents an obstacle to return. Thus, this study sought to develop a framework to capture how IDPs perceive living conditions in their places of origin as well as, for comparative purposes, their places of displacement. Such a framework also allows for tracking whether and how these perceptions shift over time as conditions change and whether they bear any weight on the decision (and indeed actual behavior) to return or not.

Individual perceptions of a given place encompass a number of often inter-related dimensions. For the purpose of this study, the five main context topics discussed in Section 3 served as the basis of the framework to separately evaluate participants' views on their places of origin and displacement as follows:

- Wellbeing and services
- Responsiveness of institutions
- Physical safety and security
- Relationship between identity groups
- Justice and accountability

Each dimension comprises six to eight questions, asked to each participant about their place of origin and place of displacement to allow for comparability in analysis. These questions were asked accordingly in each of the three waves of data collection as far as the participant was still displaced.[33] The justice and accountability dimension is the only one not linked to a specific location as it relates to broader dynamics overall among communities.

From these responses, a score is then constructed for each dimension and for each IDP participant, aggregating them on a numerical scale ranging from 0 (the participant has a very negative perception of the location) to 10 (the participant has a very positive perception). Participant scores for each dimension and location are then averaged to obtain a total perception score for place of origin and for place of displacement. Figure 5 presents the indicators used for each dimension for score calculation.

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[33] Upon return, the participant was not asked about perceptions in place of origin nor displacement as it was assumed that the process evaluated here, that is, return, was completed.

Figure 5. Indicators used to construct dimension scores

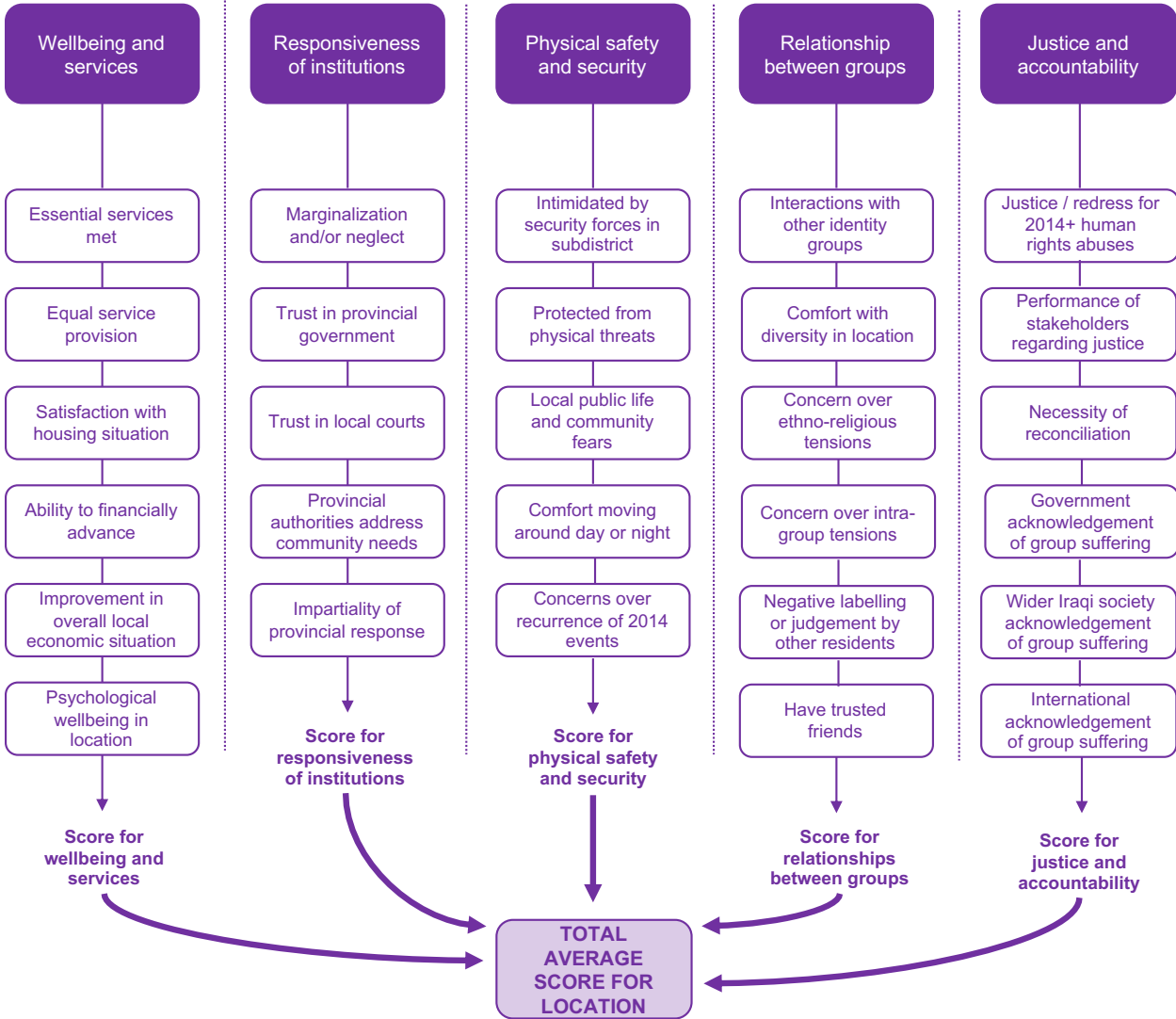| Wellbeing and services	Responsiveness of institutions	Physical safety and security	Relationship between groups	Justice and accountability
Essential services met	Marginalization and/or neglect	Intimidated by security forces in subdistrict	Interactions with other identity groups	Justice / redress for 2014+ human rights abuses
Equal service provision	Trust in provincial government	Protected from physical threats	Comfort with diversity in location	Performance of stakeholders regarding justice
Satisfaction with housing situation	Trust in local courts	Local public life and community fears	Concern over ethno-religious tensions	Necessity of reconciliation
Ability to financially advance	Provincial authorities address community needs	Comfort moving around day or night	Concern over intra-group tensions	Government acknowledgement of group suffering
Improvement in overall local economic situation	Impartiality of provincial response	Concerns over recurrence of 2014 events	Negative labelling or judgement by other residents	Wider Iraqi society acknowledgement of group suffering
Psychological wellbeing in location			Have trusted friends	International acknowledgement of group suffering
Score for wellbeing and services	**Score for responsiveness of institutions**	**Score for physical safety and security**	**Score for relationships between groups**	**Score for justice and accountability**

TOTAL AVERAGE SCORE FOR LOCATION

Note: Indicators and scores are calculated separately for place of displacement and place of origin.

Ahead of examining perceptions based on the framework above, it is worth noting that participants place different emphasis on each of these dimensions when determining which is the most important for them to find in place to live in general (Figure 6). When asked to rank the top three conditions that they feel are most critical for their being able to reside in a place, the most important condition participants report as necessary is physical safety and security, by far: 80% of participants selected this dimension as either the first, second, or third most important need. This is then followed by economic wellbeing and justice for human rights violations, respectively.[34]

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[34] In the survey question, the order of the five response options to choose from was randomized for each participant in order to limit order bias in responses.

Figure 6. Most important conditions sought by participants in a place they would prefer to live in

■ Chosen as 1st most important condition   ■ Chosen as 3rd most important condition
■ Chosen as 2nd most important condition   ■ Not chosen

| Physical safety and security | Economic wellbeing and services | Justice for human rights violations | Good relations between components | Responsive institutions |
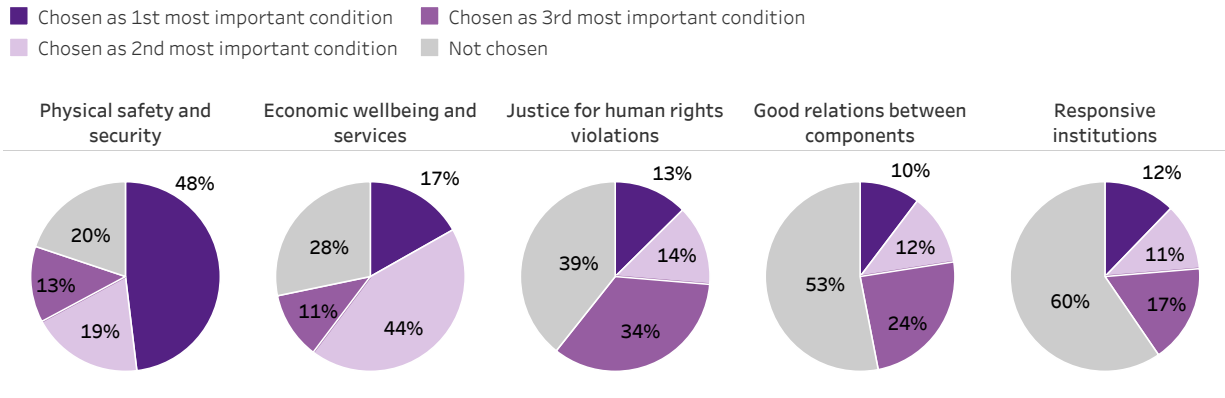
Based on responses in Wave Two.

Comparing perceptions of living conditions in place of displacement and place of origin

Turning now to measuring how participants perceive conditions in displacement and return, the figures below present the scores obtained for each wave of data collection. This is calculated by averaging over 10 the scores given by displaced participants to each individual dimension separately.
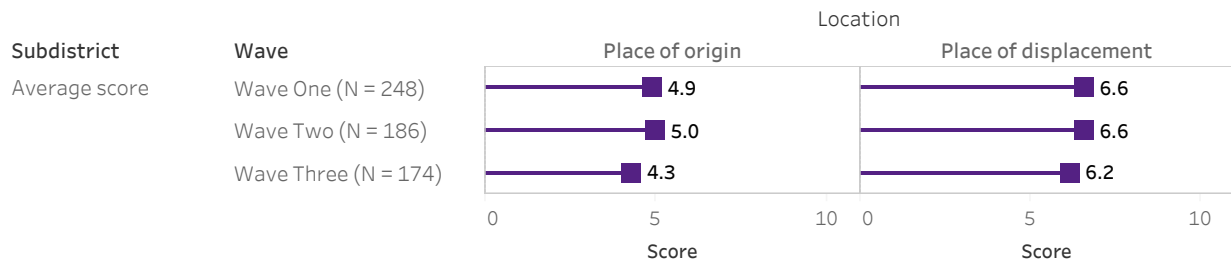
The data is also disaggregated by different levels of analysis, namely, by each of the five dimensions and by subdistrict of origin. Of note is the fact that the perception scores are only presented for those participants who remained displaced in each wave – once a participant was categorized as a returnee in Waves Two or Three, they were not asked perceptions questions.

Average perceptions per round

There are two main findings from the score comparison presented in Figure 7, which depicts the evolution of participants' perceptions across waves for both their places of origin and of displacement as an average of the five context dimensions they were asked about.

The first finding is that the scores participants give to each place do not vary significantly across waves. They tend to remain relatively constant irrespective of broader changes in context as detailed in Section 3. Only in the last wave is there a subtle worsening of perceived living conditions in both places – details on

Figure 7. Participant change in perceptions overall across waves for place of origin and displacement

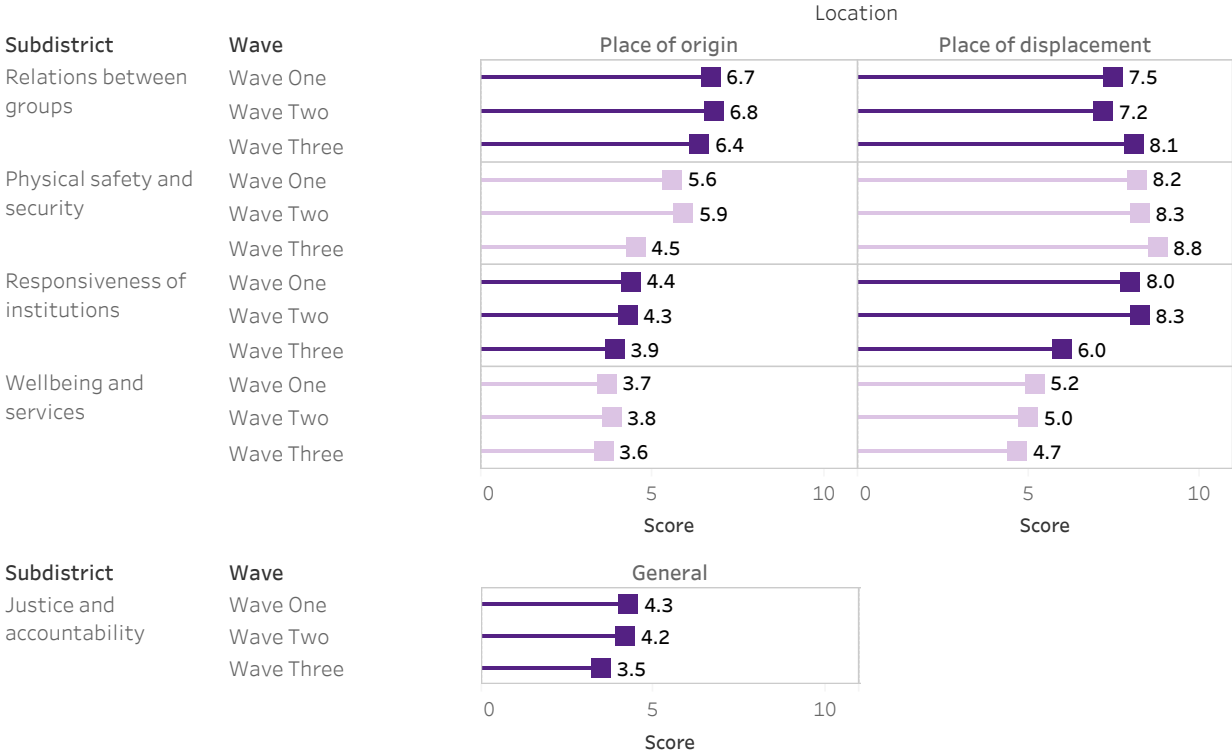| Subdistrict	Wave	Place of origin	Place of displacement
Average score	Wave One (N = 248)	4.9	6.6
	Wave Two (N = 186)	5.0	6.6
	Wave Three (N = 174)	4.3	6.2

variation per dimension that could explain this change are described below. Secondly, living conditions in place of origin are consistently perceived as worse than those in place of displacement. This gap, at least for those who remain displaced, seems to increase by Wave Three. In general, however, these scores illustrate that conditions in both places are still perceived to be far from ideal.

Average perceptions per dimension

The average perceptions score can be disaggregated into the different dimensions individually to better understand what specific conditions participants view as relatively good or bad. Figure 8 illustrates the scores calculated for each framework dimension. As before, data is presented for each wave and only for those who remained displaced in every wave. All dimensions are plotted for both location of origin and displacement with the exception of the justice dimension, which is asked at a more general, national level.

Figure 8. Participant change in perceptions by dimension across waves for place of origin and displacement

Subdistrict	Wave	Place of origin	Place of displacement
Relations between groups	Wave One	6.7	7.5
	Wave Two	6.8	7.2
	Wave Three	6.4	8.1
Physical safety and security	Wave One	5.6	8.2
	Wave Two	5.9	8.3
	Wave Three	4.5	8.8
Responsiveness of institutions	Wave One	4.4	8.0
	Wave Two	4.3	8.3
	Wave Three	3.9	6.0
Wellbeing and services	Wave One	3.7	5.2
	Wave Two	3.8	5.0
	Wave Three	3.6	4.7

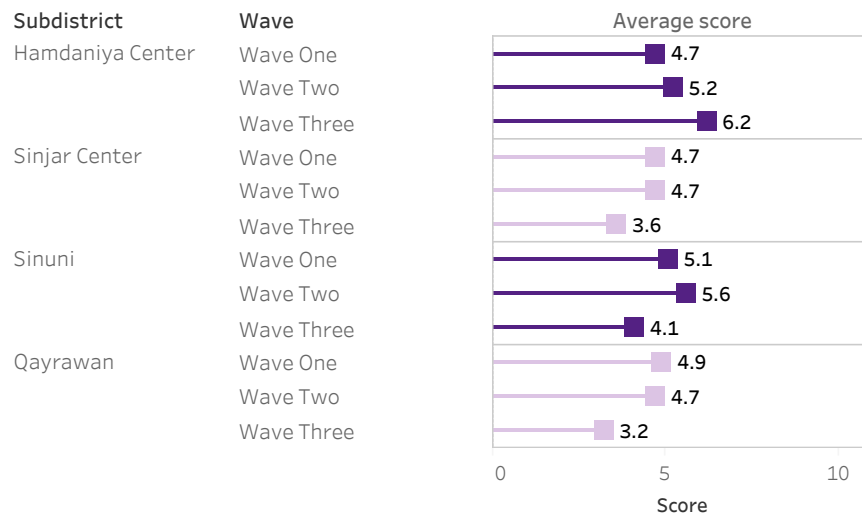| Subdistrict	Wave	General
Justice and accountability	Wave One	4.3
	Wave Two	4.2
	Wave Three	3.5

Some interesting findings emerge from this disaggregation, aside from the fact that, consistent with the previous section, there is no individual dimension score where place of origin is rated better than place of displacement. First, places of displacement receive very positive scores across waves with respect to physical safety and security and in responsiveness of institutions. It is across these two dimensions where the gap between place of displacement and origin is largest – and with regard to physical safety the gap has increased over time. Second, the wellbeing and services dimension is the worst rated across the board in both displacement and origin locations. One reason for this is the fact that many participants live in displacement camps where material wellbeing tends to be lower than non-camp locations. The low score for places of origin is likely due to the perceived need for reconstruction and improvements in services and infrastructure post-conflict, and related to this, the view that livelihoods opportunities remain limited.

Third, it is important to highlight the low score that the justice and accountability dimension receives consistently from all participants. Taking into account that it is listed as the third most important dimension for participants in any place they would live as noted earlier, its continued negative perception may influence return decision-making as well as whether participants may feel their displacement resolved in case of return. Lastly, a key transversal finding is that perceptions seem relatively static within each dimension, with little variation across waves – even when considering the considerable changes in context that occurred after the first wave of data collection. Safety is the only dimension that has shown noticeable variation over time and this is likely very much related to evolving and volatile political and security dynamics in places of origin (particularly in Sinjar district) that continue to take place.

Average perception per subdistrict of origin

A final comparison is conducted by disaggregating participants' score of their place of origin, averaged by their subdistrict (of origin). Only Hamdaniya Center, Sinjar Center, Sinuni, and Qayrawan subdistricts are included in this comparison as large enough shares of study participants are originally from these to conduct this analysis (Figure 9). Main findings show a diverging trend between subdistricts in Hamdaniya and Sinjar districts. While displaced participants from Hamdaniya district perceive a gradual improvement in living conditions there, those from Sinjar district show a drop in perceptions to their lowest levels in Wave Three. Despite the fact that participants displaced from Hamdaniya district hold of conditions in their places of displacement and origin at similar relatively positive levels, both their willingness to return and actual behavior in this regard remains extremely low, indicating that this subgroup seems intent on integrating into the communities where they currently live.

Figure 9. Participant perception overall by waves for subdistrict of origin

Subdistrict	Wave	Average score
Hamdaniya Center	Wave One	4.7
	Wave Two	5.2
	Wave Three	6.2
Sinjar Center	Wave One	4.7
	Wave Two	4.7
	Wave Three	3.6
Sinuni	Wave One	5.1
	Wave Two	5.6
	Wave Three	4.1
Qayrawan	Wave One	4.9
	Wave Two	4.7
	Wave Three	3.2

Score: 0 — 5 — 10

Connecting the dots: the influence of perceived living conditions on return

While previous figures show averaged scores for all participants, perceptions vary by the individual – even if coming from the same place of origin or being displaced in the same location, some participants hold better perceptions of these places than others. Preliminary empirical analysis on previous waves for this study showed that those participants who held better perceptions of their places of origin had a higher willingness to return in the future (while controlling for other factors).

28

With the completion of Wave Three, 18 months after Wave One, it is now possible to identify who actually has returned and to understand better whether the way they perceived living conditions in origin and displacement held any weight on their decisions and behaviors through a regression analysis. This analysis aims to estimate if and how a given outcome (in this case, the participants' actual return to their place of origin) is determined by a set of predictor variables (in this case, their perceptions of living conditions, in addition to other control variables). The regression thus incorporates the participants' return as a binary outcome measured by having returned (*yes*) or remaining displaced (*no*). Next to it, the set of predictors used are a combination of perceptions and other basic demographic characteristics of the participant's household. In more detail, these indicators are the following:

- Perceptions of the place of origin and place of displacement, measured by their aggregate positive or negative scores as described previously. The scores used for returnees correspond to those from the wave of data collection preceding their return.[35] This prevents any bias generated from return and first-hand experience of actually living in the location as opposed to perceptions of that location from displacement. For participants who remain displaced throughout the study, the score used in the analysis comes from that calculated in Wave Three. The assumption here is that participants who had more positive perceptions of place of origin previously should also have a greater likelihood of being a returnee now; while more positive perceptions of place of displacement should potentially lead to a lower likelihood of return.

- Control variables include household characteristics collected in the participants' survey and consist of basic factors that could bear a weight on the likelihood of return and thus their effect needs to be controlled for. These include whether the participant is Christian or not,[36] the household's current socio-economic status,[37] whether they live in a camp or non-camp setting, whether they own a home in their district of origin or not, and whether they belong a female-headed household or not.

Table 8 provides the results from this basic regression model. The coefficient shows the magnitude of the effect of each variable on the probability that a participant is a returnee as opposed to an IDP. The sign shows whether the relationship is positive (i.e., increases the likelihood of return) or negative. Finally, the table also shows the whether these factors are significant or not in explaining returns. If a factor is not significant, it means there is no relationship one way or another on return behavior. Thus, the regression analysis estimates how much more likely it is, for example, for a female-headed household to have returned compared to a male-headed household, irrespective of any other characteristic.

Place perceptions matter for return behavior

The first indicators of interest in the regression model are the perceptions of place of origin and displacement, as they help to explain if return movement is linked to how one views their current living conditions vis-à-vis the ones they would expect in case of return. By considering perceptions for both origin

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[35] For instance, for a participant that returned in Wave Two, the scores used are from Wave One. For a participant that returned in Wave Three, the scores used are from Wave Two.

[36] As noted, Christian participants, consistently across waves, have exhibited a very low rate of return and tend to show a high preference to remain in their displacement location, irrespective of any other factor.

[37] This indicator is generated through a standardized question that asks participants to describe the purchasing power of their household at present, based on five different ranked categorical responses, such as "we do not have enough money even for food," "we have enough money for food and clothing, but not enough to buy expensive items," or "we can buy whatever we want."

Table 8. Summary regression analysis findings on determinants of return behavior

	DV Participant has returned
Perception score for place of origin	0.081 ***
	[0.000]
Perception score for place of displacement	-0.003
	[0.902]
Is Christian	-0.680 ***
	[0.000]
Self-reported socio-economic level (from lower to higher)	0.206 ***
	[0.000]
Is/was in a displacement camp	0.029
	[0.658]
Does not own a house in origin	0.009
	[0.934]
Belongs to a female-headed household	0.013
	[0.886]
Number of observations	243

Note: results shown are based on a linear probability model for ease of interpretation; logit model gives similar results. P-values reported in brackets. * p < 0.10; ** p < 0.05; *** p < 0.01.

and displacement locations separately, it is possible to see whether it is the perceived conditions in origin or, instead, the perceived conditions in displacement that seemed to prevent or compel return.

The coefficient result for the first indicator in Table 8 highlights that the perceptions of the place of origin are a statistically significant predictor for return. This means that participants that gave a higher score to their place of origin while they were still displaced (i.e. they valued living conditions there more positively) are more likely to have ended up returning by the end of the study. The indicator for perceptions of place of displacement, however, is not a significant predictor at all and as such, there is no relationship between how participants view conditions in displacement and resolving displacement one way or another. What this implies is that perceived conditions of origin matter for return behavior and conditions in displacement do not. IDPs with higher perception scores of their places of origin are more likely to have returned by Wave Three, while high perception scores of displacement location do not necessarily translate into a greater desire to stay displaced where they are, return, or move elsewhere.

This is illustrated in Figure 10, which estimates the probability of a participant returning based different levels of scores for place of origin and displacement. It clearly shows that the higher the score given to living conditions in their place of origin, the more likely participants are to have returned. At higher scores for their place of displacement, however, the likelihood of return is not different from that at lower scores. More positive perceptions of origin, thus, are a clear indication of return. Indeed, this is also noticeable by doing a straight comparison of scores for places of origin between those participants who have returned and those who are still displaced; the latter have an average score of 5.4 and the former a score of 4.3 out of 10.

Even with such robust findings, it is still necessary to bear one caveat in mind regarding perceived living conditions in place of origin: it is common to find that participants have more positive perceptions of conditions in their places of displacement than of their places of origin overall, even among those who actually returned. Thus, it is also worth analyzing the differences between these two scores and the likelihood

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**Figure 10. Probability of participant return based on perception scores of origin and displacement**
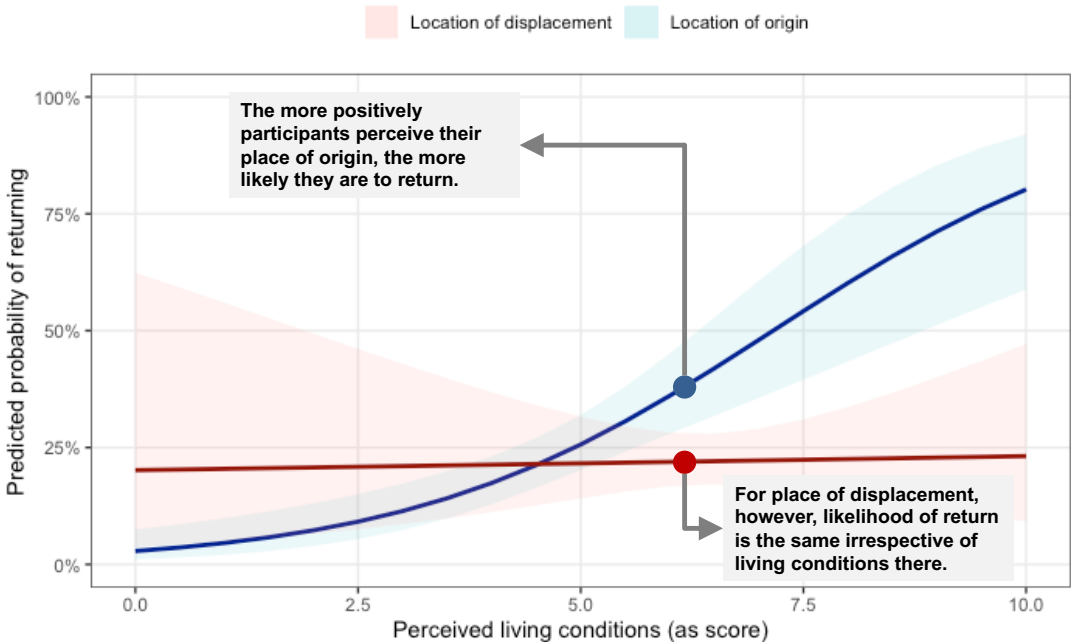
Output from the marginal effects estimated in the model in Table 8 for the first two variables (perception score for place of displacement and perception score for place of origin). The shading around each line denotes each variable's respective 95% confidence interval for each value.

of return. Findings for this analysis are depicted in Figure 11 and reveal that if the gap between place of displacement score and place of origin score is reduced to zero, that is, displacement location and origin location are perceived to have the same living conditions, the estimated percentage of participants that would have returned increases from the current rate of 24% to 39%. This would still leave more than half of the participants unwilling to return, which indicates that IDPs may be looking for conditions in origin to be considerably better before making a decision to return and actually doing so.

Significance of other household factors on return behavior

Other indicators in Table 8 relating to household characteristics of participants also provide interesting results that further contribute to the narrative on factors affecting return movements, either positively or negatively. Two in particular emerge as especially relevant to detail, given that they are statistically significant and thus correlated with return. First, Christian participants tend to show a much lower likelihood of return in comparison to Yezidi participants, irrespective of perceptions and of any other factor. This is actually seen in their lower rate of return (only three of 35 Christian participants had returned by Wave Three) despite their relatively positive perceptions of place of origin, thus indicating a stronger preference to integrate in displacement. Second, participants' current socio-economic situation is also correlated with returns – the better the situation is, the more likely a participant is to have returned. This is a rather expected finding and speaks to some of the reasons mentioned for return in previous section, where many participants indicated that they returned because they were employed or reincorporated into their governmental job.

Figure 11. Probability of participant return based on the difference in score between origin and displacement
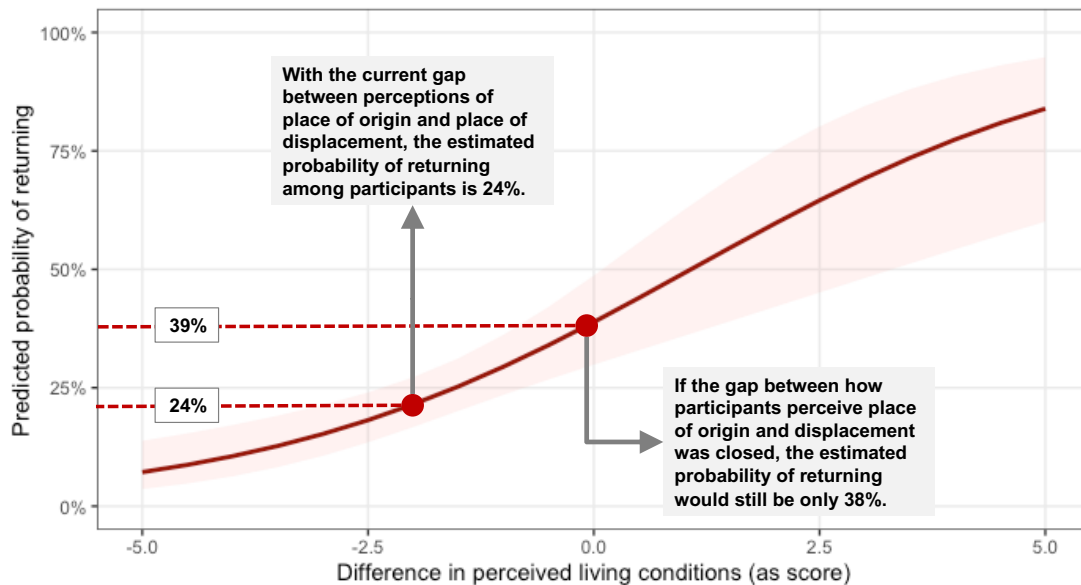
Output from the marginal effects estimated for a variation of the model in Table 8 (results not tabulated). The first two variables have been substituted by a variable calculating the difference between the score for origin and the score for displacement for each participant. The shading around each line denotes each variable's respective 95% confidence interval for each value.

There are three household factors that do not seem to bear any effect on return: living in a camp (as opposed to an urban or rural setting), not owning a house in the place of origin, and being a female-headed household. Participants with such characteristics are as likely to return as participants without them. In particular for female heads of household, it has to be taken into account that barriers to return may appear through other related means, such as a weaker economic situation which indeed does have a bearing on return movement.

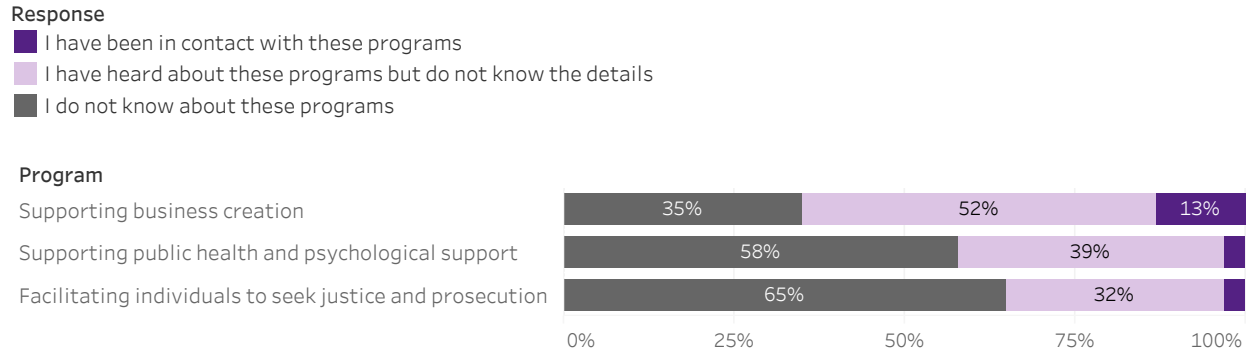## Perceptions of NGO programming in Sinjar and Hamdaniya districts

Because how one perceives living conditions in place of origin matter for return movement, a last element to consider here is whether active intervention to ameliorate living conditions in places of origin could contribute to shaping and improving perceptions and, very indirectly, potentially increase the likelihood of return movement. Many NGOs are currently implementing programs in Sinjar and Hamdaniya districts that seek to address a number of issues that span the humanitarian-development-peace nexus. This is certainly the case for HAI's Safe Return program which focuses on livelihoods, health services, and justice support.

The following analysis explores the relationship between IDP participants' knowledge of such programming in their places of origin and their perceptions of conditions in origin. Specifically, participants who were still displaced in Waves Two and Three were asked about their awareness of three types of interventions implemented in their districts of origin: public health and psychosocial support efforts, business creation, and the facilitation of individual victims' access to justice and prosecution for ISIL crimes against them. Displaced participants tend to have heard about business support programming the most and justice-related

programming the least (Figure 12). Of critical note is that in general lack of knowledge of programming in origin areas is considerably widespread among IDP participants.[38]

Figure 12. IDP participant awareness of NGO programming in place of origin

Response
- ■ I have been in contact with these programs
- ■ I have heard about these programs but do not know the details
- ■ I do not know about these programs

Program

Program			
Supporting business creation	35%	52%	13%
Supporting public health and psychological support	58%	39%	
Facilitating individuals to seek justice and prosecution	65%	32%	

0%   25%   50%   75%   100%

Responses only from Wave Three participants still displaced (N = 178).

Figure 13. Perception score of origin by IDP participant awareness of NGO programming there
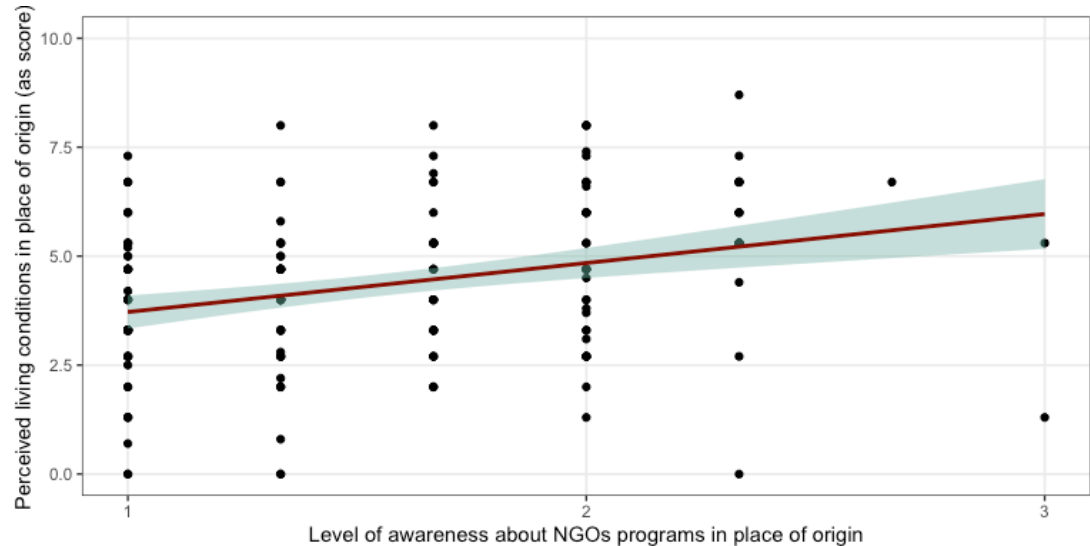
Each dot corresponds to a participant that is still displaced (N = 178). The line corresponds to the estimated linear trend, with the shaded portion denoting its respective 95% confidence interval.

Following this, it is possible to generate an aggregate indicator of awareness of NGO programming in place of origin for each displaced participant and correlate it with their perceptions on place of origin.[39] Findings are displayed in Figure 13 and confirm that better knowledge of programming taking place in place of origin is correlated with more positive views of conditions therein. This is important to note as it indicates that there may be room for improvement in how participants view their places of origin through better

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[38] A similar question was asked among displaced participants in Wave Two, obtaining almost exactly the same results as in Wave Three.

[39] This indicator is generated by aggregating and averaging responses for each of the three types of interventions from 1 (no knowledge on the program) to 3 (engaged with the program), with the values in between corresponding to knowing about (some of) the programs but not having engaged with them.

communication of the works and interventions carried out by national and local stakeholders and international counterparts.

The analysis described here, while providing relevant insight into what IDPs think and feel and how they behave as a result, is not enough to create an evidence base about how their perceptions are formed and by what or whom. These latter points are explored in detail in subsequent sections.

6. SOCIAL NETWORKS AND RETURN MOVEMENTS

Framing for social network analysis

Social networks are technically mathematical graphs, a collection of "nodes" connected by a series of "edges" linking them. Giving meaning to social networks then requires attaching meaning to the nodes and edges that constitute them in order to interpret any analysis of the network. The assignment of meaning for nodes and edges is guided by the research question at hand in relation to networks. In this case: how are IDP perceptions of place of origin shaped and how do they factor into IDP decision-making (or indeed actual behavior) around resolving their displacement?

The nodes here then are individuals either surveyed or identified by survey respondents. The edges are comprised of two different social ties. The first is information-based, focusing on the *flow* of information between members of the network, in this case on the conditions in place of origin, and the second is discussion-based, focusing on the *processing* of that information, for help in resolving displacement, by members of the network with each other. These two types of ties constitute information networks and discussion networks, respectively.

Given the focus on understanding IDP perceptions, IDP survey participants constitute the focal node or "ego" in any network configuration examined, and anyone they have identified in the survey are "alters." Information alters are those individuals from whom IDP participants directly hear relevant information about the conditions in their places of origin and discussion alters are those with whom IDP participants talk about this information to help resolve their displacement. The study also explores the ties between discussion alters and their own information alters. The rationale for collecting additional data on discussion alters is as follows: if IDP participants deliberate with others about what conclusions to draw in resolving their displacement from the information they receive, then it is important to understand how all parties to this discussion learn about the common topic of conversation (conditions in place of origin) to provide a fuller, more accurate account of the structural (i.e., network-based) forces that shape perceptions.

The social network analysis for information and discussion networks undertaken below will describe and characterize various components of each network's structure over time, comparing data from the start of the study (Wave One) and the end (Wave Three). This in itself provides a more detailed view into the social ecology of perceptions and decision-making or behavior. From here it is then possible to test which network characteristics influence (or not) IDP return behaviors.

Before exploring findings in detail, it is important to note what social network data is available for analysis. Wave One social network data was collected for all 248 remaining study participants as they were all IDPs at the time. Wave Three social network data was collected for the 178 remaining study participants who were still displaced at that time. The 70 participants who returned by Wave Three were not asked about their networks again for the same reason they were not asked about their perceptions: their displacement trajectory had come to an ostensible end, as defined by the study. Thus, comparison of networks between waves will include the 178 participants still displaced and exclude the 70 who returned, while comparison of network characteristics from Wave One alone will include all 248 remaining participants. Those

participants lost to attrition between Waves One and Three are excluded from the social network analysis overall.

Network size in Waves One and Three

The total size of the network in the study sample between the first and final wave is calculated by summing the number of participants in each wave, the number of unique discussion alters and information alters they provided in each wave, and finally, the number of unique information alters that discussion alters themselves provided in each wave (Figure 14). While the number of network members shifted between waves, the data collection strategy even with its change in method after Wave One nevertheless yielded a fairly expansive view into IDPs' social networks. One such insight is that it appears that discussion networks are larger than information networks, with participants making up a small proportion of the members in the former network and relatively similar proportion the of members in the latter network across waves. The remainder of this section examines the implications of this as well as the robustness and type of changes identified in relation to network size over time in detail.
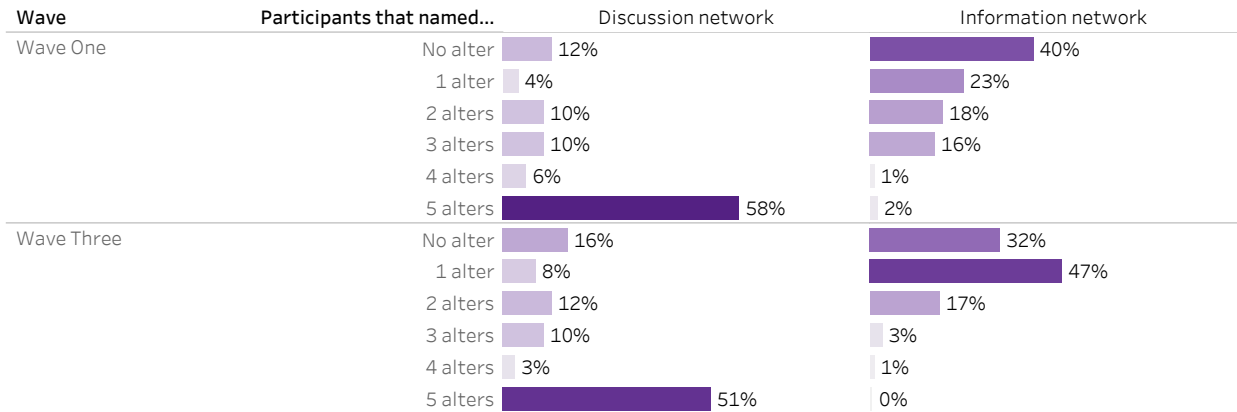
Figure 14. Full network size by wave
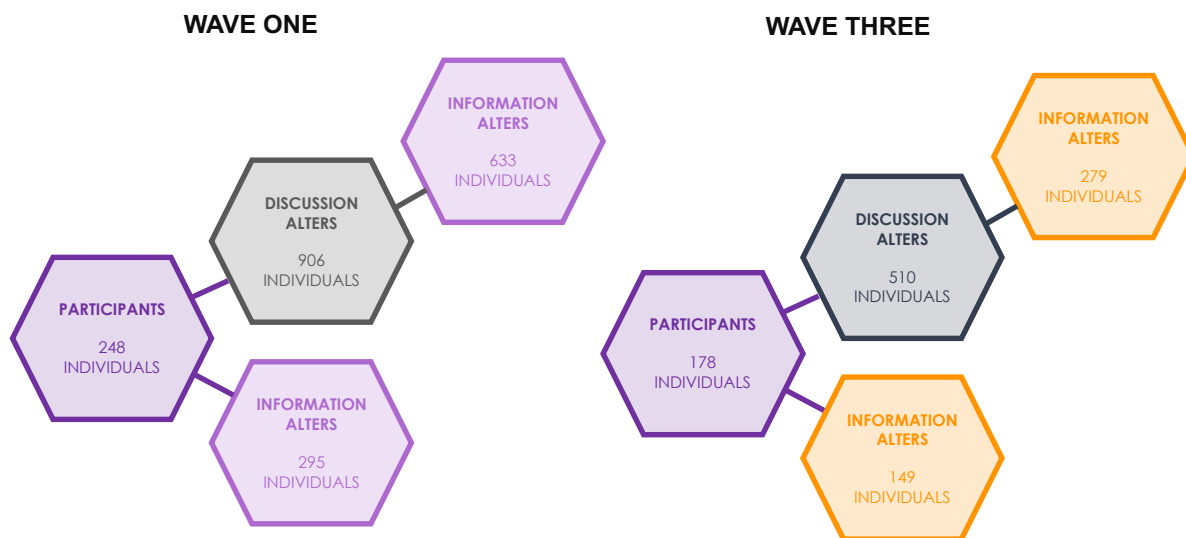
Networks depicted do not include participants lost to attrition across waves (N = 69) nor for Wave Three those participants who returned (N = 70).

The node degree of the information and discussion networks generated for Waves One and Three is described in Figure 15. In simple terms, node degree is the number of social ties an individual has with their alters (i.e., number of people reported in the name generators). It provides information on the size of an individual's immediate social network. This can be an important feature to consider when social ties provide access to resources otherwise unavailable to the individual, such as critical information about the participant's place of origin or counseling on resolving displacement. The ability to access such network-based resources is one form of social capital that individuals can cultivate.

Figure 15. Node degree for discussion and information networks by wave

Wave	Participants that named...	Discussion network	Information network
Wave One	No alter	12%	40%
	1 alter	4%	23%
	2 alters	10%	18%
	3 alters	10%	16%
	4 alters	6%	1%
	5 alters	58%	2%
Wave Three	No alter	16%	32%
	1 alter	8%	47%
	2 alters	12%	17%
	3 alters	10%	3%
	4 alters	3%	1%
	5 alters	51%	0%

Data depicted does not include participants lost to attrition overall (N = 69) nor for Wave Three those participants who returned (N = 70).

These numbers indicate that participants, for the most part, have a wide and substantial network of people with whom they discuss how to resolve their displacement. More than 50% of participants provided five names of discussion alters,[40] thus, highlighting that the majority of the displaced herein are especially social in their decision-making in this regard. There is an identity-based distinction to make however with respect to this finding over time: Yezidi participants seem to rely on discussion alters for the resolution of displacement, while Christian participants do not. In Wave One, Christian participants named discussion alters but at a considerably lower rate than Yezidi participants. By Wave Three, remaining Christian participants provided no discussion alters at all. This discrepancy could correspond with the generally tribal and tightly knit character of Yezidi communities, and may also relate to a more settled view Christian participants have reported of not being particularly willing to return.[41]

This difference between identity groups is much less stark when examining information networks as it was common for participants in general to report no information alters at all (40% in Wave One and 32% in Wave Three) or at a maximum report only one. Information networks are thus smaller in size compared to discussion networks indicating that there are more people with whom participants engage in discussion regarding potential return than people from whom they directly monitor conditions in their places of origin. More indirect and broad information sources may be more relevant for study participants than direct one-on-one engagement with individual informants. This is borne out by the different sources of information participants say they rely on to learn about what is happening where they are from, namely social media (98%), public figures (46%), television (12%), and NGOs (2%), all of which serve to broadcast information widely rather than individually.

Based on the above, on average, each participant named 3.6 discussion alters in Wave One and 3.3 in Wave Three and 1.2 information alters in Wave One and 0.9 in Wave Three (Table 9). Thus, there seems to be very little variation in the size of networks over time. The stability of the networks, on the other hand, is

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[40] This is the maximum number the survey allowed. It is possible that participants may have provided more names if the survey allowed for it, indicating that their discussion networks are larger than what is presented here. For more on the empirical basis for alter number limit, see Note 6.
[41] This is based on data collected in Waves One and Two on six-month intentions, preferred place to live in the foreseeable future, and ever wanting to return.

quite low with a turnover rate of 84% for discussion alters between waves and 95% for information alters.[42] In other words, while the size of the networks remains more or less the same over time, the individuals who populate them have changed significantly. These changes may in part be a result of the impact of COVID-19: both in terms of spurring the return of the displaced (particularly Yezidis) for public health or economic reasons and in terms of the loss of network connections due to movement restriction as well as illness and mortality. Thus, while participants may have broken (or lost) social ties, they were able to establish new albeit less close ones over time. More detail on who these alters are will be described in the next section below.

Table 9. Average information and discussion alters named by wave

Wave	Discussion network	Information alters
Wave One	3.65 alters per participant	1.19 alters per participant
Wave Three	3.29 alters per participant	0.93 alters per participant

Calculations do not include participants lost to attrition overall (N = 69) nor for Wave Three those participants who returned (N = 70).

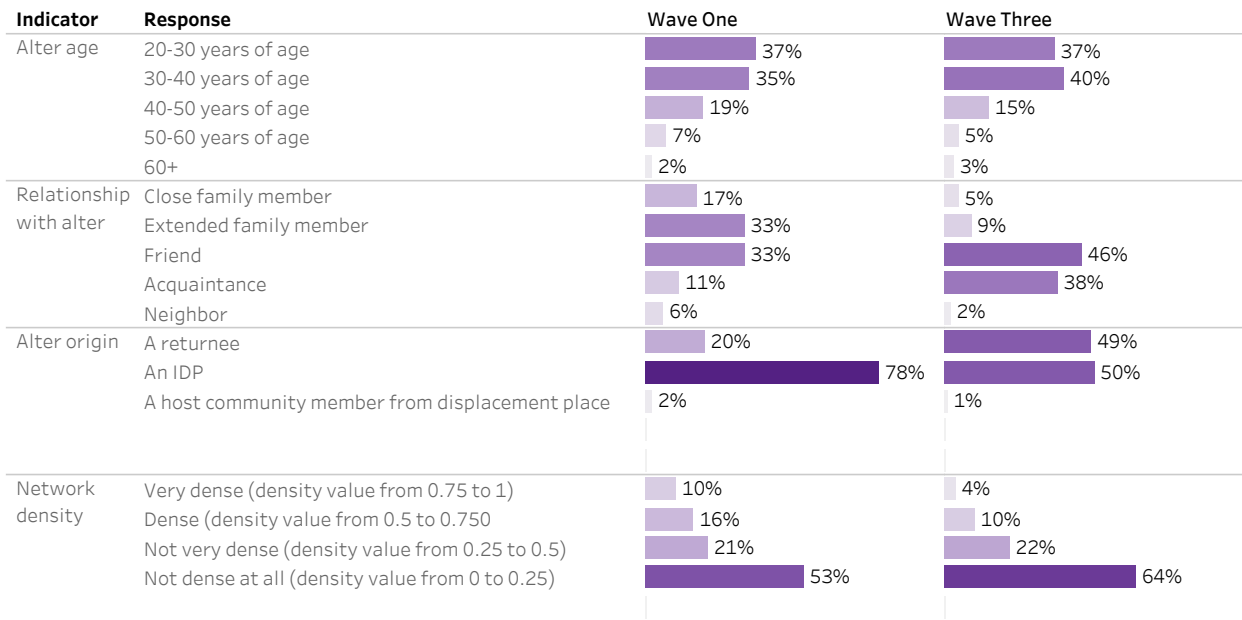## Characterizing networks over time

Discussion alters

Key characteristics of discussion alters captured in the participant survey are summarized in Figure 16. The age distribution of discussion alters seems to be the same across waves and it skews relatively young (i.e., below 40 years of age). Participants themselves are most commonly between 20 and 50 years of age, with the majority being 30 to 50 years old as heads of households. They however tend to seek out discussion with people on the younger side. A pragmatic reason for this bias toward youth may relate to the means by which members of the network communicate. Most of the social ties captured here use phones or social media for their interactions and young people are the primary users of this technology. This however is not to downplay the findings here that seem to reflect the importance young people have, and others seem to acknowledge, within their respective communities now as key arbiters of deliberation. Discussion alters were known to participants from before the conflict in their places of origin across waves as well.

What did change over waves is who these alters are and their relationships to respective participants. The discussion alters named in Wave Three tend to have more distant relationships with participants (i.e., acquaintances and friends) as compared to Wave One where most were described as close or extended family members. Wave Three discussion alters are also more likely to be people who have gone back to

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[42] To ensure robustness of these findings, the turnover rate was calculated via two measures which both yielded the same result presented above. An important caveat to note is that there is a margin of error when collecting and coding alter data. On occasion, participants do not always remember their alters' second surname or there are spelling mistakes in the recording of names. However, this would not change the magnitude of the finding overall.

place of origin, while those in Wave One were fellow IDPs. This change may relate to there being more returnees in participants' places of origin in general and, as such, participants finding it more relevant to seek out people experiencing conditions firsthand to discuss whether or not they themselves should go back.

Figure 16. Discussion alter characteristics and network density by wave

Indicator	Response	Wave One	Wave Three
Alter age	20-30 years of age	37%	37%
	30-40 years of age	35%	40%
	40-50 years of age	19%	15%
	50-60 years of age	7%	5%
	60+	2%	3%
Relationship with alter	Close family member	17%	5%
	Extended family member	33%	9%
	Friend	33%	46%
	Acquaintance	11%	38%
	Neighbor	6%	2%
Alter origin	A returnee	20%	49%
	An IDP	78%	50%
	A host community member from displacement place	2%	1%
Network density	Very dense (density value from 0.75 to 1)	10%	4%
	Dense (density value from 0.5 to 0.750	16%	10%
	Not very dense (density value from 0.25 to 0.5)	21%	22%
	Not dense at all (density value from 0 to 0.25)	53%	64%

Data depicted does not include participants lost to attrition overall (N = 69) nor for Wave Three those participants who returned (N = 70).

Box 2. A note on discussion alter advice on resolving displacement

Because the question on advice given by discussion alters to the participants was refined and revised across waves, it is not possible to compare responses over time. However, Wave Three data yields interesting insights in terms of the advice most recently given and by whom:

- A plurality of discussion alters (46%) reportedly do not give advice on resolving displacement, with the other advice options (i.e., migrate abroad, return to origin, and remain in displacement) equally distributed.

- Family members are more likely to give advice than not, while friends or acquaintances are less likely. This disparity seems to account for why more distant relations are less common sources of advice for participants.

- The displacement status of discussion alters also matters in terms of advice provision. Returnee discussion alters are more likely to give advice than not as compared to IDP or host community alters. It may also be that returnees would feel more confident or comfortable giving advice having firsthand experience of conditions in place of origin than those farther away.
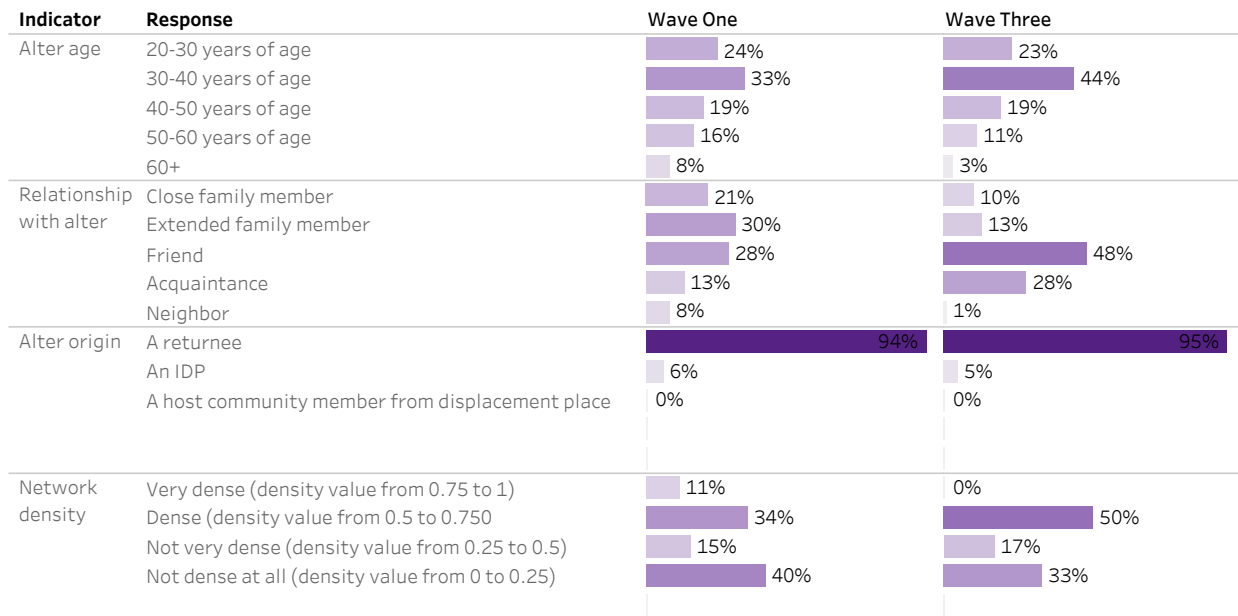
Discussion network density

This measure, network density, is defined as the proportion of ties in a social network relative to the total number of possible ties within that network – in this case a participant's discussion network. This can most easily be understood as how connected an individual and their discussion alters are to each other. In other words, does a participant have a network in which discussion alters know each other and to what degree. Density is measured from 0 to 1, with 0 meaning no alters in a discussion network know each other and 1

meaning all alters know each other.[43] The bottom segment of Figure 16 compares discussion network density between Waves One and Three. While networks were not particularly dense in Wave One, they became even less so by Wave Three, meaning that by Wave Three most alters within a network know the participant but not each other. This would be expected as discussion alters in Wave Three are also less closely related to the participants who named them, making it less likely that they would know others in the participant's network as well.

Information alters

Turning now to information alters, their key characteristics captured in the participant survey are summarized in Figure 17. As with discussion alters, the age distribution of information alters do not vary between waves. However, information alters while still relatively young tend to be slightly older than discussion alters. Once again, key changes in alters over waves relate to who they are and their relation to participants. The information alters named in Wave Three tend to be located in participants' places of origin, which make sense again as more people have returned to these locations and may been seen as having more accurate, direct information on conditions or developments to share than those farther away. Indeed, in Wave One many participants noted that they did not have information alters to provide updates on their places of origin because very few people had returned at that point. Finally, Wave Three information alters also tend to have more distant relationships to participants than in Wave One.

Figure 17. Information alter characteristics and network density by wave

Indicator	Response	Wave One	Wave Three
Alter age	20-30 years of age	24%	23%
	30-40 years of age	33%	44%
	40-50 years of age	19%	19%
	50-60 years of age	16%	11%
	60+	8%	3%
Relationship with alter	Close family member	21%	10%
	Extended family member	30%	13%
	Friend	28%	48%
	Acquaintance	13%	28%
	Neighbor	8%	1%
Alter origin	A returnee	94%	95%
	An IDP	6%	5%
	A host community member from displacement place	0%	0%
Network density	Very dense (density value from 0.75 to 1)	11%	0%
	Dense (density value from 0.5 to 0.750	34%	50%
	Not very dense (density value from 0.25 to 0.5)	15%	17%
	Not dense at all (density value from 0 to 0.25)	40%	33%

Data depicted does not include participants lost to attrition overall (N = 69) nor for Wave Three those participants who returned (N = 70).

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[43] For robustness, an alter is considered know another in a network if the participant reported that they were "very close" to one another in terms of relationship or "somewhat close" to one another.

Information network density

The information networks gathered in both Waves One and Three are denser than the discussion networks highlighted above (see bottom segment of Figure 17). This seems to be due to the fact that because the information networks are smaller than the discussion networks in general, more people tend to know each other in the former than the latter. Further to this, because the information networks named in Wave Three are slightly smaller in size than those in Wave One, they are also more dense than Wave One information networks as well. In other words, the smaller the network, the more likely it is that a participant's alters are all connected to one another.

Echo chambers

Finally, to more robustly examine how information and discussion network structures and relationships function and potentially reinforce perceptions over time, an echo chamber measure was included in the analysis. Most definitions of an echo chamber in network analysis focus on polarized opinions being shared among discrete sets of actors who only form and maintain ties with others with similar opinions.[44] A simpler definition was adopted for this study: an echo chamber exists when an IDP participant has low access to a diversity of information. This is determined by the network density of a participant's extended ego-centric network, that is, the combined density of their information and discussion networks as well as their discussion alters' information network. Diversity of information then, like network density, is also measured from 0 to 1, where 0 means that none of a participant's discussion alters know one another and none of the information alters named by both the participant and their discussion alters know each other and 1 means that a participant and their decision alters name the exact same information alters, all decision alters know each other, and all information alters know each other.

In the case of the former, diversity of information would be highest since the ego-centric network is open and minimally connected, making the chance of repeated information (or repeated logic in the case of discussants) lower. The latter would indicate an echo chamber wherein the participant is likely learning the same information as their discussion alters and discussions around resolving displacement are effectively collective in nature within this closed network. It is under this scenario that participants are expected to have stronger, more uniform feelings (one way or another) about both conditions in their place of origin and intent to return as the views expressed reinforce one another to resonate with the participant. This line of analysis is based on the idea that is difficult for disagreements to persist within dense or closed social networks and that over time these disagreements typically give way to widespread agreement, if only to resolve tensions among members of the network.[45]

Figure 18 provides insight into the presence and predominance (or not) of echo chambers in the study sample over time. Despite changes in who participants name as information and discussion alters between Waves One and Three, overall approximately three-quarters of participants have remained in open networks, with one-quarter in some form of more closed network – though still very few in fully fledged echo chambers. The slight increase in closed networks in Wave Three is due to the smaller networks named at that point, but the main finding still holds that by and large participants are embedded in open and

[44] Kathleen Hall Jamieson and Joseph N. Capella, *Echo Chamber: Rush Limbaugh and the Conservative Media Establishment* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

[45] Robert Huckfeldt, Paul E. Johnson, and John Sprague, *Political Disagreement: The Survival of Diverse Opinions within Communication Networks* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

loosely connected network structures with a presumed diversity of views on place of origin and resolving displacement circulating within them.

Figure 18. Echo chamber measure by wave

Type of network	Wave One	Wave Three
Very closed (echo chamber value from 0.75 to 1)	1%	1%
Closed (echo chamber value from 0.5 to 0.750	7%	13%
Not very closed (echo chamber value from 0.25 to 0.5)	16%	11%
Not closed at all (echo chamber value from 0 to 0.25)	76%	75%

Data depicted does not include participants lost to attrition overall (N = 69) nor for Wave Three those participants who returned (N = 70).

This is confirmed in Figure 19 which illustrates the correlation between diversity of information and network shape. Specifically, views of place of origin among members of a given participant's extended network tend to be more homogenous in more closed networks or echo chambers outright, that is, networks where most to all members know each other. However, as noted, the most frequent networks found in this sample across waves tend to be those that are not especially dense and where members hold and express a diversity of views – most participants are clustered in the bottom left quadrant of the figure.

Figure 19. Participants by diversity of information received (perceptions on origin) and network type
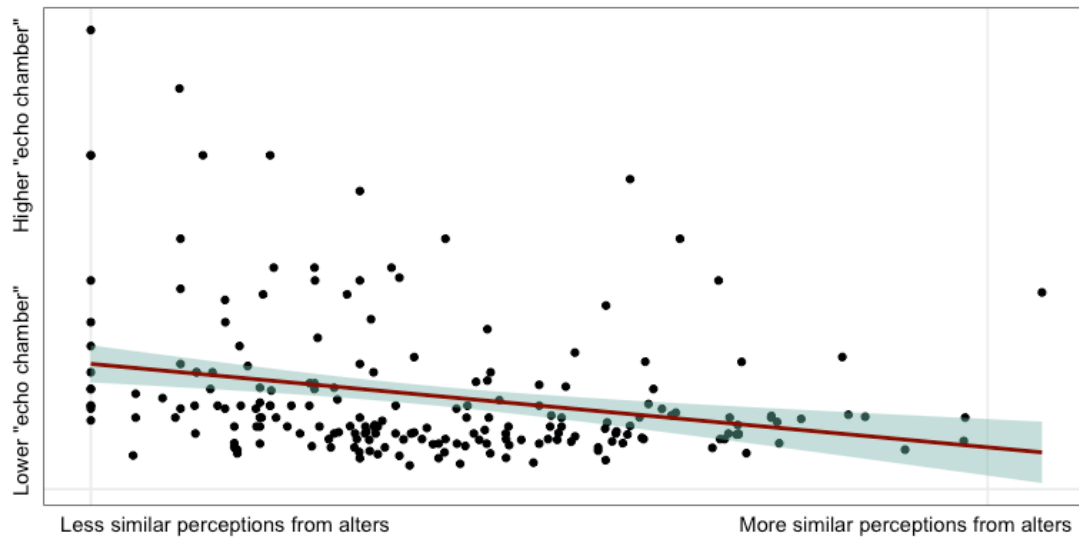
Each dot corresponds to all participants from Wave One that reported two or more discussion alters in their network (N = 207). The horizontal axis represents the variation in how the discussion alters perceived the participant's place of origin, measured in the standard deviation from their perception score (lower standard deviation means that all alters held quite similar perception scores). The line corresponds to the estimated linear trend, with the shaded portion denoting its respective 95% confidence interval.

Connecting the dots: network factors involved in participant returns

After having described changes in social networks of still displaced participants over time, the analysis now turns to exploring the characteristics and structures of named social networks that could explain why some study participants returned by Wave Three and others remain IDPs. This is possible to do by comparing Wave One social network indicators for the 70 returnee participants and 178 IDP participants remaining

in the study at Wave Three. The findings below indicate that certain network factors at the outset in Wave One are indeed particularly correlated with return behavior by Wave Three.

Information networks matter

While across waves, information networks remain small, comparing the node degree of information alters in Wave One between returnee and still displaced participants yield a relatively intuitive finding. Participants who returned had a larger information network from the outset (Table 10). They had more information alters than those still displaced, meaning that they were sourcing information on place of origin more directly from more people on average than their still displaced counterparts. Another way to frame this is that returnees seemed to be actively gathering more direct or specific information from people (or were more well-connected) while in displacement than those still displaced who instead tend to have few to no information alters and obtained information more passively through broadcast sources.

Table 10. Variation in the number of information alters between IDPs and returnees

	Average number of information alters in Wave One
For IDP participants	1.07
For returnee participants	1.49
Difference	**0.42 ****

Note: difference statistically significant within a 95% confidence interval (P-value of 0.0172).

Uniformity of advice and discussion alter perceptions matter

There is a relatively robust difference between returnee participants and still displaced participants when comparing the advice they received from their discussion alters in Wave One (Table 11). Those who ended up returning by Wave Three had a higher percentage of discussion alters advising them to return in Wave One, compared to those still displaced. This tracks with the preliminary findings in Wave One, based on stated movement intentions, where participants with more alters advising them to return had expressed higher willingness to do so. In practice, 50% of returnee participants had discussion alters advising them to return in Wave One, compared to only 34% of alters who did the same among remaining IDP participants.

Table 11. Advice received in Wave One by participant displacement status in Wave Three

Advice given by discussion alters in Wave One…	…to IDP participants	…to returnee participants
Remain in district of displacement	31%	25%
Return to district of origin	34%	**49%**
Move to another location in Iraq	2%	2%
Move abroad	33%	24%
Total	**100%**	**100%**

Calculations include all remaining participants from Wave One (N = 248).

Linked to this and perhaps shaping the advice given, the discussion alters of those participants who ended up returning had more positive views of their place of origin than the alters of still displaced participants,

with almost 50% of alters in the former case holding these views as compared to 33% in the latter (Table 12).

From these findings it could be extrapolated that participants who were embedded in echo chambers or at least relatively closed networks from the outset where all alters shared the same positive information on place of origin and provided advice to return would eventually do so by Wave Three. It also indicates that for those in much more open networks (i.e., the majority of participants), having more alters with positive views of origin and providing advice to return, even if they do not necessarily know each other, may also spur return behavior in participants as does having any kind of direct information network, again even in a more loosely configured network.

Table 12. Discussion alter perception of origin in Wave One by participant displacement status in Wave Three

Perceptions by discussion alters in Wave One on the place of origin…	…of IDP participants	…of returnee participants
Very / somewhat positive	34%	**50%**
Very / somewhat negative	61%	48%
No response	5%	2%
Total	**100%**	**100%**

Calculations include all remaining participants from Wave One (N = 248).

7. CONCLUSIONS

The comparative findings presented here from the three waves of this panel study confirm that decision-making around resolving displacement is not an independent act taken solely within the household. Rather, it is a relatively social endeavor. Because the study design allowed for participants to be surveyed over time, it was possible not only to initially capture their willingness to return but their actual return behavior (or not) as well and better delineate how this movement is shaped by perceptions on material and social conditions and the networks in which one is embedded.

By the end of this study, 28% of the remaining participants returned to their places of origin, with the rest staying in displacement. The overwhelming majority of those who returned are Yezidi participants, indicating a relatively mobile Yezidi population and a highly immobile Christian one. Their stated reasons for return pertained to accessing livelihoods opportunities in place of origin, deteriorating conditions in displacement (particularly for those previously residing in camps), and improved safety and stability in origin. While the sustainability of these returns is difficult to ascertain, participants themselves indicated that they did not plan to leave again unless forced to by conflict or political instability. Of note is a small subset of IDP participants who reported having attempted to return at some point, either by physically going back to their place of origin or making plans to, but not remaining or following through with those plans – the rate of return among study participants could have been higher had this group succeeded in their attempts.

One critical finding revealed through capturing participants' actual behaviors and their stated immediate movement intentions and long-term preferences is that the two do not seem to be correlated with each other. In other words, the participants who returned by Wave Three did not have particularly strong inclination to return at the outset of the study. The wide majority indicated wishing to remain in displacement in the immediate-term and preferred to migrate abroad in the longer-term. While participants' plans and expectations collected in early 2020 were likely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and other contextual factors, these findings also indicate that stated intentions on their own are not particularly good proxies for movement behavior among displaced populations and others may be needed to complement them.

This study relied on a social network analysis as well as a 28-item framework to measure perceptions of conditions in place of origin and displacement to seek out such proxies and better understand what makes IDPs more likely to return over time.

Social networks

The social networks mapped here included IDP participants' information networks and their discussion networks over time. The former comprises individual from whom IDPs directly hear information about their places of origin and the latter is made of individuals with whom IDPs discuss decision-making around resolving their displacement. This mapping uncovered a particularly widespread and diverse overall network, particularly in relation to discussion networks across Waves One and Three with participants on average naming the same numbers of information and discussion alters each of these times. These findings are particularly true of Yezidi participants, who seem to display fairly robust social interactions concerning

the transfer of information and decision-making around return – in fact by Wave Three no Christian participants reported any discussion alters at all indicating in part that while learning about their place of origin may be of interest, discussing return is not. Furthermore, young people (i.e., individuals under 40 years of age) seem to play a critical role overall in participants' networks, not only as arbiters of information, but as counterparts for discussion as well, this held true across waves as well.

While the size, structure, and age characteristics of social networks remained relatively constant over time, what did change was who specifically populated the networks. The rate of turnover among both discussion alters and information alters between waves is particularly high, meaning that the specific individuals participants talk to about resolving displacement and receive information on place of origin from changed over time. These individuals, while remaining relatively young, tended to be returnees themselves in the place of origin (as opposed to fellow IDPs as in Wave 1) and had less close relationships to the participant (friends or acquaintances rather than close or extended family members) though they knew each other prior to displacement. These changes in terms of broken or lost social ties may relate to increasing returns of particularly Yezidi community members during the time period as well as loss of life related to the pandemic as well.

Analysis also revealed that participants in closed networks (where all alters knew each other) tended to contain relatively homogenous information, perceptions, and advice, it also highlighted that the fact that across waves the vast majority of participants remained in open, loosely connected networks where members knew the participant who named them, but not each other. Such a configuration is more likely to allow for a diversity of information shared and discussed and a variety of perception and advice given.

This diversity matters because analysis finds that participant return movement is highly correlated with the consistency of the messages contained in their discussion networks. In other words, when comparing Wave 1 social networks of participants who returned by Wave Three and those who remained displaced, those who returned had more alters advising them to return at the outset (and who had more positive views of origin) than those who remained displaced. Thus, the more alters a participant has that share the same message, the more reinforced the message becomes in the network and to participants themselves. Further to this, a critical factor in return movement is having a direct information network at all at the outset. Those participants who returned had more information alters than those that did not. While information networks tend to be smaller than discussion networks, having direct, more proactive contact with information (as opposed to more passive or broadcast sources) mattered for return over time. These findings are especially pertinent to participants in very closed networks as it is more likely that people who all know each other will be sharing and discussion the same information but holds for those in more loosely connected networks as well.

Perceptions

Individual perceptions of a given place in terms of its conditions and long-term prospects for residing there encompass a number of often inter-related dimensions. These dimensions were measured for IDP participants' places of origin and displacement over time based on the responses they gave to questions on wellbeing and services, responsiveness of institutions, physical safety and security, relationship between groups, and justice and accountability.

One consistent finding across waves is that IDP participants in general score their places of displacement as better across all dimensions than their places of origin. Participants rank physical safety and security, wellbeing and services, and justice and accountability as the conditions they value the most in a place in order to live there. These also happen to carry the worst perception scores among IDP participants in their places of origin, irrespective of their identity group. It is also important to highlight that participant perception scores on average and per dimension for place of origin and displacement did not significantly change between waves either.

While perceptions may be relatively consistent over time, analysis reveals that they do matter for returns. In particular, perceived conditions of origin matter for return behavior and conditions in displacement do not. IDP participants with higher perception scores of their places of origin are more likely to have returned by Wave Three, while high perception scores of displacement location do not necessarily translate into a greater desire to stay displaced where they are, return, or move elsewhere. At the same time, given that perceptions of place of origin matter and are substantially worse than those found in displacement, even among those who actually returned, the results here indicate that reducing this gap in perceptions (i.e., perceptions of conditions in origin are at least the same as in displacement) would contribute to a greater likelihood of return. Better knowledge of NGO programming in place of origin may contribute to reducing this gap as this is also correlated with better perceptions. However, the estimated effect of this change is relatively moderate, indicating that IDPs may be looking for a much more substantial transformation of their places of origin before considering return.
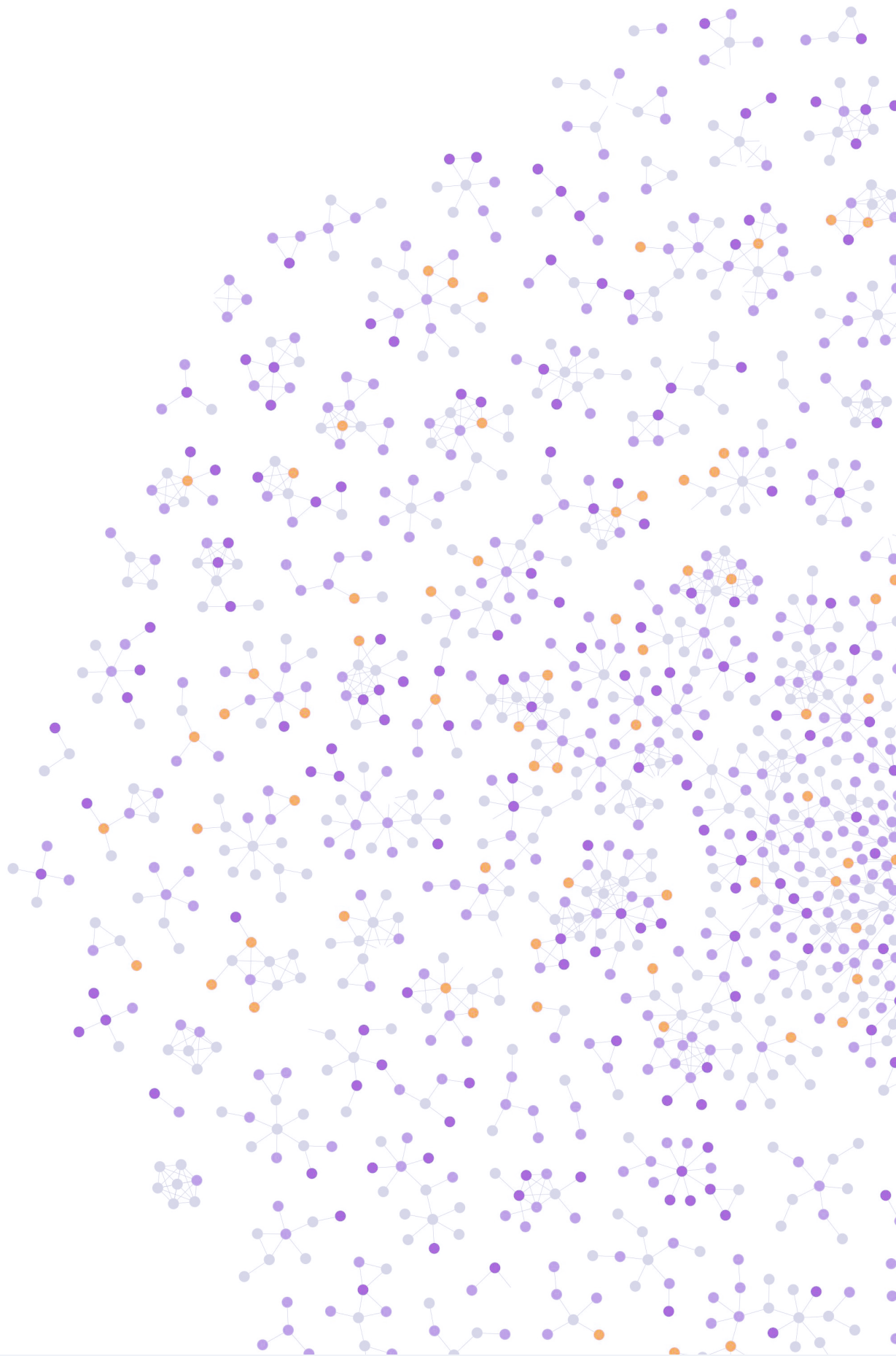
Final considerations

Taken together, these findings provide evidence that all these elements, namely return movements, perceptions of origin, and social network configuration, are indeed correlated with each other. This still does not however disentangle to what extent there is, if at all, a causality relation between them. In other words, it could be assumed that the direction of effect is that perceptions determine return, but it could also be argued that participants who have already decided, for example, that they will not return will rate conditions in their places of origin poorly regardless. Similarly, with social networks, it is not entirely clear whether alters influence participants or if participants "strategically" seek alters who hold positive views on return, reinforcing their beliefs. What Wave Three data illustrates is that those still displaced now tend to have roughly the same perceptions at the outset and discussion networks more based in their places of origin and that these alters are more likely than not to give advice and that this advice generally points to return. Regardless of directionality, perceptions of origin, having information alters at all, and being provided with more homogenous advice are better predictors of return than stated immediate-term intentions or long-term preferences alone. And irrespective of these factors, the return rate captured in this study is relatively low indicating that it takes a considerable effort to get those displaced for this long to actually return.

Finally, while perceptions remained relatively constant over time, social networks seemed to change. The networks mapped here after conflict and amid a global pandemic evolve and while the people in them may be different, their size and shape remain underscoring the ability of displaced participants to rebuild or reconstitute social capital amid significant upheaval and potential loss. This resilience should not be taken for granted or underestimated in understanding the resolution of displacement over time.