

2015-06-12

Topical Note Iraq – current opportunities to escape between the country's provinces



The camp Shariya outside Dohuk in the Kurdish region of Iraq (photo M. Rydén)

About the report

This report is written in accordance with the EU's general guidelines for the preparation of country information (2008). The report is based on reported secondary sources and interviews conducted during a research trip to Iraq 7-11 March 2015. The reports do not reflect the agency's official position and are not exhaustive, but should be weighed against other information about the evolving situation in the country.

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English summary

The main focus of this report is on internally displaced people (IDPs) in Iraq, their access to the different governorates and the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) as well as their living conditions in the mentioned places. The report is primarily based on the findings of a fact finding mission (FFM) to Erbil and Dohuk in March 2015. Later reporting has also been taken into consideration.

An official, uniformly implemented policy for entry into the KRI is missing. However, some clear patterns may be discerned. Minorities - Christians, Yezidis and others - can smoothly get into the region, as well as ethnic Kurds. Arab families often seem to get in, at least if the local security situation is under control. If they are not allowed into the KRI they may have to seek refuge in the disputed areas where the security situation is more problematic and the conditions in the camps far from as good as in the KRI. A group that clearly has difficulties getting into the KRI is single Sunni men. There is a risk that they are stopped at security screenings at entry check points, if they have not arranged a sponsor in advance. The consulted sources gave conflicting information whether sponsorship for IDPs in general still is required or not. We got the impression that the sponsorship system is on its way out, slowly fading away in the KRI – especially for the minorities and the Kurds - but at least temporarily taken up by other governorates, such as Baghdad, Kerbala and Najaf when larger waves of Sunni IDPs are approaching. On the other hand when mass migrations of the type that occurred from Sinjar in the summer of 2014 created a lot of attention, the borders of the KRI ultimately kept open, which probably guarantees that the borders will be kept open at any similar exodus from the Mosul area in any future combat situation. Still, the more security incidents that occur in the governorates of the KRI, the more restrictive border policies one can expect. The same goes for the other governorates in Iraq.

Major security incidents are already a fact of life in most central governorates and thus they should not be attractive internal flight alternatives. However Baghdad has received nearly half a million IDPs since January 2014. This does not mean that all IDPs may find refuge there. Minorities like the Christians will have a hard time finding relatively safe neighbourhoods. Sunnis Arabs may find entry restrictions.

The security situation in the southern governorates is not as good as in the KRI, but a lot better than in central Iraq. Amid political intra shia tensions, tribal fights and general lawlessness (though less than in Baghdad), IDPs of all categories have been welcome. Lately there seems to be some reservations about the Sunni Arabs. The delegation assess that Christians and other small minorities should have some link to the south in order to find a durable solution to their displacement.

IDPs living in camps in the KRI (approx 10-30% depending on the

governorate) generally receive their basic needs by the government bodies and organizations responsible for the camps. However, there are few employment opportunities in the form of work for adults and schooling for children. From the camps in the disputed areas bordering the KRI major deficiencies are reported.

For the majority who lives outside the camps living conditions depend mainly on the individual family circumstances; families with money and / or large family networks in the KRI can naturally live reasonably well, while poor families with no previous presence in the region will muddle through in improvised accommodation and without further support, in part because they are scattered in the governorates and thus harder for the authorities and organizations to reach.

In Iraq of today the Sunni Arabs are the most exposed to entry restrictions, not only into the KRI. Other groups have a better chance finding refuge if they manage to leave IS-controlled or other troubled areas.

1. Internally displaced people between Iraq's provinces: an overview

Iraq has historically been characterised by political turbulence and extensive internal migration. Many Iraqis have left their homes in several phases – the various waves of internally displaced people overlap in practice – while others have long since been integrated into the local environment. This makes it difficult to draw a clear distinction between the regular local population and the country's internally displaced people, i.e. to define the latter category and estimate how many people are in it. However most analysts claim that at the turn of 2013/2014, there were more than a million internally displaced people in the country.¹

A representative of IOM summarises the situation in the country as follows: "In Iraq, everything is going on at once: new internally displaced people are being created, while other groups of Iraqis are returning to their home areas, simultaneous with streams of internally displaced people from Syria, while at the same time resettlement is taking place and old refugee populations are still living where they long ago established themselves..."²

To this pattern of recurring crises and population movements can be added the events of the past year: the terrorist group the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), later calling itself the Islamic State (IS), made advances in the country in 2014, causing four new extensive waves of Iraqi internally displaced people:

- from Anbar in January 2014
- from Mosul/Nineva in the summer of 2014

¹ Cameron Thibos, Migration Policy Center, European University Institute (EUI): *35 years of forced displacement in Iraq: Contextualising the ISIS threat, unpacking the movements*, April 2014, [link](#)

² Lado Gvilava, Head of Regional Hub, International Organization of Migration (IOM), interview, Erbil 09-03-2015

- from Sinjar/Nineva in August 2014
- again mostly from Anbar in autumn 2014 and onwards

IOM estimates in total that just over half a million Iraqi families – corresponding to over three million individuals – were forced to flee within the country since January 2014.³

1.1. Special local conditions

The situation in Iraq differs greatly between the country's provinces ("governorates"), particularly in terms the security situation. In general, it can be said that the country's southern parts and the Kurdish region in the north are relatively stable.⁴ More violent is the "middle belt," which is made up of the IS-controlled area and the so-called disputed areas (i.e. parts of the provinces Kirkuk, Nineveh, Salah al-Din and Diyala, where both KRG and Baghdad authorities exercise some but not complete control) and Baghdad, Anbar and Babil. Together these six provinces account for the vast majority of deadly violence in the country.

The security-related differences are of course reflected in where people are fleeing from and where to:

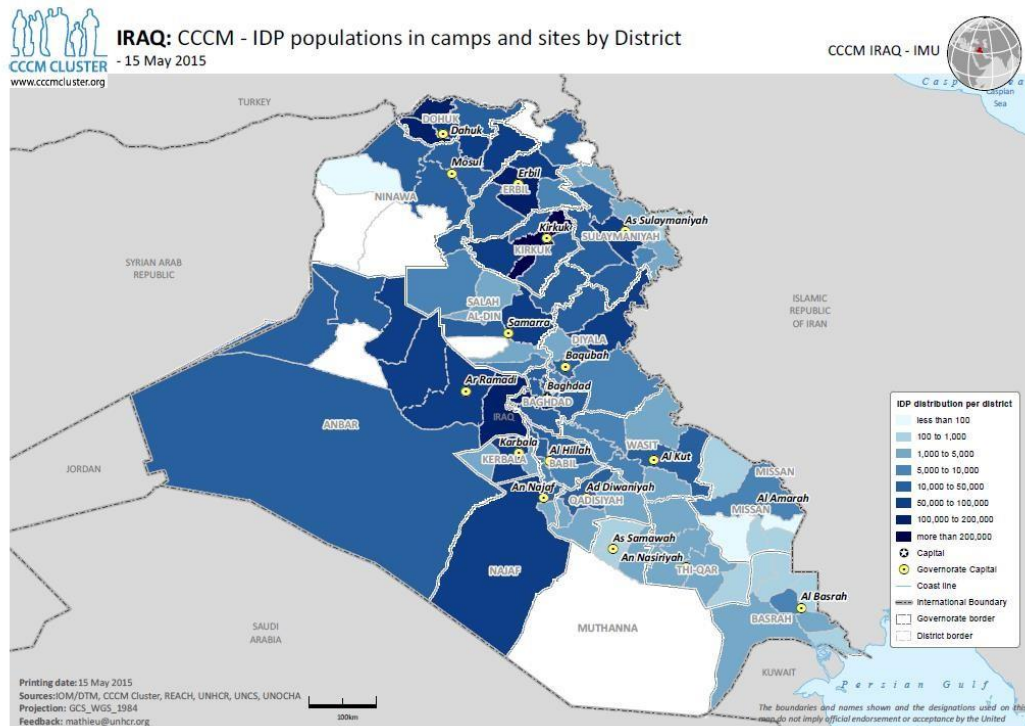
- More than 90% of the three million Iraqis who fled since January 2014 left one of the four provinces Anbar (36%), Nineveh (35%), Salah al-Din (15%) or Diyala (7%), i.e. the provinces hit hardest by IS advances. Most other provinces have generally not generated any internally displaced people.
- As for the provinces which have *received* internally displaced people recently, there are likewise four provinces which stand out, namely: Anbar (18%), Baghdad (16%), Dohuk (15%) and Kirkuk (12%).

Only a small minority (8 %) of the 3 million people who fled regularly live in camps, while most – 67% – rent some sort of dwelling on their own. This pattern applies to the country in general.⁵

³ IOM *Displacement Tracking Matrix DTM, Round XXI, 21 May 2015*. IOM's DTM document for Iraq is updated regularly with recent statistics and is found on their website, [link](#)

⁴ The Kurdish Region (KRI), controlled by the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG), includes the provinces of Erbil, Dohuk and Suleymaniya. In early 2014, KRG stated that Halabja should be separated from Suleymaniya and would then constitute the country's nineteenth province (see Ekurd Daily, *Iraqi Kurdistan government announces Halabja as its fourth province*, 13-3- 2014, [link](#)), but the initiative has not been formally accepted by the government in Baghdad.

⁵ See IOM, *Displacement Tracking Matrix DTM, Round XXI, 21 May 2015*



The map which illustrates which regions Iraq's internally displaced people seek out is produced by the humanitarian cluster for CCCM (Camp Coordination and Camp Management), 15-05-2015, [link](#)

1.1.1. The Kurdish Region of Iraq

During the current crisis, KRI has received at least one million internally displaced people, just over a third of the total number. Within the region, the province of Dohuk stands out: with a regular population of 1.2–1.4 million, the province received over 450,000 internally displaced people, primarily from Nineveh, and also about 100,000 refugees from Syria. However, the large influx to KRI has strained the region's capacity to absorb internally displaced people, which – in combination with sporadic security incidents in the region – seems to have negatively affected the opportunities to travel in for some categories of people.

Several interlocutors who Lifos recently met in the region emphasise the sectarian trends which characterise both the conflict and the influx of refugees it generates. Increasing interference from Iran-supported Shiite militias are seen as a threat by many Sunnis, so when an area is occupied by Shiite-dominated forces, the vulnerability increases for these Sunnis – and vice versa when IS occupies an area.

The influx of refugees caused by the fighting follows the same underlying pattern, where the regional affiliation is largely controlled by where one goes.

Simplified, it can be said that Christians, Yazidis and other minorities tend to flee to KRI, Shiites to the country's southern parts and Sunnis to KRI to the extent possible, otherwise to the country's "middle belt." The sectarianism is also illustrated by how the camps for internally displaced people are organised: for example, Turkmen internally displaced people generally seek special camps

near Kirkuk, which is organised by Turkmen NGOs and is primarily funded by the Turkish state.⁶

1.1.2. Central and Southern Iraq

Of the provinces in Central Iraq, Anbar is the province which has generated the most internally displaced people, both inside and outside the province. The recent fighting in Ramadi between the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF), allied Sunni militias and IS has forced more people to flee. Many of these have made their way to Baghdad province.

The Baghdad province has received almost half a million internally displaced people since January 2014, of which more than half come from Anbar. Baghdad has generated relatively few internally displaced people. More than 40,000 people have fled the province and about 20,000 people to other provinces.

From Salah al-Din, which borders Nineveh and Kirkuk to the north and Baghdad to the south, most have fled to Kirkuk. Many have also fled within the province.

Diyala, which shares a border with Suleymaniya, Salah al-Din, Baghdad and Wassit, also has many internally displaced people staying in the province.

The provinces south of Baghdad have barely generated any internally displaced people and have received about 10 % of all of Iraq's internally displaced people. Babil, where the fighting occurred in the northern parts near Baghdad, has also received more internally displaced people than it has generated.

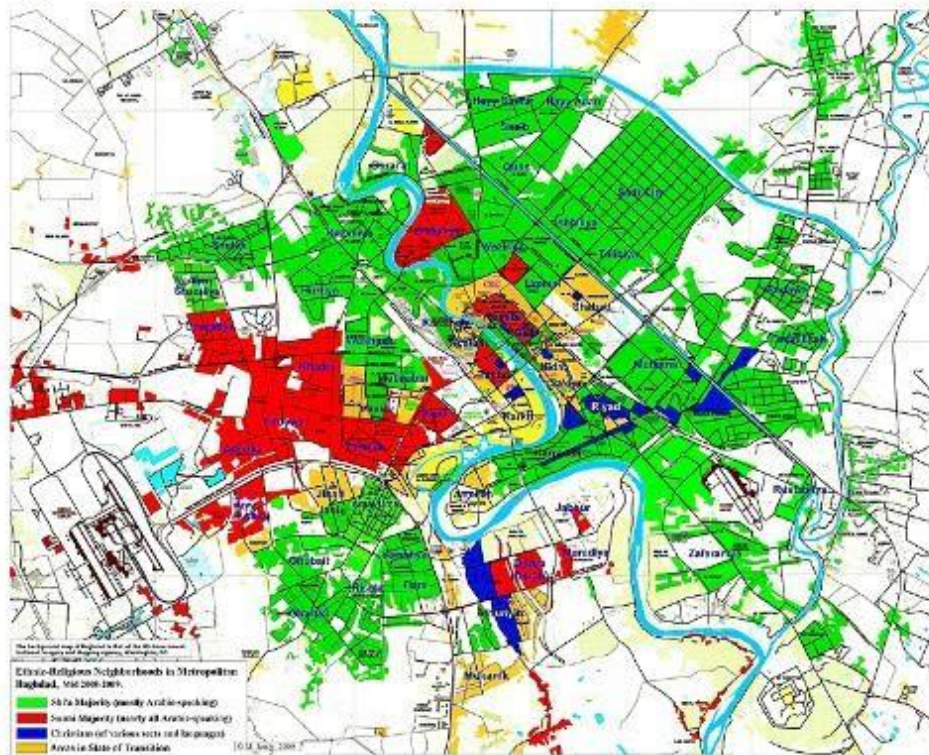
Anbar province has almost 100% Sunni Arab population. That half of the almost one million internally displaced people remain within the province, in Lifos' assessment, suggests that they can move to relatives and that they are not especially welcome in other provinces. The 300,000 internally displaced people who moved to Baghdad have sought out Sunni Arab-dominated neighbourhoods, such as Adhamiya and the suburb of Abu Ghreib (which, according to some sources, is in Anbar). Over 100,000 have moved to the Kirkuk province. Kurdish and Shiite-Arab provinces have also received internally displaced people from Anbar. Erbil has received about 69,000, Suleymaniya 62,000 and Dohuk 4,000. The Shiite Arab provinces, from Babil to Basra, have received more than 30,000 internally displaced people from Anbar.⁷

The provinces Salah al-Din and Diyala have mixed Sunni and Shiite Arab population with Kurdish elements in the northern and eastern parts. As mentioned, the provinces have a large group of their own internally displaced people. Many have also been received in almost all the other provinces.

⁶ Abdul Haq Amiri, Head of Erbil Office, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA); Tina Yu, Country Director, Save the Children, Prof. Dlawer Ala' Aldeen, President, Middle East Research Institute (MERI), interview, Erbil 08-03-2015

⁷ IOM, *Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) Round XX May 2015*

Baghdad Mid 2008



Green – Shiite majority
 Red – Sunni majority
 Blue – Christian majority
 Yellow – Mixed Sunni-Shiite

Map illustrating Baghdad's ethnic-religious distribution, [link](#). Produced by Michael Izady the Gulf 2000 project at the School of International and Public Affairs, Columbia University, New York, [link](#)

Since the ethnic cleansing in 2006 – 2007, Baghdad has essentially been divided between Sunni and Shiite Arabs with pockets of Christians and other minorities here and there amongst the millions of people in the city. Essentially, all residents are at risk of being subjected to the violence flourishing in the form of bombings, shootings and regular crime. The latter particularly affects minorities, who lack clan support. Christian interlocutors tell of a police force which does not respond when thefts are reported and when they come they want to be paid to investigate the crime. The lawlessness is described as worse than in Basra. Despite this, perhaps 1,000 Christian families fled from Mosul to Baghdad in the summer of 2014.⁸

The provinces south of Baghdad have a predominantly Shiite Arab population and the security situation there is considerably better. The violence which occurs

⁸ Nicodemus Daoud Matti Sharaf, Metropolitan, Syrian Orthodox Church in Mosul, Kirkuk and KRI and Khalid Jamal Alber, General Director, Ministry of Awqaf/Religious Affairs, interview, Erbil, 10-03-2015

is often based on intra-Shiite political conflicts, conflicts between tribes and the general lawlessness. While Sunni families are forced to flee (e.g. to Baghdad), other Sunni families have been received as internally displaced people. However, most internally displaced people are Shiites – Arabs, Turkmen, Shabaks and possibly Feyli Kurds. There are also some Christian internally displaced people.

Based on this description of the current main trends, the following sections will deal with the three entities KRI, Central Iraq and Southern Iraq in more detail with an emphasis on the opportunities to get to other provinces and the conditions for internally displaced people there.

2. Opportunities to travel to each region

2.1 Opportunities to travel into KRI

The right of Iraqi citizens to move within the country is enshrined in the constitution (article 44, first paragraph: "Each Iraqi has freedom of movement, travel, and residence inside and outside Iraq") and the national policy on internally displaced people (point 6.9: "The competent authorities have the responsibility to ensure that the IDPs enjoy the right to move freely and choose their place of residence").⁹

However, the actual implementation of this right cannot be taken for granted, particularly not in the current situation, characterised by political/religious tensions, security problems and extensive population movements. As mentioned in the introduction, about half of the Iraqis who fled since 2014 went to KRI. Within these three provinces, up to a million internally displaced people are accommodated in the current situation: the region's population increased by 30 % within the course of a few months during 2014.¹⁰ The major influx has certainly negatively affected the opportunities for internally displaced people to get into KRI (and also the living conditions for those who have come into the region, which is discussed in a later section), but the picture of the opportunities to travel in is vague and needs to be newly analysed, especially on the basis of group affiliation.

2.1.1. Unclear rules for entry

Regarding the opportunities for Iraqis to get into KRI, the responsible authorities have stated that the principles for entry into the region have not changed, the official rules which guarantee freedom of movement within the country still apply.¹¹ This seems to be confirmed by the fact that such a large number of internally displaced people have been able to get into the region so far during the crisis.

Many NGOs who work in KRI emphasise a increasing discrepancy between the official rights for Iraqi citizens

⁹ 2005 Constitution, [link](#) and 2008 National Policy on Internally Displaced People, [link](#)

¹⁰ Omer Karasapan and Sibel Kulaksiz, Brookings: *Iraq's internally displaced populations and external refugees – a soft landing is a requisite for us all*, 02.04.2015, [link](#)

¹¹ Nawzad Hadi, Erbil's governor, interview, Erbil, 10-03-2015

moving within the country – and thus travelling into KRI – and the actual opportunities to get in.¹² The situation remains generally fluid and changeable. There is no officially established, recorded policy for who is allowed to enter KRI and the decision on whether internally displaced people from the rest of Iran are admitted or not is generally made at a local level – often at individual checkpoints – on grounds which are seldom clear. For example, there seems to be a "ceiling" for how many can be admitted through a given checkpoint, and when this limit is reached, those waiting are sent on to another province.

However, the system is not easy to understand, both organisations and internally displaced people experience a general uncertainty and unpredictability in terms of what applies, which the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and Save the Children emphasised in meetings with Lifos.¹³ Other involved parties have similarly pointed out that since the ongoing internal refugee crisis began, access to KRI for those fleeing other parts of the country has been a concern. Regular reports from checkpoints monitored by NGOs state that the criteria for passage is unclear and changeable, as the decisions are in practice made by personnel at the local checkpoint.¹⁴

Getting an overall picture of who is allowed/denied access to travel into KRI is complicated both by the wide local variations and by the fact that no organisation systematically documents the authorities' practice, which also hinders effective advocacy work on the issue.¹⁵ However, the lack of a uniform policy is used by some internally displaced people trying to get into KRI in the sense that they try to get into one checkpoint, and if they cannot they try the next – until eventually they are able to get through.¹⁶

However, in practice it seems that three factors have a bearing on the opportunities to get into KRI:

1) Profile/group affiliation

- Minorities such as Christians and Yezids seem to have it relatively easy, as well as ethnic Kurds, there are reportedly no restrictions on Christians entering and staying in KRI and the Yezids who have gone to KRI (especially Dohuk),

¹² For example, pointed out by Abdul Haq Amiri, OCHA and Tina Yu, Save the Children

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ KRI Protection Cluster, *IDP Protection Strategy 2014-15*, s.4, 28-12-2014, [link](#)
Additional organisations such as the International Rescue Committee (IRC) report the same case: "Procedures at KRI entry checkpoints are unpredictable, differing between governorates and by the individuals controlling the checkpoints", IRC, July 2014:

Battling an uncertain future: Iraq's renewed displacement crisis, [link](#)

¹⁵ Rebecca Dibb, Programme Director Iraq, Norwegian Refugee Council, interview, Erbil, 09-03-2015

¹⁶ Abdul Haq Amiri, OCHA

e.g. in connection with the fighting in Sinjar, seem to have not had any difficulties getting in.¹⁷

- The KRI authorities' attitude towards Sunni Arabs is reportedly quite the opposite, but it makes a difference for single men of military age (who are carefully checked and are at high risk of being rejected at checkpoints) and families (who have largely been let through so far).¹⁸
- It can also be mentioned that there are no specific restrictions for stateless Palestinians to travel into and stay in KRI, and President Barzani has declared that they are welcome, however in practice very few have gone to the region.¹⁹

2) The local security situation

- If the situation is tense (for example, if armed groups are in the vicinity or incidents have recently occurred), the local security staff tend to restrict entry, which makes the internally displaced people go to surrounding checkpoints instead.²⁰

3) How to get in

- Entry via the airports in Erbil/Suleymaniya is generally possible, regardless of the profile of the traveller – travelling into KRI by land is generally more difficult, but what most people do.²¹

2.1.2. Sponsorship

Previously, the sponsorship system – where a person living in the region vouches for someone who wants to move in – has been a way for the authorities to manage the migration into KRI, particularly for security reasons. The principle is still applied

¹⁷ Nicodemus Daoud Matti Sharaf, metropolitan, and Khalid Jamal Alber, General Director. For a map which illustrates how Christian Iraqis fled in waves from Ninewa to KRI in the summer of 2014, see REACH, *Ninewa plains IDP crisis 6th June – 7th August*, 15-08-2015, [link](#)

¹⁸ Abdul Haq Amiri, OCHA. That Sunni families have so far been let in to KRI is exemplified by the area Shaklawa in the Erbil province, which is now popularly called "Shakluja" after a very large number of Sunni families from Fallujah established themselves there (Nawzad Hadi, Governor of Erbil).

¹⁹ Abdul Haq Amiri, OCHA, and representatives of Public Aid Organization (PAO), interview, Erbil, 08-03-2015

²⁰ A number of checkpoints per province tend to be central to the internally displaced people's trips into KRI; Al Qosh, Badrike and Sheikhan (to Dohuk), Khazir and Gwer (to Erbil), Banmaqan, Tasluja and Chamchamal (to Suleymaniya). See REACH's periodic reports on the topic (*Entry Point Monitoring, Iraqi Kurdistan Region*), for example, [link](#)

²¹ Representatives of Public Aid Organization (PAO), interview, Erbil, 08-03-2015

to foreigners.²² However, there is currently no uniformly applied sponsorship policy for Iraqis getting into KRI.

Some politicians and analysts state that the sponsorship system has now been abolished, partly because it has produced an extensive black market which in the end has been ineffective from a security point of view, the security is now maintained only through the security service – *Asayesh* – checking those who want to settle in KRI.²³ This is confirmed by reports in local media.²⁴ According to current procedure, an internal refugee must report to the local *Asayesh* office no later than two weeks after their entry in order to go through security checks (interview, check of identity and background, etc). Those who are approved get a written document which is initially valid for 6 months and they can then move freely in KRI. The permit can then be extended for 6 months at a time. After the second extension, there can be a 1-year permit.²⁵ If rejected, the person must then leave the region or, in cases of direct involvement with IS or similar groups, they will be arrested and prosecuted.²⁶

However, several sources emphasise, in contrast to the above, that the sponsorship system is still used (in addition to *Asayesh* security checks), but that its application varies significantly and that relevant decisions are often characterised by arbitrariness.²⁷ The requirements for sponsorship reportedly depend on the applicant's profile. For example, those who fled the crisis in Sinjar quickly got into KRI without sponsors, which was only later needed when they needed to get a permit to stay, while others seem to need to have a sponsor arranged before they enter.²⁸ Christians do not need a personal sponsor, but the church can arrange a guarantee for them.²⁹ A source with good insight into the KRI region (who wants to be anonymous, however), told Lifos that KRI's security authorities, after the bomb attack on the U.S.

²² Foreign citizens need to submit a written, personal guarantee from a person with Iraqi citizenship living in the province in question where they are applying for a residence permit ("residency") according to instructions on the Ministry of the Interior's own website, [link](#)

²³ Karim Sinjari, KRI Minister of Interior, interview, Erbil, 09-03-2015 and Prof. Dlawer Ala'Aldeen, MERI

²⁴ BasNews, *Displaced Arabs No Longer Need Sponsorship to Enter Kurdistan*, 24-02-2015, [link](#)

²⁵ Lado Gvilava, IOM

²⁶ Karim Sinjari, KRI Minister of Interior

²⁷ Rebecca Dibb, Norwegian Refugee Council. Cf. note 38 on the sponsor requirement for travelling into Suleymaniya for those who fled the unrest in Ramadi in April 2015.

²⁸ Abdul Haq Amiri, OCHA

²⁹ Lado Gvilava, IOM, and Nicodemus Daoud Matti Sharaf, metropolitan, and Khalid Jamal Alber, General Director. It can be noted that Kurds who fled from Syria can similarly get a certificate from PYD's local office, which replaces the requirement for a sponsor if none is available (Abdul Haq Amiri, OCHA).

Consulate in Erbil in April 2015, introduced a requirement that Iraqis of Arab ethnicity must have a Kurdish sponsor to be allowed to travel into the region.³⁰

In summary, it is difficult to determine the sponsor requirement's current status, but there are many indications that (i) it remains *de facto*, (ii) it is applied arbitrarily and (iii) that the application tends to be affected by the internally displaced person's profile, based on the pattern that sponsor requirements are placed on those of Arab ethnicity, but not Kurds, Christians or other minorities.

2.2. Travel to/within the disputed areas

To the extent that it has become more complicated to get into KRI, internally displaced people from areas south of the region have increasingly gone to parts of the disputed areas. An example of this is the large number of people who recently fled Tikrit and installed themselves in Kirkuk (a province which is now receiving more internally displaced people than Erbil). This particularly applies to Sunni Arabs and to a certain extent Shabaks, who generally have a more difficult time getting into KRI than Christians and Kurds, and who therefore go to Kirkuk and to a certain extent Diyala (Kifri, Khanaqin) and Ninewa (Shekhan, Akre).³¹ Specific information on these areas is limited. There does not seem to be any formal entry restrictions, but the principle of sponsors seems to be applied even outside KRI, for example, in Salah al-Din: it will be ensured that a person has connections to the town/city he or she lives in to make sure the "wrong" people do not establish themselves.³²

In addition, there are isolated reports of Sunni internally displaced people being prevented from returning to their homes after IS drove them out, based on a desire to change the demographic composition to the "liberating" forces' advantage, this phenomenon is reported to have occurred to some extent in the disputed Kirkuk area.³³

Returns occur to some extent, but with existing restrictions for the mentioned demographic purposes, destroyed infrastructure and security matters (in the form of mines and possible IS infiltration). As of 7 May 2015, almost 150,000 internally displaced people had returned to their provinces, of these, about 32 % to Diyala, 28 % to Nineveh, 21 % to Salah al-Din and 17 % to Anbar (before IS took over Ramadi).³⁴

³⁰ E-mail correspondence with inside source, 30-04-2015. Regarding the attack in Erbil, see, for example, Reuters, *Car bomb kills three outside U.S. consulate in Iraq's Kurdish capital*, 18-04-2015, [link](#)

³¹ REACH, *Multi-cluster needs assessment of internally displaced persons outside of camps, Kurdistan Region of Iraq*, February 2015, [link](#)

³² Abdul Haq Amiri, OCHA. See more examples of the sponsorship requirement in other regions of Iraq in OCHA's "Situation Reports," for example, *Situation Report no. 40*, 15-21 April 2015, [link](#)

³³ Weekly Diplomatic Briefing, organised by UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), Erbil, 10-03-2015

³⁴ IOM, *Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) Round XX May 2015*, New York Times, *Flee or return: Ramadi Residents Face a Tough Choice*, 2015-04-21 [link](#)

2.3. Opportunities to travel to provinces in Central Iraq

Regarding the opportunities for Iraqis to get into the central provinces, there is Anbar to the west, Nineveh and Kirkuk to the north, and the more centrally located Salah al-Din, Diyala and Baghdad, limited in many cases by both violence and restrictions. Kirkuk and Baghdad have introduced entry restrictions.

Few internally displaced people from other provinces go to Anbar, Diyala, Nineveh and Salah al-Din. Kirkuk and Baghdad have both their own internally displaced people and many from other provinces. IS is particularly making a push in Anbar and Nineveh and the fighting over Tikrit in Salah al-Din has gotten people on both sides to

Baghdad and Kirkuk, from 1 January 2014 to the end of May 2015, about 400,000 and 280,000 individuals respectively. The total number of internally displaced people in Baghdad is approached the half-million mark. The recent fighting in and around Ramadi has created increased pressure on the city/province.³⁵

Since IS took over Ramadi on 17 May 2015, over 40,000 inhabitants fled, most to other cities in Anbar. Those who try to get to Baghdad and southwards are met by checkpoints and requirements for sponsors, which, according to some sources, must meet up at the checkpoint.³⁶ Of the last wave of refugees, nearly 4,000 people have reached Baghdad. It is unclear how strictly the sponsor requirement is applied and it has not been applied to everyone over time.³⁷ Since the fighting around Ramadi has intensified in early April, 114,000 inhabitants have left the city. 54,000 of them have succeeded in getting to Baghdad, 15,000 to Suleymaniya, more than 2,000 to Babil and 900 to Diyala. The first three provinces are reported to have a sponsor requirement.³⁸ Baghdad may have at least temporarily eased the sponsor requirement in late May 2015.³⁹

2.4. Opportunities to travel to provinces in Southern Iraq

That people from Anbar to some extent go to Babil is not surprising, as the northern part of the province is inhabited by many of the province's possibly 20 % Sunni Arabs.

Kerbala (about 70,000) and Najaf (about 85,000), who previously welcomed internally displaced people regardless of religious or ethnic affiliation, have introduced restrictions – unclear whether they only apply to Sunni Arabs.⁴⁰

Other provinces in Southern Iraq have not received as many internally displaced people, 150,000 or 5 % of a total of 3 million, and do not seem to have placed any restrictions in the current situation.

³⁵ IOM, *Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) Round XX May 2015*, OCHA, *Flash Update Iraq Crisis – Ramadi Displacement No.4*, 2015-05-21, [link](#)

³⁶ RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty, *Ramadi Refugees Face Desperate Humanitarian Situation As They Wait To Cross into Baghdad*, 2015-05-22, [link](#)

³⁷ OCHA, *Flash Update Iraqi Crisis – Ramadi Displacement No.4*, 2015-05-21

³⁸ UNHCR, *UNHCR concerned about the challenges facing thousands of Iraqis fleeing Ramadi*, 2015-04-22, [link](#)

³⁹ BBC, *Anbar displaced allowed into Baghdad*, 2015-05-20, [link](#)

⁴⁰ OCHA, *Iraq Crisis Situation Report No. 42*, 29 April – 5 May 2015, [link](#)

The provinces south of Baghdad usually do not place any barriers on getting around by land. From Baghdad, one should also be able to get south. However, accessibility in the Baghdad province and the nearby area can be made more difficult by blown bridges, roadside bombs, and quickly recurring violence (militants who attack).⁴¹ The road between Mosul and Baghdad goes through battle zones. It runs between Kirkuk and Baghdad, but is dangerous. Bandits can lie in ambush and trucks sometimes block the road.⁴² With financial support from the central government, KRG has flown Shiite internally displaced people from the central provinces to Southern Iraq.⁴³

3. Conditions for internally displaced people in the various regions

3.1 Conditions for internally displaced people in KRI

3.1.1 Internally displaced people in camps in KRI

Internally displaced people in KRI primarily live in homes which they rent on their own, and also live with relatives and acquaintances. A smaller percentage live in the less desirable camps. About a quarter live more provisionally, e.g. on construction sites (in treads), in religious buildings, in parks and in hotels. The individual family's economic resources controls how they live and many new arrivals in the region can afford their own accommodations initially, but are then forced to seek out camps because they cannot afford their own housing long-term.⁴⁴

How large a proportion of the internally displaced people live in camps varies between the provinces. In Dohuk, the percentage of those living in camps is greatest: 130,000 of 450,000 individuals, or about 30 %. The larger internal refugee camps in the province are Chamishku Camp (25,000 individuals), Shariya Camp (19,000) and Khanke Camp (17,000). The internally displaced people in Erbil and Suleymaniya live in camps to a significantly lower degree (5,000 of 215,000 and 15,000 of 170,000, respectively).⁴⁵

The number of camps in KRI has grown in line with the influx: often there are informal/spontaneous camps where large numbers of families stream in, which then become official and are included in the authorities' and the humanitarian organisations' programmes. The conditions in the camps vary, particularly depending on (i) who lives in the camps and (ii) how available the camps are for

⁴¹ OCHA, *2014/2015 Iraq Humanitarian Needs Overview, Humanitarian Access as of 9 September 2014*, 2014-10-24, [link](#)

⁴² Representative of Kurdish security company, conversation while driving Erbil-Dohuk, 2015-03-11

⁴³ Prof. Dlawa Ala' Aldeen, MERI

⁴⁴ Lado Gvilava, IOM

⁴⁵ Detailed statistics are available from IOM, *DTM Dataset*, 26.03.2015, [link](#)

authorities and humanitarian organisations.⁴⁶ Camps for *refugees* have generally kept a higher standard than those for *internally displaced people*, partially because there are fewer people in the previous category and partially because they get more international attention and backing. Camps in KRI are easy to reach and work in, unlike camps in or near the unstable, *disputed areas*, which has a clear impact on the camp conditions: the camp in KRI

is described as "five-star" compared with the rather miserable camps in the disputed areas such as Kirkuk and Khanaqin.⁴⁷

For internally displaced people in camps in KRI, the current situation seems to be decent in the sense that the most essential needs are covered, living in camps implies that both the authorities and humanitarian organisations can follow the situation and meet basic needs. Few or none in the camps seem to have a problem in terms of access to food and housing/"shelter." However, there are significant shortcomings in terms of water/sanitation in many camps, and there is an extensive need to improve access to schooling for children and also access to meaningful employment for adults.⁴⁸

Just in terms of schooling, in the entire country of Iraq, 68 % of the children who fled within the country do not have access to any schooling at all.⁴⁹ The figure is also true for KRI, where 70 % of the children lack any schooling, while others have at least some access to education.⁵⁰ Many of the children who fled from Nineveh, Salah al-Din and Diyala speak Arabic, but in the schools in KRI, education is primarily in Kurdish, and the influx of Syrian children has since overloaded the Arabic-speaking education. To cover at least some of the needs, they try to use the school buildings in shifts long into the evenings, and the organised education is supplemented with informal education in Arabic from volunteer teachers who have fled themselves.⁵¹

Few adults in camps find employment, with consequences for their economy and self-esteem. As an example, everyone in the camp Shariya in Dohuk (19,000 inhabitants, primarily from Sinjar) depend on assistance for support.⁵²

⁴⁶ See, for example, IRC, March 2015: *Iraq Humanitarian Crisis: Aid must be directed according to vulnerability, not status or geography*, [link](#)

⁴⁷ Abdul Haq Amiri, OCHA

⁴⁸ OCHA/Humanitarian Response regularly publishes overviews of the situation for internally displaced people based on needs/responses within various sectors and in the various provinces, see, for example, [link](#) and [link](#)

⁴⁹ UNICEF: *Iraq Humanitarian Situation Report, March 2015*, [link](#)

⁵⁰ Tina Yu, Save the Children

⁵¹ Nawzad Hadi, Governor of Erbil and Abdul Haq Amiri, OCHA

⁵² Discussion with the camp's management, Dohuk, 11-03-2015

3.1.2 Internally displaced people outside the camp in KRI

As mentioned, the internally displaced people's form of housing varies in KRI.⁵³

- In Erbil and Suleymaniya, most people (90%) live outside the refugee camp and of these, most (60-80%) have arranged their own accommodations, particularly by renting a residence.
- In the congested Dohuk, the situation is different: there more people (30%) live in camps and others live primarily in abandoned buildings and other unofficial places: only 15 % rent a residence.

Humanitarian organisations emphasise, as mentioned, that the need for internally displaced people outside the camps tends to be greater than for those in the camps, partially because it is more difficult for humanitarian organisations to identify and respond to the needs of those who are spread outside the camp environment. Thus, significantly more internally displaced people in Suleymaniya (36 %) and Erbil (26 %) have reported that they have found it difficult to meet basic needs such as food, housing, etc. than

what the same group reported in Dohuk (5 %).⁵⁴ The access to health care for those outside the camps is similarly worse than for those in the camps, but not non-existent, they get the same care as everyone else in the local community, which is also naturally marked by the structural burden on the health care system in KRI.⁵⁵

According to some information, the internally displaced people outside the camps have document-related problems. The local authorities in KRI are reported to have issued various types of documents and it is unclear whether one gets one or another.⁵⁶ In Dohuk, for example, the authorities have opened an office where internally displaced people who did not bring their documents when they fled can obtain national ID cards. If they need other documents, a request for permission must be made to Baghdad.⁵⁷ According to a survey conducted a few months after the large influx during the summer of 2014 however, 75 % of those who had arrived had not

received any documents at all: 11% had received a permit ("residency") which grants the right to work and 14% had gotten permission to stay in KRI as a tourist.⁵⁸

The variation in what is issued can be partially explained by the general problems with multiple authorities with overlapping responsibility being involved in the work with the internally displaced people. There is also the central government's Ministry of Displacement and Migration (MoDM), which is represented in the KRI provinces. In addition, several KRI ministries are involved – primarily the Ministry of Planning (MoP) and Ministry of Interior (MoI). Under KRI's MoI is then the Bureau of Displacement and Migration (BoDM), whose

⁵³ IOM, *Displacement Tracking Matrix I DTM, Round XVII, March 2015*, [link](#)

⁵⁴ REACH, *Multi-cluster needs assessment of internally displaced persons outside of camps, Kurdistan Region of Iraq*

⁵⁵ Nawzad Hadi, Governor of Erbil and Rebecca Dibb, Norwegian Refugee Council

⁵⁶ Abdul Haq Amiri, OCHA

⁵⁷ Colonel Ibrahim A. Sadiq, Director of Dahuk Nationality, interview, Dohuk, 2015-03-

11 ⁵⁸ REACH, *Multi-cluster needs assessment of internally displaced persons outside of camps, Kurdistan Region of Iraq*

mandate is similar to MoDM's. Both the central government and KRG have also created special "IDP committees," which have both "Operational cells" in the KRI provinces, but the connection between these committees are not clear. At the provincial level, the provinces in turn have their own directorate, corresponding to KRI's ministries and have established their own "Emergency cells" at the provincial level.⁵⁹ Efforts from the UN in particular to clarify the procedure and increase the coordination between various authorities seem to be on the way to producing some results.⁶⁰

3.1.3 Increasingly strained economic situation for KRI

Amongst others, the Governor of Erbil pointed out to Lifos that the situation in KRI is troubling, particularly for the long-term, because three challenges coincide:

- (i) continued influx of both internally displaced people and refugees from Syria,
- (ii) a financial crisis (shrinking investments, fiscal dispute with Baghdad),
- (iii) an ongoing, very costly war against IS.⁶¹

Several involved parties Lifos met emphasise that it will be difficult to maintain KRI's camps – which were originally seen as temporary, but now seem permanent – as well as maintaining the overall standard of living. Both foreign and domestic sources of funding have become increasingly strained. There is a growing "donor fatigue" amongst foreign donors, which may result in large reductions: the UN accounts for upwards of 60% of the humanitarian efforts.⁶² KRI's share of the central government's budget – which finances 80% of the region's public sector – has been strangled because of political disputes with Baghdad and economic decline due to the falling price of oil.⁶³ According to reports, the federal government in 2015 transferred about USD 500 million per month to KRI, i.e. half of what was agreed.⁶⁴ This also in a situation where the influx of internally displaced refugees was massive and the war against IS costs money and also scares away investors.

The figures for KRI in terms of growth, foreign investment, import/export of goods, tourism, etc. all point steeply downwards: the region's economy currently corresponds to 30% of its size in 2012, and the general poverty has doubled – from more than 3% to more than 8% – since 2012.⁶⁵

Already in the current situation this has manifested in the form of difficulty for the authorities to pay the public sector's salaries, and humanitarian organisation's problem in taking out

⁵⁹ "[T]he arrangement between MoDM, BoDM, High Committees and Operational Cells and also governorate emergency cells is not tidy, good, clear or efficient," summarises Alya Hussain Albazaz, Head of the MoDM Representation in the KRI, cited in Buissje, 2015, p. 26

⁶⁰ KRI Protection Cluster, *IDP Protection Strategy 2014-15*, p.4

⁶¹ Nawzad Hadi, Governor of Erbil

⁶² Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN), *Emergency aid projects in Iraq face closure due to funding shortfall*, 18-02-2015, [link](#)

⁶³ World Bank, *The Kurdistan Region of Iraq: Assessing the Economic and Social Impact of the Syrian Conflict and ISIS*, 15-04-2015, [link](#)

⁶⁴ Hawler Times, *Kurdistan Region Gets Partial Payment From Baghdad*, 19-03-2015, [link](#)
BBC Business, *Iraqi Kurdistan's battle with Baghdad over oil revenues*, 10-04-2015, [link](#)

⁶⁵ World Bank, *The Kurdistan Region of Iraq*

money from local banks due to the poor liquidity. In the long-term however, the situation in KRI risks becoming unsustainable, according to several sources, and it is in light of this precarious situation which the opportunities for another possible mass influx to KRI in connection with a military operation against IS-controlled Mosul must be seen.⁶⁶

3.2. Conditions for internally displaced people in Central/Southern Iraq

3.2.1 Central Iraq

Central Iraq or the "middle belt" is characterised by the conflict with IS. Anbar, Nineveh and Salah al-Din are particularly vulnerable and humanitarian aid probably has the most difficulty reaching these provinces.

In parts of Kirkuk and Diyala, access to aid efforts is better, but the changing and often deficient security situation contributes to hindering aid efforts from time to time. Both new and old internally displaced people need food deliveries in Salah al-Din, Kirkuk, Diyala, Nineveh, Anbar and Baghdad to cover nutrition needs.⁶⁷

A large part of the internally displaced people in Baghdad come from Anbar. These mainly seek out Sunni enclaves such as Adhamiya. Many also go down to the mixed neighbourhood of Khark, near the Green Zone in Central Baghdad. The increased presence of Shiite militias and general lawlessness make life uncertain in many parts of the city. It may be sufficient to have the wrong name to have serious problems at a checkpoint.⁶⁸ Bombings and other militant activities also make life unsafe.

There are maybe 100,000 Christians still living in Baghdad. Some Christian internally displaced people therefore go to the city. According to church sources, the uncertainty particularly affects Christians and other minorities. (In particular, Asaib Ahl al- Haq is mentioned as an unruly militia).⁶⁹ Some Kurdish representatives mentioned that even Kurds feel unsafe in Baghdad.

Unemployment, lack of access to electricity, water and to some extent education affects all of Baghdad, but most of all internally displaced people. The access to health care in Baghdad is quite good, according to medical country information (Medcoi). However, it does not reach all internally displaced people, and certainly not those living illegally in, for example, buildings under construction, other unofficial sites and without permission in schools.⁷⁰ The schools are used to a limited extent for accommodations. Only 425 of 16,000 schools were used at the start of autumn term 2014 to house internally displaced people.⁷¹

⁶⁶ Lado Gvilava, IOM, Rebecca Dibb, Norwegian Refugee Council och Abdul Haq Amiri, OCHA

⁶⁷ OCHA, *Iraq Crisis – Situation Report No. 43, 6-12 May 2015*, [link](#)

⁶⁸ Prof. Dlawer Ala' Aldeen, MERI

⁶⁹ Nicodemus Daoud Matti Sharaf, metropolitan, and Khalid Jamal Alber, General Director

⁷⁰ IOM, *Governorate Profile: Baghdad, September 2014*, [link](#) (main feature)

⁷¹ Rudaw Iraq: *Squatters May Delay School Start in Iraq*, 2014-09-14, [link](#)

3.2.2. Southern Iraq

The number of internally displaced people in Southern Iraq's nine provinces⁷² is, as mentioned, relatively small. Most are Shiites of any type, Arabs, Shabaks and Turkmen.

There are also a few Christians amongst the internally displaced people in the south.⁷³ In conversations with, amongst other, Professor Dlawer Ala'Aldeen from the Middle East Research Institute (MERI), it was stated that Basra, Kerbala and Najaf belong to the provinces in Southern Iraq which have received Christian internally displaced people. The same source stated that these Christians have their roots in the south and have lived there for centuries and are well-integrated and protected by the majority population. However, some extremist groups, such as Asaib Ahl al-Haq, are reported to be less sympathetic. The hostility has mostly gone over to Sunni Arabs, who left the southernmost provinces at the same time as Sunnis from the war-affected middle belt sought and received protection in, at least, Kerbala and Najaf and parts of Babil. As said, the provinces have introduced entry restrictions. Many Christians and some Mandaean have returned to

Basra, which they left after the U.S. invasion in 2003.⁷⁴ There are also Christian internally displaced people in Missan and Thi-Qar. MoDM^{has} prioritised Christians in order to get them to stay in Iraq.⁷⁵

The internally displaced people in Qadissiya, Najaf, Kerbala, Thi-Qar and Missan need more food deliveries. If the internally displaced people are not registered in the public distribution system (PDS), they do not get food delivered at all, which seems to be common in Muthanna. Water, sanity and hygiene (WASH) are problems for some internally displaced people in Najaf and Babil. The security and health care do not seem to be major problems in the southern provinces. Schooling has generally been lacking for many school-age children. Just a little over 35 % of all internally displaced children in Iraq get some form of formal education.⁷⁶ Deviating figures for Southern Iraq have not been found.

4. Lifos' summary conclusions

4.1 KRI

Although there is no official, uniformly implemented policy for travelling in the KRI region, based on the available material it is possible to discern clear patterns: minorities – Christians, Yezids and others – can get into the region without problems, as well as ethnic Kurds. Arab families often seem to be able to get in, at least if the local security situation is under control. In cases where they are not let into KRI, they are sent on to the disputed areas where the security situation is more problematic and the conditions in the camp are worse than in

⁷² Babil 59'154, Basra 11'208, Kerbala 69'384, Missan 7'602, Muthanna 3'972, Najaf 84'408, Qadissiya 21'714, Thi-Qar 8'748 and Wassit 34'284 (from IOM DTM May 15)

⁷³ Lado Gvilava, IOM

⁷⁴ Representatives of Public Aid Organization (PAO), where the interlocutors also mentioned that the influx of refugees slowed in 2007 only to start again after the IS conquest of Mosul

⁷⁵ *Ibid.* Regarding MoDM and its relation to other relevant authorities, see 1.3.2

⁷⁶ OCHA, *Iraq Crisis Situation report No. 43, 6-12 May 2015*

KRI. (Shiite and some Sunni Arabs may also be received in Baghdad and the provinces south of it). The group which has clearly had difficulty in getting into KRI is Sunni Arab men who come without any family. For them, the risk of being rejected from a checkpoint is high, they can maybe get into KRI if they have a Kurdish sponsor arranged in advance.

Internally displaced people living in camps in KRI (about 10-30% depending on the province) generally get their basic needs – food, shelter – met by the government agencies and organisations responsible for the camps. However there are few employment opportunities in the form of work for adults or schooling for children, and there are major deficiencies reported from the camps in the disputed areas in the region's outskirts.

For the majority who live outside the camps, the living conditions depend mainly on the individual family's circumstances: families with good economic resources and/or large networks of relatives in KRI can naturally live reasonably well, while poor families without previous roots in the region muddle through in improvised housing without further support, in part because they are scattered and thus more difficult for authorities and organisations to reach. However, if their position becomes too acute, they can go to the camps, where they are received.

In the case of notable mass influx situations of the type which occurred from Sinjar during the summer of 2014, the border to KRI was ultimately kept open, which ensures that the border will be kept open in case of a future mass influx from the Mosul area. For other influxes, however, there are more security incidents within that risk promoting a more restrictive entry practice. However, such restrictions are probably not communicated explicitly by the authorities, but are applied discretely – and arbitrarily – out at the checkpoints.

In the long term, the economic and social situation in the region depends on how the overall trends which have worsened the situation develop in the future, the conflict with IS and the influx of those fleeing the fighting, the fiscal dispute with the central government and the weakening income from oil exports and foreign investments.

4.2. Central Iraq

The opportunities to flee to the central provinces of Anbar and Nineveh are limited by the IS presence and fighting. At the moment, Kirkuk and Salah al-Din seem to have sponsorship requirements, which hinders access for those who want to flee there. Even Baghdad, in light of the increasing number of refugees from Anbar/Ramadi, has introduced a sponsor requirement. However the requirement is not always strictly enforced and mainly applies to Sunni Arabs, in Lifos' assessment. Diyala has no known entry restrictions. Few refugees from other provinces have gone there, about 2,600 from Salah al-Din, 940 from Anbar, 350 from Nineveh and a dozen from Baghdad.⁷⁷

⁷⁷ IOM, *Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) Round XX May 2015*

Of the provinces in Central Iraq, Baghdad has certainly received the most refugees from other provinces. This can be explained by Baghdad's proximity to the trouble spots and the fact that, despite their own security problems, the supply in the large city is attractive along with the fact that both Sunnis and Shiites can find refuge in "their own" neighbourhoods/districts. Minorities such as Christians and Mandeans probably have a more difficult time finding equivalent security.

4.3. Southern Iraq

If the refugees go through Central Iraq or flee from KRI, they can move relatively freely in Southern Iraq with the exception of the provinces of Babil, Kerbala and Najaf. The requirement to have a sponsor to enter these provinces probably only applies to Sunnis. The religious authorities in Najaf and Kerbala have welcomed Christians who fled from Mosul.⁷⁸ According to Lifos' assessment, Christians fleeing to the Shiite-dominated southern provinces should have some connection there to get sustainable new accommodations there.

4.4 General conclusions for the entire country

The situation in Iraq's provinces differ significantly in terms of level of violence, the degree to which they generate or receive internally displaced people and the authorities' capacity to deal with the refugee situation. A sectarian dynamic was evident during Lifos' research trip: the religious affiliation characterises both the violence itself and the refugee movements it generates and how those in the country generally relate to the situation. Several interlocutors emphasised in this context that Iraq's Sunnis have a more difficult time finding a safe haven than other groups. Minorities such as Christians and Yezids are *more* vulnerable than other groups as long as they live in the area where IS is established, but *less* vulnerable when they go from there to, for example, KRI. For many Sunnis, the situation is often the reverse, i.e. they are *more* vulnerable than other groups when they flee from IS-controlled territory.

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