

IOM IRAQ

IRAQI MINORITIES IN DIASPORA MAPPING OF COMMUNITY STRUCTURES, PERCEPTIONS ON RETURN, AND CONNECTIONS TO THE HOMELAND

by Eleni Diker, Mohammad Khalaf, Michaella Vanore, & Soha Youssef; University of Maastricht, Maastricht Graduate School of Governance



ABOUT IOM

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) is the United Nations Migration Agency. IOM is committed to the principle that humane and orderly migration benefits migrants and society. As an intergovernmental organization, IOM acts with its partners in the international community to: assist in meeting the operational challenges of migration; advance understanding of migration issues; encourage social and economic development through migration; and uphold the human dignity and well-being of migrants. IOM has over a decade of experience studying diaspora engagement globally, and focuses on ways to enable, engage and empower transnational communities as agents for development. In 2018, IOM launched the iDiaspora platform, a global engagement and knowledge exchange hub for transnational communities and those looking to engage with them.

ABOUT MAASTRICHT GRADUATE SCHOOL OF GOVERNANCE/UNU-MERIT AT MAASTRICHT UNIVERSITY

Maastricht University's Graduate School of Governance (MGSoG)/United Nations University-MERIT (UNU-MERIT) is a higher-education institute that leads the way in operational, policy-relevant studies and evaluations. Its focus is on preparing robust evidence to support more informed and responsive policy across different thematic domains, including migration. In January 2011, the School became part of the United Nations University (UNU) system, which further strengthened its role in preparing researchers, policy analysts, and designers for work in increasingly complex and cross-cutting policy areas. The Migration Research Group currently chairs the UNU Migration Network and is part of the Maastricht Centre for Citizenship, Migration and Development.

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) is committed to the principle that humane and orderly migration benefits migrants and society. As an intergovernmental organization, IOM acts with its partners in the international community to: assist in meeting the operational challenges of migration; advance understanding of migration issues; encourage social and economic development through migration; and uphold the human dignity and well-being of migrants.

The opinions expressed in the report are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the International Organization for Migration (IOM). The information contained in this report is for general information purposes only. Names and boundaries do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the International Organization for Migration (IOM).

IOM Iraq endeavours to keep this information as accurate as possible but makes no claim- expressed or implied -on the completeness accuracy and suitability of the information provided through this report.

International Organization for Migration
Address: UNAMI Compound (Diwan 2), International Zone, Baghdad Iraq
Email: iomiraq@iom.int
Website: iraq.iom.int

©2020 International Organization for Migration (IOM)

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise without the prior written permission of the publisher

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Table of Contents	3
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	4
FOREWORD	5
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	6
INTRODUCTION	7
2. METHODOLOGY	8
2.1 Sample overview	8
2.2 Limitations and constraints	9
3. FINDINGS FROM THE CASE STUDIES	10
3.1. United States of America	14
3.2. Germany	18
3.3. Georgia	25
3.4. Comparison of case study findings	31
4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	33

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The research team based at the University of Maastricht, Maastricht Graduate School of Governance would like to extend our gratitude to the institutions and individuals who supported this research. The IOM Iraq country team has been indispensable in the research process; we gratefully acknowledge the guidance of Sam van Vliet, Xavier Olierio Ogando, and Jacqueline Parry. The fieldwork in Georgia would not have been possible without the dedication of Tamar Kalandadze, who expended great efforts in conducting the fieldwork. In addition, we gratefully acknowledge the support and contributions of local researchers, Menderes Candan and Ali Alfalki, in the fieldwork in Germany and in the United States. We would like to further thank Athanasios Tsarouchas and Ayman Abou Samra for the invaluable research assistance in finalization of this study. Last, but not the least, we would like to thank all the respondents who took part in this research, who provided not only insight into personal and sensitive topics but expended great efforts in including the research staff in their community activities.

This report is a shorter version of the original study. To read the full version, please visit:

<https://www.merit.unu.edu/publications/latest-publications/>

FOREWORD

Since 2003, Iraqis living abroad have made a significant contribution to Iraq's development. Through a wide variety of actions – sending remittances to their families, investing in different sectors of the Iraqi economy, transferring knowledge and skills to institutions in Iraq, and transnational political engagement – the Iraqi diaspora has demonstrated the important role it can play in building a stable and prosperous Iraq.

Following the humanitarian and displacement crisis triggered when the self-proclaimed Islamic State (ISIS) took over vast swathes of Iraqi territory in 2014, Iraqi minorities living abroad mobilized in solidarity with their communities of origin and provided vital financial and humanitarian assistance to affected families. With the military defeat of ISIS in 2017, minorities in diaspora provided additional support as their communities of origin contemplated return, including technical skills, advocacy, and financial and material assistance for reconstruction.

Despite these valuable contributions, the potential contribution that the minority diaspora may make to Iraq's political, economic, social, and cultural recovery has not been fully realized, due to limited knowledge of the composition and profiles of Iraqi minorities living abroad and a scarcity of pathways to engage the diaspora in a meaningful way has meant that.

For this reason, and within the framework of the USAID-funded project: "Supporting the return of displaced populations in Nine-wa Plains and West Ninewa," IOM formed a partnership with the Maastricht University's Graduate School of Governance / United Nations University-MERIT to understand how the minority diaspora might contribute to the political, economic, social, and cultural recovery of their communities or areas of origin in Iraq.

This study identifies concrete ways for IOM, the government of Iraq, international and national actors, and Iraqi communities to strengthen their engagement with the Iraqi minority diaspora. Ultimately, we hope the findings in this study will be used to make the most of the skills, resources and solidarity already expressed by the Iraqi diaspora, with the ultimate aim of contributing to a more stable and peaceful Iraq.



Gerard Waite

Chief of Mission

IOM Iraq

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The research project “Iraqi minorities in diaspora: Mapping of community structures, perceptions on return, and connections to the homeland” was a multi-method research that explored the perceptions and actions related to engagement with and (temporary) return to Iraq within Iraqi (-origin) Christian and Yazidi diaspora communities residing in the United States of America, Germany and Georgia. The study explored how different diaspora communities could be better engaged in community bridging programs in the local communities to which they are connected in Iraq. Based on semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions with diaspora members, and secondary data, this report provides an overview of how these ethno-religious diaspora communities perceive and enact engagement with Iraq and how they view potential return to the country of (ancestral) origin.

While the study focused broadly on Assyrian, Chaldean, Yazidi and Syriac populations, there is incredible diversity in the identities, interests, and objectives of these separate groups. The long native history of the communities within the Mesopotamian region is an integral component of the diaspora identity and a strong driver of ethnic group consciousness. Experiences of conflict and communal memories of persecution complicate the feelings of belonging to Iraq as a contemporary state and negatively influence the willingness and readiness to craft tangible connections to Iraq. The symbolic value of the (ancestral) homeland nevertheless remains, albeit imagined and defined differently across diaspora communities. The atrocities of the so-called Islamic State in Iraq, as one contemporary trauma, has played an important role in fostering a sense of alienation and resentment among some diaspora members toward communities of origin in Iraq, yet it has also rejuvenated group identity and solidarity networks and prompted high levels of collective mobilization to support the victims, both financially and through global advocacy efforts. Similarly, the civil unrest that started in October 2019 in Iraq renewed the interest of minority Iraqi (-origin) diaspora communities in the social and political processes in Iraq and amplified the sense of “Iraqiness” in some segments of the diaspora that previously had a diminished sense of belonging to Iraq.

The characteristics and modes of engagement, perceptions of return, and potential for cross-community collaboration among members of the diaspora communities are shaped by a variety of factors, including the experiences in a given country of

residence. The different cultural, political, and historical settings of diverse countries support different pathways by which minority communities form diasporic identities and engagement behaviors. Religion and communal memory of persecution is important in providing a cohesive group ideology for Yazidis and Christians, supporting opportunity structures for mobilization. The desire to preserve unique ethnic and religious identities and to support advancement of their respective communities inside and outside Iraq are common objectives of many diaspora organizations. The diaspora organizations included in this research expressed limited focus on long-term, development-oriented initiatives inside Iraq, yet there are some issue areas, such as revitalization of local communities, that have encouraged longer-term commitment of different ethno-religious communities.

Memories and community experiences of persecution, discrimination, and marginalization inside Iraq have disrupted the trust the ethno-religious minority diaspora has in Iraq and in international organizations, which in turn limits return intention, even within temporary return initiatives. The prospect of both short- and longer-term return is hindered by weak governance in the country of origin, fears of being stigmatized, and the opportunity costs diaspora members may face in returning from countries of residence where they have established, stable, and productive personal and professional lives. Return programming that is tailored to the needs of specific groups in terms of type, length, and content of temporary return assignments can increase both aspirations and plans to return among diaspora members.

Cross community initiatives and inter-religious dialogues are limited among the Iraqi diaspora communities studies, with some reproduction of conflict dynamics from the homeland to the diaspora. In comparison to the US and Germany, the topics of inter-ethnic and interreligious dialogue, diversity and tolerance are more familiar to Georgia-based diaspora actors engaged in civil society, as they address similar issues in the Georgian context. Internal splits resulting from confessional differences or disputes over ethnic origins introduce additional layers of fragmentation that must be addressed when designing activities the diaspora is expected to contribute to. Failure to recognize the internal fragmentations within the diaspora may further exacerbate the conflict both within and between respective Christian and Yazidi communities.

1. INTRODUCTION

The term diaspora invokes a sense of global connectedness, of populations dispersed across time and space, who retain a sense of shared identity and purpose despite (or because of) their experiences in exile. Despite common threads of identity and action, diaspora may be highly diverse. The Iraqi diaspora, a product of movement within different historical eras and as a result of different circumstances within and beyond Iraq, is one such highly diverse diaspora. This report focuses specifically on the interests and capacities of members of Christian and Yazidi diaspora communities residing in Georgia, Germany, and the United States of America.

The research project “Iraqi minorities in diaspora: Mapping of community structures, perceptions on return, and connections to the homeland” was a multi-method research that explored how perceptions and actions related to engagement with and eventual return to Iraq have evolved within select Iraqi minority communities abroad. Within this research, information was collected both on and from individual diaspora members as well as diaspora organizations and their membership. Through desk review of organization listings, interviews with experts and leaders of select diaspora communities/organizations (n= 29), focus group discussions with diaspora members (n=7; 61 individuals), and an online survey completed by the wider Iraqi diaspora (n=81), the research explored how the diverse communities of Christian and Yazidi diaspora regard engagement with and potential (temporary) return to Iraq.

The project was commissioned by the International Organisation for Migration Iraq country mission and designed and implemented by a research team based at the University of Maastricht Graduate School of Governance (the Netherlands). The research was commissioned as part of a broader project, “Supporting the return of displaced populations in Nineveh Plains and West Nineveh,” funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), which aims to create an enabling environment for the rapid and sustainable return of internally-displaced persons (IDPs) and migrants to their areas of origin in Nineveh Plains and West Nineveh, through integrated investment in community-based programming. The focus of the present study on ethno-religious minority groups within the Iraqi community abroad aims to understand how members of the diverse polity of Iraq may collaborate in recovery and development efforts in their communities of (ancestral) origin.

The following chapter describes the methodology used to guide the data collection and analysis. Chapter three then reviews results from the case study countries, providing reflection on how dynamics within and between the Christian and Yazidi communities shape strategies and interests toward engagement and potential return to Iraq. This chapter also compares findings across the case study countries, reflecting on how structures and histories in specific countries of destination shape perceptions of engagement and return and the actions taken to realize them. The final chapter (chapter four) summarizes the findings and synthesizes them into recommendations that can support inclusion of the diaspora in community bridging initiatives.



Figure 1: Anjam Rasool/IOM Iraq

2. METHODOLOGY

The research supports community bridging programs in local communities of Iraq through providing nuanced information on the composition and interests of Iraqi minority communities abroad. To achieve this aim, the research was framed around three objectives: 1) to develop a comprehensive mapping of Iraqi diaspora communities and organizations (e.g., networks, associations, community institutions) registered in Georgia, Germany, and the United States; 2) to assess the interests and capacities of Iraqi diaspora individuals and the organizations to which they belong related to support for recovery and development of local areas in Iraq, and; 3) to nuance understanding of how members of the Iraqi Christian and Yazidi diasporas perceive the prospect of temporary or more long-term return to Iraq, including the factors that limit or encourage return intentions. While these three objectives were overarching for all of the case study countries, Georgia had a slightly different focus. The Georgia case study did not focus on the Iraqi diaspora as such but rather explored the historical ethno-religious Assyrian, Chaldean and Yazidi communities, comprised of members from the historical Mesopotamian region.

The research objectives were further broken down into research questions spanning four thematic areas: 1) types and structure of select diaspora organizations abroad; 2) transnational practices; 3) potential for contributions to Iraq, and; 4) perceptions of return. Specific research questions were posed within each theme, as summarized in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Overview of research questions per theme

Thematic Area	Research Questions
Structure of diaspora organizations	What are the different forms of engagement or types of activities Iraqi (or Assyrian/Chaldean and Yazidi) diaspora organizations pursue, both in Iraq and in the countries of residence?
Transnational practices	What are the specific external or internal factors that foster or limit the transnational engagement of minority communities in the diaspora?
Potential for contributions to Iraq	What is the level of interest and willingness to engage structurally with Iraq, particularly in reconciliation and development initiatives?
Perceptions on return	What are the barriers to and opportunities for (temporary) return to Iraq?

The questions were answered through a combination of primary and secondary data. Secondary data included academic and grey literature; descriptive statistics on Iraqi migration flows, and; desk review of organizational registries, websites, and social media platforms hosting diaspora organizations/associations. Primary data was collected through three instruments: 1) semi-structured interviews with members of the Iraqi (or Assyrian/Chaldean/Syriac and Yazidi) diaspora and with experts/key stakeholders involved with minority diaspora communities; 2) focus group discussions (FGDs) with members of Iraqi (-origin) organizations representing the minority diaspora communities, and; 3) online surveys conducted among members of the wider Iraqi diaspora.

2.1. SAMPLE OVERVIEW

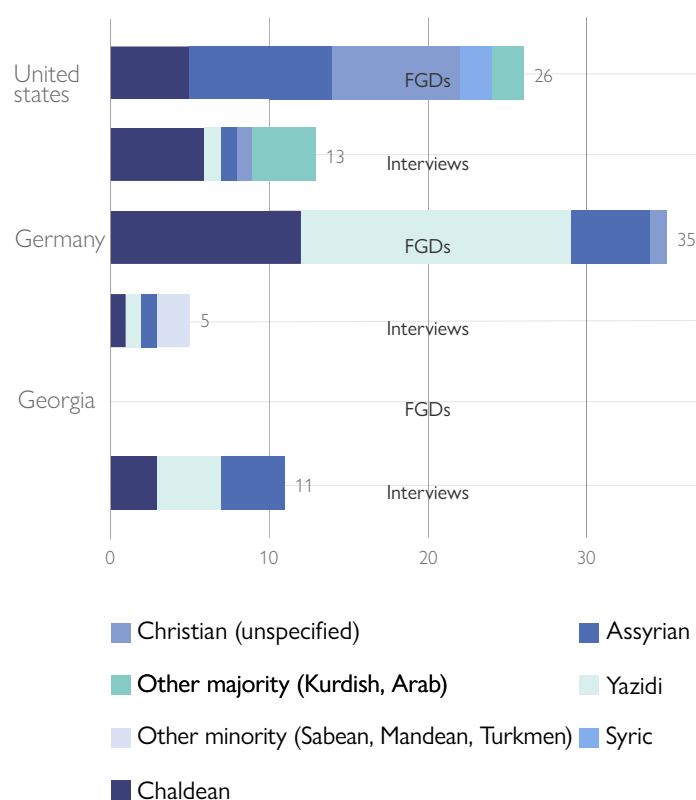
Across the three country case studies, seven focus group discussions including 61 participants and twenty-nine semi-structured interviews were conducted. In addition, 81 online surveys were collected from research participants, but the quality and completeness of the online survey was limited. After cleaning the data, 57 online surveys were completed, with similar numbers collected among diaspora members residing in the United States and Germany. Given the slightly different focus populations in Georgia as well as the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the primary data collection in Georgia only involved semi-structured interviews. Table 2 presents the distribution of the sample group in each case study country.

Table 2. Distribution of sample group, by data collection instrument and country of residence

Data collection/ Country	Germany	United States	Georgia	TOTAL
Focus group discussion	4 (35 participants)	3 (26 participants)	-	7
Interview	5	13	11	29
Online survey	31	26	-	57

The majority of respondents were representatives of diaspora organizations, and a small number identified themselves as individual activists, volunteers, or engaged members of their community. Figure 1 summarizes the ethno-religious composition of the sample group split by data collection tool and country of residence.

Figure 1. Sample group composition by ethno-religious group, by data collection tool and country of residence



2.2. LIMITATIONS AND CONSTRAINTS

This study was subject to several methodological constraints. In the initial design of the research, Turkey had been selected as a third case study. As necessary government permissions to conduct research could not be obtained, Turkey was replaced at a late stage with Georgia, which led to reconsideration of the research design and a delay in the research process. Another limitation was that the research team extensively relied on snowball sampling to gain access to and foster trust among community members, which in turn limited the research team's access to different subgroups and their narratives. A third limitation is that gender balance in the sample could not be achieved, as access to female members of the target minority communities was limited by time constraints and structural barriers. The participation of women was lowest in Germany, therefore,

a female-only focus group discussion was held among Yazidi women in Germany to compensate for this issue. In total, 30 females and 50 males participated in the research. A final limitation related to the low participation rate in the online survey, which is likely to be due to a number of factors, including the length of the survey, sensitivity of the questions, language barriers (for some groups), lack of trust, and reluctance to have information written down and potentially communicated.

Figure 2: Anjam Rasool/IOM Iraq



3. FINDINGS FROM THE CASE STUDIES

This chapter summarizes key findings and insights from the research conducted among members of the Iraqi diaspora community in the United States, Germany, and Georgia. Given the importance of understanding local context when examining the engagement of different ethno-religious minority communities with Iraq, this chapter is divided into sub-sections according to the case study country. Each of the country case studies follows a similar structure, beginning with reflections on the migration and policy context in the country of destination. The forms and structures of assessed diaspora organizations in each country are then described. Forms of engagement, opportunities, and constraints in engaging with Iraq, and the possibilities for engagement in (post-conflict) development are also reviewed. Aspirations and intentions to return to Iraq, either in person or virtually, are then described. As the nature of the communities differs across the three case study countries, some additional insight is offered in each sub-section that is tailored to the country context.

3.1. UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

3.1.1. Migration and policy context in the United States Historical overview of Iraqi migration to the United States

The Iraqi (-origin) populations in the United States consists of multiple ethnoreligious groups who arrived in the US in different eras of mobility. The early waves of emigration in the 1940s and 1950s included the socioeconomic elite migrating for education purposes.¹ Later waves were characterized by family reunification, small numbers of labor migrants, and refugees escaping internal and international conflicts. Recent migration waves have been characterized by asylum movements, with more than 160,000 Iraqi refugees and special immigrant visa holders were admitted to the United States between 2007 and 2020², with the largest number of Iraqis arriving between 2010 and 2015.³ The number of new arrivals declined in 2017 upon the suspension of the refugee admission program. The 2018 US Census estimated that there were 237,422 Iraqi-born residents in the United States, which does not include US-born people of Iraqi descent.⁴

Ethno-religious composition of Iraqi communities in the United States

Multiple ethnic and religious minority Iraqi groups reside in the US, including a large population of Iraqi (-origin) Christians and to a lesser extent, Yazidi and Sabeen-Mandaeans.⁵ Of the Iraqi Christian populations residing in the US, the majority are Chaldean Catholics, followed by Assyrians and Armenians.⁶ The Chaldean/Assyrian/Syriac community in the United States includes long-established communities of Chaldeans and Assyrians who fled the Middle East in the early twentieth century due to persistent waves of violence against Christian groups in the southern region of modern-day Turkey and northern Iraq.⁷ More recent waves of ethno-religious minorities from Iraq included 5,000 Chaldeans who entered the US in the wake of the first Gulf War in 1991⁸, and a further 12,000 Chaldeans were resettled to the US by the end of 2008⁹ after the US-led invasion of Iraq. There is no available data on the size of contemporary waves of migration among Assyrian and Syriac Iraqis, but according to the 2018 US population census, there were roughly 120,000 individuals indicating Assyrian/Chaldean/Syriac ancestry and 125,000 Arabs with Iraqi origin residing throughout the United States (See Table 3). No counts exist on the geographic origin of Assyrian/Chaldean/Syriac groups, but the majority of Chaldeans in the US originate from modern-day Iraq. The Chaldean/Assyrian/Syriac communities are settled by and large in the states of Michigan, California and Illinois.

Table 3. Persons of descent from ethno-religious communities connected to Iraq residing in the US¹⁰

Reported ancestry	2000	2018
Assyrian/Chaldean/Syriac ancestry	82,355	119,283
Armenian ancestry	385,488	464,049
Arab - Iraqi ancestry	-	125,727

1. Walt Vanderbush. *The Iraqi Diaspora and the US Invasion of Iraq*. (New York: NYU Press, 2014).

2. Department of State Bureau of Population, Refugee and Migration (BPRM). Admissions & Arrivals, 2020 Retrieved from: <https://www.wrapsnet.org/admissions-and-arrivals/>

3. United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), Population Division. *International Migrant Stock*, 2019.

4. United States Census Bureau, Ancestry Data, 2018. Retrieved from: <https://www.census.gov/topics/population/ancestry/data.html>

5. Dave van Zoonen & Khogir Wirya, "The Yazidis Perceptions of Reconciliation and Conflict", Middle East Research Institute, 2017.

6. Yasmeen Hanoosh, *The Chaldeans: Politics and Identity in Iraq and the American diaspora* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2019)

7. Yasmeen Hanoosh, *The Politics of Minority: Chaldeans between Iraq and America*, (The University of Michigan, 2008).

8. Ibid.

9. Ibid.

10. United States Census Bureau. 2018 US Census Ancestry Data. Retrieved from: <https://www.census.gov/topics/population/ancestry/data.html>

Exact numbers of Yazidis living in the United States are difficult to establish given the absence of the Yazidi ethnic category in official data sources, but various unofficial sources indicate a population between 2,500 and 4,100.^{11 12} Yazidis arrived with three migration waves. The first wave included 200 people who fled to the US in 1990 following the Iran-Iraq war, and the second occurred between 2008 and 2014 after al-Qaeda attacked two Yazidi villages in the south of Sinjar mountain in 2007 and around 1300 Yazidis were subsequently resettled to the US. The final wave occurred after the IS attack in 2014, when an estimated 1000 Yazidis were resettled to the US.¹³ The largest Yazidi community in the US can be found in Lincoln, Nebraska.^{14 15}

3.1.2. Communications and connections with the homeland and sense of belonging

The extent to which Iraqi diaspora identify with the social, economic, or political processes in Iraq plays an important role in shaping engagement in transnational activities. Understanding the conditions under which the sense of belonging to the homeland can transform into practical and instrumental linkages can shed light on the dynamic relation between identity, sense of belonging, and diaspora mobilization.

Among many US-based diaspora members, ethnic and religious identity played a crucial role in identity and fostering solidarity networks. During interviews and focus groups, participants described how collective traumas of the past, related to ethnic and/or religious identity, function as a unifying force for the uprooted community. Solidarity in the face of these traumas acted as a coping mechanism through which the experiences of the past are tackled.

First-generation migrants often expressed high levels of connectedness and a powerful emotional bonding with Iraq as a homeland. However, the “homeland” is imagined and defined differently by different members of the diaspora, which is likely shaped by political ideologies, ethnic and confessional affiliation, and gender, among other factors. For example, some Assyrian respondents referred to Iraq as Beth Nahrain, the Syriac name for Mesopotamia, a territory that encompasses almost all of present-day Iraq in addition to some parts of Turkey, Iran, and Syria. The claim to originate from Mesopotamia may allow Assyrians to distance themselves from modern day Iraq and its political apparatus¹⁶ while, at the same time, implying the rights of indigenous peoples to the land they traditionally inhabit.

Among respondents, the shifting social and political landscape in Iraq and in the country of residence also affected what it means to be “Iraqi”. For example, for some respondents the attacks of 11 September 2001 encouraged the Christian community to disassociate themselves from the wider Iraqi community due to fears that they would be associated with increasing negative stereotypes of Arabs and Muslims in the United States. In the accounts of some respondents, the desire to separate themselves from Muslims was further amplified by their communal memory of persecution by Muslims in Iraq, with some respondents conceptualizing themselves as closer to the Christian West than to their countrymen of other religions.

Identification with Iraq and with the wider Iraqi community also seemed to be shaped by the 2019 Iraqi protests, which strengthened ties between the diaspora in San Diego and Iraq by fostering a sense of belonging and collective identity that extended beyond their own communities. As a Chaldean male respondent, who is highly engaged with Iraq, stated:

“To be honest with you, since we came here we are Chaldean and we don't want us to be named Iraqi till last October [2019]... Because these young people, they really made us feel like we're proud to be Iraqi again, [...] They're more secular. They hate religion. That's a good thing about it...We want to separate religion from the government.” (Interview participant, Male)

Although many first-generation respondents felt emotional connection to the homeland, the individual, practical linkages were limited. Many respondents had few if any family members left behind in Iraq, as the last members arrived after the IS invasion in 2014. While some respondents had returned to Iraq temporarily in the past, many had never returned since their arrival to the United States. The majority of first-generation migrants follow the news through social media on a daily or weekly basis as well as through friends back home.

The sense of belonging to the country of origin in (post-) conflict settings can be complicated for many minority groups, for whom the notion of belonging is continuously contested both before and after migration. However, strong ethnic group consciousness coupled with the ancient history of Assyrian/Chaldean/Syriac and Yazidi peoples in the territory of modern-day Iraq appeared as strong drivers of the sense of belonging—albeit more to each other as a community rather than as Iraqis.

11. Presentation by Faeza Osso and Haydar Murad, “Who are the Yazidi?” United Yazidi Community of America, n.d. Accessed via: <https://lincoln.ne.gov/city/health/BOH/I706/Att71.pdf>

12. Joshua Project, Yazidis in the United States, Retrieved from: https://joshuaproject.net/people_groups/20455/US

13. Presentation by Faeza Osso and Haydar Murad, “Who are the Yazidi?”

14. Ibid.

15. Reema Khrais, “Yazidis find a home in Lincoln, Nebraska,” Marketplace. 26 September 2017. Retrieved from: <https://www.marketplace.org/26/09/2017/yazidis-find-home-lincoln-nebraska/>

16. Madawi Al-Rasheed, “The myth of return: Iraqi Arab and Assyrian refugees in London,” *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 1994) (3-2)7), Pages 219–199.

3.1.3. Structure of diaspora organizations and forms of engagement

Based on the mapping exercise, 149 explicitly Iraqi diaspora organizations were identified in the United States. Figure 2 shows the distribution of Iraqi organizations based on ethno-religious background and Figure 3 presents an overview of the main fields of engagement. Due to its relevance for this study, any organization with Assyrian/Chaldean/Syriac focus was included in the mapping.

Figure 2. Iraqi diaspora organizations in the United States, split by ethnoreligious group

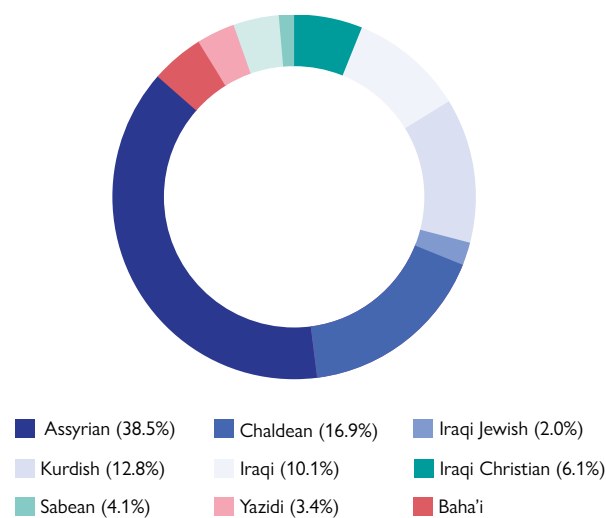
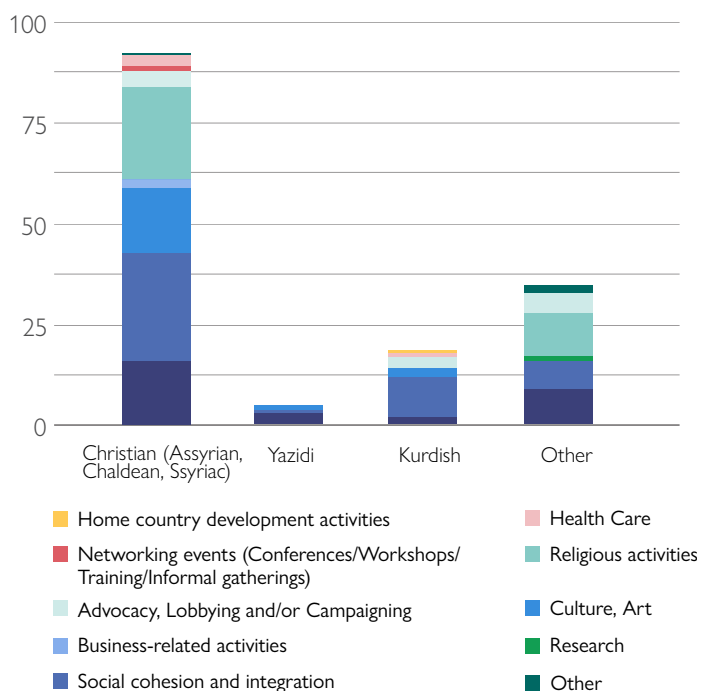


Figure 3. Iraqi diaspora organizations in the United States, split by main field of engagement and ethnoreligious group



The Iraqi diaspora organizations (DOs) included in the FGD/interview sample were diverse in terms of motives for engaging with Iraq, their main focus activities, sources of funding, and geographical orientation. The sample included associations, networks, religious institutions, political parties, and other community structures organized or led by Iraqi(-origin) individuals. Half of the 18 DOs pursued some sort of engagement with Iraq and half offered activities that were predominantly geared towards their respective communities in the US. The DOs can be divided into four groups based on their motives of engagement, their main focus, and sources of funding, which is summarized in Table 4.

Table 4. Overview of types of organizations in the USA, level of implementation and level of cross-community cooperation

Type of organization	Trans-national	National	Local	Cross-community cooperation
Charity-based groups and religious institutions	+	+	+	-
Service-based organizations	-	-	+	+
Political and advocacy groups	+	+	-	-
Social and cultural organizations	+	-	+	+

The first group of DOs in the US consisted of **charity groups and religious institutions** (six organizations) focused on provision of humanitarian aid to Iraqi Christians inside and outside Iraq, including to refugees in neighboring countries to Iraq and in the US. In this category, four organizations were engaged in transnational activities directed toward Iraq, while the other two organizations mainly supported their respective communities in the country of residence. Most of their budget is derived from donations of the Christian community in San Diego and all of them are, to varying degrees, affiliated with the church of their respective communities. These organizations mainly serve as an intermediary between affluent and philanthropic members of the Iraqi Christian communities in diaspora and those in need, both inside and outside Iraq. One of the organizations included in the sample represented the Iraqi council of a global charity network that is tied to the Catholic Church and that operates through local councils around the world. The organization is engaged in country of origin development initiatives. Activities focused on Iraq include support initiatives, such as a project that matches a Christian family in need inside Iraq with a diaspora philanthropist who agrees to provide a monthly allowance of a hundred dollars on a regular basis.

In-kind donations sent by the same organization included shoes and school supplies for children, which were sent to Iraq with planes departing from the US military base, which demonstrates cooperation between non-profit organizations and local government. A hometown association is also included in this category, which addresses the specific needs of the community members originating from one specific district in Ninewa plains. The beneficiaries of other charity-based DOs are predominantly composed of Iraqi Christians in Iraq and in the US.

A second group consists of [service-based organizations \(five organizations\)](#) that primarily support the integration of new arrivals and facilitate their access to social services. The forms of assistance tailored to refugees include legal and educational counseling, health services, psychosocial counseling for victims of domestic violence, cultural orientation training to refugees and public officers dealing with the refugees, leadership and civic engagement training, and vocational training. Some of the organizations represent the interests of refugees or lobby for increasing refugee admissions to San Diego in city councils. The DOs in this category included three organizations with mixed ethno-religious composition in their membership or that catered their activities to the wider group of refugees and immigrants regardless of ethnic and/or religious background. The organizations in this group are mainly funded through grants from governmental agencies and private foundations, however, some of them are concerned about the diminishing funding opportunities for programs benefiting refugees.

[Political organizations and advocacy and human rights groups \(four organizations\)](#) constitute the third category of diaspora organization in the sample group. Within this group is a political party representing the interests of Assyrian, Chaldean and Syriac peoples worldwide, with transnational representation. The organization organizes annual trips to Iraq to introduce second-generation Assyrian/Chaldean/Syriac youth to their ancestral homeland in relatively safe regions of the KRNI. A second organization in this group mainly organizes nation-wide events that bring together Assyrian diaspora groups in the US and promotes Assyrian culture. Another advocacy group, which has mixed ethno-religious membership, aims to establish unity among the diverse groups and communities of Iraq and to support the struggle for a democratic Iraq and freedom through means of campaigns, awareness raising events, and demonstrations. In cooperation with some charity groups and networks, they also collected funds to provide financial assistance to the groups leading the 2019 anti-government protests in Iraq. The fourth organization in this category is an international human rights organization, the only Yazidi organization represented in the sample group, which advocates for the international recognition of the Yazidi genocide in 2014 and provides humanitarian assistance and services to IDPs inside the KRNI. The organizations in this category often have high visibility on the national

and/or transnational level, and their activities often targeted the wider Iraqi diaspora or specific ethno-religious groups. Except for the Yazidi organization, the organizations do not have significant physical presence on the local level.

The last group includes [social and cultural organizations \(three organizations\)](#), which organize cultural festivals (sometimes with the dual purpose of promoting culture and fundraising), offering Aramaic/Arabic language courses, and issuing periodic magazines and newspapers that promote cultural and artistic productions among Iraqis in general and among specific ethno-religious communities. A media organization with more than 40,000 social media followers regularly broadcasts internet-based programs on different issues, including fraud, citizenship issues, health-related topics, and political issues concerning Iraq. Such organizations heavily rely on membership fees, self-funding and donations. The DOs in this category included an organization with members from different religious backgrounds, representing one of the few examples of cross-community cooperation.

Figure 3: Yad Bayad/IOM Iraq



The majority of organizations in the sample group had low or moderate online activity. Organizations with youth-centered programs, advocacy groups, and to a lesser extent, charity activities, used social media (namely Facebook) to promote their activities, attract participation to fundraising events, cultural festivals and other social gatherings, and share news and updates. Despite the limited use of the internet to facilitate their activities, many of the organizations emphasized the benefits of the internet as an essential intermediary between the homeland and the transnational communities elsewhere. The organizations seemed to use social media more intensely after the 2019 protests and perceived it as a tool to demonstrate solidarity with the protesters in Iraq.

The next section summarizes the challenges and opportunities facing the diaspora organizations in their engagement efforts, reflecting specifically on the ecosystems in which organizations are embedded in the US.

3.1.4. Challenges and Opportunities Facing Diaspora organizations

The ability of diaspora members to mobilize and the patterns of their mobilization in the country of residence depends on a favorable environment that provides incentives for people to undertake or sustain collective action. Among the key challenges faced by the respondents were low participation and lack of interest in diasporic activities especially among youth, limited funding opportunities, limited cooperation among the DOs, high levels of bureaucracy and complex regulations to set up a non-profit and sustain activities and, to a lesser extent, negative host community attitudes. In contrast, the democratic and multicultural environment in the United States was generally praised for allowing space for ethnic expression and civic and political engagement.

Among respondents, the motivation to engage in diasporic activities was primarily found among highly integrated, higher-status members of the respective communities and among individuals with secure legal status and longer periods of residence in the US. The participation of 'newcomers' in diaspora organizations seemed limited. Respondents also indicated challenges in incentivizing the participation of young people despite their desire to increase youth engagement to ensure the sustainability of associations.

Perhaps the most present challenge for DOs was the lack of funding opportunities. Many organizations wanted more financial security to broaden their scope of activities and to ensure sustainability of their efforts. Some DOs (e.g., service-based organizations, political organizations, advocacy groups), obtain grants through donor agencies or public funding schemes. In contrast, social and cultural organizations and charity groups generally rely on membership fees and donations. Some participants felt that they had been refused grants due to concerns that their activities were linked to terrorist activities and therefore, with most funding going to large-scale organizations that are perceived as less risky

by donor agencies. Furthermore, availability of funding varies by sector; for example, the decrease in funding of refugee programs in recent years has led to a reduction in grassroots organizations supporting refugees.

Other organizations had been able to build more sustainable and long-term funding schemes, yet the nature of the funding and its 'earmarking' for particular types of activities reduced the flexibility in developing tailored programming. The Yazidi organization included in the case study, which runs large-scale projects inside Iraq, established long-term partnerships with international donors and had a consistent flow of funding for humanitarian assistance and social cohesion programs inside Iraq. The organization could not easily obtain funds for their efforts in fields of advocacy and justice, however. Despite funding challenges, the organization generally felt supported in the political context of the US, as they felt the Yazidi diaspora still have leverage to have the genocide recognized, which is a precondition for the later development of justice and accountability measures.

A major concern across discussions was the lack of cooperation among Iraqi DOs, which respondents identified as hampering their ability to have a strong and unified voice and as a barrier to accessing funding opportunities tailored for networks and coalitions of diaspora organizations. Ideological differences related to confessional and religious differences, lack of a culture of cooperation, and high levels of mistrust seemed to diminish prospects of cooperation. Some respondents expressed that the divisions among different groups became more distinct in the diaspora, while others perceived it as an extension of the fragmentation inside Iraq. The lack of cooperation between organizations, in particular Muslim and Christian organizations in the diaspora, is also perceived as diminishing chances to access funding opportunities from the Arab world:

"Now there is money and financial support, who receives it? The Somalis take the aid from the Arabs. They give it to the Somalis because the Iraqi community and their organizations are not united in this aspect. [Donor organization] want this [name of Assyrian organization] and [name of Arab organization] to unite, [they say] if you unite we will give you financial support instead of giving it to the Somalis (FGD Participant, Male)"

According to some, US regulations for establishing a non-profit organization were complicated and time-consuming, requiring some organization to hire specialists to handle the legal issues. The procedures to establish or run a non-profit seemed to be a challenge, but the fact that the regulations apply equally to everyone without discrimination was regarded positively. In this regard, many respondents emphasized the freedoms and opportunities offered to them in the US, as well as the multicultural landscape that allows diaspora groups to mobilize in any desired thematic area and to implement activities without fear.

Host community attitudes towards newcomers were seen in most cases as positive, but some actors, specifically those working in service-based organizations and charity groups that support refugees, expressed finding it difficult to mitigate the prejudices of public officials while at the same time supporting refugees, especially during the initial years that followed the first refugee arrivals.

The discussions with diaspora actors revealed a number of perceived challenges related to the Iraqi context that deter DOs from pursuing engagement with Iraq. The perception of DOs towards the Iraqi government is characterized by widespread mistrust and avoidance, which is informed by a combination of factors related to: 1) weak governance (e.g., corruption, lack of stability, safety), and; 2) the troubled relationship between the Iraqi government and the diaspora. Again underscoring the widespread distrust in the state, the 2019 anti-government protests were generally perceived as an opportunity to pursue better engagement with Iraq.

Many respondents held reservations about transferring financial resources to Iraq due to perceptions of rampant corruption in Iraq, with some fearing that financial support for development could end up in the hands of corrupt officials. In addition, safety and security concerns were central in discussions regarding returning to Iraq to lend their skills and labor. These concerns are captured in the quote from a Chaldean woman:

"We cannot do it, we are not there to help when we lose everything. We cannot afford to lose not only money, but lives. So if there is no security, there is no street, there is no real life, there is no real job, how do you convince investors to go and invest? To invest in what? When there is no government. It's all fake. Government is there to steal. Not to build. It's so hurtful."
(Interview participant, Female)

Other informants identified corruption not only on governmental level but also among political organizations and some civil society organizations that are affiliated with the government. A common feeling was that the Iraqi government is not genuinely interested in cooperation with Iraqi organizations inside or outside Iraq but only does so with certain groups to obtain funding from international organizations.

The second group of challenges was related to respondents' perception of being in a troubled relationship with the Iraqi government institutions, which was manifested in feelings of being marginalized and criminalized. Such marginalization arose from being members of religious minority communities and as members of the diaspora who escaped to live an "easy" life. The relationship between the Iraqi consulates and embassies, and some diaspora members have reinforced these negative perceptions. For example, a respondent who attended a cultural event organized

by the Iraqi consulate in the USA, expressed a feeling of being "otherized" as an Iraqi Chaldean as her ethnic background was not displayed as part of the Iraqi civilizations in an exhibition. Another source of marginalization related to highly-educated and skilled individuals who are perceived as being "infiltrated" with Western values or potential "spies". The below quote from a female respondent, who travels back and forth between Iraq and the United States, outlined the multi-layered nature of the discrimination she faced when she visited a government office during one of her trips to Iraq:

"I am Christian, I have a PhD, I came to Iraq to the Ministry of Higher Education... I want to extract a certificate. They said 'you don't wear a hijab, you are a Christian coming from the US, what are you doing here? Go back to your country.' They have been losing my files for two years. Those who are now in the Square are the new generation, the youth, they are not into sectarianism, they search for the situation that was in the fifties and sixties, when we were living in safety."
(FGD participant, Female)

The discussions on discrimination also revealed a heightened interest of diaspora actors in the social and political processes in Iraq as a result of the civil unrest and anti-government protests that started in October 2019 in Iraq. As the above comment captures, the protests emerged as an important central rallying point in the broader community and prompted collective mobilization to show solidarity with the protesters, both financially and through advocacy.

3.1.5. Resource mobilization and (post-)conflict development initiatives

On the individual and household level, sending remittances to support extended family members or friends in Iraq is common, yet the practice was limited among the respondents from the 'old' diaspora who came to the United States as early as the 1970s and the 1980s. Many had few if any family members left in Iraq, therefore, the majority did not remit money to individuals or households in Iraq.

On the community level, respondents mentioned several philanthropic activities targeted at bigger groups in Iraq. For example, regular donations made through churches were used to support relief efforts in Iraq and in neighboring countries. Other diaspora organizations collected funds to support health facilities in the Iraqi Kurdistan region, to provide relief for the victims of the IS violence in 2014, to reconstruct or renovate buildings and cemeteries destroyed by IS in specific communities in the Ninewa Plains, and, more recently, to support the 2019 protests and show solidarity with the protesters in Tahrir Square.

Churches both in Iraq (including in Iraqi Kurdistan) and in the diaspora appeared to be an important vehicle for Iraqi Chaldeans and Assyrians' philanthropic activities. For example, a global faith-based network that involves a Chaldean branch initiated a project that raises funds from members of the community in San Diego to provide monthly income to displaced families in Iraq, and the church in Iraq was responsible for identifying intended beneficiaries inside Iraq. Another Assyrian church-based charity organization collected donations from the community and channeled them every three months to the diocese, who then transferred the collections received from the broader Assyrian diaspora in the United States, Canada, Australia and Europe to churches inside Iraq or in the neighboring countries to provide relief for IDPs and refugees. Some of the fundraising events or initiatives are organized on the local level in San Diego, and some others are initiated on a wider geographic scale, demonstrating the transnational characteristic of diaspora actors and the important transnational and local presence of ethnic churches. Given the widespread distrust of institutions in Iraq, the church seemed to provide a rare, trusted institutional structure for diaspora entrepreneurs, offering a bridge between the homeland and the diaspora.

The diaspora leaders in the sample group carry a strong desire to support their communities in the homeland, but large-scale collective mobilization mainly occurs as a reaction to critical events or deteriorating conditions inside Iraq. The humanitarian crisis triggered by IS in 2014 and the 2019 protests, in particular, made it possible to find a common ground for action and facilitated the generation of funding and support from the broader community in San Diego. The decision to mobilize collectively did not appear to be part of a conscious collaboration strategy, however.

Many diaspora leaders are informed about the efforts of USAID in supporting religious and ethnic minority communities in Northern Iraq, yet only one respondent, a Chaldean businessman representing a nation-wide network of Iraqis, mentioned engaging in such initiatives. He indicated that his organization participated in a matching program to support small businesses inside Iraq by connecting affluent diaspora members with potential entrepreneurs who want to initiate businesses inside Iraq. For him, the challenging part of the project is having to travel back to Iraq, which he hadn't done since he left forty years ago. Another active member of the diaspora with strong emotional connections to Iraq articulated a somewhat similar reservation. For her, it would not be fair to visit Iraq without seeing her place of origin, Baghdad:

"North is a little bit easy for the people to go. They go visit and come back. but me, I don't like to go just North. I want to go to Baghdad. My loyalty is Baghdad, I'm born there. I love to see the North, but I want to see Baghdad first."
(Interview participant, Female)

Regarding the prospects of business investments in Iraq, other respondents stressed the challenges in the origin country and the difficulty in rationalizing channeling resources to a country from

which they had to escape, leaving everything, including their businesses, behind. The high level of corruption and lack of stability and safety inside Iraq were repeatedly quoted as major sources of frustration and obstacles to more structural economic engagement.

3.1.6. Perspectives of (temporary/virtual) return

In the accounts of many informants, personal considerations for return are informed both by negative conditions ("pushes") from Iraq but also by the favorable conditions in the United States ("pulls"), which are usually discussed in contrast. The respondents often used the phrase "if only" to emphasize the drastic changes that need to occur in the country of origin in order for them to consider (temporary) return. The most commonly articulated preconditions to return were: (1) the restoration of stability and safety, (2) the adoption of a more democratic system that treats citizens equally and (3) the elimination of corruption. Additionally, the altered ethnic composition in the places of origin and lacking opportunities for human development also negatively influenced desires to return. Security and the achieved standard of life in the US also strongly disincentivized return: the rootedness of many respondents in the United States and the unwillingness to give up or disrupt what they built over the years (e.g., a career, established family, community life) did not make return appealing. In general, the key factors influencing the decision to return seemed largely beyond the scope of direct policy interventions.

In general, the feeling of being a "second-class" citizen in Iraq was omnipresent in the ponderings over return. For example, a respondent reflecting on the status of Assyrians as a peripheral minority group in Iraq, and an immigrant group in the United States, argued that it is harder to come to terms with discrimination in one's homeland than in a host country: "We know we are immigrants here. Unlike there, it's your country (FGD Participant, Male)." In similar lines, another respondent underlined the institutionalized discrimination as a main source of frustration and a reason not to return:

"When the Iraqi government respects me and considers me as a human being then I return (FGD Participant, Male)."

Temporary return

The discussions on transfer of knowledge and skills through temporary return programs revealed that the respondents are highly conscious of the potential of the diaspora as a key resource for the development of Iraq, but they are skeptical about their personal chances of leading a decent and safe life in Iraq if they were to return. In the sample group, two respondents have returned to Iraq on a temporary basis and participated in activities in their fields of work. Having returned to Iraq with a government-run program that promoted the return of political refugees after the fall of Saddam, one of the respondents explained that the government failed to provide what has been promised in terms of compensation and property.

There was a common feeling that educated and high-skilled people are viewed as troublesome subjects by the Iraqi government or stigmatized as “spies” or “traitors” especially if one is coming from the United States, which some perceived as imposing security risks. Additionally, many had doubts about whether they would be (re-)accepted within the local community, as members of the diaspora may be seen as privileged people who escaped the political or economic pressures to live an “easy” life. Additionally, tensions arose due to cultural conflict and problems of communication with local colleagues, as indicated by a female participant, who returned for a temporary assignment to Iraq:

“The University of Baghdad, which is the most prestigious university in Iraq, I used to teach professors and give education courses. He said to me: ‘I will never call you a doctor until you equvalate your degree here, I will call you madam.’ This is a psychological war, ‘why do you live abroad? What brings you here? Why did you come back?’ This is the case now on the level of Iraq as a whole, not only in Baghdad.” (FGD Participant, Female)

The frustrating personal experiences or the stories that circulate about return experiences seemed to discourage diaspora members from partaking in a temporary return initiative. One of the respondents gave the example of her partner who returned to Baghdad to realize his dream of installing lights on the streets of Baghdad but quickly returned after witnessing a violent attack:

“My husband, his dream was to put lights in every street of Baghdad, that was his dream, to light Baghdad... When he went there, worked there as a contractor, first, his life was in danger. Second, he was shocked, after they built a huge, beautiful electric plant, an engineer bombed himself inside that plant. [...] That kind of ideology, we couldn't understand. We thought we can build the country, right? This is our dream...” (Interview participant, Female)

Another recurring theme was the high level of corruption in various sectors that may prevent people from returning for professional purpose, owing to a fear that engaging in an assignment that turns out to be corrupt may have consequences for their professional careers in the US, such as losing their work licenses.

Structural problems related to conflicting political and social practices and norms led to disappointment among the previous returnees interviewed in this project, which created a sense of alienation from Iraq. The majority of the respondents formed opinions about return based on return experiences of others, leading to hesitation to participate in skills transfer programs, particularly those that require direct engagement with the Iraqi government institutions. Trust is a key element for diaspora engagement, and the deep-seated disruption of trust between the diaspora and both Iraqi authorities and the international community poses significant challenges.

3.1.7. Prospects of collaboration and engagement in reconciliation initiatives

Understanding the prospects for collaboration and engagement in reconciliation initiatives would require an awareness of the

fragmentations that exist within the Iraqi diaspora. The Iraqi diaspora is fragmented along various lines including but not limited to ethno-religious identification, cause of migration, and political ideologies.

Christians in Iraq belong to at least fourteen officially-recognized denominations, including the Chaldeans (an eastern sect of the Catholic Church), Assyrians (Church of the East), Syriacs (Eastern Orthodox), Armenian Catholics, and Armenian Orthodox.¹⁷ The discussions with Christian diaspora actors revealed that the confessional differences become a source of fragmentation within the Iraqi Christian diaspora groups, between Chaldeans and Assyrians in particular. Many Assyrians were critical of the divisions imposed upon them by the church and emphasized the significance of unity among the groups who fit under the ethnic umbrella of Assyrians. Chaldeans in the sample group were also highly conscious of the shared language, ancient lineage, and cultural symbols between Assyrians and Chaldeans, but their allegiance with the Chaldean Catholic church seemed more central in their narratives.

The different trajectories of migration and displacement emerged as another core factor that divides the Iraqi Christian groups. Respondents suggest a disconnect between the “old diaspora” and the refugees who came to the United States after 2003. Iraqi oldcomers often framed their generation as highly educated and well-integrated into the host society, whereas the so-called ‘newcomers’ were perceived to occupy lower socio-economic strata. While charity-based organizations established by the members of old diaspora support newcomers, the humanitarian and integration support provided to newcomers has not been accompanied by increased social interactions. Churches appear to be one of the few places where members of the new and old diaspora come together, which remain accessible despite the perceived socio-economic gap between the two groups.

Inter-group engagement across religious communities may be challenged by a transferal of the conflict from Iraq to the US, which threatens the peacebuilding potential of collaborative actions. Some segments of the diaspora, namely the Assyrian groups, are highly mobilized in the political domain, and their narratives reflected an ongoing sense of discrimination and mistrust that would prevent them from interacting with Muslim groups. In contrast, others argued that they left the conflict back home and that all Iraqis outside of Iraq have improved their relations. Differences in opinions about the degree of solidarity within the wider Iraqi diaspora are likely to be shaped by organizational goals and missions, political ideologies, and lived experiences. Although many organizations work either fully independently or collaborate with organizations led by the same ethno-religious group, there are examples of cooperation among diaspora leaders from different religious backgrounds. When asked about potential future collaboration opportunities, many organizations showed willingness to work together and cooperate with any Iraqi group based in either the US or Iraq given the condition of mutual respect and equality.

17. Saad Salloom, “Barriers to return for ethno-religious minorities in Iraq. Identity Politics and Political Patronage Among Yazidi and Christian Communities from Ninewa Governorate,” IOM Iraq, January 2020.

3.2. GERMANY

The research conducted in Germany focused on diaspora members and organizations from the Chaldean, Yazidi, and Assyrian communities. While both focus groups and expert interviews included representatives from other minority groups such as the Sabeen Mandeian and Turkmen communities, the case study placed specific emphasis on understanding the diaspora engagement behaviors among the Yazidis, Chaldeans, and Assyrians. Given the limited inclusion of Yazidis in the US context, the research in Germany provided insight into how this distinct diaspora regarded future engagement with Iraq.

3.2.1. Migration and policy context in Germany

Historical overview of Iraqi migration to Germany

Germany has been one of the major destination countries for Iraqi migrants since the mid-20th century, with early waves of Iraqi migration to Germany dating to the mid-1960s with the movement of Iraqi students to the German Democratic Republic (GDR) for education or political refuge.¹⁸ During periods of conflict from the 1980s and onwards, many Iraqis fled the country which allowed them to establish social networks in Europe and North America.¹⁹ The preexisting migration networks made Germany one of the most popular destination countries among Iraqi migrants. The social and communal networks established by Iraqis were not only based on Iraqi nationality, but also on ethnic or ethnoreligious membership. Iraqi Kurds, for example, often relied on existing migration networks established by Kurds from Turkey who arrived in Germany in earlier decades.²⁰ Between 1996 and 2002, Germany became the top receiving country of Iraqi asylum-seekers worldwide, with more than 80,000 applicants.²¹ The numbers continued to increase in the 2000s, with a dramatic increase occurring in 2015.²²

Ethno-religious composition of Iraqi communities in Germany

The Iraqi population in Germany is characterized by its religious, ethnic, and political heterogeneity. The population consists of a

large Sunni and Shi'a Iraqi community followed by ethnic and/or religious minority groups in Iraq such as Yazidi, Sabeen Mandeian, Assyrian, Turkmen, and Chaldean communities. There are no official statistics on the population of Iraqi ethno-religious groups in Germany, however, some media outlets and academic studies provide estimates for some of these communities in different years. According to one study²³, Germany hosted approximately 100,000 individuals of Assyrian/Syriac ancestry originating from Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria. Another study²⁴ indicates some 2,500 Iraqi Christians were living in Germany in 2010. Official sources do not provide information on the geographic distribution of Iraqi minority groups in Germany, but previous studies show that Chaldean and Assyrian communities can be found in Essen (North Rhein-Westphalia), Stuttgart (Baden Wuerttemberg) and Munich (Bavaria).²⁵

The largest single Yazidi diaspora worldwide can be found in Germany. By mid-2016, it was estimated that around 120,000 Yazidis had sought refuge in Germany since 2014²⁶, with the total Yazidi population in Germany thought to include roughly 140,000 people^{27 28}. There are established Yazidi communities who migrated to Germany in the early 1990s and settled in Lower Saxony and North Rhine-Westphalia, mainly concentrated in the cities of Oldenburg, Hanover, Bielefeld, and Cell.²⁹

Figure 4: Yad Bayad/IOM Iraq



18. Menderes Candan, "The Iraqi Diaspora in Germany Structure, Organisation, Activities and Engagement for Development." Centre for International Migration and Development, 2017.

19. Ibrahim Sirkeci, "War in Iraq: Environment of Insecurity and International Migration," *International Migration*. 214 – 197 (2005) .43.

20. Ahmet İçduygu and Sule Toktas, "How do smuggling and trafficking operate via irregular border crossings in the Middle East? Evidence from fieldwork in Turkey," *International migration*, 54-25 ,(2002) (6)40.

21. Ibrahim Sirkeci, "Iraqi International Migration: Potentials for the Postwar Period," *Population Review*. 49-37 ,(2004) .43.

22. United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) Population Division. *International Migrant Stock 2019*.

23. Naures Atto, *Hostages in the homeland, orphans in the diaspora : identity discourses among the Assyrian/Syriac elites in the European diaspora*, (Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2011)

24. Martina Schwager, "Irakische Christen finden ein neues Leben in Deutschland," 27 May 2010. Retrieved from: <https://www.evangelisch.de/inhalte/2010-05-27/100153/irakische-christen-finden-ein-neues-leben-deutschland>

25. Otmar Oehring, "Christians and Yazidis in Iraq: current situation and prospects." Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung e.V. 2017, Sankt Augustin and Berlin, Germany.

26. Minority Rights Group (MRG). *Iraq: Yazidis*. Minority Rights Group, (2017).

27. Sefik Tagay, et al., "The 2014 Yazidi genocide and its effect on Yazidi diaspora." *The Lancet*, 46-19 (2017) ,390.

28. Saad Salloum, "Barriers to return for ethno-religious minorities in Iraq.

29. Christine Allison, "The Yazidis," *Islamic Studies in Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Religion*,2017.

3.2.2. Communications and connections with the homeland and sense of belonging

The majority of respondents of Yazidi and Christian backgrounds expressed high levels of emotional attachment to the country of origin, characterized by a strong sense of belonging to a people with deep historical roots to the land of Iraq. The historical existence of the indigenous Yazidi and Christian communities who lived for hundreds of years in Iraq manifest itself as an integral component of the diasporans' identity, with that historical experience perceived of as a sufficient reason to maintain attachment to Iraq as a homeland even if one lived for long periods abroad. The strong place and cultural attachment to Iraq is more distinct among respondents who have spent longer periods of time in Iraq and still have family members and friends in the country. However, immigrants' sense of belonging is rarely static and unidimensional, and it is shaped and influenced by a variety of factors. The discussions reflected a growing sense of rootedness in Germany, which did not substitute the belonging to Iraq but rather created a dual sense of belonging to both countries. As expressed by one Christian respondent:

"You can never take away your roots from your life. You have grown up there. [...]. For every human psyche, the place where you have grown up - you can forget a lot, a lot of other places – but this place you will never forget. And the connections which are there, either to your own people, to the Assyrian, to the Kurds or to the Turks, they will always maintain. Therefore, you are always... in one body with two hearts. If something happens in the country, you have grown up at, it touches you. You feel with them. You[feel solidarity] solidarize with them. On the other side, if you ... in the country you have found refuge and peace, found development opportunities, you must be an "un-human", if you cannot identify with this country. And, that is why there are always two, two hearts in one body." (FGD Participant, Male)

The country of origin also represents oppression, discrimination, and unpleasant memories for some respondents, complicating the feeling of belonging and emotional attachment. As expressed by a Yazidi female respondent: "as for myself, I am 25 years old and I haven't seen anything nice in Iraq" (FGD Respondent, Female). For example, recent harsh experiences of Yazidi women under IS captivity inside Iraq have clearly left long-lasting scars on the Yazidi community, particularly among women, which was observed clearly during the female-only focus group held among Yazidi women. The discussion, which included a survivor of the IS attacks, unveiled the depth of trauma experienced by the Yazidi community and the deep divisions between ethno-religious communities the IS attacks fostered. As captured in the below extract of another Yazidi respondent women, the sense of Yazidis' rejection from Iraq reflects not only their experiences of persecution and systematic attacks that threatened the very existence of their communities, but that rejection was solidified by feelings of be-

ing denied, discriminated against, and abandoned by their local communities during the IS attacks. One respondent poignantly summarized her mixed feelings about Iraq the homeland:

"We are not saying that the country is not nice... no! we all love our country but us, as Yazidis, in Iraq they call us infidels. When ISIS came, not only ISIS attacked us, but all Iraq [did]. They would have been able to help, [...] but not a single Iraqi helped. Why? Because they call us infidels" (FGD Participant, Female)

On the individual level, the varying degrees of emotional attachment correspond to different activities that foster a connection to Iraq, which include keeping in touch with friends and family members in Iraq, following the developments in Iraq on social media and satellite TV channels, and participating in organizations. As in the US case study, the anti-government protests that began in October 2019 (referred to as the "October Revolution" among some respondents), inspired new or renewed interest of the diaspora members in the political and social landscape of Iraq, perhaps triggering an increased sense of belonging.

Another commonly-held perspective, particularly among Assyrians but also mentioned by Chaldeans and Yazidis, suggests that the ethnic and religious identifications are inherent, central components of their identities, while a sense of "Iraqiness" is subject to limits. Furthermore, some reflected on how to situate a homeland, arguing that their ancestral communities have inhabited not only Iraq but also parts of other geographies framed today by the borders of different states:

"My homeland is not part of Iraq but Iraq is part of my homeland I would say, because my homeland... Assyrians have been there way before the Iraqi state first, so it's part of it, and I have the Iraqi citizenship so I do identify as Iraqi at some level. [...]. But we don't necessarily relate to only the Iraqi identity, there is the Assyrian identity which is... stateless and borderless. So we also consider Syria and Turkey and Lebanon, those countries are on some level, not as much as Iraq, but on some level, we relate to them as well..." (Interview participant, Female)

The above sentiment--about the existence of an ethno-religious community that extends beyond contemporary political borders--was reflected by many respondents. The sentiment implies strong group consciousness driven by the long native history in the geographic territory that covers parts of present-day Iraq, Iran, Turkey and Syria, which again underscores the complexity of symbolic attachment to Iraq as a contemporary state. At the same time, it seemed that the respondents actively negotiate and reconfigure their identities tied to place, building a dual sense of belonging to Iraq and Germany. Experiences of conflict and communal memories of persecution complicate the feelings of belonging and negatively influence the willingness and readiness to craft tangible connections to Iraq, yet the symbolic value of the homeland remained, albeit imagined and defined differently.

3.2.3. Structure of diaspora organizations and forms of engagement in Germany

Based on the mapping exercise, 87 Iraqi diaspora organizations have been identified in Germany. Figure 6 shows the distribution of Iraqi organizations based on ethno-religious background, and Figure 7 presents an overview of the main fields of engagement identified during the organizational mapping exercise.

Figure 4. Iraqi diaspora organizations in Germany, split by ethnoreligious groups

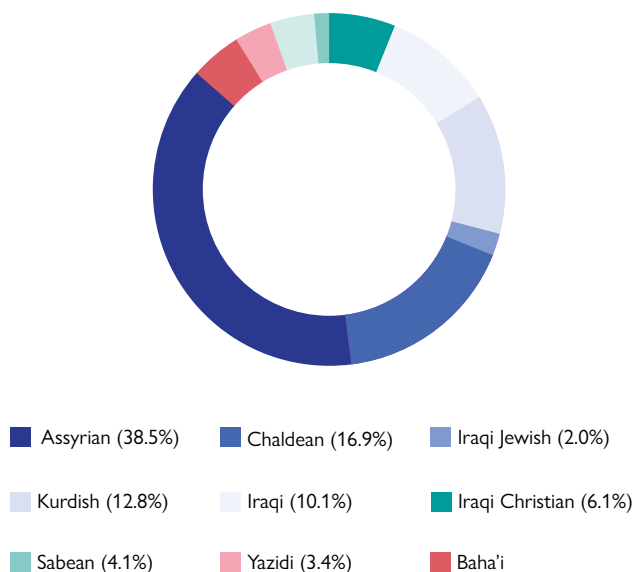
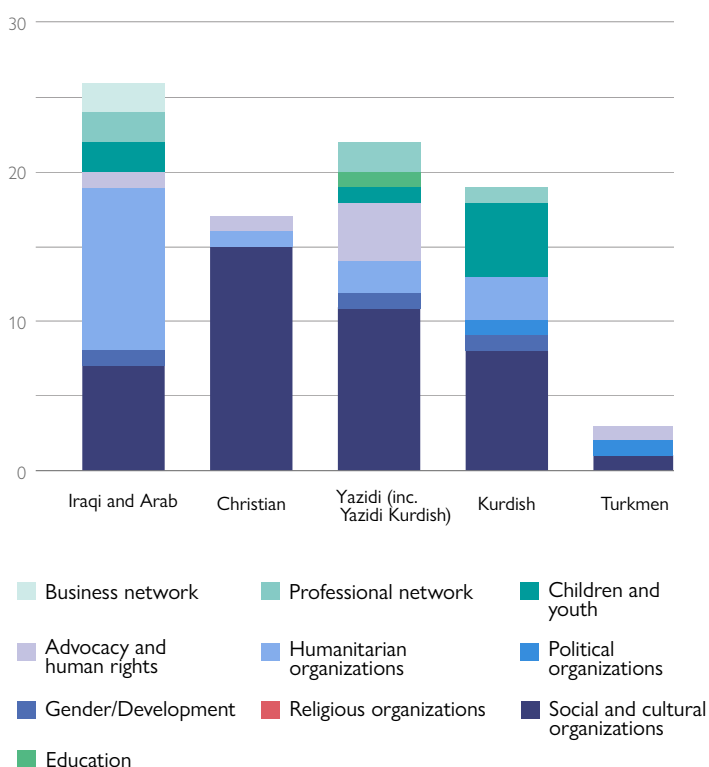


Figure 5. Iraqi diaspora organizations in Germany, split by main field of engagement and ethnoreligious group



The focus group discussions and interviews included representatives from 15 diaspora organizations (DOs), of which six were represented by Iraqi Yazidi members, one was represented by an Iraqi Turkmen, and the remaining eight were represented by Christians of Chaldean, Syriac and Assyrian backgrounds. The diaspora associations that are established by Assyrian, Chaldean, Syriac and Yazidi communities often convene around the specific ethnic and/or religious identities, although some of them have a wider target audience. Two of the Assyrian DOs were represented by individuals with ancestral ties to Turkey. To ensure gender balance, one focus group discussion brought together female members of the Yazidi community in Germany who were not affiliated with any particular organization but who participated in the activities of diaspora organizations. The study also included a member of the Iraqi Sabean Mandaean community in Germany who succeeded in organizing an informal initiative that linked families of Sabean Mandaean origins.

Table 5 shows the level of engagement of each group of organization on local, national and transnational levels. It also demonstrates the level of cross-community cooperation, with minus (-) and plus (+) signs representing the intensity of engagement.

Table 4. Overview of types of organizations in the USA, level of implementation and level of cross-community cooperation

Type of organization	Trans-national	National	Local	Cross-community cooperation
Social and cultural organizations	+	-	+	-
Integration service organizations	-	-	+	+
Humanitarian, development and religious institutions	+	+	-	+
Advocacy and human rights organizations	+	+	-	+

Except for the Sabean Mandaean group, all DOs in the sample are legally-registered as non-governmental organization and were established by a small core of active individuals. Some organizations collect membership fees on a monthly or annual basis, but in most of the cases, fees are symbolic. The members benefit from the services provided by their organizations and are encouraged to participate in events such as fund raising and cultural activities. The activities implemented by the DOs seem responsive to the emerging needs of their respective communities in both Iraq and Germany. Many have a broad coverage in their activities, yet one can observe four main fields of engagement for the sample of Iraqi DOs in Germany.

The first and largest group is composed of organizations engaged in **social and cultural activities**. Seven DOs (five Yazidi and two Christian organizations) stated that their organizational mission focuses on preserving the culture and identity of their respective communities. The activities include providing language courses and organizing events such as religious festivals and cultural/art events (e.g., Christmas and Easter celebrations, poetry festivals) that bring together the communities and help its members, particularly children and youth, keep in touch with their respective cultures, religion, and traditions. In addition to the cultural activities of diaspora associations, they also serve as spaces of solidarity among the wider diaspora. For example, bringing different confessional components of the Iraqi Christians in the diaspora together emerged as a key motive for one of the Christian organizations. One Yazidi organization was more focused on education and engaged in activities that support the regular education of children and youth about their religion, heritage and language. The lack of religious facilities representing the Sabeen Mandaean community constituted a motive for their community members to organize cultural and religious activities that aim at preserving their religious identity. In this category, an Assyrian youth organization dedicated its work to bringing together Assyrian youth in the diaspora – and to a lesser extent other Christian groups from the Middle East – by hosting events and workshops, and organizing youth exchange programs between different countries of residence, including Germany, Sweden, Switzerland, Austria and the United States. Some of the organizations stressed that their doors are open for all groups, yet in practice participation was mostly from within their own communities. The social and cultural DOs depend financially on membership fees, philanthropic contributions of their community members, and in a few cases on grants and governmental funding.

In the sample group, two diaspora organizations (one Assyrian and one Yazidi) are engaged in **integration-related** activities, with organizations mainly assisting refugees in their integration process. Integration is often not the sole focus of organizations, as they are combined with cultural and social activities. In addition to assisting refugees in their daily life, such as accompanying them to governmental institutions, helping out with paper work and job applications, the integration-focused organizations also aim to inform newcomers about their rights and responsibilities in the German system, offer educational scholarship opportunities, German language courses and vocational training programs.

Both organizations receive public funding or donations from different entities, but the funding is limited to small grants that do not allow organizations to expand their services. Their activities are oriented to a wider audience that sometimes goes beyond their respective communities. For example, Syrian refugees attended some programs organized by one of the organizations. Both organizations have high levels of online activities, with regular updates on their projects and events. The Assyrian organization stressed the positive impact of social media platforms in connecting the Assyrian diaspora worldwide.

The third group of organizations included humanitarian/development organizations and religious institutions (four Christian organizations). Given the pressing needs of newly-arrived migrants in Germany, many organizations that are engaged primarily in other domains of activities also implement activities of humanitarian nature. This category includes organizations that target communities mainly in Iraq and, to a lesser extent, in Germany. The difficult living conditions of the Iraqi Christians and Yazidis inside Iraq, especially after the IS attacks, were commonly highlighted by respondents as a key motivation to engage in civil work in the first place. The humanitarian activities include collecting and sending financial and in-kind donations to those in need in Iraq, targeting mainly orphans, students, women, displaced persons, and IS survivors. A key initiative under this umbrella of activities was a fundraising campaign organized by a Christian organization to collect funds to liberate Yazidi women from IS. Another organization established educational and recreational centers in cooperation with local organizations in Iraq, mainly targeting youth and women of minority backgrounds. The objective of the center is to support development and recovery of communities affected by the conflict, with a specific aim to contribute to empowerment of women. Humanitarian and development-focused organizations are primarily financed through donations from community members and individual contributions, and in some cases they receive help from other institutions. The DOs that implement activities and initiatives inside Iraq tend to target minority groups. Most initiatives targeted, Chaldeans, Assyrians, Yazidis and other members of minority communities who were internally displaced from their home cities and villages after the IS invasion and were living in camps. Representatives of the humanitarian and religious organizations highlighted the importance of online campaigns to help them mobilize donations for humanitarian purposes, especially through Facebook pages.

Figure 5: Yad Bayad/IOM Iraq



The fourth field of engagement is advocacy and human rights, represented by two organizations (one Christian and one Turkmen). While the Christian DO dedicates its work to documentation of the violations of human rights against minority communities inside Iraq, the Turkmen organization works to raise awareness on human rights violations in Iraq by organizing campaigns, demonstrations, and rallies across Europe. However, awareness raising events and demonstrations are also attended and organized by groups in other categories, who often mobilize as a reaction to certain developments in the homeland. For example, despite having a non-political mission, some organizations took to the streets to show solidarity with the 2019-20 Iraqi protests that began in October 2019. Both organizations stressed that they target all vulnerable groups, regardless of their ethno-religious affiliation. Online platforms are central to the advocacy work of these groups, as it enables them to reach a wider audience with their campaigns and facilitates communications with other organizations and entities.

As illustrated above, the organizations sampled in this project are engaged in a diverse range of activities in different fields. While almost half of the DOs in the sample engage in social and cultural activities with the aim to preserve cultural identity and prevent assimilation, a small section of the organizations are primarily engaged in advocacy work. Humanitarian assistance and integration support are mainstreamed in the activities of many, with several organizations supporting and funding humanitarian/development projects in Iraq. It should be noted that the categories are not conclusive and many activities overlap, but the aim is to provide a clear understanding of primary fields of engagement and the activities they cover.

3.2.4. Challenges and opportunities facing diaspora organizations in Germany

Germany was described by many respondents as a democratic state where people have the right to exercise their freedoms and rights; Iraq was often defined, in contrast, as a country ruled by a corrupt government that does not guarantee civil and human rights, especially for minority groups. The conditions in both countries had significant influence on the engagement behaviors of the selected DOs.

A variety of factors in the country of residence affect the space and actions of diaspora organizations. On the one hand, the democratic and pluralist environment in Germany provides space for civic expression and encourages accessibility of funding in certain areas. On the other hand, selective funding schemes entail high levels of bureaucracy, and the lack of recognition of the Yazidi religion by the German government and the low participation of the wider diaspora communities in diaspora activities constitute major challenges for the selected DOs.

The institutional framework and funding mechanisms in Germany influence the capacity of diaspora organizations and often shape the activities they pursue. Diaspora organizations, particularly those active in the social and cultural field, often face a lack of structural funds and heavily depend on membership fees and contributions of diaspora members to support their operational budgets. External funding opportunities are relatively more accessible for organizations working on integration-related issues and with specific target groups (e.g., children, youth, women), but grant application procedures are perceived to be complicated and subject to high levels of bureaucracy, as a member of a Yazidi organization explained:

"[...] here [Germany] is completely different, the government does not fund. If they do, they do it with conditions you have to have certain characteristics or programs that serve the country, especially the integration programs. The youth, women or children, are [groups] that the country [Germany] would fund. [...] you have to meet all the administrative conditions, you have to finish all the bureaucratic procedures. You have to fill in the forms, you have to fill it in clearly in a correct German language. [If you] have a minor grammar mistake, they would reject the application. It has to be written in German that is a hundred percent correct. So, a German has to write it so that you can get the funding." (FGD Participant, Male)

Next to the challenges, the diaspora actors also recognize the opportunities provided by the democratic, secular, and multicultural environment in Germany, which provides freedom and space for civic expression. The separation of religion from the state is articulated by some respondents as a new, positive experience. Though limited, the financial and organizational support received from some German governmental entities and foundations represent an opportunity for organizations working on integration.

The discussion on the factors that influence transnational and diasporic political activities embedded in the origin country context revealed more challenges than opportunities. The perception of rampant corruption, security problems, and political and financial instability in Iraq poses serious challenges to transnational activities. Many Christian and Yazidi respondents explained that governmental corruption and the lack of transparency in dealing with different ethnic or religious organizations hinders their work and limits their access to certain geographic areas inside Iraq. For example, the head of a Yazidi organisation stressed the lack of trust between the Iraqi diaspora organizations and the government, arguing that the government does not allow the distribution of humanitarian aid in Iraq that is collected by Iraqis abroad unless it is distributed through their own channels (and therefore vulnerable to skimming). Similar experiences tend to inform the perceptions of diaspora members and diminish the interest and commitment to pursue engagement with Iraq.

Overall, ethno-religious minority DOs in Germany value the freedom of civic expression and accessibility of funding offered in the country yet are also faced with challenges in terms of expanding their capacities and outreach in the German context. The lack of cooperation is perceived to be a result of diverging political views in the diaspora, with negative implications on the chances of having a unified voice to influence policy change, for example, in their efforts for the official recognition of the Yazidi religion. On the home country level, structural conditions in Iraq, ranging from instability to perceptions of corruption, arise as serious hindrances to transnational engagement.

3.2.6. Perspectives of (temporary/virtual) return

The majority of respondents explicitly expressed their unwillingness to return to Iraq, even temporarily, in light of the perceived negative political, economic, and social conditions in the country of origin. The factors that shaped return perceptions also related to experiences in Germany, however.

Throughout the discussions, many respondents felt that the decent life that they succeeded in building over time in Germany would be difficult to leave behind, signaling that return to Iraq is perceived as a necessary abandonment of life in Germany given the significant risks associated with return. Having better chances of education, employment, and social security, but also feeling safe and free, are some of the reasons indicated as diminishing intentions to return. Among young and second-generation diaspora members who had spent most of their lives or grown up in Germany, perceived cultural differences with people in Iraq were identified as insurmountable challenges that would disincentivize return. For some female participants, moving to Iraq is a high-risk endeavor that is further challenged by gender-related challenges due to perceived inferior status of women in Iraq.

Permanent return is also described as conditional on radical changes and improvements in Iraq. Commonly-recurring themes were safety and security, political and economic stability, and the presence of legal framework that protect minority rights and prevent discrimination. Some Yazidi women articulated safety and legal protection as preconditions for return, stressing that laws and regulations that protect Yazidis specifically should be implemented not only by the central government but should also be implemented and internalized in local communities. The distrust among Yazidis of the local communities, which were at times perceived as betraying the Yazidi population, remains a challenge for some diaspora members considering return.

Many respondents stressed that the current Iraqi constitution does not preserve the rights of minorities but on the contrary provides room for discrimination and oppression of non-Muslim groups. While some attributed the lack of minority rights to the whole political situation in Iraq, others linked it to the Islamization of the country by referring to the interference of neighboring countries in the affairs of Iraq and demanding to separate religion from the state.

The political, economic, socio-cultural, and legal factors minimize the desire for permanent return, and few return initiatives are supported by the profiled organizations. Only one youth association cooperates with other Assyrian organizations worldwide in a diaspora heritage tourism initiative for Assyrian youth, which aims to promote Assyrian identity and heritage by introducing young Assyrians in the diaspora to their homeland. According to the respondent representing this organization, some Assyrians ended up permanently settling in Iraq after joining the program, suggesting that long-term return may indeed be desired and sought by some members of the diaspora.

Temporary Return

Despite having strong opinions against permanent settlement in Iraq, several respondents had returned to Iraq for short personal visits and for work-related reasons as part of their organizational activities. For example, a representative of a Christian DO that works on the documentation of human rights violations stated that he goes to Iraq on a regular basis as part of these activities, which are implemented in coordination with local Kurdish and Yazidi organizations.. Despite these experiences, many other respondents expressed little interest in joining a temporary return program, owing to negative perceptions of structural conditions in Iraq as discussed above. A former returnee shared his unpleasant experience in Iraq as part of the return of skills program:

“So they issued a decree... I went in 2004, and I am a university professor, and tried to return with the return of the competencies program. What I saw was unbelievable, so I told them this is an impossible country, “peace be upon him”, the discrimination is clear in everything...”

(FGD Participant, Male)

As indicated above, and prevailed in many discussions, perceptions of discrimination and corruption, some of which have been experienced directly by members of minority groups who participated in temporary return initiatives, tend to inform the opinions about return and diminish return prospects.

3.2.7. Prospects of collaboration and engagement in reconciliation initiatives

Given the general orientation of diaspora organizations towards the needs and position of their own ethnic and religious groups, the chances of cooperation and collaboration appear to be limited and conditional on identifying a common ground for action and shared interests. The discussions with diaspora actors show that the diverging political views, strong allegiance to ethnic and/or religious identifications, and the collective memory of those identities may complicate the prospects of collaboration. This section will discuss the diaspora actors' opinions regarding collaboration with other groups in reconciliation initiatives and the realities of fragmentation within the Iraqi diaspora.

The diasporic space in Germany rarely provides opportunities for different ethno-religious groups to come together given the absence of common events or organizational frameworks (e.g., diaspora fora, joint funding programs), which provides limited opportunity for groups to establish cooperation. Perceptions about collaboration are therefore more sensitive to past memories and fragile relations between different communities in Iraq. Respondents often expressed openness and interest to work and collaborate with counterparts regardless of their ethnic or religious affiliation, with the condition that they have common principles and goals. A few respondents explicitly stated negative opinions about Arab and Muslim organizations and reported high levels of distrust. Other respondents added that feeling inferior to other ethno-religious groups, being discriminated against, and being stigmatized as “infidels” are experiences that amplify the mistrust and avoidance of Arab and/or Muslim communities by Yazidi and Christian communities. A few other respondents stressed their unwillingness to collaborate with Islamic organizations, as another member of Christian background argued:

“the Islamic organizations that are here are unfortunately a center of extremism” (FGD Participant, Male).

Those respondents often adopt a secular approach in their civic work and they are not oriented along religious or faith-based lines, and they refuse to collaborate with any organization that has a religious character.

Despite the deeply entrenched fears and negative views that trigger fragmentation among Iraqis abroad, the majority of the respondents expressed a longing for a united Iraq where the different ethnic and religious components of the society can peacefully coexist and collaborate. Views about reconciliation reflected common aspirations, primarily underpinned by ensuring equal rights for all segments of the society and separation of religion from government affairs. Such demands echo with what the respondents perceive as one of the demands of the protesters in Iraq who took to the streets in October 2019, which renewed their hopes for reconciliation. The majority of respondents expressed increasing optimism after the outbreak of what they call “revolution” in Iraq. A representative of a Yazidi organization cited:

“Look at the Tahrir square now. All the Iraqi people, with different ethnicities: Yazidis, Christians, Sunni, Shi’a... All of them are in the Tahrir square together, all of them want change because everyone is targeted. The people of Iraq are composed of 14 components [groups]. [...] The Iraqi people are one of the people that very quickly can unite. The national reconciliation, even with the Yazidi, is possible.” (FGD Participant, Male)

While existing divisions along religious and political lines are difficult to tackle and perhaps deepened by limited encounters among diaspora communities in Germany, a positive shift in the dynamics in Iraq can positively influence diasporans’ perceptions of reconciliation and collaboration. Mutual respect, equal rights, and a common ground for action are key to developing a collab-



Figure 6: Bilal Izaddin / Shutterstock.com

3.3. GEORGIA

The research conducted in Germany focused on diaspora members and organizations from the Chaldean, Yazidi, and Assyrian communities. While both focus groups and expert interviews included representatives from other minority groups such as the Sabeen Mandeian and Turkmen communities, the case study placed specific emphasis on understanding the diaspora engagement behaviors among the Yazidis, Chaldeans, and Assyrians. Given the limited inclusion of Yazidis in the US context, the research in Germany provided insight into how this distinct diaspora regarded future engagement with Iraq. The Georgian country case is distinct from those of the US and Germany. In comparison to the ethno-religious minority diaspora communities residing in the United States and Germany, the communities of Christians and Yazidis with ancestral or community ties to Iraq that reside in Georgia are generally part of long-established, historical minority communities. Rather than focusing on contemporary migration trends and the emergence of diaspora structures among relatively “young” diaspora communities, the Georgian case focuses more on understanding the role of identity in shaping the activities diaspora members pursue, both within their own communities and in terms of cross-community collaboration.

3.3.1. Migration and policy context in the Georgia

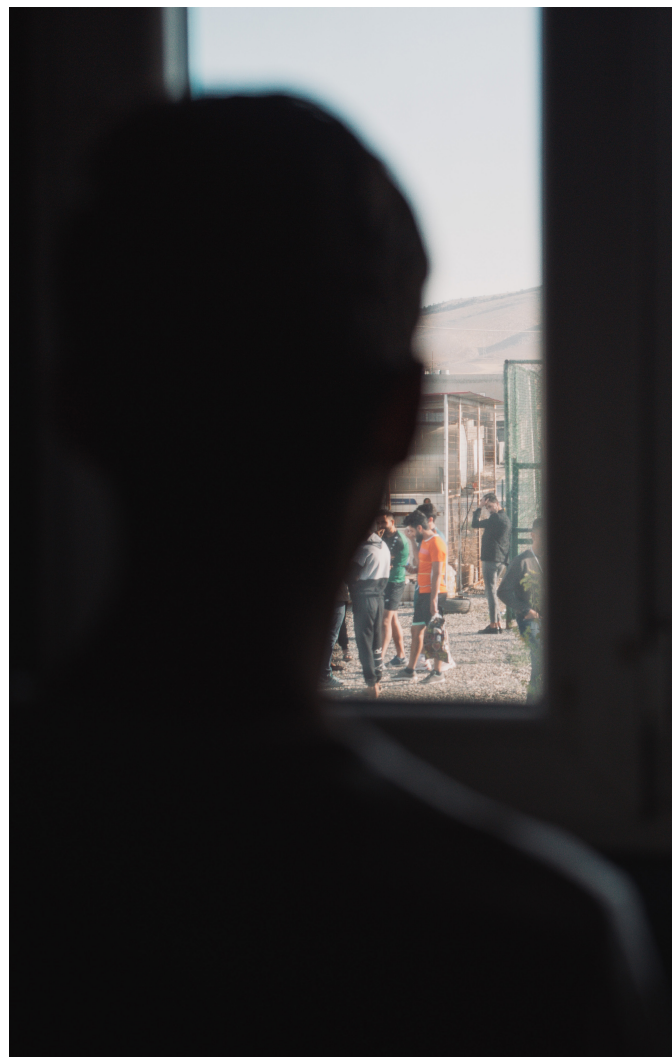
Assyrians and Yazidis: Non-migrant minority communities in Georgia

Georgia is home to a number of national, ethnic and religious minority communities, including the historical minority communities of Assyrians, Chaldeans and Yazidis.³⁰ It is possible to trace the ancestry of both communities to the multiple (historical) countries of origin within the Mesopotamian region encompassing parts of Turkey, Syria, Iraq and Iran.³¹

There were two significant waves of Yazidi migration to the Caucasus in the 19th and early 20th centuries.³² The majority of Yazidis (and Yazidi-Kurds) fled to Georgia to escape the genocidal practices of the Ottoman Empire in 1915, which targeted Armenians and other non-Muslim groups such as Assyrians and Yazidis. According to the last Soviet population census of 1989, the 33,000 Yazidis resided in Georgia. The 1990s saw large

waves of migration to Russia and Europe as a result of rising nationalism and the Georgian civil war.³³ By 2014, their numbers were slightly more than 12,000, accounting for 0.3% of the total population of Georgia.³⁴ According to the 2002 national census, the Yazidi populations largely reside in Tbilisi (93.4% in the 2002 census), accounting for 1.6 per cent of the capital's population.³⁵ Outside of Tbilisi, the cities of Rustavi and Telavi host a Yazidi population of more than a hundred. Other cities with smaller numbers of Yazidis are Batumi, Kutaisi, and Poti.³⁶

Figure 6: Anjam Rasool/IOM Iraq



30. Minority Rights Group (MRG), “Breaking the cycle of exclusion: minority rights in Georgia today,” 2009.

31. David Szakonyi, “Ethnic mobilization in post-Soviet Georgia: the case of the Yazidi-Kurds,” JEMIE 2 (2007) 6.

32. Lemma Shehadi, “Emerging from Isis genocide, Yazidis in Armenia open religion's biggest ever temple,” The Independent. 21 October 2019. Retrieved from <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/yazidi-armenia-temple-aknalich-iraq-religion-isis-genocide-a9160411.html>

33. Ibid.

34. United Nations Statistics Division, Population by national and/or ethnic group, sex and urban/rural residence. Retrieved from <http://data.un.org/Data.aspx?d=POP&f=tableCode:26>

35. Writenet, “The Human Rights Situation of the Yezidi Minority in the Transcaucasus (Armenia, Georgia, Azerbaijan),” 2008, Retrieved from: <https://www.refworld.org/publisher/WRITENET,,GEO,485fa2342,0.html>

36. Ibid.

The Assyrian community in Georgia (as an umbrella title for Assyrians, Chaldeans and Syriacs) was formed progressively throughout the 18th and 19th century, with its core composed of descendants of the survivors of the atrocities carried out by the Turkish authorities during the decline of the Ottoman Empire in the beginning of the 20th century. There were also significant waves of labor migration through the Turkmanchai Peace Treaty of 1828 between Russia and Persia that facilitated migration of a sizable population of Assyrian workers.^{37 38} At the time of the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Assyrian community of Georgia numbered around 5,200. The political unrest in the 1990s caused waves of migration and by 2002, the number of Assyrians dropped to 3299. In 2014, 2377 Assyrians remained in Georgia.³⁹ Assyrians can be found in Tbilisi, mainly in the Kukia neighbourhood, in the village of Dzveli-Kanda, Mtskheta Municipality, and in the village of Vasilievka, Gardabani Municipality. A smaller number of Assyrians also lives in Akhaltsikhe, Batumi, Kutaisi, Samtredia, Senaki and Zestaponi.⁴⁰

3.3.2. Sense of belonging to multiple (historical) countries of origin and perception of identity

The majority of Assyrians and Yazidis in the sample group self-identified as Georgian, frame themselves and their communities as well-integrated members of the Georgian society, and perceive Georgia as 'home'. The Yazidis in the sample group mainly originate in present-day Turkey, while Assyrians were predominantly from Iran (Urmia) and partly from Turkey, whose ancestors arrived in Georgia during the years that coincided with the First World War. Given the rootedness of the Assyrian and Yazidi communities in Georgia and ancestral ties to multiple (historical) countries of origin, the discussion on sense of belonging explored how the Assyrian and Yazidi communities relate to Iraq as a contemporary site of community trial and a historical homeland.

In the perception of most of the respondents, Iraq is a distant, historical homeland everyone feels natural affection for and attached to, albeit with different visions and myths. The role of religious symbols and historical links emerged not only as central to emotional attachment but also as drivers of structural engagement with Iraq. In the accounts of Yazidis, the attachment to Iraq had a spiritual nature deriving mainly from the existence of highly valuable religious symbols (e.g., Lalish temple), while Assyrians tended to narrate their emotional attachment to Iraq around the aspect of indigeneity, often symbolized by the historical existence of Assyrians in present-day Iraq, dating back to the Assyrian civilization which collapsed in 612 BC. Referring to this long native history, the Assyrian community was defined by a respondent as "26 centuries without a homeland" (Interview participant, Female). The myth of a homeland that existed centuries ago was

celebrated in many personal stories, but situating this narrative in the nationalistic Assyrian/Chaldean political discourses is found somewhat risky by a Chaldean religious leader who argued that such statements create an additional hindrance to peaceful co-existence with the current inhabitants of the territory.

The discussions over the creation of an autonomous region for Christians inside Iraq has been on the agenda of Christian political parties and religious leaders for many years now. Salloum's study⁴¹ exploring the power dynamics and internal divisions within Yazidi and Christian communities in Iraq, show that the debates among political and religious stakeholders on issues related to the future existence of minorities in Sinjar and the Ninewa Plains are highly influential on the identity choices and return decisions of displaced communities. The involvement of religious leaders in political discussions on the issue of autonomy is considered problematic and harmful for the community, as put forward by a respondent:

"In our community, there are many patriots now. Assyrian or Chaldean. [They] don't care about Jesus. [They] don't care about Christianity, but [they say] 'I am a Chaldean. I want my land... we have to fight for our land. We have to kill this, kill that.' Okay, then when the church is involved in these political discussions, we damage our community. Because we cannot have land now and I think for many years [...]. But when we open this discussion of heritage of Chaldean land or Assyrian land, we get side effects back more than we think." (Interview participant, Male)

Given the reluctance to be involved in political debates concerning Iraq, the politicization of the Assyrian or Chaldean identity that is likely driven by multiple Christian political parties and religious leaders in Iraq may create a backlash in the perceptions of diasporic identity among Assyrians and Chaldeans of Georgia, who already have a diffused diasporic identity with selective and partial participation in the broader Assyrian diaspora. Diasporic participation of both Assyrians and Yazidis often remained on an emotional and spiritual level that transformed into concrete action only in critical moments. The crimes committed by IS against Yazidi and Christian communities in 2014 affected the community deeply and prompted unprecedented levels of collective action and organization; first, to address the needs of the Iraqis who sought refuge in Georgia and second, to raise awareness on the situation of their communities inside Iraq. In the accounts of many, the events of 2014 led to a revival of group consciousness and strengthened the perception of their ethnic or ethnoreligious identity. However, it can be argued that both groups tend to remain on a diffused diaspora identity status which does not entail continuous commitment to mobilize around, but becomes salient at different times, often as a reaction to critical events and developments.

37. Mamuka Komakhia, "Georgia's Slavic Population," (2007)

38. Ketevan Khutsishvili, "Religious Aspects of Structuring the Ethnocultural Identity of the Assyrian Community in Georgia," (2016)

39. Lemma Shehadi, "Our community was dying out': Yazidis struggle to find an identity in post-Soviet Georgian landscape." The Independent. 15 December 2019.

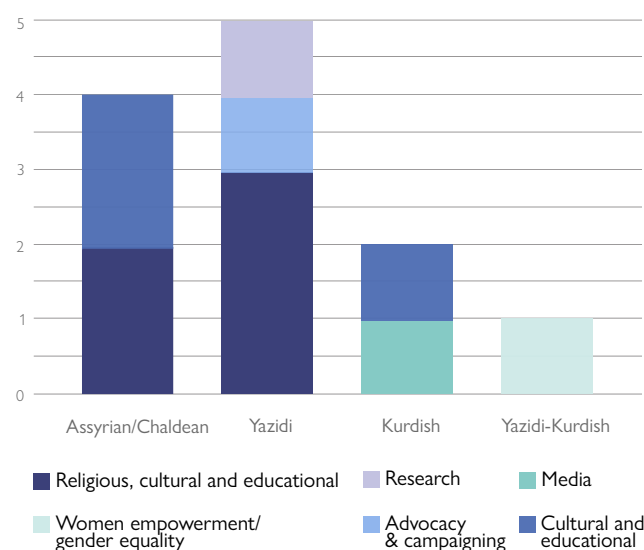
40. Ketevan Khutsishvili (2016)

41. Saad Salloum, "Barriers to return for ethno-religious minorities in Iraq."

3.3.3. Structure of Assyrian and Yazidi organizations and forms of engagement

The mapping exercise in Georgia resulted in a list of 12 organizations that are active and led or represented by members of the Assyrian and Yazidi minority groups. Figure 9 gives an overview of the primary thematic areas covered by the organizations, split by ethnic and/or religious affiliation.

Figure 6. Organizations led or represented by Assyrians and Yazidis in Georgia, split by main field of engagement and ethnic and/or religious background



Seven out of twelve organizations mapped in the study were approached for interviews. Four organizations were represented by individuals of Assyrian/Chaldean background and the remaining three were led by Yazidi and Yazidi-Kurdish representatives. The identified organizations had a pan-ethnic character and the majority targeted their own communities as beneficiaries of their activities regardless of sub-identities on ethnic (Yazidi, Kurdish) and confessional (Assyrian, Chaldean, Syriac) grounds. The organizations can be divided into two broad groups based on their main focus and motives of engagement. Table 6 shows the level of engagement of each group of organizations on local, national and transnational levels and the level of cross-community cooperation, with minus (-) and plus (+) signs representing the intensity of engagement

Table 4. Overview of types of organizations in the USA, level of implementation and level of cross-community cooperation

Type of organization	Trans-national	National	Local	Cross-community cooperation
Religious, cultural and educational	+	-	-	+
Human rights and advocacy groups	+	+	+	+

The first group consists of religious, cultural and educational associations (five organizations) that implement a diversity of activities ranging from celebration of special events (e.g., Assyrian language day, religious holidays), organization of cultural, artistic and sport events (e.g., theatre plays in Kurdish/Aramaic, radio broadcasting, Yazidi-Kurdish football team), to educational activities (e.g., Yazidi/Aramaic language courses, student exchange programs, lectures and discussions on interreligious dialogue and the cultural diversity in Georgia). Such organizations aim to preserve the linguistic, historical, cultural and religious heritage of their communities as well as promote intercultural dialogue. Two religious institutions are included in this category, as both offer cultural and educational activities next to religious services. The religious institutions often rely on donations to realize their activities. They have transnational connections but operate and organize independently of religious authorities of their respective groups in Iraq (e.g., the Supreme Yazidi Spiritual Council in Iraq) and in the diaspora (e.g., Chaldean Catholic Church in Detroit). The other two organizations have an exclusively cultural and educational focus and most of their budget is derived from grant applications to embassies, foundations, local funds, and to a lesser extent, donations. The target audience of the cultural and educational programs are often youth of their respective communities. The organizations in this category are predominantly staffed by members of the same group, and their staff size varies between 5 to 25, excluding project-based volunteer contributions.

A second group consists of human rights and advocacy groups (two organizations) that are oriented along rights-based lines and mainly engage in activities to promote empowerment, participation, and representation of youth, women or minority groups. Both organizations are represented by members of the Yazidi community, but their membership is diverse and the target audience of the programs is often the entire Georgian society, with some activities geared towards specific groups. The activities of the organization range from providing trainings on diversity, tolerance, intercultural and interreligious dialogue to organizing demonstrations and rallies to raise awareness about the situation of their communities inside Iraq, organization of retreats/self-care events for activists and journalists and human rights defenders in the broader Caucasus region, and fundraising trainings to promote civic engagement of underrepresented groups. They have established networks or regular channels of communication with organizations in the broader Caucasus region, and/or with the diaspora groups in Europe and the United States. These organizations appeared to be well-integrated in the institutional landscape of Georgia, and they managed to build connections with Georgian organizations and participate in national networks and umbrella organizations that are geared towards increasing representation of minority groups in Georgia. The organizations in this group mainly derive funds through grant applications to governmental agencies and foundations, as well as through the contributions of diaspora philanthropists. The number of active members realizing

The majority of organizations had moderate or high online activity, depending on the content and the target group of their activities. Organizations with youth-centered programs, advocacy groups use social media more intensively than religious and cultural organizations. Many emphasized the benefits of the internet as an intermediary that connects diaspora communities in different countries of residence but also as an essential tool that facilitates outreach to target groups and beneficiaries in Georgia.

The organizations in the sample group have a dynamic structure, covering a wide range of activities that evolved over time - or at critical moments - to adapt to the changing political realities and to respond to the pressing needs of their respective communities. For instance, after the conflict in Iraq 2014, mobilization increased to address the humanitarian needs of the refugees fleeing from IS atrocities.

3.3.4. Challenges and opportunities facing the organizations in Georgia

This section provides a summary of the key challenges and opportunities that shape or influence the actions and space of the organizations in the Georgian context, their level of interest in pursuing engagement with Iraq, and the factors that may facilitate or hinder their engagement with Iraq.

The discussions on the challenges embedded in the Georgian context were dominated by financial problems and limited participation of the target audience in organizational activities. The sources of funding vary significantly, as some rely solely on donations and others receive funds through grant applications. Those who have relatively more access to structural funds argued that the shifting focus of donors towards issues related to immigration and integration is diminishing the chances of securing funding, as their target group predominantly consists of non-migrant minority groups. Moreover, some highlighted as a challenge the requirement to justify their capacity in the form of a prior track record in related work and financial capacity, which is easier for larger NGOs to provide. This is perceived to result in a vicious cycle in which smaller NGOs cannot breakthrough and they have no choice but to continue with small-scale projects. Another organization that relies solely on donations problematized the lack of state funding for Yazidi religious institutions despite the official recognition of Yazidism as a religion in 2011. A second challenge was having a small population that is perceived to have little interest and time to engage in the activities of the organizations. In some cases, the educational activities or trainings targeting youth were suspended due to a lack of participation.

Discussions regarding the Georgian context revealed a number of opportunities next to the challenges. Many praised the enabling

environment for civic engagement, proven by the embeddedness of their organizations in the Georgian institutional context as well as the civil society landscape. Some organizations are members of umbrella organizations that aim to bring together Georgian communities of different ethnic, religious and linguistic backgrounds and promote tolerance and diversity as a norm of public life. Several opportunities had arisen in the past to cooperate with and/or receive funding from state structures on the national (e.g., Ministry of Culture) or local levels (e.g., Tbilisi City Municipal Assembly, Gardabani and Mukhrani municipalities). The Assyrian and Yazidi organizations are also members of the Council of Ethnic Minorities, which was established in 2005 under the Tolerance Center of Public Defender's Office.⁴²

On the transnational level, engagement with Iraq remains limited to a few initiatives mainly undertaken by Yazidi organizations, including advocacy efforts for granting the Lalish temple in Iraq the status of a World Heritage Site and student trips to visit the Lalish temple. Moreover, organic ties exist between the religious institutions in Georgia and the religious authorities inside Iraq and in the wider diaspora. Several organizations initiated collaboration with community-based organizations inside Iraq, and these experiences tend to inform their perceptions about potential challenges and opportunities. Drawing on past attempts, those interviewed stated that the most common challenges in their involvement with organizations in Iraq were linked to communication problems, unmatched expectations, different civic organizing principles, and different ways of thinking, resulting in what they call 'an underdeveloped NGO sector' in Iraq. For example, a respondent underlined the problematic of hierarchical structures and criticized the corrupt way of thinking that he felt he has been exposed to in their correspondence with an Iraq-based organisation:

"The point is that each of those local organizations is run by one leader, a community leader, and if you are not in agreement with this leader, then no one moves...We had a few attempts, wanted to do something in the frames of the program of the European Union but we failed, we couldn't take a step... Do you know how they speak to you? Let's say the project is of a million and a half, "that's it, give us one million and do whatever you want with the rest" - that's how people talk! This is what I call the Stone Age..." (Interview participant, Male)

As captured in the above comment, and in some other statements, there was clear interest to intensify contact with actors in Iraq. Despite the perceived challenges that are informed largely by the failed past experiences, the respondents often expressed an unmet desire to craft partnerships with community-based groups inside Iraq with whom they can find common ground for action and common goals in areas that fall under their specific fields of expertise, without being involved in politics and religion.

42. Minority Rights Group (MRG), "Breaking the cycle of exclusion: minority rights in Georgia today," (2009)

3.3.5. Perspectives on (temporary/virtual) return (relocation) to Iraq

As an organic outcome of the interviews, moving/returning to Iraq were often associated with return to the KRNI and the discussions were mainly centered around the options of temporary relocation to Iraq or a virtual assignment.

For many respondents, Iraq is a faraway, historical homeland that many desire to visit and feel natural affection for but that would not be feasible or realistic for permanent settlement. It is only the myth of return that manifested itself as a symbol of hope that 'one day' they will be recognized as indigenous inhabitants of their ancestral homeland: "The Assyrians of Georgia will only think about repatriation if democracy develops in Iraq and the Assyrians will be accepted as inhabitants of their historical homeland" (Interview participant, Female)

The visions of temporary return/relocation were marked by a diversity of factors that are shaped by structural conditions in Iraq, return program and policy-related factors, and to a lesser extent, individual factors. Among the key structural challenges were the perceptions of physical and legal insecurity and discrimination in Iraq. With regard to program and policy-related factors, the specific incentives offered by temporary return programs, their structure and length mattered significantly. On the individual level, a common theme was having family commitments, mainly in terms of childcare responsibilities.

Safety concerns in Iraq and feelings of discrimination and non-acceptance felt present in some of the discussions on return. While the relative safety in the KRNI in comparison to other parts of the country was acknowledged, it is still perceived to be in a precarious position owing to the instability and volatility in the broader region. Program and policy-related factors were often identified as necessary prerequisites to partake in a return initiative, revealing a diversity of opinions on the length of assignment (ranging from 1 week to 4 years), compensation, type of assignment (virtual vs. physical) and its content. The diverging opinions on the ideal length of a return program and on whether a return program should involve physical encounters or not was shaped in line with perceived security risks and the personal commitments in Georgia, as well as professional aspirations and areas of expertise. Some respondents favored virtual programs over physical return given the perceived security threats, while others argued that physical encounter is a vital component of the learning. The latter view was often asserted by respondents working in advocacy and human rights organizations, who also argued that the programs should last long enough to achieve real impact, ranging from one month to a couple of years or more.

For actors engaged in non-religious social and cultural work, a prerequisite for temporary return is non-involvement in political and religious affairs. Some respondents expressed desire to be involved in programs constructed around educational and cultural activities targeting youth such as exchange programs, which one organization tried but failed to realize in the past. Language was another barrier underlined by a Yazidi respondent who argued that a program in English would be more desirable given the different spoken dialects of Kurdish by Yazidis (Kurmanji) and Iraqi Kurds (Sorani).

Return is also a private and individual affair with implications for their everyday life and their families. Family commitments such as having children and an established social life in Georgia were some of the obstacles highlighted by the respondents. Those with such commitments on top of the security concerns often seemed more interested in short term programs ranging from one week to one month.

Discussions with Yazidis often reflected a sense of responsibility towards their communities in Iraq, which is a key driver of their willingness to increase their transnational engagement, be it through joint projects with non-profit groups or temporary assignments. Both groups demonstrate an eagerness to contribute to the development and recovery of their respective communities by sharing knowledge and expertise, under certain conditions. The structural factors are difficult to address in the short-run, but certain aspects can be tackled by designing tailored programs that match the expectations of diaspora actors.

3.3.6. Social dynamics and prospects of collaboration and engagement in reconciliation initiatives

The strong group consciousness among Yazidis has its roots in the numerous collective traumatic experiences of the past, most recent one perpetrated by IS in 2014. Many respondents felt that the events of 2014 led to revitalization of the sense of "Yazidiness". However, the discussions revealed lines of fragmentations that exist in the broader Yazidi community: the dispute over conflicting views about traditional religious norms and practices, and the controversy over ethnic identification as Kurdish or Yazidi.

The discussions showed that the conservative religious norms and practices is a matter of ongoing controversy within the wider Yazidi community, with many respondents emphasizing an urgent need to reconsider and reform some of the rigid rules and patriarchal norms of the Yazidi religion. Most widely criticized by the respondents was the strict practice of endogamy that prohibits marrying non-Yazidis, which also means that for someone to be accepted as Yazidi, both parents have to be Yazidi.

A respondent, who is engaged in efforts to facilitate a dialogue on religion with the Yazidi Spiritual Council in Georgia, expressed his frustration with the rigid rules, while at the same time, acknowledging that reforming or reconsidering a religion is not a straightforward process:

"Young men who wouldn't be allowed in the temple for the reason of not wearing a mustache ... It is absurd in my opinion. What temple are we talking about if we limit with such categories someone coming to God ... We try our best ... the youth likes and receives those modern perspectives, because the Yazidi community is a rather closed society due to its ethnoreligious specificity. It does not like and does not accept changes. It is radical and closed, but we have started this (renewal) practice... Yazidi Spiritual Council in Georgia can be said to be the most modernist, most modern type of religious association in the world among Yazidi organizations ... it must be mentioned, that it is very difficult for them... it is such a topic, religion... but we try our best to explain to them that we live in this reality" (Interview participant, Male)

As captured in the above quote, there was a general tendency to distinguish the Yazidis in Georgia, as well as the Spiritual Council of Yazidis in Georgia, as more progressive than Yazidis elsewhere. Thus, the dispute over the religious practices seemed to be less of an issue in the Georgian context, but more divisive on the transnational level, which may diminish chances of improving intercommunal relations between Yazidis of Georgia and Yazidis inside Iraq. However, the perceived wide gap between visions and norms should be understood in light of the respective communities embeddedness in entirely different historical and political contexts. Living under the rule of the Soviet Union for many years, which did not allow space for the articulation of different ethnic and religious identities, may have altered the habits and viewpoints of Georgian Yazidis regarding religious norms. Conversely, Yazidis in Iraq, like other minority groups, have been under significant threat in the past decades and systematically targeted on account of their ethno-religious identity, beliefs, and practices, perhaps triggering a deeper attachment to traditional norms and practices that potentially act as a cohesive force and keep the community and its traditions alive. The respondents often portray these differences as a potential challenge to meaningful communication, but also indicate a sense of responsibility toward those in the historical homeland and an aspiration to connect as much as they can on an organization level to narrow down this perceived gap. For example, an activist who works at a woman rights organization expressed her frustration with the inferior position of Yazidi women in Iraq as a main motivation for her to pursue potential engagement opportunities. While acknowledging that their life

experiences are entirely distinct, she put an emphasis on being in a good position to support their co-ethnics as they have a somewhat insider position with an understanding of the cultural dynamics and sensitivities and highlighted the urgency establishing transnational platforms that can bring together Yazidi women in Iraq, Georgia and Germany.

Creating depoliticized spaces of interaction represented for many a prerequisite to transnational engagement. Another respondent, who works with youth in the field of culture and education, argued that where politics are divisive, culture is uniting. In the accounts of the respondents, the ethnic origins of the Yazidi was a second source on intra-group division. In the Yazidi community of Georgia, a small minority identify ethnically as Kurdish while the majority claim a distinct Yazidi ethnic identity. According to some scholars⁴³, extreme violence against the Yazidi in Iraq in 2007 and 2014 evoked an ethnicization of this community and urged the Yazidi to claim their ethno-religious identity and break away from the Yazidi-Kurdish stream. Other scholars⁴⁴ suggest that Yazidis' resentment toward the Kurdish Peshmerga because of the perception that they left Yazidis defenseless in the face of the IS attacks in August 2014 has supported separation between the Yazidi and Kurdish movements in the post-2014 period. Many respondents acknowledge that ethnic identification is a personal choice for Yazidi, and in general, the debate over ethnic origins is not perceived as an obstacle to collaboration as many emphasize an inclusive approach in their activities. Yet the troubled relationship between the communities inside Iraq is a source of frustration, as implied in the below comment:

"You know; some were upset against Kurds that they didn't protect the Yazidis ... [...] The Kurds were saying that the Yazidis rejected their support like "we don't need your protection"... It's very difficult to judge from here, you can't judge and you can't discuss it from this distance ... Probably, history will judge... [...] I always said that if a person thinks he is a Kurd - let him be a Kurd and if he thinks he is a Yazidi, let him be a Yazidi ... In any case, Yazidis and Kurds should not have such a relationship in Kurdistan..." (Interview participant, Female)

Among Assyrians of Georgia, belonging to different denominations is not regarded as a source of division but rather a minor nuance. None of the Chaldean or Assyrian respondents recalled significant confrontation between them; on the contrary, they claim that unity behind "being Assyrian" is already enough to feel the sense of belonging to one community. With regard to transnational collaboration, the connections of Assyrians seemed stronger with their co-ethnics in the United States and Europe than with communities in Iraq.

43. Katharina Brizic, et al. Şingal 2014: Der Angriff des „Islamischen Staates“, der Genozid an den Êzîdî und die Folgen, (Wiener Jahrbuch für Kurdische Studien. Wien: Caesarpres, 2016)

44. Peter Nicolaus and Serkan Yuce, "A Look at the Yazidi Journey to Self-discovery and Ethnic Identity," Iran and the Caucasus, 104-87 (2019),(1)23.

Good networks in the country of residence provides diaspora members with an opportunity to act as bridge-builders.⁴⁵ The social, cultural and advocacy groups led by Assyrians and Yazidis are well-embedded in the institutional context and civil society landscape of Georgia. Inter-ethnic and interreligious dialogue, diversity and tolerance are familiar topics among diaspora actors engaged in civil society, as they address similar issues in the Georgian context. Owing to their experience as historical minority communities of Georgia, many actors acknowledge the importance of dialogue between different ethno-religious groups and demonstrate readiness to cooperate with counterparts working in their respective fields in Iraq and in the wider diaspora. Intentions to engage are amplified by a sense of responsibility triggered by the events such as those of 2014 which led to a deepening of group identity, particularly among Yazidi actors. There are lines of divisions in the broader Yazidi communities that can present an obstacle to transnational cooperation and solidarity, yet the fragmentation lines are not deeply engrained within the Yazidi communities in Georgia as in other countries. As long as intersections of interest, vision and objectives exist and politics are not involved, the organizations in Georgia demonstrated openness to collaboration and exchange with diaspora communities across different countries of residence and with Iraq-based counterparts.

3.4. COMPARISON OF CASE STUDY FINDINGS

This section reviews the key findings from the individual country case studies, comparing the differences and similarities that emerge across the diaspora communities and case study environments. It is organized around the main research questions that guided this study.

3.4.1. Nature and structure of diaspora organizations & challenges/opportunities for mobilization

The results across the United States, Germany, and Georgia indicate that several context-specific factors, such as institutional framework and access to funding mechanisms, asylum and integration policies, and the history and composition of the immigrant population, may influence how the diaspora members organize and structure their activities in the respective countries of residence:

- **Legal and institutional framework:** Bureaucratic hurdles of starting and sustaining a non-profit organization posed acute challenges for some US- and Germany-based organizations. Most organizations operate at a low capacity and rely on donations or self-funding to realize their activities. The majority of funding is acquired through the contributions of individual philanthropists in the diaspora. In Georgia the organizations representing minority communities are highly embedded in the institutional context of the country, with some united under umbrella organizations and in close contact with national government structures, whereas organizations in the United States and in Germany have limited representation in the broader civil society landscape.
- **Motivation to engage:** Collective memories of group trauma, narratives of historical belonging and indigenous ownership of the

land on which modern-day Iraq sits, and religious symbolism are important roots of diaspora identity that motivate engagement among members of both Yazidi and Christian communities. In the Georgian context, motivation to engage relates to the desire to preserve the Assyrian and Yazidi identities and facilitate inter-religious and inter-ethnic dialogue within the Georgian community. Given the limited space for the articulation of different ethnic and religious identities during the Soviet era, personal motivations to engage in civic life are also driven by a desire to reclaim the previously sidelined unique, hybrid identities that have emerged in the Georgian context. The experiences of diaspora communities in Georgia suggests that the different cultural, political, and historical settings of diverse countries contribute to different pathways by which Assyrian and Yazidi communities form diasporic identities.

- **Focus of activities:** The majority of organizations have a broad thematic focus, engaged in many different fields of work that respond to the needs of the communities they seek to serve. In the United States and Germany, humanitarian work and services that facilitate integration of newcomers is a key component of many organizations' work. In all case study countries, organizations largely mobilized in response to humanitarian crises and/or political upheavals in the country of (historical) origin. Except a few rights-based groups engaged in advocacy and justice efforts, the majority of organizations across case study countries operate on a needs-based approach and are therefore responsive to changing contexts in both Iraq and their countries of residence. Nevertheless, inadequate funding for justice and advocacy efforts (in comparison to humanitarian, integration and socio-cultural work) is concerning, particularly for Yazidi organizations working for the recognition of the 2014 Yazidi genocide.
- **Community participation:** The fear of loss of cultural identity among second-generation youth is concerning for diaspora actors in the United States and Germany, who note at times stark contrasts between the interests and values of different generations and cohorts of Iraqis. In Georgia, the secularized identities of youth from minority communities is perhaps a reason for their limited participation in organizational activities that are largely centered around preservation of (religiously-grounded) cultural identity.
- **Barriers to resource mobilization in Iraq:** Widespread mistrust of Iraq and its political apparatuses among members of the diverse diaspora communities affected willingness to support initiatives in Iraq. The communal memory of discrimination of minority communities has contributed to lingering hesitation to engage with Iraq in more structural ways. Such traumas seemed to be easier overcome or ignored during times of crisis, when the diaspora actors demonstrated high levels of collective mobilization to raise funding to support different communities in Iraq. Home country development initiatives were more commonly undertaken in the German context, that often address community level initiatives to support education, housing, health, and social cohesion.

45. Cindy Horst et al., "Participation of diasporas in peacebuilding and development: a handbook for practitioners and policymakers." (PRIO Report, 2. Oslo: PRIO, 2010).

3.4.2. Prospects for (temporary) return

Given the potential role of returning migrants in support post-conflict development, it is crucial to understand what drives or hinders diaspora members' capacities and willingness to return to their countries of origin, permanently or temporarily. Attitudes toward return were generally negative and informed by a range of conditions related to Iraq and the countries of residence:

- **Conditions in Iraq:** The majority of diaspora actors across three country case studies possess no desire to permanently return, primarily due to structural conditions in Iraq. The political and economic instability, corruption, discrimination, lack of human development opportunities, damaged social fabric of the country, and shifting demographics were some of the factors perceived as barriers to return. Diaspora members in the US and Germany indicated skepticism toward engaging in even temporary or “digital” return given their understanding of past return initiatives or experiences. Among the key barriers to temporary return were a lack of confidence in the guarantees (e.g., safety, compensation, job security) that the Iraqi government or the international community can provide, fears about being socially excluded and being stigmatized as “spies” or “traitors”, concerns about being discriminated against based on religious identity, and perceived tensions between the diaspora and local communities back in Iraq. Such perceptions and stories of disappointing return inform the perceptions of others, as they quickly circulate around in the tightly-knit communities.
- **Conditions in the country of residence:** Respondents indicated that the level of stability and high standard of living root them in their countries of residence and make return to Iraq unappealing. Having a stable job, family, an established social life, and experiencing a high standard of living with access to advanced educational and social systems were all identified as factors that would support a respondent to remain in their residence countries. For Assyrians and Yazidis of Georgia, Iraq is a distant, historical homeland many have the desire to visit and feel natural affection for, but permanent settlement is not a feasible option given the historical rootedness of the communities in Georgia as non-migrant minority groups.
- **Policy and program-related factors:** Among members of the Georgian diaspora, reflections on necessary prerequisites to partake in a temporary return initiative revealed a diversity of opinions on return program-related factors including the length, type and content of the assignment as well as the level of compensation that takes into account the perceived risks associated with physical return. Such discussions were limited in the US and Germany, as the idea of temporary return was found less realistic by the diasporans.

3.4.3. Prospects of collaboration in reconciliation and development initiatives

The long history of emigration from Iraq has led to a multi-layered and heterogenous diaspora with different perceptions, aims, and strategies of engagement with the (ancestral) country of origin. The high level of fragmentation can in some cases lead to limited interactions among members of different ethno-religious communities, yet many respondents indicated willingness to engage with other communities in reconciliation and development initiatives under certain conditions. Interest and willingness to engage in cross-community initiatives face both constraints and opportunities:

- **Constraints to cross-community engagement:** The interreligious dialogue in the US context is limited to a few examples of cross-community initiatives among social and cultural organizations, which are largely organized on the local level. Transnationally-engaged actors hold more reservations toward cooperation with groups that belong to larger ethno-religious groups in Iraq. Germany-based diaspora members expressed some reservations with cross-community engagement and indicated that necessary prerequisites to engage in cooperation with different communities within Iraqi society included equal representation, mutual respect, common ground for action, and shared principles. In both contexts, there is some transfer of conflict dynamics from Iraq to the country of residence. The limited resources available to institutions and the diffused transnational collaborative networks also entail significant opportunity and financial costs for organizations to expand their activities to include development and reconciliation initiatives in Iraq. Those costs may also be perceived of as greater when the wider diaspora and the organizations to which they contribute do not trust authorities and institutions in Iraq.
- **Opportunities for cross-community engagement:** Common actions or goals that require a coordinated response seem to encourage diverse groups of diasporas to engage across community boundaries. The 2019-20 Iraqi protests have notably revived a sense of national identity and a sense of distinct “Iraqiness” among many diaspora members, prompting high levels of collective mobilization across the diasporic spaces in the United States and Germany. Common across three country cases, a similar revival of a sense of ethnic identity and group consciousness occurred in the wake of 2014 as a result of the brutal IS campaigns. Both of these developments can be considered transformative events that strengthen the unity and solidarity among diaspora actors, and as such they may pave the way for an environment that is ripe for increased collaboration between the diaspora and other actors in reconciliation and development initiatives. There are also institutions and structures within the different ethno-religious communities that may act as focal points for cross-community dialogue, with churches and global, rights-based alliances standing out as particularly compelling struc-

4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The country case studies illustrate the diversity of perceptions, interests and aspirations among Christian and Yazidi populations residing in the United States, Germany and Georgia. The findings demonstrate the hybridity and fluidity of the diaspora identity and the diversity of engagement behaviors in each context. Beyond ethnicity, religion or nationality, intersecting experiences of political ideologies, social class, generation, gender, and (non)migration experiences shape engagement behaviors. The atrocities of the so-called Islamic State in Iraq have clearly left long-lasting scars on Yazidi and Christian communities. The traumas associated with IS have fostered resentment toward Iraq while simultaneously rejuvenating group identity and solidarity networks and prompting collective mobilization to provide relief for victims and raise awareness on the situation of their respective communities. Similarly, the civil unrest that started in October 2019 in Iraq renewed the interest of Iraqi (-origin) diaspora communities in Germany and in the United States in the social and political processes in Iraq, amplifying the sense of “Iraqiness” among some diaspora and prompting collective action, both financially and through advocacy, to show solidarity with the protesters.

In spite of these clear mobilization moments, the diaspora actors showed limited willingness and readiness to structurally engage with Iraq, mainly due to structural conditions in Iraq, widespread mistrust in the competencies and practices of the Iraqi government, and to a lesser extent, program and policy-related factors and individual factors. Diaspora organizations often have limited capacities

and dwindling participation and support of community members in activities and programs, which further limit organizations’ abilities to go beyond activities on the local level and engage transnationally. Desires and plans to return to Iraq, both temporarily or for longer periods, were similarly limited. The prospect of return is hindered by weak governance in Iraq and the opportunity costs diaspora members face in returning from countries of residence, where they have established stable and productive personal lives.

Cross community initiatives and inter-religious dialogues are limited among the different components of the Iraqi diaspora communities, with some reproduction of conflict dynamics from the homeland to the diaspora. Internal splits resulting from confessional differences or disputes over ethnic origins introduce additional layers of fragmentation that must be addressed when designing activities the diaspora is expected to contribute to.

To inform the design of community bridging initiatives, several recommendations arise from the research, which can be roughly divided into three thematic areas: 1) communication and outreach; 3) intervention design, and; 3) local and global advocacy. The recommendations are primarily intended for development cooperation partners, including international and intergovernmental organizations, and donor agencies. The recommendations given below are organized by theme, with individual recommendations within each thematic area presented in the sequence in which implementation should occur.



Figure 7: Anjam Rasool/IOM Iraq

1. Communications and outreach

The first set of recommendations relate to establishing and implementing a strategy for informing the diaspora, creating opportunities for exchange and feedback, and ensuring that the diaspora perceives the processes and institutions involved in community bridging initiatives as credible. To achieve these objectives, the following recommendations are given:

- **Embed community bridging initiatives within a long-term communication and outreach strategy:** The centerpiece of diaspora engagement is trust. In low-trust settings, clearly and consistently communicating with the diaspora is imperative and should begin before any request is made of its members. That communication should address the objectives of working with the diaspora, how the diaspora members were identified and selected to be included in discussions or initiatives, what kind of information or resources may be asked of the diaspora (and how their information or resources will be safeguarded), what the strategy is to ensure equitable inclusion of different diaspora communities, and identification of what the potential outcomes of engaging may be. Where possible, the communication and outreach strategy should be tailored to specific sub-groups within the diaspora, for example ethno-religious communities, given their different pre- and post-migration experiences that affect current and future relationships with other elements of the Iraqi diaspora, international organizations, and governments in countries of residence and origin. This recommendation is not specific to community bridging initiatives but relates to any initiative that seeks structural engagement or cooperation of the diaspora. Recognizing and tailoring messaging and outreach to different groups within the Iraqi diaspora is particularly important, however, when an initiative involves cooperation with government authorities in Iraq. Communication and outreach with the diaspora should also not occur only once but should be part of a longer-term engagement plan, creating multiple opportunities for information sharing and exchange.
- **Adopt a conflict- and context-sensitive approach to address fragmentation in a constructive manner:** It is essential to bear in mind the multiple lines of divisions/fragmentations that characterize the Iraqi diaspora, which relate to elements such as political affiliation, ethnicity, and past experiences of persecution or displacement. Community bridging programs should take a conflict-sensitive approach that entails careful analysis and monitoring of the possible positive or negative impacts of interventions on communities and sub-groups within those communities by undertaking regular assess-

ments and conflict analyses that build on existing studies on the lines of fragmentation and conflict. Continuous dialogue with diaspora members and within Iraqis living in Iraq can facilitate identification of divergent views within the diaspora and help actors reflect on how the proposed programming and policy interventions interact with identified conflict risks (divisions and tensions); it can also support identification of opportunities for the design of community bridging programming (e.g., selection of local partners, geographic targets). Failure to recognize the internal fragmentations within the diaspora may exacerbate existing tensions both within the Christian and Yazidi communities and among different ethnic or religious groups, or may lead to (perceived) politicization of diaspora engagement, if, for instance, one group is viewed as favored over another. A conflict-sensitive approach may entail partnership with organizations specialized in conflict resolution and intercommunal dialogue who can facilitate both intra-group and inter-religious dialogue meetings that involve trust building exercises to address existing lines of fragmentation and conflict.⁴⁶ Existing tensions between diaspora groups and local actors should also be approached with a conflict-sensitive approach to minimize unintended negative impacts of engaging the diaspora in local processes. In this regard, regular assessments can be undertaken in the local context to understand the perceptions of local actors about diaspora groups and their inclusion in ongoing reconciliation and reconstruction efforts, which can help identify opportunities to support positive cross-community attitudes, behaviors, and relations.

- **Create opportunities to restore trust in the international community:** The long-term project of building partnerships with diasporas is much more likely to succeed if it has a strong foundation of good communication and mutual trust. There is widespread mistrust in the practices and competencies of the Iraqi authorities, and a failure to distinguish or clearly explain the work of international organizations may cause diaspora members to view them in a similar way to the authorities, or to doubt more broadly their intentions and capacities. As part of a long-term communication strategy, international organizations should develop systems for information sharing with diasporas regarding the interventions in Iraq (particularly those in Sinjar and Ninewa Plains) and demonstrate transparency and accountability. Particularly when the diaspora is asked to contribute resources, including networks and knowledge, to such interventions, structural consultation mechanisms should be built into the intervention lifecycle.

46. For instance, an example is found in Nansen Peace Center engagement with Somali communities in Norway.

- **Engage diaspora organizations in the design of the community bridging programs:** It is essential to involve diaspora groups in the design of the programs in which their contributions are requested. Diaspora engagement is a two-way street that requires reciprocal provision of benefits. It is challenging to involve diaspora actors in decision making processes without incurring resentment of local actors, however. Creating periodic consultation fora that bring diaspora organizations and local actors together to advise on the design of interventions can provide diaspora actors with a greater sense of ownership in relation to subsequent development activities and processes, which could in turn increase prospects of engagement. Tensions between locals and diaspora actors may arise when diaspora members get involved in local processes, which can be minimized by a conflict-sensitive approach. For example, the involvement of the diaspora can initially be limited to non-political aspects of recovery such as livelihood programs, humanitarian aid programs, or rehabilitation of public structures.
- **Encourage sensitive communication between the Iraqi government and its institutions abroad and the diaspora:** Given past experiences of state-sponsored marginalization and violence, different ethno-national diaspora communities may regard the Iraqi state as an expression of institutionalized exclusion, and trust of entities connected to the government may be limited. The fear of government surveillance and repression through consulates and embassies can also emerge as a barrier to engagement, regardless of the validity of these concerns⁴⁷. To mitigate these concerns, the Iraqi government may be advised to develop transparent, accountable, and accessible government institutions that are responsive to the needs and vulnerabilities of the diaspora population. One strategy of building trust between the diaspora and Iraqi Institutions is to encourage the use of an inclusive and sensitive language towards minority groups by local embassies and consulates. The use of an inclusive language that recognizes and caters to all components of the Iraqi(-origin) society, while acknowledging the differing and often diverging views of different groups, can improve the chances of healthy communication and engagement with DOs. In this regard, the international community can play a mediating role between the government and diaspora communities by updating diaspora communities about the efforts of the Iraqi government in areas that are important to the diaspora, for example, related to justice and reconciliation. For example, the establishment of the Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Da'esh/ISIL (UNITAD) at the initiative of the Iraqi government was viewed as a positive development by some diaspora members. Highlighting such efforts in addition to demonstrating the interests of the government to engage with its diaspora as a two-way process can help build trust of the minority communities in the efforts of the Iraqi government and increase the willingness of the diaspora communities to engage with the country of origin on a structural level. The international community may further mediate the relationship between the government and diaspora by supporting research on the needs and interests of diverse strands of the Iraqi diaspora. The government of Iraq may already offer rights and services (e.g., voting abroad, support for property restitution, restoration of identity and citizenship) that are desired by certain groups within the diaspora, yet the diaspora may not be aware of those entitlements or may feel that there are substantial barriers to exercising those entitlements. The international community could therefore support the government to understand what substantial provisions are currently or may be offered to the diaspora to encourage their long-term engagement with Iraq.
- **Build common spaces for interaction:** Limited encounters between organizations and members of different ethno-religious diasporas may risk deepening fragmentation within the wider Iraqi diaspora. Building up a communication strategy that gives diverse groups the space to interact with each other in neutral spaces can foster their interactions and help them devise a common interest in coordinating and/or combining their engagement efforts. Neutral spaces can be offered by development practitioners and donor agencies that are engaged with diaspora organizations in the countries of residence. Such neutral spaces can focus on common challenges and needs, for example through events that focus more on building organizational capacities (e.g., professionalization of CSOs, which Germany used to regularly conduct under GIZ) or through events that support profession-based business networking. This approach can encourage a bottom-up approach that recognizes the existing diaspora-initiated networks and builds on them.
- **Support more extensive research and systematic mapping exercises:** Data collection on specific migration cohorts that further explores the interactions and connections within the diaspora can help inform more nuanced policy and programming design while creating opportunities to increase “face time” and strengthen dialogue with the diaspora. To achieve meaningful results from research-oriented exercises, the implementation should occur subsequent to establishing a long-term communication strategy with the diaspora so that higher participation of the diverse components of the diaspora in the research initiatives can be achieved. Policy and programming should be responsive to the interplay of ethno-religious identities with personal and group-related characteristics such as gender, class, political ideologies, and migration experience, all of which shape engagement behaviors. One-off or short-term studies may inadvertently exclude the diversity of diaspora voices. To tackle the challenge of misrepresentation, systematic data collection strategies can be developed to allow for identification of existing networks and ties. If a sequence of a long-term communication strategy, research and mapping exercises are offered that build relationships with diverse diaspora members and organizations, the quality of the resulting data may increase, and the diaspora may have a greater sense of ownership (and therefore commitment to) the initiatives that the data they provide informs.

47. Cindy Horst et al., “Participation of diasporas in peacebuilding and development: a handbook for practitioners and policymakers.” (PRIO Report, 2. Oslo: PRIO, 2010).

2. Intervention Design

The second set of recommendations relate to the nature, structure, and methodologies for implementing community bridging interventions. They include:

- **Build organizational capacities of diaspora organizations:** Sustainable and equitable inclusion of diaspora in development projects requires organizational capacity and stability. Given the generally low capacities of DOs, future programming may emphasize professionalization and capacity building among diaspora organizations, which should be tailored to the context in each specific country of destination and the civil society ecosystem in which organizations function. Such capacity-building initiatives could include training, seminars, and workshops on topics such as organizational registration procedures, grant writing and navigation of funding schemes, organizational accounting and financial management, results communication, and non-violent communication, among others. Such initiatives should build or strengthen organizational capacities, solidify organizations' access to resources in the country of residence, and enhance the (perceived) legitimacy of such organizations as development cooperation partners.
- **Design targeted funding support schemes:** Many diaspora organizations find it difficult to access and compete for funding opportunities. Supporting organizations to access appropriate funding can begin with inventorying the information diaspora organizations have on funding options and on the conditions for/steps to access this funding. Funding databases, information websites and grant portals, and information on both funding opportunities and capacity-building opportunities can be made available to diaspora organizations. Events on professionalization related to application processes can include provision of more customized support in application writing, for example. Funding support mechanisms can also include schemes that encourage consortium applications, which can foster interaction between communities. Yet, forming consortiums should not be a requirement but rather provided as a voluntary option with certain advantages, as it may risk intensifying existing conflicts over resources. Application procedures, eligibility criteria, and other relevant information should be available in different languages, and applicants should be given the option to write grant applications in multiple languages. The selection procedures should be open, transparent and participatory, with information published in accessible sources so applicants perceive evaluation as fair and independent of ethno-religious identity or personal networks.
- **Support profession-oriented temporary/virtual return programs with minimal state involvement:** Despite having strong emotional attachment and sense of belonging, respondents indicated limited willingness and readiness to directly interact with the socio-political and economic transformations occurring in their places of origin. Transnational entrepreneurs and civil society actors from the so-called 'old' diaspora, who have secure legal status and well-established professional careers in the countries of residence, are perhaps more interested and able to partake in temporary return initiatives. Temporary return programs can advantageously provide a non-political, profession-oriented focus. For example temporary or virtual return projects may be organized around professions (e.g., doctors, teachers) or focused on cultural and educational activities or exchange programs between local NGOs and diaspora organizations, and with minimal or no government involvement. Return initiatives may include careful selection and vetting of placement organizations (for programs that include placements in host organizations for sake of knowledge exchange), the development of appropriate monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, and mentoring/advising both of returnees and of the staff in the institutions to which people return to prepare them for inter-cultural communication challenges.
- **Promote trans-local and low-key engagement in development and peacebuilding:** Diaspora members may create stronger bonds with their hometowns, cities or neighborhoods rather than the country as a whole, particularly if they have a troubled relationship with the state. A sense of belonging to a locality can encourage engagement while providing distance from contentious discourses or practices on the national level. Therefore, prospects for engagement in the entire territory of the homeland may not be necessarily attractive for the diaspora members if these prospects are not relevant for the localities where they perceive as 'home'. Development initiatives and peacebuilding programming can therefore aim at promoting trans-local engagement through, for example, designing tailored programs in specific towns in the Ninewa province that include cooperation with small-scale actors such as hometown associations or charity groups. Before embarking on long-term development and peacebuilding programs, engaging the diaspora in small-scale and more localized engagement (e.g., reconstruction of symbolically-valuable public structures, supporting livelihood opportunities for youth in specific conflict-affected towns) that tackle indirect consequences of conflict can prove useful to begin with.

- **Adopt a multi-stakeholder approach with less formalized programming:** International organizations and donors should provide diasporas with opportunities to operationalize programs and projects in Iraq without the direct engagement of the state. For example, for the Assyrian/Chaldean communities in the diaspora, church functions as a bridge between the diaspora and the homeland; many philanthropic activities are conducted in cooperation with the church or channeled back home through the church. Therefore, less formalized and decentralized engagement frameworks that work with such existing institutions and networks can encourage diaspora contributions. Such an approach can be mainstreamed across non-religious sectors by initiating or encouraging development of similar networks of, for example, women-led, humanitarian, and advocacy organizations. Supporting the formation of cooperation platforms or networks that involve organizations working in the respective fields inside and outside Iraq can foster cross-community collaboration and encourage mobilization around shared values, common goals, and commitments while demonstrating that the efforts of diaspora actors are endorsed by external actors. Such platforms can enhance the linkages between communities in Iraq and diaspora communities in countries of residence. As umbrella organizations alone are not a direct solution to lack of cooperation/ coordination and under-engagement, this approach, as in others, needs to be applied with a conflict-sensitive approach.
- **Leverage recent events to foster collective identity and bottom-up partnerships:** The 2019-20 Iraqi protests have emerged as a key development that renewed Iraqi minority groups' interest in the political and social processes happening in Iraq and revived a distinct sense of "Iraqiness". Policy initiatives and programming for the purpose of engagement with diaspora communities can capitalize on these developments to establish a new channel of dialogue. Bottom-up partnerships can be promoted between DOs and local development NGOs with a secular background, including those led by or focused on youth.
- **Promote cultural, artistic and educational activities to engage the diaspora:** Youth projects such as student/civil society exchange programs and leadership programs that are centered around culture, art, and educational activities can provide the younger generation with credible opportunities to become active agents of positive change, peacebuilding, and reconciliation. For example, in the Georgian context, minority communities engage on issues of national importance, and their transnational activities are issue-based, driven by emerging issues, rather than identity-based and relevant only for their own ethno-religious communities. Rather than framing initiatives as being "diaspora relevant", they may be advantageously framed around the thematic issue area they concern.

3. Advocacy, justice and reconciliation

Governance reform, human rights, equal treatment, justice, and accountability all relate to core values that the selected ethno-religious diaspora communities endorse to varying degrees. The international community can support diaspora groups in their advocacy, justice and reconciliation efforts in different ways:

- **Understand the expectations and desires of different diaspora communities related to justice and accountability:** A common thread of action across different ethno-religious communities related to supporting recovery from more contemporary IS-related atrocities or from less contemporary experiences of targeted violence or repression. The strong role the IS attacks played in inciting collective action has also been accompanied by growing interest of the diaspora in justice and accountability work, suggesting that justice initiatives may unify and encourage cooperation across the diverse diaspora communities. Yet different elements of the diaspora may have experienced different contemporary and historical ills, with different desired means of redress (e.g., criminal proceedings, community courts, truth and reconciliation commissions). Understanding what the different diaspora communities view as justice-related priorities—and inventorying the political, economic, and social solutions that members of the diaspora identify as appropriate forms of redress—are important first steps if justice and reconciliation programming that addresses diaspora experiences is being designed. Such programming should take into account the sensitivity of the term reconciliation among the segments of the diaspora that consider official redress/ justice as a prerequisite for reconciliation and peace. The programming in this field should be designed with a conflict-sensitive approach that views the pursuit of justice not only as a means to achieve peace but as an end in itself that can pave the way for reconciliation.
- **Map the existing programming on justice and reconciliation:** A practical starting point to ensure complementarity between and among ongoing processes in the field of justice and reconciliation is to inventory and map past and current initiatives undertaken by different stakeholders (e.g., international organizations, local and national civil society, diaspora organizations) related to justice and reconciliation. This approach can prevent duplication of efforts and enable identification of gaps in programming, helping stakeholders identify potential areas of complementarity between the parallel processes. Moreover, identification of common areas of engagement across different communities (e.g., Germany-based Christian and Yazidi organizations jointly fundraising for liberation of Yazidi women from IS captivity) can provide an entry point to promote cross-community initiatives.

- **Encourage the bottom-up development of global or national platforms, alliances, and coalitions:** The international community can play an important role in bringing together local and transnational activists but providing incentives to form networks, platforms, or global alliances that are representative of diverse segments of the diaspora that are pursue legal resolution, restitution, and justice and accountability. Alliances or networks should be primarily centered around the common interests and objectives of the diaspora organizations rather than on the expectations of external actors. The platforms can offer customized mentoring programs for organizations, which could also include tailor-made advice on accessing funding mechanisms.
- **Learn from past experiences:** Programming on reconciliation can be streamlined by organizing study visits and workshops to learn how community bridging programs have been designed and included diaspora contributions in other contexts with similar fragmentation and trauma among ethno-religious minority communities, with a specific focus on examples of transitional justice and community reconciliation in post-conflict societies. In addition to implementers of these programs, these opportunities should be extended to include local and diaspora actors and involve consultations with other entities and institutions that are pursuing transitional justice and reconciliation initiatives. Empowering and equipping the local actors with necessary tools and evidence-based knowledge through this type of activities can enhance the likelihood of local and grassroots ownership in peacebuilding and reconciliation, which can render it successful and durable.



Figure 8: Anjam Rasool/IOM Iraq

IOM IRAQ

iraq.iom.int

iomiraq@iom.int

UNAMI Compound (Diwan 2),
International Zone,
Baghdad/Iraq

   
@IOMIraq



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE



UNITED NATIONS
UNIVERSITY
UNU-MERIT



Maastricht University

© 2020 International Organization for Migration (IOM)

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise without the prior written permission of the publisher.