



# THE ROLE OF KURDISH COMMUNITIES IN ACHIEVING SUSTAINABILITY GOALS WHILE SERVING IDP AND REFUGEES

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## Abstract

This research examines the complex interplay between humanitarian response and sustainable development in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI). A place where Kurdish communities have become critical stakeholders in supporting 1 and 1.5 million only internally displaced persons during the (2014-2015 ISIL shock) (iMDC, 2015) and more than 300,000 Refugees since 2011 (UNHCR, 2025). Through a comprehensive mixed-methods approach combining quantitative surveys (n=806) with qualitative focus group discussions and systematic camp assessments, we analyze the multidimensional factors influencing displacement management and community integration. Our investigation spans four distinct settlement sites—Domiz 1, Shariya, Qushtapa, and Baharka camps—each representing unique demographic and operational contexts.

The study identifies significant variations in integration outcomes across economic, social, and environmental domains, revealing that successful interventions must address interconnected challenges including restricted livelihood pathways, educational barriers, infrastructure limitations, and evolving host-community dynamics. Our findings demonstrate that while Kurdish communities have demonstrated remarkable resilience in response to displacement crises, sustainability remains contingent on strengthening governance frameworks, enhancing resource management, and cultivating meaningful participation among displaced populations.

*Keywords:* Kurdish Communities; Sustainability Goals; Humanitarian Response; Urban Planning

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Background and context

The Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) has emerged as a significant refuge for displaced populations fleeing regional conflicts across the Middle East. Currently hosting 90,722 refugees and 108,439 internally displaced persons reported from our senior camp managers, the region has responded to humanitarian crises stemming from both the protracted Syrian civil war and the territorial expansion of ISIS. Kurdish communities have demonstrated remarkable resilience in addressing these displacement challenges, mobilizing responses through both formal governmental institutions and grassroots community-based initiatives. This multi-layered approach has facilitated comprehensive humanitarian support, encompassing emergency relief, transitional assistance, and longer-term integration efforts. Despite these achievements, the sustainability of humanitarian interventions remains an ongoing challenge, complicated by funding constraints, regional political instability, and the evolving needs of diverse displaced populations.



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### 1.2 Research Objectives

The research addresses three fundamental questions to guide its investigation and analysis. First, how do Kurdish communities contribute to the sustainability of IDPs and refugees, considering both formal institutional mechanisms and informal community-based support systems? This question examines the unique cultural, social, and political factors that characterize the Kurdish response to displacement. Second, what are the economic, social, and environmental challenges in camp management, particularly regarding resource allocation, service provision, and infrastructure development? This question explores the practical obstacles to sustainable humanitarian response. Third, how can interventions align with global sustainability standards while respecting local contexts and capacities? This question seeks to bridge international frameworks with contextually appropriate implementation strategies, recognizing that sustainability must be locally defined and operationalized to be effective. Moreover, the survey answers are perspective and reflections of displaced persons and their host community. The responses answers may have biases and lack full truthfulness, however, not be the absolute truth but it's important to acknowledge how the interviewees perceive life in the context we are addressing.

From a city and regional planning perspective, the protracted displacement in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) poses significant challenges to urban and regional development frameworks. The influx of over 90,722 refugees and 108,439 internally displaced persons (IDPs) has transformed camps like Domiz 1 into semi-permanent urban extensions, straining municipal resources in cities like Erbil and Duhok (UN-Habitat, 2016). These camps, initially designed as temporary humanitarian spaces, now require integration into KRI's regional master plans to address land use, infrastructure, and urban sprawl. The Kurdish response, combining grassroots initiatives with formal governance, reflects informal urban planning practices that align with the New Urban Agenda's call for inclusive and sustainable urbanization (UN-Habitat, 2016). However, funding constraints and political instability complicate efforts to balance humanitarian imperatives with long-term regional planning, necessitating policies that integrate camps into urban fabrics while fostering resilience and equitable resource distribution.

## 2. Literature Review

Over the past decade, humanitarian organizations have maintained sustained operations across four major camps in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI). The interventions reflect an evolution from emergency response to more sustainable development-focused approaches:

2.1 Domiz 1 Camp is the largest Syrian refugee camp has consistently hosted around 29,630 residents that being according to Barzani Charity Foundation (BCF) Camp Coordination Camp Management CCCM database. UNHCR's primary interventions included establishing comprehensive WASH facilities serving all residents (UNHCR WASH Report, 2022) and upgrading 2,800 temporary shelters to concrete bases (UNHCR Shelter Report, 2021). BCF has played a crucial role in service delivery, managing monthly food distributions for 5,200 families targeting vulnerable residents and operating educational programs benefiting 3,400 children (BCF Annual Report, 2022). The camp has developed significant infrastructure, including primary healthcare facilities serving 1,500 patients monthly (UNHCR Health Access Report, 2023). This camp has been selected to module the sustainability for other selected camps, here where residents are self-sufficient and vulnerability rates are low. Within the survey and FGDs it's quite apparent where there is high positivity when answering questionnaire.

2.2 Housing over 8,522 Syrian refugees, Qushtapa has benefited from coordinated humanitarian support. UNHCR



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has maintained protection services assisting 1,200 cases annually (UNHCR Protection Report, 2022), while BCF implemented winterization programs supporting 1,800 families (BCF Winter Response Report, 2022). A notable development was the installation of solar power infrastructure, though implementation challenges persist (KRG Camp Management Report, 2023), however, later the status of solar power sustainability will be addressed along with and the efficiency cross-management of such facilities and its handovers from the UN to the Government. Qushtapa camp was selected mainly because of the unique aid it received from the humanitarian organizations, it being the most developed and closer to factories and has the most working opportunities nearby, in the mapping process however, the residents had a lot of complaints about their situation, and the camp was selected to identify their challenges despite the opportunities mentioned.

- 2.3 Primarily hosting Yazidi IDPs, Shariya's population has fluctuated, currently standing at 9,365 residents according to our CCCM database. Key interventions include UNHCR's shelter assistance to 4,200 families (UNHCR Shelter Report, 2022) and enhanced protection services focusing on GBV prevention (UNHCR Protection Update, 2023). BCF has maintained consistent support through NFI distributions to 3,800 families and operation of child-friendly spaces serving 900 children (BCF Emergency Response Report, 2022). The camp has seen significant focus on psychosocial support services, particularly for ISIS survivors (UNHCR Mental Health Services Report, 2023). Rationale of selection for this camp stemmed from the FGDs, the 10 participants showed lack of stability and mourned the loss of their farming land, because the majority of them come from villages near Sinjar, like Wadia Tel Ozer and Siba. Their perspectives are interesting to note in the survey data.
- 2.4 Baharke Camp hosting only 848 Arab IDPs primarily from Mosul, originally it had been hosting more than 4,000 residents but more recently the number has decreased due to because of the returnee programmes and financially independence. The camp has received sustained support in WASH facilities (UNHCR WASH Report, 2023) and education support for 800 students (UNHCR Education Update, 2022). BCF has maintained healthcare facilities serving 1,200 patients monthly while and implementing skills training programs for 300 youth (BCF Health Services Report, 2023). Baharke Camps' urban proximity to Erbil has presented unique integration opportunities, that also comes with own challenges (IOM Integration Report, 2023). The selection of the camp was mainly because of the close distance it has to Erbil, availability of basic resources, and the reintegration challenges residents have.
- 2.5 Cross-Cutting Themes: Throughout the past decade, the humanitarian landscape in KRI has undergone significant transformation, evolving from crisis-oriented emergency to sustainable, development-focused interventions:
  - **Paradigm Shift to Sustainable Development:** The humanitarian community has transitioned from immediate relief to sustainable solutions, with comprehensive livelihood programming, skills development, and permanent infrastructure systems including water networks, healthcare facilities, and educational institutions. Temporary shelters have been upgraded to durable housing, emergency food distribution has evolved into agricultural capacity-building, and ad hoc health services have developed into integrated healthcare systems.
  - **Urbanization of Camps and Regional Planning:** The transition from emergency response to sustainable development in KRI's camps mirrors the global phenomenon of camp urbanization, where temporary shelters evolve into urban-like settlements with complex infrastructure needs (UNHCR & World Bank,



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2021). For instance, Domiz 1's concrete shelters and Qushtapa's solar power initiatives highlight attempts to create durable urban systems within camps. However, these efforts often lack integration with regional planning frameworks, leading to inefficiencies like Qushtapa's non-functional solar panels due to missing battery storage (Agier, 2011). This underscores the need for city and regional planning approaches that treat camps as extensions of urban systems, requiring coordinated land-use policies, transportation links, and resilient infrastructure to align with Sustainable Development Goal 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities).

- **Enhanced Coordination Mechanisms:** Improvements in inter-agency coordination have transformed service delivery effectiveness. The Humanitarian Response Plan (6) details how coordination between UNHCR, BCF, governmental bodies, and NGOs has eliminated service duplication and standardized methodologies. The cluster approach has created clear accountability frameworks, enhancing coverage and quality of services.
- **Mainstreaming Protection Frameworks:** Protection considerations are now fundamental to humanitarian programming. The Protection Cluster Annual Report (11) documents enhanced safeguarding mechanisms for vulnerable populations, including gender-based violence prevention, child protection, and psychosocial support, ensuring dignified access to services.
- **Community Empowerment:** Community-driven initiatives and participatory governance models have emerged, with camp management committees contributing to needs assessments and program design (4). Community-based protection networks, women's committees, and youth councils enhance program effectiveness and community resilience

### 3. Methodology

This study adopted a mixed-methods research design, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide a comprehensive analysis of the experiences of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), refugees, and host communities. The methodology is structured into the following components: In the research design the project employed a mixed method approach integrating; qualitative surveys (404 responses from IDPs and Refugees, 402 responses from the host communities), focus group discussions (FGDs) conducted in all camps primarily, case study analysis mapping sustainability aspects in targeted camps, and finally, secondary data analysis.

#### 3.1 Research Design

The research utilized a mixed-methods approach to ensure a robust examination of the subject matter. The quantitative component included structured surveys administered to 404 IDPs and refugees and 402 host community members, providing numerical data on their experiences and perspectives. The qualitative component consisted of focus group discussions (FGDs) conducted in all targeted camps, case study analyses to explore sustainability aspects within these camps, and secondary data analysis to contextualize primary findings with existing literature and reports.

#### 3.2 Data Collection

Primary data collection involved two main methods:



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- **Quantitative Data:** Structured surveys were distributed to 404 IDPs and refugees and 402 host community members. The surveys were designed to capture measurable insights into the challenges and needs of these populations.
- **Qualitative Data:** Semi-structured interviews and FGDs were conducted with refugees, IDPs, and host community members. FGDs involved 10 participants per camp, selected to represent diverse perspectives. Additionally, interviews with camp managers, coordinators, and senior officers were conducted to map sustainability aspects and operational challenges within the camps.

### 3.3 Qualitative Analysis and Validation

Qualitative data were gathered through FGDs and a participatory social workshop in each camp, where participants discussed challenges and proposed solutions. To ensure the surveys accurately reflected participants' perspectives, four consultation sessions were held: three prior to survey development to inform question design and one post-survey to validate findings and assess error rates. Case study analyses further complemented the qualitative findings by providing in-depth insights into sustainability practices within the targeted camps.

## 4. Case Studies: Sustainability and Service Gaps in Camps

- 4.1 **Domiz 1 Camp:** With a survey sample of 150 forms, Domiz 1 stands as the largest refugee camp, hosting approximately 29,630 Syrian refugees (6,172 families). FGDs revealed financial stability, with strong educational integration (children attending local schools and some pursuing higher education). Five operational organizations provide employment opportunities, fostering skill development. However, improvements in protection services and infrastructure are needed. Domiz 1's success as a "golden standard" for camp sustainability exemplifies effective urban integration within regional planning contexts. Its proximity to Duhok's urban economy has facilitated employment opportunities, with five operational organizations fostering economic linkages akin to urban labor markets (UNHCR & World Bank, 2021). This reflects a form of informal urban planning, where camp infrastructure supports socio-economic integration into the host city's fabric, aligning with SDG 11's emphasis on inclusive urbanization.
- 4.2 **Shariya Camp:** Established for Yazidi IDPs, with a survey sample of 99 forms, Shariya's population has decreased from 2,300 to 1,896 families. Returnees face barriers like suspended federal funds and bureaucratic issues for ISIS survivors. Infrastructure challenges include water, electricity, and fire-vulnerable tents. Twelve organizations operate permanent centers, with health facilities providing basic care.
- 4.3 **Qushtapa Camp:** With 8,522 Syrian refugees and a survey sample of 104 forms, Qushtapa faces challenges in renewable energy implementation (e.g., solar panels lacking battery storage). FGDs highlighted women's political engagement and cultural barriers (e.g., Sorani curriculum). Proximity to factories offers work opportunities, and NGOs support women's microenterprises. Qushtapa's renewable energy initiatives, while aligned with SDG 7 (Clean Energy), reveal critical gaps in regional energy planning. The lack of battery storage for solar panels renders them ineffective, highlighting a disconnect between sustainability goals and practical urban infrastructure planning (UN-Habitat, 2020). Additionally, limited transportation infrastructure restricts access to nearby factories, underscoring the need for regional planning that enhances mobility and economic connectivity between camps and urban centers.



4.4 Baharke Camp: Located near Erbil, with 848 residents and a survey sample of 49 responses, Baharke’s population has decreased due to reintegration programs. FGDs indicate high resident engagement but challenges with stray dogs, waste, and economic precarity. Urban proximity to Erbil offers integration opportunities but is limited by transportation and employment access. Baharke’s proximity to Erbil offers unique opportunities for urban integration, yet challenges like stray dog populations and waste accumulation reflect failures in regional land-use planning (UN-Habitat, 2020). Abandoned shelters indicate unplanned urban decay, necessitating resilient urban designs that address waste management and public safety. Enhanced transportation planning to connect Baharke to Erbil’s economic hubs could mitigate economic precarity and foster SDG 11-aligned urban integration.

**5. Refugees and IDPs: Findings and Analysis**

5.1 Demographics and Displacement History (SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities)

Individuals were interviewed ranging from ages 18 to upwards of 55 years old. Noticeably the women of Syrian origin in refugee camps, whether living in Domiz camp or Qushtapa camp, tend to be more outspoken and lead conversations during the survey calls. However, a different pattern was observed when calling IDPs in Shariya and Baharke camps of Kurdi Yazidi and Iraqi Arab Origins. In these camps, men typically took over answering for their wives when the organization called for surveys.

In 2014, The civil war in Syria resulted in immigration of 3 million Syrians to KRG. According to our survey, the majority of those who arrived at Domiz Camp and Qushtapa Camp had previously lived in Cities and Municipalities, with a small percentage of villagers. Individuals with city origins instantly become categorized as educated and formerly employed. In contrast, most of the internally displaced persons previously lived in villages before the displacement. Their displacement was triggered by acts and threats of violence by ISIS in Sinjar city, Ninewa and surrounding areas. These previous villagers and shepherds typically sent their kids to school until the 6th or 9th grade due to a lack of available schools in the area; they were qualified as persons skilled in agricultural and animal husbandry work. Since living in the camps, both IDPs and Refugees have been able to attend schools, enroll in universities and get employment opportunities for the past decade.

When interviewees were asked “have you been displaced more than once?” 72.7% of Shariya residents who were interviewed replied “Yes”. The reasoning behind their answers arises from a timeline which begins when Yazidis from Sinjar and surroundings initially seeking refuge on the Sinjar Mountain. This led to survivors then being placed in Duhok schools followed by IDP camps after a year. Some refugees attempted to return to their places of origin; however, they were met by difficulties emerging from economic instability in the region as well as Hashid Al Shabbi, and other political parties occupying Sinjar. The arabizing of the villages where Kurd Yazidis were settled before the war has also contributed to the feeling of danger for those who returned to Sinjar, majority of which had ended up coming back to the camp as they felt unsafe.

**Table 1.** Survey results showing the demographics and displacement history of refugees and IDPs in Domiz 1, Shariya, Qushtapa and Baharke camps

Question asked to participant	Options to choose from	Individual Camp Statistics (%)				Combined Camps statistics (%)			
		Domiz 1	Shariya	Qushtapa	Baharke	IDP (Shariya + Baharke)	Refugee (Domiz +	Duhok (Domix +	Erbil (Qushtap



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	when interviewed						Qushtapa)	Shariya)	a + Baharke)
What age category and range do you fall under?	18-24 years	4.00	3.03	10.58	6.12	4.05	6.69	3.61	9.15
	25-34 years	22.00	37.37	30.77	44.90	39.86	25.59	28.11	35.29
	35-44 years	34.00	34.34	27.88	30.61	33.11	31.50	34.14	28.76
	45-54 years	23.33	16.16	20.19	10.20	14.19	22.05	20.48	16.99
	55+ years	16.676	9.09	10.58	8.16	8.78	14.17	13.65	9.80
What gender do you identify as?	Male	43.33	83.84	14.42	87.76	85.14	31.50	59.44	37.91
	Female	56.67	16.16	85.58	12.24	14.86	68.50	40.56	62.09
What country are you originally from?	Syria	96.00	1.01	94.23	0.00	0.68	95.28	58.23	64.05
	Iraq (Yazidi/ Arab)	4.00	97.98	5.77	100.00	98.65	4.72	41.37	35.95
	Other	0.00	1.01	0.00	0.00	0.68	0.00	0.40	0.00
How many years have you been displaced from your country of origin?	2014	92/67	96.97	93.27	89.80	94.59	92.91	94.38	92.16
	2015-2017	6.67	3.03	6.73	10.20	5.41	6.69	5.22	7.84
	2018+	0.67	0.00	0.0	0.00	0.00	0.39	0.40	0.00
Where were you living before you experienced displacement	City	40.67	17.17	3.85	4.08	12.84	25.59	31.33	3.92
	Town	35.33	21.21	55.77	8.16	16.89	43.70	29.72	40.52
	Village	24.00	61.62	40.38	87.76	70.27	30.71	38.96	55.56

### 5.2 Economic Conditions and State of Residency (SDG 8: Decent work and Economic Growth)

When both IDP and Refugee camps were asked about their work status, the unemployed percentage was the highest among all camps. But it's worth noting that in Domiz camp, 76% of unemployed individuals were housewives, 89% in Qushtapa, 33% in Baharke and 37% in Shariya. The percentage of unemployment is low in Baharke and Shariya compared to the other two camps.

Camp residents were asked if they have a legal permit to work, which essentially means whether they have legal residency and a clean criminal record. After discussing the topic in a focus group in Qushtapa camp it turns out that the residents had misunderstood this question. 82.7% answered "No" mistakenly assuming that the question was asking if they have work opportunities. The same confusion was seen with the Shariya camp where 45.5% answered "No" and 79.6% in Baharke.

When asked about how they provide an income for themselves, most individuals chose "Other" among the options of work, aid, and family support. "Other" was relatively high in Domiz, Qushtapa and Baharke. This option could indicate that they rely on short term work or daily wages, but the majority selected this option because they don't wish to share financial details.

Furthermore, when residents were asked about justice in work opportunities, approximately 39% of people across IDP and Refugee camps in FGD and survey saw work opportunities as unfair. Their reasoning was that locals are paid higher than IDPs and refugees, the most dissatisfied camp was Qushtapa with 81.7% disagreeing that work opportunities are fair.

**Table 2.** Survey results showing statistics collected from refugees and IDPs in Domiz 1, Shariya, Qushtapa and Baharke camps that focus on the economic condition and state of residency

Question asked to participant	Options to choose from when interviewed	Individual Camp Statistics (%)				Combined Camps statistics (%)			
		Domiz 1	Shariya	Qushtapa	Baharke	IDP (Shariya + Baharke)	Refugee (Domiz + Qushtapa)	Duhok (Domix + Shariya)	Erbil (Qushtapa + Baharke)
What is your current employment status?	unemployed	62.00	37.37	92.31	36.73	37.16	74.41	52.21	74.51
	unofficial work	24.67	48.48	5.77	44.90	47.30	16.93	34.14	18.30
	NGO worker	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
	Private Sector	10.00	5.05	0.00	2.04	4.05	5.91	8.03	0.65
	governmental employment	0.67	7.07	0.00	12.24	8.78	0.39	3.21	3.92
	other	2.67	2.02	1.92	4.08	2.70	2.36	2.41	2.61
Do you have legal permission to work in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq?	Yes	27.33	49.49	1.92	20.41	39.86	16.93	36.14	7.84
	No	3.33	45.45	82.69	79.59	56.76	35.83	20.08	81.70
	I don't know	69.33	5.05	15.38	0.00	3.38	47.24	43.78	10.46
What is your main source of income?	Organization Aid	0.67	2.02	33.65	0.00	1.35	14.17	1.20	22.88
	Work	43.33	79.80	27.88	59.18	72.97	37.01	57.83	37.91
	Family Support	14.00	11.11	3.85	14.29	12.16	9.84	12.85	7.19
	Other	42.00	7.07	34.62	26.53	13.51	38.98	28.11	32.03
Do you believe that IDPs/refugees are given fair job opportunities in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq?	Yes	91.33	70.71	18.27	63.27	68.24	61.42	83.13	32.68
	No	8.67	29.29	81.73	36.73	31.76	38.58	16.87	67.32
What is the biggest employment challenges that you face?	Not Having a License to Work	0.67	11.11	9.62	8.16	10.14	4.33	4.82	9.15
	Discrimination at Work	4.00	6.06	11.54	0.00	4.05	7.09	4.82	7.84
	Low Wage/ Bad Work Circumstances	62.00	48.48	77.88	63.27	53.38	68.50	56.63	73.20
	Low Number of	78.00	72.73	84.62	81.63	75.68	80.71	75.90	83.66



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	Work Opportunities								
	Other	42.67	9.09	8.65	16.33	11.49	28.74	29.32	11.11

### 5.3 Access to Services (Health, Education, Shelter...) (SDG 3: Good Health and Well-being)

Considering that all of Domiz 1, Qushtapa, Shariya, and Baharke camps have schools within the camps covering grades 1 to 12, it was surprising that among the number of families we interviewed that 2-3 out of 10 kids didn't attend school. The reasoning for this differs from camp to camp. In Domiz, the majority of teens between ages 15 and 18, especially boys, drop out of school because they have difficulties in achieving passing grades. This results in a majority of the dropouts to begin labour jobs in Duhok in order to support their families. In Qushtapa, language barrier was a prominent issue, most families speak the kirmanci dialect at home, and it is difficult for the children to receive passing grades when the education is only offered in Sorani.

As understood from FGD participants after they completed the survey, the issues involving the education in the area was also due to educators not attending work as a result of delayed salaries. A vast majority of the educators were recent graduates, lacking a background in dealing with complex communities as well as a lack of knowledge on the spoken dialect, leading to poor communication between educators and students. Meanwhile, in Shariya camp, some families would take their children to work with them in jobs like farming or cleaning houses in Duhok, however, their kids would continue their studies until at least the 12th grade. Nonetheless, the greatest challenge that teenagers faced in the shariya camp is the abuse of alcohol and cigarettes, which are commonly consumed due to a feeling of hopelessness about their futures. In Baharke, there is a common trend among the youth, they drop out of school and start labour work at a young age.

Upon interviewing IOM and UNHCR representatives, they stated that the goal from the in-camp clinics had always been a temporary project along with all other services. This is because they had not anticipated the camps to be resided in for this long, but within the decade, they realized that the displaced persons must start communicating and interacting with the host community more often. Therefore, IDPs and Refugees are encouraged to visit governmental hospitals to receive treatment when needed. However, this suggestion resulted in dissatisfied camp residents, uncontented with governmental hospitals and clinics stating that the doctors lack expertise and are not well supplied with medication. With private clinics being so expensive, camp residents have no choice but to borrow money in order to afford medical help and medication especially for women who are pregnant or mothers.

The types of shelters the refugees and IDPs live in are a great measure of their financial capacities. Unfortunately, up to 75.8% of Shariya residents that were interviewed still live in tents. In Baharke only 10.2% live in tents, while Qushtapa and Domiz camps have no residents residing in tents. This shows the extent of poverty the residents in shariya camp live in, and lack of aid that might have better supported their livelihood.

**Table 3.** Survey results of responses collected from refugees and IDPs in Domiz 1, Shariya, Qushtapa and Baharke camps that focus on questions surrounding the access to services.

Question asked to participant	Options to choose from when interviewed	Individual Camp Statistics (%)				Combined Camps statistics (%)			
		Domiz 1	Shariya	Qushtapa	Baharke	IDP (Shariya +)	Refugee (Domiz +)	Duhok (Domix +)	Erbil (Qushtapa +)



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						Baharke)	Qushtapa)	Shariya)	Baharke)
Are your children currently attending school?	yes	69.33	73.74	62.50	67.35	71.62	66.54	71.08	64.05
	no	26.67	15.15	27.88	20.41	16.89	27.17	22.09	25.49
	I don't have children	4.00	11.11	9.62	12.24	11.49	6.30	6.83	10.46
If you have children and you answered that they DON'T attend school, what is the reason?	School not available	0.00	6.67	3.45	10.00	1.35	0.39	0.40	1.31
	Financial challenges	0.00	0.00	3.45	10.00	0.68	0.39	0.00	1.31
	Discrimination at school	0.00	6.67	3.45	0.00	0.68	0.39	0.40	0.65
	Don't having accredited paperwork to admit	0.00	0.00	3.45	0.00	0.00	0.39	0.00	0.65
	Other	100.00	86.67	86.21	80.00	14.19	25.59	21.29	21.57
What type of healthcare do you have access to?	Camp Clinic	0.00	14.14	18.27	14.29	14.19	7.48	5.62	16.99
	Government Hospital	33.33	65.66	70.19	51.02	60.81	48.43	46.18	64.05
	Private Clinic	66.67	17.17	8.65	34.69	22.97	42.91	46.99	16.99
	I don't have access to healthcare	0.00	3.03	2.88	0.00	2.03	1.18	1.20	1.96
What is the biggest challenge in accessing healthcare?	Not having a camp clinic	61.33	12.12	2.88	14.29	12.84	37.40	41.77	6.54
	Expensive Medications	34.00	58.59	89.42	67.35	61.49	56.69	43.78	82.35
	Lack of skilled/ specialized doctors	2.67	20.20	0.96	14.29	18.24	1.97	9.64	5.23
	Discrimination at healthcare facilities	0.00	1.01	0.96	0.00	0.68	0.39	0.40	0.65
	Other	2.00	8.08	5.77	4.08	6.76	3.54	4.42	5.23
What type of shelter are you currently living in?	Tent	0.67	75.76	0.00	89.80	80.41	0.39	30.52	28.76
	Cement base	98.00	18.18	99.04	10.20	15.54	98.43	66.27	70.59
	Other	1.33	6.06	0.96	0.00	4.05	1.18	3.21	0.65
How satisfied are you with shelter conditions?	Satisfied	86.00	36.36	7.69	53.06	41.89	53.94	66.27	22.22
	Average	12.67	19.19	70.19	12.24	16.89	36.22	15.26	51.63



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	Unsatisfied	1.33	33.33	20.19	32.65	33.11	9.06	14.06	24.18
	Very unsatisfied	0.00	11.11	1.92	2.04	8.11	0.79	4.42	1.96

#### 5.4 Security and Safety Concerns (SDG 16: Peace, Justice, and Strong Institution)

Safety and protection of camp residents are a primary concern in camp management. Over the years, guidelines and procedures have developed thanks to the United Nations. One of the main questions of concern that were asked to IDP camps was whether they feel safe in the camp. The number of those answering with a “No” in shariya and Baharke camp was relatively high, an average of 31% across both camps. When the question was asked again during an FGD in Shariya, concerns from residents were related to alcohol use by men and police officers being camp residents themselves, resulting in the occasional burying of problems instead of a solution. In Baharke on the other hand, the concern was mainly about stray dogs staying in abandoned shelters from past residents that have returned to their original areas. Furthermore, both camps expressed joint frustration and lack of safety in using shared toilets.

Another topic that needed further analysis was on the violence in the camp, luckily, violence reports were relatively low, however, it was the highest in Shariya camp. This is due to alcohol abuse from men which results in Domestic Violence when they return late at night. This anger is combined with the frustration of lack of water, electricity, resources, money and/or work.

**Table 4.** Survey results of responses collected from refugees and IDPs in Domiz 1, Shariya, Qushtapa and Baharke camps that focus on questions targeting security and safety concerns.

Question asked to participant	Options to choose from when interviewed	Individual Camp Statistics (%)				Combined Camps statistics (%)			
		Domiz 1	Shariya	Qushtapa	Baharke	IDP (Shariya + Baharke)	Refugee (Domiz + Qushtapa)	Duhok (Domiz + Shariya)	Erbil (Qushtapa + Baharke)
Do you feel safe in the camp?	Yes	100.00	62.63	98.08	75.51	66.89	99.21	85.14	90.85
	No	0.00	37.37	1.92	24.49	33.11	0.79	14.86	9.15
What security issues concern you the most?	theft	0.67	7.07	2.88	12.24	8.78	1.57	3.21	5.88
	GBV	0.67	5.05	17.31	8.16	6.08	7.48	2.41	14.38
	Militant groups	0.67	0.00	1.92	0.00	0.00	1.18	0.40	1.31
	none	98.00	87.88	77.88	79.59	85.14	89.76	93.98	78.43
Have you witnessed or experienced any form of violence in the camp?	yes	2.00	27.27	13.46	8.16	20.95	6.69	12.05	11.76
	no	98.00	72.73	86.54	91.84	79.05	93.31	87.95	88.24
If you answered yes to the previous	Yes	100.00	77.78	50.00	100.00	16.89	3.94	9.64	7.19
	No	0.00	22.22	50.00	0.00	4.05	2.76	2.41	4.58

question, was the incident reported?									
If the incident wasn't reported, why not?	Scared of revenge	0.00	33.33	85.71	0.00	1.35	2.36	0.80	3.92
	Don't trust authority	0.00	66.67	0.00	0.00	2.70	0.00	1.61	0.00
	Other	0.00	0.00	14.29	0.00	0.00	0.39	0.00	0.65
Do you believe the camp authorities are doing enough to ensure security?	Yes	93.33	93.94	91.35	95.92	94.59	92.52	93.57	92.81
	No	6.67	6.06	8.65	4.08	5.41	7.48	6.43	7.19

### 5.5 Women Participation (SDG 5: Gender Equality)

One of the important scopes in this research focuses on women and their safety, participation and leadership. Women are the pivotal caregivers and nurturers of communities, so it is important for the camps to be a place where women are empowered so that the place thrives.

When asked if women have similar opportunities to men in camps, we had not expected them to completely agree, but we noticed a significant percentage of 64.4% in Qushtapa camp objecting with a “No”. After discussing these results in FGD with camp women, they stated it's due to women carrying most of the responsibility on their shoulders for their kids and livelihoods. They also voiced concerns about the camp having water shortages as well as electricity loss and being relatively far from Erbil which affects access to opportunities in general. Overall, the lack in resources is a major stressor for women and men living in the camp.

We faced a similar objection from Qushtapa camp, after asking if the camp is a safe place for women and girls, 50% of them stated that it is not safe. This is due to lack of opportunities, livelihood aggression and low access to resources resulting in male aggression toward their female counterparts in heated arguments.

**Table 5.** Survey results of responses to questions collected from refugees and IDPs in Domiz 1, Shariya, Qushtapa and Baharke camps that focuses on the aspect of women participation.

Question asked to participant	Options to choose from when interviewed	Individual Camp Statistics (%)				Combined Camps statistics (%)			
		Domiz 1	Shariya	Qushtapa	Baharke	IDP (Shariya + Baharke)	Refugee (Domiz + Qushtapa)	Duhok (Domiz + Shariya)	Erbil (Qushtapa + Baharke)
Do you believe women in the camp have the same rights and opportunities as men?	Yes	96.67	71.72	35.58	73.47	72.30	71.65	86.75	47.71
	No	3.33	28.28	64.42	26.53	27.70	28.35	13.25	52.29
Are there safe	Yes	100.00	74.75	66.35	91.84	80.41	86.22	89.96	74.51



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spaces for women and girls in your camp?	No	0.00	25.25	33.65	8.16	19.59	13.78	10.04	25.49
Have you heard of or participated in any women's empowerment programs?	Yes	98.00	70.71	33.65	83.67	75.00	71.65	87.15	49.67
	No	2.00	29.29	66.35	16.33	25.00	28.35	12.85	50.33
Do you feel that women are involved in decision making in the camp?	Yes	98.00	69.70	36.54	71.43	70.27	72.83	86.75	47.71
	No	2.00	30.30	63.46	28.57	29.73	27.17	13.25	52.29
Do you believe that cases of GBV are properly addressed in your camp?	Yes	98.00	55.56	69.23	42.86	51.35	86.22	81.12	60.78
	No	2.00	16.16	2.88	36.73	22.97	2.36	7.63	13.73
	Unsure	0.00	28.28	27.88	20.41	25.68	11.42	11.24	25.49
If you need help regarding GBV, would you know where to report it?	Yes	96.00	79.80	90.38	83.67	81.08	93.70	89.56	88.24
	No	4.00	20.20	9.62	16.33	18.92	6.30	10.44	11.76

#### 5.6 Social Integration and Future Aspirations (SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities)

The way in which displaced persons feel they are perceived is an important step in co-existing and co-building sustainable cities and communities. When we asked all four camps how they are perceived by their host communities, reasonable answers were collected. Domiz camp has existed so long in Duhok, that they feel a sense of belonging to the city and have contributed to the fabric of its society without language barriers due to similarities in dialects spoken. Domiz camp residents speak Kirmanci which is similar to the badini dialect spoken by Duhokis. On the other hand, Qushtapa camp residents experience dialect barriers and cultural differences in comparison to their host communities which undermines their feeling of belonging. Compared to IDP camps, Baharke and Shariya, both feel they're well perceived by their communities. Baharke residents feel accepted since Erbil is very versatile and Arabs are not quite marginalized. As for Shariya camp, it's well integrated with the Shariya community because its social fabric is also yazidi religion and culture. The Yazidis have never been discriminated against or looked at differently by Duhok residents.

When the four camps were asked if they see themselves residing in KRG for the long term, 95% of all camps answered "Yes" except for Shariya camp. This is because they want to return to their areas of origin to reclaim their lands and continue living as villagers, doing farming and animal husbandry. Another desire for some is to travel outside of the country to move forward from the Isis war trauma. Their demands differed for a better life, and it is realistic for all camps to want better work opportunities to become self-sufficient. However, Qushtapa camp's residents also demanded for the inclusion of 'more legal rights', which to them means the right to have an income solely because they are refugees.

Moreover, the social integration challenges in Qushtapa, driven by dialect barriers and perceived discrimination,

highlight deficiencies in inclusive urban design. The mismatch between Sorani-based education and Kirmanci-speaking refugees undermines social cohesion, reflecting a lack of culturally sensitive urban planning (UN-Habitat, 2016). Regional planning strategies, such as zoning for mixed communities or shared public spaces, could bridge host-displaced divides, fostering sustainable urban communities as per SDG 11.

**Table 6.** Survey results of responses collected from refugees and IDPs in Domiz 1, Shariya, Qushtapa and Baharke camps that highlight questions associated with social integration and future aspirations.

Question asked to participant	Options to choose from when interviewed	Individual Camp Statistics (%)				Combined Camps statistics (%)			
		Domiz 1	Shariya	Qushtapa	Baharke	IDP (Shariya + Baharke)	Refugee (Domiz 1+ Qushtapa)	Duhok (Domiz 1 + Shariya)	Erbil (Qushtapa + Baharke)
How do you feel you are treated by the local Kurdish community?	Welcoming and accepting	94.00	83.84	22.12	87.76	85.14	64.57	89.96	43.14
	Accepting, but not entirely	0.67	14.14	61.54	12.24	13.51	25.59	6.02	45.75
	Discriminating	5.33	2.02	16.35	0.00	1.35	9.84	4.02	11.11
What are the biggest challenges to integrating into Kurdish society?	Language barriers	6.67	17.17	64.42	6.12	13.51	30.31	10.84	45.75
	Cultural differences	0.00	9.09	25.96	8.16	8.78	10.63	3.61	20.26
	Discrimination at work	4.67	0.00	3.85	0.00	0.00	4.33	2.81	2.61
	Not having legal rights	2.67	2.02	0.96	0.00	1.35	1.97	2.41	0.65
	Other	86.00	71.72	4.81	85.71	76.35	52.76	80.32	30.72
Do you see yourself staying in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq long term?	Yes	87.33	62.63	97.12	59.18	61.49	91.34	77.51	84.97
	No	12.67	37.37	2.88	40.82	38.51	8.66	22.49	15.03
If given the opportunity, would you prefer to...	Return to your homeland	25.33	50.51	4.81	42.86	47.97	16.93	35.34	16.99
	Immigrate to a different country	4.00	18.18	89.42	14.29	16.89	38.98	9.64	65.36
	Integrate in KRG	70.67	31.31	5.77	42.86	35.14	44.09	55.02	17.65
Do you believe the KRG is providing enough support to IDPs/refugees?	Yes	98.67	84.85	85.58	81.63	83.78	93.31	93.17	84.31
	No	1.33	15.15	14.42	18.37	16.22	6.69	6.83	15.69
What kind of additional support would improve your situation the	More work opportunities	8.67	58.59	18.27	77.55	64.86	12.60	28.51	37.25
	Better access to education	6.67	4.04	1.92	0.00	2.70	4.72	5.62	1.31



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most?	Better healthcare	65.33	14.14	0.00	6.12	11.49	38.58	44.98	1.96
	More Security	0.67	10.10	1.92	4.08	8.11	1.18	4.42	2.61
	More legal right	19	13.13	77.88	12.24	12.84	42.91	16.47	56.86

### 6. Host Community Findings and Analysis

**Table 7.** Statistical results of responses gathered from surveys conducted among individuals in host communities for perception analysis

#	Question asked to participant	Multi-Choices	Statistics (%)
1	What is your gender?	Male	69.8
		Female	30.2
2	Which Governorate are you residing?	Hawler	38
		Duhok	38
		Sulimaniya	24
3	Which age category do you fall under?	18-27	22.6
		28-37	30
		38-47	27.3
		48-57	12.8
		58+	7.3
4	What is your education level?	Uneducated	7.4
		Literate	13.5
		Elementary	23.6
		Middle School	23.6
		Bachelors	18.7
		Diploma	10.6
		MA/MSc	1.6
PhD	1		
5	What are your working status at the moment?	Daily wage	28.2
		Housewife	17
		Public Sector	13.5
		Peshmerge/Asayesh/ Police	10.1



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		Unemployed	6.4
		Private Sector	6.4
		entrepreneur	4.2
		Expertise (Doctor, Engineer, Lawyer)	3.7
		Student	3.2
		Labourer	3.2
		Farmer	1.2
		Office work	1
		Retired	0.7
		Other	1.2
6	Perception on IDP and Refugee density in community?	Very High	10.6
		High	58.5
		Low	30.9
7	Group of displaced persons in your area?	Kurd-Rojava	49.8
		Arab	30.2
		Kurd-Yazidi	15
		Other Groups	2
		I don't know	3
8	How do you perceive IDPs and Refugees?	Non-Problematic	38.1
		Not so Problematic	48.2
		Very Problematic	10.8
		I don't know	2.9
9	do you agree that the government should allow IDPs and Refugees to come to KRG?	I agree	30.2
		I completely agree	2.5
		Don't agree at all	9
		Don't agree	44.5
		I don't know	13.8
10	Do you agree that once it's safe for IDPs and Refugees to return, they should be forced to return?	Be given the option to choose for themselves	16
		Forced to return	30.5
		Motivate to return	53.5
11	Have you ever worked with Refugees or IDPs?	Yes	25.8
		No	74.2
12	Have Refugees or IDPs ever worked for you?	Yes	28.3



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		No	71.7
13	During Sinjar crisis how well did you help Yazidi IDPs?	Excellent	2.7
		Good	38.8
		Average	19.2
		Not at all	39.3
14	During Ninevah crisis how well did you help Arab IDPs?	Excellent	0.7
		Good	29.7
		Average	18.9
		Not at all	50.7
15	Have you helped Rojava kurds since they immigrated?	Excellent	1.5
		Good	38.3
		Average	19.9
		Not at all	40.3
16	Have you provided aid to IDPs and Refugees in the last 10 years?	Excellent	4.2
		Good	41.3
		Average	19.9
		Not at all	34.6
17	What are the group of IDPs or Refugees that are problem makers?	Kurd Rojava	17.3
		Arabs	7.3
		Kurd Yazidi	2.4
		All of them	1.9
		Shabak	0.3
		Some of them	10.2
		None of them	60.6
18	What are the group of Refugees and IDPs who conduct illegal work?	Kurd Rojava	12.1
		Arabs	4.6
		Kurd Yazidi	2.7
		All of them	1.9
		Some of them	19
		None of them	59.7
19	Group of Refugees and IDPs who negatively affect your community?	Rojava Kurd	19.1
		All of them	13.6
		Arabs	6.9



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		Yazidi Kurd	1.4
		I don't know	3.5
		Some of them	22
		None of them	33.5
20	Group of Refugees and IDPs who affect your job opportunities?	Rojava Kurd	33.8
		All of them	17.7
		Arabs	5.4
		Yazidi Kurd	1.7
		Shabak	0.3
		Some of them	21.9
		None of them	19.2
21	What is the group of Refugees and IDPs suspected to be associated with terrorism?	Arabs	9.9
		Rojava Kurds	2.6
		All of them	1
		Yazidi Kurd	0.5
		Some of them	0.3
		I don't know	12
		None of them	62.3
22	Which group of Refugees or IDPs with their arrival raised the criminal rate?	Rojava Kurds	7.8
		Arabs	7.5
		All of them	5.9
		Yazidi Kurd	0.5
		Some of them	17.3
		None of them	61
23	Which is the group of Refugees and IDPs who can't get along with you and created social problems?	Arabs	10.6
		Rojava Kurd	9
		All of them	6.9
		Yazidi Kurds	1.9
		Christians	0.3
		Some of them	18.3
		None of them	53.1
24	Do you agree that the government is providing all basic services to refugees and IDPs in camps?	I agree	65.6
		I completely agree	3.5



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		I don't agree at all	1.2
		I don't agree	21.1
		I don't know	8.6
25	Do you agree that NGOs and INGOs should help IDPs and Refugees?	I agree	67.3
		I completely agree	6.1
		I don't agree at all	1
		I don't agree	19.9
		I don't know	5.7
26	Do you agree that wealthy citizens should make assistance donations for IDPs and Refugees in camps?	I agree	65
		I completely agree	6.1
		I don't agree at all	1.7
		I don't agree	20.6
		I don't know	6.6
27	Should refugees and IDPs have the right to buy properties in KRG?	I agree	25.8
		I completely agree	1.5
		I don't agree at all	14
		I don't agree	49.6
		I don't know	9.1
28	Do you agree that the host community should help refugees and IDPs?	I agree	71.5
		I completely agree	4.7
		I don't agree at all	0.5
		I don't agree	16.2
		I don't know	7.1
29	Do you agree that despite all circumstances Refugees and IDPs should be accepted?	I agree	41.3
		I completely agree	3.2
		I don't agree at all	4.4
		I don't agree	35.6
		I don't know	15.5
30	Do you think that refugees and IDPs should only live in camps?	I agree	53.6
		I completely agree	18.1
		I don't agree at all	1.5
		I don't agree	19.9
		I don't know	6.9



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31	Do you think refugees and IDPs should not be allowed to work?	I agree	29.2
		I completely agree	4.7
		I don't agree at all	3.2
		I don't agree	50.4
		I don't know	12.5
32	Do you think refugees and IDPs who conduct illegal work should be deported?	I agree	54.3
		I completely agree	33.2
		I don't agree at all	0.5
		I don't agree	7.1
		I don't know	4.9
33	Is it okay if your brother marries an IDP or Refugee?	I don't agree	64.6
		Whomever	26.3
		Only if muslim	7.9
		Only kurdish muslim	1.2
34	Is it okay if your sister marries an IDP or Refugee?	I don't agree	64.6
		Whomever	26.3
		Only if muslim	7.9
		Only kurdish muslim	1.2
35	Is it okay if your family members become friends with an IDP or Refugee?	I don't agree	33.5
		Whomever	63.1
		Only if muslim	1.7
		Only kurdish muslim	1.7
36	Is it okay for you to be a neighbour with an IDP or Refugee?	I don't agree	28
		Whomever	70
		Only if muslim	1
		Only kurdish muslim	1
37	Is it okay if your children go to school with IDPs and Refugees?	I don't agree	29.7
		Whomever	68.1
		Only if muslim	1
		Only kurdish muslim	0.7
38	Is it okay for you to work in the same workplace with an IDP or Refugee?	I don't agree	24.1
		Whomever	73.7
		Only if muslim	1.5
		Only kurdish muslim	0.7



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The survey reveals a community grappling with the reality of hosting large numbers of displaced people. Most respondents are working-class men from Erbil and Duhok, many with limited formal education and employed in daily wage labor or household work. This demographic context shapes much of what we see in their responses.

When asked about the displaced population in their areas, people overwhelmingly describe it as "high" or "very high." Kurdish refugees from Rojava make up the largest group they encounter, followed by Arab IDPs and Yazidis. Yet despite this significant presence, most respondents don't see displaced people as particularly problematic in their daily lives. There's a sense of resigned acceptance—people have adapted to this new reality, even if they haven't fully embraced it.

However, this tolerance comes with clear boundaries. When it comes to long-term solutions, the preference is unmistakable: most people want displaced populations to return home when it's safe, with some even supporting forced return. Very few support permanent settlement in the Kurdistan Region. This suggests that while people can coexist with displaced populations, they view their presence as temporary by necessity rather than choice.

The gap between general tolerance and personal engagement is striking. Most respondents report little to no direct involvement in helping displaced groups during major crises, whether supporting Yazidis fleeing Sinjar, Arabs escaping Nineveh, or Kurds arriving from Syria. This pattern suggests that while people may not actively oppose displaced populations, they also haven't stepped forward to actively support them.

Perceptions vary notably by group. Kurdish refugees from Rojava face more criticism around job competition and community disruption, while Arabs are more likely to be viewed through a security lens. Still, the majority of respondents don't associate any displaced group with illegal activities or terrorism, indicating that negative stereotypes, while present, aren't universal.

The community shows a complicated mix of compassion and caution when it comes to support and integration. People broadly agree that NGOs should continue providing aid and that the government is doing enough to provide basic services in camps. They're comfortable with surface-level integration—having displaced people as neighbors, colleagues, or classmates for their children.

But deeper integration faces resistance. Most oppose property ownership rights for displaced people and prefer they remain in camps rather than integrate into broader society. The strongest boundaries emerge around family relationships, with nearly two-thirds rejecting the idea of a family member marrying someone from a displaced community.

What emerges is a portrait of a host community that has learned to live alongside displaced populations without truly welcoming them as permanent members of society. There's pragmatic acceptance mixed with clear limits on integration. People support humanitarian assistance but maintain social and economic boundaries that preserve a sense of temporary coexistence rather than genuine inclusion.

This dynamic reflects the broader challenge facing the Kurdistan Region: how to balance humanitarian obligations with local concerns about resources, identity, and long-term demographic change. The findings suggest that while outright hostility is rare, building genuine acceptance and integration will require addressing underlying anxieties about jobs, social change, and community identity.



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### 7. Discussion

This research has highlighted the multifaceted realities of displacement management in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), revealing both strengths and persistent challenges in achieving sustainable outcomes for internally displaced persons (IDPs), refugees, and host communities. Through data collected from Domiz 1, Shariya, Qushtapa, and Baharke camps, it becomes evident that Kurdish communities are not only empathetic first responders to humanitarian needs but also long-term partners in development, albeit within an increasingly strained socio-political and economic environment. The correspondence in this report between displaced persons and the host community of KRG showcases a complex relation of empathy but also an urgency for stability and sustainability.

A central finding is the significant variation in responses and overall observations from researchers when it comes to integration, sustainability, and service access between refugee and IDP camps. Domiz 1 emerged as a comparatively successful model and was selected to become the “gold standard control” for data collection, characterized by strong community infrastructure, positive host-refugee relations, and opportunities for education and employment. The results seen in Domiz 1 camp are an ideal end result for the rest of the camps, making it a gold standard control. These achievements are underpinned by shared dialect (Kirmanci) in Duhok and cultural proximity to the host community, facilitating smoother social integration. In contrast, Qushtapa camp, though geographically advantageous and adjacent to economic hubs, suffers from dissatisfaction among residents. Researchers observed that due to lack of communication between the host community and Qushtapa refugees, stemming from dialect differences, the refugees had constrained themselves to not socializing outside of the camp. This in time has accumulated misunderstanding and dissatisfaction among the refugee community. The residents of Qushtapa camp raised many complaints, including water shortage during the summer and the education being offered in Sorani rather than their native dialect of Kirmanci. The residents classified this as discrimination in education, overall leading to an inequality in job opportunities—especially among women. Moreover, this cumulative misunderstanding has led to refugees in Qushtapa camp to perceive the services as insufficient. This makes it difficult for refugees to live sustainably and makes them perceive their status as vulnerable.

The intersection of economic opportunity and legal ambiguity was most pronounced in Qushtapa, where 82.7% of respondents mistakenly reported not having legal work permits due to a misunderstanding of the term. However, even when legality is clarified, the survey illustrates that discrimination and the lack of fair wage practices continue to hinder displaced populations from accessing decent work (SDG 8). The issue is further compounded in Baharke and Shariya camps, where despite urban proximity (Baharke) or shared ethno-religious identity (Shariya), residents face deep systemic barriers—particularly Yazidis who suffer from the trauma of ISIS attacks and bureaucratic hurdles in return and compensation mechanisms. It was also found that one of the dangers facing Shariya camp was the proximity to Shariya sub-district and the easy access it provides youth and men to alcohol - posing women to domestic violence and youth to fail in education.

Education is both a promising and challenging domain. While school attendance remains relatively high across camps, dropout rates among teenage boys—especially in Qushtapa—are influenced by the need to provide labor for their families. In Qushtapa, the mismatch between teachers’ dialect of instruction (Sorani) and students’ mother tongue (Kirmanci) significantly undermines educational attainment. Moreover, delayed public sector salaries and undertrained teachers further erode trust in the schooling system. These findings underscore the need to localize educational content and strengthen teacher training, particularly in linguistically diverse camp environments. Healthcare and shelter services also remain unevenly distributed. The majority of respondents rely on government



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hospitals or expensive private clinics, with minimal satisfaction in terms of medication availability and specialized services. Domiz stands out with relatively high cement-based sheltering, while Shariya still houses over 75% of its residents in tents—exposing them to environmental hazards and health risks. The disparity suggests the necessity of investing in durable infrastructure, particularly for vulnerable groups such as Yazidis, who face ongoing marginalization, and maternal needs that can be quite expensive and difficult to reach as a displaced person.

The varied integration outcomes across KRI's camps underscore their role as urban planning testbeds. Domiz 1's success contrasts with Qushtapa's infrastructure gaps, highlighting the need for regional master plans that integrate camps into urban systems (Ministry of Planning, Republic of Iraq, 2018). Transportation corridors linking camps to cities like Erbil and Duhok could enhance economic access, while resilient urban designs—addressing waste, energy, and shelter—would mitigate environmental risks (UN-Habitat, 2020). Host-displaced tensions, particularly around job competition, reflect planning failures in inclusive land-use policies (Hyndman, 2000). By treating camps as extensions of urban fabrics, KRI can pioneer displacement responses that align humanitarian and planning objectives.

Gender dynamics emerged as a powerful thread throughout the research. Women in refugee camps, particularly in Domiz and Qushtapa, are active in informal economic ventures, participating in FGD discussions and leading household financial efforts. Despite this, many women continue to bear the brunt of economic instability, compounded by unequal access to decision-making spaces and heightened risks of domestic violence, particularly in camps where economic and infrastructural frustrations are high. The demand for safe spaces, psychosocial support, and gender-sensitive programming is not only valid—it is urgent.

Finally, the host community survey reveals a nuanced and cautious stance toward displaced populations. While a majority do not view refugees and IDPs as inherently problematic, support for long-term integration remains weak. The strongest opposition surfaces around intermarriage, property rights, and political inclusion—suggesting that coexistence, while functional, is conditional and superficial. This is especially visible in the case of Rojava Kurds, who are seen as competitors in the labor market and sources of cultural disruption, despite also being Kurdish. The reluctance to fully integrate displaced groups—coupled with preferences for temporary containment in camps—reveals a tension between humanitarian tolerance and socio-political exclusion.

In conclusion, these findings emphasize that while KRI's displacement response has achieved considerable successes, long-term sustainability requires a deeper, systemic commitment to equity, inclusion, and locally adapted service provision. Addressing infrastructure gaps, tackling employment discrimination, and fostering host-refugee cohesion must be prioritized through coordinated policies and increased investment. The Kurdistan Region holds the potential to model a development-centered displacement response—one that recognizes displaced persons not as burdens, but as contributors to a shared future.

## 8. Policy Recommendations

### 8.1 End Child Labor Through Education and Income Security

Child labor emerged as a persistent issue, particularly among teenage boys in Domiz and Qushtapa camps who drop out of school to support their families. This not only undermines their future prospects but also perpetuates cycles of poverty. Policies must:

- Establish incentivized education programs that provide financial or material support for families whose



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children remain in school.

- Strengthen monitoring and accountability systems within camps to identify and intervene in cases of child labor, in collaboration with community leaders and NGOs.

#### 8.2 Promote Community Cohesion and Reconciliation

The study reveals a growing rift between host communities and displaced populations, particularly in Qushtapa, where dialect and cultural differences inhibit integration. To bridge these divides:

- develop joint community projects - such as shared marketplaces, schools, and recreational spaces - that bring host and displaced populations into cooperative, daily contact.
- facilitate local dialogue platforms and reconciliation activities, especially between IDP returnees and origin communities, to rebuild trust and social cohesion. instancing shariya camp, whereas residents are yazidi kurds but culturally differ from shariya's yazidi kurds, and this is due to them being original inhabitants of villages of Sinjar and farming life.
- encourage youth-led initiatives and peer exchange programs across community lines to foster long-term solidarity.

#### 8.3 Ensuring Women's Safety and Access to Health Services

Women bear a disproportionate burden of displacement, facing higher exposure to domestic violence, healthcare gaps, and economic exclusion. Key actions include:

- Establish more safe spaces for women and girls, especially in Shariya and Baharke where domestic violence and safety concerns are prevalent.
- Improve access to maternal health services, psychosocial support, and chronic disease care by strengthening healthcare aid to camps and subsidizing medical costs.

#### 8.4 Design Inclusive Project That Benefit Both Host and Displaced Communities

Tensions around service provision and employment are intensified when aid is perceived as one-sided. To address this:

- Develop dual-benefit programs that support both displaced persons and vulnerable host community members, especially in job creation, vocational training, and urban infrastructure.
- Incentivize private sector partnerships that employ both groups, offering tax benefits or subsidies for inclusive hiring.
- Promote sustainable models, such as community cooperatives and green enterprises, to reduce dependency and foster shared economic development.

#### 8.5 Raise Awarenesses and Inform Displaced Populations of Their Roles

Many displaced persons remain unaware of the legal and civic pathways available to them, as seen in confusion over work permits and limited engagement in civic life. To address this:

- Launch information campaigns within camps using culturally and linguistically appropriate materials to clarify legal rights, services available, and participation opportunities.
- Support community media and mobile information units to reach populations with limited literacy or access to digital tools.



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- Train camp staff and local NGOs to serve as resource focal points, helping residents navigate legal, educational, and employment systems more effectively.

### 8.6 Enhance Urban and Regional Planning Frameworks

To ensure sustainable displacement management, KRI must integrate camps into regional master plans. Zoning for sustainable camp management and displacement resolutions, as seen in Domiz 1, can prevent urban sprawl, while resilient urban designs—such as waste management systems in Baharke or energy storage in Qushtapa—enhance livability (UN-Habitat, 2020). Participatory planning, involving both displaced and host communities, can address tensions and foster inclusive urban governance (Ministry of Planning, Republic of Iraq, 2018). These measures align with SDG 11 and position KRI as a model for urban planning in displacement contexts.

## 9. Conclusion

The Kurdistan Region of Iraq has served as a humanitarian corridor for displaced communities, balancing immediate relief with growing aspirations for sustainable development. Kurdish host communities, while empathetic and accommodating in many instances, face their own social and economic pressures, creating a delicate equilibrium between solidarity and self-preservation. This research highlights that while some camps, like Domiz 1, have evolved into relatively integrated spaces, others—such as Qushtapa and Shariya—continue to struggle with issues of marginalization, infrastructure disparity, and systemic exclusion.

Key challenges include the lack of inclusive education due to language mismatches, inadequate shelter and healthcare access, employment discrimination, and underrepresentation of women in decision-making. Simultaneously, the host community's mixed attitudes—supportive of humanitarian presence but resistant to deeper social integration—reflect the urgent need for reconciliatory strategies and shared development agendas.

To ensure sustainability in displacement response, humanitarian efforts must extend beyond service delivery and toward structural transformation. This includes cultivating mutual understanding, empowering local governance within camps, and framing IDPs and refugees not only as vulnerable groups but as capable contributors to community well-being and regional development.

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