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MEAC Findings Report 20

Rehabilitation and Reintegration of Children from Families with Perceived ISIL Affiliation: Experiences from Iraq and Al Hol

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MANAGING EXITS
FROM ARMED CONFLICT

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KEY FINDINGS

- Children who lived under ISIL occupation and in Al Hol had high rates of exposure to violence.** Two-thirds of children who lived under ISIL occupation ‘frequently’ felt they were in danger of being hurt or killed.¹ Almost all children felt ‘not safe at all’ in Al Hol camp; many witnessed violence against family members, and boys often experienced detention and assault.
- Education rates were very low amongst children returning from Al Hol.** Most had completed less than six years of education, despite being at least 15 years of age.
- At the local level, ‘rehabilitation’ was understood as a process to promote positive behavioural change, rather than an ideological shift.** Therefore, people recommended activities that would support Jeddah-1 families (and their children) to fulfil the administrative requirements for return; help children address symptoms of trauma and distress; and support the eventual reintegration of children.

¹ Compared to 30 per cent of those who did not live under ISIL occupation.

- **Children’s behaviour changed during their stay in Jeddah-1 camp.** The primary change was a reduction in mental distress. All children interviewed in Jeddah-1 reported that they felt less stressed there, after spending time in Iraq, compared to when they had been in Al Hol.
- **Behavioural changes in Jeddah-1 were attributed mainly to environmental factors rather than an ‘ideological’ shift.** Positive influences on behaviour included the perception that Jeddah-1 is safe; improved access to services, psychosocial support and livelihood activities; increased control over the future; and respectful treatment by authorities and service providers.
- **Some children in Jeddah-1, however, continued to experience high rates of anxiety, linked to their risk of protracted (or indefinite) confinement in the camp and poor reintegration prospects.** These children had significantly reduced control over their lives, which undermined their sense of safety. The top factor undermining prospects for return was the inability to renew civil documentation. Other factors included being a member of families who could not return due to a lack of approval, weak social networks, or having a close relative accused of criminal behaviour with ISIL.
- **Female heads of household and their children face significantly higher barriers that complicate their rehabilitation and reintegration.** They also spend more time in Jeddah-1 due to higher barriers that affect their return.
- **Children from families with perceived ISIL affiliation often face social stigma in their communities post-return.** Three-quarters of parents were not comfortable with their children attending school with these children,² and the parents of families with perceived ISIL affiliation were more likely to report that teachers ‘never’ treated their children fairly at school.³ Children who lived under ISIL occupation were also more likely to report being treated poorly in a shop or market.
- **Children who lived under ISIL occupation have weaker social support networks.** One-quarter of children who lived under ISIL occupation did not have anyone to turn to for guidance. This is double the rate of those who did not live in ISIL territory.
- **Revenge attacks in areas of return are a dominant concern for all children, whether or not they lived under ISIL occupation.** Children who lived under ISIL occupation feel comparatively less safe in their area,⁴ and those returning from Jeddah-1 urged the UN to

² This varied according to whether the person had lived in ISIL territory: 28 per cent of those who lived in ISIL occupied territory felt comfortable, versus 23 per cent of those who did not live in ISIL territory. Dr. Jacqueline Parry and Yousif Khalid Khoshnaw, with Dr. Siobhan O’Neil and Dr. Juan Armando Torres Munguía, "Supporting the Reintegration of Families with Perceived ISIL Affiliation in Iraq," forthcoming.

³ 7 per cent versus 4 per cent of those who never lived in ISIL occupied territory.

⁴ 91 per cent of children who did *not* live under ISIL occupation considered all members of their family safe in their area, whereas only 74 per cent of children who *did* live under ISIL occupation considered their family members safe.

conduct social cohesion activities, encourage community acceptance, and help to resolve tribal disputes.

- **Children who lived under ISIL occupation had significantly less trust in formal institutions.** Across all institutions, children who did *not* live under ISIL occupation were at least 20 per cent more likely to believe that their family was ‘always’ treated fairly by local institutions.
- **The key issue determining the successful rehabilitation and reintegration of children from families with perceived ISIL affiliation is access to civil documentation.** Without civil documentation children cannot access education and have limited access to other government services, impacting their livelihoods, socioeconomic status, mental health, and social inclusion, and putting children at risk of future recruitment or influence by armed groups who may exploit their marginalized status.

This Findings Report, and the research that supported it, were undertaken as part of UNU-CPR and UNIDIR’s Managing Exits from Armed Conflict (MEAC) project. MEAC is a multi-donor, multi-partner initiative to develop a unified, rigorous approach to examining how and why individuals exit armed conflict and evaluating the efficacy of interventions meant to support their transitions. While the Findings Report benefited from feedback from MEAC’s donors and institutional partners, it does not necessarily represent their official policies or positions.

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Background

About MEAC

How and why do individuals exit armed groups, and how do they do so sustainably, without falling back into conflict cycles? These questions are at the core of UNU-CPR and UNIDIR's Managing Exits from Armed Conflict (MEAC) initiative. MEAC is a multi-year, multi-partner collaboration that aims to develop a unified, rigorous approach to examining how and why individuals exit armed conflict and evaluating the efficacy of interventions meant to support their transition to civilian life. MEAC seeks to inform evidence-based programme design and implementation in real time to improve efficacy. At the strategic level, the cross-programme, cross-agency lessons that will emerge from the growing MEAC evidence base will support more effective conflict resolution and peacebuilding efforts. The MEAC project and accompanying case studies are supported by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Switzerland's Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA); the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO); the Irish Department of Foreign Affairs; the UN Development Programme (UNDP); and the International Organization for Migration (IOM); and is being run in partnership with the Secretariat of the Regional Strategy for Stabilization, Recovery and Resilience; UN Department of Peace Operations (DPO); UNICEF; and the World Bank.

About this Series

The MEAC findings report series seeks to put evidence about conflict prevention, conflict transitions, and related interventions into the hands of policymakers and practitioners in real time. The reports present short overviews of findings (or emerging findings) across a wide range of thematic areas and include analyses on their political or practical implications for the UN and its partners.

About this Report

This report is based on findings drawn from a number of quantitative and qualitative studies in Iraq. This includes a large-scale survey of 1,882 respondents in four areas of Iraq that were occupied by ISIL: Muhalabiyah (Nineveh), Tuz (Salah al-Din), Al Qaim (Anbar), and Habbaniya (Anbar), conducted in July 2022 in partnership with, and with support from, UNDP Iraq. It also draws on research conducted with Iraqis returning from Al Hol camp in Syria through Jeddah-1 camp, with interviews facilitated by IOM Iraq and support from the Swiss FDFA. The research in Jeddah-1 camp included ten focus group discussions conducted with Jeddah-1 residents in July 2022; key informant interviews with camp leadership, government officials, and camp service providers; a survey conducted with 223 Jeddah-1 camp residents in August 2022; and phone surveys completed with 60 former Jeddah-1 residents who had returned to their areas of origin, in September 2022. Finally, the report also draws on key informant

interviews with mukhtars, tribal sheikhs, and key political and security actors in areas where Jeddah-1 residents have returned (19 interviews total). The report presents findings on children's return and reintegration journeys in Iraq and looks at the experiences of children who have lived under ISIL, those who have returned from Al Hol camp in Syria, and/or children whose families are perceived as having ISIL affiliation. It examines metrics of wellbeing for these children and the challenges they face post-return and concludes with key policy and programmatic recommendations that may be useful to government, UN, and NGO partners working to support the return and effective reintegration of children in Iraq.

Introduction

Between 2014 and 2017, the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) carried out a violent insurgency across Iraq, at the height of its power controlling 20 major Iraqi cities and a civilian population greater than 5 million.⁵ Many residents in areas targeted by ISIL fled when the group arrived, but some remained throughout ISIL's occupation, for diverse reasons.⁶ Many of those who remained were children and many others were born during ISIL's occupation or in the subsequent period of displacement. For some of these children, their experience of war and displacement has become a defining factor in their post-war lives, affecting how they are able to reintegrate into 'ordinary' life and sometimes determining whether they can return 'home' at all.

Iraqi children in families with perceived ISIL affiliation have been particularly affected. In this study, this refers to children whose families face barriers to return and reintegration due to the perception that they collaborated with ISIL in some way (and does not include children who were recruited by or fought for ISIL) Across Iraq, people who held certain roles under ISIL (such as senior leadership or roles that contributed to ISIL's war effort, including day labourers) or committed crimes on behalf of ISIL are typically perceived by the community as affiliated to the group, and this perception usually extends to the relatives of the accused, including children.⁷ The members of families with perceived affiliation to ISIL can find their return to their communities blocked by security actors.⁸ They may also experience community rejection and

⁵ Daniel Egel, Alexander Rothenberg, Patrick B Johnson, and Eric Robinson, *When the Islamic State Comes to Town: The Economic Impact of Islamic State Governance in Iraq and Syria*, (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2017), 192-195.

⁶ See Mara Revkin, "Competitive Governance and Displacement Decisions Under Rebel Rule: Evidence from the Islamic State in Iraq," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol 65, No.1 (September 2020), 46-80.

⁷ Specifically, perceptions often extend to first- or second- degree relatives, and even reach up to fourth-degree relatives in some communities. See IOM Iraq, *Tribal Justice Mechanisms and Durable Solutions for Families with a Perceived Affiliation to ISIS* (Baghdad: IOM, 2020).

⁸ Blocked returns are commonly enforced by security actors on the ground, usually because IDP families do not possess the required documentation (usually a security clearance) to leave the area to which they have been displaced to, or to re-enter the area of origin. See IOM Iraq, [Protracted displacement in Iraq: Revisiting categories of return barriers](#) (Baghdad: IOM, 2021).

stigmatization,⁹ and are at risk of revenge attacks and violence.¹⁰ Adults may struggle to access livelihoods, due in part to the inability to move freely through checkpoints. Their children may face barriers to accessing education or other services. As such, these families – and their children – face barriers to reintegration beyond those faced by other internally displaced persons (IDPs).¹¹

A second, related group that faces steep barriers to reintegration are families who have returned to Iraq from Al Hol camp in north-east Syria.¹² Not only are camp residents assumed to have been associated with ISIL, but media coverage of the camp has also emphasized the influence ISIL retains over residents today, a perspective that has been mirrored in statements by public figures in Iraq. Since May 2021, and in line with the 2021 *Global Framework for United Nations Support on Syria / Iraq Third Country National Returnees*,¹³ the Government of Iraq (GoI) has repatriated at least 920 Iraqi households (comprising around 3,749 individuals) from Al Hol, many of whom are children.¹⁴ While Al Hol returnees face many of the same barriers to reintegration as those with perceived ISIL affiliation displaced within Iraq,¹⁵ what sets this group apart is the expectation that they complete some form of ‘rehabilitation’ prior to return, together with additional security measures such as sponsorship by a trusted community member.¹⁶ To do this, the GoI established Jeddah-1 camp in Nineveh and designated it a ‘Rehabilitation Centre,’ and Al Hol returnees are hosted there for several months (or longer) while completing arrangements for their return (or relocation).

Within both categories of families with perceived ISIL affiliation – that is, those returning from within Iraq and those returning from Al Hol in Syria – children make up the majority of the population. While they were too young to consent to living under ISIL occupation and are not personally accused of committing crimes, these children experience stigma by association, with far-reaching consequences for their futures. This report aims to understand their experiences during and after the war with ISIL, and how ‘rehabilitation’ and ‘reintegration’ of these children is understood locally, by both the children themselves and those around them. The primary policy objective of this report is to identify ways the UN, its partners, and other

⁹ IOM Iraq, *Tribal Justice Mechanisms and Durable Solutions for Families with a Perceived Affiliation to ISIS* (Baghdad: IOM, 2020).

¹⁰ See Human Rights Watch, “[Iraq: Looting, Destruction by Forces Fighting ISIS](#),” 16 February 2017.

¹¹ Attempting to understand the reintegration challenges these families face does not imply that the UN believes these families were in fact combatants or acted in the service of ISIL. Rather, the intention is to understand the range of diverse reintegration challenges derived from different wartime experiences, so as to better tailor reintegration programming.

¹² Since ISIL’s defeat, around 64,000 people have remained confined in Al Hol camp, of which over 90 per cent are women and children and nearly half are Iraqi nationals. See International Centre for Counter-Terrorism and IOM Iraq, [Roundtables on Prosecution, Reintegration, and Rehabilitation](#) (2022).

¹³ To address the situation in Al Hol, in September 2021, the Government of Iraq, together with the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre (UNCCCT) of the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT) and the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) jointly launched [the Global Framework for United Nations Support on Syria / Iraq Third Country National Returnees \(Global Framework\)](#).

¹⁴ According to figures provided by the Iraqi Office of the National Security Advisor in October 2022.

¹⁵ Dr. Jacqueline Parry and Yousif Khalid Khoshnaw, with Dr. Siobhan O’Neil and Dr. Juan Armando Torres Munguía, “Rehabilitation and Reintegration after Al Hol: Reflections on the Iraqi Experience,” forthcoming.

¹⁶ Sponsorship entails a trusted community member – often a relative, but sometimes a tribal leader or other prominent community figure – formally vouching for the family (i.e. that the family is not affiliated to ISIL and is of ‘good standing’) to the authorities in the area of return.

humanitarian and early recovery actors can better design, implement, and/or evaluate programming aimed at supporting complex transitions out of conflict, with a specific focus on the needs of children.

Methodology

This study utilized a mixed methods approach, including a desk review of relevant materials in Arabic, Kurdish, and English; key informant interviews with stakeholders in Jeddah-1 camp and areas of return; focus group discussions with youth in Jeddah-1 camp; and a survey with current and former residents of Jeddah-1, including children. All children interviewed or surveyed for this study were above the age of 14. Details of the field research included:

- Survey A – In July 2022, surveys were conducted in partnership with UNDP Iraq with 1,882 respondents in four areas of Iraq that were occupied by ISIL: Muhalabiyah (Nineveh), Tuz (Salah al-Din), Al Qaim (Anbar), and Habbaniya (Anbar).¹⁷ Roughly equal numbers were drawn from each location. Within this study sample, 69 respondents were children, aged 15 to 17, including 33 boys (48 per cent) and 36 girls (52 per cent). Half of the children lived under ISIL occupation and half did not.
- Survey B – In August 2022, a survey was completed with 223 Jeddah-1 residents who had returned from Al Hol camp in Syria, with access facilitated by IOM and support from the Swiss FDFA. This included 95 male and 128 female respondents, of which 40 were children (20 boys and 20 girls).
- In July 2022, ten focus group discussions were conducted with Jeddah-1 residents. Of these, two focus groups (of five participants each) were carried out with children aged 15 to 17, including one group of boys and one group of girls.
- Survey C – In September 2022, phone surveys were completed with 60 former Jeddah-1 residents who had returned to their area of origin or another location. The sample included 3 minors, all girls.
- In September 2022, 19 interviews were carried out with key stakeholders in areas where Jeddah-1 residents have returned or are likely to return. This included 11 mukhtars, three tribal sheikhs, and a small number of other key political and security actors.

Within each of the above datasets, information was drawn directly from child respondents where available. The study also incorporates the perspectives of adults who reflected on the experience of children during and after the war with ISIL.

¹⁷ Roughly equal numbers were drawn from each location.

Children From Families With Perceived ISIL Affiliation

This study aims to understand how Iraqi children from families with perceived ISIL affiliation are transitioning from war to peace, by examining their experiences with rehabilitation and reintegration. The sections below present the profiles of children in this study: first, children who are members of families with perceived ISIL affiliation displaced within Iraq; and second, children from families with perceived ISIL affiliation who have returned from Al Hol camp in Syria.

Families With Perceived ISIL Affiliation Within Iraq

Within the survey sample from Nineveh, Anbar, and Salah-al Din (Survey A), half the children had lived under ISIL occupation and half fled the area when ISIL arrived.¹⁸ Of those who did live under ISIL occupation, roughly 5 per cent of families demonstrated what the authors term as ‘proximity markers,’ which means that they were identified by the Government or security actors as having a family member who supported ISIL. They therefore had to fulfil additional steps in order to return, such as obtaining a sponsor or disavowing the accused relative. Families with proximity markers experience significantly higher barriers that complicate their return and reintegration,¹⁹ and this also affects their children’s transition from conflict to peace. It is important to note, however, that most families included in this particular study had already returned to their place of origin, meaning that they had (typically) received a security clearance and fulfilled any such requirements (and were themselves therefore not listed on key government databases for ISIL affiliation, or accused of any crimes).

Exposure to violence during the war was common, with 60 per cent of children who lived under ISIL occupation reporting that they ‘frequently’ felt they were in danger of being hurt or killed (compared to 30 per cent of those who did not live under ISIL occupation.) In addition, over half of all children reported that their property or belongings were destroyed or taken away as a result of the conflict.²⁰ Approximately 5 per cent of children who lived under ISIL occupation attended school during that time, meaning that they had greater exposure to ISIL’s ideology and lost years of their formal education in the process.

¹⁸ The study surveyed 69 children aged 15 to 17 (equally split between girls and boys), located in 4 towns in Nineveh, Anbar, and Salah-al Din, as well as 1,813 adults.

¹⁹ Dr. Jacqueline Parry and Yousif Khalid Khoshnaw, with Dr. Siobhan O’Neil and Dr. Juan Armando Torres Munguía, “Supporting the Reintegration of Families with Perceived ISIL Affiliation in Iraq,” forthcoming.

²⁰ 60 per cent of those who lived under ISIL occupation and 50 per cent of those who did not.

Families Returning From Al Hol Camp

Of those who returned from Al Hol to Jeddah-1 camp,²¹ three-quarters of respondents in Survey B had lived in ISIL occupied territory in both Iraq and Syria, while a minority (9 per cent) did not live in ISIL occupied territory in either Syria or Iraq.²² Roughly 10 per cent of children attended school under ISIL occupation (with a higher rate for female-headed households.)²³ Since they returned via the government-facilitated process, all residents in Jeddah-1 camp had completed an initial security screening carried out by the Gol in Al Hol, meaning that they are not listed on key government databases for ISIL affiliation or accused of any crimes.²⁴ Almost all respondents (95 per cent) intend to return to their area of origin, and most wanted to return as soon as possible. The most common provinces of origin were Nineveh (53 per cent), Anbar (31 per cent), and Salah al Din (15 per cent).

Almost half the female Jeddah-1 residents interviewed in this study were female heads of household,²⁵ a fact that is vital to understanding the dynamics of rehabilitation and reintegration and the specific experience of children.²⁶ This included women who were widows, divorced, separated, and – the majority (51 per cent) – married but not living with their spouse. Women explained the separation occurred because their spouse was missing, imprisoned, or living in another governorate or camp.

Child Experiences in Al Hol Camp

The conditions in Al Hol camp are appalling; the overcrowding, insecurity, and lack of basic provisions and services led the United Nations to warn that confinement there may amount to cruel or inhuman treatment.²⁷ The experience of living in Al Hol has had a marked impact on children (as well as their parents) and is key to understanding transition outcomes. One of the most influential factors was that fear and anxiety were pervasive in Al Hol: virtually all respondents, including children, considered that they and all their family members were ‘not safe at all’ in the camp.²⁸ Prominent fears amongst boys were arrest and detention as well as violence. This was reinforced by focus group discussions, wherein a group of boys who reside in Jeddah-1 described their daily fears while they lived in Al Hol. One boy said: “The situation there [in Al Hol] is so bad...the security forces captured me in the small market in the camp and they hit me. Then they detained me from 5 pm to 8 pm, and when I was detained, they hit

²¹ The study surveyed 40 children aged 15 to 17 (equally split between girls and boys) who were current residents of Jeddah-1 camp, as well as 183 adult Jeddah-1 residents.

²² 20 persons, of which 18 were women.

²³ 12 per cent of female-headed households versus only 1 per cent of male-headed households reported that their children attended school during ISIL occupation.

²⁴ However, they may be included on provincial databases or on less formal lists held by local armed actors.

²⁵ This is slightly less than representative. According to the Jeddah-1 camp population data for July 2022, approximately 60 per cent of households are female-headed.

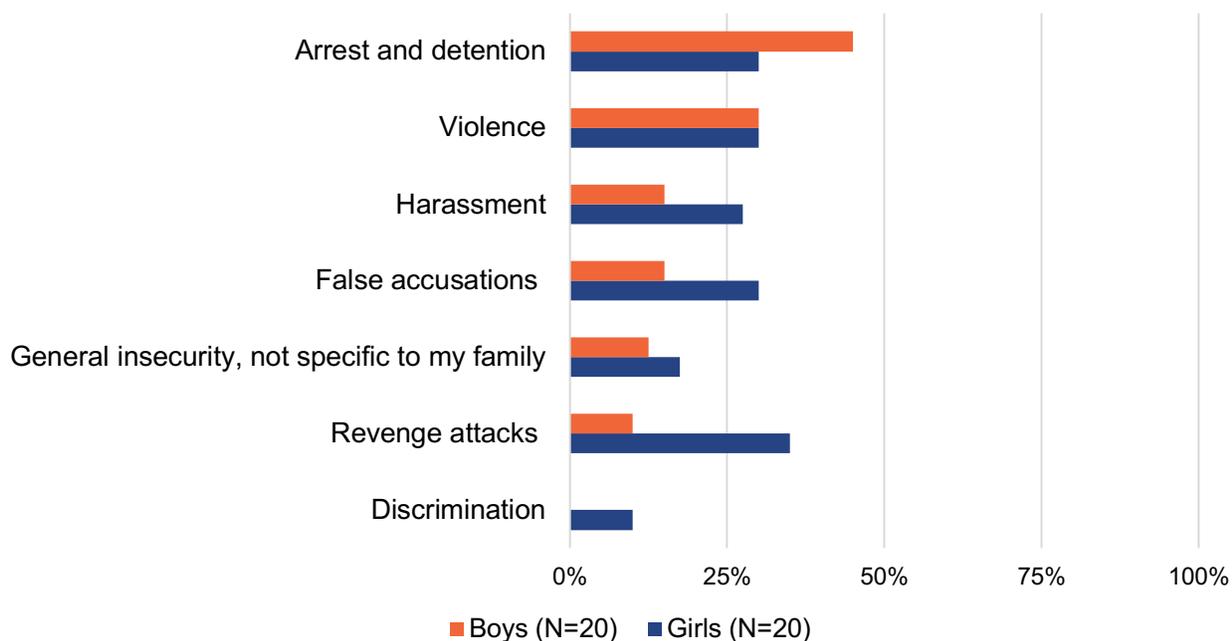
²⁶ 60 of 128 respondents or 47 per cent. Similarly, within the sample of former Jeddah-1 residents who have already returned to their areas of origin and are discussed in chapter 4, half the female respondents were head of their households (17 of 35 female respondents).

²⁷ United Nations Human Rights Council, “[Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic](#),” United Nations, 13 August 2021, A/HRC/48/70, para. 116.

²⁸ Most pointed to the Syrian Democratic Forces, the host community, and foreign or Syrian residents in Al Hol as contributing to their lack of security. Only 9 per cent of female respondents and 2 per cent of male respondents reported that other Iraqis made Al Hol unsafe for their family.

me with plastic ropes (...)"²⁹ Another boy shared a similar experience: "They hit me too. I was playing with some children in the camp, and they came and took me and kept me in jail for six days."³⁰ Girls were less likely to report direct violence against them, but some described attacks on their male family members (which may point to the stigma of girls reporting violence rather than a lack of violence against girls per se). In a focus group held with girls in Jeddah-1 camp, one girl described her father being shot in front of her in the central Al Hol camp market, while another girl described how security forces stormed her family's tent at night and shot her father. Experiences such as these led to high rates of reported psychological distress amongst children, discussed in the next section, as well as a strong desire to leave the camp. As seen in Figure 1, girls shared boys' fears of violence but were also more likely than boys to fear revenge attacks, false accusations, and harassment.³¹

Figure 1 – "What kind of fears did you have in Al Hol?"



At the family level, the primary motivation to return to Iraq was the poor security situation in Al Hol (reported by 86 per cent of all Jeddah-1 survey respondents (survey B)). The belief that Iraq would be safer than Al Hol was also the dominant motivator amongst children. A group of boys explained in a focus group why they wanted to return: "A delegation came from Iraq and they...conducted investigations with the adults. They told us we can return to Iraq, and that we would be respected if we return. They told us the security is good in our locations, that people will distribute clothes to us, and that nobody would beat us if we return..."³²

²⁹ MEAC, *Focus group discussion held with boys aged 15–17 years*, (Jeddah-1 Camp, July 2022).

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ These mirrored adult fears: prominent fears amongst men included arrest and detention (95 per cent) and violence (60 per cent). Women shared these fears but were also more likely than men to fear revenge attacks (77 per cent), false accusations (66 per cent), and harassment (59 per cent).³¹

³² MEAC, *Focus group discussion held with boys aged 15–17 years* (Jeddah-1 Camp, July 2022).

In addition to the lack of security, the second top motivating factor to return to Iraq (for both adults and children) was the poor living conditions in Al Hol (65 per cent of Jeddah-1 respondents). The conditions in Al Hol are so dire that the United Nations concluded that the basic human rights of camp residents were being violated.³³ Children spoke repeatedly of the poor conditions in the camp, and in particular their lack of access to education. Most had missed years of school not only in Al Hol, but also while living under ISIL occupation (effectively leaving them without education from 2014 until 2022). These experiences meant that all of the children that the authors spoke to were happy to return to Iraq, even when they identified shortcomings and fears related to the reintegration process, discussed in the next sections.

Rehabilitation

Community Perspectives on Rehabilitation of Children

The GoI established Jeddah-1 camp in 2021 as a transition facility for Iraqis returning from Al Hol camp and designated it a 'Rehabilitation Centre.' Although to date no formal rehabilitation programming has taken place,³⁴ a range of services are provided within the humanitarian framework of a camp setting, including education for children, Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS), cash-for-work opportunities, and social activities. These activities do not intend to 'disengage' residents perceived as affiliated to ISIL, although they may in fact contribute to this effect, as discussed in the next section.

Parts of the government and some community members expect that people returning from Al Hol should complete some form of 'rehabilitation,' although the meaning of this term is unclear. The expectation arises from the fear that many communities express towards Al Hol returnees, often at a higher rate than towards families with perceived ISIL affiliation who return from within Iraq. This fear is driven by a lack of trust; suspicion that families will continue to support ISIL; concern that Al Hol returnees will introduce security risks to the community; and worry that returnees will put the reputation of the community at risk.³⁵ In addition, even the return of children is feared in some communities because "people believe that children have the ISIL ideology of their parents."³⁶

³³ United Nations Human Rights Council, "[Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic](#)," United Nations, 13 August 2021, A/HRC/48/70, para. 116

³⁴ International Centre for Counter-Terrorism and IOM Iraq, "[Roundtables on Prosecution, Reintegration, and Rehabilitation](#)" (2022).

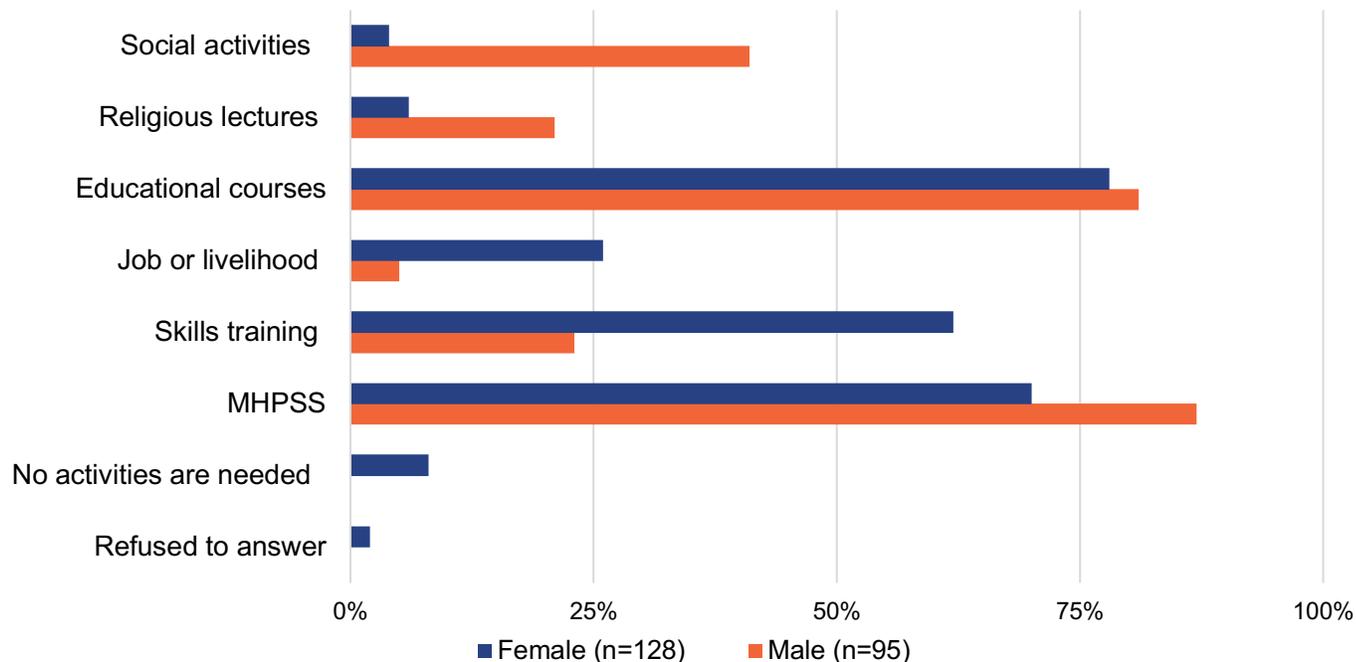
³⁵ In a wider survey of four communities across Iraq, roughly one-third of respondents were more concerned about the return of families from Al Hol compared to IDPs with perceived ISIL affiliation who returned from within Iraq. Dr. Jacqueline Parry and Yousif Khalid Khoshnaw, with Dr. Siobhan O'Neil and Dr. Juan Armando Torres Munguía, "Supporting the Reintegration of Families with Perceived ISIL Affiliation in Iraq," forthcoming.

³⁶ MEAC, *Key informant interview held with service provider* (Jeddah-1 Camp, July 2022).

The use of Jeddah-1 as a transition facility appears to increase community acceptance of Al Hol returnees, including children. Many community members believe that Al Hol returnees should fulfil different conditions than families with perceived ISIL affiliation returning from within Iraq. This includes additional security screening; completion of a ‘psychological rehabilitation’ programme; and disavowal of family members who joined ISIL.³⁷ It must be noted that while there are some services and activities in Al Hol (e.g., psychological services), they are not being expressly undertaken as part of a rehabilitation programme.

When community members were asked what activities or services in their opinion would be most helpful for children who were influenced by ISIL’s ideology, the majority did not reference ideological rehabilitation, but instead suggested MHPSS, educational courses, skills training, and social activities. Children who had already returned to their communities from Jeddah-1 also suggested that the same type of activities would be helpful for their peers who had been influenced by ISIL’s ideology (see Figures 2 and 3)³⁸. It is worth noting that all child respondents recommended providing some type of activity or support.

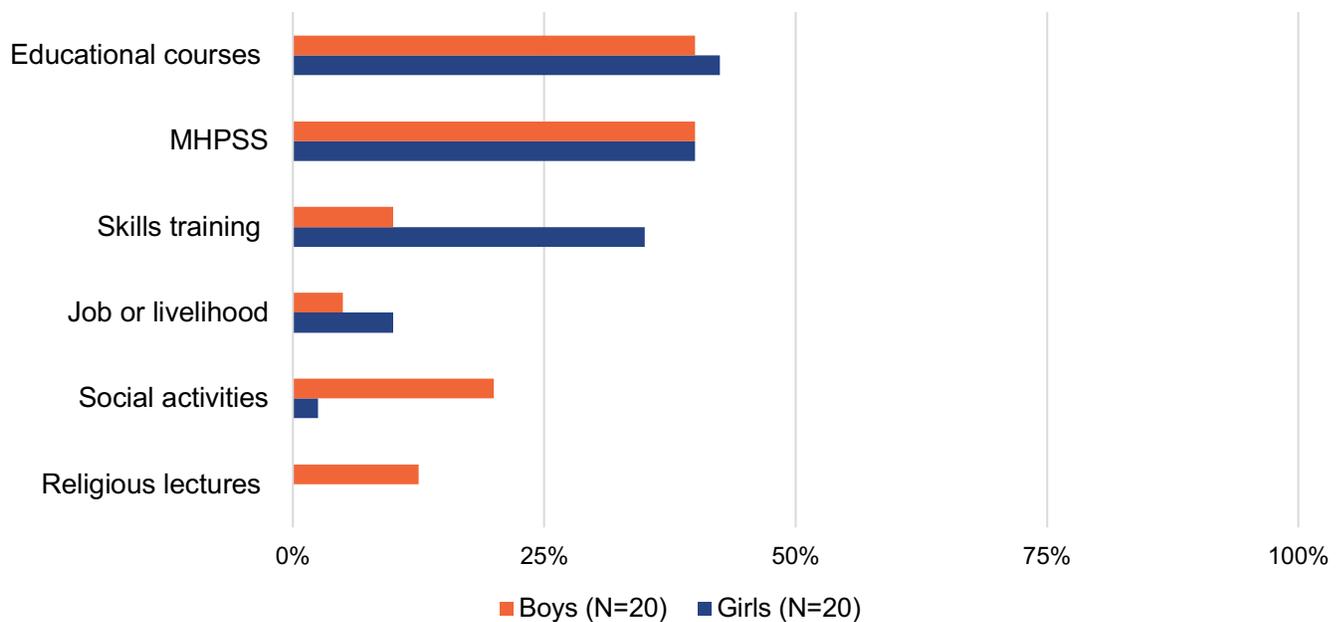
Figure 2 – “What activities or services would be most helpful for children who were influenced by ISIL’s ideology?” (Community member perspectives)



³⁷ In the same survey, roughly 30 per cent of respondents felt that returnees from Al Hol should fulfil the additional conditions set out above. Dr. Jacqueline Parry and Yousif Khalid Khoshnaw, with Dr. Siobhan O’Neil and Dr. Juan Armando Torres Munguía, “Supporting the Reintegration of Families with Perceived ISIL Affiliation in Iraq,” forthcoming.

³⁸ In this context, ‘educational courses’ refers to access to schooling, given that most children in the study had completed less than 6 years of education despite being at least 15 years of age, indicating that they had all missed multiple years of schooling due to war and displacement. Of the children who had returned from Jeddah-1 camp, 55 per cent of boys and 40 per cent of girls had completed no education; 25 per cent of boys and 55 per cent of girls had completed less than 6 years of primary education; and 20 per cent of boys and 5 per cent of girls had completed primary education. No children had completed more than primary education.

Figure 3 – “What activities or services would be most helpful for children who were influenced by ISIL’s ideology?” (Child perspectives)



Community members appear to view Al Hol returnees who spend a period of time in Jeddah-1 more favourably than those who bypass the camp,³⁹ because the camp was seen as a venue that assisted in the rehabilitation of residents. Specifically, community members trusted those who had transited through Jeddah-1 more than those who circumvented the government process on the basis that ‘psychological rehabilitation’ takes place in Jeddah-1.⁴⁰ Furthermore, the additional security screening of Al Hol returnees conducted by the Government also helped enhance the trust of those who came through Jeddah-1 camp.⁴¹

How is ‘psychological rehabilitation’ understood in the context of children with perceived ISIL affiliation? The term, while used widely in government and international community circles, was not well understood by community stakeholders, Jeddah-1 service providers, or Jeddah-1 residents. For respondents, the international community’s conceptualization of rehabilitation for this population seemed to miss the mark in two respects: First, as the above graphs indicate, most people did not describe rehabilitation as an ideological process associated with the concept of ‘deradicalization’. Instead, most people emphasized that it was impossible for ‘true’ ISIL affiliates (or what some referred to as “the killers”) to enter Iraq via the government-led process due to the stringent security clearance requirements, making it unlikely that any

³⁹ Approximately one-quarter of respondents stated that the community is less comfortable with returnees who come directly from Al Hol and bypass Jeddah-1.

⁴⁰ According to a recent MEAC study, 70 per cent of respondents stated that the provision of ‘psychological rehabilitation’ increased their trust in the Jeddah-1 transition process. Dr. Jacqueline Parry and Yousif Khalid Khoshnaw, with Dr. Siobhan O’Neil and Dr. Juan Armando Torres Munguía, “Supporting the Reintegration of Families with Perceived ISIL Affiliation in Iraq,” forthcoming.

⁴¹ According to a recent MEAC study, 90 per cent of respondents stated that the completion of additional security screening increased their trust in the Jeddah-1 transition process. Ibid.

current Jeddah-1 residents were active ISIL supporters. In addition, many also argued that even if some returnees amongst Jeddah-1 residents did originally support ISIL's ideology, they were no longer perceived as a threat since most "joined for economic and not ideological reasons," and people are "tired and broken" and "just want to forget." This meant that what these residents – and children – needed was not ideological rehabilitation, but support to address the mental, social, and other practical challenges caused by living under ISIL and in Al Hol for years. The focus was often on MHPSS, education, livelihoods, and even interventions aimed at restoring social skills. Linked to this, respondents typically described rehabilitation in terms of behavioural changes rather than ideological change. This understanding meant that instead of suggesting ideology-based interventions – such as counselling to shift beliefs, or religious lectures – key stakeholders were more likely to recommend activities that would help people address symptoms of trauma and distress; support Jeddah-1 residents to fulfil the administrative requirements of return; and support their eventual reintegration.

The next sections map how the behaviour of children changed while in Jeddah-1, as well as the factors contributing to this behavioural change, as a way of understanding rehabilitation within Iraq's existing practice. Although the data is drawn from residents in Jeddah-1, the same factors are likely to influence the behaviour of other families with perceived ISIL affiliation when they return from within Iraq, and as such could help inform programming to support that population.

Behavioural Change in Children in Jeddah-1 Camp

The study heard consistent reports that the behaviour of many residents – adults and children alike – changed during their stay in Jeddah-1 camp. The primary change observed by service providers and Jeddah-1 residents was a reduction in mental distress. When people arrive in Jeddah-1 they are often overwhelmed by fear and anxiety; some display high rates of aggression, and a minority express 'extremist' beliefs. Over time, however, people display fewer psychological symptoms of stress; socialize more; show greater empathy towards each other; and change their manner of dress from the conservative attire worn during the ISIL occupation to a style that is more familiar to Iraq (and less conservative).⁴²

All children interviewed in Jeddah-1 reported that they felt less stressed now, after spending time back in Iraq, compared to when they had been in Al Hol. Adults reflected on the behavioural changes they witnessed in their children, referencing mainly the psychological shift as children began to feel safe. For example, one father in Jeddah-1 noted that: "The time spent in Jeddah-1 is important. Especially for children, our children were afraid of seeing cars when we first arrived in Jeddah-1. In Al Hol, our children were afraid of everything, they did

⁴² Dr. Jacqueline Parry and Yousif Khalid Khoshnaw, with Dr. Siobhan O'Neil and Dr. Juan Armando Torres Munguía, "Supporting the Reintegration of Families with Perceived ISIL Affiliation in Iraq," forthcoming.

not have a chance to participate in any recreational activity or schooling. But now they go outside, they interact with NGOs and the security forces, they have changed a lot.”⁴³

A service provider in Jeddah-1 also noted that: “We see the effects of violence on children, like injury and exhaustion and abuse they experienced before they arrived. Some cases need referrals and follow up, it’s common among newcomers of all ages. However, we see a big positive impact of the rehabilitation process on children after they spend time in Jeddah-1.”⁴⁴

Children in Jeddah-1 described the behavioural changes of their peers and adults around them as becoming “calmer” and more “comfortable” over time. For example, one teenage girl observed that: “When people have the freedom to move and sleep safely without worrying, they become calmer.”⁴⁵

Several children also noted that people’s “extremist views” changed over time as their mental state changed. A teenage girl noted that: “Their psyches change because their interaction with society changes, as well as their clothing, and they forget the style and violence of ISIL.”⁴⁶ A group of teenage girls observed that most camp residents in Jeddah-1 and Al Hol suffer from mental distress due to their experiences in Al Hol, and they themselves continued to deal with “trauma and anxiety” that affects them daily. They urged the UN to make this issue a priority because to ignore it would mean “they might not do well in the future, once they return or leave the camp.”⁴⁷

Factors Influencing the Behavioural Change of Children

Behavioural changes in Jeddah-1 are attributed mainly to environmental factors rather than a targeted ‘ideological’ shift. In the wider study with adults, the study found that positive influences on behaviour included the perception that Jeddah-1 is safe; provided access to services, psychosocial support, livelihood activities, and information; enabled residents to exercise increased control over the future and return to a ‘normal’ life; and hosted authorities and service providers who were respectful of residents.⁴⁸ These same factors apply equally to children in Jeddah-1. Feeling safe was the most important explanation that service-providers and Jeddah-1 residents gave for the behavioural change seen in children. Children also emphasized that their well-being (and behaviour) improved in Jeddah-1 camp as a result of the increase in safety, better conditions, and the more respectful treatment they received from authorities. All these factors were also linked to a feeling of increased control over their future. Certain children, however, continued to experience high rates of anxiety while in Jeddah-1, linked to their risk of protracted (or indefinite) confinement in the camp and poor reintegration

⁴³ MEAC, Key informant interview with male adult (Jeddah-1 Camp, July 2022).

⁴⁴ MEAC, Key informant interview with service provider (Jeddah-1 Camp, July 2022).

⁴⁵ MEAC, Key informant interview with female minor (Jeddah-1 Camp, July 2022).

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ MEAC, *Focus group discussion held with girls aged 15–17 years* (Jeddah-1 Camp, July 2022).

⁴⁸ Dr Jacqueline Parry and Yousif Khalid Khoshnaw, with Dr Siobhan O’Neil and Dr Juan Armando Torres Munguía, “Rehabilitation and Reintegration after Al Hol: Reflections on the Iraqi Experience,” forthcoming.

prospects. These children had significantly reduced control over their lives, which likely undermines their ability to imagine and plan for a life outside the camp.

The top factor undermining positive transition outcomes for children in Jeddah-1 was the inability to renew civil documentation. Children in Jeddah-1 frequently expressed anxiety about their lack of civil documentation. They were acutely aware that a lack of documentation would prevent them from attending school once they left Jeddah-1 camp, and this caused high rates of distress. Boys observed that they would not be able to freely move around or work without documentation, and girls expressed anxiety about not being able to legally marry or, in one case, to register to receive the pension from her deceased husband. Two girls who did not have documentation also had undocumented children themselves. They also had no idea how to renew their civil documentation once they left Jeddah-1. While the issue of civil documentation is addressed at length in the next section, it is vital to recognize the negative impact it has on the mental well-being of children in Jeddah-1, the way it undermines the control they have over their lives, and how it puts them at high risk of protracted confinement at the camp.

Several other factors further undermined the ability of children in Jeddah-1 to prepare for life outside the camp. This included being a member of a family that could not return due to a lack of approvals (such as a failure to obtain a security clearance) or poor community acceptance (due to community rejection or threats) and having a close relative accused of criminal behaviour under ISIL (which introduces additional requirements to the return process, such as sponsorship by a trusted community member).⁴⁹ In addition, children who come from families with weak social networks struggle to identify a suitable sponsor or connect with key community leaders in areas of return who could support them, further delaying or derailing their departure. These families face steep – and often unsurmountable – barriers to fulfilling the administrative requirements for return, and also find it much more difficult to reintegrate. Female-headed households and their children are significantly more affected across all these categories – and also spend longer in Jeddah-1 due to higher barriers to return. This is a vital issue to address not only in terms of rehabilitation and reintegration, but to avoid creating grievances that armed groups (such as ISIL) may exploit in future.

Reintegration

Departing the Jeddah-1 camp marks the start of a second vital phase of the transition process: reintegration. Reintegration, in this context, refers to the safe transition of children and their families back to their community (or to another community) and ‘normal’ life. This section aims

⁴⁹ Sponsorship entails a trusted community member – often a relative, but sometimes a tribal leader or other prominent community figure – formally vouching for the family (i.e., that the family is not affiliated to ISIL and is of ‘good standing’) to the authorities in the area of return.

to understand how communities respond to children from families with perceived ISIL affiliation upon return, and the barriers children face to reintegrate.

Transition Outcomes and Child Reintegration

Community Acceptance

The return of families with perceived ISIL affiliation – particularly those coming from Al Hol – made many community members apprehensive. Three-quarters of all community respondents indicated that they were concerned about the return of families with perceived ISIL affiliation from within Iraq. In addition, one-quarter of community respondents said they were more worried about the return of people from Al Hol than those with perceived ISIL affiliation from within Iraq.⁵⁰ Several communities did not accept the return of people from Al Hol at all, regardless of their profile. In these ‘areas of no return,’ even female-headed households with children found their return blocked. In fact, as this section will demonstrate, perceptions of proximity to ISIL and barriers to reintegration were frequently much higher for female-headed households. One mukhtar explained the view of people in his community: “The community does not accept the return of families from Al Hol because the feeling is they are ISIL, even the women and children, and the people’s minds are locked on this, I cannot change it.”⁵¹

These areas of ‘no return’ demand dedicated attention, since Jeddah-1 residents who originate from these locations are unlikely to be able to return in the foreseeable future. This may force families into protracted – or even indefinite – confinement in Jeddah-1 if the community stance does not change and the family cannot identify a third location to relocate. This has implications not only for these families, but for the ability of the camp to accept further returns from Al Hol and maintain the relatively positive environment there. For children, the repercussions of protracted confinement are particularly dire as it prevents them from accessing government schools, generates significant anxiety, and will create stigma that will severely undermine their long-term reintegration and transition prospects into adulthood.

For children who did manage to return with their families, they often faced social stigma in the community. This is clear from the experiences of the children themselves, but also from community responses. Children who lived under ISIL occupation were more likely to report being treated poorly in a shop or market in their daily life.⁵² Parents of families with perceived ISIL affiliation were more likely to report that teachers ‘never’ treat their children fairly at

⁵⁰ People who did not live under ISIL occupation were more likely to express concern than those who lived under ISIL occupation.

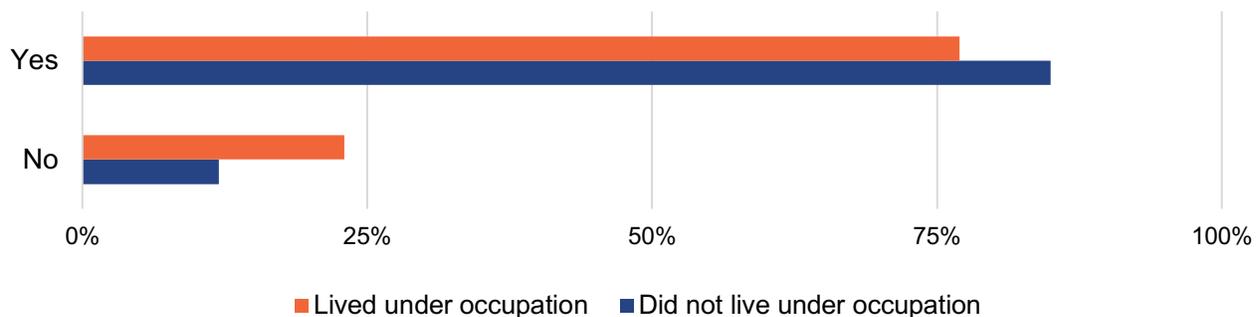
⁵¹ MEAC, *Key informant interview*, (Anbar, September 2022).

⁵² 13 per cent of children who lived under ISIL occupation reported poor treatment, versus 4 percent of children who did not live in ISIL-occupied territory. Dr. Jacqueline Parry and Yousif Khalid Khoshnaw, with Dr. Siobhan O’Neil and Dr. Juan Armando Torres Munguía, “Supporting the Reintegration of Families with Perceived ISIL Affiliation in Iraq,” forthcoming.

school.⁵³ Three-quarters of parents in communities of return were not comfortable with their children attending school with the children of families perceived as having an ISIL affiliation.⁵⁴

When examining the broader population of children who lived under ISIL, not just those whose families were perceived as having an ISIL affiliation, there are notable differences with other Iraqi children who did not live under occupation. A concerning finding is that children who lived under ISIL occupation have weaker social support networks. Nearly one-quarter of the children who lived under ISIL occupation did not have anyone to turn to for guidance, which was double the rate of those who did not live in ISIL territory. For children in Jeddah-1, when asked who would support them once they returned to their community (or another one), boys often said “friends” and “family,” but more than half of the girls said “nobody,” another example where gender seems to impact social support networks (see Figure 5).⁵⁵ A lack of social and material support when facing challenges may exacerbate the risk of marginalized youth being vulnerable to all types of adverse outcomes, including possible exploitation by armed or nefarious actors (such as the remnants of a resurgence of ISIL).

Figure 4 – “These days, if you experience hardship, is there someone you could turn to for guidance, advice, support, or help to make plans for the future”

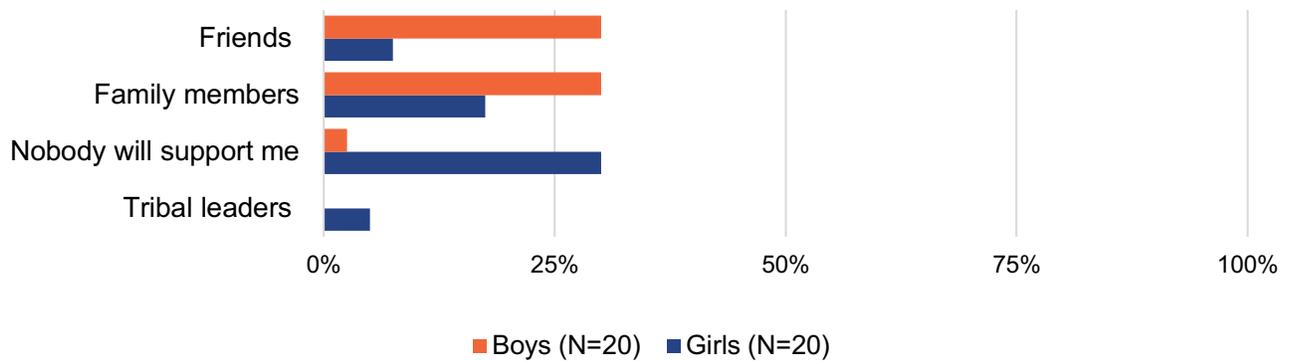


⁵³ Ibid., 7 per cent versus 4 per cent of those who never lived in ISIL occupied territory.

⁵⁴ Ibid., Rates were slightly higher if the person had lived in ISIL territory: 28 per cent of those who lived in ISIL occupied territory felt comfortable, versus 23 per cent of those who did not live in ISIL territory.

⁵⁵ There was little difference in how generally ‘accepted’ children felt by their communities regardless of whether or not they lived under ISIL occupation. Roughly one-quarter of both groups stated that other people in their area “sometimes” express critical or negative perceptions of them because they don’t agree with the experiences they had during the war, and roughly three-quarters of both groups felt that people who had a similar experience during the war understand them better. This suggests that the experience of conflict continues to define the way some people within the community relate to each other, including towards children. Left unaddressed, there is a risk that this may lead to entrenched divisions in the community that influence children into adulthood.

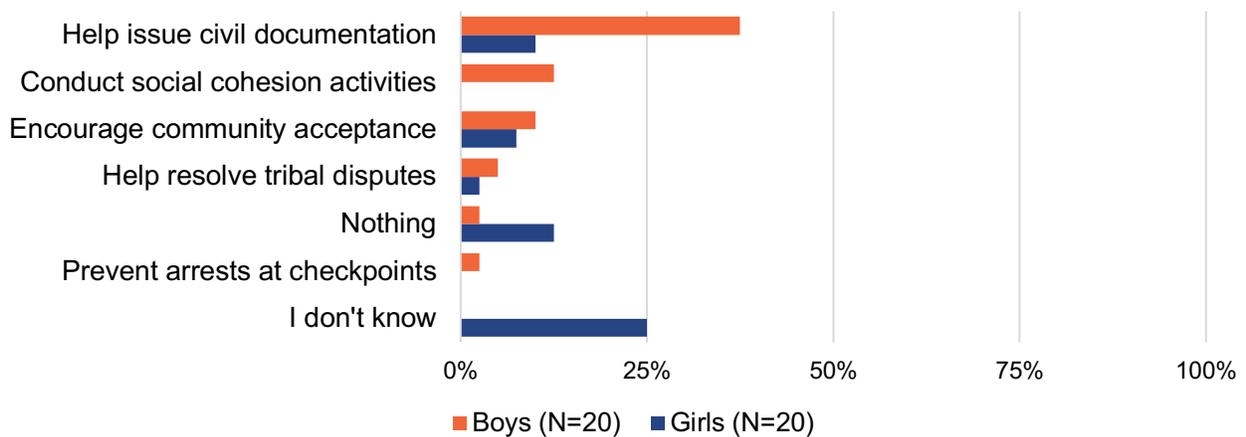
Figure 5 – “Once you return, will anyone support you socially, to help you feel accepted in the community?”



Perceptions of Safety

Having lived under ISIL has long-term impacts on children’s perceptions of safety and security. Among those surveyed across four locations in Nineveh, Salah al-Din, and Anbar (Survey A), 91 per cent of children who did *not* live under ISIL considered all members of their family safe in their area, whereas only 74 per cent of children who lived under ISIL occupation considered their family members safe. Almost half of all children were concerned about revenge attacks in their area, regardless of whether or not they lived in ISIL territory, suggesting that even children from families that fled ISIL’s arrival are conscious of cycles of revenge and fear that this may affect them in future. This fear of revenge attacks is reflected in the graph below, where children suggested that the UN could make Jeddah-1 residents feel safer post-return by conducting social cohesion activities, encouraging community acceptance, and helping to resolve tribal disputes. As noted in the above section, however, the top factor undermining their sense of safety – and the top request made to the UN – was to support children to obtain or renew civil documentation.

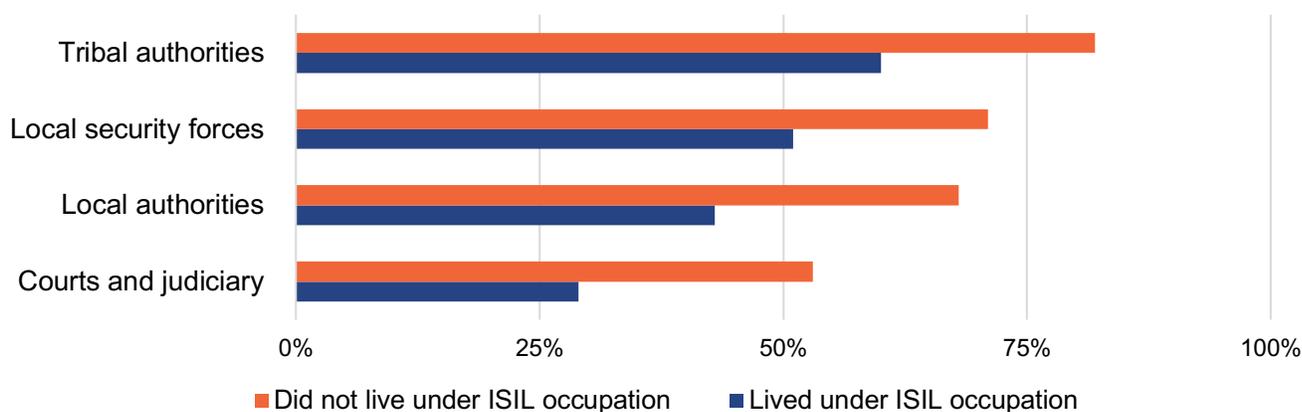
Figure 6 – “What can the UN do to make J-1 residents feel safer after they depart J-1 and return to another place?”



Trust in Institutions

Like perceptions of security, living under ISIL had implications for perceptions of the Iraqi State. Children who lived under ISIL occupation had significantly less trust in formal institutions, measured by the expectation that their families would be treated fairly. Across all institutions, children who did *not* live under ISIL occupation were at least 20 per cent more likely to believe that their family was ‘always’ treated fairly by local institutions. Trust was particularly low for the courts and judiciary, and highest for tribal authorities. This is likely influenced by the judiciary’s use of sweeping anti-terrorism legislation and trials that lack due process to prosecute those accused of ISIL affiliation,⁵⁶ while tribal leaders have, to varying degrees, played a strategic role in facilitating the return of families with perceived ISIL affiliation.

Figure 7 – Children: “Do you feel that your family is treated fairly?” Answer = Always



Access to Civil Documentation

A key barrier to the reintegration of children from families with perceived ISIL affiliation – both returning from within Iraq and from Al Hol – is access to civil documentation. Lacking documentation has dire consequences in Iraq, preventing access to education, limiting the availability of government services, reducing access to livelihoods, and undermining socioeconomic status, mental health, and social inclusion. The inability to renew civil documentation significantly undermines the ability of children to fully transition back to ‘normal’ life and puts children and families at risk of protracted confinement in Jeddah-1 camp. Lacking civil documentation reduces a child’s ability to engage in many aspects of formal life (e.g., the economy, health, and social services), thus relegating them to informal and illegal spaces and enhancing their vulnerability to recruitment or exploitation by those actors that operate in them, including traffickers and criminal and armed groups.

⁵⁶ The United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) monitored 794 hearings in criminal courts in Iraq in 2018 and 2019 and found that the majority (78 per cent) concerned defendants prosecuted under the 2005 Anti-Terrorism Law for allegations of “ISIL membership.” In the cases it monitored, UNAMI found that no account was taken of whether a defendant’s association with ISIL was voluntary or coerced, including in cases against the wives and children of fighters. For more details, see: UNAMI and UN OHCHR, [Human Rights in the Administration of Justice in Iraq](#) (Baghdad: 2020).

The number of children from families with perceived ISIL affiliation who are missing documentation is high. Of those who had returned from Al Hol camp to their area of origin, 75 per cent of female heads of household and 30 per cent of male respondents reported that at least one member of their family had missing civil documentation, most of whom were children.⁵⁷ Strikingly, 95 per cent of female heads of household returning from Al Hol reported that their children were missing documentation (versus 63 per cent of male respondents).⁵⁸ Of the respondents who had children born after 2014, 80 per cent did not have a government-issued birth certificate,⁵⁹ while one-third of children had expired documents they had been unable to renew.⁶⁰ Of families who returned from within Iraq but had proximity markers, 22 per cent had children with expired documentation they had been unable to renew.⁶¹ All of these data points reinforce the finding that those families perceived as ISIL affiliated have un- or under-documented members, which inhibits their freedom of movement and ability to access services and markets.

During the period of ISIL occupation, children were not issued with Iraqi government birth certificates, nor did the State recognize marriages or deaths. This means that all children born under ISIL occupation since 2014 are undocumented in the eyes of the state, as are all marriages performed under ISIL (which is a further impediment to civil documentation, since Iraqi law requires parents to be married in order to obtain a birth certificate). Families with perceived affiliation face a range of challenges when applying for civil documentation and registering children born during the conflict, including the need to obtain security clearance from intelligence actors in order to access the offices that issue such documents and to meet restrictive legal and administrative requirements (discussed below). This makes the process highly complex and largely inaccessible for the majority of families with perceived affiliation.⁶²

There were some initial signs that this issue was being addressed, but unfortunately progress appears to have stalled. In 2019, the Ministry of Interior issued directives instructing Civil Affairs Departments to process civil documentation regardless of whether the household had obtained a security clearance (in line with Iraqi and international human rights law, which ensures the right to a legal identity). These directives, however, are not implemented consistently and there is no ability to appeal or report misprocesses.⁶³ In March 2021, the Court of Cassation - the court of last resort in Baghdad for criminal and civil cases - issued a

⁵⁷ Rates are similar for those who currently live in Jeddah-1 camp: 63 per cent of female respondents in Jeddah-1 camp and 47 per cent of male respondents had at least one member of their families missing documentation. Children were most likely to be missing documentation, followed by female adults. Of those who had children born after 2014, only 12 per cent had a government-issued birth certificate (14 per cent for male respondents and 11 per cent for female respondents). Another 25 per cent of children had expired documentation that the parent had been unable to renew (20 per cent for male respondents and 28 per cent for female respondents).

⁵⁸ This is linked to the fact that female-headed households generally had children born after 2014, while male respondents were more likely to have children born prior to 2014 who were able to access government-issued documentation.

⁵⁹ There was negligible difference between male and female-headed households.

⁶⁰ There was negligible difference between male and female-headed households.

⁶¹ Compared to 4 per cent without proximity markers and 3 per cent of those who did not live in ISIL territory.

⁶² For a detailed discussion of these challenges, see Elysia Buchanan and Caroline Zullo, *Life in the Margins: Re-examining the needs of paperless people in post-conflict Iraq*, (Danish Refugee Council and Norwegian Refugee Council, 2022).

⁶³ Ibid.

decision that requires women with perceived ISIL affiliation to provide evidence of the whereabouts of the child's father in the form of a death certificate or evidence of incarceration.⁶⁴ This is impossible for women whose husbands are missing, deceased, or whose whereabouts are not documented.⁶⁵ In interviews for this study, key informants consistently referenced this decision as the primary barrier to accessing civil documentation and which, so long as it remains in place, severely limits the ability of children from families with perceived ISIL affiliation from accessing documentation. While the definition of an ISIL affiliate is opaque, this appears to apply to persons against whom an arrest warrant was issued by an investigative judge; those listed in the various security databases; or potentially others whose information was shared by informants or listed in ISIL documents.

In addition, in March of 2022, following a request from the Forensics Department of the Ministry of Health in Baghdad, courts widely began requiring that families with perceived affiliation seeking proof of paternal lineage - a requirement to obtain a birth certificate and other civil documents for a child - provide DNA samples from up to three male paternal relatives,⁶⁶ an increase on the single sample ordinarily required. Even if it is possible to secure these samples, the lengthy processing time (at least one year and often much longer), the requirement to travel to Baghdad (the only location where DNA can be processed), and the cost and complexity involved make the process largely inaccessible. More recently, in July of 2022, the High Judicial Council - the judicial advisory panel which oversees the Iraqi judiciary - issued a letter to the Ministry of Migration and Displacement reaffirming the requirement of multiple DNA tests and confirming that, for women with foreign ISIL-affiliated spouses, birth registration is impossible.⁶⁷

As a result of these developments, legal solutions exist for only a tiny minority of families of perceived ISIL affiliation: women who have access to a death certificate and to three male paternal relatives who are able to provide DNA samples at the Forensics Department in Baghdad; or those who are able to negotiate leniency with the judge handling their case, an option that returnees suggested was out of reach.

Moreover, these developments mean that returnees from Al Hol are now required to return to their area of origin and apply at the Civil Affairs Directorate for the renewal or issue of civil documentation. Following this instruction, the legal service provider in Jeddah-1 is only able to renew documents if the person can provide all four expired Iraqi identity documents issued by the Gol, which is impossible for many Jeddah-1 residents who lost their documents or had them confiscated by the Al Hol authorities, or for those who were married or born under ISIL occupation and were never issued government documents. There are also consistent reports that in areas of return, organizations that provide legal assistance have stopped providing support to renew documentation for children whose fathers are dead or missing and accused of ISIL affiliation, due to the above-mentioned requirements. In practice, most Jeddah-1

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Either because the woman does not know where her husband is and authorities cannot or will not confirm his whereabouts, or because the documentation was lost.

⁶⁶ Elysia Buchanan and Caroline Zullo, *Life in the Margins: Re-examining the needs of paperless people in post-conflict Iraq*, (Danish Refugee Council and Norwegian Refugee Council, 2022).

⁶⁷ Ibid.

residents who have returned without documentation have been unable to obtain documents despite visiting the personal status administration.

Long-term Vulnerability to Recruitment or Influence by Armed Groups

In the long-term, there is a risk that armed groups (such as ISIL) may prey on the vulnerabilities of those whose reintegration progress has been hampered and related grievances.⁶⁸ Social exclusion, lack of civil documentation, poor socioeconomic status, inability to access work or marry legally, and protracted (or indefinite) confinement in Jeddah-1 are all issues that provide armed groups such as ISIL an opportunity to generate rumours that such treatment or policies were an intentional punishment of the Sunni community on the part of the GoI, and may enable those armed groups to exploit grievances for recruitment purposes. In addition, these same issues may encourage youth – now and as they mature into adults – to view the opportunities offered by armed groups favourably. In the words of one key stakeholder, if children continue with such limited prospects for the future, they will “run to the first person who offers them money and ... better prospects for survival and a life of dignity.”⁶⁹

Recommendations

- **The UN should advocate for the issuance of civil documentation for all Jeddah-1 residents prior to return.** This appears to be the most important and urgent issue to address for the success of rehabilitation and reintegration efforts targeting children from families with perceived ISIL affiliation to prevent their risk of recruitment by armed groups.
- **The Government of Iraq should remove or adjust the restrictive requirements that make obtaining civil documentation inaccessible for most families with perceived ISIL affiliation.** Specifically, it should adopt an exception on supporting documentation requirements for children born during the conflict who lack birth registration and whose families do not have security constraints; and standardize procedures for the issuance of death certificates and marriage certificates for men who disappeared during the conflict, including the issuance of alternative means of community verification (e.g., a letter from a mukhtar).
- **The Government of Iraq should ensure that civil documentation is issued in accordance with the 2019 Ministry of the Interior directive to all Civil Affairs Departments (which recognises the right to an identity under Iraqi law)** and that additional requirements, such as multiple DNA samples and security clearances, are not incorporated into the application procedures. This should include a directive overturning

⁶⁸ United States Institute of Peace and Wilson Center, *The Jihadi Threat: Isis, Al Qaeda, and Beyond* (Washington, DC: 2017).

⁶⁹ MEAC, *Key informant interview with service provider* (Jeddah-1 Camp, July 2022).

the Court of Cassation decision that prevents the issuing of civil documentation to many families with perceived ISIL affiliation.

- **Develop interventions specifically for families at high risk of protracted (or indefinite) confinement in Jeddah-1 camp.** This should include identifying those within the camp population who fall within the 'at risk' categories identified in this study; designing interventions to address their specific barriers to departure; and taking a case management approach to ensure that individuals are supported to achieve a timely departure from Jeddah-1 camp.
- **Encourage, strengthen, and expand the environmental factors and activities in Jeddah-1 camp that are contributing to children's positive behavioural changes.** This includes ensuring the ongoing safety of the camp; addressing gaps in service provision; increasing access to specialized MHPSS support; expanding access to education and skills training; and ensuring respectful treatment by authorities.
- **Work on building trust between children from families with perceived ISIL affiliation and local institutions.** This includes repairing relationships so that children will feel willing to contact local authorities when they experience crime or other issues (as adults) and do not feel increasingly marginalized by state institutions.
- **Introduce or strengthen interventions that address the risk of revenge attacks, with active engagement of children.** This may include social cohesion activities; dialogue sessions involving local authorities, returnees, and victim families; or community awareness, all with the active involvement of older children and youth.
- **Engage in community outreach to address concerns about the return of families with perceived ISIL affiliation, with a focus on the experience of children post-return.** Community outreach should aim to reduce discrimination and stigma towards children, in order to reduce the poor treatment some face in the community, improve school environments, and enhance their sense of safety.
- **Introduce activities to strengthen the social networks of children who are isolated,** particularly those from female-headed households who are typically even more isolated than others.

