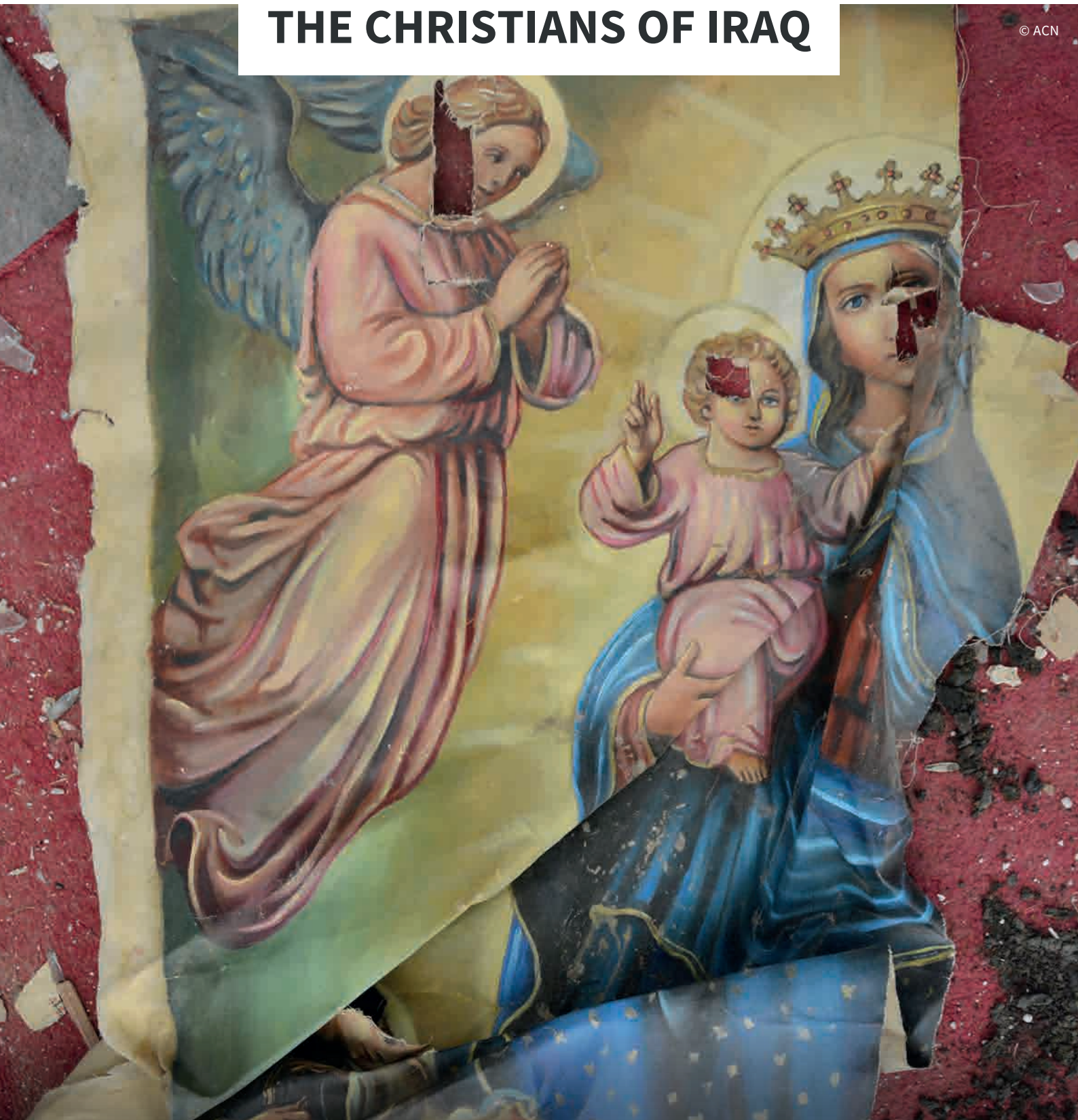


# THE CHRISTIANS OF IRAQ

© ACN

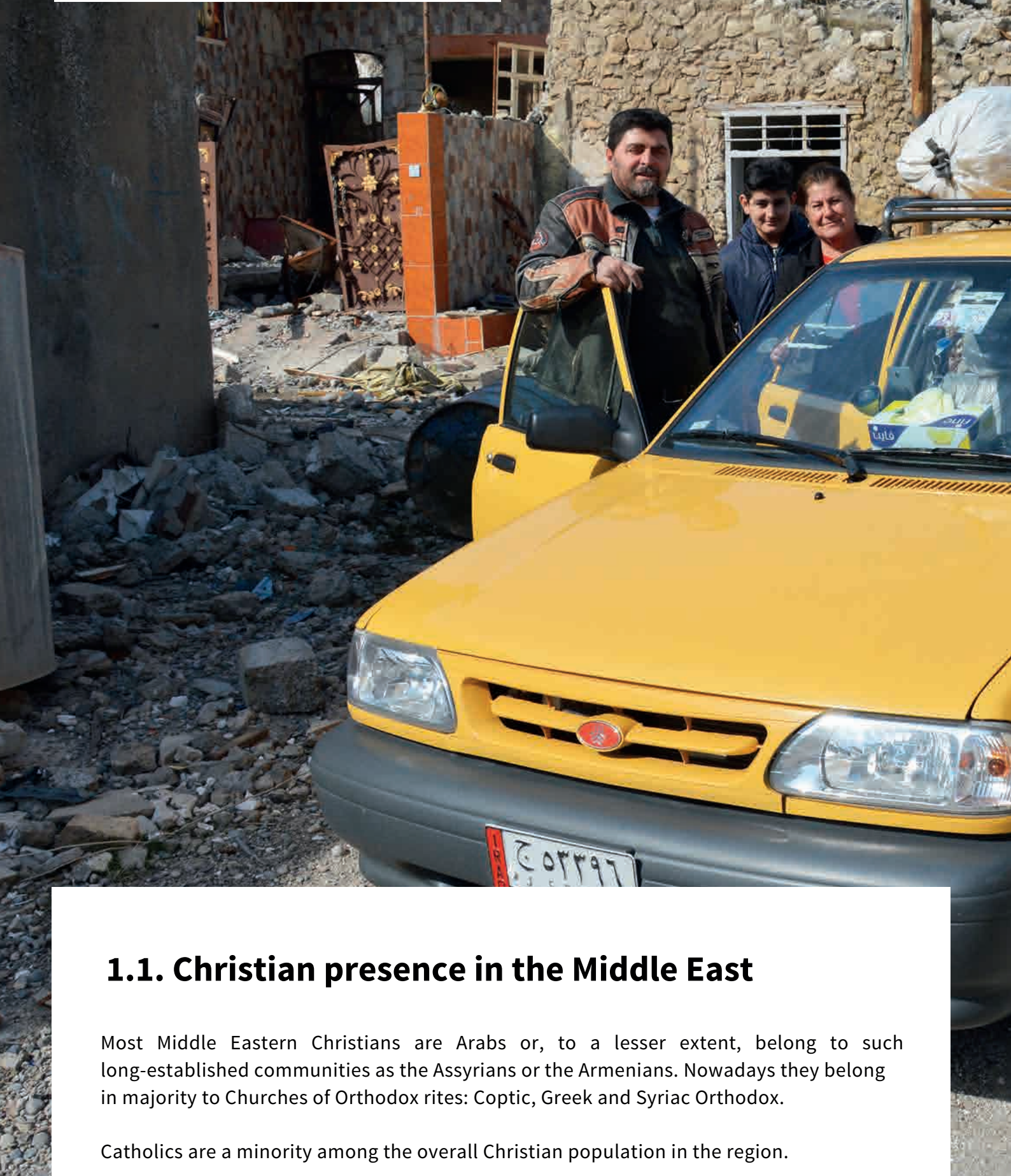


# Table of contents:

1. The Middle East .....	3
1.1.Christian presence in the Middle East .....	3
1.2. Emigration of Christians from the Middle East .....	6
2. The Country .....	7
2.1 Iraq .....	8
2.2 The Demography .....	9
2.3 The Cradle of Civilization - ancient biblical and Christian land .....	10
2.4 Distribution of Christians in Iraqi regions .....	11
2.5 Christians in Iraq according to their denomination .....	12
2.6 Iraq's Catholic church .....	13
2.7 Projection of Christian population development in Iraq .....	14
3. Christians in distress .....	15
3.1. A target of violence also before ISIS .....	16
3.2 ISIS attacks Christians .....	16
3.3 The aftermath of the 3-year war against ISIS (1) .....	17
The aftermath of the 3-year war against ISIS (2) .....	18
The aftermath of the 3-year war against ISIS (3) .....	19
3.4 Destruction of Christian heritage and church properties in Iraq by ISIS (1) .....	21
Destruction of Christian heritage and church properties in Iraq by ISIS (2) .....	23
Destruction of Christian heritage and church properties in Iraq by ISIS (3) .....	24
4. ACN helps .....	25
4.1 Overview of ACN's help in Iraq from 2011-2021 .....	26
4.2 First aid after the outbreak of the war August 2014 - June 2015 .....	26
4.3 ACN rehabilitation projects and establishment of Nineveh reconstruction committee .....	28
4.4 The return of the Christians .....	28
4.5 Houses restored .....	29
4.6 Church reconstruction: Al-Tahira .....	29
4.7 The reconstruction as chance of Christianity's long-term survival .....	31
5. Challenges ahead .....	32
5.1 Major issues .....	33
5.2 Reasons for emigration .....	34
5.3 Security concerns for Christians .....	34
5.4 Economic concerns .....	34
5.5 Neglect by foreign entities .....	35
5.6 Religious discrimination .....	36
6. Positive signs? .....	37



# 1. The Middle East



## 1.1. Christian presence in the Middle East

Most Middle Eastern Christians are Arabs or, to a lesser extent, belong to such long-established communities as the Assyrians or the Armenians. Nowadays they belong in majority to Churches of Orthodox rites: Coptic, Greek and Syriac Orthodox.

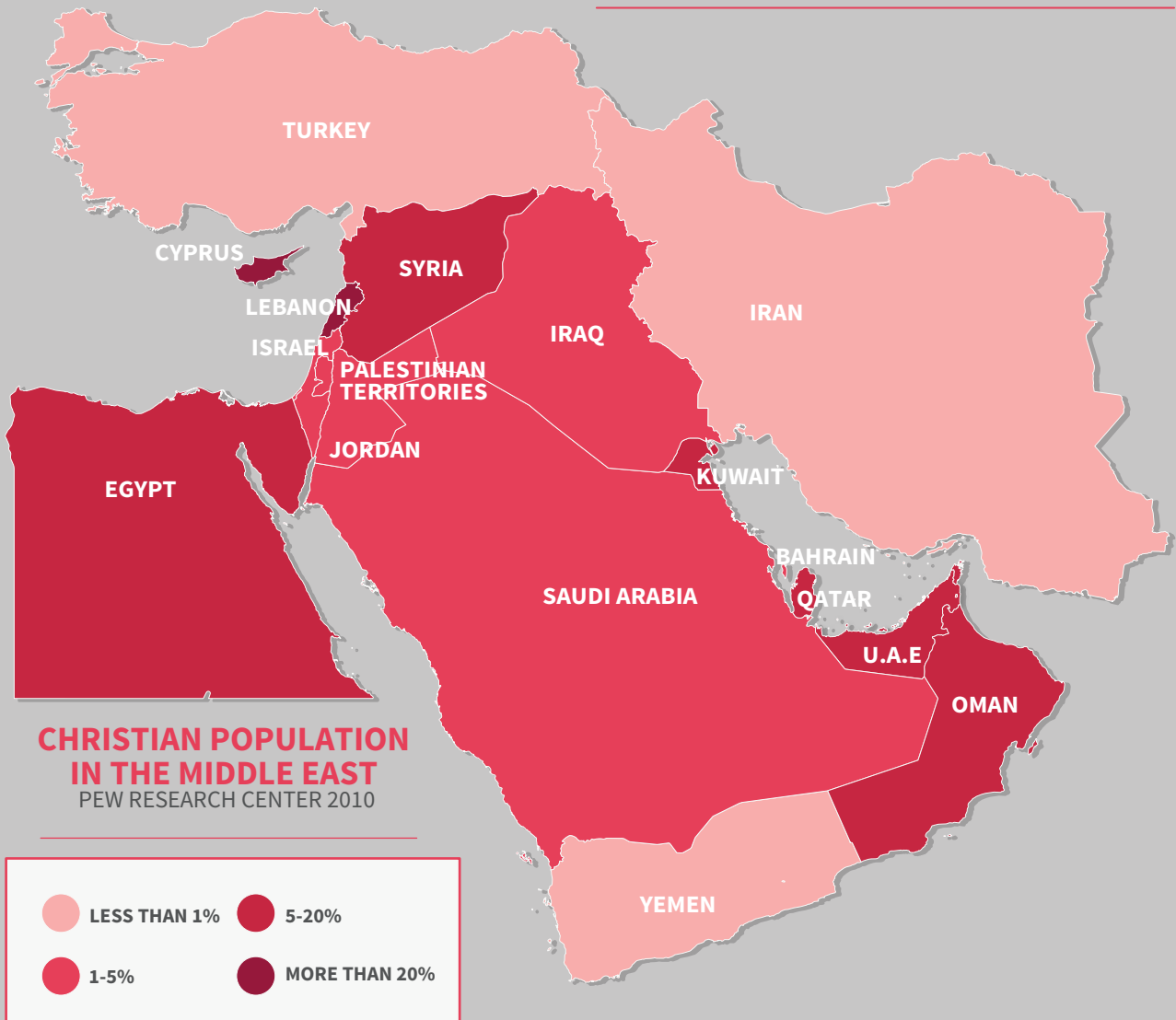
Catholics are a minority among the overall Christian population in the region.





# CHRISTIAN POPULATION IN THE MIDDLE EAST

PEW RESEARCH CENTER 2010



EGYPT - 4.120.000	IRAN - 110.000
JORDAN - 130.000	KUWAIT - 390.000
ISRAEL - 150.000	BAHRAIN - 180.000
PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES - 100.000	QATAR - 240.000
LEBANON - 1.620.000	U.A.E - 940.000
CYPRUS - 810.000	OMAN - 180.000
TURKEY - 320.000	SAUDI ARABIA - 1.200.000
SYRIA - 1.060.000	YEMEN - 40.000
IRAQ - 270.000	

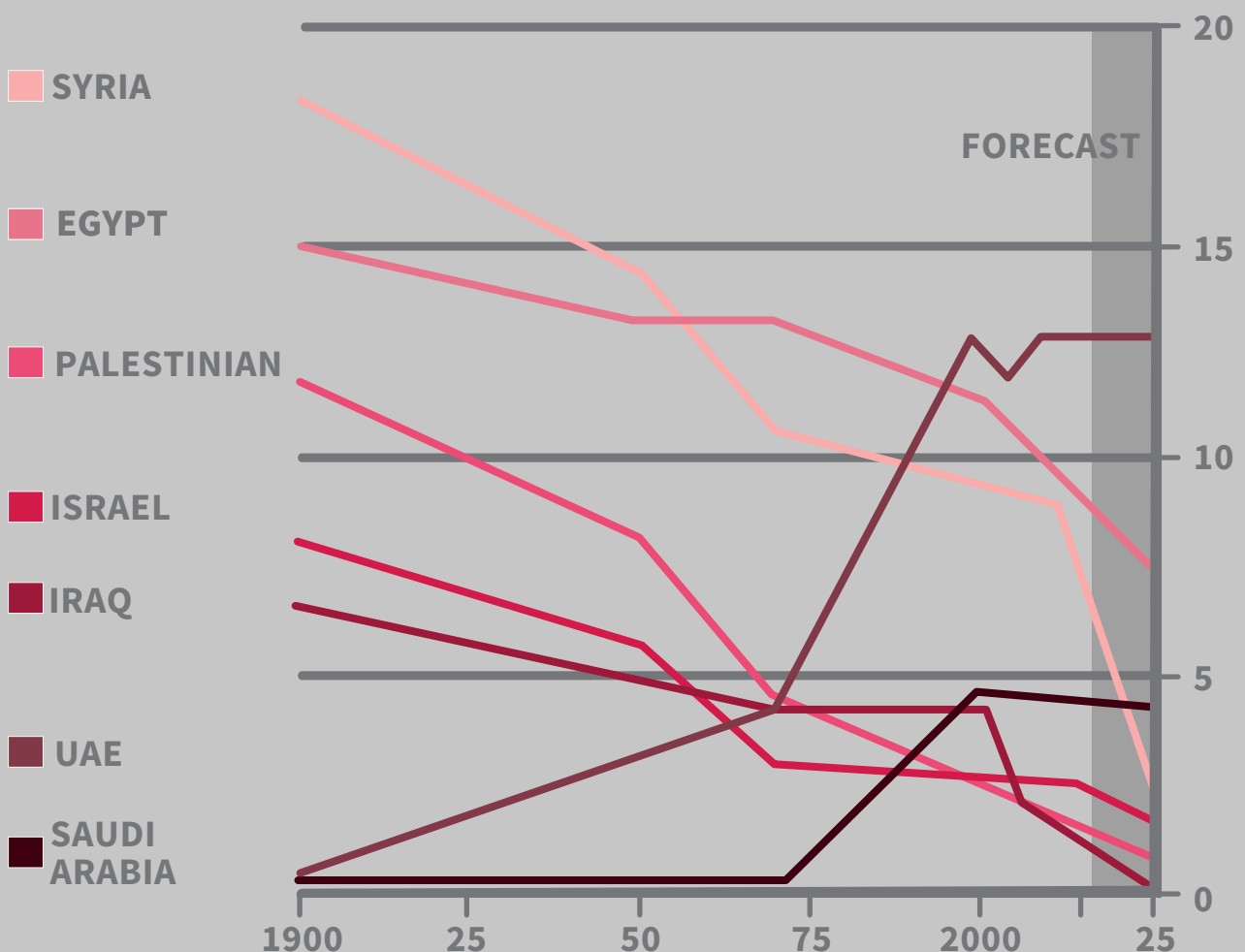
## 1.2. Emigration of Christians from the Middle East

Most important factors behind Christian exodus from the Middle East impacting the number of Christians in the Middle East:

- serious and long-lasting military conflicts
- socio - demographic and economical situation
- influence of Muslim political and legal mentality
- emergence of new Islamist movements
- full citizenship rights refusal
- reemergence of political Islam, that led to the formation of Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS)

### EXODUS

Christians, as % population



Source: World Religion Database



## 2. The Country



## 2.1 Iraq

- The Republic of Iraq is divided into 19 provinces.
- In 2020 it had 40 million inhabitants according to the UN.
- The capital, and largest city, is Baghdad. Basra in the South and Mosul follow.
- The official languages of Iraq are Arabic and Kurdish.
- Iraq is number 5 when it comes to oil resources in the world.

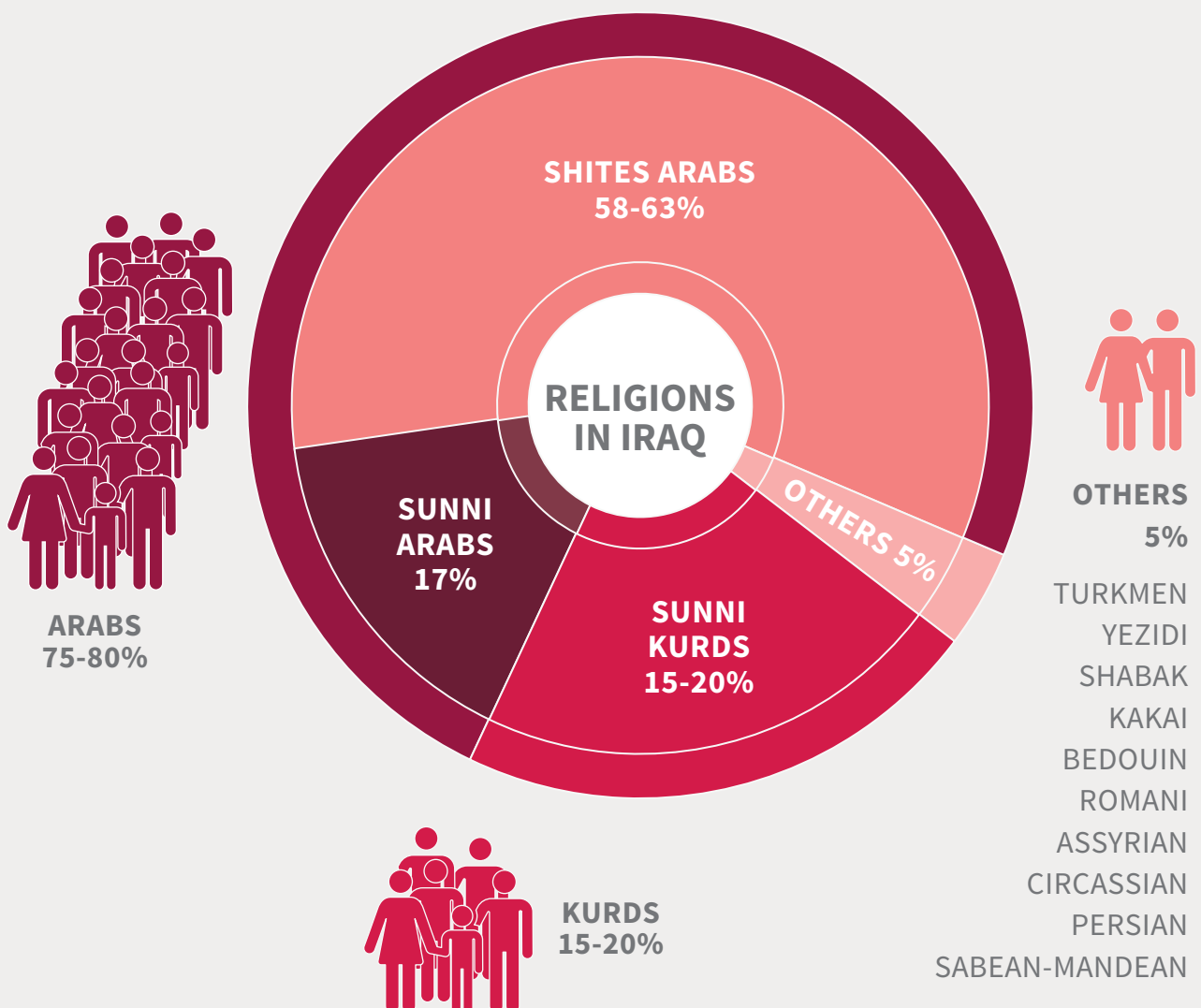




## 2.2 The Demography

- The main religion is Islam made up of both Shia as well as Sunni populations.
- Arabs are the largest ethnic community.
- Ethnic Kurds live mostly in the North where they have established autonomy with the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG). Many Christians found refuge there. All locations in the Nineveh Plains with its Christian heartland fall into Iraq's disputed territories, claimed by both the KRG and the Central Government in Baghdad. In theory, a vote should regularize this situation, but there is no sign that such a vote is on the horizon. At the moment Baghdad controls the area.

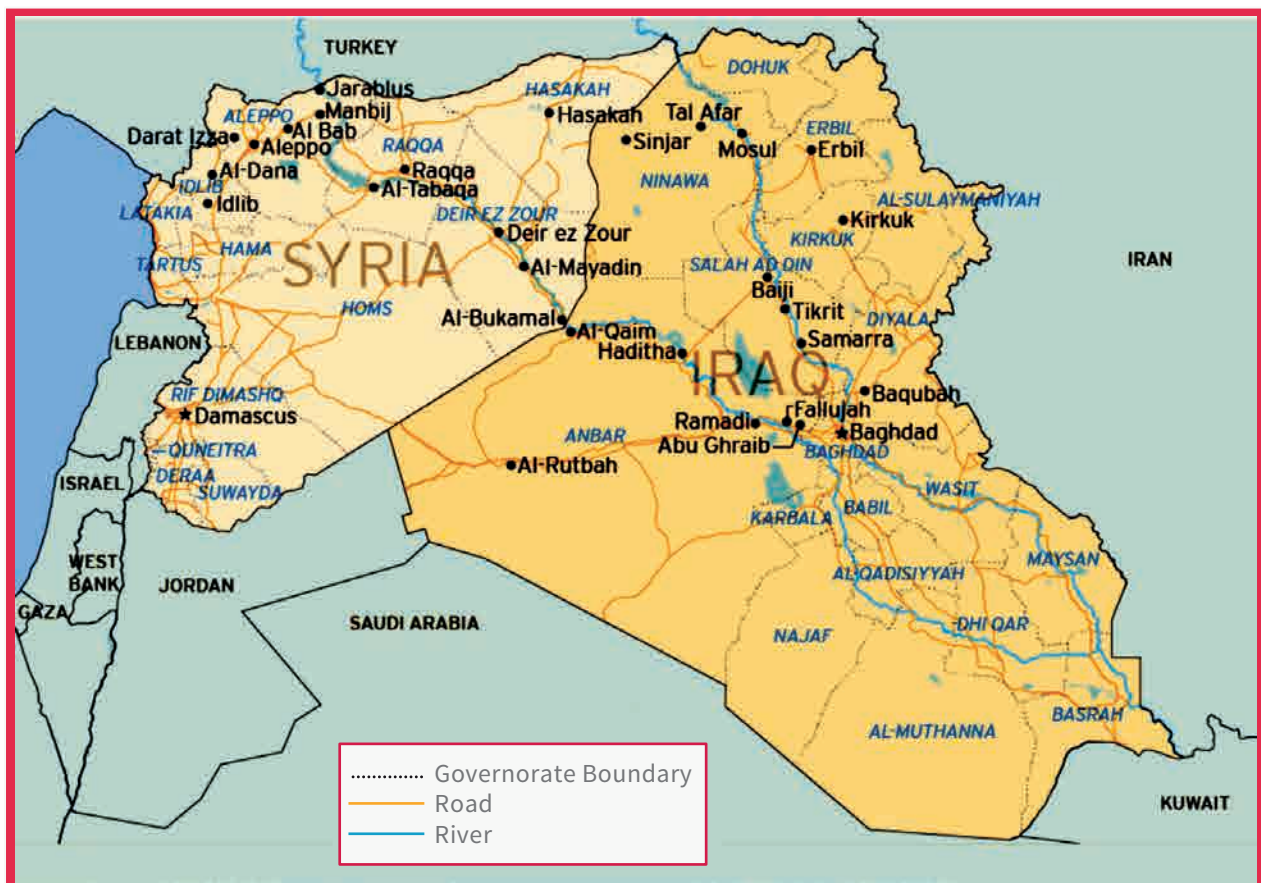
### ETHNO-RELIGIOUS LANDSCAPE



## 2.3 THE CRADLE OF CIVILIZATION - ancient biblical and Christian land

The region between Tigris and Euphrates rivers, historically known as Mesopotamia, is often called the cradle of civilization. The Christians of Iraq are one of the oldest continuous Christian communities in the world. Christianity was brought to Iraq in the 1st century.

Territories of today's Iraq are known from the Bible, the paradise of the Book of Genesis is believed to have been located in today's Iraq, the same as: the construction of the Tower of Babel, the Noachian flood, Abraham's birthplace - Ur in Chaldea, Jacob and Rachel meeting, the lion's den, where Daniel was imprisoned, the furnace, where the three Hebrew children were put in the fire by Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, who carried the Jews captive, the events of the book of Esther, the prophet activity of: Amos, Ezekiel...



Before World War I: 20%  
**CHRISTIAN POPULATION  
IN THE MIDDLE EAST**  
NOW: 4%



## 2.4 Distribution of Christians in Iraqi regions

Iraqi Christians live alongside other communities primarily in

- the capital Baghdad
- the Southern city of Basra
- and mostly in the North, especially in Erbil, Dohuk, Sulaymaniyah and Kirkuk provinces and in Ninewa Province with the Niniveh Plains where many Christians cities and villages are located.

Historically, Christians settled in the North. Many emigrated for economic and security reasons to Baghdad and Basra in the 70ies only to return with the security situation deteriorating after the US invasion in 2003.

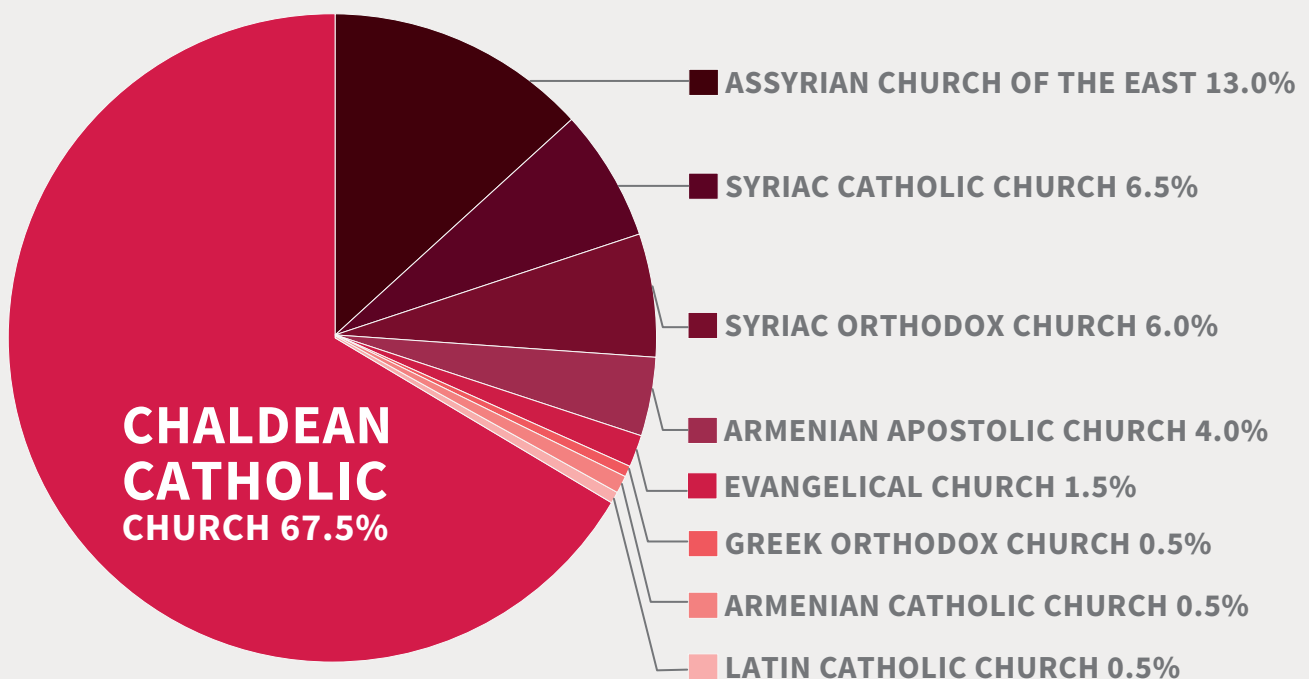


## 2.5 Christians in Iraq according to their denomination

- Christians are overwhelmingly the descendants of the original inhabitants of the Assyrian Empire, a civilization that lasted from the 25th century BC until the 7th century BC. They are indigenous Eastern Aramaic-speakers.
- The most widely followed denomination in Iraq is the Chaldean Catholic Church, however, other communities of Syrian rite play an important role.

The other rites, as per Armenian, Byzantine (Melkite) and Latin also being present.

(the chart shows the situation in 2007. The proportions might have changed slightly with the Chaldean Church still being the biggest one)





## 2.6 Iraq's Catholic church

### ARMENIAN CATHOLIC CHURCH



**2 PARISHES**  
**1 ARCHDIOCESE**  
(BAGHDAD)



**1 ADMINISTRATOR**

### GREEK-MELKITE CATHOLIC CHURCH



**1 PARISH**  
**1 PATRIARCHAL EXARCHATE**  
(IRAQ AS ONE)

### LATIN CHURCH



**3 PARISHES**  
**1 ARCHDIOCESE**  
(BAGHDAD)



**11 PRIESTS**



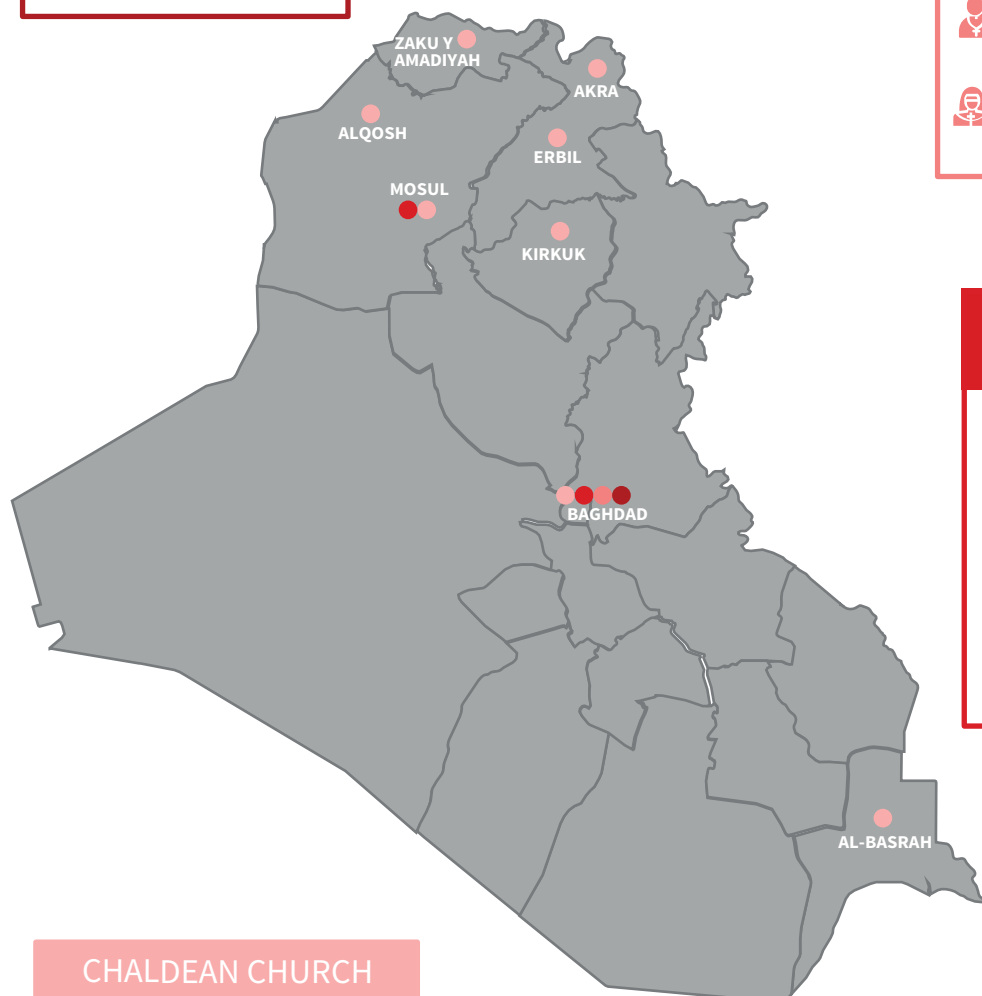
**2 MONASTIC ORDERS**



**6 MALE CONGREGATIONS**



**9 FEMALE CONGREGATIONS**



### SYRIAC CATHOLIC CHURCH



**16 PARISHES**  
**1 ARCHDIOCESE**  
(MOSUL, BAGHDAD)



**1 MONASTIC ORDER**



**52 PRIESTS**



**1 FEMALE CONGREGATION**

### CHALDEAN CHURCH



**96 PARISHES**  
**1 PATRIARCHATE** (BABYLON)  
**4 ARCHDIOCESE** (MOSUL, BASRAH, KIRKUK, ERBIL)  
**1 ARCHDIOCESE** (BAGHDAD)  
**3 DIOCESES** (ALQOSH, AKRA, AMADIYAH Y ZAKU)



**71 PRIESTS**



**1 MONASTIC ORDER**



**2 FEMALE CONGREGATIONS**

### CATHOLIC CHURCH TOTAL

**118 PARISHES**



**134 PRIESTS**

**1 PATRIARCHATE**



**6 MALE CONGREGATIONS**



**1 PATRIARCHAL EXARCHATE**



**4 MONASTIC ORDERS**

**7 ARCHDIOCESES**



**15 RELIGIOUS MEN**

**2 ARCHDIOCESES**



**12 FEMALE CONGREGATIONS**

**3 DIOCESES**



**139 RELIGIOUS WOMEN**

## 2.7 Projection of Christian population development in Iraq

Christian population Iraq:

2003: 1.400.000

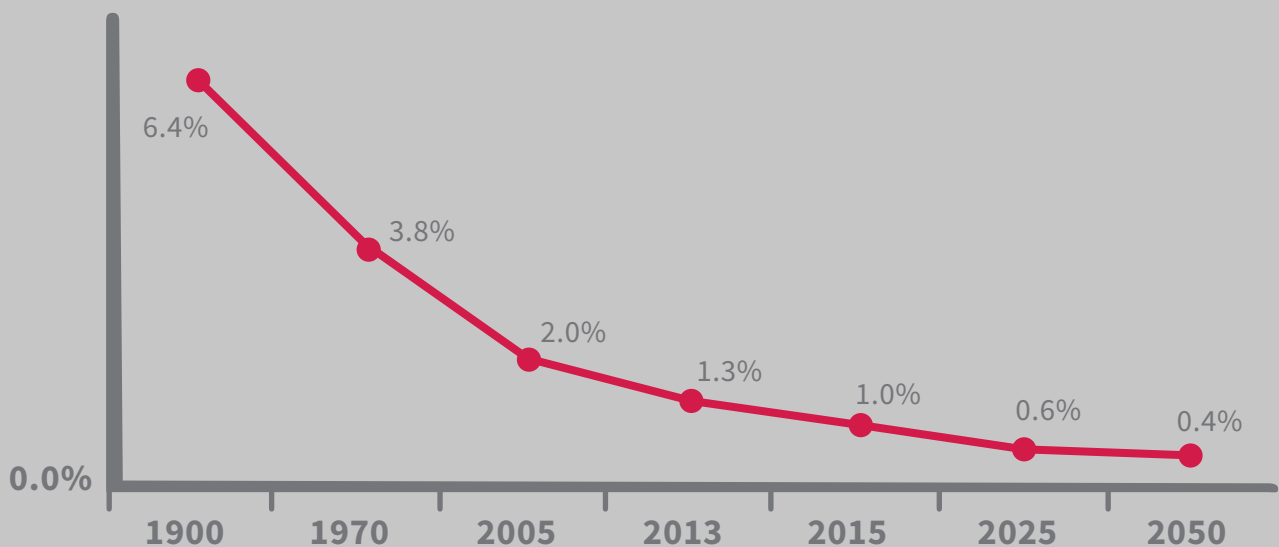
2015: c. 300.000

2021: less than 250.000

(there are no official or verified numbers). Chaldean Archbishop Warda of Erbil told ACN in 2019: “In the years prior to 2003, we numbered as many as one-and-a-half million – six percent of Iraq’s population. Today, there are perhaps as few as 250,000 of us left. Maybe less.”

### IRAQ Christian Population in Decline

Christians share of Iraqi Population, Projected to 2050



\*1900 data reflect current borders; time units are not uniform.

Data: World Religion Database, Brill, 2014, Eds. Johnson & Grim

Chart: The Weekly Number, Brian J. Grim, Aug. 19, 2014



### 3. Christians in distress

© ACN



## 3.1. A target of violence also before ISIS

Some important events

- Due to conflict between Kurds and the central government in the 1970ies many Christians left Northern Iraq for Baghdad and other Iraqi cities like Basra.
- The widespread terrorist attacks on churches in Baghdad and Mosul first began on Sunday, August 1, 2004, when simultaneous bombing of six churches (Baghdad and Mosul) was carried out and a subsequent bombing of nearly thirty other churches throughout the country. These developments unleashed several waves of refugees (both within the country and a massive emigration of Christians). The area under the control of the Kurdish regional government was the safest zone to go to.
- As attacks on Christians increased after 2006 in Baghdad and other towns, more families turned northward to areas controlled by the Kurdish government.
- In February 2010, the attacks against Christians in Mosul forced 4,300 to flee to the Nineveh Plains.

## 3.2 ISIS attacks Christians

**9/10 June 2014:** Iraq's second largest city Mosul falls to ISIS

**June 29th 2014:** The so called Islamic State officially announces the reestablishment of the Caliphate

**July 18th 2014:** The last Christians are leaving Mosul after receiving warnings from ISIS militants constituting the following choices:

**1- Conversion to Islam.**

**2- Death by the sword in the events of the so called Jizya not being paid, Jizya is a per capita tax for non-Muslims.**

**3- Fleeing.**

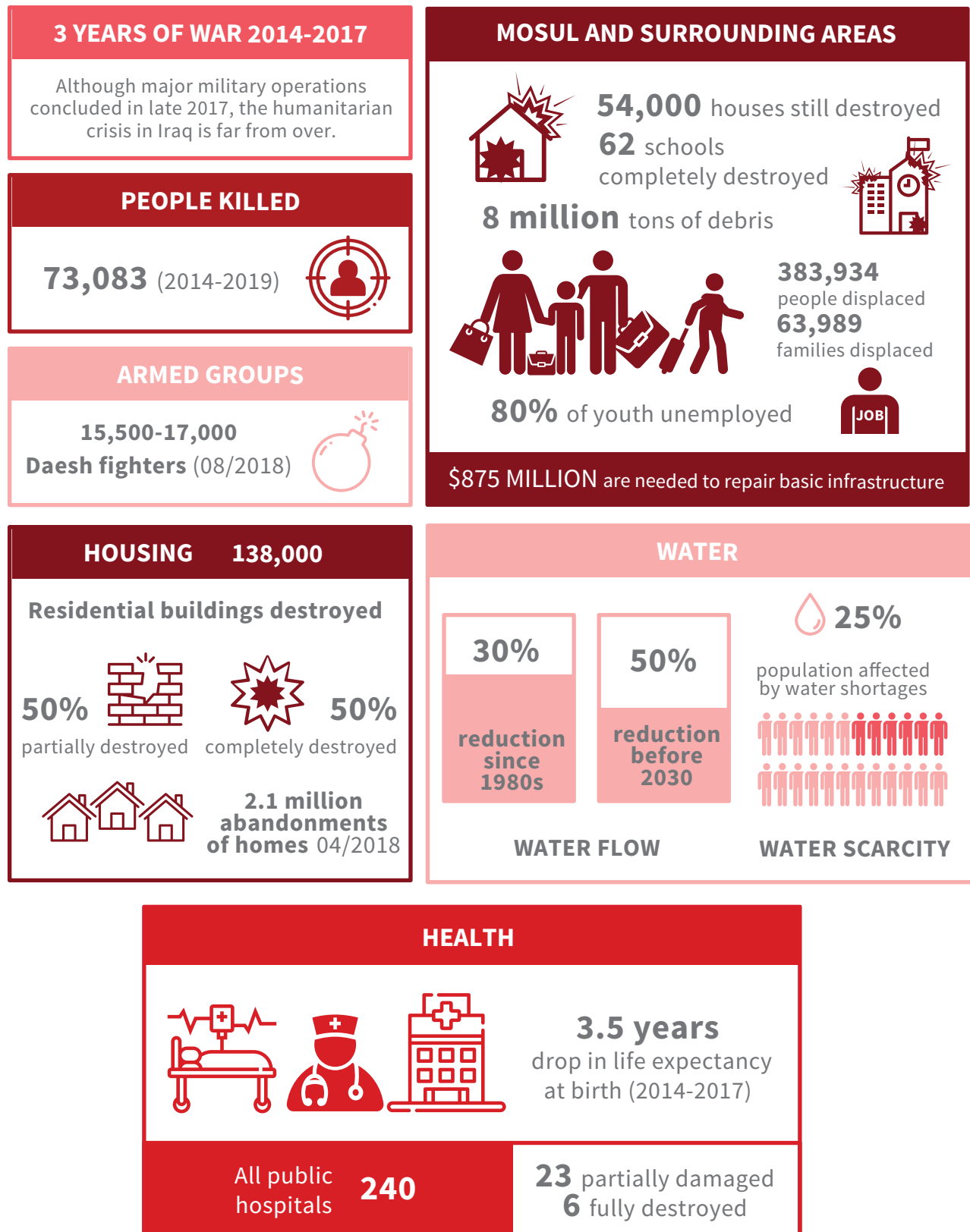
On the 6th of August 2014 ISIS advances in the Nineveh Plains forcing between 100.000 to 120.000 Christians to flee, mostly to areas under Kurdish control





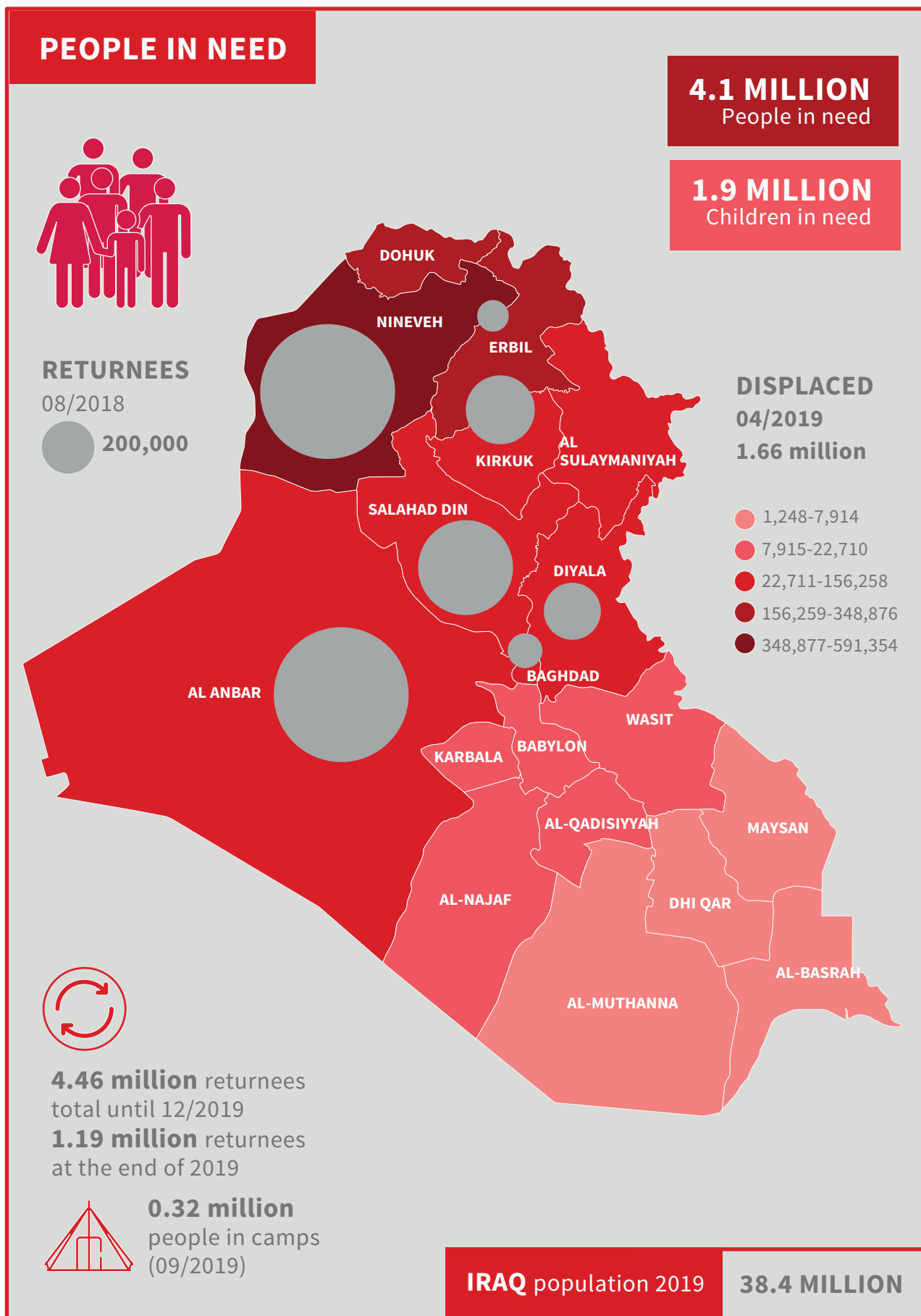
### 3.3 The aftermath of the 3-year war against ISIS (1)

NOTE - the following statistics are not just for Christians but for the whole population.





## The aftermath of the 3-year war against ISIS (2)



## The aftermath of the 3-year war against ISIS (3)

### CHILDREN

**728,000**

Internally Displaced  
(30% lives in camps)

Children in Iraq suffer terrible physical and spiritual pains that no child should experience: orphanhood, material poverty, disease and other health issues, abuse (including but not limited to: female genital mutilation, kidnappings, child trafficking, labour or military service).



**1.9 MILLION** in need  
out of 8.7 million people affected



**45,000**

Children born under Daesh do not have personal documentation and therefore cannot have access to education, health care, parents' inheritance etc.



### VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN 2018

**902**  
detained



**132**  
killed or maimed



**39**  
recruitment by  
armed non-state  
actors



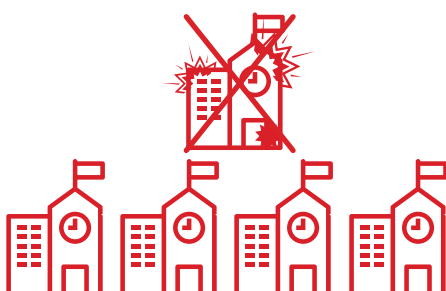
**2**  
cases of  
abduction



**1,075** verified violations against children

### EDUCATION

**3,2 million** children out of school ( **355,000** displaced children )



**3,5 million** children attend  
school irregularly or not at all



More than 1 in 5 schools have been damaged or destroyed while others are being used as refugee shelters and for other purposes.

Decades of conflict and under-investment of Iraq have destroyed what used to be the best education system in the region and severely curtailed Iraqi children's access to quality learning.





### 3.4 Destruction of Christian heritage and church properties in Iraq by ISIS (1)

#### CHRISTIANS VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE

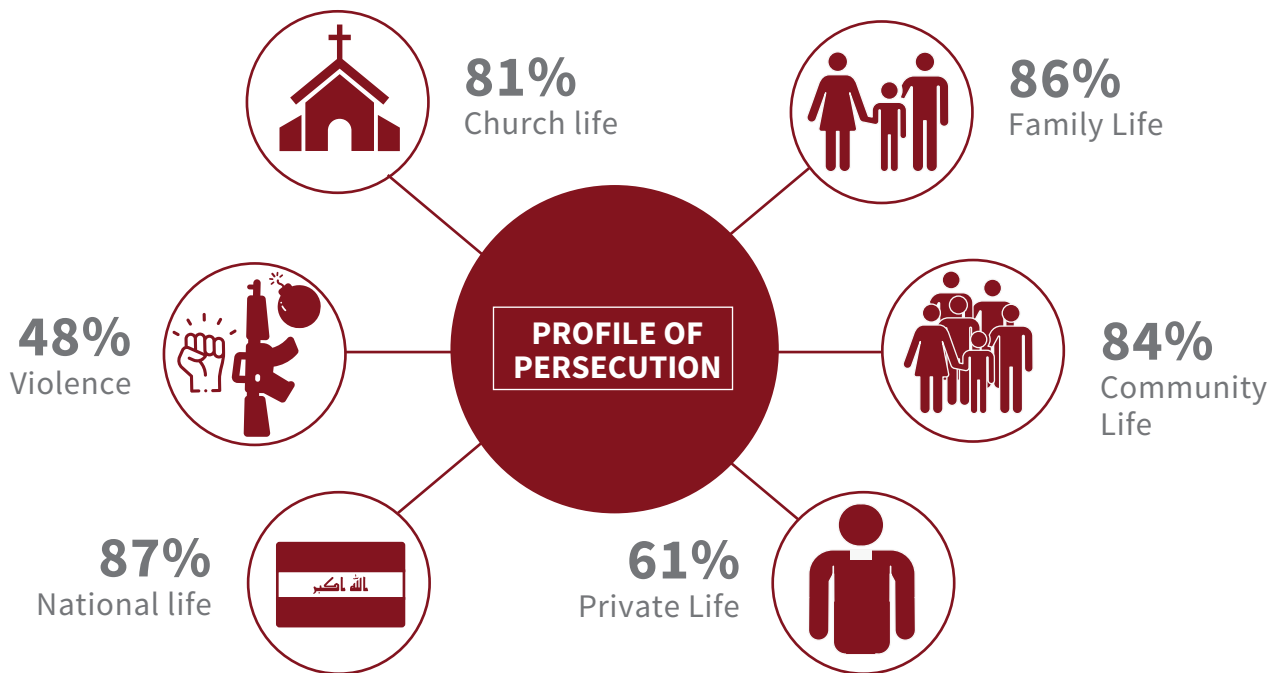
##### Christian Martyrs 2004-2014

**1,107**  
Christians killed



**15**  
Priests killed

53 died in the Our Lady of Salvation church in Baghdad in 2010.



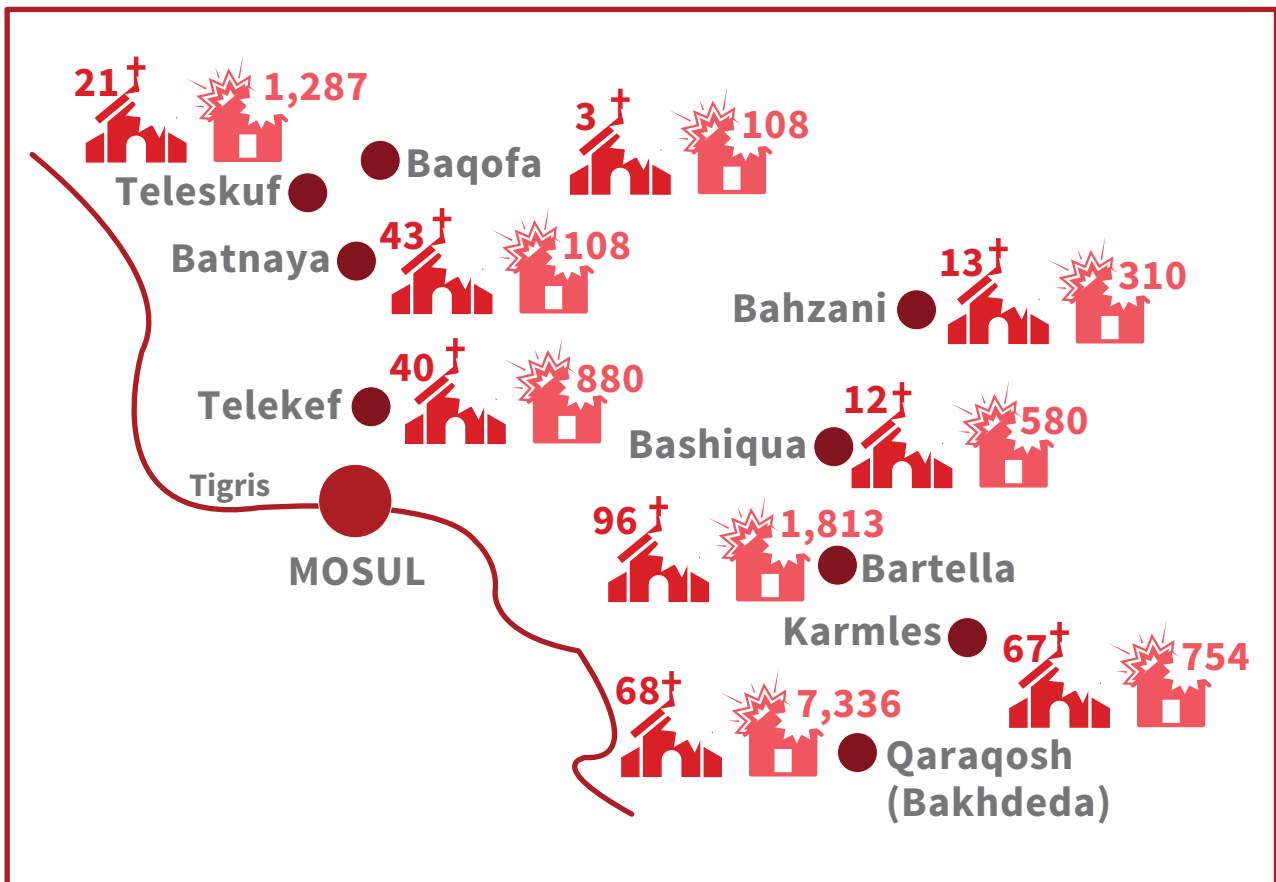
#### ATTACKS ON CHRISTIANS IN 11/2016 - 10/2018

**169**  
Christians attacked  
(8 killed, 17 arrested)

**6,010**  
Christian-owned houses  
and shops attacked

**13**  
Churches  
attacked

## Destruction in the Nineveh Plains ( without Mosul )



### Church Properties

05/2017

**34** Totally destroyed  
**132** burnt  
**197** Partially damaged

**Total 363** including

**46** Churches, chapels, shrines  
**18** Convents and monasteries  
**10** Cemeteries  
**9** Parish offices



### Christian Private houses

11/2018

**1,040** Totally destroyed  
**3,292** Burnt  
**9,703** Partially damaged

**Total 14,035**

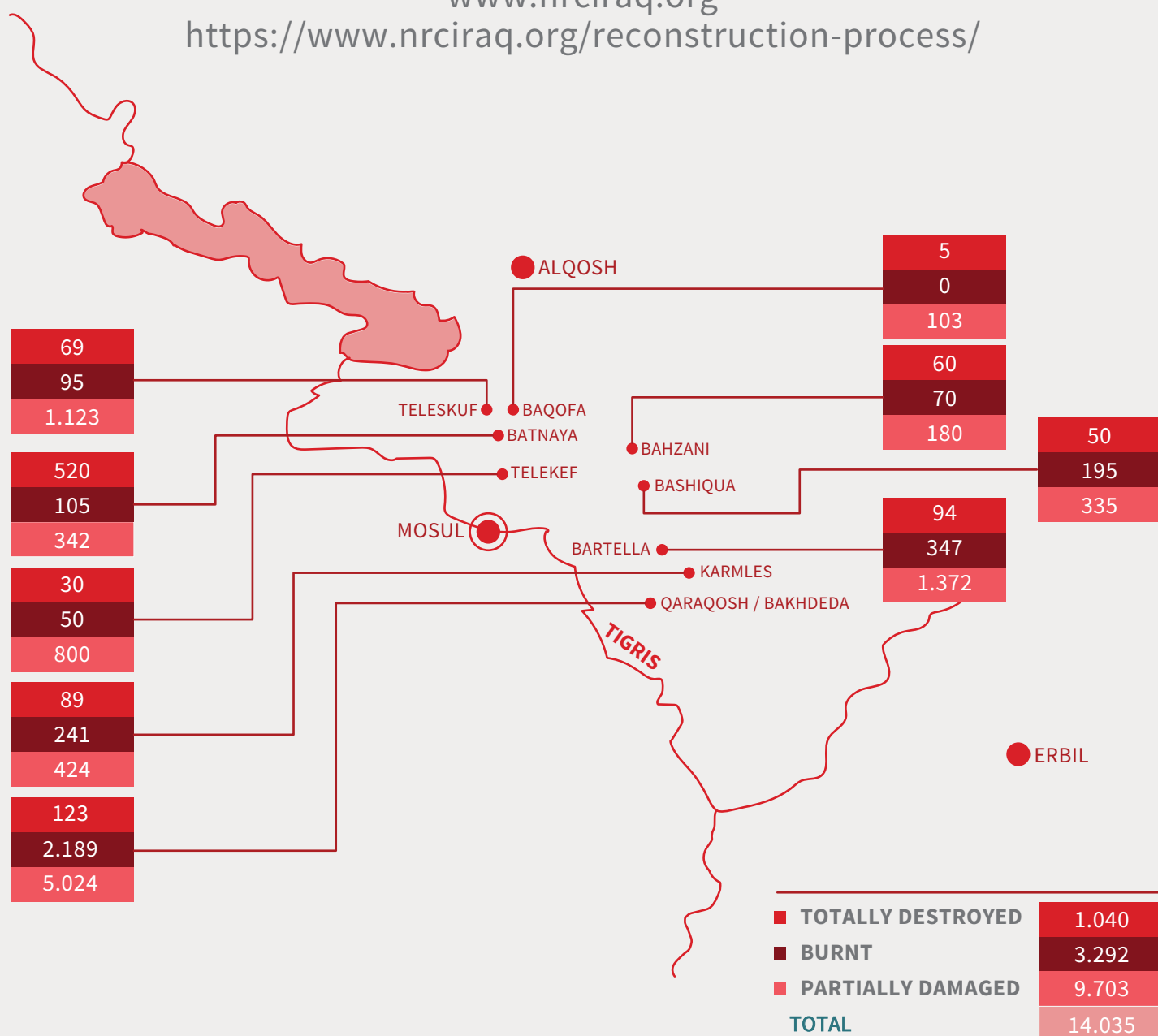
# Destruction of Christian heritage and Church properties in Iraq by ISIS (2)

## PRIVATE HOUSES ( In numbers )

updated on 06 november 2018

[www.nrciraq.org](http://www.nrciraq.org)

<https://www.nrciraq.org/reconstruction-process/>



Source: ACN



# Destruction of Christian heritage and Church properties in Iraq by ISIS (3)

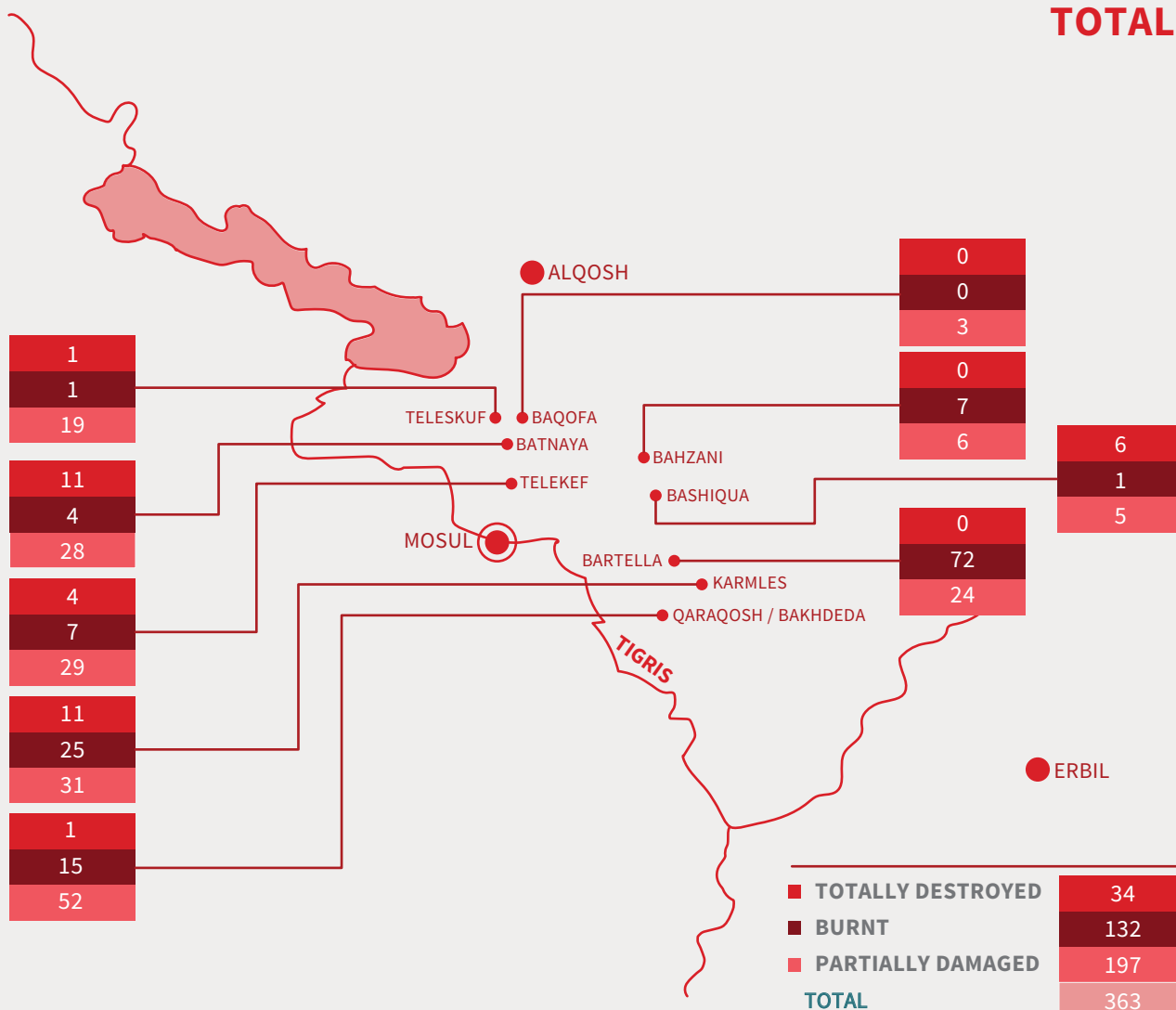
## CHURCH PROPERTIES ( In numbers )

updated on 11 May 2017

CHURCH PROPERTIES DAMAGED  
( totally, partially or burnt )

Church	34	For catechesis	6	Wedding reception hall	4
Chapel	6	Pastoral centre	2	Church rentals	79
Convent ( active )	15	Cultural center	4	Church rentals ( for shops )	89
Monastery ( contemplative )	3	Open recreation areas	3	Orchard	7
Shrine	6	Sport centre	4	Cemetery	10
Presbytery ( rectory )	10	Liturg.sewing vestment	1	Kindergarten ( preschool )	13
Bishop's residence	2	Multipurpose hall	21	Primary school	2
Parish Offices	9	Lecture hall	3	Nursery	1
Of the parish compound	4	Internet hall	3	Orphanage	2
Seminary	1	Post-funeral reception hall	5	Clinic ( dispensary )	1
Library	9	Radio centre	1	Other	3

**TOTAL:363**



**Destruction in Nineveh Plains ( without Mosul )**

Source: ACN

## 4. ACN helps

© ACN/ A.Gage



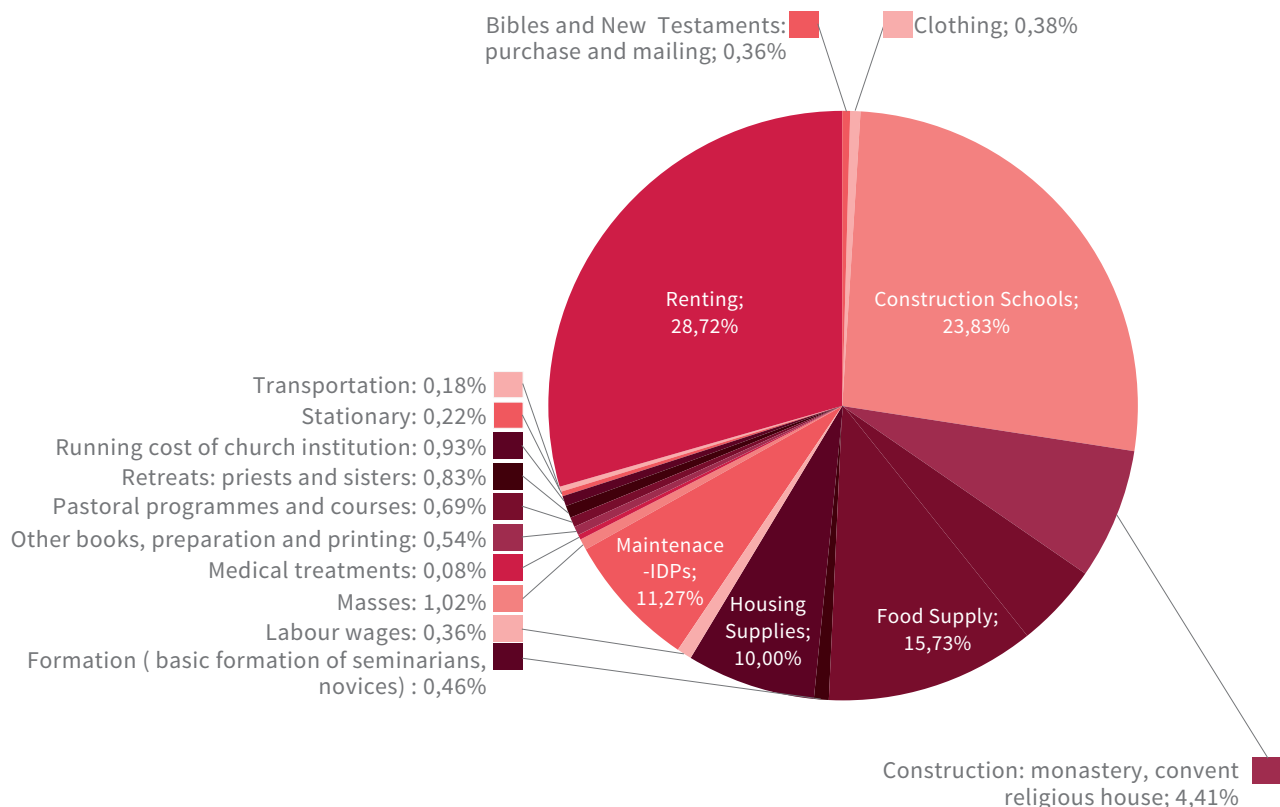
## 4.1 Overview of ACN's help in Iraq from 2011-2021

### GRANTS OF ACN FOR IRAQ

YEARS 2011 until 2020 ( preliminary figures for 2020 as of 14 January 2021 )

Program Sector	EUR
Construction	17.449.196
Motorization	111.500
Subsistence aid	1.044.096
Pastoral aid	1.377.441
Humanitarian aid	28.138.303
Mass Media	16.170
Formation	937.024
Religious books	218.426
Masses	231.360
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>49.523.516</b>

## 4.2 First aid after the outbreak of the war August 2014 - June 2015







## 4.3 ACN rehabilitation projects and establishment of Nineveh reconstruction committee

From 2014 to the end of 2020, ACN's benefactors provided € 48,23 million to maintain the Christian presence in Iraq and in particular in the Nineveh Plains.

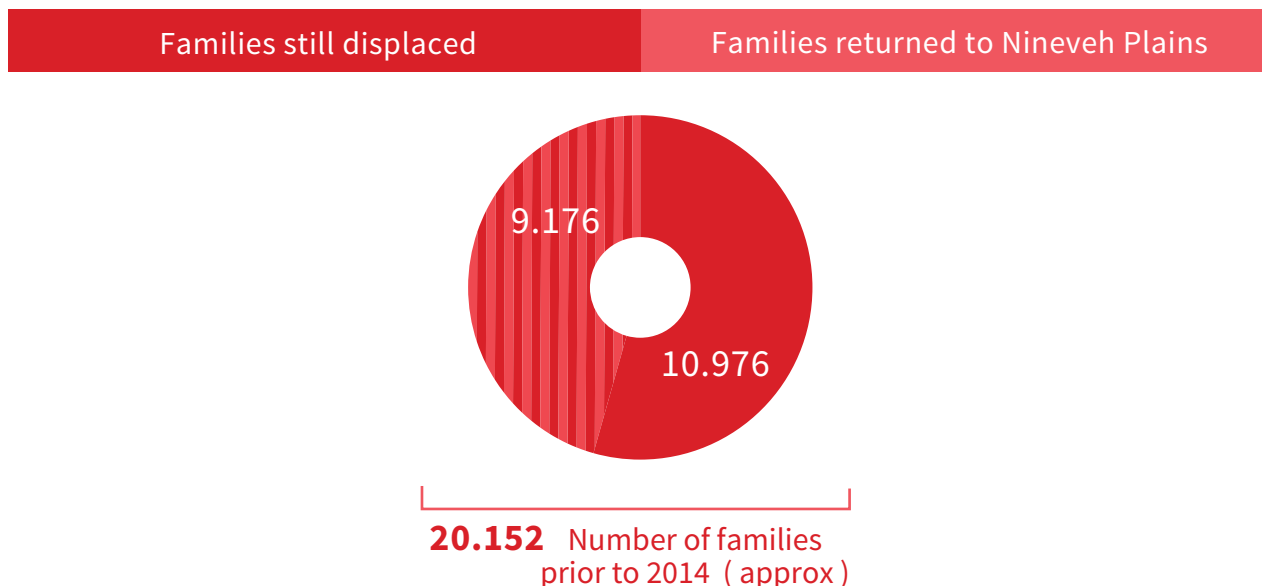
After the defeat of ISIS, ACN's spending policy and support has shifted **from emergency aid to reconstruction and rehabilitation projects.**

With the support of Aid to the Church in Need, the three main Christian Churches of the Nineveh Plains region [the Chaldean Catholic Church, the Syrian Catholic Church and the Syrian Orthodox Church] united in the Nineveh Reconstruction Committee (NRC) jointly called:

- 1 to facilitate the return of Christians to their respective ancestral communities from which they were expelled during the ISIS invasion of 2014-17
- 2 to secure the presence of a permanent cluster of Christians through efforts aiming at legal protection of Christians and other minorities, their fundamental human rights, especially equal citizenship
- 3 to secure the thriving of the Christian minority through funding and support of education and development projects.

## 4.4 The return of the Christians

**FAMILIES RETURNED TO NINEVEH PLAINS 45.53%**



Data updated on 12 January 2021

Source: ACN

## 4.5 Houses restored



**14936**  
DAMAGED  
HOUSES



**1009**  
TOTALLY  
DESTROYED

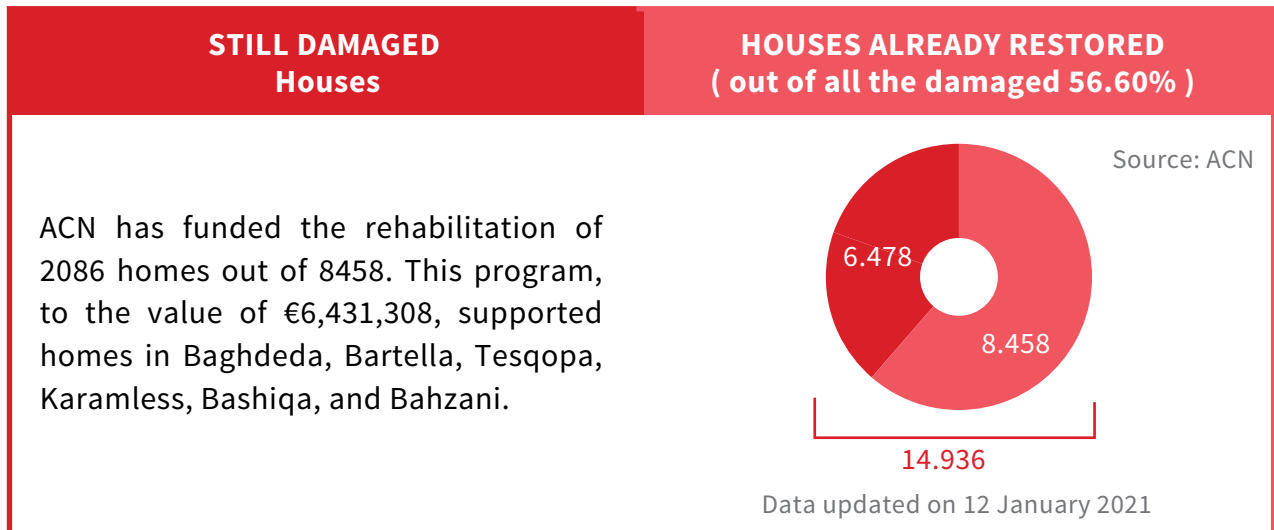


**3257**  
BURNT  
HOUSES



**10670**  
PARTIALLY  
DAMAGED

### PROPERTIES ALREADY RESTORED



## 4.6. Church reconstruction: One of our flag projects

### Reconstruction of the great Syriac Catholic Al-Tahira church in Qaraqosh (Baghdeda / Al-Hamdaniya)

This project concerns the rehabilitation of the church of Al-Tahira in Baghdeda (Qaraqosh). The church was built between 1932 and 1948, and is named in honour of the Immaculate Conception, defined as dogma by Pope Pius IX in 1854. The building was last renovated in 1964 and 2017, the latter involving structural repair of the pillars of the building, funded by ACN. The area of the church is 1296m<sup>2</sup>. Al-Tahira Church is the largest Syriac Catholic Church in the Middle East, and notable for its design and cultural significance to the largest Christian city in Iraq. Its roof rests on 22 one-piece marble pillars from Mosul. The church sites are adjacent to a courtyard containing a replica of the grotto of Lourdes and underground, remains of the former church can be located. During the ISIS occupation from August 2014 to October 2016, the Church's courtyard was used as a firing range. Bullet holes can still be seen in the walls. In 2016, when ISIS fled, all the furniture, manuscripts, and remaining prayer books were burnt inside the Church. The Church's ceiling was damaged by the smoke and fire. In addition, the Church's clock tower was dynamited, with the clock itself being lost.

The plan is to renovate the church to make it fully usable as before; specifically, this project involves the second and third phases of the original plan to repair the church. ACN has also contributed to finish the first phase of the reconstruction. Second and third phase are ongoing . The Pope visit has sped up the work.





<https://acninternational.org/iraq-a-beacon-of-light-for-baghdeda-qaraqosh/>



## 4.7 The reconstruction as chance of Christianity's long-term survival



**Incentivise resettlement:** Encourage families to return from Kurdistan or abroad to their homes in the Nineveh Plains by making these towns more attractive places to live in

Stable Christian population centres in Nineveh will be particularly important if, as many expect, Kurdistan one day secedes and is not able to annex villages close to Mosul



**Limit emigration:** Give Iraqi Christians, especially young people, strong community bonds and additional employment opportunities that limit their desire to emigrate

Venues such as wedding halls and kindergartens encourage community life while also provide limited employment opportunities

Emigration directly harms the Chaldean, Syriac Catholic, and Syriac Orthodox Churches, who struggle to keep their rites alive while dispersed across heavily secular Western countries



**Strengthen the local churches:** Help local churches proclaim and live the Gospel by repairing critical infrastructure, such as churches and parish halls




## 5. Challenges ahead





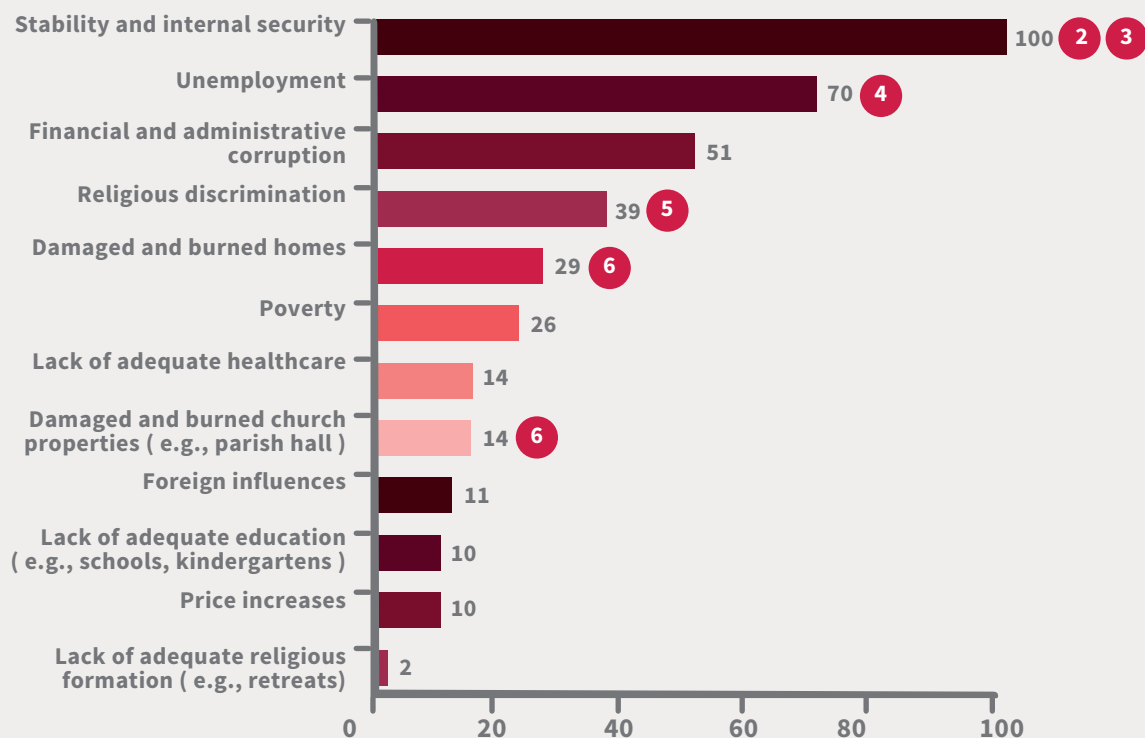
## 5.1 Major issues

Source: Life after ISIS, New challenges to Christianity in Iraq, published by ACN in June 2020  
<https://www.kirche-in-not.de/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/irak-studie-2020.pdf>

- 
- 1 EMIGRATION
  - 2 SECURITY CONCERNS ABOUT MILITIAS
  - 3 SECURITY CONCERNS ABOUT ISIS
  - 4 ECONOMIC CONCERNS
  - 5 RELIGIOUS DISCRIMINATION
  - 6 CONTINUED RECONSTRUCTION NEEDS

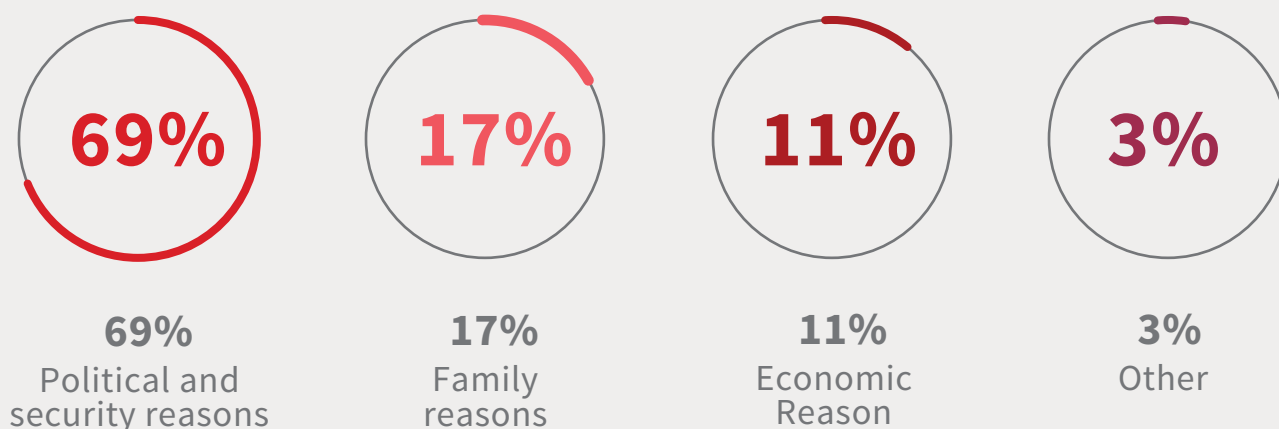
### SECURITY, UNEMPLOYMENT, AND CORRUPTION RATED MOST IMPORTANT

Weighted score, based on respondent prioritization



## 5.2 Reasons for emigration

WHAT IS THE PRIMARY REASON THAT MAKES YOU WANT TO EMIGRATE?



## 5.3 Security concerns for Christians

- **ISIS:** With the territorial defeat of ISIS by the end of 2017, the country has defeated the worst enemy of religious freedom in its contemporary history. Thus, the general situation for religious freedom has improved considerably. But the threat is not banned. Many ISIS fighters could not be arrested and went underground. They occasionally attacked religious minorities also in recent years. Therefore, an overwhelming majority of Nineveh Plains Christians believe ISIS is likely to return.
- **Shia militias:** The most immediate security concern is Iranian-backed militias in the Nineveh Plains. These mostly Shia militias helped defeat ISIS. Some Christians accuse them of corruption and human rights violations.
- **Turkey:** The Turkish interventions in Northern Iraq directed against PKK militants are affecting different religious minorities like Christians and Yazidis. Since the beginning of 2020, at least 25 Christian villages in northern Iraq have been emptied of their original population, asianews.it reports.

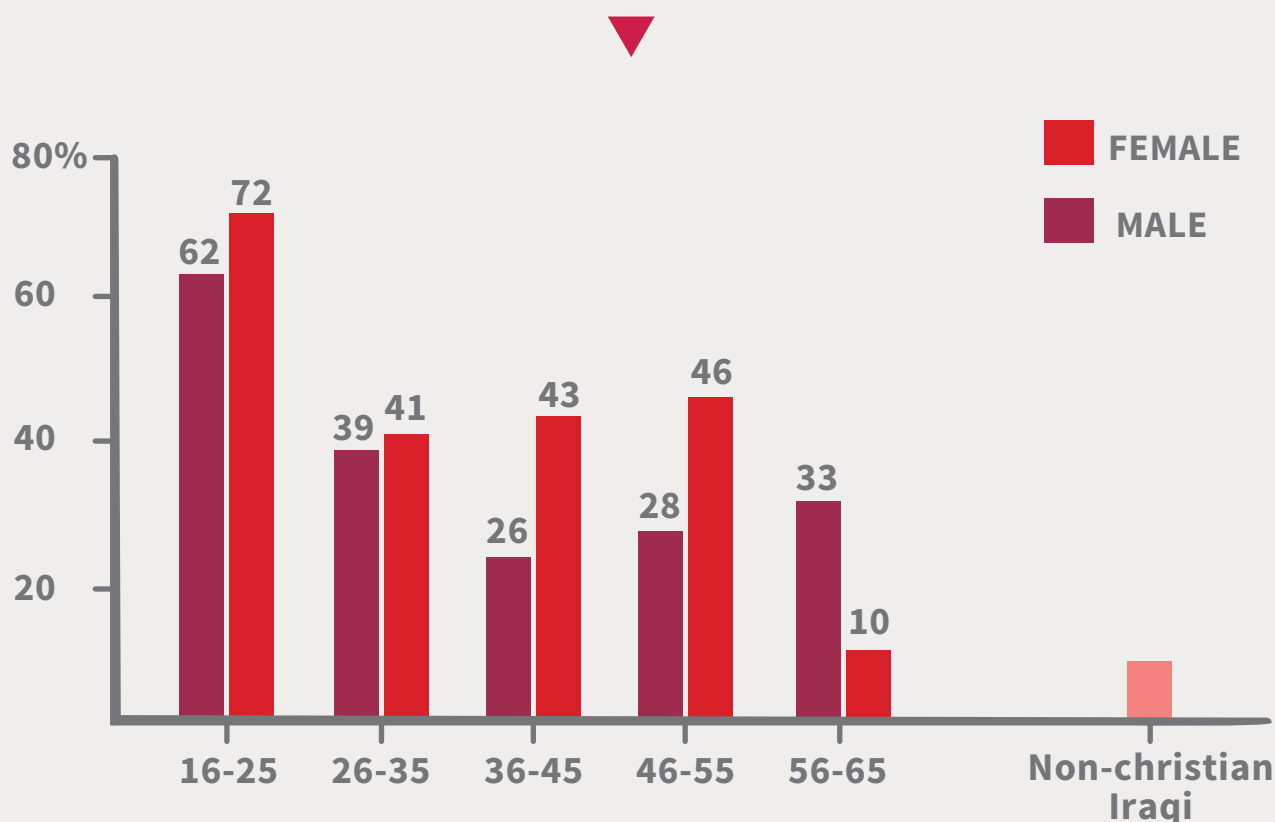
## 5.4 Economic concerns

Although unemployment is a chronic concern in Iraq, it is a particular issue in the Nineveh Plains. Although Christians are more likely than other groups to be part of the merchant or professional class, they contend with discrimination and interference from the militias who control their area. Unemployment is a secondary driver of emigration among young people, although less important than security concerns.



## THE INEMPLOYMENT RATE IN IRAQ IS HIGHER AMONG CHRISTIANS

Unemployment rate by age group and gender



### 5.5 Neglect by foreign entities

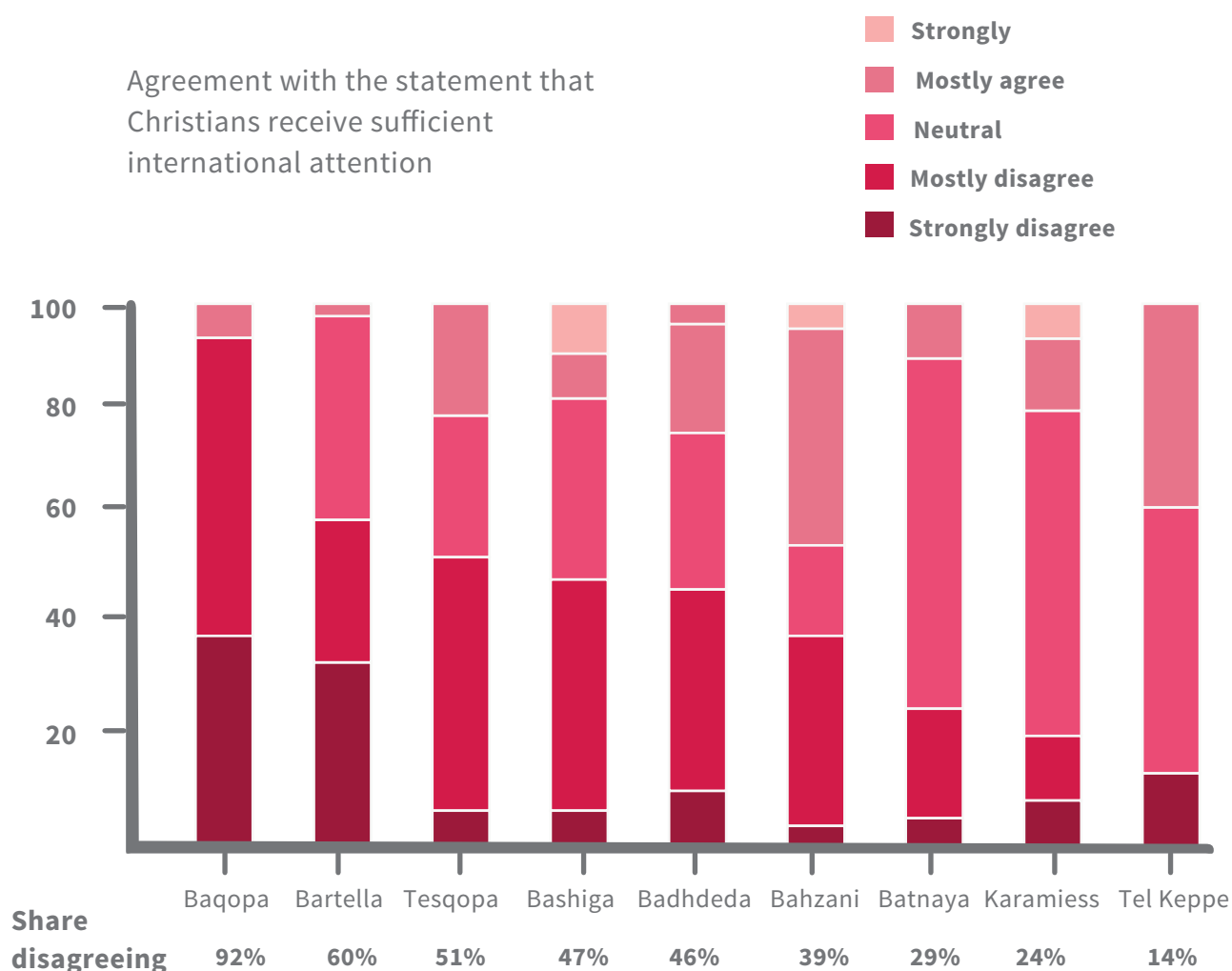
Only a minority of Christians agree that international attention given to their cause is sufficient.

While hundreds of NGOs work out of Mosul and Erbil, few work in Christian areas, largely because of the perception that Christians are more educated and better-resourced than other communities in Iraq. Christian leaders vigorously disagree with this perception, arguing that Christians, alongside Yezidis, have been the pre-eminent victims of aggression over the last 17 years, and deserve a share of the resources that are being invested in Iraq.

Most Christians are aware that the Hungarian and Polish governments have invested large sums of money in the Christian community, as well as the US government, through USAID.

Some, however, note the apparent lack of interest on the part of Western European governments, such as the UK, France, and in Scandinavia. Many express the general opinion that these governments are secular to the point of discriminating against Yezidis and Christians, the religious minorities most impacted by ISIS.

## SOME FEEL NEGLECTED BY FOREIGN GOVERNMENTS AND NGOS



## 5.6 Religious discrimination

A variety of laws discriminate against Christians living in Baghdad-controlled Iraq:

- **Marriage law:** It is illegal for Christian men to marry Muslim women without converting to Islam.
- **Parental rights:** Although Christian women are permitted to marry Muslim men, their children must be raised Muslim.
- **Conversions:** It is virtually although not technically illegal for Muslims to convert to Christianity. Although there are several welldocumented instances of Muslims converting, all of them convert in secret or seek asylum overseas upon conversion. A convert to Christianity might be prosecuted under Iraq's anti-blasphemy law; more likely, they might be murdered by their family or local jihadist militants.

Likewise, those living under the control of the KRG face similar legal issues.

## 6. Positive signs?





- There are various initiatives to build bridges between religions after ISIS. For example, in March 2020 religious leaders from Iraqi Muslim, Yazidi and Christian communities have released a joint statement to collectively highlight their commitment towards peace, and show solidarity to the victims of crimes committed by the so-called Islamic State. It is the first instance of a joint endorsement of the need for justice and the rights of victims by religious leaders in the country.
- The heads of State and Government have expressed on various occasions their appreciation for a multireligious Iraq. In 2020, Christmas was declared an official holiday.
- The Iraqi protests in late 2019 and 2020 against corruption and mismanagement hinted at an end of sectarian polarization that has ravaged the country for more than a decade. Catholic religious leaders said that Christians, Yazidis and other minorities have been openly welcomed into the protest movement.

**For years already we fear that the last lines of the book of Christian presence in Iraq are written. We hope to be proven wrong with the visit of Pope Francis opening a new chapter of Christian life in Mesopotamia.**

Lord our God, grant Pope Francis health and safety to carry out successfully this eagerly awaited visit. Bless his effort to promote dialogue, enhance fraternal reconciliation, build confidence, consolidate peace values and human dignity, especially for us Iraqis who have been through painful “events” that affected our lives.

Lord and Creator, enlighten our hearts with Your light, to recognize goodness and peace, and to realize them.

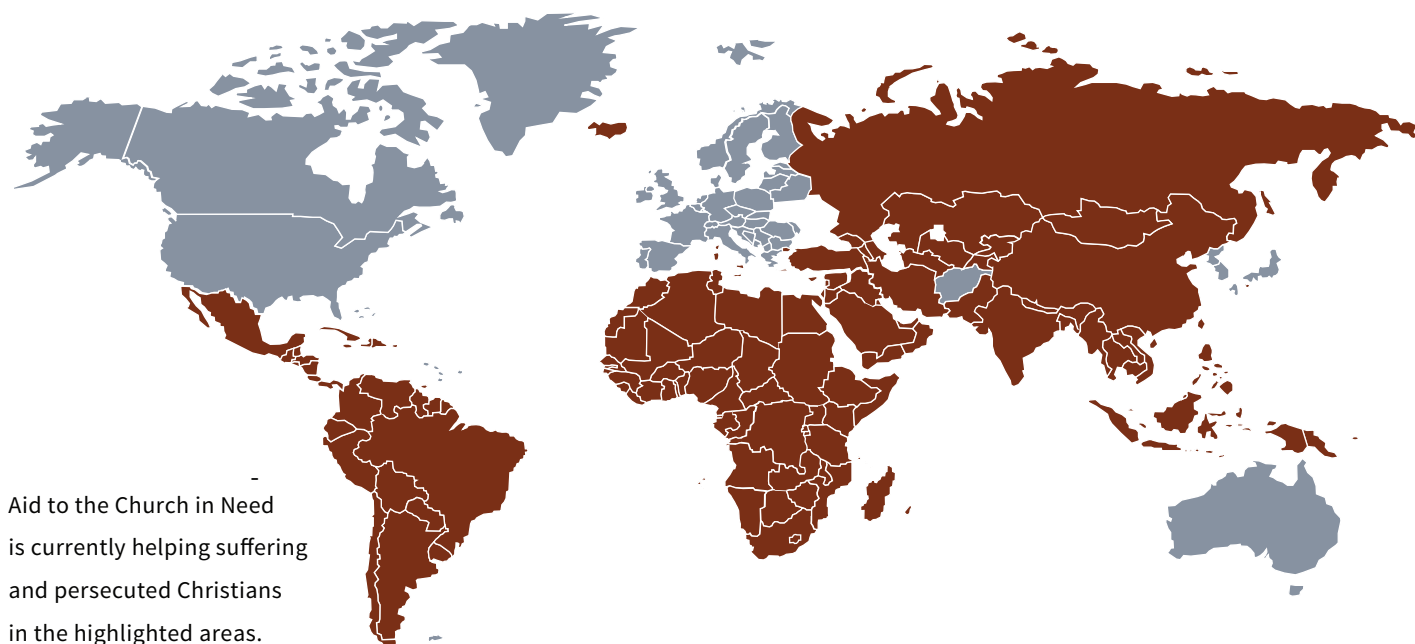
Mother Mary, we entrust Pope Francis’ visit to your maternal care so that the Lord may grant us the grace of living in full national communion, and to cooperate fraternally to build a better future for our country and our citizens. Amen.



(Prayer for the Papal visit by Chaldean Patriarch and Cardinal Louis Raphael I. Sako)







Aid to the Church in Need  
is currently helping suffering  
and persecuted Christians  
in the highlighted areas.

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