



19 August 2014 – Fleeing Yazidis continue to seek refuge in neighbouring countries as a result of the systematic onslaught of minorities in Iraq. During the past two weeks, more than 200,000 Yazidis have abandoned their homes in Sinjar in northern Iraq to escape the brutal advances of the Islamic State (IS). 15,000 Yazidis are now seeking refuge in Syria, and about 2,000 have fled to Turkey.

"People arrive in the camps extremely weak, thirsty and traumatized, especially women and children. Their feet are covered in blisters, having spent days on Mount Sinjar in searing temperatures without food, water or shelter after fleeing for their lives, then walking many hours – in some cases days – to find safety", [according](#) to a UN Refugee Agency ([UNHCR](#)) staff member in the Newroz camp in north-eastern Syria.

"I have not seen a happy or smiling child. None of the kids were playing or trying to hold your hand, give you a smile like other kids normally do. They were all walking aimlessly, either barefoot or just wearing sad faces . . . it was heartbreaking."

Many refugee families have been separated, with children being parted from their parents in the chaos. Several refugees also said that they had to leave behind elderly people whom they could not carry. Others told of young girls and women forced to stay behind and being sold, and young men being killed.

The local communities in Syria and Turkey have warmly welcomed the refugees. UNHCR in Syria reports that the local population has cooked hot meals and distributed aid to the Yazidis, as acts of goodwill and kindness. Similarly, residents of the Turkish border town Silopi, have provided the new arrivals of about 1,600 with food and medical care. However, crossing the border is no easy endeavor.

The Turkish government has publicly [claimed](#) that it has opened its doors to Yazidis, but some refugees at Silopi camp told IRIN News that those who did not have passports were not being allowed in and were being turned back by Turkish soldiers. Others said they paid smugglers up to US\$500 to be able to get across the border.

Turkey has its reasons to keep its borders tight – the country is already supporting a caseload of more than 800,000 [Syrian refugees](#) and as IS continues its advance, it will naturally be on guard for militants entering.

The country focuses therefore its aid efforts on helping the displaced population across the border in Kurdistan. And as one aid worker told IRIN: “Many people are saying they want to get to Turkey because they see it as a stepping stone to Europe and they think they will get asylum, but they forget that there are thousands of Syrian refugees already there and waiting for their ticket out so, they will not be a priority.”

UNRIC's related articles:

- [Iraq's Yazidis at risk of genocide](#)
- [UN Report: Litany of human rights violations in Iraq](#)
- [UN condemns ISIL actions in Iraq](#)

Traumatized Yazidis seek refuge in neighbouring Turkey and Syria

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