



Hardan Village, located in Sinjar District, is a predominantly Yazidi area devastated by IS attacks in 2014. Historically, residents had good relations with the Sunni Arab villages that surround Hardan. However, the relationship changed when IS attacked Sinjar. Many families were unable to reach the safety of the nearby Sinjar Mountains and were trapped at Hardan Junction, where men were executed – their remains later discovered in seven mass graves – and women and children were enslaved. Much of the village's infrastructure is yet to be rehabilitated and only 169 of the original 370 families now reside in the village. Return rates are low and most of the displaced families remain in IDP camps in Kurdistan.

NP began engaging in Hardan in May 2022 to address growing tensions with the potential for further escalation within the community. Community members started sharing with NP that tensions mostly arose over the allocation of services, goods, and infrastructure, rooted in perceived and real power inequality between and within the communities. Aware that similar tensions had given rise to threats of violence in other areas in Sinjar District, NP began proactive engagement to de-escalate these situations and strengthen the capacity of community members to address protection concerns.

### **Tensions between youth leaders and mukhtar**

NP facilitated Community Security Forums (CSFs) – meetings between village leaders, community elders, youth and women discussing security and protection – to further analyse the community's concerns and workshop solutions. In July 2022, NP learned about tensions between leaders of the Hardan Youth Centre and the village mukhtar (local leader). The Youth Centre was created in July 2020 to be the focal point between NGOs and potential beneficiaries in four different villages, including Hardan. In early 2022, the youth leaders were

accused of nepotism with regards to the allocation of livelihood projects from an NGO. Four of the nine proposed beneficiaries had already benefited from other services, and one of them was the father of two Youth Centre leaders. Multiple community members were angered by the perceived unequal distribution of aid and tensions arose, leading to the closure of the Youth Centre by Hardan's mukhtar. The Centre's activities, many of which had previously been beneficial to the community and contributed to social cohesion, were suspended, creating animosity between the youth and the mukhtar.

To reduce tensions in Hardan and allow the Youth Centre to resume the work it had been doing for the community, NP engaged in shuttle negotiations to restore the relationship between the youth leaders and the mukhtar. After organizing multiple meetings with the interested parties, NP facilitated an agreement that allowed the Centre to reopen in August 2022, under the condition that the youth commit to greater transparency and oversight to ensure nepotism would not occur again. All community members involved expressed their satisfaction with this outcome. Following this initiative, youth leaders expressed interest in attending NP capacity-strengthening trainings on Unarmed Civilian Protection (UCP), including self-protection, social cohesion and nonviolent conflict resolution, so they could apply these methods as well in the future. NP's proactive engagement thus contributed to peaceful relations in Hardan, to re-establishing the provision of much-needed services to the community, and to engaging youth in training on nonviolent conflict resolution, violence prevention and, more generally, UCP.

### **Hardan's female IS survivors**

Soon after these shuttle negotiations, NP learned through its engagement with women in Hardan of challenges IS survivors living in the village were facing in accessing services from the Directorate of Survivors' Affairs (DoS). On March 1, 2021, the Iraqi Government passed the

Yazidi Survivors' Law, which instituted compensation and support to survivors of the Yazidi Genocide. In mid-August 2022, an online platform was opened to apply for these services and the DoS opened offices in Sinjar Town to assist survivors in their applications. Survivors living in Hardan, however, faced challenges navigating the platform due to limited literacy and accessibility.

*"I am one of the poor and uneducated women, I do not have a code and never get an appointment"*  
(Female IS survivor, Hardan Village, September 2022)

Many did not have the financial means to travel to the DoS offices in Sinjar Town for assistance. Female survivors risked harassment and stigmatization if they were to travel by themselves to Sinjar Town, based on negative gender norms related to traveling in the community of Hardan and surrounding villages. This especially affected female-headed households, as they had little alternative to reaching Sinjar without facing protection risks to themselves and their children. Additionally, rumours circulated that errors in applications would forever prohibit survivors from receiving the benefits, creating fears in the village and further aggravating the situation.

After identifying this issue, NP engaged in rumour control, gathering and sharing information to support the community in accessing the services. NP visited the DoS offices in Sinjar to verify the rumours and seek a solution to the challenges around the application process. DoS representatives discredited the rumours regarding exclusion due to errors and NP took the opportunity to advocate for increased support for the female survivors in remote areas, including those from Hardan, by negotiating that their

applications be processed at the DoS without appointment, providing NP accompanied them to the DoS offices.

*"NP is the only NGO that listens to issues of the community"* (Head of DoS, Sinjar Town, November 2022).

Fears subsided in Hardan after NP relayed this information to the community and several female survivors were accompanied by NP to the DoS office. Thus, from September to December 2022, NP conducted protective accompaniments of women from the Hardan community to the DoS offices. This included for example a woman and her four children and a young woman who survived IS captivity and whose husband and two children are still missing.

As a result of NP's protective accompaniment, all survivors in Hardan were successfully able to apply for the Yazidi Survivors' Law benefits. By March 2023, 17 of the women that NP had accompanied had received their compensation and noted that NP's negotiations and rumour control, NP was able to improve the responsiveness of duty bearers to community needs and increase the community's access to services safely.

*"Without NP's accompaniment, we would lose our right in Iraq and we are very grateful for NP as it was really big change in our life"* (female IS survivor, Hardan village, March 2023)

NP will continue its engagement with community members and stakeholders in Hardan village to continue contributing to increased, equal and safe access to services for civilians, particularly focusing on the inclusion of youth and women in decision-making and the responsiveness of duty bearers to the community's needs.

