

Advancing Peacebuilding through Inter-Religious Research and Dialogue in Iraq

Mercy Hands, KAICIID Research Centre

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INTRODUCTION

Traditionally a cradle of many ancient religions and civilizations, Iraq has been plagued since the American-led invasion by sectarian convulsions that have proved destructive for its minorities. Some of them date back to pre-Islamic times, and are endemic to northern Iraq in particular. Since 2003, they have suffered unprecedented violence that has seriously affected their stability and demography: the Christian community has shrunk from 1.4 million before 2003 to 150,000 today, while the Yazidi genocide orchestrated by the Islamic State between 2014 and 2017 wiped out almost 7,000 souls (US Commission on International Religious Freedom, 2022) (Minority Rights Group, 2017). The most affected regions, a good example of which are the Ninevah Plains in the Nineveh governorate, are today expressing an urging need for reconciliation. Local inter-religious dialogue, nurtured by civil society and limited initiatives, is hampered by a lack of public awareness of the need for tolerance and mutual coexistence, starting at school. It was precisely with the aim of assessing the extent to which primary and secondary education contributes - or fails to contribute - to inter-religious dialogue in Iraq that this research was structured by Mercy Hands on commission from KAICIID. It was structured around three main questions: is religion taught in school through inter-faith lens, which promoted peaceful coexistence, mutual respect and understanding? what is the role of informal education (family, traditions, community leaders...) in encouraging inter-faith peaceful coexistence, mutual respect and understanding? how can the religious curricula in primary and secondary education be developed to foster tolerance and co-existence values?

This research was carried out in the town of Bashiqa, 50 km north of Mosul, by the local Mercy Hands team: selected for its strong ethno-religious diversity, this locality constitutes a good synthesis of the Ninevah Plains and in extenso of the multiethnic and multi-religious regions of Northern Iraq. It was based on qualitative data gathered from 10 Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with local religious leaders, and 9 Focus-Group Discussions (FGDs) with 5 groups of aid workers, 3 of teachers and 1 for officials of the governmental Department of the Nineveh governorate. The initial findings of this research revealed that - according to the participants - pupils' lack of knowledge about their peers' religions and the unpopular content of the Islamic curriculum did not appear to affect inter-religious quietude within the schools. Outside schools, however, they were convinced that all actors in Bashiqa society should be more active in promoting inter-religious dialogue, in order to compensate for the lack of tolerance among young people. Finally, the third part of the research demonstrated that, despite a near-consensus on the need to reform the religious syllabus, participants were very divided on the manner and intensity with which this reform should be carried out.

Acronyms :

CoR: Council of Representatives

DoE : Directorate of Education
FGD : Focused-Group Discussion
IFG : Iraq Federal Government
IKR : Iraqi Kurdistan Region
ISIS : Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham
KII : Key Informant Interview
KRG : Kurdistan Regional Government
MoE : Ministry of Education
PMF : Popular Mobilisation Forces

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RESEARCH BACKGROUND

Roots and issues of the ethno-religious diversity in Iraq and the Ninevah region

The Iraqi ethnoreligious diversity

With a rich history dating back to Ancient Mesopotamia and the Empires of Sumer, Akkad, Assyria and Babylon, and having played a founding role in the emergence of a large number of monotheisms, Iraq remains to this day a country unique in the world in terms of ethno-religious diversity. The country's population of around 42 million in 2024 has been predominantly Arab (75-80%), with a strong Kurdish minority in the mountainous north of the country (15-20%). The remaining 5% is divided between a large number of other ethnic groups¹ such as Turkmen (600,000 - 2 million), Yezidi (400,000 - 500,000), Shabak, Kakai², Bedouin, Roma, Assyrian, Circassian, Sabean-Mandean and Persian (CIA, 2024) (Minority Rights Group, 2017).

This ethnic distribution becomes even more fragmented if we take the linguistic factor into account. Recognized by the Constitution as national languages, Arabic and Kurdish have the status of official languages, spoken respectively by the corresponding ethnic populations. The Kurdish spoken by Iraqi Kurds, furthermore, is divided into Northern Kurdish (Kurmanji³), Central Kurdish (Sorani) and Southern Kurdish (Gorani). Turkmen (or South Azeri Turkish), Syriac (Neo-Aramaic or Syriac-Aramaic) and Shabaki have the status of regional languages in the governorates where the corresponding populations are significant: Ninevah (for all three), Kirkuk, Erbil (for Turkmen and Syriac), Salah-ad-Din and Diyala (for Turkmen only) and Dohuk (for Syriac only). They are respectively spoken by the homonymous populations, with Syriac representing the liturgical and vehicular language of Assyrian Christians. In addition, Chaldean (also an Aramaic language) is used liturgically by Catholic Chaldeans, and Armenian by Orthodox and Catholic Armenians. Finally, the Feylis Kurds, spread along the Iranian border, use their own Kurdish language, Feyli, as a lingua franca.

Superimposed on this ethnolinguistic diversity is a religious mosaic unique in the Arab region, as detailed below. According to 2010 Iraqi religious data - the latest to date - quoted by international observers, 97% of the Iraqi population is Muslim, with a Shia majority (57%) spread across the south and center of the country, The second component of society is the Sunni Arabs in the west and north, made up mainly of 10 million Arabs and 6 million Kurds, as well as a Turkmen and Kavkaz minority⁴ (UK Home Office, 2021) (US Department of State, 2022).

¹ The notion of ethnicity here is that of international statistical sources, itself based on that of the 1987 Iraqi census, the most recent to date. This may be open to debate, as some Yezidis and Shabaks claim to be Kurds rather than belonging to a sui generis ethnic group.

² The Kakais are also known as Ahl-el-Haqq or Yarsanis.

³ More specifically, Northern Iraqi Kurdish speak Behdini, which is a dialect of Kurmanji.

⁴ The Kavkaz group brings together the descendants of ancient Circassian, Chechen and Dagestani populations settled in

There is also a sizeable Christian minority in the north of the country, with around 150,000 people divided between the Assyrian and Armenian communities and their numerous churches, mainly Chaldean Catholic (100,000) and Ancient Church of the East (30,000). Particularly hard hit by political events and the security situation since the 2003 invasion - all the more so during the Islamic State's occupation from 2014 to 2017 - the size of the Christian population has nevertheless largely declined, having probably numbered around 700,000 representatives before 2014 and 1.4 million before 2003 (US Commission on International Religious Freedom, 2022). The same applies to the Yezidi community, an ethno-religious group in northern Iraq comprising between 400,000 and 500,000 people who, according to the United Nations, have suffered genocide at the hands of the Islamic State. Finally, ancient Kakai, Sabean-Mandean and Zoroastrian ethno-religious communities remain in Iraq, in addition to the Baha'i and Jewish religious minorities.

Detailed Iraqi demography according to ethnoreligious groups (US Department of State, 2022) (UK Home Office, 2021)

Ethnoreligious group			Statistics				
Religious group		Ethnic group					
Muslims	Sunni	Arabs	10 M	24%	16,2 M	40%	97%
		Kurds	6 M	15%			
		Turkmen	360.000 - 1.4 M ¹	≈1%			
		Kavkaz ²	50.000	<1%			
	Shia	Arabs	21,5 M	53%	23,1 M	57%	
		Faili Kurds	1.5 M ³	3,7%			
		Turkmen	180.000 - 800.000 ¹	≈1%			
Shabaks ⁴		350.000 - 400.000	<1%				
Christians	Chaldean Catholic	Assyrians	≈100.000	<1%	140.000 ⁵	<1%	<1% (≈150.000)
	Assyrian Church of the East		≈30.000	<1%			
	Syriac Orthodox		N/A	<1%			
	Syriac Catholic		N/A	<1%			
	Armenian Orthodox	Armenians	≈12.000	<1%	12.000	<1%	
	Armenian Catholic		<100 ⁶	<1%			
	Other Christians ⁷		N/A	<1%			
Yezidis		400.000 - 500.000	≈1%				
Kakais		120.000 - 150.000	<1%				
Zoroastrians		80.000 - 100.000	<1%				
Sabean-Mandeans		10.000 - 15.000	<1%				
Baha'is		2.000	<1%				
Jewish		<100	<1%				

¹ (Minority Rights Group, 2017) (Oğuzlu, 2004)

² Unified name for Circassian, Chechen and Dagestani groups

³ (Minority Rights Group, 2017) (Oğuzlu, 2004)

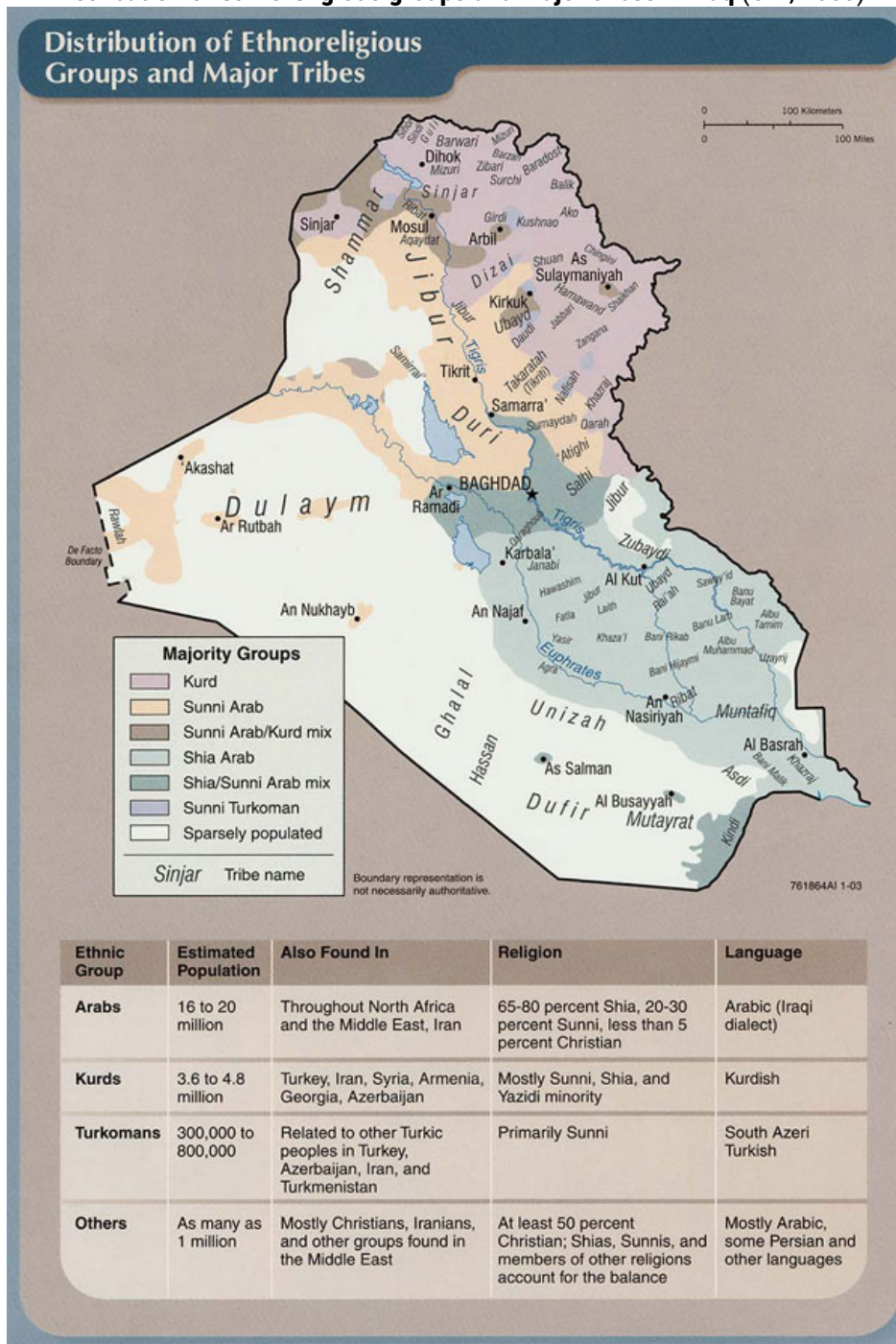
⁴ ¾ of Shabaks identify as Shia Muslims, ¼ as Sunni Muslims

⁵ (Shlama Foundation, 2023)

⁶ (Kotounian, 2021)

⁷ Among the religious groups recognized by the Iraqi Personal Status Law: Roman Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Latin-Dominican Rite, National Protestant, Anglican, Evangelical Protestant Assyrian, Adventist, Coptic Orthodox...

Distribution of ethnoreligious groups and major tribes in Iraq (CIA, 2003)



This religious diversity can be explained by the dense history of the Mesopotamian and then Iraqi territory. Claiming to be descended from the Assyrian civilization (XXI century BC - XIV century BC), the Christian Assyrians⁵ display a multi-millennia historical continuity in the Mesopotamian territory, ideologically reinforced by the importance of this region in monotheistic religions: the prophet Abraham is said to have originated from Ur, and it is also on this territory that the prophets Ezekiel, Daniel and Jonah are said to have lived. Their mausoleums are a source of adoration for representatives of the three main monotheistic faiths. The Iraqi territory is also of vital importance to Islamic civilization and religion. The heart of the brilliant Abassid Empire,

⁵ Assyrians adopted Christianity in the 1st century AC, after the arrival of Thomas the Apostle in Mesopotamia.

of which Baghdad was the capital, it is also the location of most of the mausoleums of the twelve Imams, notably that of Ali ibn Abi Talib in Najaf and Hussein in Karbala, as well as the Golden Mosque in Samarra⁶. Last but not least, the tomb of Sheikh Adi ibn Musafir, a Yezidi pilgrimage center and the most sacred site of their faith, is located in Lalish, in the governorate of Ninevah.

The Christians

Iraq's Christians, numbering around 150,000, are divided into several distinct churches. The majority are ethnic Assyrians⁷ and belong to the Chaldean Church or the Ancient Church of the East, with Syriac Orthodox and Syriac Catholic minorities. Assyrians claim descent from the ancient Mesopotamian empires, notably the Assyrian Empire, which ruled between the 21st century BC and the 14th century BC over the region around Ashur - the ancient capital founded on the banks of the Tigris, south of Mosul - including the cities that today correspond to Erbil, Kirkuk, Nimrod, Ninevah and Tikrit. There is also an Armenian minority in Iraq, mostly Armenian Orthodox, with a very small minority of Armenian Catholics. Finally, there are a few Greek Orthodox and Protestant (Assyrian Evangelical Church) Christians in the country. Beyond the obvious historical and cultural differences that justify such a mosaic of churches, the source of their fundamental distinction is doctrinal, and dates back to the Council of Chalcedon in 451, which laid down the Church's position on the nature of Christ. While Catholics - Chaldean, Syriac or Armenian - maintain that the divine and human natures of Jesus are distinct, Jacobite Monophysites (Syriac Orthodox) defend a single nature, and Nestorians (Assyrian Apostolic and Ancient Church of the East) separate natures (Chaliand & Mousset, 2002).



Iraqi Christians have been widely dispersed geographically throughout their modern history. In 1961, one million Christians lived in Northern Iraq (The Cambridge History of Christianity, 2008). In 1979, 50% of the country's Christians claimed to live in Baghdad, where they represented 14% of the population. Under the Ba'ath regime, they were forced to assimilate to the Kurdish or Arab ethnic groups, before finally being recognized as Christians by both the 2005 Iraqi constitution and the KRG. Today, the majority of Christians remaining in Iraq live in the country's major cities, as well as in Kirkuk, the Ninevah Plains and the governorates of Erbil and Duhok. Christian communities have played a fundamental role in the construction of the modern Iraqi state through their significant participation in national political life under the Monarchy (1921-1958) and the Republic (1958-2003). However, they have been subject to a pronounced policy of exclusion and discrimination since 2003, which reached its peak during the Islamic State's occupation of the north of the country (2014-2017). Since 1998, and especially since the ousting of Islamic State fighters, a significant fringe of Assyrian Christians have been calling for the creation of an independent Christian region in northern Iraq, under international patronage and protection (United States Commission for International Religious Freedom, 2013) (MERI, 2017).

⁶ Mausoleum of the 10th and 11th Imams, Ali al-Hadi and Hasan al-Askari, and place where the 12th Imam Muhammad al-Mahdi entered occultation.

⁷ The Chaldeans sometimes claim to be an independent ethnic group.

The highly diversified region of Ninevah

The governorate of Ninevah, located in north-west Iraq in the foothills of the Kurdistan mountains, is without doubt the region that best represents Iraq's ethno-religious diversity. With a population of 3,100,000 according to the latest valid estimates, and a territory of 36,700 km², it is the second most populous governorate after Baghdad, and the third largest (Central Organisation for Statistics and Information Technology, 2009). Mosul, its capital, is Iraq's second most populous city, with around 2.5 million inhabitants in 2003, according to the American authorities. The governorate of Ninevah is distinguished from other Sunni Arab governorates⁸ by its strong multi-ethnic and multi-religious component. While the Sunni Arab population represents a large majority, significant Turkmen, Assyrian, Kurdish and Yezidi populations live alongside small Shabak, Kavkaz, Kakai, Roma and Armenian minorities. This impressive ethno-religious diversity, especially in the northern part of the governorate, is justified in part by the presence of places of worship that are fundamental to a large number of practices, as mentioned above. The mausoleum of Jonah, recognized as a prophet in the Abrahamic religions, is located in Mosul, while a number of important Christian monasteries are scattered throughout the mountains of the governorate: such is the case of the Syriac Orthodox monastery of Mor Mattai, one of the oldest still in existence, or that of Rabban Hormizd, central to Chaldean worship and the Ancient Church of the East. Finally, the site of Lalish, described above as fundamental to the Yezidi faith, is also situated in Ninevah, as is the sacred mountain of Sinjar.

Ninevah governorate in Iraq (in red)



(The territory in light red is formally part of Ninevah governorate but administered by KRG)

Bashiqa sub-district, 18 km north-east of Mosul and the focus of this research, is also a particularly diverse urban area in the governorate. Before 2014, and to a lesser extent up to the present day, it was one of the main centers of Yezidi settlement, with numerous mausoleums and important places of worship. According to the latest national census in 1987, 85% of Bashiqa's population is Yezidi, 12% Christian and 3% Muslim. Contrary to Christian majority trends in Iraq, Bashiqa's 1,560 Christians are majorly Syriac Orthodox (300 families) and Syriac Catholic (90 families) (Shlama Foundation, 2023). Both churches are of the Syriac rite, but the former is autocephalous and the latter recognizes the authority of the Holy See. The city is also home to Shabak, Turkmen and Kakai minorities, whose contribution to this research has been appreciated.

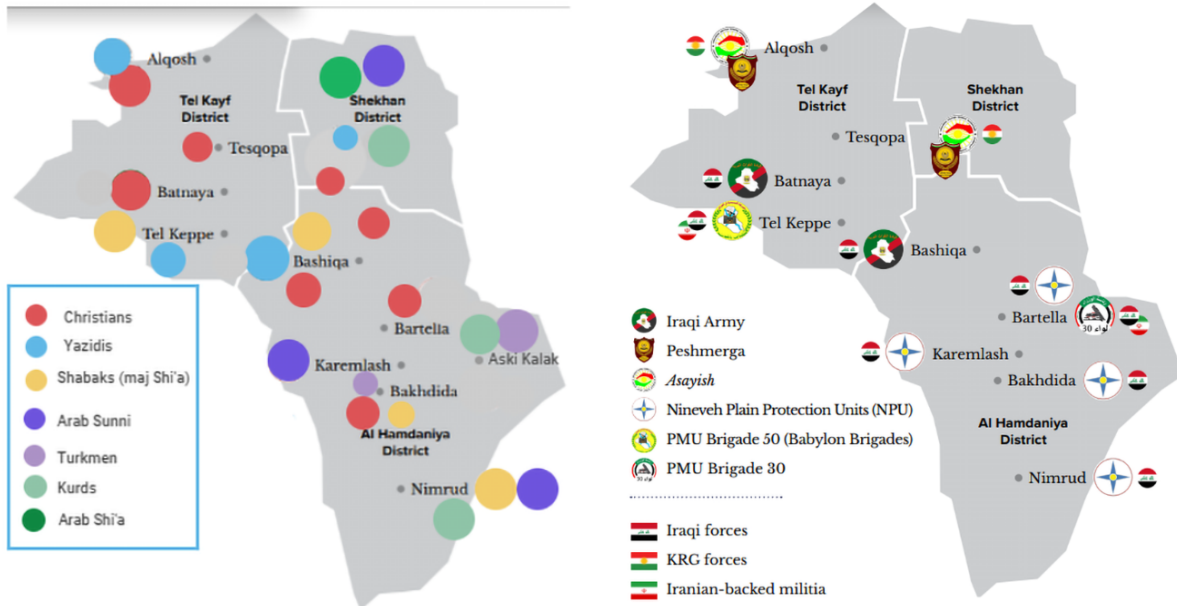
⁸ Al-Anbar, Diyala, Kirkuk and Salah ad-Din.

Geographic position of Bashiqa (in green) inside Ninevah governorate



The three districts on the left bank of the Tigris - Hamdaniya, Shekhan and Tel Kaif - traditionally form the boundaries of the so-called "Ninevah Plains", covering an area of around 5,000 km². Historically, these three districts were predominantly inhabited by a Christian population: a minority of Shabaks were counted in the rural areas of Hamdaniya - notably the Bartilla subdistrict - and a large Yezidi population resided in the Shekhan district. Although it is impossible to obtain precise estimates, it would appear that since the defeat of the Islamic State the Shabaks have become the majority in the Ninevah Plains, followed by the Christian population, the Yezidis, the Kurds, the Arabs, the Kakais and then the Turkmens, as can be seen on the map below (Ezzeddine & Pellise, 2021).

Ethno-religious distribution after ISIS defeat and distribution of security actors in the Ninevah Plains (Ezzeddine & Pellise, 2021) (Assyrian Policy Institute, 2020)



Bashiqa's social and administrative fabric

Bashiqa is administratively a neighborhood of the Mossoul district, or of the Hamdaniya district according to multiple international organisations. For the sake of simplicity and representativeness, we will place Bashiqa in the Hamdaniya district in the course of this research, in order to emphasize the proximity that its inter-community problems confer on it with the rest of the localities in the three districts of the Nineveh Plains (more so than with the city of Mosul). The town in itself is divided into 15 "Neighborhoods" (administrative sub-level) and the rest of the neighborhood is made of 51 villages. The Bashiqa sub-district is led by a neighborhood council, technically elected but in reality appointed by the provincial council since the 2003 occupation. 2 "mukthars" administer the town, one responsible for Bashiqa itself and the other for Bahzani, an adjoining village. Bashiqa is protected militarily by the 30th brigade of the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF).

In Iraq, Sunni and Shia Muslim preachers, imams and muezzins are salaried religious officials subject to civil service regulations issued by the Sunni Endowment Office and the Shia Endowment Office respectively. The same applies to Christian priests and Yazidi sheikhs, who are administratively attached to their own Endowment Office. Several social councils complete the social-administrative picture of the locality. 4 Social councils (one for the Shabaks, one for the Turkmen and two for the Yazidis) represent and manage the day-to-day affairs of their communities through regular meetings, adjudicating disputes and mediating: their members - some 20 in all - are not elected but unofficially appointed from among the most respected older members of the community. These social leaders also represent the community in dealings with the local authorities, who often turn to them for help, and take care to strengthen and preserve intra-community ties by organizing regular events. A large number of tribal councils manage the day-to-day affairs of the tribe or clan. and do not necessarily meet regularly but only when necessary. Finally, the Bashiqa Council of Notables is the unofficial inter-religious and inter-ethnic body that decides on serious issues requiring the attention of several communities. It also brings together some twenty members, among the most respected on each side, and often acts in support of the local authorities, even though it has no legal existence.

Threats and unrest of minorities in Ninevah

A modern history of discriminations against minorities in Ninevah governorate

After the American-led invasion, the sectarian war (2003-2009)

Inter-religious dialogue is made particularly complex in Ninevah governorate, as in the rest of Iraq, by a centuries-long history of marginalization and varied and fluctuating discrimination against different ethno-religious minorities. They also suffered greatly as collateral victims of the Sectarian civil war from 2006 to 2009, even though it mainly pitted the three main ethno-religious groups against each other: Shia Arabs, Sunni Arabs and Kurds. Thus, among the large number of Iraqis affected by the conflict - between 25% and 30% of the population has been displaced - minority ethno-religious groups are disproportionately affected: it is estimated that around 80% of Mandaean⁹ and 60% of Christians respectively have been displaced by political events (CIGI, 2009) and, according to the UNHCR, 30% of the refugees who left the country during this period came from ethnic or religious minorities (Minority Rights Group International, 2014). Generally speaking, the situation of minorities has deteriorated considerably since the 2003 war and under the American occupation, as political instability has engendered a climate of fear and persistent insecurity. While violence and displacement have been constant since 2003, they erupted in two peaks in 2006 and 2008, the second of which forced thousands of Christians living in Mosul to flee the city for Iraqi Kurdistan. It has also been reported that the city was completely emptied of its Yezidis in 2007: unlike Christians and "ahl-el-kitab" (members of Abrahamic religions), they were unable to pay a tax (jaziyya) to Muslim extremist groups - notably Al-Qaeda - to remain in their homes and were thus forced to leave (CIGI, 2009).

The numerous acts of violence suffered by minority groups, even before the advent of Daesh in 2014, had already largely redistributed the ethno-religious demography of Iraq, and particularly Ninevah, leading to tensions that are still being felt today. Traditionally the majority in many villages in the north of the governorate or in Sinjar, the Yezidis have seen their social base threatened by the arrival of large numbers of displaced persons from other ethno-religious groups. Given that their minority situation already implies a particularly precarious demographic balance, based on rigid social norms (such as a ban on extreme-community marriages), this new demographic redistribution could significantly jeopardize the survival of their ethno-religious group. Similarly, Christian demographics were marked by a significant reduction in numbers during this period, as seen above: of the 1.4 million Iraqi Christians in the 90s, 700,000 remained in the country in 2009 at the end of the civil war (CIGI, 2009) and 150,000 today, as seen above. Once again, their forced internal displacement has added to the socio-political complexity of the so-called "disputed territories" bordering Iraqi Kurdistan, where the balance of power between the KRG, IFG and local groups evolves as they succeed, through clientelist or coercive means, in buying the loyalty or even ethnic identification of Christian, Yezidi, Turkmen, Shabak, Kakais and local inhabitants (Minority Rights Group, 2007).

The ISIS occupation in Western-Northern Iraq and its long fallbacks (2009 to now)

In 2009, it was estimated that 2.7 million Iraqis had been internally displaced (5% of the population) and that around 2 million had fled to neighboring countries. In 2008, the Ministry of Displacement and Migration estimated that around half of the representatives of minority communities had left the country: only a very small number returned to their communities of origin after 2009 (Ferris & Taylor, 2014) It was against this backdrop that ISIS swept into the Ninevah governorate, seizing Mosul in June 2014, which would not be liberated until July 2017 after 8 months of unprecedentedly violent fighting. ISIS grip on the region, as well as on a territory corresponding to almost 1/3 of Iraq, has been synonymous with an escalation in terms of population displacement: 6 million Iraqis left their homes due to military operations between 2014 and 2017 (Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor, 2021). Ninevah governorate had the highest rate of IDPs of all Iraqi governorates (Ezzeddine & Pellise, 2021) some 500,000 people are thought to have left, and to date only 45% have returned (IOM, 2017) (Ezzeddine &

⁹ The Sabaeen-Mandaeans are a very small Arab-speaking ethno-religious group present in Iraq and Iran, although on the verge of extinction in their native regions of the Shatt-el-Arab (between 60,000 and 100,000 representatives worldwide, around 5,000 in Iraq compared with 60,000 before 2003) (Deutsch, 2007). Gnostic, they believe that John the Baptist is the last and most important Prophet.

Pellise, 2021). Minorities, harassed by ISIS jihadists, are naturally over-represented in these population displacements - as we shall see below - but are also under-represented among returnees to date: in 2021, for example, only 35% of Christians had returned to their homes, compared with 80% of Shabaks (Ezzeddine & Pellise, 2021). Since 2019, the lack of housing solutions has been the main factor preventing displaced people from returning to Ninevah, ahead of the security factor (IOM, 2019). Yet the reconstruction of housing and infrastructure, carried out by the Iraqi authorities in cooperation with international agencies, is not progressing fast enough to cover the needs of populations waiting to return.

Pursuing a policy of systematic and violent intolerance, the ISIS occupation from 2014 to 2017 has had devastating effects for the governorate's minorities. The Yezidis, considered by the terrorist organization to be "pagans" or "worshippers of the devil", have been subjected to massacres on an unprecedented scale in their strongholds in Sinjar or the Ninevah Plains having led to the death of 3,100, the kidnapping of 6,800 and the displacement of 400,000 of them (Minority Rights Group, 2017). The international community and the UNHCR have since characterized these massacres as genocide, signifying an attempt by the Islamist group to erase the entire Yezidi population, culture and history. The former Christian community was also subjected to forced displacement, property theft and destruction of holy sites. According to UN estimates, some 200,000 Christians left the Ninevah governorate when ISIS swept through the region in June 2014, including all 50,000 Christians in Mosul. Experiencing a situation of insecurity and a lack of economic opportunity, less than 60% of Christians displaced by the conflict with ISIS have returned home since 2017 (US Commission on International Religious Freedom, 2022). Other minority communities have not been spared either: Shia Muslims, particularly Turkmen and Shabaks, have been the target of several massacres, including the Badush prison massacre in June 2014 (600 dead). Numerous executions of religious leaders have been recorded among the Kakais, amid countless other persecutions, thefts and destruction of sacred sites (KRG Representation in the US, 2016). The toll of this colossal violence and destruction, an avowed attempt to erase the cultural identities and traces of presence of the region's minorities, becomes dramatic when we consider the widespread loss of hope in the possibility of peaceful coexistence between distinct ethno-religious groups. The group's bloodthirsty attempt to impose a monolithic and radical vision of Sunni Islam could then outlast it through an increasing geographical fragmentation of Ninevah's territory and a gradual distancing of communities from each other (Fazil, Addressing challenges to tolerance and religious diversity in Iraq, 2023).

The Yezidis

The Yezidis are an ethnic and religious population originally from Upper Mesopotamia, living mainly in Iraq in the governorates of Ninevah and Dohuk, and to a lesser extent in Syria, in the Djezair region. Although non-Kurds under Iraqi law¹⁰ - and even if some Yezidis identify themselves ethnically as Kurds - they are predominantly Kurdish-speaking as they communicate in Kurmanji (Northern Kurdish). The Yezidi religion is a monotheistic faith based on belief in a heptad of seven angels created by God, the most important of whom is said to be the peacock-angel Malak Ta'us. Believed to have emerged 4000 years ago, it incorporates elements, Zoroastrian, Manichaeism, Jewish, Nestorian Christian and Muslim worship and liturgy. Believing themselves to be the descendants of Adam and Eve, the Yezidis set themselves apart from the rest of humanity, with numerous inter-relational and communal consequences: excommunication is often synonymous with social exclusion, and extra-community marriages are prohibited. The caste structure of Yezidi communities further complicates these intra- and extra-community fractures, since the "pir" (class in charge of religious affairs) and "sheikhs" (political and social affairs) are not allowed to marry each other or the "mureed" (Normal Yezidis). Finally, it should be noted that all these classes are placed under the guidance of the "mirs" (princes and secular leaders), of whom the "baba sheikh" (spiritual father) is the leader.

¹⁰ In the eyes of the KRG authorities, however, the Yezidis represent a Kurdish ethnic group.



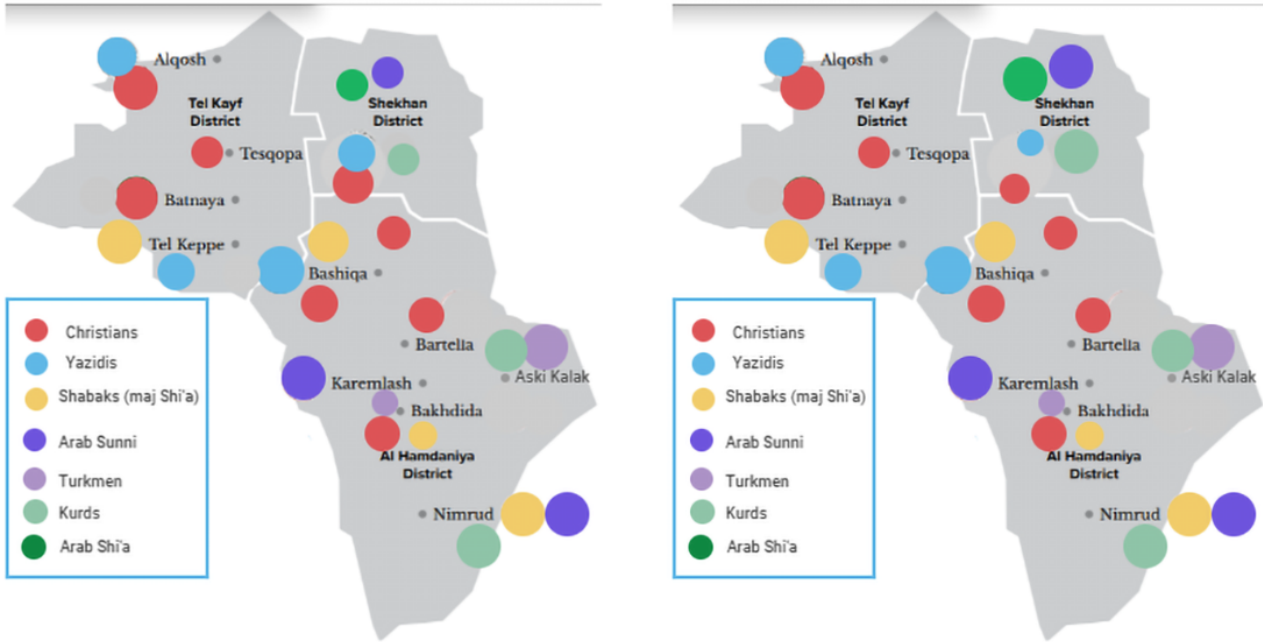
The Ba'athist regime made repeated efforts to Arabize their territory and weaken the Yezidi identity. The security of the Iraqi Yezidi community deteriorated particularly after 2003, with Muslim extremists regularly attacking and assassinating them as "worshippers of the devil", in line with a common misinterpretation of their faith: it is estimated that 335 Yezidis were directly or indirectly killed between 2004 and 2007 (Ministry of Human Rights, 2008). Between 2014 and 2017, the Islamic State's invasion and subsequent occupation of the Sinjar and Mosul region led to the displacement of 400,000 Yezidis, the massacre of 3,100 of them and the abduction of 6,800 individuals, in what is now recognized by multiple international observers as "genocide" (Minority Rights Group, 2017) (MERI, 2017) (IOM, 2022).

Complex tensions between communities perpetuate minority unrest

Long-standing discriminations keep affecting minorities

Although Iraq is currently enjoying its longest period of stability in two decades, the pernicious effects of structural violence are still being felt, in that it has become an integral part of the region's social, political and economic life. Decades of conflict and oppression have broken down what remained of urban mixing to push minorities into peri-urban areas, increasing the homogeneity of the majority Arab Muslim community while shattering the traditional social structures of minorities (sometimes through forced mixing, as Christians have been relocated to predominantly Yezidi villages and vice versa). Alongside geographical marginalization, social marginalization is increasingly crystallizing, through "mere symbolic political representation, frozen social mobility, and constant stigmatization where negative stereotypes abound and are frequently espoused as facts" (Fazil, Addressing challenges to tolerance and religious diversity in Iraq, 2023).

Ethno-religious distribution before and after ISIS takeover (Ezzeddine & Pellise, 2021)



The Turkmen

The Turkmen constitute the 3rd largest ethnic group in Iraq, with between 600,000 and 2 million members spread along an arc stretching from Tel Afar, west of Mosul in the Ninevah governorate (a predominantly Turkmen city) to Khaniqin in Diyala, via Kirkuk. Between 60 and 70% of them are Sunni Muslims, the rest Shia Muslims, but all speak Turkmen, a Turkish dialect. Historically, they are probably descended from Turkish garrisons based in Iraqi territory, although they claim ancestry dating back to the Seljuk Turks.



The Kakais

The Kakais, also known as Ahl-e Haqq, are a religious and linguistic community distributed mainly to the southeast of Kirkuk and in the Ninevah Plains near Daquq and Hamdaniya. Speaking a Kurdish dialect called Macho, as well as Arabic for some sub-communities, they are generally considered ethnically Kurdish. Their religion is the result of a unique syncretism between Zoroastrian and Shia Muslim beliefs and practices: it is said to have originated in 14th-century Iran and follows the precepts laid down by Sultan Sahak in the sacred book Kalam-e Saranjam. Neither the Kakai religion nor language is recognized by the Iraqi Constitution: Kakais are registered as Muslims with the authorities. However, in 2015, the KRG's Ministry of Endowment and Religious Affairs recognized the Kakai religion.

While they often occupied privileged socio-economic positions in the Ottoman Empire, the Kakais, like many other Iraqi socio-ethnic groups, largely suffered from the Ba'ath party's policy of Arabization, which led to forced population displacement and a policy of forced acculturation. Similarly, the Kakais have borne the brunt of the Islamic State's advance on their lands in the Ninevah and Kirkuk governorates. In response, a famous 600-strong Kakai contingent was formed and integrated into the Kurdish peshmerga forces.

Legal situation of minorities in Iraq

A difficult and still partial legal recognition

Recognition of Iraqi minorities is variable. The 2005 Iraqi Constitution recognizes five "ethnic minorities" (Turkmen, Assyrians, Chaldeans, Syriacs, Armenians) and three "religious minorities" (Christians, Yezidis, Sabeans-Mandeans). In 2003, the official recognition of these three minorities gave them the right to set up a joint Endowment Office to administer the "awqaf" (plural form of "waqf"), i.e. the religious real estate belonging to these communities. The Office thus takes the place of the Sunni Endowment Office and the Shia Endowment Office, which resulted from the break-up in 2003 of the former Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs. In Kurdistan the KR-I Law on the Protection of Minority Rights No. 5 of 2015 recognizes eight "religious minorities" (Christians, Yezidis, Sabeans-Mandeans, Kakais, Fayli, Shabaks, Zoroastrians, Baha'is). Jews, now almost non-existent in Iraq, are also recognized and protected by a separate national law dating from 1981¹¹. Baha'is, on the other hand, are not only still not officially recognized by Iraqi constitutional or legal provisions, but were also banned from practicing their faith under the Ba'ath regime¹². Similarly, article 41 of the Iraqi Constitution guarantees freedom from religious coercion and establishes that all citizens are equal before the law without discrimination on the basis of their religion or beliefs.

However, inequalities persist in the effective application of these laws, and are reflected in certain specific cases linked to the Personal Status Code, enacted in 1959. Based on Islamic jurisprudence, it applies to everyone and comes into direct conflict with the traditions and customs of certain non-Muslim communities, specifically in the areas of marriage, divorce, inheritance, child custody and alimony (LAAF, 2023). Similarly, the application of article 26(2) of the Iraqi National Unified ID Card Law No. 3 of 2016 poses a number of problems. In itself, the practice of recording religious identity on state-issued identification cards is in itself already a form of discrimination according to some civil society activists (Minority Rights Group International, 2014). In addition, the limitations on religions recognized by the Personal Status Law¹³ have forced many members of certain minorities (Baha'is, Kakais) to register officially as Muslims in the past, unable to change due to the current prohibition on apostasy. Similarly, the 2015 National Identity Card Law requires children of mixed marriages to be registered as Muslims. This is particularly problematic for women, including Yezidi women, who have given birth as a result of rape (EUAA,

¹¹ Iraqi Supplementary System to the Religious Sects Welfare System Law No. 32 of 1981

¹² Law No. 105 of 1970 (never revoked) and Rule No. 358 of the Directorate of Civil Affairs, repealed in 2007 by the Ministry of Interior.

¹³ Islam, Chaldean, Assyrian, Assyrian Catholic, Syriac Orthodox, Syriac Catholic, Armenian Apostolic, Armenian Catholic, Roman Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Latin-Dominic Rite, National Protestant, Anglican, Evangelical Protestant Assyrian, Adventist, Coptic Orthodox, Yazidi, Sebaen-Mandean and Jewish. The conventional (non-biometric) ID cards contain the holder's religion but there is no distinction between Shia and Sunni Muslim, nor a designation of Christian denominations.

2022).

An uneven representation that comes from unequal political participation

Appointments to public sector posts, particularly in ministries and governing bodies, follow the logic of the "muhasasa", an ethno-sectarian quota system supposed to guarantee the representation of Iraqis through their three main demographic groups: Sunni Muslims, Shia Muslims and Kurds. This system is neither constitutional nor legislative in nature, since it is simply a political practice introduced by the transitional government under the aegis of the American occupation and perpetuated over time. In Parliament, or the Council of Representatives (CoR), this logic is reflected in the presence of 9 seats reserved for minorities out of the 329 that make up the assembly (5 for Christians and 1 each for the Yezidis, Shabaks, Sabeans-Mandeans and Feylis Kurds). The KRG Parliament, meanwhile, reserves 11 seats for minorities out of a total of 111 (5 for Christians and Turkmens respectively, and one for Armenians) (Abdullah & Hama, 2020). However since the implementation of this system minorities themselves have complained of two different factors weakening their effective representation: their numerical under-representation in Parliament and the instrumentalization of their seats by national political parties (or regional parties in the case of Kurdistan, which faces similar problems). Firstly, Article 49 of the Constitution stipulates that the ratio of representation in the Assembly should be one seat for every 100,000 Iraqis, which would mean that the country's 400,000 - 500,000 Yezidis (see above) would have between 4 and 5 seats in Parliament, compared with 1 at present.

Yet the electoral component is just one aspect of the political discrimination suffered by Iraqi minorities in the "disputed territories" of the Ninevah governorate. This competition, dating back to 2003 and the US-led invasion of Iraq, is partly responsible for the inability of the two administrations to meet the needs of local populations, progressively aggravating insecurity and tensions, including between minority communities as seen above. Indeed, the struggle for influence between Baghdad and Erbil has led them to court local community leaders, undermining inter- and intra-communal cohesion, as well as co-opting the creation of security units (reporting respectively to the PMF or the peshmergas) made up of minorities in the name of community self-defence. Insecurity and the resulting tensions are also aggravating the situation of IDPs from the region, as their prospects of return are diminishing. Minorities are over-represented among IDPs from the Ninevah Plains and under-represented among returnees: by 2021, while 80% of Shabaks had returned to their places of origin, only 35% of Christians had done so (Ezzeddine & Pellise, 2021).

The Shabaks

The Shabaks are an Iraqi ethnic and linguistic minority not recognized by the Iraqi or Kurdish authorities. Living mainly from agriculture, they are scattered in a small number of villages to the east of Mosul, in the Ninevah Plains and a small number in Mosul itself. They speak a language distinct from Arabic and Kurdish, Shabaki, which is the result of Persian, Kurdish, Turkish and Arabic influences. They number between 350,000 and 400,000 in the Ninevah governorate, 70% of them identifying as Shia Muslims and 30% as Sunni Muslims (US Department of State, 2022) (Minority Rights Group, 2017).

The presence of the Shabaks in the Ninevah region can be traced back to the 16th century. Like the Yezidis, under Saddam Hussein's regime they were the subject of determined attempts by the authorities to assimilate them into the Arab identity, notably in order to consolidate the regime's hold on the oil resources of their territories. In the wake of the 2003 American invasion, the Shabaks have been the object of multiple acts of violence, with estimates indicating 1,300 Shia Shabaks killed between 2003 and 2014 at the hands of extremist Sunni militants (UNHCR, 2012). Categorized as "rafida" (deniers) by the Islamic State, Shia Shabaks were also hit hard between 2014 and 2017, with estimates putting the number of decimated Shabak families at 117 (Minority Rights Group, 2017) (MERI, 2017).

A recent and partial Iraqi interreligious dialogue

Theoretical framework of interreligious dialogue

Particularly varied definitions of inter-religious dialogue coexist, and we ourselves will arrive at our own theoretical framework during the research. This will enable us to go beyond the framework provided by a more traditional definition such as "activities which are intentionally constructed to include two or more different religious communities or individuals and with the purpose of furthering collaboration, peaceful coexistence, or general knowledge between them" (Adyan Foundation, 2020). This Lebanon-based institute also points out that activities falling under the definition of "inter-religious dialogue" are similar insofar as they seek to increase stability and peace in a given socio-political context. Secondly, the researchers identified several typologies of theories of change that these organizations pursue beyond their common goal. For some, promoting inter-religious dialogue is a means of defending the rights of religious minorities; for others, of facilitating the emergence of inclusive citizenship; for still others, of promoting freedom of belief - seven "theories of change" were thus identified by the Adyan Foundation team led by Michael Daniel Driessen, quoted above.

Any type of institution or organization can also be at the origin of an initiative defined as such. Over time, however, the Middle East has seen a gradual evolution in the sources of these efforts: from inter-religious dialogue led directly by regional states in the 2000s, there has been a gradual shift towards greater civil society activism in this area since 2010 (Haddad, Yazbeck, & Fischbach, 2015). Lastly, the various action strategies implemented by them have in the past been categorized according to their degree and "form of action". (KAICIID, 2015) : while some initiatives simply aim to bring people of different faiths together for an event (prayer, meal, pilgrimage, etc.), others actively promote and defend tolerance through a media campaign, for example, or educational measures.

Interreligious dialogue in Iraq

Both the 2006-2009 sectarian war and the 2014-2017 war against ISIS, in spite of the human tragedies that they're obviously assimilated to, presented according to some scholars "immense opportunities for interreligious dialogue to grow and mature in Iraq" as a response to the conflict and violence (Wainscott, 2019). Thus this period has seen major and innovative initiatives for interreligious dialogue as Iraq had probably never seen during the Saddam Hussain era, led among others by eminent religious leaders from various confessions as the Chaldean Patriarch Louis Raphael I Sako, the Yezidi Baba Sheikh and the Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani, ayatollah of the Shia Marjaeya of Najaf. Among the most successful ones, we can cite the establishment of the Iraq Council for Interfaith Dialogue (IRAQCID) by the journalist Dr. Saad Salloum together with a Dominican friar and a Shia Sayyid from the al-Khoei Institute, which focuses on raising awareness about Iraq's interfaith diversity. We can cite the creation of the UNESCO Chair for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue, which was established in Kufa University in 2014 to pursue programs in the field of dialogue, coexistence, and cross-cultural development. Nevertheless, interreligious dialogue in Iraq still faces multiple challenges that either impede the launch of initiatives in this direction either undermines their popularity and success in local populations.

The challenges of religious education in Iraq in the context of a troubled national education system

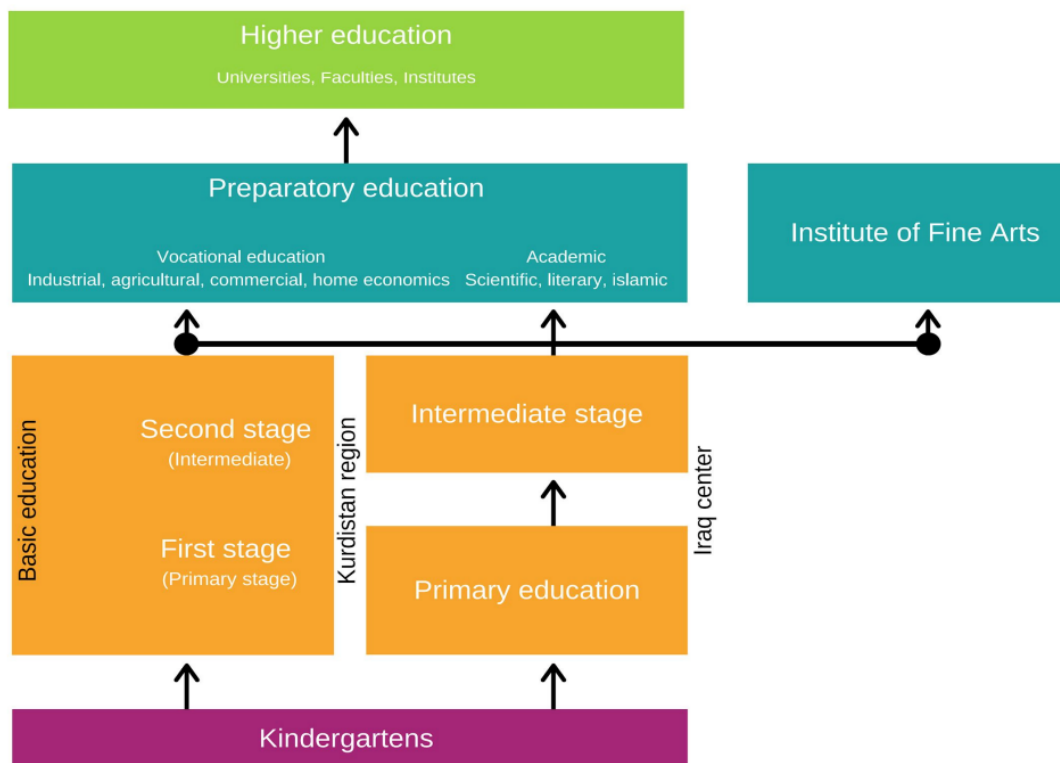
Realities of primary and secondary education in Iraq

Iraqi national education had its heyday in the 60s, 70s and 80s, when it ranked among the best in the Arab region: by 1985, Iraq had completely eliminated illiteracy. The rise in the national education budget over this period (6% of GDP in 1984) was characterized by a flourishing of school and university results: the Gulf War, the sanctions against Iraq and the Oil For Food program brought this process to an abrupt halt and led national education close to complete collapse. Post-2003 Iraq guarantees the right to free education for all and requires all young citizens to complete and validate at least the primary education program. The Ministry of Education (MoE), subdivided by governorate into Directorates of Education (DoE), is responsible for education and receives a budget equivalent to 3.7% of GDP for this purpose (World Bank, 2022) which has been steadily increasing since 2003.

The KRG, for its part, controls its own education system via a separate Ministry of Education, sharing with IFG the objectives of national curricula in primary and secondary education. Completely banned in 1974, private education made a comeback in Iraq after the American occupation and limitedly spread throughout the country in the context of the post-2003 near-collapse. However, it remains an unpopular solution today due to its cost and the good quality of the public system (IRFAD, 2014).

Iraq's national education system consists of 6 years of compulsory primary education, followed by 6 years of secondary education, with 3 years of intermediary level followed by 3 years of preparatory level. At preparatory level, pupils are divided between vocational training (industrial, agricultural, commercial, etc.) and general training (scientific, literary, Islamic). At the end of both the primary and preparatory levels, students must pass a national standardized exam, which must be validated before moving on to the next level.

Description of the Iraqi education system (KAPITA, 2021)



Decades of conflict have since seriously set back what was once considered one of the best national education systems in the region. Today, around 28% of Iraqi girls of school age, and 15% of boys, are not in school, the majority of them in the areas most affected by the conflict with ISIS. 46% of children who have completed primary school will never finish secondary school (UNICEF, 2022). Almost half of displaced children, therefore, will not attend a class, again with a majority of girls among them. In the governorate of Ninevah, the consequences of the conflict are still deeply felt through the disorganization of the education system: the destruction of school infrastructures and the psychological impact on children and teachers are complicating the region's educational rebound. Reconstruction, carried out by the MoE in partnership with UNICEF, is a lengthy process, complicated by the gradual return of IDPs to their region of origin. In the Ninevah Plains and Sinjar, this process is further complicated by the legal vacuum and lack of investment caused by the territorial dispute between the IFG and KRG. We identified that there are currently around 40 schools in Bashiqa and its surrounding area, among which one private school – which teaches the same official pedagogical curriculum – as well as one Christian school registered as a “waqf”, administered by the Christian Endowment Office and that only covers primary education.

Beyond these short-term problems, the education system suffers from other structural problems that weaken its ability to train young Iraqis to their full potential. School infrastructures, even outside ISIS-affected areas, are

dilapidated or even completely unsuitable: in 2019, the Ministry of Planning estimated that 58% of them required rehabilitation or rebuilding. To compensate for this lack of infrastructure, schools have been working double or even triple shifts for several years now, lowering the quality of teaching for students on staggered shifts and further straining infrastructure and teaching staff. Last but not least, the mismatch between theoretical and practical training and the realities of the academic and job markets makes it harder for secondary school leavers to leave school, especially if they come from a vocational training background (KAPITA, 2021).

Religious education and its shortcomings for minority communities

Religious education is considered one of the pillars of the school curriculum. Exclusively Islamic, a class devotes four periods to it¹⁴ during the 1st and 2nd grade of primary school, then 3 periods until the end of secondary school. Common to both Sunnis and Shia Muslims, it covers Koranic learning, the study of the facts and sayings of the Prophet, the study of pre-Islamic prophets and a civilizational component. Every school-leaving exam includes a religious test. In a handful of schools¹⁵ - as is the case of the aforementioned Christian school of Bashiqa - where the majority of pupils are Christian, they can follow a Christian religious education up to the end of primary school, which they also validate with a specific exam. Some teachers told us during our interviews that some schools in Bashiqa also offer courses in Yezidism at primary level, although these are not subject to examination. Both Christian and Yezidi pupils must then either join the Islamic religion course, or - in the majority of cases - can dispense with it. This is also the case for pupils of other faiths (Kakais, Mandeans...), who are generally exempt from this requirement as early as primary school. The KRG applies its own rules, which include Christian and Yezidi religion courses based on curricula issued by the Kurdish MoE.

In the rest of the country, young Iraqis attend religious classes from the age of 6 to 18. With a few exceptions - and this concerns only Christians and Yezidis living in localities where they are in the majority - pupils of minority faiths are prevented from learning about their religion at school. The segregation, including physical segregation, created by religion classes is not without consequences for the socialization and psychology of pupils: studies have reported the sense of inferiority and even discrimination that young non-Muslims can feel as a result of this divide (Barany, 2013). Many religious leaders have openly complained about this unequal representation in national education, which they experience as religious discrimination (US Department of State, 2022). The curriculum had already been reformed in 2012 in consultation with minority representatives so that Yezidis, Christians, Sabeans-Mandeans and Shabaks were represented in textbooks for the first time, although many activists insist that this has not proved sufficient (Minority Rights Group International, 2014). Religious discrimination is superimposed on linguistic discrimination: although the Iraqi constitution guarantees the right of every pupil to be taught in his or her native language, this is hardly enforced in practice. Education in Turkmen and Syriac is very limited, while that in Shabak and Mande is non-existent.

Research Methodology

The three parts of the research are based on qualitative - and partially quantitative - data collected during 10 Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and 9 Focus-Group Discussions (FGDs) organized between March 1 and May 30, 2024 in Bashiqa by the Mosul-based Mercy Hands team. The people interviewed during the KIIs are 10 recognized religious and community leaders from Bashiqa, selected to cover the locality's ethno-religious diversity as representatively as possible: among the ten participants we find Shabak, Yezidi, Sunni Arab, Christian, Kakai, Sunni Turkmen and Sunni Kurdish leaders. The FGD participants, meanwhile, were subdivided into three groups: 5 groups of local aid workers, 3 groups of active or recently retired teachers and 1 group of Directors of local state departments in Bashiqa and their employees in Nineveh governorate. Finally, it should be noted that the questionnaires designed to guide both KIIs and FGDs are based on a single foundation but vary slightly to offer participants the questions best suited to their expertise.

¹⁴ One period corresponds to 45 minutes of teaching in single-shift schools and 40 minutes in double-shift schools.

¹⁵ 255 across the country, including 55 in IKR (US Department of State, 2022).

Thematic areas and guidelines for the conduction of the FGDs

In orange the questions specific to the KIIs, and in white the questions common to the FGDs and KIIs guidelines.

THEMATIC AREA 1: Assessment of the religious content of curricula in terms of promoting inter- and intra-religious dialogue, peaceful coexistence and mutual respect	
1	What is your general opinion of the religious syllabus in primary and secondary education?
2	According to your opinion how is the religious education, in its current state, promoting peaceful coexistence?
3	Do you know if religious syllabuses are mentioning diverse religions and faiths? If so, how are they presented?
4'	Do you know if the teachers are trained in diversity management (promoting inclusion in the classroom)? If yes, what are they've been taught regarding this matter?
5'	Do schools have a policy/infrastructures to include students from other religions?
6'	How would you rate the students' knowledge of other religions, customs and liturgies?
THEMATIC AREA 2: The role of non-formal education in promoting inter- and intra-religious peaceful coexistence and mutual respect	
1	How would you assess young people today's sensitization to inter-religious dialogue and peaceful coexistence?
2	In your opinion, is it the role of schools to teach inter-religious dialogue, peaceful coexistence and mutual respect? Why so?
3	What are the other ways rather than schools that young people could learn about inter-religious dialogue and mutual respect?
4	Which other actors rather than school play an important role in advancing interreligious dialogue and peaceful coexistence?
5	In your experience, what are some successful examples (outside of school) of interreligious dialogue initiatives or projects that have positively impacted society?
6	According to you, how are public authorities currently acting in promoting better interreligious dialogue? What more should they do?
7	How do you think we (teachers, parents, community leaders) could increase non-formal education promotion of inter-religious peaceful dialogue and coexistence?
THEMATIC AREA 3: Ways of improving primary and secondary education curricula to better promote intra- and inter-religious tolerance and the values of coexistence	
1	What strategies or approaches do you believe should be taught in religion classes to foster inter-religious peaceful dialogue and coexistence?
2	Do you think it would be beneficial to inter-religious dialogue and peaceful coexistence if other religions were taught in religious classes? Why?
3	In your opinion, in what ways can schools improve - besides religious classes - inter-religious religious dialogue and peaceful coexistence between religions?
4	What do you think are the best ways, in school or out of school, to promote peaceful coexistence between religions?
5'	Have you encountered any challenges in including students from diverse religions in your school and if so, how have you addressed them?

Thematic areas and guidelines for the conduction of the KIIs

In green the questions specific to the KIIs, and in white the questions common to the FGDs and KIIs guidelines.

THEMATIC AREA 1: Assessment of the religious content of curricula in terms of promoting inter- and intra-religious dialogue, peaceful coexistence and mutual respect	
1	What is your general opinion of the religious syllabus in primary and secondary education?
2	According to your opinion how is the religious education, in its current state, promoting peaceful coexistence?
3	Do you know if religious syllabuses are mentioning diverse religions and faiths? If so, how are they presented?



4'	Do you think primary and secondary schools' students have today a good knowledge of other religions, and customs?
5'	What strategies or approaches do you believe should be taught in religion classes to foster inter-religious peaceful dialogue and coexistence?
THEMATIC AREA 2: The role of non-formal education in promoting inter- and intra-religious peaceful coexistence and mutual respect	
1	How would you assess young people today's sensitization to inter-religious dialogue and peaceful coexistence?
2	In your opinion, is it the role of schools to teach inter-religious dialogue, peaceful coexistence and mutual respect? Why so?
3	What are the other ways rather than schools that young people could learn about inter-religious dialogue and mutual respect?
4	Which other actors rather than school play an important role in advancing interreligious dialogue and peaceful coexistence?
5	In your experience, what are some successful examples (outside of school) of interreligious dialogue initiatives or projects that have positively impacted society?
6	According to you, how are public authorities currently acting in promoting better interreligious dialogue? What more should they do?
7	How do you think we (teachers, parents, community leaders) could increase non-formal education promotion of inter-religious peaceful dialogue and coexistence?
8'	Do you think religious/community institutions (mosks, hussayniyyas, ziarats, shrines...) have a role to play in advancing interreligious peaceful coexistence? In which ways can they do so?
9'	Do you think religious/community institutions are currently sensitizing young people to inter-faith mutual dialogue and how?
THEMATIC AREA 3: Ways of improving primary and secondary education curricula to better promote intra- and inter-religious tolerance and the values of coexistence	
1	What strategies or approaches do you believe should be taught in religion classes to foster inter-religious peaceful dialogue and coexistence?
2	Do you think it would be beneficial to inter-religious dialogue and peaceful coexistence if other religions were taught in religious classes? Why?
3	In your opinion, in what ways can schools improve - besides religious classes - inter-religious religious dialogue and peaceful coexistence between religions?
4	What do you think are the best ways, in school or out of school, to promote peaceful coexistence between religions?
5'	According to you, what could religious/community institutions do and teach more to better sensitize young people to interreligious dialogue and coexistence?
6'	Can you share any success story of your knowledge about religious/community leaders teaching interreligious dialogue and respect?

RESEARCH FINDINGS

The research findings will be presented on the basis of the structure of the KIIs and individual interviews. They will be supported by the predominantly qualitative data extracted from the research, as well as the few interesting quantitative data that can be extracted from the interview reports. We stress that the sample selected is not representative, and that the statistical data extracted cannot indicate a general trend in the population of Ninevah, Bashiqa or even in the social group of religious leaders, teachers or aid workers. The participants' answers were studied in terms of their diversity and what they might explicitly or implicitly signify on the part of those who gave them: the recurrence of this answer among the participants simply made it possible to assess its general weight. The coded data will be presented in the form of bar graphs, the ordinates of which will be the number of groups having given an answer, or at least an answer so close that it can be considered assimilated. Some participants in the KIIs or groups provided more than one response: the sum of all responses therefore almost never equals the number of groups in the FGDs or interviewees in the KIIs. Finally, for reasons of discretion and security, participants, and in particular religious and community leaders, were anonymized.

PART 1: Assessment of the religious content of curricula in terms of promoting inter-religious dialogue¹⁶, peaceful coexistence and mutual respect

The first part of the study focused on assessing the opinions of FGDs and KIIs participants on the quality of religious education at Bashiqa and its ability to consolidate tolerance and inter-religious dialogue in the classroom. It emerged that, while opinions diverge widely on the content of the Islamic curriculum and the way it is delivered, inter-religious peace in the classroom does not seem to suffer particularly, even though pupils seem to show little or no interest in the religions and customs of their peers.

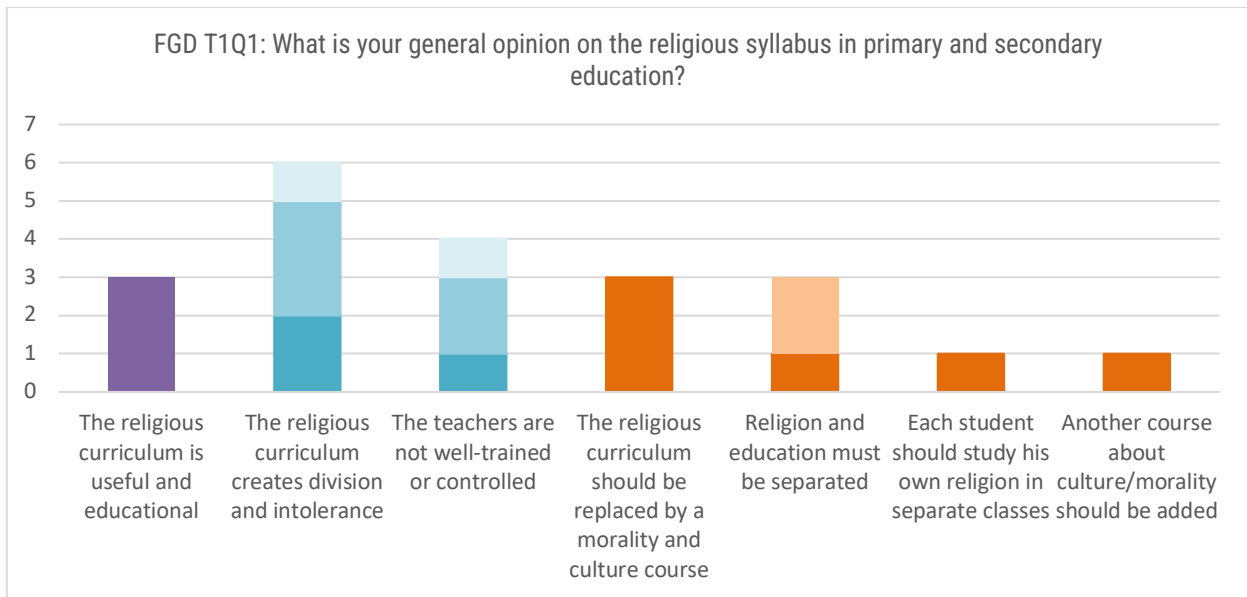
Participants expressed contrasting views on the quality of religious education and its ability to foster peaceful coexistence, demonstrating well-considered personal opinions and criticisms

Whether for KIIs or FGDs, the first questions put to the interviewed audiences concerning the quality of religious education and its ability to foster peaceful coexistence generated varied reactions, demonstrating the lack of consensus on the subject. While a majority of participants expressed confidence in the curriculum's ability to instill principles of tolerance in students, a similar majority were critical of the way in which it was delivered, with criticisms directed at teacher training, infrastructure and the syllabus itself. Finally, participants' hesitations about the presence of minority religions in the religious curriculum betrayed a lack of knowledge about the content of the teaching and initial disagreements about how to approach other faiths.

Contrasting, albeit mostly negative, opinions from participants on the content and teaching of the religious syllabus

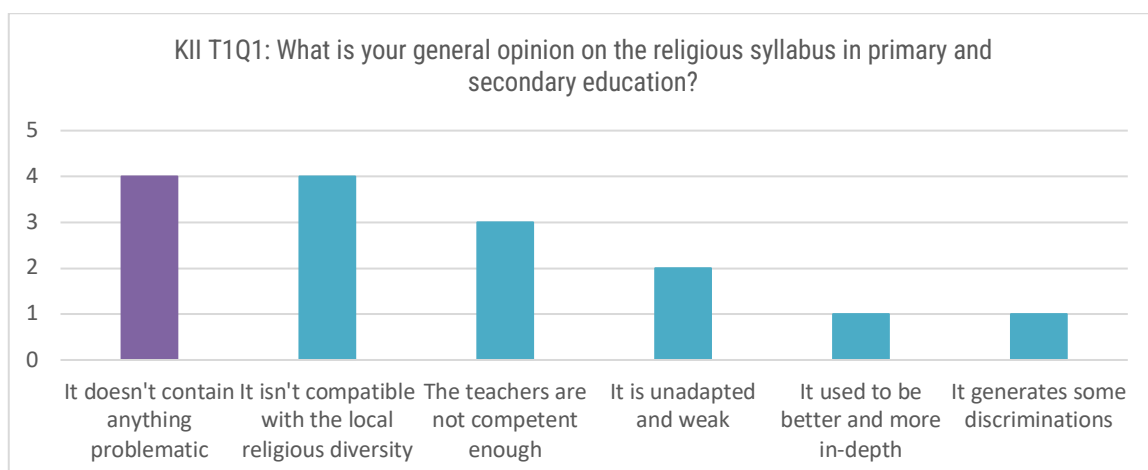
Above all, it seemed that the general opinions of participants in both the FGDs and the KIIs on the religious syllabus were mixed, to say the least, with a majority of negative opinions. In the FGDs, when participants were asked the question T1Q1 "what is your general opinion on the religious syllabus in primary and secondary education?", 6 out of 9 groups supported the idea that "the religious curriculum creates division and intolerance" (67%), while the remaining 3 argued that "the religious curriculum is useful and educational" (33%). Confronted with the same question, KII participants responded broadly along the same lines, with 4 out of 10 interviewees defending the religious balance of the syllabus, saying it "doesn't contain anything problematic", and 6 attacking it on its content and teaching for various reasons. It is interesting to note that KII participants from Muslim backgrounds, whatever their ethnicity, showed a greater propensity to defend the religious curriculum in force in the schools, while participants from minority backgrounds (Christian, Yezidi...) leaned more towards criticizing it.

¹⁶ The study will present in this report mainly inter-religious dialogue. Intra-religious dialogue and tolerance has been addressed during both the FGDs and the KIIs, especially in the case of Sunni and Shia Shabaks, but hasn't proved an eminent topic enough for the participants to be talked of at length here.



	NGO	Teachers	DoE
Positive opinions	3	0	0
Negative opinions	6	4	1
Propositions	3	3	0

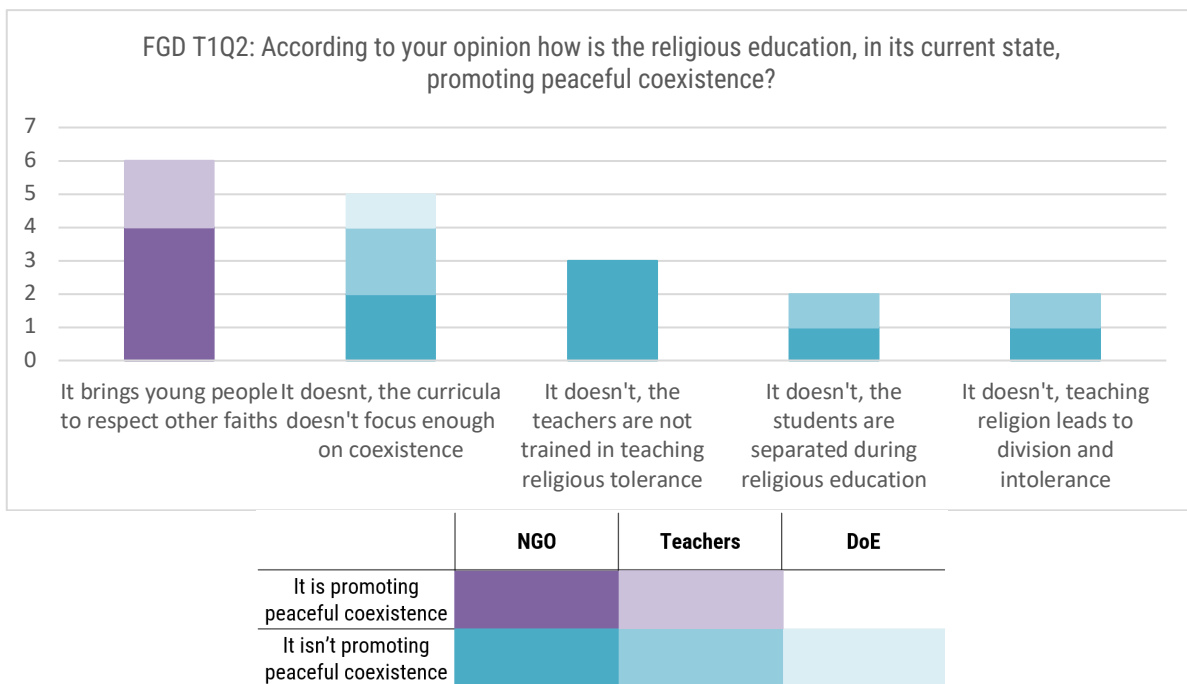
The most frequently voiced criticisms of the curriculum, therefore, center around its incompatibility as an exclusively Muslim religious education with the establishment of effective dialogue with representatives of minority religions, particularly prevalent in Bashiqa and the surrounding area. 4/10 of KII participants said that the curriculum "isn't compatible with the local religious diversity", and 6/9 groups taking part in the FGDs even argued that "the religious curriculum creates division and intolerance". Secondly, a number of groups and interviewees denounced the unpreparedness and incompetence of the teachers themselves in delivering religious courses: this was the case for 3 KII participants and 4 FGD groups, including interestingly 2 of the 3 groups made up of teachers. At the opposite end of the critical spectrum, a lone interviewee was also critical of the content of the Muslim religious curriculum but denounced its superficiality. In his view, a more in-depth study of the Koran and its interpretations - instead of mere recitations - would naturally lead students to grasp the exegetical content of the text, a bearer of peace and tolerance. Finally, a number of FGD participants went beyond the scope of the question to suggest avenues for improvement, as we shall see below. Some suggested that the religion course should be replaced by a "religious morality and culture" course (3 groups), while others proposed a "separation of religion and education" (3 groups).





Overall, opinions are more favorable towards the ability of religious education to foster peaceful coexistence, albeit with a diverse range of criticisms

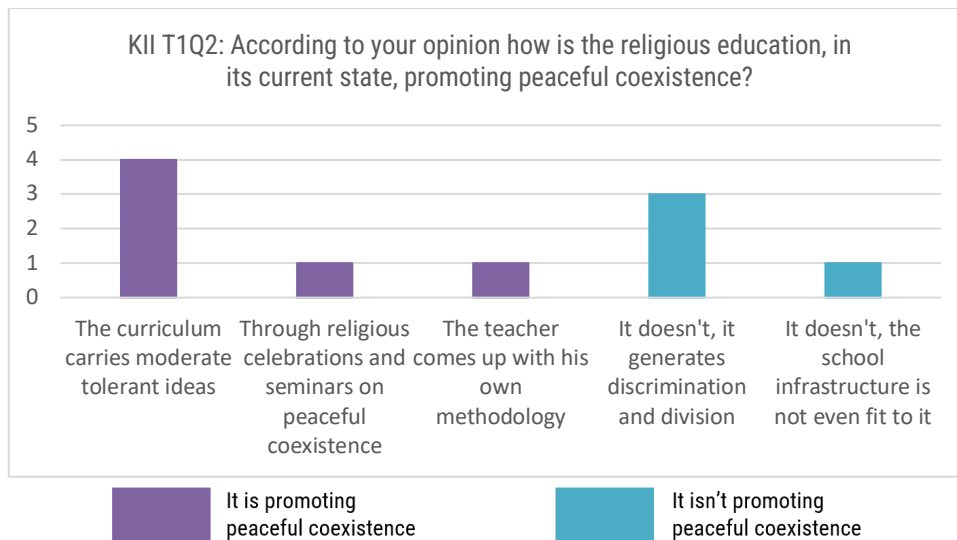
Question T1Q2 shows that this small majority of negative opinions about religious education in primary and secondary schools as a whole coexists with an overall positive opinion of its ability to foster peaceful coexistence. In response to the question "according to your opinion how is the religious education, in its current state, promoting peaceful coexistence?", 6 groups of FGDs responded by arguing that it was doing so, compared with 5 who argued the opposite¹⁷. The same is true of KII interviewees, who answered 6 to 4 that the curriculum "carries moderate tolerant ideas". It's also worth noting that, while there was no particular difference of opinion between the groups made up of NGO workers and national education teachers and administrators, the divide between Muslim religious leaders and those of minority religions was repeated, with the latter arguing overwhelmingly and for a variety of reasons that religious education does not help promote peaceful coexistence. Nonetheless, this small positive majority of participants for the ability of the religious syllabus to consolidate inter-religious dialogue confirms that some of the negative opinions expressed in the previous question on the religious syllabus in its entirety (T1Q1) were based on third-party elements, be it teacher training or the content of religious instruction. Indeed, a not inconsiderable number - perhaps a majority in a representative sample - of religious leaders, members of civil society and members of Bashiqa's teaching and administrative staff remain convinced that the religious syllabus in primary and secondary education as such not only contains nothing problematic in terms of tolerance but helps to build it.



Through its primary meaning - how? - this question also enables us to shed light on why participants believe that religious education fosters peaceful coexistence. We can see that the answers were distributed around 3 axes: the curriculum as such, the teachers and their pedagogy, and the school infrastructure. Firstly, the majority of responses focused on the content of the syllabus, as seen above, with 6 groups and 4 interviewees arguing that it is suitable for teaching tolerance and 5 groups and 3 interviewees arguing the opposite. But as in the previous question, the ability of teachers to carry out this mission - and their training to this end - was called into question, specifically by three groups participating in the FGDs and one participant in the KIIs, who, in arguing that teachers

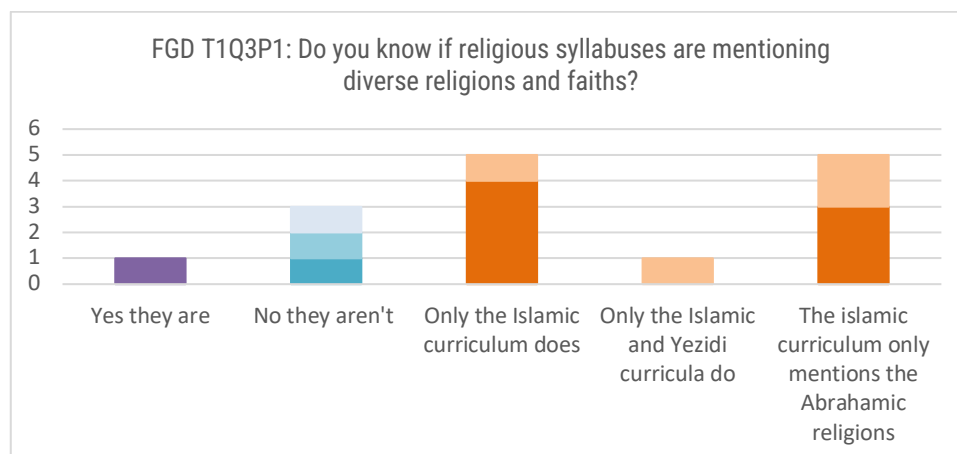
¹⁷ In a rare occurrence, 2 groups decidedly split into two camps defending opposing opinions. We've noticed that this rarely happens, as the groups often arrive at relatively homogeneous opinions in the course of the discussion.

arrived at a methodology for teaching tolerance on their own, incidentally denounced the absence of prior training. Finally, the negative impact of school infrastructures was criticized (2 groups and 1 interviewee): by distinguishing students wishing to take religion classes from others, they create a religious segregation harmful to dialogue, all the more so as schools are often not equipped to accommodate objectors in the meantime.



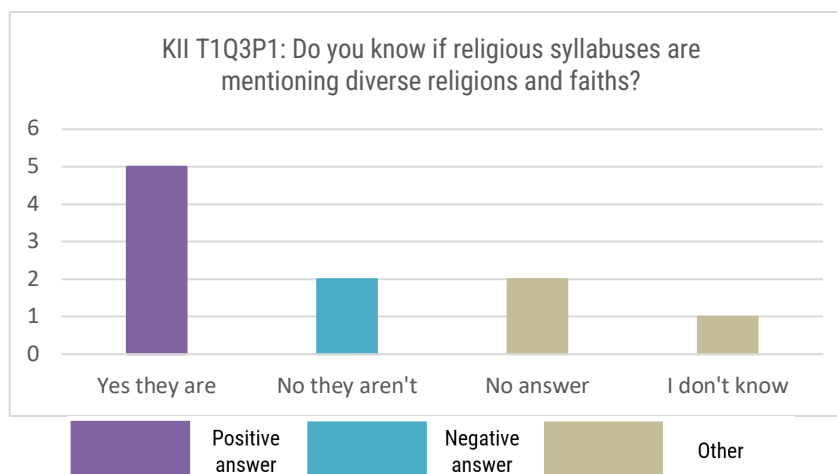
Apparent hesitation over the treatment of minority religions in Islamic teaching, giving way to personal interpretations of the latter

Although official public religious education is exclusively Islamic, it naturally leads, more or less explicitly, to deal with the subject of other Abrahamic religions from at least a historical and dogmatic point of view¹⁸. It is therefore surprising that the responses to the first part of question T1Q3 "do you know if religious syllabuses are mentioning diverse religions and faiths?" were as fractured as they appeared. While a majority of participants seemed to answer in the affirmative - whether with a straightforward "yes" (1 group, 5 interviewees) or with distinctions between religious syllabuses (5 groups) - several others claimed that such mentions do not exist in religious courses (3 groups, 2 interviewees). More specifically, a number of FGD participants (5 groups) stated either that "the Islamic curriculum mentions the Abrahamic religions", or that "only the Islamic curriculum does", in the latter case leaving room for doubt as to whether non-Abrahamic religions such as Yarsanism or Yezidism are mentioned. By way of explanation for these divisions, even within the teaching staff interviewed, we can underline the importance of the input of the religion teachers themselves, who may in the freedom offered by the classroom decide to tackle the subject of third-party religions in one way or another: and if this seems to be the case relatively often for Abrahamic religions, it seems less common for non-Abrahamic faiths.



¹⁸ Even more since the 2012 reforms which explicitly includes in the textbooks mentions of the other Abrahamic faiths.

	NGO	Teachers	DoE
Positive answer	5	0	0
Negative answer	2	2	1
Other	2	2	0



The answers to the second part of the question "if so, how are they presented?" suffered from the lack of representativeness of the samples, and possibly from the lack of direct knowledge of the interviewees, especially at the KIIs. This made it difficult to extract particularly contrasting views from different socio-professional groups. Overall, participants in both the FGDs and the KIIs - particularly Muslims - focused less on the content of religious education in primary and secondary schools, and more on the intrinsic tolerance they perceive in the Muslim religion. For them, for example, Islamic religious teaching leads to the perception of members of other religions as "brothers and partners in the same land" or "people worthy of respect". One of the religious leaders interviewed even quoted a famous hadith such as "whoever harms a dhimmi¹⁹ I shall be his foe on the Day of Judgement".

The double invisibility of minority religions: no diversity management in schools and a general lack of awareness among young people of other faiths

It emerged from the research that everything happens in schools as if minority religions didn't exist: even though pupils are excluded from religion classes, no policy or infrastructure is dedicated to them, and teacher training contains no dedicated component. The participants were keen to point out, however, that apart from the segregation created by the religious courses, there is no segregation between pupils on the school premises. Apart from this, the participants were very pessimistic about young people's level of knowledge of their peers' religions, pointing out that it would be mainly through their friends and religious leaders that they should become aware of them.

While participants reported that diversity management policies were virtually non-existent in schools, they insisted on equal treatment for all students

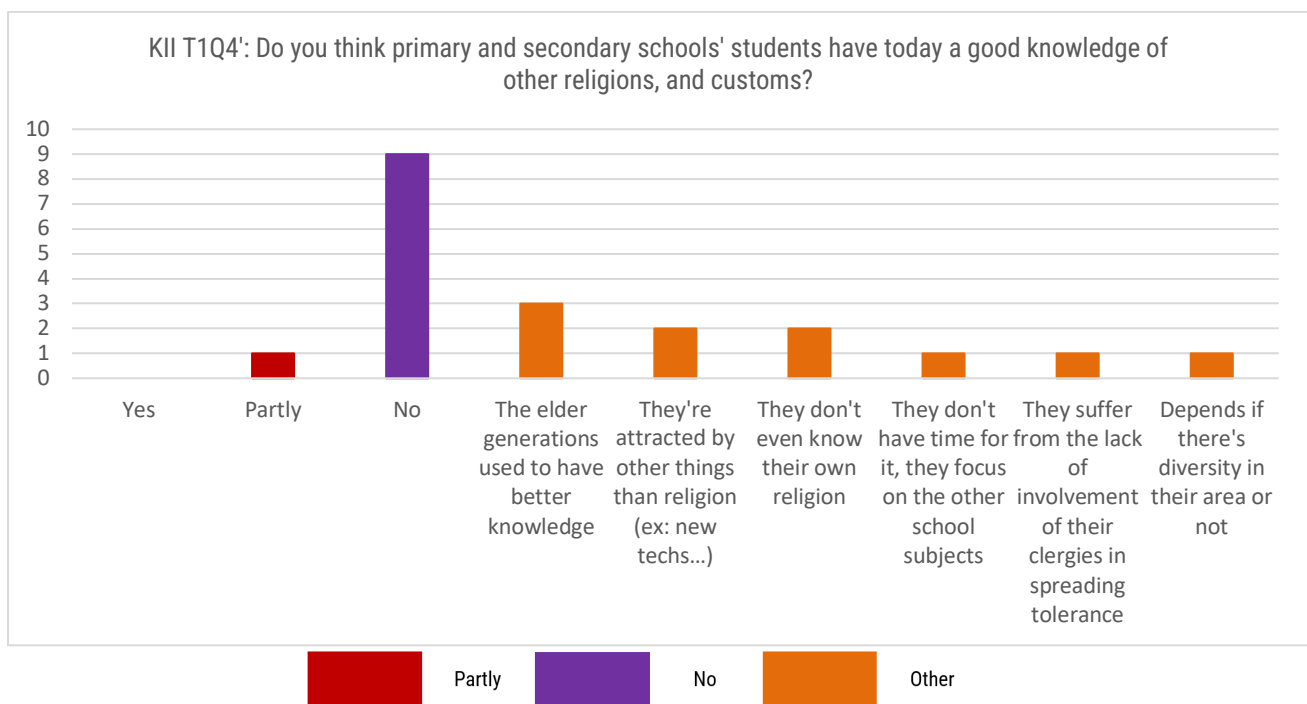
Specifically addressed to groups participating in the FGDs, question T1Q4' "do you know if the teachers are trained in diversity management (promoting inclusion in the classroom)? If yes, what they've been taught

¹⁹ In Islamic law and tradition, a "dhimmi" is a non-Muslim living in the land of Islam, enjoying a stable legal status and protected against the payment of a tax, the "jaziya".

regarding this matter?" raised unanimous responses: all the groups who answered the question, whether they were members of NGOs, teachers or DoE administrators, answered "no" (8 groups, the last of which did not express an opinion). One of these groups went into further detail, stating that teachers learn "on the job", refuting the equivalence between a lack of formal training in diversity management and an inability to enforce it in the classroom. It should be noted, however, that the same group replied to the second part of the question that the lesson they felt the teachers had learned from this on-the-ground training was to "stay as much as possible away from religion". Finally, in the course of the ensuing discussion, and on the bangs of the questions explicitly posed, 7 groups supported statements such as it was "preferable" or even "absolutely necessary" to "train the teachers in diversity management and promoting inclusion and peaceful coexistence in the classroom". This conclusion seems to concur with that of the academic literature, which has widely identified the importance of diversity management in the classroom for the learning and balanced development of children in contexts of ethno-religious plurality, and has explored in depth the practical and theoretical paths that teachers should follow to put it into practice (Sherpa, 2020).

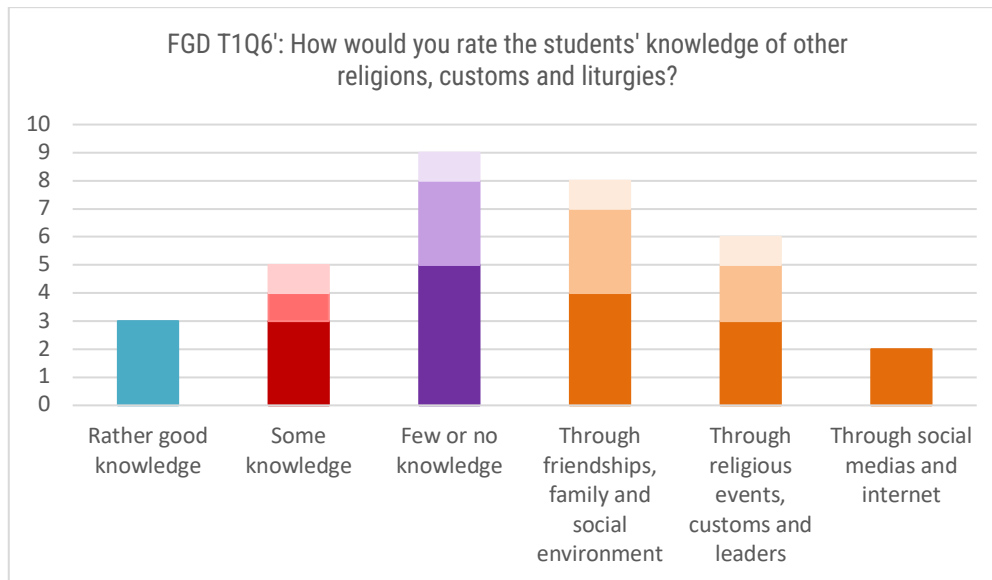
Schools' failure to take diversity management into account therefore seems to be due to a lack of teacher training, but also to the inadequacy or non-existence of internal school policies and school infrastructures in the face of the existence of ethno-religious plurality among pupils. For example, The fact that students of religions other than the religion lesson being taught at that specific time have to wait outside the classroom without a dedicated area until the end of religion class had been mentioned earlier in question T1Q2, and reappeared in question FGD T1Q5 "do schools have a policy/infrastructures to include students from other religions. That said, it's worth noting that apart from the specific case of the practical consequences of religious education, all the groups maintained that "there is no separation or distinction of students on the basis of religion".

A general low opinion of students' knowledge of their peers' religions, which participants see as a contemporary evil



Discussions with participants in the FGDs and KIIs revealed that they generally have a poor or very poor opinion of primary and secondary school students' level of knowledge of religions other than their own. Significantly, all religious leaders, whatever their faith, answered "no" to the KII T1Q4 question "do you think primary and secondary schools' students today have a good knowledge of other religions, and customs?", apart from one interviewee who answered "partly". Similarly, all groups who took part in the FGDs at least partially defended the idea that students have "little or no knowledge" "of other religions, customs and liturgies" (FGD T1Q6'), with a

high prevalence of the school teachers and administrators at the DoE. It should also be noted that participants in 5 groups argued against the others that students have "some knowledge" of other religions, and that participants in 3 groups maintained that their knowledge is "rather good". Critically, it seems natural that pessimism about young people's religious knowledge in general should come from religious leaders themselves: specialists in a field generally seem quickest to perceive the shortcomings of others in it. Although also present among observers of civil society and education, this critical view is nevertheless more tempered among them and, to some extent, perhaps more objective.



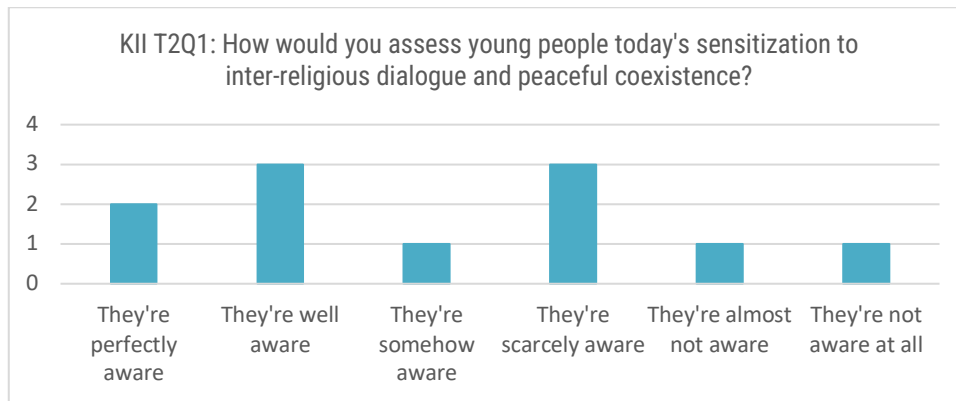
		NGO	Teachers	DoE
Knowledge	Rather good	3	0	0
	Some	3	2	2
	Few or no	5	3	2
Channels		4	3	2

Once the discussion was underway, participants in both the KIIs and the FGDs offered additional comments on the subject, either to deepen or explain the phenomenon. In particular, it emerged from the interviews that the elder generation would have "a better knowledge" of the religions, customs and liturgies of people of other faiths: the DoE administrative group and 3 interviewees supported this remark. One Kakai religious leader went further, explaining that in the past, Bashiq'a's inhabitants attached a bygone importance to the concept of "kreev", the act of choosing a brother from another religion (he himself is said to have several). To explain this generational loss of knowledge, two participants – Shabak and Yezidi – put forward the fact that young people today are "attracted by other things than religion", citing new technologies in passing, while others put forward the lack of time - "they focus on the other school subjects" - or the "lack of involvement of their clergies in spreading tolerance". Finally, the religious leader who had preferred to see that pupils had "partly" a good knowledge of other religions qualified his peers' remarks, explaining that young people's level of knowledge depended very much on "if there's diversity in their area or not". This would corroborate the probing remarks of the FGDs participants, who had focused on describing the channels through which students were made aware of religions other than their own, and who had emphasized social, family and friendship ties, as will be seen later in this report.

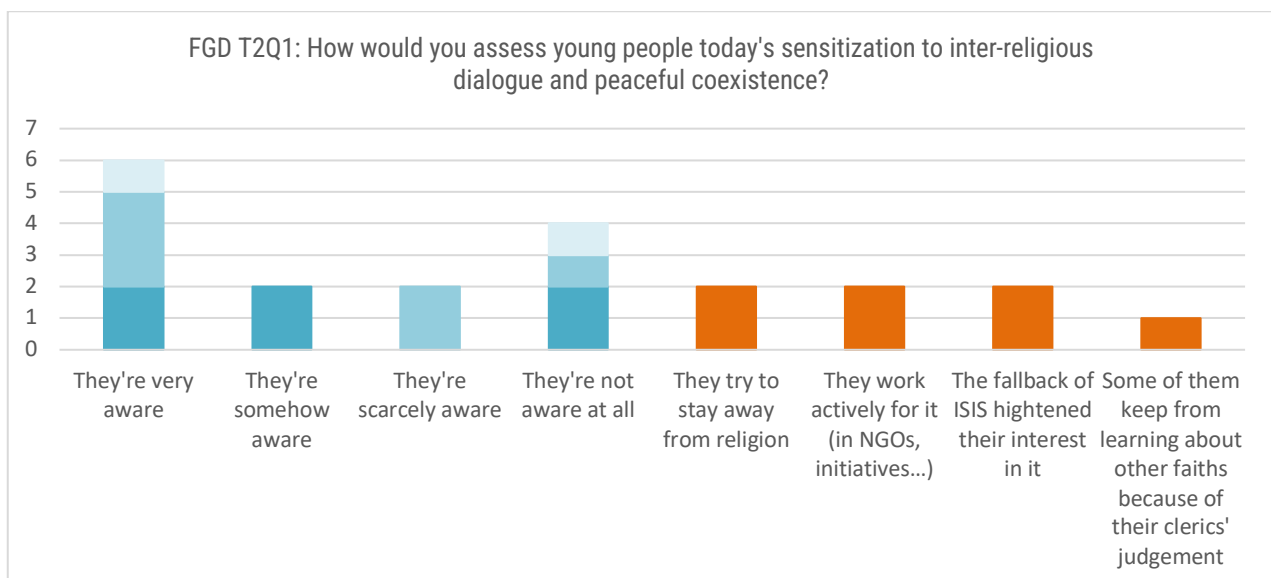
PART 2: The role of non-formal education in promoting inter-religious peaceful coexistence and mutual respect

The second part of the research focused on young people's awareness of inter-religious tolerance and, above all, its origins, whether inside or outside the classroom. It found that, while the question of how much tolerance young people should be aware of divided the participants, they were united in identifying a group of key players who should be more active in it, from civil society to religious institutions to the individual.

Two extremes of opinion on the question of young people's awareness about the importance of inter-religious dialogue



Paradoxically, while at the end of part 1 of the questions the participants had resolutely affirmed that young people knew little about the religions of their peers, opinions on their sensitization to inter-religious dialogue and peaceful coexistence are far more contrasted, and even rather positive. This is what emerges from the first question of the second part (T2Q1) "How would you assess young people today's sensitization to inter-religious dialogue and peaceful coexistence? The religious leaders questioned at the KIIs, in particular, were particularly scattered in their opinions, ranging from "they're perfectly aware" to "they're not aware at all". Two short relative majorities of responses (3 interviewees) were thus concentrated around "they're well aware" and "they're scarcely aware": despite everything, a wide variety of opinions emerged from these ten interviews on this subject, without the nature of their religion appearing to be a determining factor. In the case of the FGDs, this dispersion even took on a polarized aspect, with the few median responses giving way to opinions such as "they're very aware" (6 groups) and "they're not aware at all" (4 groups). Interestingly, all the groups of teachers, who are on the front line of young people's opinions, supported the fact that young people are highly aware, although there was no unanimity within their groups.



	NGO	Teachers	DoE
Assessment			
Other			

Equally polarized, the explanations offered by participants in support of their opinions reveal deeply contrasting analyses of how awareness of inter-religious dialogue has evolved from generation to generation. At both the FGDs and the KIIs, opinions maintaining that older generations were much more aware of the importance of inter-religious peace clashed head-on with opinions believing, on the contrary, that today's young people are all the more sensitive to it because they have experienced first-hand the consequences of intolerance via the ISIS occupation. Similarly, some FGD participants identified that although young people are sensitive to the importance of inter-religious tolerance, they don't know how to get involved in defending and reinforcing it; on the contrary, examples of initiatives in this field abounded during the KIIs with religious leaders. Finally, while two groups argued that young people "try to stay away from religion", two others praised "the active work" that young people are doing in the field of inter-faith dialogue.

For the participants, the school is only one of the fundamental actors in promoting inter-religious dialogue: civil society, religious, traditional and public institutions and social circles also play an important role, albeit partial

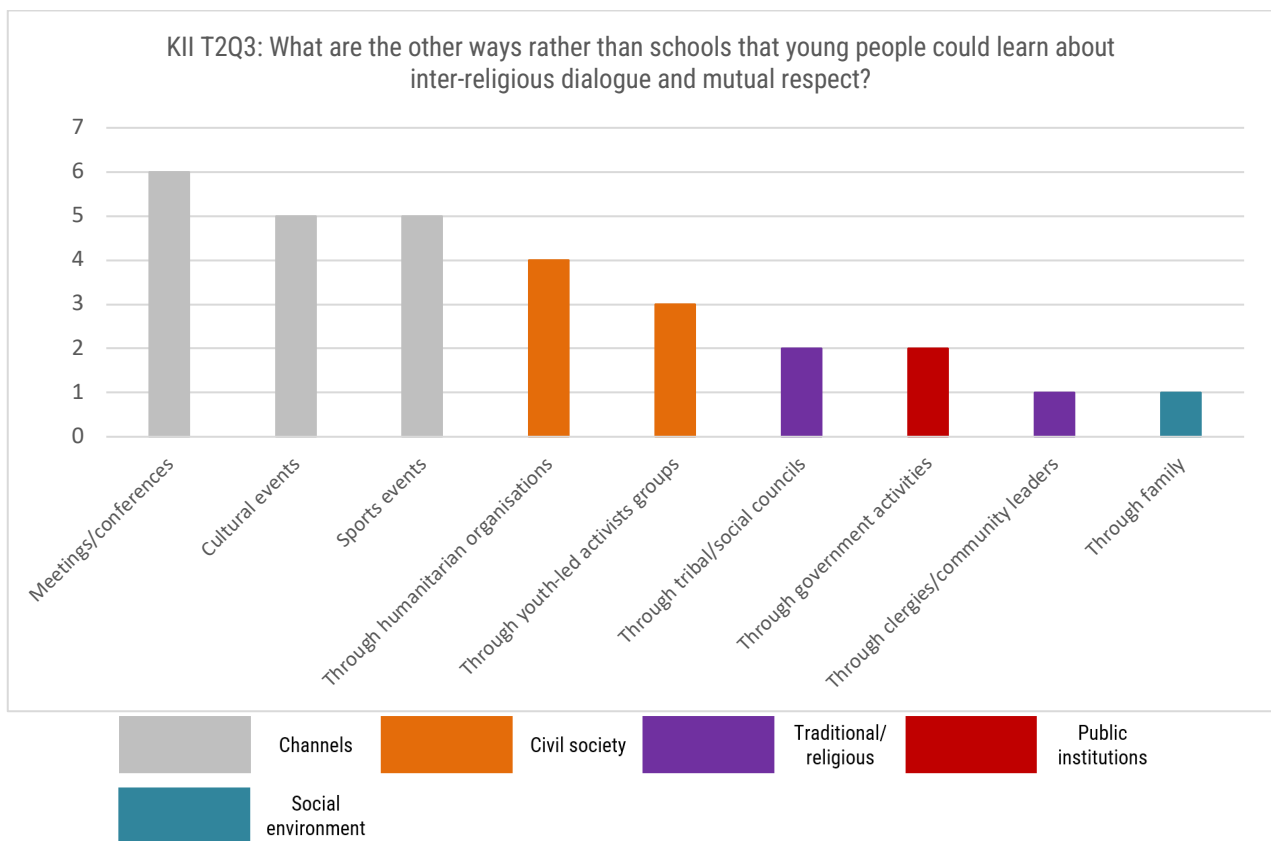
The question that arose following the assessment of young people's level of awareness of inter-religious tolerance is that of the actors: who is currently active in Bashiqa in promoting dialogue between faiths? While the school seems to play an undisputed role in this respect for the participants, they also pointed to other sets of actors who have or could have a positive impact in this area. There are four of these, ranging from the most to the least mentioned: civil society, religious and traditional institutions, public authorities and direct social circles. The various anecdotes of successful initiatives on their part in the field of peaceful coexistence, in addition to reinforcing this hierarchy, also enabled us to enrich our definition of inter-religious dialogue. In this way, we were able to understand which of the three levels of inter-religious dialogue were involved in Bashiqa's activities, and which of its components seemed to be ignored by local participants and actors in inter-religious dialogue.

There was unanimous agreement that schools play a fundamental role in the moral education of young people, and that it is therefore their duty to deploy every possible means to raise awareness of the importance of tolerance within their walls

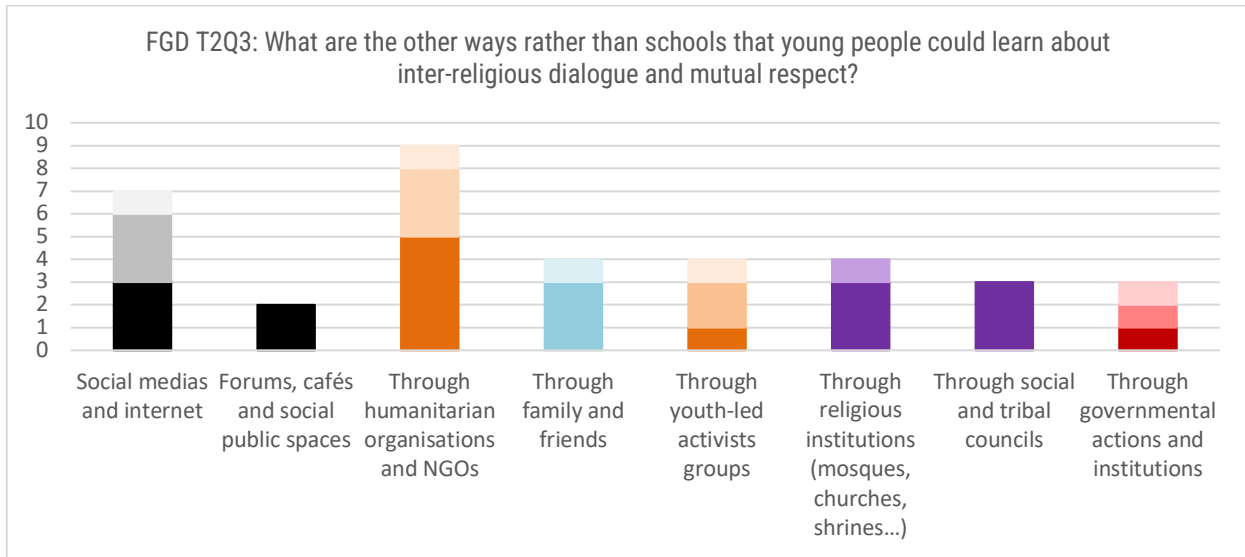
Participants were unanimous on the importance of schools in educating young people about tolerance and dialogue between religions. Thus, 9 out of 10 interviewees supported the positive when asked "in your opinion, is it the role of schools to teach inter-religious dialogue, peaceful coexistence and mutual respect? Why so?" (T2Q2); only one religious leader argued "not compulsorily", pointing to the importance of other actors and vectors. Similarly, without exception, all FGD groups were equally in the "yes" camp. Furthermore, when asked why, the vast majority of KIIs and FGDs participants argued that "school is central in the education of youth", justifying the fact that it is through this vector that tolerance awareness should be raised. 4 groups of FGDs went even further, describing school as "the nucleus of society", a status which confers on it specific responsibilities in the area of student morality, and therefore a duty to promote inter-religious dialogue. Finally, two interviewees clarified their thoughts by adding that, while it was indeed the school's responsibility to make young people aware of peaceful coexistence, "it shouldn't be done only in religious classes but in all of them". The question of whether or not schools should play a role in educating young people to be tolerant did not provoke any particular debate but gave way to an indisputable consensus.

The participants' responses made it possible to draw a hierarchy of the other actors active in inter-religious dialogue in terms of recognition of their actions, from members of civil society to family and friendship circles, via traditional and religious institutions and public authorities

Questions T2Q3 and T2Q4 respectively "what are the other ways rather than schools that young people could learn about inter-religious dialogue and mutual respect?" and "which other actors rather than school play an important role in advancing interreligious dialogue and peaceful coexistence?" were designed to shed specific light on the channels and actors other than education and school via which young people are currently made aware of tolerance, in the specific context of the city of Bashiqa and its surroundings. In the event, it became clear that the question of channels had little impact on the participants, who preferred to list the various players they knew to be locally involved in inter-religious dialogue. To make the responses more readable, we divided them into four categories, each associated with a color: civil society actors in orange (NGOs, humanitarian organizations), traditional and/or religious institutions in purple (clergy, tribal councils, councils of notables, community leaders), public institutions in red (public and cultural organizations, government figures) and components of the social environment in blue (family, friends, social networks...). As we are about to see, participants generally attributed a decreasing importance in the field of inter-religious dialogue first to civil society, then to traditional/religious institutions and finally to public institutions, with the social environment appearing to have a fluid place in the responses.

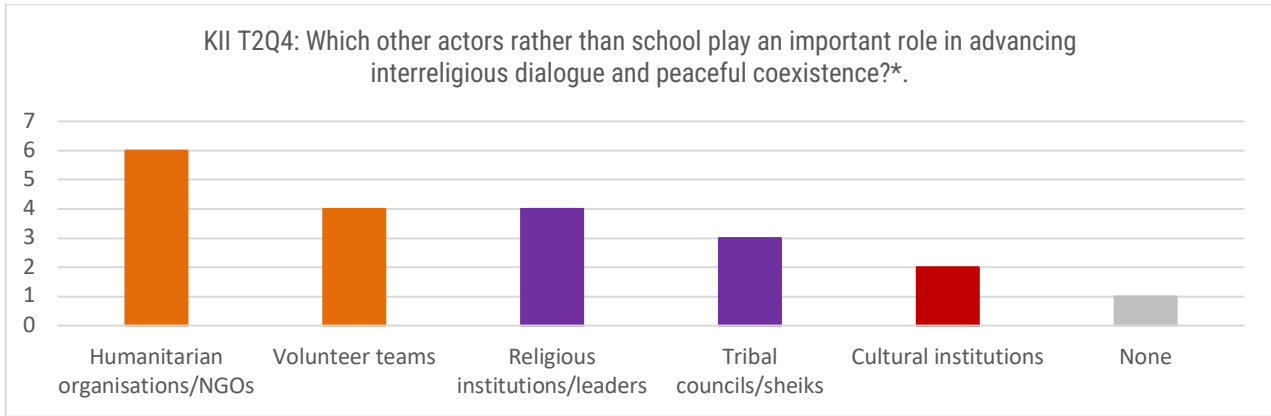


To question T2Q3 "what are the other ways rather than schools that young people could learn about inter-religious dialogue and mutual respect?", the responses revealed five main channels through which the players studied below interact with and educate young audiences. These were "meetings and conferences" (6 participants), "cultural events" (5 participants), "sports events" (5 participants), "social medias and internet" (7 groups) and "forums, cafés and social public spaces" (2 groups). We'll see later in question T2Q5 that this fine diversity of responses is based directly on the experience of the participants, who were able to cite several interesting examples of each of these types of events on the theme of religious coexistence having taken place in the past in Bashiqa. In the meantime, we can see that these answers are articulated around specific temporary events, or around places of physical or digital socialization.



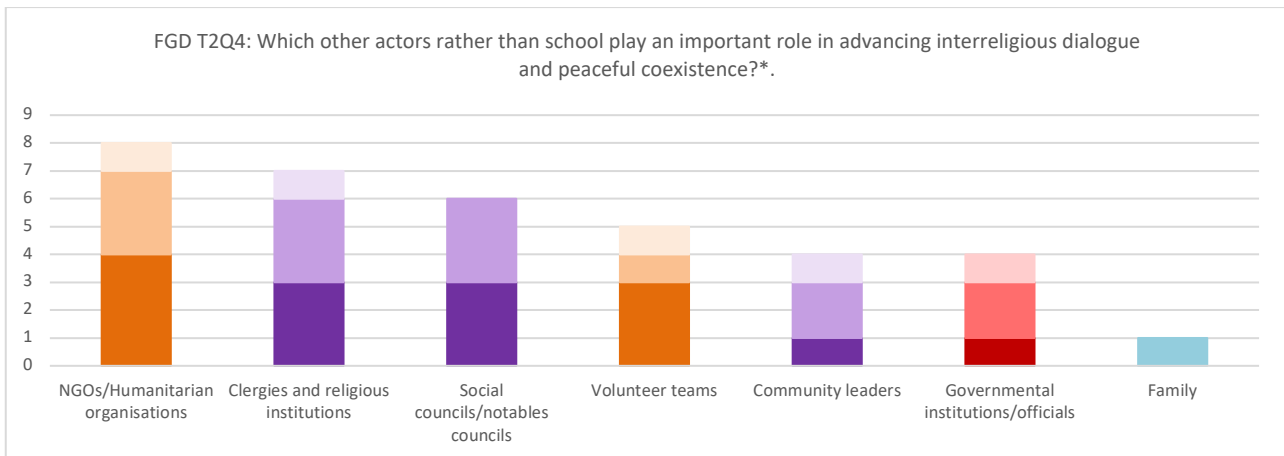
	NGO	Teachers	DoE
Channels	Black	Grey	Light Grey
Civil society	Orange	Light Orange	Light Orange
Social environment	White	Light Blue	Light Blue
Traditional/religious institutions	Purple	Light Purple	Light Purple
Public institutions	Red	Light Red	Light Red

Interestingly, participants in both the KIIs and the FGDs developed their answers to this question in such a way as to deal with the actors of inter-religious dialogue, the subject of the following question T2Q4. In the results of both T2Q3 and T2Q4, we can see that a hierarchy of actors seems to emerge, depending on the level of recognition of their actions. This hierarchy is found in all the answers to both questions, whether they come from religious leaders or FGD groups. Thus, the actors mentioned almost unanimously each time are above all the NGOs/humanitarian organizations, represented in orange: they are named respectively by 4 interviewees and the 9 FGD groups in question T2Q3, and by 6 leaders and 8 groups in T2Q4. Bashiqa's civil society, which we know to be particularly active in the first person, thus seems to see its action fairly generally recognized among the participants in our interviews, and particularly among the religious leaders of minority faiths: one of the interviewees thus particularly highlighted their commitment by declaring that "the NGOs are doing effective efforts and initiatives and useful meetings to promote peaceful coexistence and interfaith dialogue, and instill confidence in the souls of everyone". This statement can be tempered, however, if we take into account the words of another minority religious leader, who argued that "some humanitarian organisations exploit the topics of peaceful coexistence to obtain fundings, sometimes without serious or plans". Finally, participants also repeatedly highlighted the activity of youth-led activist groups or "volunteer teams" (between 3 and 5 participants/groups for each question), completing the picture of a local civil society particularly active in the field of inter-religious dialogue, and highly appreciated for it.



*The same color code as above (KII T2Q3) is applied.

As for traditional and religious institutions (shown here in purple), they were generally only mentioned later, and usually in the form of two distinct groups: religious institutions and leaders (clergy, places of worship...) and community leaders and social councils (including notables and tribal councils). With the exception of the KIIs in question T2Q3, the former were mentioned more than the latter, possibly indicating - although this sample is not representative - greater recognition on the part of religious authorities' activism than traditional social authorities' in promoting peaceful coexistence. Note, moreover, the absence of any tendency on the part of the various social groups surveyed to express themselves more or less about these actors. Thirdly, and often in a relatively small minority, participants mentioned the investment of public authorities (in shades of red), generally remaining relatively vague about their own nature. Thus, in question T2Q3, two participants in the KIIs and 3 groups who took part in the FGDs recognized "governmental activities" and "governmental actions". Interestingly, two religious leaders clarified their thoughts in question T2Q4, mentioning the activities carried out by public cultural institutions to promote tolerance between faiths. It's worth noting, however, that the small number of actors of this type - in the case of the KIIs, exclusively minorities - and the general vagueness surrounding their precise identity seem to betray a secondary commitment on their part, or at least little recognition of the benefits of their activities.



*The same color code as above (KII T2Q3) is applied.

Finally, some of the groups who took part in the FGDs - as well as a religious leader interviewed during the KIIs - emphasized the importance of the direct social environment, i.e. family and friends, in raising young people's awareness of inter-religious tolerance. Interestingly, these responses came exclusively from the groups made up of teachers and DoE members (4 at FGD T2Q3 and 1 at FGD T2Q2), who by the nature of their duties are naturally more in contact with young people and are therefore in a prime position to know the actors influencing their attitudes towards other religions. Indeed, it seems astonishing that family and friendship circles, which play a fundamental role in the upbringing of children, were bypassed in this way by the other participants: perhaps their relative distance from them by the nature of their functions made them prefer answers that were more

institutional than inter-personal.

Anecdotal evidence of successful initiatives in the field of inter-religious dialogue overlaps with the mapping of stakeholder groups above, and feeds into the definition of inter-religious dialogue

The examples and anecdotes of these initiatives provided by participants in question T2Q5 "in your experience, what are some successful examples (outside of school) of interreligious dialogue initiatives or projects that have positively impacted society?" corroborate this hierarchization we have arrived at of interreligious dialogue actors according to their activism. The majority of examples of initiatives implemented in Bashiqā, whether among the anecdotes of interviewees or groups of FGDs, were by humanitarian organizations or NGOs. One group of NGO workers was particularly prolific in citing examples of NGO initiatives, such as cycles of visits to places of worship organized by the Peace & Freedom Organisation, or the publication of a book on the commonalities between religions by the Mercy Corps. Themselves part of the civil society, independent volunteer groups have also seen their action recognized by a Yezidi religious leader, who gave the example of the recurrent organization of dance parties (dabké) open to all. Finally, another Chabak interviewee was also keen to celebrate the investment of the population at large - in the most open sense of civil society - in tolerance and peace, citing as an example the celebrations organized by Mosul residents in Bashiqā to celebrate the return of its inhabitants after the final defeat of ISIS.

With almost the same frequency as for civil society players, participants recounted specific initiatives led by local religious and traditional authorities, in various forms. Both KIIs and FGDs welcomed a wealth of anecdotes about religious events organized by local clergy on the theme of tolerance and sharing, and open to members of all Bashiqā faiths. To cite just a few examples: an iftar dinner organized at the Marcorkis Christian complex, a multi-faith visit to Imam Reza's mausoleum organized by the Shia clergy, the participation of members of minorities in Ashura processions... In direct contact with the faithful, religious leaders seem to be ideally placed to mobilize large groups in peace-promoting initiatives likely to benefit from good visibility. Less numerous, some acts attributed to traditional social authorities (social councils) were nevertheless mentioned, such as the intervention of the Yezidi council of Bashiqā to punish a young Yezidi guilty of anti-Muslim provocation (he had spilled a bottle of wine on the square of a mosque). It should be noted, however, that like this example, these acts are less a matter of voluntary activism to promote inter-religious dialogue than of positive reaction to an external fait accompli. In the words of the participants, the activism of traditional authorities does not seem to be comparable to that of religious leaders and clergy, which appears to be quite predominant.

Finally, the actions of public authorities and social circles (friends and family) were also noted, albeit with less frequency. The group of DoE administrators stressed that the local government pursues a policy of religious non-discrimination in employment²⁰, and a group of NGO workers shared an anecdote about how tolerance is promoted in the academic world (in the University of Erbil). Interviewees at the KIIs, meanwhile, focused on the small-scale initiatives taking place on a daily basis between members of different religions, whether sharing meals or common ceremonies (weddings, funerals...) taking place daily among the inhabitants of Bashiqā.

Finally, as one religious leader pointed out at the KII, all these initiatives can be divided into two categories according to their *raison d'être*: cultural initiatives with a religious theme (visits to places of worship) or non-religious sharing initiatives (communal meals, dancing...). Interestingly, none of them - with the possible exception of the publication of the Mercy Corps book on different religions - was based on the principle of inter-religious dialogue in its mediation component, i.e. "a conversation between two or more people with different religious traditions in order to express their opinion freely and mediate differences". (Center for Intercultural Dialogue, 2020). This observation, as well as the various academic definitions of the concept of "inter-religious dialogue", can enrich our approach to this concept, which, according to our observations, comprises three main levels:

- The physical encounter between believers of different religions with the aim of social mixing: this is what is pursued by non-religious joint events (meals, parties, etc.);

²⁰ However, this seems to be contradicted by the studies mentioned above.

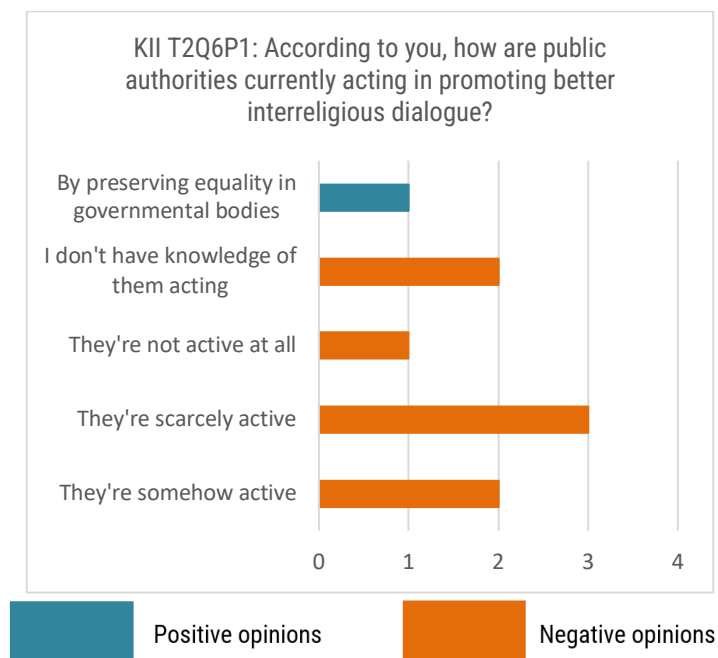
- The learning by the faithful of the values, beliefs and practices of their peers from different religions: this is the aim of cultural initiatives with religious themes;
- Direct and free mediation between members of different religions, caused by their different practices and faiths: no examples of this level have been recorded.

In conclusion, let's note the insight of one of the KIIs interviewees, whose experience in the field led him to the following conclusion: "I don't remember any successful example that address inter-religious dialogue seriously. There are meetings, seminars and cultural events, but they do not talk about the fundamental matters that we disagree on with others".

Divergent opinions on the energy deployed by public and religious actors in the inter-faith dialogue give way to investment at the individual level by the inhabitants of Bashiqra

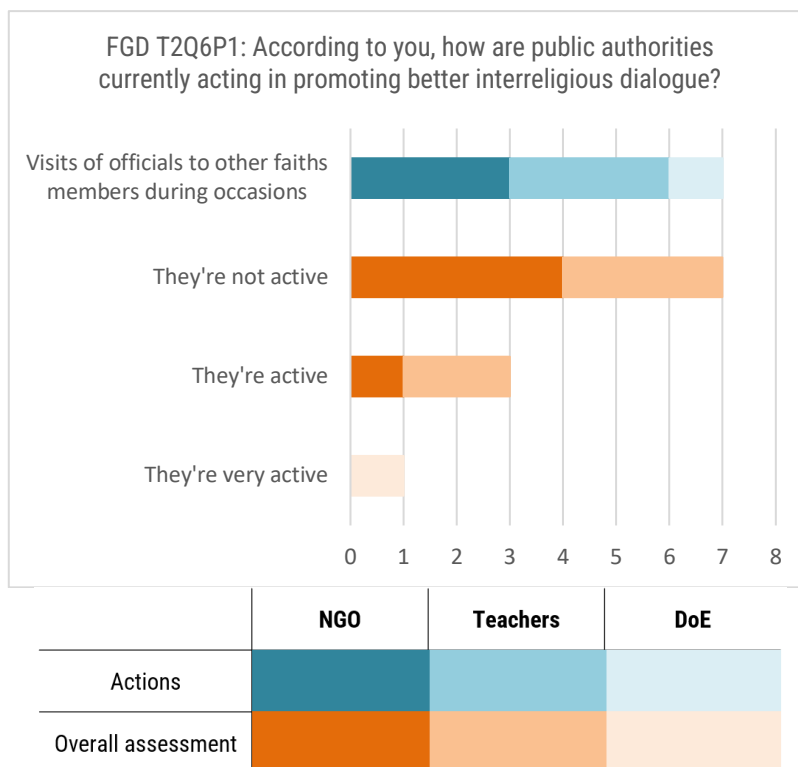
Despite having identified many players who could take part in inter-religious dialogue in Bashiqra, participants in the FGDs and KIIs were nonetheless critical of the effectiveness of the role they currently play. This was particularly true of the public authorities, whose energy in this area was generally judged to be weak and insufficient. This was less the case with religious and traditional authorities, whose investment was better appreciated by the religious leaders themselves, with all the risk of bias that this entails. In both cases, however, participants put forward a list of ideas for boosting the activity of these institutions, which proved to be particularly rich and diverse. They would recommend that the local government increase its expertise in this important field, reform its problematic practices from within before stepping up its activism with the local population and arm itself with new mechanisms to crack down on intolerance and discrimination. Likewise, they suggested that religious authorities, in addition to their traditional role of promoting peace and tolerance between faiths, should become more involved, and modify their communication habits with the faithful to this same end. Finally, the participants showed that they not only expected more from the various local authorities, but also demanded more from everyone, stressing the importance of personal investment in each of their social circles: family, professional, religious, etc.

Half-hearted investment by public authorities, which could be increased and diversified in many different ways



First and foremost, the general opinion of KII and FGD participants on the investment of public authorities in inter-religious dialogue seems to be that it is particularly weak. None of the religious leaders who took part in the KIIs gave a more positive answer than "they're somehow active" (2 participants); a small relative majority

declared that "they're scarcely active" (3 participants) and a large proportion did not express an opinion on the subject. This assessment is all the more striking in the results of the FGDs: 7 groups out of 9 declared that "they're not active", 3 argued that "they're active" and only one defended that "they're very active". Interestingly, as workers for the public authorities, professors and DoE members were probably subject to a slight bias which led them to have a better opinion on average of government investment in the field of inter-religious tolerance. It's also worth noting that this "how?" question was generally greeted as a request for a personal assessment of the energy deployed by the authorities in inter-religious dialogue, rather than an invitation to provide well-known examples. One religious leader mentioned the fact that the authorities are active "by preserving equality in government bodies", but 7 groups defended the fact that official figures make "visits to other faiths members during occasions". However, this welcome recognition does not help enhance a balance sheet that appears negative overall: for the participants, the public authorities are guilty of being little or non-active in the field of inter-religious dialogue in Bashiq.



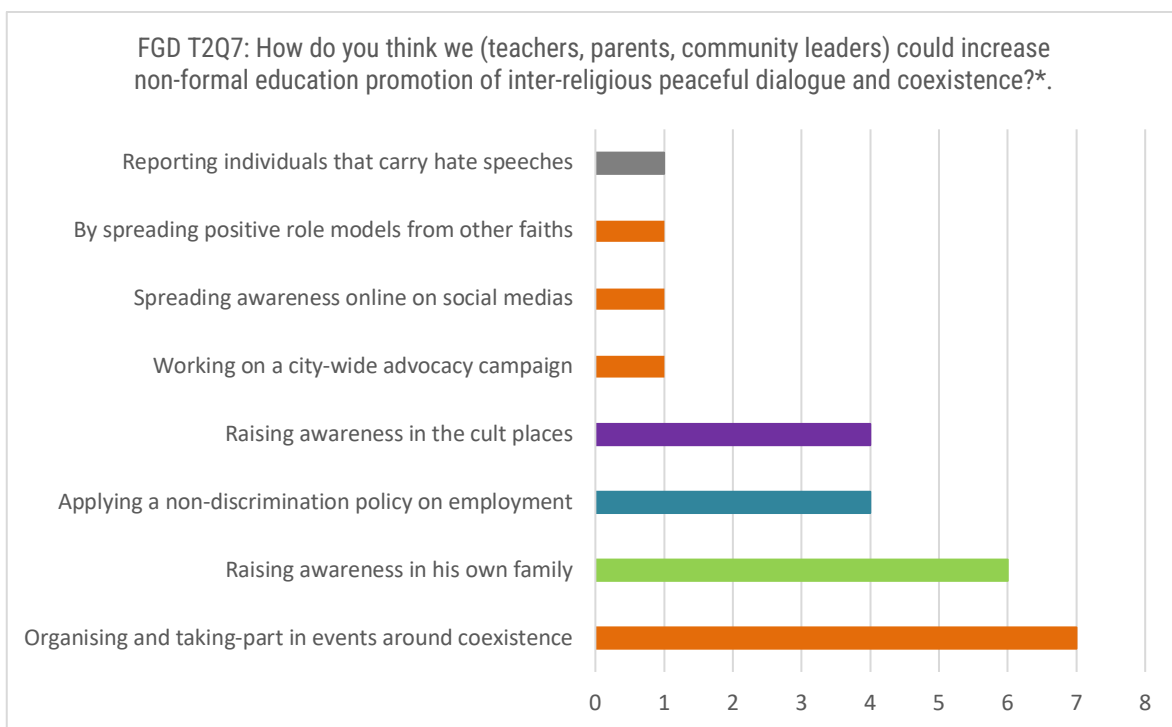
The participants were all the more acerbic about the public authorities' investment in the inter-religious dialogue sector, as they demonstrated that they had a large number of ideas for actions they could take to encourage tolerance and peaceful coexistence in Bashiq. The second part of question T2Q6 "what more should they do?" invited them to put forward their ideas and suggestions for improvement, of which there were many. As we shall see, most of these would be satisfied with implementation at local level, and would not require major national reforms (with the exception of repressive measures). To better understand them, we can classify them into four distinct categories, more or less equally represented: studying the problem better to identify solutions (1), reforming internally (2), being more proactive alone or with partners (3) and punishing religious and ethnic discrimination more severely (4).

The first suggestion seems to take note of the fact that most of the participants feel that the public authorities have no up-to-date knowledge of the realities in the field of religious intolerance. A better understanding of these realities was seen as a necessary first step to effective action: this was the thrust of the proposals to "bring the clerics together to work on inter-religious dialogue" (1 group) and "work with experts to address this matter" (2 religious leaders). On the basis of this knowledge, the participants then put forward proposals for reforms that would first and foremost combat discrimination within the very workings of public authorities (2). The question of "implementing a merit-based job allocation in the government bodies" thus reemerged in the mouth of a Yezidi

leader. On the other hand, a group of FGDs and a Muslim participant in the KIIs independently proposed the creation by the authorities of a "specialized department/directorate to work on fixing the gaps between the members of society", seeing in this task a challenge of sufficient size to justify this major new investment. Thirdly, a similarly educated and reformed public authority would then be equipped to engage in greater activism with the population of Bashiqa, whether on its own or with the help of other actors already active²¹. This is the thrust of the proposal by two religious leaders to "organize more inter-faith events", or to "develop cooperations with other actors", or to "facilitate the work of NGOs" (2 groups of NGO members). Failing to act, or to act alone, public authorities could start by catching up, drawing on the proven expertise of humanitarian organizations. Lastly, several participants were in favor of "punish more firmly discrimination and racism" (a group and a religious leader) and "finalize and promulgate the law on extremism and hate speech" (a group of NGOs). Beyond the promotional and incentive aspect, therefore, a structured campaign to establish peaceful coexistence should, according to some, include a repressive component (4).

Individual investment as a mean of promoting peaceful coexistence in any environment

When participants were confronted with the issue of individual responsibility - via question T2Q7 "how do you think we (teachers, parents, community leaders) could increase non-formal education promotion of inter-religious peaceful dialogue and coexistence?" - they proposed a diverse range of actions that could be taken in different non-school environments. Five of these were identified: the individual level (working on oneself), the family environment, the professional environment, the place of worship (mosque, church...) and the public at large.

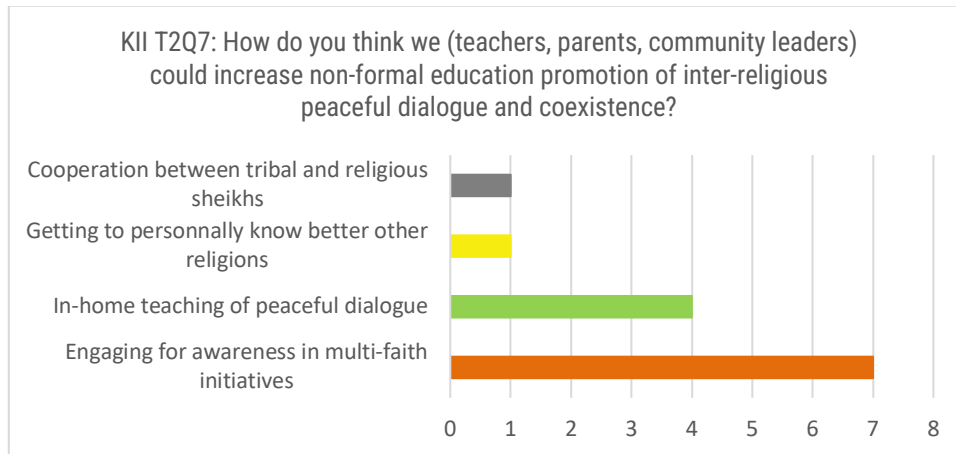


*As the differences between groups (NGOs, teachers, DoE) are not relevant, we have preferred to remove them here to make the graph easier to read.



²¹ However, these courses of action seem applicable to many multi-ethnic terrains, and it often seemed during interviews and FGDs that participants went beyond the simple framework of Bashiqa to reflect on the situation of discriminated minorities everywhere.

Whether at the KIIs or the FGDs, the environments that most frequently came to mind were public and family, in that order. Thus, 7 FGDs groups and 7 KIIs participants stated that individuals could personally contribute to the promotion of peaceful coexistence by "organizing and taking part in events around coexistence" and "engaging for awareness in multi-faith initiatives" respectively. For participants, one of the most obvious channels for personal action was therefore to pool their efforts with other like-minded people to structure initiatives likely to reach a wide audience: some even suggested more specific ideas, proposing to rely on social councils to benefit from their funds and structure. A number of isolated ideas also enriched the panorama of possible actions to meet this audience. While some groups suggested "spreading positive role models from other faiths", others put forward the idea of a "city-wide advocacy campaign" or its counterpart "on social media". The family environment was then the second most-mentioned framework for action, with 6 groups declaring that we should "raise awareness in how own family" and 4 religious leaders proposing an "in-home teaching of peaceful dialogue".

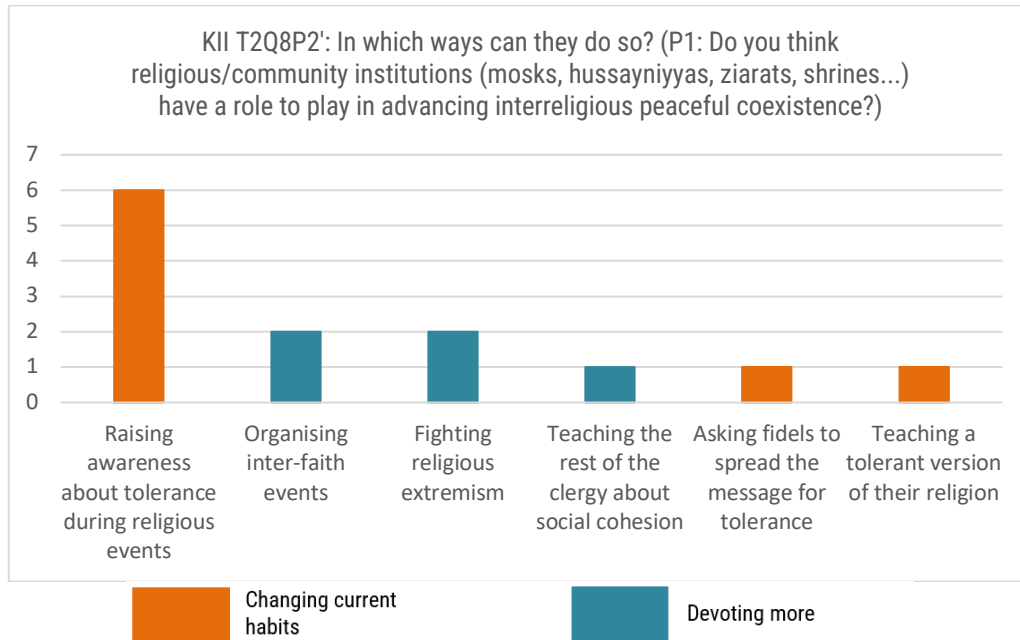


Interestingly, the groups who took part in the FGDs went on to highlight the professional environment and the social circles linked to worship, which the religious leaders did not identify during the KIIs. Thus, 4 groups of FGDs respectively proposed that each "raise awareness in the cult place" and "apply a non-discriminatory policy on employment". On the other hand, it was mainly groups of NGO members who supported the second proposal: this is probably linked to the fact that, by the nature of their activities around inter-religious dialogue, they are more familiar with the realities of socio-professional discrimination from which members of minorities may suffer. Finally, one Yezidi leader suggested that everyone "get to personally know better other religions", suggesting a complete individual investment before turning to other audiences. This wide range of proposals confirms that participants see individual action as an important channel for complementing the tolerance education provided in schools. Moreover, the diversity of ways in which this can be achieved suggests the possibility of a total investment by the individual in the fight against religious discrimination, whatever the environment with which he or she is in contact at a given moment.

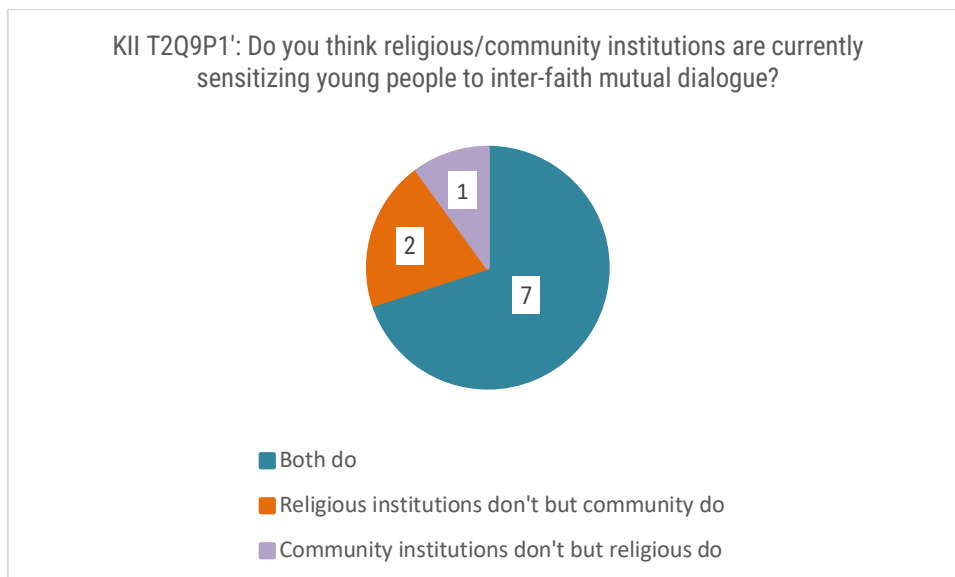
Religious leaders are convinced that they have a role to play in promoting inter-religious tolerance, although they are more divided about the effectiveness of the actions currently being undertaken by their various clergy

KII participants - as religious leaders - were naturally unanimous on the importance that religious and traditional institutions should play in promoting interfaith dialogue and peaceful coexistence. Thus, when asked in the first part of question KII T2Q8' "do you think religious/community institutions (mosks, hussayniyyas, ziarats, shrines...) have a role to play in advancing interreligious peaceful coexistence?", all participants without exception answered in the affirmative. Furthermore, their answers to part 2 "in which way can they do so?" indicate that not only do they think that this responsibility of religious leaders should commit them to changing their usual way of running their community (in orange in the graph below), but also to undertaking additional efforts and initiatives (in blue). The most frequent response to this question was "to raise awareness about tolerance during religious events" (6 responses): a small majority of participants felt it was their duty to direct their traditional homilies towards a goal of peace and tolerance. At the margins, some also suggested that they "teach a tolerant version of their religion" or even that they "ask fidels to spread the message for tolerance" (1

participant respectively). Other responses - partly from the same participants - pointed to an additional investment by religious leaders: it would be their responsibility to "organize inter-faith events" and "fight religious extremism". Whether through additional investment or an aggiornamento in the way they run their communities, the religious leaders in any case demonstrated their awareness and conviction of their responsibility to advance inter-religious dialogue in the social context of Bashqa.



Beyond the religious leaders' unanimous conviction that their clergy - and traditional social institutions - have a role to play in sensitizing the masses to peaceful coexistence, they were also rather positive about their current activity and investment. This was demonstrated in the first part of question T2Q9' "do you think religious/community institutions are currently sensitizing young people to inter-faith mutual dialogue and how?" to which the majority answered positively (7/10), except for one Kakai leader who stated that "community institutions don't but religious do" and two Yezidi - thus also from minority faiths - that "religious institutions don't but community do". One Christian participant who responded positively to the investment of the two types of institution further clarified his thoughts by maintaining that "before ISIS, some clerics were spreading hate speeches and working on dividing society; now they're working in a more positive way", thus noting, as had already been done above, that the brutal occupation of the region by ISIS has served as an electroshock for clerics leading them to realize the centrality of spreading a message of peace and tolerance. On the contrary, another was more pessimistic about the role currently played by his religious authorities: "the clergy is responsible for the image young people have of other faiths, and they're not planting the appropriate images right now".



Curiously, while more participants responded that they were aware of the positive investment made by traditional/community authorities than by religious authorities, the examples given of these initiatives in the second part of the "how?" question mainly concerned the latter. As before, 5 participants noted the positive impact of certain religious leaders "through religious events and prayers", but only 2 mentioned "awareness raising by the tribal sheikhs". This could be explained by the poor visibility of actions undertaken by traditional authorities (councils of notables, tribes, religious authorities...), or simply by a better knowledge of clergy activity on the part of religious leaders who took part in the KIIs.

We can also draw on the religious leaders' responses to the conclusion of the interview (question T3Q6' "can you share any success story of your knowledge about religious/community leaders teaching interreligious dialogue and respect?") to study some examples of initiatives taken by religious leaders to foster interreligious dialogue in Bashiqa. One Yezidi leader used the example of a local Muslim woman who would freely visit her peers of different faiths (Christians, Yezidis and Kakais) on the occasion of each religious holiday: over time, she would become very influential and famous in the region, and her impact would be known to all. Interestingly, another Yezidi religious leader also cited as an example a Muslim sheikh from Mosul who is said to have been very active in inter-religious pacification and to have greatly served to strengthen ties between communities in the governorate. Finally, a Kakai leader mentioned the beneficial impact of the late Professor Haneen Al-Qaddo, a Shabak religious leader and former parliamentarian. Among other initiatives, he is said to have organized a large-scale inter-religious iftar a few years ago, which set a milestone in the community. Overall, and even if some were unable to cite specific examples, all those interviewed were positive about the general impact of religious leaders on Bashiqa coexistence. Only two participants were keen to point out that the impact of clergy is sometimes less obvious, as they are not completely free to move about and are dependent on their hierarchy.

PART 3: Ways of improving primary and secondary education curricula to better promote inter-religious tolerance and the values of coexistence

The third and final part of the research opened up the subject to explore the range of ways in which the values of peaceful coexistence could be taught to young people. It found that despite a near-consensus on the need to change the religious curriculum, participants were very divided on how and how intensively it should be reformed, and that to best promote inter-religious dialogue, this reform needed to be accompanied by a growing investment in tolerance issues by society at large.

Despite a near-consensus on the need to introduce the other faiths into the religious curriculum, there are extremely divergent opinions on the manner and intensity with which it should be reformed

Initially, the questions calling for the identification of the main avenues of reform in religious education opened up a discussion which brought out a very large number of possible avenues of reform among the participants, from the most extreme to the most median. While some proposed that the current syllabus be updated and enriched with a component dedicated to minority faiths, other participants - notably among the groups of DoE teachers and administrators who took part in the FGDs - put forward proposals ranging from the outright abolition of religion courses to the possibility of each student having a separate course on his or her own faith. These wide variations in opinion were then nuanced, however, when it was observed that there was a near-consensus - including among religious leaders - on making more room in the religious curriculum for minority faiths, even if the exact modalities of teaching them once again brought out some differences.

A particularly diverse range of proposals for reforming religious education in schools, from updating the current syllabus to abolishing religion classes altogether

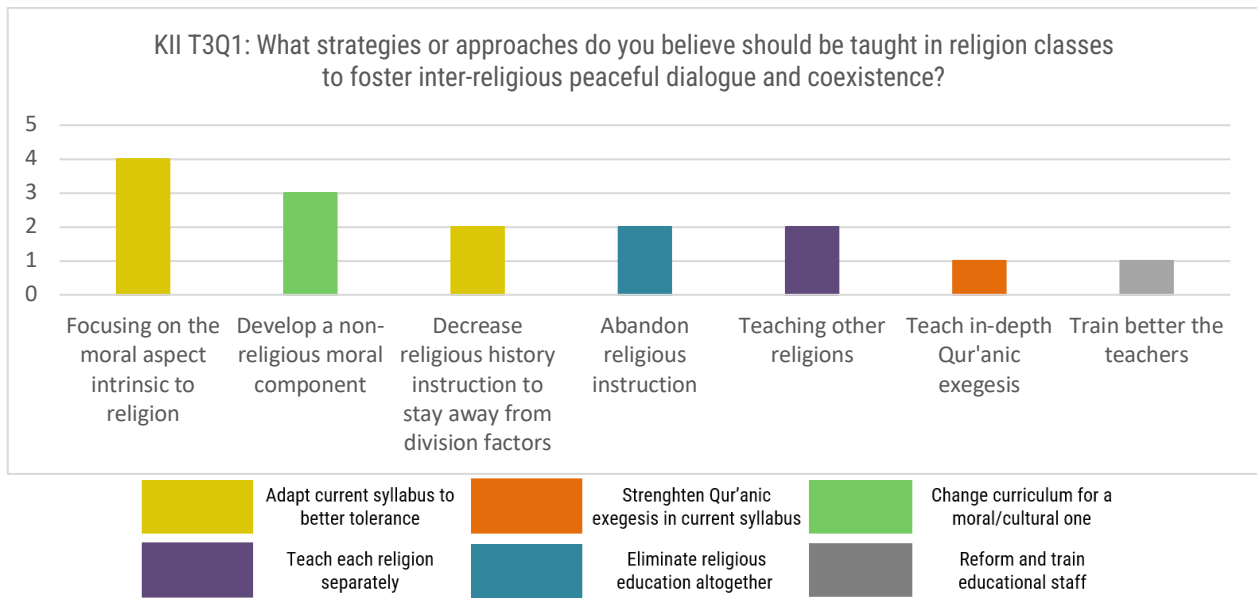
The subject of in-class strategies to foster inter-religious dialogue, which had already been discussed with KII participants at the end of part 1 of the questionnaire, was the starting point for a large number of proposals from groups of FGDs and religious leaders: similar ones are to be found in part 3 under question T3Q1. An overall analysis of these proposals shows that participants were divided into 5 main groups:

- those who advocate adapting the religious curriculum to better integrate the teaching of tolerance (in yellow);
- those who propose reinforcing the religious curriculum with an in-depth study of Koranic exegesis to demonstrate to students that the Islamic religion is marked by tolerance (in orange)
- those who suggest replacing the religious curriculum with a moral or cultural course (in green)
- those who would prefer each religion to be taught in separate classes at school, and those who advocate a divorce between school and religious education (in blue).

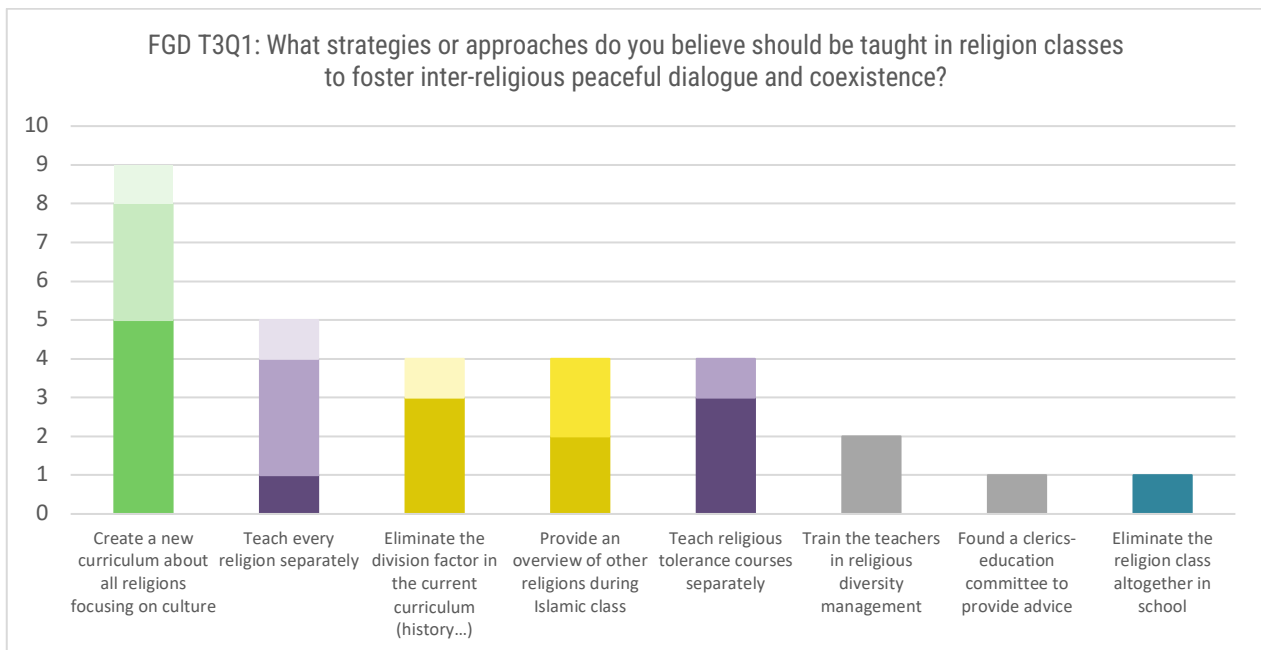
Finally, it should be noted that several of these participants also suggested teaching staff reforms superimposed on their other proposals (shown in grey). At first glance, we notice that the proposals most often defended by the groups and interviewees are those proposing the least ambitious changes to current religious education, i.e. modifying the current curriculum or replacing it with a course in religious culture and morals. More far-reaching reforms - aimed at opening up the possibility for other religions to be taught or erasing religious education from schools altogether - garnered little support. Finally, before examining the proposals in more detail, we should note a greater difference in terms of the quality of the proposals between the religious leaders of the KIIs and the FGD groups, the latter having shown themselves to be far more reformist in their ideas, supported specifically by very ambitious DoE professors and administrators.

First and foremost, while both the FGDs and the KIIs generally came up with moderate solutions for reforming religious education, these were not the same on both sides. The majority of KII participants advocated reforms to the current curriculum to better incorporate the notion of tolerance. 4 participants suggested "focusing on the moral aspect intrinsic to religion" and 2 suggested "decreasing religious history instruction to stay away from division factors": interestingly, it was around these ideas that Muslim religious leaders gathered, whatever the ethnic minority to which they belonged. If we consider that these proposals were also put forward at the FGDs, along with the idea of "providing an overview of other religions during Islamic class", we can see that the participants were generally in favor of 3 ways of reforming the religious curriculum: eliminating serious historical disputes with other religions, increasing the moral content of the syllabus and introducing pupils to the principles and dogmas of other faiths. FGD participants, meanwhile, were more ambitious, unanimously putting forward the possibility of eliminating the Islamic curriculum and instead "creating a new curriculum about all religions focusing on culture". One NGO worker pointed out that this proposal, which would mark a radical change in national educational policy, had already been successfully implemented in Kurdistan; however, it had only been

supported on 3 occasions by religious leaders, all of whom belonged to minority religions.



However, the most concrete difference between the reform suggestions of the FGDs and the KIIs crystallized around a third proposal: that of systematically and segregatedly offering students a course on their religion. While this proposal was endorsed by only two religious leaders at the KIIs (both Muslims), it was defended by no less than 5 groups at the FGDs, including all the groups made up of DoE teachers and administrators. Particularly interesting, this preponderance seems logical if we consider the rather negative opinions of these same groups about the capacity of religious education in its current state to enforce inter-religious dialogue (FGD T1Q2 and FGD T1Q6'): moreover, their proximity to the realities on the ground suggests that their suggestion for reform, however drastic, should be taken seriously. Four groups, this time mostly made up of NGO members, also expanded on this possibility, arguing that if it were to be implemented - whether they were opposed to it or not - each religion course thus created should nevertheless contain a significant component of tolerance awareness.



	NGO	Teachers	DoE
Adapt current syllabus to better tolerance	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow
Change curriculum for a moral/cultural one	Green	Green	Green
Teach each religion separately	Purple	Purple	Purple
Reform and train educational staff	Grey		

It should also be noted that a very small minority of participants (2 religious leaders and a group of NGO workers) pushed this logic to the limit by suggesting secular education, completely dissociating religious instruction from school. This proposal, put forward at the FGD by a specific participant, did not, however, receive the support of the rest of his group, and therefore seems to remain relatively marginal. Finally, alongside these broad ideas for reforming religious education, some participants (1 religious leader, 2 NGO groups) added that it would be additionally necessary to implement reforms directly linked to the teaching team, notably "train the teachers in diversity management" and "create a cleric committee to provide advice". These ideas echo the analyses already made in the first part of the interviews - questions T1Q1, T1Q2 and KII T1Q6' - which referred to teachers' poor ability to manage diversity in their classrooms and the non-existence of diversity management trainings available to teaching staff. To make the results easier to understand, all the proposals that emerged during the interviews are summarized below:

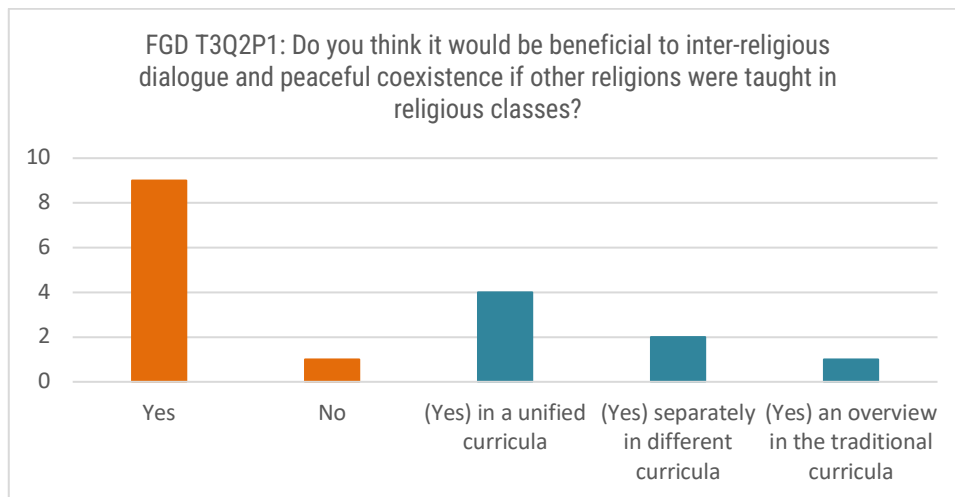
COLOR	MAIN PROPOSAL	SPECIFIC PROPOSITION
Yellow	Adapt current syllabus to better tolerance	Eliminating historical disputes with other religions
		Increase the moral content of the syllabus
		Introduce students to the principles and dogmas of other faiths
Orange	Strengthen Koranic exegesis in current syllabus	
Green	Change curriculum for a moral/cultural one	
Purple	Teach each religion separately	Separate the students during religious class and provide them a teacher for their specific faith
		Introduce a tolerance component in each one of the different religious syllabus
Blue	Eliminate religious education altogether	
Grey	Reform and train educational staff	Train the teachers in diversity management
		Create a cleric committee to provide advice

The idea of presenting other religions in the Islamic classroom was very well received by the participants, although their opinions differed as to the modalities and objectives of such a presentation

To question T3Q2 "do you think it would be beneficial to inter-religious dialogue and peaceful coexistence if other religions were taught in religious classes? Why?" participants were almost unanimously in favor of introducing other religions into the Islamic religious curriculum, although there was no consensus on the exact modalities of this introduction. Thus, 9 out of 10 religious leaders answered "yes" to the first part of the question: it's important to note that the only participant who refused was not motivated by traditionalism around the syllabus, but because he defended a complete abolition of religious courses. Similarly, all the FGD groups supported the positive response: only two groups disagreed, arguing that it would make religion classes too complex and "not acceptable for society and the teachers". It's worth noting that one religious leader asserted that this debate was "pointless, as it is already common practice in religion classes to teach elements of other faiths".

The discussions triggered by this question within the groups, however, interestingly brought out different opinions on how and with what intensity other faiths should be presented, summarized in this graph below. While two groups supported the above-mentioned idea of separate curricula for pupils of other faiths than Muslim, a

relative majority (4 groups) were in favor of a unified curriculum - in line with the previous proposal for an inter-religious moral and cultural curriculum - while two participants preferred the idea of an "overview" in the syllabus already in force. One of these groups, moreover, supported the idea that while it was important for a question of social peace to introduce the various local religions to young people, this teaching should not take on an exaggerated proportion to reflect the fact that "despite the presence of minorities, the general identity of the country remained Islamic".



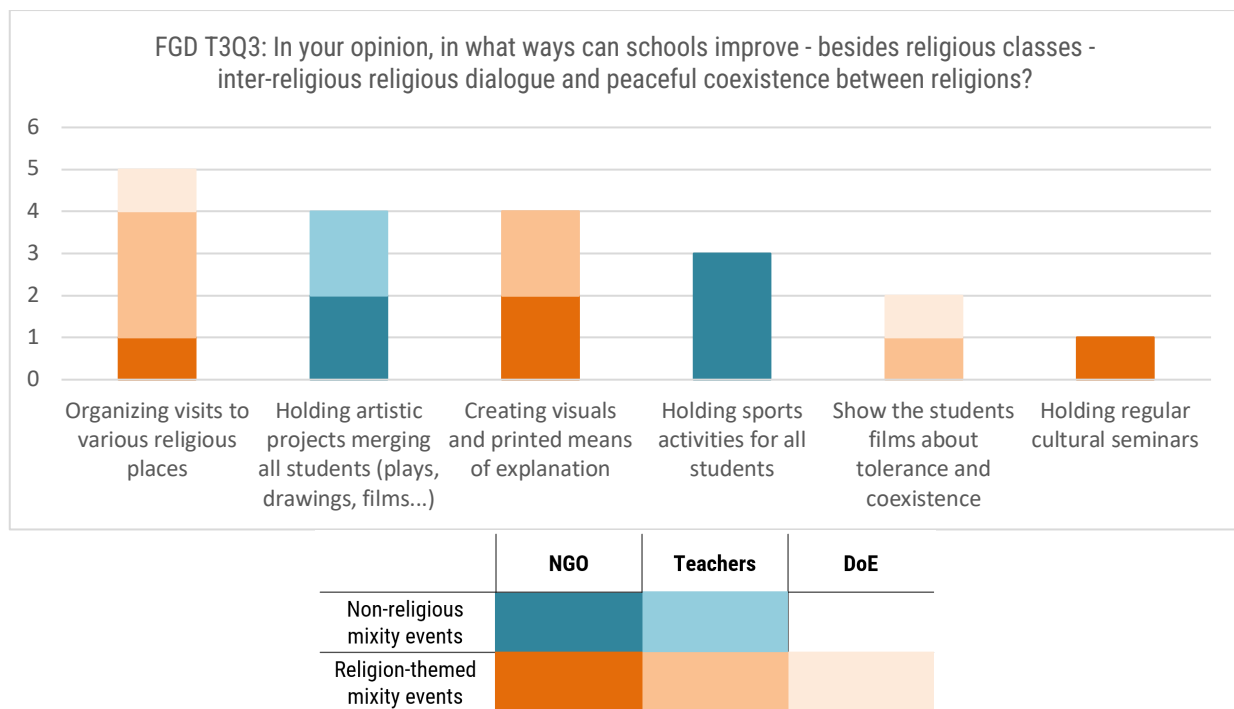
The second part of the question, which confronted participants with the "why?" of their previous answer, brought out a number of interesting arguments as to why a presentation, however brief, of other faiths to students in religion classes would be beneficial to local peaceful coexistence. Most participants postulated that a better knowledge by pupils of the religions of their peers would naturally lead them to greater tolerance and would therefore be "beneficial to peaceful coexistence" (4 groups - mainly NGOs - and 5 interviewees). Other participants didn't go quite so far, claiming that such learning would be beneficial for its own sake, as it would "introduce students to other religions" and thus increase their knowledge in this important area (4 groups - mainly teachers and 3 participants). Two Muslim religious leaders, on the other hand, argued that this knowledge would be beneficial because it would enable students to "understand the similarities between religions", which would incidentally lead them towards greater closeness and tolerance. Finally, a minority religious leader argued that "every religion should have the right to be taught in schools", effectively eliminating the question of the benefit of such teaching in favor of a moral issue of religious equality.

If diversity is to be considered in schools, society as a whole needs to invest more in promoting diversity and mutual understanding between religions

Outside the classroom, there are many ways of raising young people's awareness of tolerance: among the many tools that can be employed are non-religious events that encourage social mixing, particularly playful ones, and educational initiatives centered on religion or tolerance (first and second levels of inter-religious dialogue, in accordance with the classification developed at the end of Part II). It is clear, however, that it is schools and national education in general that participants expect the most in terms of promoting peaceful coexistence and tolerance: traditional institutions and civil society are only mentioned secondarily by participants listing the actions that society should undertake. It is also clear from the research methods that NGO members and national education officials (interviewed during the FGDs) have crossed expectations of each other, with the former believing - in part - that they are already sufficiently active, and the latter having little confidence in their institution's ability to change its usual activities. However, this did not prevent the participants from seeming very satisfied with the tolerance currently at work in their classrooms.

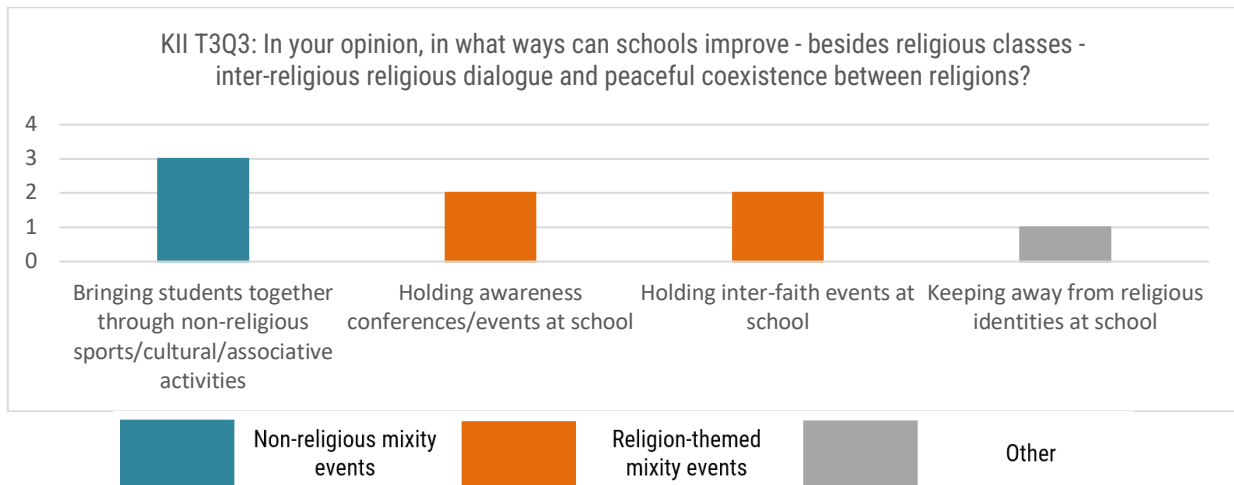
Raising young people's awareness of inter-religious dialogue could be pursued outside the classroom, through fun events promoting diversity or educational activities focusing on the theme of tolerance

However, educating young people at school is not limited to formal classroom teaching: learning continues, for example, in all the time children spend on school premises outside the classroom, including the extracurricular activities that take place there. And participants were quick to argue that this ancillary time can also be put to good use, and that raising pupils' awareness of tolerance and the importance of inter-religious dialogue can continue outside the weekly hours devoted to religion lessons. When asked in question FGD T3Q3 "in your opinion, in what ways can schools improve - besides religious classes - inter-religious religious dialogue and peaceful coexistence between religions?", almost all participants put forward or supported a proposal. These fall into two categories, already introduced in the past: they follow the first two levels of the three identified above for inter-religious dialogue (in Part II). These are either non-religious mixity events, organized on a sporting or cultural pretext to socialize young people of different faiths, or religion-themed mixity events, structured around a pedagogical theme revolving around religions or tolerance itself. As before, no proposal here has touched on the 3^{ème} level of inter-religious dialogue, i.e. the direct mediation of religious problems or issues of religious origin by groups of different faiths: in any case, the young age of the main people concerned seems to make any proposal approaching this unrealistic.



KIIs and FGDs combined, it seems that both categories of proposals received support that is difficult to rank: while religious leaders mentioned a little more often (3 times) the idea of "bringing students together through non-religious sports/cultural/associative activities", the groups were more in favor of "organize visits to various religious places" (5 groups). However, a greater diversity of religion-themed mixity events emerged, with "create visuals and printed means of explanation" for religions (4 groups), "show the students films about tolerance and coexistence" (2 groups) and "hold regular cultural seminars" or "awareness conferences" or "inter-faith events" (1 group and 2 religious leaders respectively) adding to the previously mentioned idea of visits to places of worship. Participants were often vaguer about non-religious mixity events, probably because these include every possible type of activity that could be carried out on school premises, and they didn't see fit to go into detail. They preferred to sum up their thoughts by proposing the organization of "artistic events" (4 groups), "sports activities" (3 groups) or "cultural/associative activities" (3 religious leaders). Finally, it's worth noting that during the FGDs, the groups made up of NGO workers were more inclined to support ideas for non-religious recreational events, in contrast to DoE teachers and administrators, who were more in favor of educational events focusing on religion and tolerance. This dual positioning perhaps reflects a tendency among faculty to hold teaching as

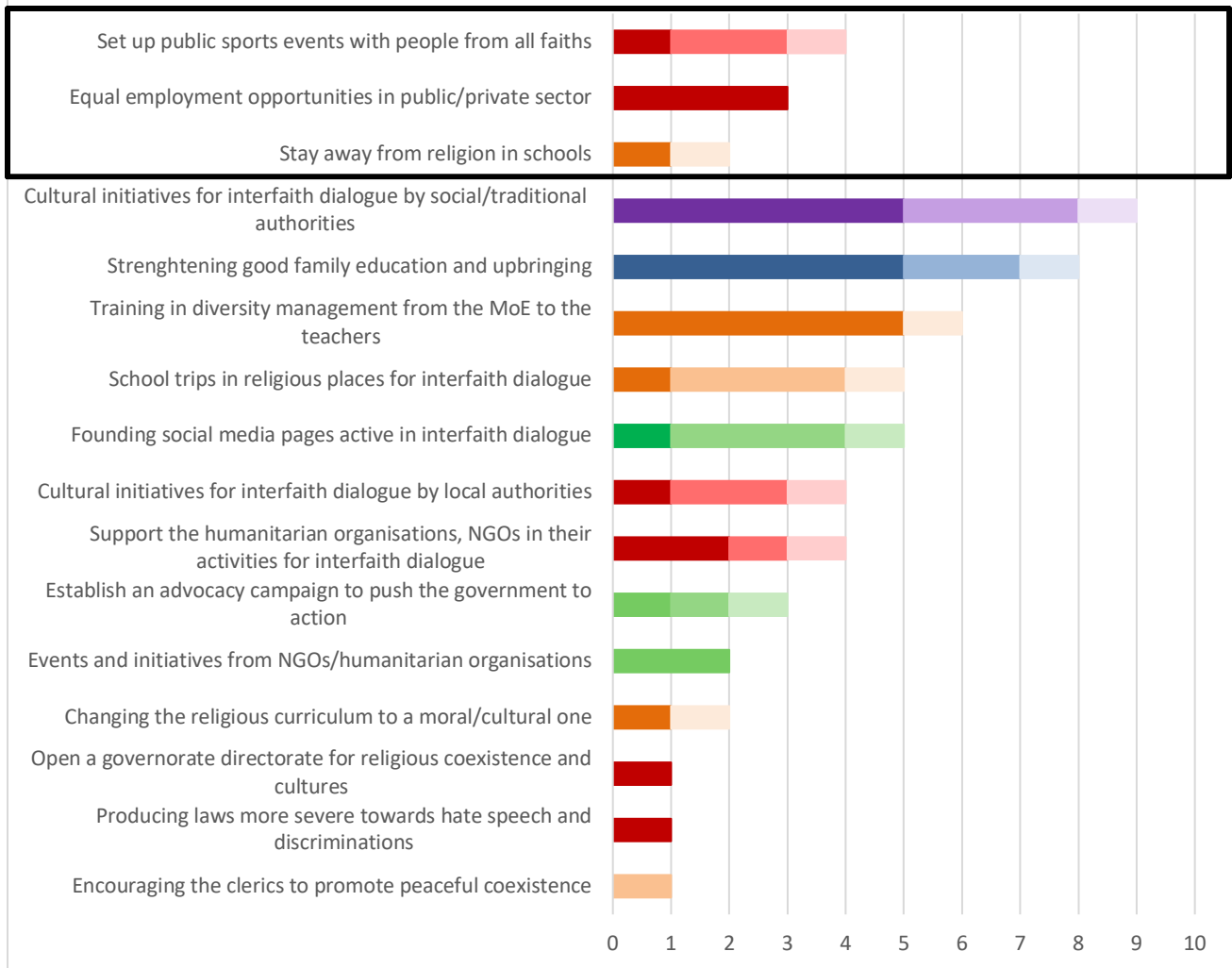
such in high esteem, even outside the confines of the classroom, while aid workers would be inspired by alternative, more playful teaching methods in vogue among NGOs.



The FGDs' final proposals for promoting peaceful coexistence highlighted the existence of cross-expectations between aid workers and national education officials

As a summary of the various suggestions made by participants to strengthen inter-religious dialogue in Bashiqa, and to see where they felt the school should position itself in this process, we finally asked them one last time "what do you think are the best ways, in school or out of school, to promote peaceful coexistence between religions?" in question T3Q4. From the responses we got from the FGDs, we can see above all an overwhelming preponderance of suggestions linked to raising awareness among young people or the overall Bashiqa population as part of religious/tolerance themed mixity events and initiatives. Only three proposals - circled in black below - concern non-religious mixity events aimed simply at bringing together populations of different religions on cultural or sporting pretexts. Once again, none of the proposals explicitly concerned what has been called the 3^{ème} level of inter-religious dialogue, i.e. direct mediation between people of different faiths and their differences.

FGD T3Q4: What do you think are the best ways, in school or out of school, to promote peaceful coexistence between religions?



	NGO	Teachers	DoE
Social/traditional institutions	9	8	4
Family	8	7	3
Schools/MoE	6	5	2
Civil society	5	4	3
Public institutions	4	3	2

This wide range of responses can also be used to assess the prevalence of the school (and of national education in general, in orange) in inter-religious dialogue and the promotion of tolerance, according to the participants. While the most popular responses did not necessarily focus directly on this actor, it was around national education that the greatest diversity of ideas to be implemented revolved: FGD groups thus proposed "trainings in diversity management from the MoE to the teachers" (6 groups), "schools trips in religious places" (5 groups), "encourage the clerics to promote peaceful coexistence" (1 group), "stay away from religion in schools" (2 groups). It should be noted that this may be partly due to the bias based on the number of questions preceding this one concerning measures to be taken in schools, which may explain the major profusion of ideas linked to this specific actor.

National education aside, it was traditional social institutions that were most often mentioned by participants, with all nine groups taking part in the FGDs mentioning the possibility of these - whether notables, religious or tribal councils - "organizing cultural initiatives for interfaith dialogue". Similarly, several groups suggested civil society initiatives, including new ones compared to previous suggestions such as "founding social media pages active in inter-faith dialogue" (5 groups) or "establishing an advocacy campaign to push the government to action" (3 groups). Here we find again, albeit slightly reversed - traditional social institutions ahead of civil society - the participants' confidence in these two categories of actor that we had already observed in questions T2Q3 and T2Q4.

Surprisingly, the family generated a recurrence of previously unobserved proposals, namely that of "strengthen good family education and upbringing" (8 groups). Similarly, appeals to public authorities - outside schools - were slightly more frequent here than previously, with 4 groups proposing that they "support the humanitarians organisations, NGOs in their activities" and 1 that they "open a governorate for religious coexistence". This increase in the number of public and family players can be partly explained by the fact that this question is similar to several previous ones, which prompted some participants to look for new, previously unmentioned proposals, even from players they had thought secondary.

Although numerically unrepresentative, this question did highlight an interesting oppositional phenomenon among NGO workers and national education officials respectively. This can be summed up as follows: while NGO members were more emphatic about the need for public authorities to take action, civil servants were more emphatic about the need for civil society to lead the way. Indeed, while aid workers were in the majority when it came to suggestions for action on the part of civil society - all 5 groups against only the Bashiqa DoE group suggested that the MoE should set up diversity management trainings - the opposite was also true - all civil servants proposed that civil society take action on social networks against only one NGO group - and this despite the numerical inferiority of civil servants. This could be explained in one of two ways: either each of the two camps believes that it is sufficient to take action for inter-religious dialogue, and that it is therefore up to the other to take action (exculpation), or both are aware of their own limitations and, lacking confidence in their own abilities, believe that it would be better for the other to take action first (demotivation).

Taking into account the conclusions of Part II, we can see a middle way, although we can't say for sure. Indeed, the FGDs' poor assessment of the current activity of the public authorities (including civil servants) and, on the contrary, the more cheerful assessment of civil society's commitment means that it is likely that the latter believes - at least in part - that it is doing enough for tolerance in Bashiqa, and that it is looking forward to the authorities making equivalent efforts (relieving civil society of its guilt). On the other hand, education officials would be pessimistic about the latter's ability to reform itself to improve its impact, and failing that, would think it better to hope that civil society does even more and better (demotivating public authorities).

Despite widespread dissatisfaction with the way in which religious diversity is approached institutionally, the real social mix at school seems to be a source of satisfaction

To the FGDs T3Q5' final question "have you encountered any challenges in including students from diverse religions in your school and if so, how have you addressed them?", all the groups denied having experienced any problems whatsoever linked to a religious divide between students. Only one member of a local NGO disagreed, recounting an anecdote that was rather flattering for the French education system and its social handling of diversity. Belonging to a minority group, her child was allegedly repeatedly taken to task by his Muslim teacher, who accused him of disbelief. After his son confided in him, the witness complained to the DoE authorities, who took and implemented punitive measures against the teacher, and the story ended there. It must be stressed, however, that despite the positive nature of this story, it gives us only an anecdotal insight into how the Ninevah DoE actually defends minorities in the schools under its care.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this research identified that - according to the participants - pupils' lack of knowledge about their peers' religions and the unpopular content of the Islamic curriculum did not appear to affect inter-religious quietude within the schools. Outside schools, however, they were convinced that all actors in Bashiqa society should be more active in promoting inter-religious dialogue, in order to compensate for the lack of tolerance among young people. Finally, the third part of the research demonstrated that, despite a near-consensus on the need to reform the religious syllabus, participants were very divided on the manner and intensity with which this reform should be carried out. Encouraging at first glance, since they seem to testify to a general willingness on the part of the participants - who turned out to be influential members of the community - to contribute to local dialogue between religions, these results nevertheless betray a resolute call from the participants for the authorities to become more involved in tolerance issues, both in and out of school. Similarly, the participants' rather positive opinion of tolerance between young people in Bashiqa cannot overshadow the structural discrimination suffered by religious minorities in the Ninevah Plains (evictions, job discrimination, lack of public services...), reinforced by the legal-administrative vacuum characterizing this region. Although the school plays a fundamental role in fostering inter-religious dialogue and symbolizes the inequality of legal treatment between communities, it is only one of the many obstacles that need to be overcome if inter-religious dialogue is to become a local reality.

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