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IRAQI MIGRATION TO EUROPE IN 2016: PROFILES, DRIVERS AND RETURN

IRAQ / GREECE

REPORT

JUNE 2017

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About REACH

REACH is a joint initiative of two international non-governmental organisations - ACTED and IMPACT Initiatives - and the UN Operational Satellite Applications Programme (UNOSAT). REACH's mission is to strengthen evidence-based decision making by aid actors through efficient data collection, management and analysis before, during and after an emergency. By doing so, REACH contributes to ensuring that communities affected by emergencies receive the support they need. All REACH activities are conducted in support to and within the framework of inter-agency aid coordination mechanisms. For more information please visit our website: www.reach-initiative.org. You can contact us directly at: geneva@reach-initiative.org and follow us on Twitter @REACH_info.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

The number of Iraqis migrating irregularly to Europe drastically increased between 2014 and 2016. In 2015, 91,769 Iraqis arrived in Europe through the Eastern Mediterranean route, compared to only 1,023 in 2014.¹ At the same time, since 2014, return migration from Europe to Iraq has substantially increased: between 2014 and 2016, the number of returnees from Europe to Iraq through the International Organisation for Migration's (IOM) Assisted Voluntary Return Scheme has increased tenfold (from 1,280 to 12,776)² and many more anecdotal accounts of individual returns exist.³

These migration flows – from Iraq to Europe and the increased number of returnees from Europe to their country of origin – are inherently complex and multi-faceted. As policy responses in Europe, as well as the situation in Iraq and associated migration drivers, keep shifting, there is a need for a more timely understanding of Iraqi migration to Europe, as well as returns. As such, the aim of this study was (1) to gain an overall understanding of the migration profile and drivers of Iraqis who migrated to Europe in 2016 and (2) to gain an in-depth understanding of what shapes the return of Iraqis from Europe to Iraq, as well as of what facilitates return in Iraq in the long-term.

Key Findings

The study finds that Iraqis who migrated to Europe in 2016, interviewed on the Aegean islands in Greece, did so primarily for conflict-related reasons and came from areas where they did not feel safe. Iraqi returnees interviewed in Iraq who returned from Europe between 2015 and 2017 did so for reasons tied to their situation in Europe or due to personal factors, rather than due to an improvement in their area of origin. Many migrants returned to areas where they did not feel safe.

Back in Iraq, returnees were found to be particularly exposed to socio-economic marginalisation, as they had heavily invested in migration by selling productive assets and homes. Once back, they faced limited access to livelihoods and continued not to feel safe. Furthermore, as a result of the economic burden which resulted from unsuccessful migration, many returnees were less well equipped to deal with these challenges than they were before migrating. As such, returnees in all areas of Iraq were in need of targeted support to be able to build a sustainable life. The most urgent immediate needs were found to be economic assistance, as well as psycho-social support to deal with the experience of migration and return. In the longer term, an improvement of the overall security situation in the country is needed, to ensure that Iraq can become a viable return destination.

Findings herein presented are based on two sets of data collection exercises: findings on the profile of Iraqi migrants who arrived in Europe in 2016 are based on a quantitative profiling exercise of Iraqis on the Aegean islands of Lesbos, Samos, Chios and Leros. Greece was selected as a site for data collection because the vast majority of Iraqis who migrated to Europe in 2016 did so via the Eastern Mediterranean route, through Greece.⁴ With the EU-Turkey Statement in March 2016,⁵ Iraqis arriving on the Aegean islands were unable to continue their journey to other EU countries, making Greece, at the time of data collection, the host of the largest proportion of Iraqis who migrated to Europe in 2016. Findings on the return of Iraqis from Europe to Iraq are based on qualitative data collected in the primary areas of return across the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) and in the wider Baghdad area. Data collection took place between 2 and 29 March 2017 in Greece and between 6 April and 16 June 2017 in Iraq. In total, 413 individuals took part in the study. While findings are statistically representative of the Iraqi population on the Aegean islands after March 2016, they are not generalisable to the entire Iraqi population who migrated to Europe in 2016. Findings on Iraqi returnees are based on qualitative research. As such, these pertain to the specific sample of returnees interviewed in Iraq and are only indicative of wider trends.

Profile of Iraqi Migrants to Europe in 2016

This study finds that the majority of Iraqis who migrated to Europe in 2016, interviewed on the Aegean islands in March 2017, came from conflict-affected governorates, such as Baghdad (30%) and Ninewa (20%).⁶ One in three (31%) had been internally displaced prior to migrating to Europe, with most having been displaced to the KRI (80%) or Baghdad (20%). Seventy-five percent (75%) of respondents left Iraq after the EU -

Turkey Statement of 20 March 2016, knowing of its existence. This suggests that Iraqis who migrated in that period were not deterred by restrictive entry policies and knew they may become stranded in Greece.

Conflict and other forms of violence emerged as the most frequently reported reason for migrating among Iraqis interviewed on the Aegean islands in Greece. However, conflict and its impact on the individual were experienced differently by Iraqis from different areas of origin. Respondents from Ninewa had been directly impacted by the conflict, with many reporting death of family members and destruction of shelter. Iraqis from KRI or Baghdad reported fearing that conflict escalation would negatively impact their livelihoods and security.

The most reported countries of destination were Germany (37%), followed by the Netherlands (11%) and the United Kingdom (11%). One in five respondents (18%) reportedly wanted to reach 'any safe country'. The most reported reason for choosing a specific destination in Europe was having family members at destination, as reported by 25% of respondents. This suggests that a sizeable group of Iraqis who migrated to Europe in 2016 may be eligible for family reunification from Greece.

Returning from Europe to Iraq

Returnees interviewed in Iraq reportedly decided to return from Europe mostly due to factors tied to their situation in Europe (49 out of 65 respondents), notably due to rejected asylum applications (22 out of 65), or for personal reasons (16 out of 65). Many returnees returned to areas in which they still felt unsafe. For some returnees, the security situation in their area of origin, such as Mosul, made return impossible, so they stayed in KRI or Baghdad. For any policy intervention this suggests that, even though some Iraqi migrants to Europe return to Iraq, this does not necessarily mean that the security situation in their area of origin has improved.

The vast majority of Iraqis who returned to Baghdad did so because their application for international protection in Europe was denied. Most reported not knowing that they could appeal this decision, and therefore chose to return voluntarily, rather than being deported. This may suggest a lack of information provision on subsidiary protection schemes for Iraqis in Europe.

The journey back to Iraq, always by plane, was reportedly easy. Thirty-four out of 65 respondents received assistance in the return journey, either by IOM (16) or by the host government (18).⁷ While this support was appreciated, it did not reportedly influence returnees' decision to return. More than one third of respondents (23 out of 65) returned to Iraq without support.

Life once back in Iraq

Returnees interviewed in Iraq reported that, once back, they encountered challenges in relation to limited access to livelihoods, lack of security, and difficulties to reintegrate socially and culturally. Often, returnees had sold their productive assets and houses to be able to migrate, spending on average 1,200 US dollars (USD) per person to reach Europe. Upon return, they no longer had these to rebuild their livelihoods. Lack of appropriate shelter was particularly often reported by Iraqis who returned to KRI as IDPs, who struggled to afford rent once back.

Among Iraqis who returned to Baghdad, security was the greatest concern, as reported by 15 out of 33 respondents interviewed in Baghdad. This influenced their ability to settle back into the country. Furthermore, one in four respondents interviewed in KRI reported feeling unsafe upon return, mostly due to the region's proximity to conflict areas.

Returnees reportedly found that the individual support schemes offered by international organisations to help returnees settle back were useful. These should reportedly aim to facilitate the development of sustainable livelihood sources, including skills development and economic support in the form of loans.

At a broader level, the general sense of insecurity that respondents felt upon return should be addressed. This concerns conflict resolution and the long-term stabilisation of the country, but also, as reported by Iraqis on the Aegean islands, the general sense of mistrust towards the government in Iraq and lack of confidence that the state can address the challenges Iraqis reportedly face. Social reconciliation in newly liberated areas and inclusive economic growth will be essential accompanying elements to this development.

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List of Acronyms

AVRR	Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration
DFID	Department for International Development
ERIN	European Reintegration Network
EU	European Union
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IOM	International Organisation for Migration
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organisation
KII	Key Informant Interview
KRI	Kurdish Region of Iraq
MMP	Mixed Migration Platform
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
ODK	Open Data Kit
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Science
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

Geographical Classifications

Governorate	Largest sub-national administrative and geographical division of Iraq
Sub-district	Administrative and geographical sub-level to a governorate in Iraq

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INTRODUCTION

Since 2014, the number of Iraqis migrating irregularly to Europe has drastically increased.⁸ While in 2014 only 1,023 Iraqis arrived in Europe through the Eastern Mediterranean route,⁹ in 2015, 91,769 Iraqis reached the European Union (EU) via that same route.¹⁰ With the EU-Turkey Statement in 2016,¹¹ although the number of arrivals decreased, Iraqis still represented the third top nationality arriving in Greece in 2016, with 26,138 arrivals.¹² At the same time, since 2014, return migration from Europe to Iraq has substantially increased: between 2014 and 2016, the number of returnees from Europe to Iraq through the International Organisation for Migration's (IOM) Assisted Voluntary Return Scheme has increased tenfold (from 1,280 to 12,776)¹³ and many more anecdotal accounts of individual returns from Iraq to Europe exist.¹⁴

Migration from Iraq to Europe and the increased return of Iraqis from Europe to their country of origin are inherently complex and multi-faceted. Iraq figures in UNHCR's Top Ten of refugee-producing countries¹⁵ and has been falling in and out of active conflict for decades. With the emergence of the so-called Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) in the western parts of the country in 2014, millions of Iraqis were displaced, fleeing both to neighbouring countries, as well as further afield within Iraq. As of June 2017, three million people are internally displaced,¹⁶ including 80,000 individuals who fled their homes in Mosul during the onset of operations to liberate the city in October 2016.¹⁷ Many of those who fled moved to the more prosperous and comparatively stable Kurdish Region of Iraq (KRI) in the North of the country. Heralded for some time as a hallmark of economic growth and development of the country, KRI has been hit hard by the fall of oil prices in 2015 and 2016 and the ensuing economic recession. As a result, both Iraqi Kurds and more than one million internally displaced persons (IDPs) residing in the region¹⁸ struggle to build a sustainable life for themselves and their families.

While some information on Iraqi migration to Europe is available, this is usually embedded in studies on push and pull factors for migration to Europe, which do not disaggregate findings by nationality.¹⁹ While one study on Iraqi migration to Europe in 2015 exists,²⁰ in the face of changing policy responses to migration to Europe, such as the EU-Turkey Statement in March 2016, a more timely understanding of Iraqi migration to Europe in 2016 is needed. This is of particular relevance in light of the increasing return migration from Europe, as well as the possibility of increased state-sanctioned returns from Europe to Iraq in the medium and long term. A more nuanced understanding of these dynamics will allow for targeted interventions to reduce returnees' vulnerability once back home and support them in building a sustainable life in their country of origin.

To fill this information gap, REACH, funded by the Department for International Development (DFID), conducted an assessment on the profile of Iraqis who migrated to Europe in 2016, and on the dynamics which shape return from Europe to Iraq. As such, the overall objective of this research was two-fold: (1) to gain an overall understanding of the migration profile, drivers and origins of Iraqis who migrated to Europe in 2016 and (2) to gain an in-depth understanding of what shapes return of Iraqis from Europe to Iraq at the individual level, what facilitates reintegration at the community level and what enables sustainability of return in the long-term. It is based on primary and secondary data collection carried out between 2 March and 16 June 2017 in Greece and Iraq. In Greece, a quantitative profiling of the Iraqi migrant population on the Aegean islands of Lesbos, Chios, Samos and Leros was conducted, and later triangulated with findings from 15 focus group discussions (FGDs) administered with Iraqi migrants on the islands. In Iraq, a qualitative methodology was employed, which included 11 FGDs and 33 key informant interviews (KIIs) with returnees from the primary areas of return in Iraq, such as KRI and Baghdad, as well as with community leaders who came from communities which had witnessed large numbers of migration to Europe and subsequent return.

The report is structured as follows: the first chapter outlines the methodological approach adopted, including details on analytical frameworks applied, the data collection methods, sampling frames and limitations. The second chapter presents findings in relation to the profile of Iraqis who migrated to Europe in 2016, including their areas of origin in Iraq, their socio-economic profiles and drivers of migration. The third chapter presents findings on return migration from Europe to Iraq, including the decision-making process behind return, the journey back home, as well as the sustainability of return once back in Iraq. The report ends with a chapter on suggested areas of interventions to facilitate sustainable return of Iraqis who return from Europe to Iraq.

METHODOLOGY

This chapter of the report presents an overview of the methodology employed and outlines some limitations. It includes information on the different data collection methods used and provides an overview of the analytical framework which guided the design of the research, the research questions, indicators and subsequent analysis. For more details on the methodology, please refer to Annex 1.

Objectives

The overall objective of this research was two-fold:

- (1) To gain an overall understanding of the migration profile, drivers and origins of Iraqis who migrated to Europe in 2016;
- (2) To gain an in-depth granular understanding of what shapes return of Iraqis from Europe to Iraq at the individual level, what facilitates reintegration at the community level, and what enables return in the longer term.

Analytical Framework

Building on previous research on migration and return, this study looked at migration and return as a *process*, with different steps which shape the individual's decision making over migration, return, and their ability to settle back in their area of origin.²¹ Thereby, the aim was also to determine the most effective means of intervention to facilitate reintegration. For each of these steps a different analytical concept was used, which informed the research design, implementation and subsequent analysis.

Return steps and analytical concepts

1. **Decision making:** Migration Thresholds
2. **Ability to return:** Return Preparedness
3. **Once back in Iraq:** Mixed Embeddedness

1 Decision Making on Migration and Return

The '**Migration Thresholds**' approach, developed by van der Velde and van Naerssen, was used as an analytical framework to understand the extent to which different factors contribute to decision-making on migration to Europe and subsequent return to Iraq.²² The advantage of this approach is that it looks at decision-making as a process in which following 'thresholds' must be overcome before the individual migrates: (1) a person must overcome their indifference towards the concept of migration; (2) the idea of migration starts to be seen as positive rather than negative; (3) a destination is selected and (4) a 'trajectory' or journey is decided on how to get there.

2 The Ability to Return

Once the decision to return is taken, the ability to return, in practical and financial terms, but also mental terms, must be examined. According to the concept of '**Return Preparedness**',²³ this component can be measured through two factors: (1) **readiness to return** (the extent to which returnees are able to gather the resources needed to return, including time, financial resources, experience, knowledge and awareness of the conditions in the host and home countries) and (2) **the voluntariness of return** (the extent to which returnees perceive their return to be their own decision). The level of preparedness to return shapes the subsequent ability of the individual to settle back in the country of origin.

3 Once Back in Iraq

To measure the factors which enable, facilitate and hinder longer term return and reintegration, this study combined the findings of steps one (decision-making) and two (ability to return) with the analytical framework of '**Mixed embeddedness**',²⁴ thus including motivation and preparation for return in the process whereby a person is able to integrate in a given society both socially and economically.²⁵ Mixed embeddedness in turn includes the concepts of economic embeddedness (the ability of the returnees to provide for themselves and construct a livelihood upon return) and social embeddedness (the social network that an individual can build and rely on upon return).

Methodology Overview

Findings presented in the present study are based on two distinct data collection exercises, in line with the overall objectives of the study. Findings on the profile and drivers of Iraqi migrants to Europe in 2016 are based on a quantitative profiling exercise of Iraqi migrants on the Aegean islands of Greece, as well as FGDs with Iraqis on the islands to triangulate findings. Findings on the return journey and the life of returnees once back in Iraq are based on a qualitative methodology with data collection activities in the primary areas of return in Iraq. For this component, FGDs and KIs with Iraqi returnees in KRI and Baghdad, as well as with community leaders in Iraq, were conducted.

Data collection took place between 2 and 29 March 2017 in Greece and between 6 April and 16 June 2017 in Iraq. In total, 413 individuals took part in the study across Greece and Iraq. Greece was selected as a site for data collection because the vast majority (95%) of Iraqis who migrated to Europe in 2016 via sea did so via the Eastern Mediterranean route, through Greece.²⁶ With the EU-Turkey Statement in March 2016,²⁷ Iraqis arriving on the Aegean islands were unable to continue their journey from Greece to other EU countries, which is why Greece, at the time of data collection, was deemed to host the largest proportion of Iraqis who migrated to Europe in 2016. The sites for data collection in Iraq were selected on the basis of prevalence of return migration from Europe to Iraq.

Chapter	What are findings based on?	How to use the findings
Iraqi Migration to Europe in 2016	Quantitative profiling exercise of Iraqi migrant population on the Aegean islands of Lesbos, Samos, Chios and Leros, triangulated with 15 FGDs; carried out between 2 and 29 March 2017	Statistically representative of the Iraqi migrant population on the four Aegean islands of Lesbos, Samos, Chios and Leros at 95% confidence level and 5% margin of error, as of March 2017. NB: as part of the Greek law L4375/2016 vulnerable individuals are to be transferred from the Aegean islands to the mainland; hence these groups are underrepresented in the sample.
Returning from Europe to Iraq	Qualitative data collection (FGDs and KIs) in primary areas of return in Iraq in KRI and Baghdad	Findings pertain to the specific sample of returnees interviewed in Iraq. They are not statistically representative of the Iraqi returnee population, but may be considered indicative of wider trends.
Life once back in Iraq	Qualitative data collection (FGDs and KIs) in primary areas of return in Iraq in KRI and Baghdad	Findings pertain to the specific sample of returnees interviewed in Iraq. They are not statistically representative of the Iraqi returnee population, but may be considered indicative of wider trends.

Limitations

- Findings on Iraqi migration to Europe in 2016 are based on a quantitative profiling of Iraqis on the Aegean islands, and are therefore not generalisable to the entire Iraqi population who entered Europe in 2016. In accordance with the Greek law L4375/2016 and since the implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement, vulnerable migrants, such as unaccompanied women and families with vulnerable family members, have been transferred from the islands to the Greek mainland. As a result, these groups are underrepresented in the profiling exercise.
- During data collection activities in both Greece and Iraq, field teams faced difficulties in gathering women together for FGDs, as they were often not able to leave their homes for extensive periods of time or travel to where FGDs took place. To compensate for the small number of women-only FGDs, where possible, KIs with women were administered. Notwithstanding the efforts made, women's perspectives may be underrepresented as a result.
- Findings are based on self-reported responses. Throughout, respondents were reminded about the anonymity of their participation in the study and that responses would have no impact on their asylum application in Europe or life in Iraq. Nevertheless, particularly for more sensitive questions, such as reasons for migrating to Europe among Iraqis on the Aegean islands, a certain bias in response is possible. For such more sensitive questions, responses were triangulated with other information provided by respondents, i.e. areas of origin in Iraq and personal history. At the end of each questionnaire, enumerators also noted their impressions of respondents' responses, to guide subsequent analysis.

FINDINGS

Iraqi Migration to Europe in 2016

This sub-chapter presents findings related to migration from Iraq to Europe in 2016, including the areas of origin of Iraqis who migrated to Europe in 2016, their gender, age and socio-economic status, as well as the drivers of Iraqi migration and intended destinations in Europe. Please note that findings herein presented illustrate the profile of Iraqis who arrived on the Aegean islands between March 2016 and March 2017, the main gateway to Europe for Iraqis in that period. Furthermore, as per Greek law 4375, vulnerable individuals, notably individuals with disabilities, unaccompanied women and persons requiring specific medical attention are to be transferred from the islands to mainland Greece. As such, these groups are underrepresented in the findings.

Profile of Iraqi Migrants to Europe in 2016²⁸

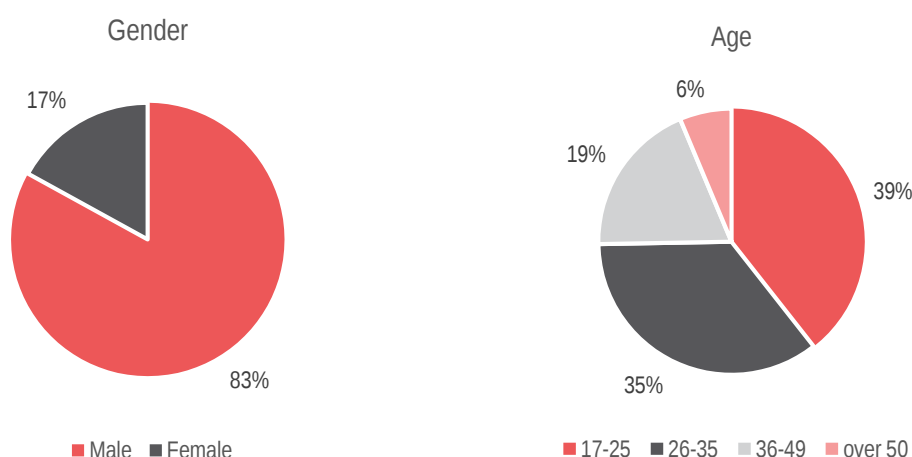
Key Findings

- **Top three areas of origin:** 1. Baghdad (30%); 2. Ninewa (20%); 3. Sulaymaniyah (13%).
- **Respondents were predominantly young males:** 83% were male; 39% were aged 17 to 25 and 35% were 26 to 35 years old.
- **Top three levels of education completed:** 1. Primary school (34%); 2. Middle school (26%); 3. University (16%).
- **While most Iraqis were working in Iraq prior to leaving for Europe, many reportedly did not earn enough money to support themselves;** most reported jobs were 1. Running a small business (20%); 2. Practitioner of trade (16%); 3. Low skilled service labour (15%); only 10% were unemployed prior to migrating.

Age and gender

The Iraqi migrants interviewed on the Aegean islands of Lesbos, Samos, Chios and Leros were mostly male (83%) and predominantly young (39% were aged 17 to 25 and 35% were 26 to 35 years old). Only one in five Iraqis interviewed on the Aegean islands was older than 35 years.

Figure 1: Gender and age of Iraqi migrants on the Aegean islands

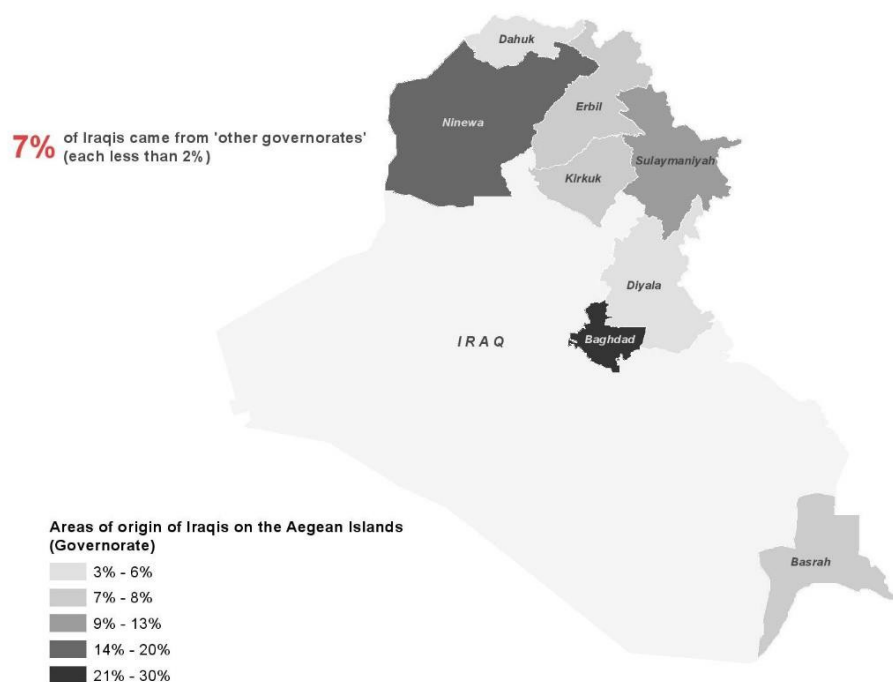


However, almost half of respondents (45%) reported having travelled to Greece with members of their family. This illustrates that the sample of Iraqis on the Aegean islands is likely to underrepresent women, as men may have stepped in to respond on behalf of their household.²⁹ Indeed, during data collection along the Western Balkans route between December 2015 and May 2016, REACH found that 41% of Iraqi migrants along the route were women.

Area of origin in Iraq

Half of all respondents interviewed on the Aegean islands originated from two governorates in Iraq (50%): **Baghdad (30%)** and **Ninewa (20%)**. The third most reported area of origin, stated by one in six respondents, was Sulaymaniyah (13%) in KRI.

Map 1: Areas of origin of Iraqi migrants on the Aegean islands



One in three respondents (31%) had been internally displaced prior to migrating to Europe. Most reported areas of origin were Sinjar, followed by Mosul and Baghdad. Most had moved to KRI (80%), while 20% had been displaced to Baghdad. Only two respondents had reportedly migrated to Europe for a second time.

Table 1: Sub-districts of origin in top three areas of origin in Iraq

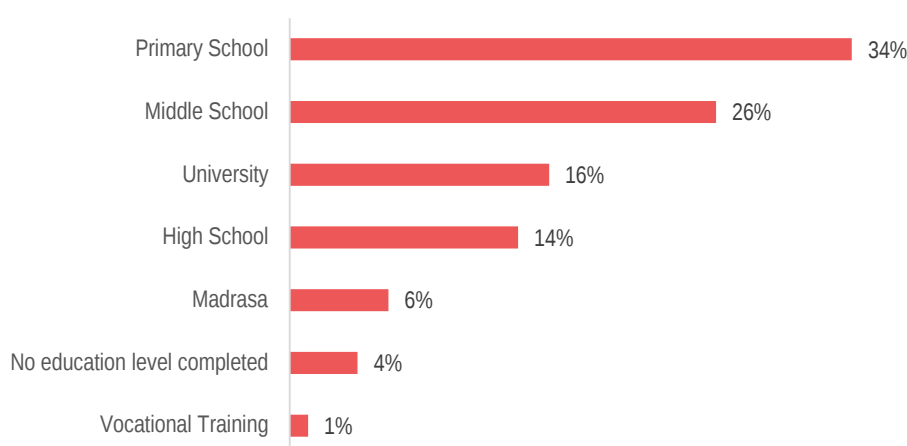
Baghdad	Ninewa	Sulaymaniyah
Al Jidida/ New Baghdad (15%)	Sinjar (51%)	Kalar (15%)
Adhamiyah (10%)	Mosul (22%)	Sarchnar (12%)
Karkh (6%)	Shikan (5%)	Darbandikhan (9%)

The areas of origin of Iraqi arrivals prior to and after the EU-Turkey Statement in March 2016 were largely comparable. Nevertheless, since the EU-Turkey Statement there has been a slight increase in arrivals from areas which can be considered less safe, such as Ninewa and Baghdad. While prior to the EU-Turkey Statement most Iraqis came from Ninewa (16%) and Dahuk (16%), followed by Diyala and Baghdad, after the statement arrivals from Ninewa increased to 20%, as did arrivals from Baghdad (30%).³⁰

Education and employment prior to migration

More than one third of respondents interviewed on the Aegean islands had completed primary school (34%); one in four respondents (26%) had completed middle school. Higher education levels, such as high school or university were reported less frequently. A comparatively low 16% of respondents had reportedly completed university; 14% had completed high school.

Figure 2: Highest education level completed by Iraqi migrants on the Aegean islands

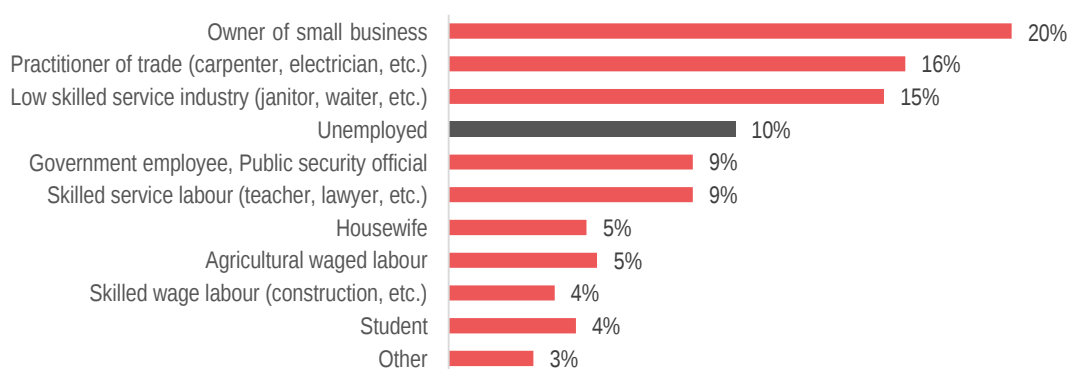


The relatively high frequency of reporting of lower levels of education may be related to the increased affordability of migration from Iraq to Europe over time, whereby poorer families, with lower education levels, could only afford migration to Europe when it became more common and, thereby, less expensive. Indeed, already during the months of December 2015 to May 2016 along the Western Balkans route, REACH recorded an overall decrease in the number of Iraqi adults who had completed at least primary or secondary education. For instance, while in December 2015 70% of Iraqi migrant groups included at least one adult with completed primary or secondary education, in May 2016, only 42% of Iraqi groups interviewed included adults with this level of education.

In comparison, in one IOM study on Iraqis who migrated to Europe in 2015, 47% of Iraqis in the sample had completed secondary education and 41% university.³¹ While the sample in that study was not statistically representative of Iraqis who migrated to Europe in 2015,³² it does indicate a trend which stands in stark contrast to findings on the Iraqi population who migrated to Europe in 2016.

Furthermore, most respondents on the Aegean islands reported having been working prior to leaving Iraq, mostly as owners of small commercial businesses (20%), as practitioners of specific trades, such as carpenters, electricians (16%) or working in the service industry, including as janitors, waiters or cooks (15%). A comparatively low 10% of respondents reported having been unemployed prior to migration.

Figure 3: Last employment prior to leaving Iraq



Among employed Iraqis who migrated to Europe interviewed by IOM in 2015, the reported types of employment were comparable to those of Iraqis who migrated to Europe a year later on the Aegean islands, with work in sales and business, as well as skilled manual labour, being the most reported types of employment. That being said, the employment rate of Iraqis interviewed by IOM was found to be significantly different. Almost half (47%) of them reported having been unemployed at the time of departure, compared to a much lower 10% of Iraqis on the Aegean islands in 2016. This suggests that unemployment was not such a common reason for migrating for Iraqis in 2016 as it was in 2015.

Decision Making over Migration to Europe

Key Findings

- **Top three self-reported reasons for migration:** 1. Conflict (37%); 2. Religiously, ethnically or politically motivated persecution (22%); 3. Health problems (9%).
- **Conflict as driver of migration was experienced differently in different regions:** in Ninewa, respondents felt that their immediate life was in danger; in Baghdad and KRI, fear of a spread of conflict prevailed.
- **Impact of EU-Turkey Statement:** 75% of respondents on the Aegean islands left Iraq after the Statement, reportedly knowing of its existence.
- **Top three migration triggers:** 1. Traditional/social media made migration seem possible and easy (38%); 2. Personal situation changed (including threats to the respondent, conflict-related deaths in the family) (24%); 3. Person believed they could be granted asylum or a residence permit in Europe (22%).
- **Top three planned destination countries:** 1. Germany (37%), 2. the Netherlands (11%), 3. United Kingdom (11%). Eighteen percent reported 'any safe country'.
- **Top three reasons for choosing any destination:** 1. Family members at destination (25%); 2. Safety (17%); Social services, including good education and health services (17%).

Migration was very rarely a rushed decision and most Iraqis who migrated to Europe in 2016 had contemplated migration for years, gathering the necessary resources before leaving. On average, respondents on the Aegean islands reported having spent two and a half years between first thinking about migration and leaving.

Once respondents decided to migrate, it still took them an average of six months or more to gather the necessary resources to leave. In fact, **Iraqis on the Aegean islands and returnees who had migrated to Europe in 2016 repeatedly reported during FGDs that they had spent months saving money and selling assets prior to leaving.** Often, respondents reported having sold their houses or productive assets, such as their shops or cars (in the case of taxi drivers) to be able to afford the journey. This illustrates that many Iraqis who migrated to Europe in 2016 were less affluent and needed months to accrue the necessary resources to leave.

Average time spent between first thinking about migration and departure to Europe: 2.5 years

Of these:

- **2 years** contemplating migration
- **6 months** to prepare for the journey and sell assets

At the same time, it also indicates that the idea of migration matured in people's minds over time and that **even when policies were implemented to deter migration, these did not impact individuals' determination to migrate to Europe.** In fact, 75% of Iraqis interviewed on the Aegean islands had left Iraq after the implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement in March 2016. When asked whether they had been aware of the policy, respondents in FGDs often reported that they had, but that they were nonetheless determined to reach Europe.

Drivers of migration

The most frequently self-reported primary reasons for migrating to Europe among Iraqis on the Aegean islands were conflict (37%), individual persecution on political, ethnic or religious grounds (22%) or health issues (9%).

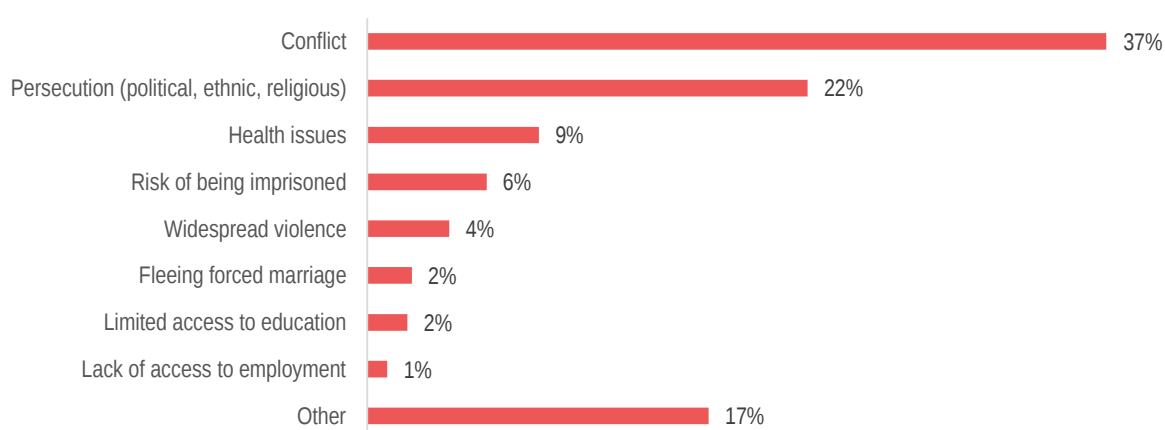
Main drivers of migration:

1. Conflict (37%)
2. Individual persecution (22%)
3. Health issues (9%)

Contributing factors:

1. Lack of trust in authorities
2. Lack of improvement in situation in Iraq over time

Figure 4: Self-reported primary reasons for leaving Iraq



The drivers of migration are often multiple and complex; individual migration decisions and flows can be affected by a number of intertwined drivers influenced by the economic, political, social, demographic and environmental context, well-documented in migration research.³³ Therefore, respondents on the Aegean islands were asked to report the top three reasons why they left Iraq. **Across primary, secondary and tertiary reasons, almost all were related to conflict or some form of violence, which respondents feared or had reportedly experienced in Iraq.** Among respondents who reported 'other' reasons as drivers of migration, migrants usually explained that their decision to leave home had been triggered by so many intertwined issues that they did not feel they could break these down into separate categories.

Table 2: Self-reported primary, secondary and tertiary reasons for migration

	Conflict	Individual persecution	Health issues	Risk of being imprisoned	Fear of spread of violence	Lack of access to employment	Other/ No further
1. Reason	37%	22%	9%	6%	4%	1%	17%
2. Reason	5%	39%	7%	7%	15%	3%	20%
3. Reason	0%	18%	8%	14%	0%	3%	18%

In both Baghdad and Ninewa, conflict and persecution were the most reported drivers of migration. In contrast, in Sulaymaniyah, while the fear of conflict in neighbouring regions was still the most reported reason for migration (26%), health issues were reported by one in four (24%) respondents. In addition, 15% of respondents in Sulaymaniyah reported a fear of spread of violence as driver of migration.

Table 3: Self-reported top five drivers of migration in top three reported areas of origin³⁴

	Baghdad	Ninewa	Sulaymaniyah
1	Conflict (34%)	Conflict (38%)	Conflict (26%)
2	Individual persecution (26%)	Individual persecution (18%)	Health issues (24%)
3	Risk of being imprisoned (13%)	Health issues (7%)	Fear of spread of violence (15%)
4	Reunite with family abroad (4%)	Better education (4%)	Individual persecution (15%)
5	Other (10%)	Other (10%)	Employment opportunities (3%)

Conflict

Conflict was reported as the primary driver of migration by 37% of respondents overall. That being said, how conflict impacted on the individual and how it influenced the decision to migrate differed by area of origin. Respondents originating from Ninewa governorate reported that the conflict in Mosul had an immediate impact on their lives, which made remaining in their area of origin impossible. Respondents from Sulaymaniyah governorate reported that the fear of the conflict spreading to their areas of origin prompted the decision to leave, as they did not feel safe, even though their area was not directly affected. Several participants from Ninewa and Baghdad governorates reported that they had been directly affected by the conflict, as family members had been killed by armed groups or militia.

Conflict as migration driver

Conflict was the most reported driver of migration across areas of origin (37%). How conflict drove migration differed across regions:

- In Ninewa conflict had an immediate impact on personal security.
- In KRI and Baghdad fears of spread of conflict and economic impact of conflict prevailed.

Conflict was repeatedly reported as having an impact on many aspects of respondents' lives, other than their immediate safety. Among respondents from Ninewa, the conflict in Mosul had the most severe effects, as family members were reportedly killed and access to basic goods, including food and water, and services, such as health and education, was severely limited. Some FGD participants from Ninewa mentioned that their houses had been bombed, or that larger areas in their region of origin needed rebuilding. Among respondents in Baghdad and KRI the opinion emerged that the conflict in Ninewa heavily impacted the economy in the whole of Iraq.

Conflict as driver of asylum-related migration is well documented in the academic literature on migration.³⁵ Research on conflict and migration in Colombia suggests that, while actual violent events drive migration, perceptions of violence and a generalised lack of security are key determinants of forced population movements.³⁶ This illustrates that it is not only the conflict per se, but also the perception of resulting insecurity which drives migration.

According to neoclassical migration theory, whereby a would-be migrant makes a cost-benefit calculation on staying versus leaving, **in the face of conflict or the threat of violence, the costs of staying vastly increase, making departure all the more appealing.** This theory is corroborated, among others, by research conducted by Moore and Shellman in 2004, who used a global sample of countries with data spanning from 1952 to 1995 to identify the drivers of forced migration.³⁷

Individual persecution

In addition to the frequently reported fears related to the general security situation in Iraq, 22% of respondents on the islands indicated that they had left Iraq primarily because they felt personally at risk. Several Iraqis on the islands reported that they had been threatened, and had left because they felt that their life was in danger. For the most part, this related to their religious affiliation, or affiliation to certain political groups.

Some participants also reported that they had been kidnapped and held for ransom, as victims of crime. In 2017, Baghdad's criminal court announced that there has been a significant increase in the number of cases of kidnapping in the capital, which some officials suspected was due to rising unemployment.³⁸ Victims, often children from wealthy families, were held for ransom, although perpetrators reportedly often ended up killing the victims even if the ransom was paid.³⁹ Official statistics on the number of kidnappings are not publicly available, although one source within the Interior Ministry reported **745 registered instances of kidnapping in Baghdad in the first nine months of 2016**, with many more reportedly gone unrecorded.⁴⁰

Individual persecution as migration driver

Individual persecution was reported to be the primary reason for leaving Iraq by 22% of respondents. Types of persecution mentioned were:

- Persecution on the basis of religious affiliation
- Persecution on the basis of political affiliation
- Kidnapping for ransom, as victims of crime

Health

Health-related reasons were reported as the primary reason for leaving Iraq by 20% of respondents who originated from KRI. Although most participants in FGDs on the islands did not reportedly have serious health problems, many reported that the lack of reliable and good quality healthcare in Iraq was one of their main reasons for migrating. Participants repeatedly reported that public services, particularly hospitals, were of poor quality. Some reported that healthcare was difficult to access or that certain medicines were not available. Some participants reported that they or their children had specific health problems and that they had wanted to be in Europe where the healthcare system was better. This is consistent with the findings of other studies, whereby an increased investment in services such as healthcare decreases the likelihood of migration.⁴¹

Health problems as migration driver

Mostly reported in KRI as public health services were perceived to be of low quality. Often reported together with other migration drivers.

Lack of trust in authorities

In FGDs in Greece, respondents frequently reported that their decision to leave was further influenced by the political situation in Iraq, and a general sense of mistrust towards official authorities in the country. While not a driver of migration per se, this added to respondents' feeling that they could not trust the authorities back home and, as such, contributed to their decision to leave. Respondents shared that Iraqi society was divided and that they did not feel that all interests were equally represented.

These findings resonate with some of the reasons given by returnees in the 2015 IOM study on why they had decided to migrate. This qualitative study found that many returnees had the feeling that the law did not apply equally to everyone, and that Iraqi citizens tended to have unequal access to services such as education and healthcare, job opportunities, resources and wealth.⁴²

Lack of trust in authorities as contributing factor in decision to migrate

Lack of trust towards official authorities in Iraq shapes migrants' impression that difficult situation in Iraq will not be solved on two levels:

- **Security:** sense of a lack of power monopoly in country
- **Livelihoods:** perceived lack of meritocracy, nepotism, corruption

Issues tied to corruption and nepotism were mentioned frequently in FGDs, as was the necessity of having 'the right connections'.⁴³ In this context, law enforcement was reportedly not trusted, meaning that when individuals were in need of help, they were not necessarily reaching out to official channels, as they did not believe these would be able or willing to help them.⁴⁴

Lack of improvement in overall living situation in Iraq

While not explicitly mentioned as driver of migration, the length of time respondents contemplated migration prior to deciding to migrate (2.5 years on average) and the fact that this timing coincided with the start of the conflict in Mosul indicate that **the decision to migrate was also influenced by the impression that the situation in the country was not improving and the fear that it may get worse.** This is consistent with the most reported reason for migration reported by Iraqis interviewed in 2015 by IOM, namely 'lack of hope in the future'. Notably, a minority of respondents (20%) had reportedly already started thinking about migration to Europe in 2011 and in 2003, when other conflicts took place. This suggests that, even though the violence in the country may not have had an immediate impact on individuals' lives, the experience of witnessing one conflict after the other and the lack of trust that these would abate in the near future, shaped the decision to migrate among Iraqis of all regions.

Lack of improvement in overall living situation in Iraq as contributing factor in the decision to migrate

General sense that situation in country in terms of security, livelihoods, access to services does not improve.

- **Security:** several, consecutive conflicts in country: 2003, 2011, 2014
- **Livelihoods:** falling oil prices, economic impact felt across the country
- **No trusted power monopoly** to address perceived challenges

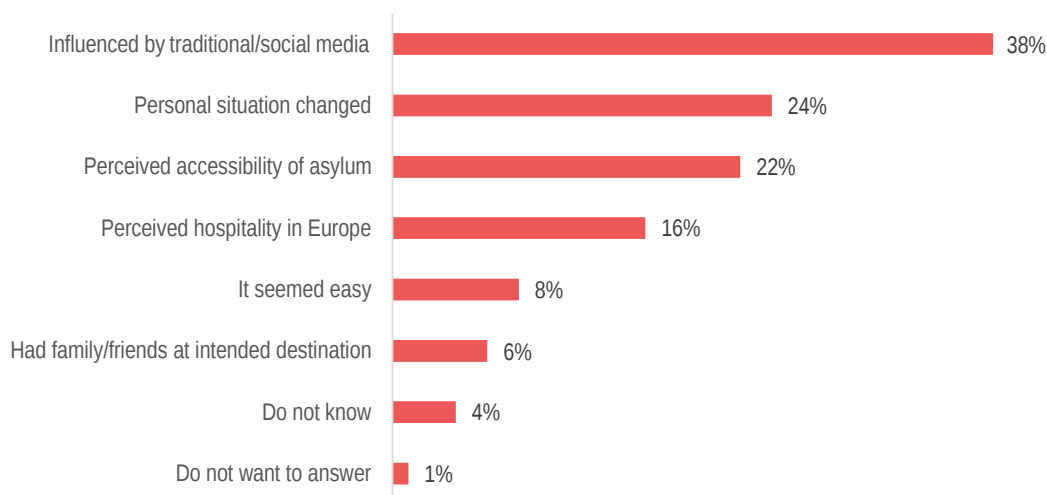
Triggers of migration

While most respondents had reportedly contemplated migration for some time, the actual decision to leave was often triggered by a specific event.⁴⁵ For 38% of respondents, news they received through social or traditional media prompted the decision to leave. For others, as was the case of one in four respondents on the Aegean islands (24%), a specific event - changing their personal situation - occurred, mostly due to direct security threats to or violent deaths of family members.

Migration triggers (why now?)

1. Media (traditional / social) (38%)
2. Personal situation changed (24%)
3. Perceived accessibility of asylum (22%)

Figure 5: Migration triggers



In FGDs in Greece, respondents frequently reported that family members had experienced security incidents, or that they had received acute security threats, which prompted the immediate decision to leave. In these instances, most reported having known how to leave, as information on the predominant routes and ways of travel was easily accessible through media and accounts from friends or community members.

Planned destination upon departure

Among respondents interviewed on the Aegean islands, the most reported destination upon departure was Germany (37%), followed by the Netherlands (11%) and the United Kingdom (11%). One in five respondents (18%) reported that they wanted to reach any safe country.

Destination upon departure

1. Germany (37%)
2. Netherlands (11%)
3. United Kingdom (11%)

Germany was also the preferred destination among migrants who travelled in the first months of 2016 along the Western Balkans route, where 70% of all migrant groups reported wanting to reach Germany.⁴⁶ Among Iraqi migrants interviewed by IOM in 2015, Germany had also been the preferred destination, although other European countries, notably Austria, Finland and Sweden, were also reported as potential destinations.

Map 2: Countries of destination of Iraqis on the Aegean islands who migrated to Europe in 2016



When asked why they had a particular destination in mind, respondents on the Aegean islands most frequently reported having family in the destination country as reason. Also frequently reported were good social services, including education and health services (reported by 24% of respondents who wanted to reach Germany and 20% of respondents aiming to reach the United Kingdom).

Top three reasons for choosing a particular destination

1. Family at destination (25%)
2. Social services (17%)
3. Safety (17%)

Table 4: Primary reasons for choosing destination, by top three destinations⁴⁷

	Primary reason for choosing destination	Family at destination	Social services	Safety	Easier to ask for asylum	Free, democratic country	Already speak the language
1	Germany	26%	24%	21%	6%	2%	0%
2	Netherlands	27%	7%	20%	10%	17%	0%
3	United Kingdom	23%	20%	10%	10%	0%	27%

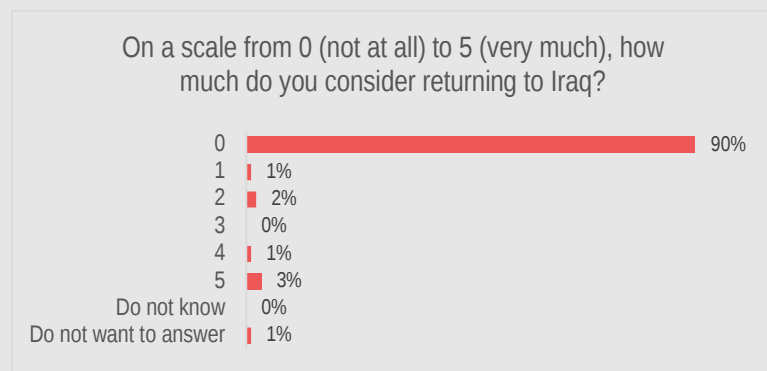
Among Iraqis who wanted to reach the United Kingdom, 27% reported that the primary reason was that they could already speak the language and, as a result, they would feel more comfortable living there than elsewhere. This is consistent with the findings of Robinson and Segrott, who conducted research on asylum seekers in the United Kingdom in 2002. They found that among individuals who did actively decide to reach the United Kingdom, destination choice was influenced by the existence of social networks in the country and the ability to speak English.⁴⁸

Among Iraqis who migrated to Europe in 2015 and were interviewed by IOM, family was not reported as the most important factor when choosing a destination. The two top reported reasons for choosing a destination among Iraqis interviewed in Europe in 2015 were the accessibility of asylum (43%) or the presence of family or friends in the country (27%).⁴⁹ Smaller numbers of respondents in the IOM study reported that they had chosen their destination based on how easy it was to reach (11%), the ease of obtaining a visa (11%), or the affordability

of the journey (8%).⁵⁰ This illustrates that **more recently arrived migrants often already have family at the destination they aim to reach and may not base their choice of destination on changing policies between different European countries.**

Intentions to Return among Iraqi Migrants on the Aegean Islands, March 2017

Among Iraqis interviewed on the Aegean islands only very few reportedly contemplated returning to Iraq. When asked whether they thought about returning to Iraq, the vast majority of respondents (90%) reported not considering returning at all. It is worth noting that this was not due to the limited information available on return, as most respondents reported they knew how to return or, in case they did not, whom to ask for information. All participants in FGDs repeatedly stressed that no matter how bad their situation in Greece was, they would not return to Iraq.



Migration to Europe

More than half (62%) of respondents reported that they still thought migration to Europe had been a very good idea, despite the difficulties and harsh living conditions recorded on the Aegean islands. Most still intended to reach their final destination in Europe. Only 8% reported that they thought migration to Europe was a bad idea.

Preconditions for return to Iraq from Greece

Top 5 Preconditions for Return

1. Safety in area of origin in Iraq (29%)
2. Safety in another region in Iraq (22%)
3. Social reconciliation in area of origin (8%)
4. Shelter in Iraq (7%)
5. Access to employment in Iraq (7%)

All reported preconditions for return to Iraq from Greece were factors concerning the situation in Iraq, rather than factors in the host country or personal factors. The most commonly reported preconditions were improvement in the security situation, political and economic stability and the end of conflict. Participants in all FGDs reported that there was no hope for the situation in Iraq to improve, and hence they did not want to return. This is in marked contrast to the reasons for return reported by returnees in Iraq, suggesting that the conditions in Iraq are a driver of migration, and that return is rather dictated by adverse circumstances in the host country or the migrant's personal situation, rather than by an improvement in the situation in Iraq.

Ability to return

All participants in FGDs on the islands reported that, since they did not want to return, they had not thought about how they would go back to Iraq, and believed that **the journey back, should they choose to return, would not pose any difficulties**. Participants reported that they had sufficient information regarding the return journey, often reporting that they felt pressure from the government or from (I)NGOs to return to Iraq. Furthermore, participants did not want to know about assisted return, and often reported that they were not interested in support available to return, adding that if they decided to return they could do so without help.

Impact of migration on the individual and their family

All participants reported that they had spent large amounts of money to make the journey to Greece, and all had used intermediaries in order to reach Greece. The cost of migration had reportedly had a negative impact on participants' families back in Iraq, as many were reportedly being supported by their family, when they had hoped to be able to send remittances to support their family instead.

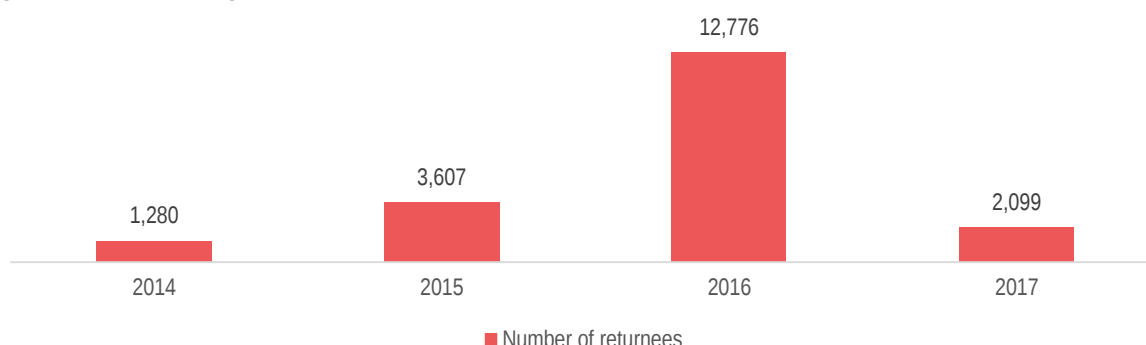
More than half of participants in FGDs on the islands (39 out of 71) reported that they had travelled with family members to Greece. Participants who had travelled with their family often reported that migration was putting pressure on family relationships, and that they were suffering from anxiety, depression or other mental health conditions as a result of their uncertain situation on the islands. For those who travelled on their own, migration was also reported to sometimes put pressure on family relationships, because families were separated.

Returning from Europe to Iraq

This sub-chapter of the report outlines assessment findings related to return migration from Europe to Iraq from 2015 to 2017, including decision-making over return migration, the ability to return and the journey back to Iraq. It is based on qualitative data collected in the primary areas of return in Iraq: several locations in KRI and Baghdad.

The number of Iraqis returning from Europe to Iraq between 2014 and 2016 has substantially increased. The number of Iraqis who returned with IOM assistance increased almost ten-fold from 2014 to 2016.⁵¹ However, in the first three months of 2017, 2,099 Iraqis were assisted with return by IOM, compared to 3,788 in the same period in 2016,⁵² suggesting that fewer Iraqis may return to Iraq with assistance in 2017, compared to 2016. Nevertheless, these figures do not include Iraqis who have decided to return to Iraq without formal assistance, about whom there are no figures available. However, according to several media sources, there appears to have been an increase in the number of Iraqis returning on their own.⁵³

Figure 6: Number of Iraqis who returned with IOM assistance, 2014-2017⁵⁴



Decision Making over Return to Iraq

Key Findings

- **Top host countries in Europe that returnees returned from:** 1. Germany (31 out of 65); 2. Finland (10 out of 65); 3. Sweden and Austria (6 out of 65).
- **Top three reasons for return:** 1. Asylum application rejected (22 out of 65); 2. Family reasons (16 out of 65); 3. Tired of waiting for result of asylum application (12 out of 65).
- **Voluntariness of return:** Half of returnees felt the decision to return was not at all their choice (32 out of 65 returnees); 17 reported it was mostly not their choice.
- **Top five preconditions for return among Iraqi migrants on the Aegean islands:** 1. Safety in area of origin in Iraq (29%); 2. Safety in another region in Iraq (22%); 3. Social reconciliation in area of origin (8%); 4. Shelter in Iraq (7%); 5. Ability to work (7%).

Returnees interviewed in primary areas of return in Iraq had returned from 13 different European countries. **The most commonly reported host countries were Germany, Finland, Austria and Sweden.**

Table 5: Host country from which returnees interviewed had returned to Iraq⁵⁵

Host country	Total	Baghdad	KRI
Germany	31	14	17
Finland	10	9	1
Sweden	6	3	3
Austria	6	5	1
UK	3	0	3
Turkey	2	0	2
Other	7	0	7

The self-reported primary drivers of migration from Iraq to Europe among respondents in the sample in Iraq were as follows:

Table 6: Self-reported drivers of migration to Europe among sample of Iraqi returnees interviewed in Iraq

Top three drivers of migration	
1	Limited livelihoods (30 out of 65)
2	Lack of safety / security (25 out of 65)
3	(Fear of spread of) conflict (12 out of 65)

Voluntariness of return

Of the 65 returnees interviewed, only a small minority were forcibly returned. Three returnees interviewed (all males from Sulaymaniyah) reported having been deported from their host country in Europe (the United Kingdom, Switzerland and Sweden respectively). However, the extent to which return can be considered voluntary is often more nuanced than simply not being deported.⁵⁶ **In fact, 49 out of 65 returnees reported that the decision was entirely not or mostly not their choice, as there had been circumstances beyond their control which made it necessary to return.**⁵⁷

'My decision was not free because we were forced to return by the circumstances and by not being granted residency.'

23 year old male returnee from Baghdad

Table 7: Voluntariness of return, as reported by returnees (1= felt little choice; 5= felt a lot of choice)⁵⁸

Voluntariness of return	1	2	3	4	5
KRI	15	5	0	0	7
Baghdad	17	12	2	0	2

Many returnees reported that external circumstances or personal factors had shaped the decision to return, and that they had not had other options. **The most common example of this, particularly among returnees interviewed in Baghdad, was that returnees had their asylum application rejected (reported by 18 returnees in Baghdad), and so they felt that they had no other choice but to return to Iraq.** Nineteen returnees returned before receiving a result on their asylum application, because seeing other Iraqis being denied asylum reportedly made them believe that they had very low chances of being granted asylum themselves, or because they could not wait for the outcome of their asylum application any longer.

A number of returnees who had returned for personal reasons, such as to be with their family (16 out of 65), also reported that they felt they did not have much choice over the decision to return. Five returnees reported that they had not had the money to continue their journey to their intended destination, and so they had to return to Iraq.

Reasons for return

Among respondents who had returned to Iraq from Europe between 2014 and 2017, factors in the host country and individual factors were more frequently reported as reasons which shaped the decision to return than factors in Iraq. The most reported reason for return was that the individual's application for asylum had been rejected. Family reasons, such as a death or serious sickness of a close family member, were the second most reported reason for return, reported by 16 individuals.

Table 8: Reasons for return, by area of origin and frequency of reporting

Primary reason for return	KRI	Baghdad
Europe-based reasons		
Asylum application rejected	4	18
Tired of waiting	6	6
Host country not as expected	1	4
Could not reach destination	5	0
Deported	3	0
Difficult conditions in host country	1	1
Personal reasons		
Family reasons	14	2

Only few studies looking into the reasons for return from destination countries in the Global North to the Global South exist.⁵⁹ One of the main studies conducted on the topic is a comparative study on return in 15 countries conducted by Koser and Kuschminder and commissioned by IOM in 2015. That study found that conditions in the host country and personal factors were the most reported reasons for return among the sample of respondents. In fact, 54.2% of respondents in the study commissioned by IOM reported that conditions in the host country were an important factor in the decision whether to return. The second most reported reason was individual factors, followed by social factors, which included missing one's family or homeland.

This is in stark contrast with the main reasons for return reported by Iraqi IDPs who never left for Europe but returned to their areas of origin within Iraq. An IOM study on Iraqi IDP returnees to their areas of origin found that, most commonly, IDPs returned to their areas of origin upon improvement of conditions there, rather than due to conditions in their site of displacement.⁶⁰ This contrasting finding may be partly explained by the fact that one third of returnees interviewed (22 respondents) in the present study reportedly returned because their asylum application was rejected. As such, their ability to decide whether to stay or return was more limited, compared to IDPs, who, in the context of the IOM study, had more agency to decide whether to stay or return to their areas of origin. Another reason may be that IDPs had reportedly left their areas of origin mostly due to conflict experienced; while returnees interviewed in the present study had migrated to Europe for a wider array of reasons, including economic factors, and, as such, the situation in their area of origin was relatively less important than their situation in Europe or personal reasons.

Migrants' situation in Europe as reason for return

The majority of returnees had decided to return from Europe to Iraq due to the conditions in the host country. **Most reported reasons were (1) the difficulties in obtaining legal residence in Europe, (2) economic factors in the host country which affected the family back home and (3) the limited access to family reunification in Europe.** Despite the diversity of host countries, the reasons for return were similar across countries.

1. Difficulties in obtaining legal residence in Europe

All returnees interviewed in Iraq had wanted to obtain legal residence in their intended destination in Europe. For many, the difficulty of doing so was a primary reason for returning to Iraq. This was reported by returnees who had come back from all host countries except Turkey, Bulgaria, Hungary and France, where five returnees had not applied for international protection. These returnees had decided to return to Iraq because they had been unable to continue their journey to other European countries, having run out of money and hope of reaching their intended destination.

'I started thinking about leaving Austria after four months. I got nothing. I was waiting there for a long time with no change in my situation, no progress. I saw many families and individuals who returned home after a few days.'

28 year old male returnee from Wasit

Around one third of returnees (22 out of 65) had their asylum applications rejected, which was a particularly common reason for return among returnees from Baghdad (reported by 18 returnees interviewed in Baghdad). None of the respondents had reportedly considered remaining in their host country illegally. Three returnees interviewed in KRI had been deported and therefore had had no choice over their return.

Close to one third of returnees (19 out of 65) chose to return to Iraq before their asylum procedure was completed, often because they felt there was little hope of being granted asylum. These returnees often reported that the procedure to obtain legal residence and access to employment in Europe was taking far longer than they had anticipated, and that they had actually not managed to do so during their time in Europe. Many returnees reported that, having run out of money, hope or patience, they felt they had no other option than to return to Iraq. Twelve returnees reported that they had become tired of waiting, adding that hearing of other Iraqis returning was another indication that it was not worth waiting for the outcome of their asylum application.

Anxiety over one's legal status and its influence over the decision to return have also been found in other studies on migration and return. In a study of returnees to Sri Lanka who had been living irregularly in the United Kingdom, Collyer et al. found that anxiety over living irregularly 'wore people down' and affected their return decisions.⁶¹

2. Economic factors shaping the decision to return

Many returnees expressed disappointment and frustration with their inability to work legally in their host country in Europe. Five returnees claimed that their situation was worse than they had expected and was unsustainable since they could not support themselves or their families back home, so they decided to

'We were not allowed to work because according to European Union law it is forbidden to work without a residence permit.'

24 year old male returnee from Baghdad

return to Iraq in order to try to construct a livelihood back in Iraq. This resonates with the findings of the study on returns by Koser and Kuschminder, where 30% of respondents across all the 15 countries surveyed reported that not having the right to work or being able to find employment were important factors shaping the decision to return.⁶²

The inability to work was often linked to the need to send remittances and support family back in Iraq. Most participants reported that it took longer than they had anticipated to be able to send remittances, which meant that many returnees felt that they had become a burden to their families back home, which had invested large amounts of money or sold assets, hoping to see remittances sent back quickly. A REACH/Mixed Migration Platform (MMP) assessment on separated families conducted in April 2017, which included Iraqis, found that families often waited around two years to receive any remittances from family members in Europe, becoming increasingly vulnerable as a result.⁶³

3. Limited access to family reunification at destination

Five returnees reported that procedures for family reunification to bring family members from Iraq to Europe took longer than anticipated. As a result, having waited for up to a year with no progress, they decided to return to Iraq to be with their family. Three of these returnees had returned to Iraq in order to bring their families to the host country, only to find that the borders had closed before they managed to migrate again.

'I didn't think about leaving Europe, but then I couldn't take my family there, it would take one to two years. So I came back to collect my family, but by that time the border had been closed.'

36 year old male returnee from Mosul
(displaced in KRI)

Often, the difficult living conditions in the host country were a contributing factor to the decision to return, and two returnees reported this as their primary reason for returning to Iraq. Many returnees reported that they were staying in temporary accommodation, such as camps, for longer than they had anticipated. This, combined with the inability to work, meant that many returnees became increasingly hopeless and sometimes suffered from anxiety, depression or other mental health problems as a result. According to IOM, the main sources of frustration for Iraqis in Europe in 2015 were reportedly the living conditions, particularly regarding the lack of employment opportunities and unclear legal status.⁶⁴

The situation in Iraq as reason for return

Having decided to leave the host country, almost all returnees (61 out of 65) reported that they had decided to return to Iraq, rather than to go somewhere else. This was reportedly because returnees often had family and a community to return to, or they did not have any other options, as they had run out of money having spent their savings on the journey from Iraq. Only four returnees reported that they had wanted to go elsewhere (to the UK, Norway, or Canada), but they did not have the resources to make the journey.

'After about six months in Germany I still had no result on my asylum application, and my city got liberated from ISIL so I thought it would be good to return. Germany was very different from what I expected. Many Iraqis went back home because of the hard life for refugees there, with no jobs and no residence permits.'

27 year old male returnee from Anbar
(displaced in Baghdad)

No returnees reported conditions in Iraq as the primary reason for return.

This resonates with the findings in the study on return to 15 countries by Koser and Kuschminder in 2015, where the situation in the area of origin was also not found to be a significant factor influencing the decision to return.⁶⁵ However, as the authors in said study postulated at the time, this finding remains surprising, as it contrasts with previous research on return migration, notably a study conducted by Black for the UK Home Office in 2004, where the situation in the area of origin was found to be key to the decision to return.⁶⁶ As reported by the author of the study, this may be partly explained by factors which shaped the decision to migrate to Europe in the first place. Koser and Kuschminder in their study in 2015, for instance, suggest that most respondents in their sample were so-called economic migrants, for whom the situation at origin may have been more suitable to return to, than for asylum seekers or recognised refugees. However, the authors also point to the prevalence of return due to a lack of legal status in the country, which reduces respondents' ability to make an agentic choice over return. Similar dynamics may be at play in the present study.

For some returnees (18 out of 65), the situation in their area of origin remained too difficult for them to return, which meant that 14 returnees originally from Mosul and Anbar had returned from Europe, but were now internally displaced in KRI. Four returnees from Babel, Anbar and Mosul were living in Baghdad at the time of data collection.

Personal reasons for return

Sixteen returnees reported that they had returned to Iraq because of family reasons, such as caring for a sick family member or in order to be with family, rather than remain alone in Europe. Reasons relating to returnees' family were found to be the most influential ones for deciding to return to Iraq by IOM in late

'I just came back because my sister was kidnapped, because she needed me. Otherwise I would have stayed in Germany.'

27 year old male returnee from Mosul
(displaced in KRI)

2016,⁶⁷ and were one of the top reported reasons in another IOM study.⁶⁸ **Family reasons were the most common reason for return among returnees interviewed in KRI, reported by 14 out of 34 returnees.**

Women's Views on Migration and Return

Women's experiences of migration

The majority of women interviewed in Greece (17 out of 21) had migrated with their family, and they often reported that the decision to migrate or to return was made jointly with their husband. The women who had migrated alone were all young women in their early twenties, who had left Iraq with the support of their family left behind (i.e. in order to further their education).

'We are not free at all to decide, because we don't want to go back to Iraq, it's not safe. We don't want to ever go back.'

36 year old female migrant from Kirkuk, Lesbos Island

None of the women interviewed worked in the host country. This was mostly due to their legal status, although women in one FGD reported that in any case they preferred to look after their children than to work. Women interviewed were often concerned that their children were not attending school while they waited for a result of their asylum application, and one returnee returned to Iraq for this reason.

Women interviewed in Greece repeatedly reported that they were tired of travelling 'the illegal way', and would have preferred to travel through legal routes if this had been possible. As a result, women were reportedly waiting in Greece until they could reach their intended destination through legal pathways, such as family reunification.

The decision to return

None of the women interviewed in Greece were considering returning to Iraq. The main deterrents to return reported by women were all factors related to the situation in Iraq, particularly the security situation and the lack of rights, as well as the lack of religious freedom. Women in Greece reported that even though the conditions were difficult and they were economically worse off in Greece, they felt safer and freer than in Iraq. For example, some women reported being able to go out alone, when it had not been considered safe to do so in Iraq.

'In Iraq we didn't have freedom of speech, we women did only what the society wanted us to do. The society had to approve even what we were wearing. There were no human rights.'

22 year old female migrant from Erbil, Leros Island

'In 2016, my husband's financial situation got bad. We couldn't live a good life and provide for our family in Germany, and our house was not that good. We had spent all the money we brought with us from Iraq, so we decided to return even before the result of the interview came out.'

28 year old female returnee from Baghdad

Women interviewed on the Aegean islands often reported that they did not trust the information available on return and, as they did not want to go back, they were not interested in receiving more information regarding return. Most women were aware of support available to return, but reported that it was not the journey back that would be difficult, but the situation in Iraq upon return. This is consistent with the data collected from returnees in Iraq, where none of the female returnees reported having faced any difficulties on the journey back to Iraq, and most received money from their family to pay for the journey back.

Experiences upon return

All women interviewed in Iraq reported that they had received support from their family upon return. As such, they indicated that they did not face any particular difficulties once back, often because they had support from their family and were glad to be back in Iraq.

All female returnees reported that they would not migrate to Europe again and that they wanted to settle in Iraq.

'I don't think migrating and coming back had an impact on our family because we were all together on the journey. I just think we changed our mind about Europe. I don't think migration to Europe is a good thing. I feel good now that I am back in Iraq and I don't ever want to go back.'

28 year old female returnee from Sulaymaniyah

The Journey Back to Iraq

Key Findings

- **Assisted return:** More than half of the returnees interviewed (39 out of 65) reported having received assistance to return to Iraq.
- **Information about return:** Respondents reported being well informed about return assistance available in host countries in Europe.
- **The main deterrents to return reported by all interviewees concerned the situation in Iraq, rather than the journey back.**

Having decided to return, returnees reported that they did not face any difficulties in preparing for or during the journey back to Iraq. The vast majority of returnees interviewed were able to return legally to Iraq; either with the support of IOM or the host government, or by applying for a return passport from the Iraqi embassy. Only one participant reportedly used an intermediary for the journey back from Bulgaria to Iraq.

'There weren't any difficulties on the journey back, the government and the organisations did everything and made it easy for us.'

23 year old male returnee from Baghdad

Figure 7: Number of returnees interviewed, by type of return



The most commonly reported deterrents to return reported by returnees in Iraq were the difficulties they would face upon return, rather than the journey back. Returnees repeatedly reported that the main problem was the current situation in Iraq, particularly regarding security and political and economic instability. This information was corroborated by the fact that **18 returnees from Mosul, Anbar and Babel had been unable to return to their area of origin, and so were living in KRI or Baghdad upon return.** In an assessment on IDP returns within Iraq, IOM found that the lack of safety in the area of origin was the main obstacle to return.⁶⁹

Time to prepare the return journey

All returnees who returned voluntarily reported that they felt they had enough time to prepare their return, and that they did not need much time between making the final decision to return and leaving the host country. The most common length of time taken between deciding to leave and returning to Iraq was two months. Returnees who returned with the assistance of IOM mentioned that all travel arrangements were made for them and they did not need more time to prepare their return; this also usually took around one to two months.

'I had one month between deciding to return and leaving. It was enough time for me to prepare and to get the passport from the Iraqi Embassy in Finland.'

31 year old male returnee from Baghdad

Most returnees were aware that support was available for the return journey to Iraq; those who returned without financial assistance sometimes reported that they had not wanted to wait for assistance to return.

This was often because they needed to return to Iraq urgently for family reasons or because they could no longer bear their situation in the host country.

In contrast, nine returnees reported having taken less than a week to prepare their return, and that they had not needed to prepare longer than that. In these cases, the returnees had the resources to return and only needed to buy their plane ticket home. The three returnees who were deported mentioned that they did not have time to prepare their return and that they were not aware of the situation in Iraq at the time of their departure.

Information used to return

Most returnees reported that they had enough information about the return journey, and that all they needed was a return ticket home. Returnees most commonly reported that they obtained **information about return from friends (26 returnees), other returnees (18 returnees), family in Iraq (12 returnees), and social media.** However, returnees also reported having information from (I)NGOs or interpreters in the camp where they had been staying (10 returnees), or from the host government (9 returnees).

'I wish there was more information in public spaces and that it was more accessible. First I had to just rely on what everyone was saying before going to the German officials.'

35 year old male returnee from Erbil

However, some interviewees reported that they had some difficulties with accessing reliable information. Returnees often reported that they trusted information regarding return provided by the European Union, and that they relied on information from friends and family because it was more easily accessible than official information. Others reported that they trusted information from friends and family because they knew they would tell them the truth. In some cases, returnees reported that they had difficulties accessing reliable information in the host country because of language barriers and lack of translation. All three returnees who were deported reported that they had very little information about the return journey and about the situation in Iraq before being sent back.⁷⁰

Knowledge and use of support available

Returnees reportedly did not experience difficulties gathering the resources needed to return to Iraq. In contrast to when they left Iraq, returnees were able to return legally, and so the return journey was not as expensive as the journey to Europe. Those returnees who did not have the resources to return (30 out of 65) were able to receive assistance from IOM, the host government or their families in order to pay for the journey back.

'I came back by plane. I knew there are organisations helping us to go back, but I knew it would take a long time, so I decided to come back on my own. I didn't have a passport so the Iraqi Embassy gave me one so I could return.'

27 year old male returnee from Mosul
(displaced in KRI)

Over half of the returnees interviewed (39 out of 65) reported having received assistance to return to Iraq, which usually consisted of the return ticket being paid for, either by IOM's Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) scheme⁷¹ or by the host government. Of those who received assistance, 17 returnees reported having returned through IOM's AVRR programme, although some interviewees did not have a clear understanding of which organisation had helped fund their return. **It was more common among returnees from Baghdad (13 out of 26 returnees in Baghdad) that the host country paid for the journey back to Iraq, because many of these returnees had had their asylum application rejected and so they chose to return before they were deported.**

Map 3: Case study of two returnees' journeys from Europe to Iraq



Almost one third of respondents (23 out of 65) returned without formal assistance, often with help from their families to pay for the ticket back home. This was more common among returnees in KRI (15 out of 34 interviewed in KRI), many of whom returned for personal reasons. A growing number of Iraqis are reportedly choosing to return to Iraq without support.⁷² Given that many Iraqis in Europe did not have travel documents to return to Iraq legally, Iraqi embassies have been providing Iraqis with passports.⁷³ Between October 2015 and February 2016, the Iraqi embassy in Berlin reportedly issued nearly 1,500 passports for Iraqis who wanted to return home.⁷⁴

Once Back in Iraq

This sub-chapter of the report outlines assessment findings related to returnees' lives after having migrated to Europe and subsequently returned. It is based on qualitative data collection carried out with returnees who had returned from Europe to Iraq between 2014 and 2017, as well as with community leaders from areas which have witnessed out- and return migration. Data collection took place in the primary areas of return in Iraq: several locations in KRI and Baghdad.

Key Findings

- **Main difficulties faced upon return:** 1. Limited access to livelihoods (30 out of 65 returnees), 2. Lack of safety and security (24 out of 65 returnees); 3. Lack of services (14 out of 65 returnees, all in Baghdad); 4. Precarious housing (9 out of 65 returnees).
- **Economic impact of return:** 26 out of 65 returnees were able to rebuild a livelihood; 18 had a job which they did not think was sustainable; 11 out of 65 were unemployed upon return.
- **Social impact of return:** Communities welcomed back returnees, however, some returnees felt excluded and ashamed of having returned to Iraq, and had difficulties settling back.

Difficulties faced upon return

The most frequently reported difficulties upon return were (1) limited access to livelihoods; (2) lack of security, particularly in Baghdad; (3) poor public services in Baghdad and (4) lack of shelter in KRI.

Table 9: Most reported difficulties faced upon return, by area of return

Main difficulties faced upon return	KRI	Baghdad
Limited access to livelihoods	19	11
Lack of safety/security	9	15
Lack of services	0	14
Poor housing	9	0
Lack of civil/human rights	0	8
Psychological problems	7	0
Corruption	0	3
No difficulties faced upon return	0	5

1. Limited livelihoods

The economic impact of migration and return was reported in all FGDs as one of the main difficulties faced by returnees once back in Iraq. More than half of participants (39 out of 65) reported that their economic situation upon return was either similar or worse than before they migrated. This was reportedly because many returnees needed to rebuild their life from the beginning upon return.

The large costs associated with migration abroad meant that returnees found it difficult to build a life for themselves once back in Iraq. All participants had

'I spent my savings from work, it cost me about 3,000 USD, and now since I came back I have started from the beginning, working as a blacksmith, because there are no job opportunities for my college degree. I spent all I had from years of working with no results. It was good to return because at least I can work or do something now. I would not migrate again because it is very expensive to go, and Germany is a nice country only for its own people.'

25 year old male returnee from Baghdad

used intermediaries to reach Europe, and reported that the cost of intermediaries varied widely, with an average cost of 1,660 USD and a median cost of 1,200 USD per person. Some participants reported having spent more money, usually because they travelled with family or had to make the journey multiple times. In order to afford the costs of the journey, participants had often sold assets, used savings or borrowed money. All returnees reported that, being unable to work in the host country, they had to use their savings and rely on support from family in Iraq. This was also observed among Iraqis interviewed along the Western Balkans route in early 2016, with many migrants reportedly having used their savings (71%), taken out a loan (61%) or sold their house (54%) in order to fund their journey to Europe.⁷⁵ As a result, upon return, many returnees were left without assets or savings, or were in debt, without a job to support themselves or their families.

A large number of returnees interviewed in KRI reported that they had no job or that it was difficult for them to find suitable work (25 out of 34). This impacted particularly IDPs who returned to KRI rather than to their area of origin, which was considered unsafe. IDPs from other areas of Iraq tended to have less support to count on in KRI, and most had to rent houses, which they found difficult to do with their reportedly low salary.

Table 10: Self-reported employment situation upon return

Employment situation upon return	Returnees in KRI	Returnees in Baghdad
Able to build a livelihood	9	17
Employed, but salary not sustainable	13	5
Unemployed	10	1
Employed, but not related to experience/education	2	3
Student	0	5

Although 23 returnees reportedly had found employment, all reported that they were not satisfied with their current job and hoped to find work opportunities with better salaries and better suited to their education and experience in the future. Five returnees reported that they were employed in jobs that were not related to their education, training or previous work experience. More precisely, these returnees were reportedly working as taxi drivers or in shops, when they had previously worked in business or studied at university.

Access to income was also the priority concern for both IDP and returnee populations assessed in Iraq in 2017, due to the lack of jobs, work opportunities with insufficient income and poor access to jobs because of the distance or poor road conditions.⁷⁶

'Coming back was difficult economically. It put an extra burden on my family, because it was difficult to find a job. Also the situation was worse economically than when I left KRI for Europe, and so it is even harder for us to find a job.'

29 year old male returnee from Mosul
(displaced in KRI)

Furthermore, even where returnees received assistance, be it from family, or external assistance programmes, it was reportedly not sufficient to enable individuals to rebuild their lives. In fact, the majority of returnees reported that they could only rely on their families for support, rather than on their local community or organisations. This was reportedly primarily because

'I only got support from family and friends when I returned. It would be great to get loans to set up small businesses.'

28 year old male returnee from Wasit

others in the community had their own problems, and sometimes because returnees were not seen as particularly in need of support. This may be due to the general situation in Iraq, where an estimated 11 million people are predicted to be in need of humanitarian assistance in 2017, including 4.2 million IDPs, 3 million vulnerable host community members and 1.4 million highly vulnerable people living in conflict areas.⁷⁷

Table 11: Economic support received upon return, as reported by returnees

Economic support received on return	KRI	Baghdad
No support received	28	15
Support from family	2	14
Support from IOM	4	0
Support from friends	0	2

Iraqis who returned through official return schemes had received support through reintegration programmes, such as those run by IOM and the European Reintegration Network (ERIN).⁷⁸ However, **the four returnees who had received financial assistance upon return reported that it was appreciated, but not sustainable as it would only cover expenses and not allow for investment in new projects.** One returnee was able to successfully run a business with the help of official assistance upon return, while another was unable to make enough revenue to keep the business running. Some returnees reported that they felt there was more support available for IDPs in Iraq than for returnees from Europe.

'When I came back to Iraq, they [IOM] told me to find a restaurant or a shop. They gave me money and bought me chairs and food to start the business. But I lost the restaurant, it wasn't working so I had to close it.'

28 year old male returnee from Mosul
(displaced in KRI)

2. Security conditions upon return

In Baghdad, the most commonly reported difficulties upon return were related to lack of security. Almost half of the returnees interviewed expressed concerns about the risk of terrorist attacks in the capital (15 out of 33). Baghdad is by far the worst affected region in Iraq as regards suicide bombings, with 124 attacks in the last five years, which have killed or injured at least 5,066 people.⁷⁹

'The result came out that I am from a safe part of Iraq so they refused to give me asylum. But the security condition in Baghdad is really bad. There are car bombs and explosions, armed groups. No one feels safe or can be sure they will come back safely when they go to work.'

34 year old male returnee from
Baghdad

Returnees reported that they did not feel safe in Baghdad and felt at risk on their way to and from work, and in their daily life more broadly. This is corroborated by the number of attacks the capital has witnessed in recent years. There continue to be attacks in Baghdad by armed groups, including multiple attacks on 30 May 2017 outside an ice cream parlour and a government building, which led to the deaths of at least 27 people and left at least 50 injured.⁸⁰ Terrorist attacks killed more than 200 people across Baghdad in one week from 11 to 17 May 2016, targeting crowded markets and checkpoints.⁸¹ As part of these attacks, 77 people were killed and more than 140 were injured by three attacks in just one day.⁸² The most deadly attack by armed groups in Baghdad took place on 3 July 2016, when a truck was detonated in a crowded area, killing over 200 people and leaving hundreds more injured.⁸³

3. Lack of appropriate housing and limited public services

Notably, in KRI, lack of appropriate housing was reported as one of the main difficulties faced upon return (9 out of 34). The returnees who reported problems with housing were usually renting accommodation, and were often IDPs, which implied that they were struggling to afford the rent. In Sulaymaniyah, a high proportion of IDPs (81%) were living in rented accommodation, which has been found to be the most pressing concern for IDPs displaced in the governorate due to the high rents.⁸⁴ In Baghdad, lack of appropriate housing did not appear to be a major concern.

'It has been difficult since I came back because I don't have enough money to pay the rent.'

42 year old male returnee from Mosul
(displaced in KRI)

In Baghdad, many returnees reported that they were experiencing difficulties related to public services upon return (14 out of 26). Public services such as healthcare and education were repeatedly reported to be limited or of poor quality, as well as difficult to access. Returnees also reported that the roads were in poor condition,

which made access to work and other services more difficult. Limited availability of electricity, as well as unreliable water supply, were also reported as concerns by some returnees.

4. Psychological problems upon return

Seven returnees, all in KRI, reported that they were facing psychological problems upon return. This was often due to the difficult experience of migration such as the long time spent in uncertainty in the host country. Others reported that return had impacted them psychologically because of the sense of failure and shame, or the feeling that they had disappointed their families.

The majority of returnees reported that they did not feel judged by their family and community for having returned. However,

some returnees reported feeling ashamed that they had not managed to support their family, and felt they may be a disappointment to their families. Returnees sometimes reported a sense of failure and loss of respect because of not having been able to build a life for themselves elsewhere. This is consistent with evidence from other studies that found that many Iraqis returnees felt shame of returning to Iraq from Europe, which often led them to withdrawing from their social networks.⁸⁵

Some returnees reported that they felt isolated from their community since returning and that they looked at their own society differently as a result of migration. Some returnees reported that during their stay in Europe they had learned about how people could live together despite their differences, and found the divisions in Iraqi society even more difficult to live with upon return.

'We didn't face any problems on the way back to Iraq. The only problem was when we were back here – we had no money, no house or anything. Also our friends and family said, 'You arrived in the country where you want to live and you still dream to live there, why did you come back?'

31 year old male returnee from Dahuk

'I gave hope to my family that they would have a better life and then came back empty handed, so I've disappointed them.'

27 year old male returnee from Ninewa
(displaced in KRI)

5. Lack of trust in authorities

In FGDs, three returnees reported that other difficulties they faced were linked to their lack of trust in the government, as well as the high level of corruption in Baghdad. Eight returnees indicated that one of the main difficulties faced upon return was the lack of civil and human rights in Iraq. Inequality was also a concern for many returnees, notably in relation to access to employment, as they often reported that good connections were necessary to be able to find work.

Community Leaders' Views on Migration and Return

When migrants leave their homes, they often also leave behind their community, with family and friends who may have supported them in gathering the necessary resources to migrate and, eventually, also to return. In the course of this study, nine community leaders from communities which had witnessed large numbers of people migrating and returning were interviewed, to gain a better understanding of the impact migration had on the community, as well as of the ways the community dealt with the subsequent return of individuals. Five of the community leaders interviewed represented communities in KRI and four community leaders represented communities in the surrounding areas of Baghdad.

Impact of migration and return on the individual and the community

The majority of community leaders reported that migration had very little impact on the community as a whole. In contrast, they felt that the impact on the individual and their family was much more severe. Migration did not tend to have an impact on the community, because the number of individuals who migrated was a relatively small proportion of the overall population.

'Migration has two sides, positive and negative. For those who were successful in Europe, who could work, migration was very good. But for the rest who failed or died it was extremely bad for their families and the community, too.'

Mukhtar, Sulaymaniyah

For individuals and their families, migration and return tended to have a much larger impact, as many had sold assets to afford the journey to Europe, hoping that, once at their destination, they would be able to support the family back home and repay their debt. As migrants, once in Europe, did not have a stable income while waiting for their asylum applications or residence permits to be processed, this put their family back home in a vulnerable position, as they had counted on remittances to be sent from Europe which did not come.

Community leaders' view of migration depended on the situation migrants found themselves in in their host country. Where migrants were able to work in Europe and send money back home, community leaders deemed migration to Europe to have been successful and good for the individual, their family and the wider community. Similarly, some community leaders reported that migration could be positive when migrants were able to gain new skills in Europe, which would facilitate their ability to find work once back in Iraq.

'Some of the migrants gained skills or learned a new language in Europe. This is useful for the community.'

Mukhtar, Sulaymaniyah

Life upon return

All community leaders reported that returnees were welcomed back into their communities and none felt communities had difficulties in accepting returnees. However, some acknowledged that returnees themselves could struggle once back, as they did not 'succeed' in migrating and building a better life for themselves elsewhere.

Still, the majority held that there were no opportunities for returnees once back home and, since most had been unable to learn new skills in Europe, returnees were usually worse off than before, as job opportunities were scarce and returnees had 'wasted time in Europe'. Upon return, returnees often lived in precarious shelters and were reportedly heavily dependent on family and community support.

'Their families and friends help them [returnees] when they come back; they give them a place to sleep, maybe some furniture. But it's not sustainable - they should get real jobs with real salaries. This is what they need help with.'

Mukhtar, Baghdad

When asked what kind of support could help returnees once back, community leaders mostly reported the need for support which would facilitate sustainable livelihood opportunities, such as support to starting a business.

Aspirations of Returnees for the Future

Among returnees interviewed in Iraq, the most commonly reported aspiration for the short term was to find work or a better job, so that returnees could support themselves and their families. Returnees were often unemployed or working in jobs which reportedly provided a low income or were not relevant to their studies or work experience.

The vast majority of returnees reported that they would not return to their host country in Europe, usually because of the difficulty of residing there legally. Nonetheless, the majority of returnees interviewed held a positive view of the host country, despite reportedly having had difficult experiences there. It was often reported that **host countries in Europe were good places to live as a citizen, but that, as a migrant, life was difficult**, with some returnees reportedly having faced discrimination and islamophobia in the host country. The most commonly reported negative aspects of the host country were how difficult it was to obtain legal residence, and the difficult living conditions faced while waiting for asylum applications to be processed.

'Germany would have been great if we had got the residency and stayed, but our asylum request was rejected.'

33 year old male returnee
from Baghdad

'If the job situation gets better I would not leave, but that is very unlikely. So I will probably leave again.'

33 year old male returnee from
Mosul (displaced in KRI)

Many returnees reported that in the long term they hoped to settle in Iraq and to create a life for themselves and their families, which usually meant having a stable job with sufficient income. Some returnees also expressed the hope to have their own house, rather than rent property or rely on support from family members. This was often reported among returnees who had made the decision to return in order to be with their families, or those who had returned because they had become tired of waiting for their asylum application to be processed. The majority of returnees interviewed in Baghdad reported that they

would not migrate again, because they thought they had little hope of being granted asylum or because they could not afford the journey again.

However, many returnees reported that they would migrate again if they could not manage to find work in Iraq, or if the opportunity to migrate arose in the future. Usually, these returnees reported that they would like to migrate to other countries, notably Canada, or to Europe in general. Returnees interviewed in KRI more often reported that they would migrate again, particularly if the situation got worse, or if they were unable to find work and the opportunity arose. Returnees interviewed in KRI who were displaced from Mosul were particularly likely to report that they would migrate again, as most of them were unemployed.

CONCLUSION

The number of Iraqis migrating irregularly to Europe has drastically increased between 2014 and 2016. At the same time, more and more Iraqis have returned from Europe to Iraq, mostly to KRI and Baghdad governorate. As Iraq remains one of UNHCR's Top Ten refugee-producing countries, the question emerges why Iraqis decide to return and what challenges they face upon return. The aim of this study was to gain an overall understanding of the profile of Iraqis who migrated in 2016, as well as to explore the reasons why Iraqis return from Europe to Iraq, what the challenges are upon return and how their life back in Iraq can be facilitated in the longer term.

This study finds that Iraqis who migrated to Europe in 2016, interviewed on the Aegean islands, did so primarily for conflict-related reasons and came from areas they did not feel safe in. While 20% of respondents came from conflict-ridden Ninewa governorate, 30% of respondents came from Baghdad, where respondents felt unsafe due to the frequent occurrence of terrorist attacks and its relative proximity to fighting. Iraqis from other areas of Iraq, such as KRI, although not in immediate physical danger, reported feeling unsafe due to the proximity of the conflict and a sense that the security situation in the country will remain precarious in the foreseeable future.

The majority of Iraqi returnees interviewed in KRI and Baghdad reported having returned due to reasons tied to their situation in Europe (49 out of 65 respondents), or for personal reasons (16 out of 65), rather than due to an improvement of the situation in their area of origin. This stands in stark contrast with Iraqis who are internally displaced and tend to return to their areas of origin once the situation there has improved.⁸⁶

Findings are based on two distinct datasets: a set of quantitative data on Iraqi migrants on the Aegean islands, collected in March 2017 and a set of qualitative data collected from returnees in primary areas of return in Iraq, notably in KRI and Baghdad. Contrasting the two datasets, important trends emerge which yield wider implications for the study as a whole:

1. **Reported drivers of migration to Europe, reasons and pre-conditions for return were found to be different among Iraqi migrants interviewed on the Aegean islands and returnees interviewed in Iraq.** Among Iraqis on the Aegean islands, the most reported drivers of migration were (1) conflict (37%); (2) individual persecution (22%); and (3) health issues (9%). In contrast, returnees' reported top three drivers of migration were (1) limited livelihoods (reported by 30 out of 65 returnees); (2) lack of safety or security (25 out of 65); and (3) (fear of spread of) conflict (12 out of 65). At the same time, while reasons for return among returnees were mostly tied to the situation in Europe or personal circumstances, the top three pre-conditions for return reported by Iraqis on the Aegean islands were based on an improvement of the situation in Iraq, notably (1) safety in the area of origin in Iraq (29%); (2) safety in another area in Iraq (22%); and (3) social reconciliation in the area of origin in Iraq (8%). Based on triangulation with secondary data, the following explanatory hypotheses emerge:
 - A large proportion of Iraqi returnees interviewed in Iraq had reportedly returned because their asylum application in the host country in Europe was rejected (22 out of 65). As such, the sample of returnees interviewed in Iraq fell, at least partly, into the sub-group of 'economic migrants', whom relevant legal bodies in the EU had not deemed to be in need of international protection. In contrast, Iraqis interviewed on the Aegean islands were still awaiting the outcome of their individual asylum procedures and, as such, were likely to mirror a wider array of migration drivers.
 - The areas of origin of Iraqis interviewed on the Aegean islands and the areas of origin of the sample of returnees interviewed in Iraq differ. Based on secondary data, it was determined that primary areas of return among Iraqi returnees (KRI and Baghdad) do not mirror the primary areas of origin of Iraqis who migrated to Europe in 2016. Among Iraqis interviewed on the Aegean islands, for instance, primary areas of origin were Baghdad (30%) and Ninewa (20%). As the security situation differs significantly between different areas in Iraq, this is likely to impact the drivers of migration.
 - While every effort has been made to ensure a degree of trust between interviewer and respondent, there can be no guarantee of the accuracy of the responses provided by respondents, especially considering

the sensitive and sometimes vulnerable situation in which respondents found themselves. This may be particularly the case of respondents on the Aegean islands, who were awaiting the outcome of their asylum procedures. As such, a certain response bias, whereby respondents were more likely to report conflict-related drivers of migration and pre-conditions for return, rather than other factors which may be deemed damaging to their asylum application, is possible.

2. Security remains the key concern for Iraqis in Europe considering return, as well as for those who have returned to Iraq, notwithstanding varying primary migration drivers and reasons or pre-conditions for return.

- Conflict and other forms of violence emerged as the most frequently reported migration driver among Iraqis interviewed on the Aegean islands in Greece. However, how conflict impacted individuals was found to differ by area of origin. Respondents from Ninewa governorate had been directly impacted by the conflict, with many reporting death of family members and destruction of shelter. Iraqi migrants from KRI or Baghdad reported fearing that conflict escalation would negatively impact their livelihoods and security. Among returnees interviewed in Iraq, almost half of respondents in Baghdad (15 out of 33) reported not feeling safe upon return. Returnees to KRI reportedly feared a spread of the conflict (9 out of 34) in Mosul, only 80 km from the city of Erbil.
- Some returnees interviewed in Iraq were unable to return to their area of origin due to a lack of security. As a result, upon return from Europe, they remained internally displaced in other areas of the country, notably KRI and Baghdad.

The following policy implications emerge from this study in relation to return migration and longer term support for returnees from Europe to Iraq:

Returning from Europe to Iraq

- Returnees interviewed in Iraq did not return due to an improvement of the situation in Iraq. At the same time, 90% of Iraqis interviewed on the Aegean islands in Greece reportedly did not consider returning to Iraq at all with pre-conditions for return being security and social reconciliation. This suggests that, to make return a more viable option, a long-term investment into the country is needed. This includes investment into improvements in the overall security situation in the country, most notably in newly liberated areas, such as Ninewa. Such interventions must aim to support political stability, as well as to restore a feeling of trust among Iraqis towards government authorities. In areas which can be considered as relatively safe, such as KRI, an improvement in the economic situation, as well as efforts which allow for inclusive economic growth, are needed to make the areas more attractive to return to.
- This study found that return assistance programmes, such as AVRR or state-run voluntary return support schemes, did not influence the decision to return of returnees interviewed in Iraq or of Iraqis interviewed on the Aegean islands. Rather, once an individual had decided to return, they took advantage of the service offered. In some cases, returnees decided to return individually and self-fund their return, as it was quicker. This illustrates that return assistance programmes did not impact on the decision to return.
- Information on voluntary return assistance programmes was reportedly widely available in both host, as well as transit countries, such as Greece. Iraqis on the Aegean islands reportedly felt pressured into returning by the sheer amount of information on voluntary return offered to them. This suggests that any policy intervention in this area should be designed to allow potential returnees to make their own decisions, rather than encouraging them towards any particular option.

Once back in Iraq

Once back in Iraq, returnees were found to face a range of difficulties, which can broadly be categorised into three areas: (1) limited access to livelihoods; (2) (feeling of) lack of security; (3) limited ability to socially and culturally re-integrate into the community of origin.

- Limited access to livelihoods was one of the main obstacles faced by Iraqi returnees. Returnees had very heavily invested into migration to Europe by selling productive assets and homes. Upon return, they faced the same livelihoods challenges for which they had left, in addition to having accumulated debt to be able to migrate in the first place. The few returnees who had received financial assistance from assisted return

programmes reported that it was appreciated but not sustainable, as it did not allow for investments in new projects that could prove sustainable in the long run. Moreover, most returnees had been unable to acquire new skills while in Europe and none had been able to work. This meant that, upon returning from Europe, returnees in Iraq were more vulnerable to socio-economic marginalisation than they were before migrating. Considering returnees' different education levels and skill sets, economic support to returnees may include:

- Economic support in the form of loans, combined with training on business skills;
 - Vocational training and skill development;
 - Housing support for returnees, notably for those who sold their house prior to migration and found themselves in precarious shelter upon return as a result.
- Iraqis who decided to return to their area of origin in Iraq often did not feel safe, as reported by 15 out of 33 returnees interviewed in Baghdad. This influenced their ability to reintegrate economically (as they did not feel safe to travel to and from work) as well as psychologically. For any policy intervention this suggests that, even though some Iraqi migrants to Europe return to Iraq, this does not necessarily mean that the security situation in their area of origin has improved.
 - Returnees interviewed in Iraq primarily returned for reasons which they felt were beyond their control. The vast majority of returnees interviewed reported that they did not feel free in their decision over returning. This must be considered in support schemes for returnees, as it influences their willingness to reintegrate into their community and invest into being back in Iraq. A sizeable group of respondents further reported that support in 'returning home' would be helpful and should include psychological support for returnees. International NGOs were identified by respondents as the most trusted actors to provide such support, which may include:
 - Community centres for returnees which offer social support and advice on settling back;
 - Targeted psychological or psycho-social support to help returnees with stress and trauma of migration and return.

Returnees' inability to take advantage of migration, combined with the limited choice they had over return, suggests that **Iraqis who returned to Iraq between 2015 and 2017 are not well prepared to settle back in Iraq and, as a result, are likely to struggle building a livelihood in the country.** Iraqis returning to Baghdad continue not to feel safe once back in Iraq. Some returnees are unable to return to their areas of origin, and instead settle in neighbouring areas with often limited access to social networks to support them. All struggle with limited access to livelihoods upon return, while challenges related to a lack of trust in authorities and a general feeling of lack of safety persist.

ANNEXES

Annex 1: Methodology

This annex provides an in-depth review of the methodology employed in the current study. It includes information on the different components on the study, presents the analytical framework which guided the design of the research, the research questions, indicators and subsequent analysis, and illustrates the limitations of the study.

Objectives

The overall objective of this research was two-fold:

- (1) To gain an overall understanding of the migration profile, drivers and origins of Iraqis who migrated to Europe in 2016;
- (2) To gain an in-depth granular understanding of what shapes return of Iraqis from Europe to Iraq at the individual level, what facilitates reintegration at the community level, and what enables sustainability of return in the long-term.

Analytical Framework

Building on previous research on migration and return, this study looked at migration and return as a *process*, with different steps which shape the individual's ability to return and build a sustainable life back home.⁸⁷ It includes the decision-making process on migration and return, the nature of return (forced/voluntary; the return journey) and life once back in Iraq.

Looking at these different stages as interrelated steps in the return

journey served to understand the factors which shape and hinder return and reintegration. Thereby, the aim was also to determine the most effective means of intervention to facilitate reintegration in the longer term. For each of these steps a different analytical concept was used. This analytical framework guided the design of the research, the research questions, indicators and subsequent analysis.

Return steps and analytical concepts

1. **Decision making:** Migration Thresholds
2. **Ability to return:** Return Preparedness
3. **Once back in Iraq:** Mixed Embeddedness

1. Decision Making on Migration and Return

Building on a recent study by Hagen-Zanker and Mallet,⁸⁸ the '**Migration Thresholds**' approach, developed by van der Velde and van Naerssen, was used as an analytical framework to understand the extent to which a range of different factors contribute to decision-making on migration to Europe and subsequent return to Iraq.⁸⁹ The advantage of this approach is that it looks at decision-making as a process in which several 'thresholds' must be overcome before a decision is taken, thereby breaking down the decision to move into different steps to allow for a more nuanced analysis.⁹⁰

The model takes as a starting point that before actually leaving home, a person must pass through a series of thresholds: first, a person must overcome their indifference towards the concept of migration; second, the idea of migration starts to be seen as positive rather than negative; third, a destination is selected; and fourth, a 'trajectory' or journey is decided upon to get there.

This goes beyond push and pull factors to take into account the different factors which Iraqis in Greece and returnees consider(ed) before returning to Iraq, which are often interrelated and closely linked to personal characteristics, networks and capabilities.

2. The Ability to Return

Once the decision to return is taken, the ability to return, in practical and financial terms, but also mental terms, must be examined. According to the concept of '**Return Preparedness**',⁹¹ this component can be measured through two factors: (1) **readiness to return** (the extent to which returnees are able to gather the resources needed to return, including time, financial resources, experience, knowledge and awareness of the conditions in the host

and home countries) and (2) **the voluntariness of return** (the extent to which returnees perceive their return to be their own decision). The level of preparedness to return shapes the subsequent ability of the individual to settle back in the country of origin.

3. Once Back in Iraq

Finally, to measure the factors which enable, facilitate and hinder longer term return and reintegration, this study combined the findings of steps one (decision-making) and two (ability to return) with the analytical framework of '**Mixed embeddedness**'.⁹² The two preceding stages were included in the analysis of return, because the more prepared returnees are for their return and the more they feel it is their decision, the easier it should be for them to become re-embedded in their home country and for their return to be successful in the long-term.

Sustainability of return was hence measured through:

- 1) Motivation and preparation for return (steps one and two)
- 2) The level of '**Mixed embeddedness**'⁹³ of the returnee back in the country of origin in economic and social terms:
 - a. *Economic embeddedness*: If and in what way returnees are able to provide for themselves and construct a livelihood upon return.
 - b. *Social embeddedness*: Social capital refers to the features of social organisation, reciprocity, information flows and social safety nets that emerge from an individual's networks of social contacts. This leads to a more efficient and stable position of the individual in society.

While the concept does not include 'political embeddedness', Van Houtte and Davids (2008) acknowledge that political participation and an individual's feeling of being part of a society politically, is part of being 'embedded'. This aspect has been added in the analysis in relation to political participation.

Methodology

Secondary data review was used to identify the level of information available on each research question and adapt the methodology and research foci accordingly. In accordance with the two research themes, two distinct sets of activities were developed which complemented and built on each other. For the first theme, 'Migration Profile, Drivers, Origins', a mixed methods methodology was employed, which included a quantitative profiling exercise of Iraqi migrants on the Aegean islands of Greece, as well as focus group discussions (FGDs) with Iraqis on the islands to triangulate findings. For the second theme, 'Return Dynamics and Sustainability of Return', a qualitative methodology was adopted; FGDs and key informant interviews (KIIs) with Iraqi migrants on the Aegean islands, Iraqi returnees and community leaders in Iraq were conducted.

Data collection took place between 2 and 29 March 2017 in Greece and between 6 April and 16 June 2017 in Iraq. Greece was selected as a site for data collection because the vast majority (95%) of Iraqis who migrated to Europe in 2016 via sea did so via the Eastern Mediterranean route, through Greece.⁹⁴ With the EU-Turkey Statement in March 2016,⁹⁵ Iraqis arriving on the Aegean islands were unable to continue their journey from Greece to other EU countries, which is why Greece, at the time of data collection, was deemed to host the largest proportion of Iraqis who migrated to Europe in 2016. The second site for data collection was Iraq, where data collection took place in several locations across the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) and in the wider Baghdad area - the primary areas of return in Iraq.

Fully trained data collection teams were set up in Greece and Iraq. For individual interviews and KIIs, hand-held mobile devices were used, and data was stored using digital data collection software (Kobo). During FGDs, data was recorded manually and later transcribed. Questionnaires were developed in English and then translated into the languages used for respondent interviews, including Arabic and Iraqi Kurdish. Interviews were held in the respondents' mother tongue. Data was analysed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), a software package for statistical analysis, for individual interviews and KIIs; Atlas Ti, a qualitative data analysis and research software, was used for the analysis of FGDs.

In total, 413 individuals took part in the study across Greece and Iraq. In Greece, a total of 339 Iraqi migrants were interviewed, of whom 268 in individual interviews. In Iraq, a total of 74 Iraqi returnees participated in FGDs or acted as key informants (KIs). Twenty-five women took part in FGDs and KIIs in both Greece and Iraq. Nine community leaders were also interviewed about the experiences of their communities with migration to and return from Europe to Iraq.

Table 12: Number and type of interviews, by location

Location	Interview type	#	Respondents
Greece	KII	268	268
Greece	FGD	15	71
Kurdistan Region of Iraq	FGD	8	29
Kurdistan Region of Iraq	KII	5	5
Wider Baghdad area	FGD	3	12
Wider Baghdad area	KII	19	19
Kurdistan Region of Iraq	KI Community leader	5	5
Wider Baghdad area	KI Community leader	4	4
Total			413

Data was analysed in conjunction and triangulated with secondary data;⁹⁶ where secondary data was available, a longitudinal analysis of findings has been included, notably on the profile and drivers of Iraqi migration to Europe since 2015.

Migration Profile, Drivers, Origins

The aim of this component of the study was to build an as comprehensive picture as possible of the profile, drivers and origins of Iraqis who migrated to Europe in 2016. Given the challenges in conducting a quantitative and statistically representative assessment of a population group of people 'on the move', who, by definition, are distributed across a range of EU countries, a mixed methodology was employed, combining secondary data analysis on the profile of Iraqis who migrated to Europe from January to March 2016 with a quantitative profiling exercise at 95% confidence level and 5% margin of error of Iraqis who entered Europe after March 2016, located on the Aegean islands in Greece. Indicators were developed so as to yield comparable findings across both studies.

Population of interest

The population of interest were Iraqis who migrated to Europe (reached the European Union) from Iraq in the year 2016.

Secondary data analysis

In the ambit of its European Migration program,⁹⁷ REACH covered Iraqi migration to Europe between January and May 2016 by collecting information at transit points in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Serbia. The information collected covered the profile of Iraqis travelling along this route in this timeframe, including drivers, origins in Iraq, socio-economic background, gender and age groups. While this information is not statistically representative of all Iraqis migrating to Europe in that period, it does provide an overall understanding of the predominant profile and trends of Iraqi migration in the first months of 2016. This information was used to triangulate data collected on the Aegean islands in March 2017.

Sampling frame

According to the EU-Turkey Statement, Iraqis who arrived on Europe's shores in Greece after 20 March 2016 are confined to five Aegean islands, where their application for asylum is to be processed in designated hotspots. The hotspots are situated on the islands of Lesbos, Chios, Samos, Leros and Kos. A probability sampling methodology was used with the aim to provide findings generalisable to Iraqi migrants on the Aegean islands overall with a 95% level of confidence and a 5% margin of error. The design of the probability sampling methodology was preceded by secondary data review and participatory mapping exercises on the islands.

Underrepresentation of vulnerable groups in sample of Iraqis on Aegean islands:

Please note that among the Iraqi migrant population on the Aegean islands, some vulnerable population groups, such as unaccompanied women and individuals with disabilities, are underrepresented. This is due to a policy implemented by the Greek government, whereby individuals who meet a set of vulnerability criteria could be transferred from the Aegean islands to mainland Greece (Article 60(4)(f) [L 4375/2016](#)). As of 10 February 2017, 5,400 vulnerable people had been transferred from the islands to mainland Greece ([European Commission](#), March 2017). As such, these groups are underrepresented in the sample, even though they were among Iraqis who migrated to Europe in 2016.

The following steps were implemented:

- a. **Secondary data review and KIIs:** Prior to deployment to the Greek islands, a preliminary mapping of the Iraqi population on the islands was conducted on the basis of secondary data and KIIs with representatives of international organisations active on the five Aegean islands, to develop a general understanding of Iraqi presence on each island. In the course of this preliminary phase, the island of Kos was excluded from further data collection activities, as, at the time of the assessment, only 10 Iraqis⁹⁸ were reported to be on the island.
- b. **Participatory mapping exercise** of Iraqi population on the Aegean islands: once the four data collection sites of Lesbos, Chios, Samos and Leros were identified, a participatory mapping exercise with four to six participants each was conducted on each island with the aim to identify the presence (numbers) and locations of Iraqis in each island. Mapping exercises lasted between one and two hours and included representatives from international and national organisations which provided services or implemented activities on the islands, camp managers and civil society actors, as well as volunteers. Participants were asked to gather around a map of the island and identify where Iraqis were located and their approximate numbers. Locations included hotspots, shelters run by non-governmental organisations (NGOs), informal gathering spaces such as squats, and apartments and hotels. The information collected was then triangulated among participants, as well as with secondary data previously collected and, once data collection activities were complete in each island, verified in situ.
- c. **Consolidation of sampling frame:** Upon completion of participatory mapping exercises on each island, data collected was consolidated and a random sample was drawn to reach 95% confidence level and 5% margin of error of the Iraqi migrant population on the four Aegean islands of Lesbos, Chios, Samos and Leros. Within each island, the determined island-wide sample size was distributed proportionately across locations identified on the basis of pre-identified population sizes. To account for non-response rate, a 10% buffer was included in the sample size.

Primary data collection

In total, 268 individual interviews with Iraqis on the Aegean islands took place, as well as 15 FGDs with a total of 71 participants. Individual interviews were administered using KOBO mostly through multiple choice questions; on average, individual interviews lasted 20 minutes and took place in participants' dwelling spaces or in areas nearby. The response rate was 98%. Participants for FGDs were selected through homogeneous screening in order to form groups of individuals who shared similar characteristics or traits, in terms of area of origin in Iraq and gender.

Return Dynamics and Sustainability of Return

To gain an in-depth understanding of the dynamics which shape return and the sustainability thereof, this component of the study adopted a qualitative methodology, which included FGDs and KIIs with Iraqis who returned from Europe to Iraq between 2015 and 2017 in the primary areas of return in Iraq, as well as KIIs with community leaders from communities which had witnessed large numbers of out-migration to Europe and/or return.

Population of interest

The population of interest were Iraqis who had migrated to Europe between 2014 and 2017 and returned from Europe to Iraq between 2015 and 2017 to the primary areas of return in Iraq.

Sampling frame

The primary areas of return were determined on the basis of an in-depth secondary data review, which was subsequently triangulated with KIIs with stakeholders who facilitate return migration from EU countries to Iraq. Furthermore, already during data collection activities in Greece, anecdotal information on return areas was collected, which was used to further triangulate secondary data. Primary areas of return identified were: (1) KRI and (2) Baghdad and surrounding areas.

Once primary areas of return were determined, in each of these areas, Iraqi returnees were identified through a chain referral system, whereby respondents were sampled through personal networks of REACH teams in the primary areas of return and were then asked to refer REACH teams to other returnees who could take part in the study. To ensure that the perspectives of particular groups, such as women, would be included, those groups were sampled purposively.

Of the 65 returnees interviewed, the majority had returned to Iraq voluntarily. Three of the returnees interviewed in FGDs (all male from Sulaymaniyah) were deported from their host country in Europe (from the United Kingdom, Switzerland and Sweden). Thirty-nine returnees reported having received assistance to return (of these, 17 specified having received assistance from IOM, while the rest reportedly received money or tickets from the host country or did not know who had helped them to return). Twenty-three returned without assistance.

Community leaders were sampled purposively on the basis of representing communities which had witnessed large numbers of out-migration to and/or return from Europe.

Primary data collection

FGD participants were sampled purposively from the pool of potential participants identified through a chain referral system, on the basis of shared traits, such as shared areas of origin and gender. FGDs were administered in safe spaces, including REACH offices or other areas to which all respondents felt safe to travel.

KIIs took place both over the phone and in person, depending on the availability of the respondent, as well as on the security situation in situ. In KRI all KIIs took place in person. In Baghdad the majority of KIIs took place over the phone, as due to security reasons the respondents were unable or unwilling to be reached in person.

Limitations

In Greece, the sampling frame for the quantitative profiling component only draws on Iraqis on the Aegean islands, hence it does not represent the entire Iraqi population who entered Europe in 2016. Rather, it presents a profiling exercise of Iraqis who arrived on the Greek islands post- EU-Turkey Statement (post 20 March 2016). A number of Iraqis, particularly more vulnerable cases, such as unaccompanied women, and families with vulnerable family members, have since the implementation of the Statement been transferred to the Greek mainland from the islands, which resulted in the underrepresentation of these groups in the profiling exercise.

In some instances in both Greece and Iraq, field teams faced difficulties in gathering women together for FGDs, as they were often not able to leave their homes for extensive periods of time or travel to where FGDs took place. To compensate for the small number of women-only FGDs, where possible, KIIs with women were administered. In some instances, and only upon suggestion by the female respondent, the respondent took part in mixed FGDs; in these cases, women's answers were noted down separately to be able to disaggregate in the subsequent analysis by female respondents only. Notwithstanding the efforts made, women's views may be underrepresented as a result.

In Iraq, returnees were sometimes difficult to identify as they are a highly dispersed population, living among the host population and not gathering in specific locations and often not disclosing that they are returnees, due to the shame associated with having gone to Europe and returned. As such, while the chain referral system allowed to sample the requisite number of returnees, the sample is not statistically representative of Iraqi returnees, as certain groups, notably individuals in harder to reach areas or outside of accessible networks, may be excluded from the present sample.

Please note that findings are based on self-reported responses. Throughout, respondents were reminded about the anonymity of their participation in the study and that responses would have no impact on their asylum application in Europe or life in Iraq. Nevertheless, particularly for more sensitive questions, such as reasons for migrating to Europe among Iraqis on the Aegean islands, a certain bias in response is possible. For such more sensitive questions, responses were triangulated with other information given by respondents, i.e. areas of origin in Iraq and personal history. Field teams had been specifically trained how to address these questions, reminding respondents about the anonymity of response prior to raising sensitive topics. At the end of each questionnaire, enumerators also noted their impressions of respondents' responses, to guide subsequent analysis.

Finally, while the sample allows for findings to be generalised to Iraqi migrants on the Aegean islands, it may not be able to provide representativeness in comparing sub-groups, especially where sub-groups are very small.

Glossary

Mixed embeddedness – The process whereby a person, organisation or company is able to integrate in a given society both socially and economically.⁹⁹ Being embedded means being able to establish a self-sustaining livelihood in conditions of equal rights with other residents and citizens, as well as having a social network and feeling part of the community of return. The concept suggests that the stages of pre-migration, migration and re-migration all contribute to the returnee's experience upon return. It does not necessarily signify that the returnee will not migrate again.

Livelihood – Comprises the capabilities, assets (stores, resources, claims and access) and activities required for a means of living. A livelihood is sustainable when it can cope with and recover from stress and shocks, maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets, and provide sustainable livelihood opportunities for the next generation in the short and long term.¹⁰⁰

¹ IOM Greece, [Assessing the Risks of Migration Along the Central and Eastern Mediterranean Routes: Iraq and Nigeria as Case Study Countries](#), December, 2016.

² MMP, [Turning back: Policy and data analysis of Iraqis moving back from Europe](#), January 2017.

³ See e.g.: Deutsche Welle, [Next stop Erbil: Iraqi refugees line up to return home](#), January 2016; The New York Times, [Disappointed with Europe, thousands of Iraqi migrants return home](#), 4 February 2016; The Times, [Meet the Iraqi returnees who are going back to Iraq](#), March 2016; PRI, [Some Iraqi refugees who made it to Europe are choosing to return home](#), April 2016; The Telegraph, [Migrants return to Iraq after Europe dreams fail](#), February 2016; The Washington Post, [Unhappy in Europe, some Iraqis return home](#), January 2016.

⁴ UNHCR, [Refugees and migrants sea arrivals](#), December 2016.

⁵ Council of the European Union, [EU-Turkey Statement 18 March 2016](#), March 2016.

⁶ These findings are based on the quantitative profiling exercise of the Iraqi migrant population on the Aegean islands in Greece, March 2017. Please refer to the methodology section for further detail.

⁷ Findings and proportions presented in this section refer to the qualitative data collection which took place in primary areas of return with 65 returnees in KRI and Baghdad area.

⁸ Note on terminology: This report uses the word 'migrant' to refer to all people on the move, including people who intended to seek asylum and may gain refugee status once in Europe.

⁹ IOM Greece, see IOM, [Assessing the Risks of Migration Along the Central and Eastern Mediterranean Routes: Iraq and Nigeria as Case Study Countries](#), December, 2016.

¹⁰ IOM Greece, see IOM, [Assessing the Risks of Migration Along the Central and Eastern Mediterranean Routes: Iraq and Nigeria as Case Study Countries](#), December, 2016.

¹¹ Council of the European Union, [EU-Turkey Statement 18 March 2016](#), March 2016.

¹² UNHCR, [Refugees and migrants sea arrivals](#), December 2016.

¹³ MMP, [Turning back: Policy and data analysis of Iraqis moving back from Europe](#), January 2017.

¹⁴ See e.g.: Deutsche Welle, [Next stop Erbil: Iraqi refugees line up to return home](#), January 2016; The New York Times, [Disappointed with Europe, thousands of Iraqi migrants return home](#), 4 February 2016; The Times, [Meet the Iraqi returnees who are going back to Iraq](#), March 2016; PRI, [Some Iraqi refugees who made it to Europe are choosing to return home](#), April 2016; The Telegraph, [Migrants return to Iraq after Europe dreams fail](#), February 2016; The Washington Post, [Unhappy in Europe, some Iraqis return home](#), January 2016.

¹⁵ UNHCR, [Mediterranean Situation - Greece](#), Accessed 29 May 2017.

¹⁶ IOM DTM, accessed 27 June 2017.

¹⁷ IOM DTM, [Integrated Location Assessment Part 1](#), March 2017.

¹⁸ IOM DTM, [Integrated Location Assessment Part 1](#), March 2017.

¹⁹ See e.g. <http://www.medmig.info>; IOM, [Migration Trends Across the Mediterranean: Connecting the Dots](#), 2015; REACH, [Migration to Europe through the Western Balkans](#), May 2016.

²⁰ IOM, [Migration flows from Iraq to Europe](#), February 2016; IOM, [Migration flows from Iraq to Europe: Main reasons behind migration](#), July 2016.

²¹ See, e.g. Van Houte, M., Davids, T. (2008). 'Remigration, Development and Mixed Embeddedness: An Agenda for Qualitative Research?', *IJMS* 8,2; Van Houte, M., Davids, T. (2014). 'Moving Back or Moving Forward? Return Migration, Development and Peace-Building', *New Diversities* 16,2.

²² Van der Velde, M. and van Naerssen, T. (2011) 'People, borders, trajectories: An approach to cross-border mobility and immobility in and to the European Union'; and Van der Velde, M. and van Naerssen, T. (Eds.) (2015) *Mobility and migration choices: Thresholds to crossing borders*. Farnham: Ashgate.

²³ For more information on the concept of 'Return Preparedness', please see: <http://rsc.eui.eu/RDP/research-projects/cris/survey-on-return-migrants/dataset/migration-cycle-and-return-preparedness/>.

- ²⁴ Van Houte, M., Davids, T (2008). 'Remigration, Development and Mixed Embeddedness: An Agenda for Qualitative Research?', *IJMS* 8,2.
- ²⁵ Van Houte, M., Davids, T (2008). 'Remigration, Development and Mixed Embeddedness: An Agenda for Qualitative Research?', *IJMS* 8,2.
- ²⁶ UNHCR, [Refugees and migrants sea arrivals](#), December 2016.
- ²⁷ Council of the European Union, [EU-Turkey Statement 18 March 2016](#), March 2016.
- ²⁸ Please note that findings herein presented illustrate the profile of Iraqis who arrived on the Aegean islands, the main gateway to Europe for Iraqis in that period, post-March 2016. Due to the Greek law 4375 vulnerable individuals, notably individuals with disabilities and single women and persons requiring specific medical attention are to be transferred from the islands to mainland Greece. As such, these groups are underrepresented in this sample. For a more in-detail understanding of the methodology and limitations, please consult the methodology chapter.
- ²⁹ This information has further been triangulated with UNHCR hotspot population data, shared internally.
- ³⁰ Due to the lack of representative data on areas of origin of Iraqis who migrated in 2015 to Europe, no more longitudinal comparisons on changes in origin over time could be drawn.
- ³¹ IOM, [Migration flows from Iraq to Europe](#), February 2016.
- ³² This is due to the non-random sampling methodology employed, whereby respondents were 'snowballed' on the basis of personal contacts of IOM RART members. For a more in-depth methodology review please consult: IOM, [Migration flows from Iraq to Europe](#), February 2016.
- ³³ Black et al., [The Effect of Environmental Change on Human Migration](#), January 2012. For more on the multiplicities and complexities of the drivers of migration in the context of migration through the Mediterranean, see: <http://www.medmig.info/>; Cummings, Clare, et al., [Why people move: understanding the drivers and trends of migration to Europe](#), December 2015.
- ³⁴ Please note that findings which relate to a sub-section of the population, have a lower significance level than findings pertaining to the whole sample. As such, these figures should be treated as indicative only.
- ³⁵ See e.g. EASO, [The push and pull factors of asylum-related migration](#), 2016.
- ³⁶ Ibáñez, A.M., & Vélez, C.E. (2008). Civil conflict and forced migration: The Micro determinants and welfare losses of displacement in Colombia. *World Development*, 36(4), 659-676.
- ³⁷ Moore, W.H., and Shellman, S.M. (2004). Fear of Persecution Forced Migration, 1952-1995. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 48(5), 723-745.
- ³⁸ Al-monitor, [Why are kidnappings on the rise in Baghdad?](#), January 2017.
- ³⁹ Al-monitor, [Why are kidnappings on the rise in Baghdad?](#), January 2017.
- ⁴⁰ Middle East Eye, [Criminal kidnappings are big business in Baghdad](#), January 2017.
- ⁴¹ See for instance: Dustman 2013.
- ⁴² IOM, [Migration flows from Iraq to Europe: Main reasons behind migration](#), July 2016.
- ⁴³ IOM, [Migration flows from Iraq to Europe: Main reasons behind migration](#), July 2016.
- ⁴⁴ See Dustman 2013 for more on the link between corruption and increased migration; for more on how increased corruption can lead to higher rates of emigration for high-skilled migrants, see [Cooray and Schneider, Does Corruption Promote Emigration? An Empirical Examination](#), August 2015.
- ⁴⁵ This has also been found in other studies, see for instance: Zimmerman, S., Danger, Loss, and Disruption in Somalia after 1991: Practicalities and Needs Behind Refugee Decision-Making. *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, 30, 45-66.
- ⁴⁶ REACH, [Migration to Europe through the Western Balkans](#), May 2016.
- ⁴⁷ Please note that only the most reported reasons for any destination are included in this table, hence percentages may not add up to 100%.
- ⁴⁸ Robinson, V. and Segrott, J. (2002). Understanding the decision-making of asylum-seekers. London: Home Office Research Study 243. Retrieved from <http://www.ners-sunderland.org.uk/content/hors243.pdf>.
- ⁴⁹ IOM, [Migration flows from Iraq to Europe](#), February 2016.
- ⁵⁰ IOM, [Migration flows from Iraq to Europe](#), February 2016.
- ⁵¹ Data for 2014, 2015: IOM, [AVRR Bulletin 2016/2 \(July- December\)](#), December 2016.
- ⁵² Data for 2014, 2015: IOM, [AVRR Bulletin 2016/2 \(July- December\)](#), December 2016.
- ⁵³ See Deutsche Welle, [Next stop Erbil: Iraqi refugees line up to return home](#), January 2016; The New York Times, [Disappointed with Europe, thousands of Iraqi migrants return home](#), 4 February 2016; The Times, [Meet the Iraqi returnees who are going back to Iraq](#), March 2016; PRI, [Some Iraqi refugees who made it to Europe are choosing to return home](#), April 2016; The Telegraph, [Migrants return to Iraq after Europe dreams fail](#), February 2016; The Washington Post, [Unhappy in Europe, some Iraqis return home](#), January 2016.
- ⁵⁴ IOM, [AVRR Bulletin 2017/1 \(January-March 2017\)](#), March 2017.
- ⁵⁵ Please note that these findings only pertain to the sample of respondents interviewed and does not necessarily reflect host countries of Iraqi returnees to Iraq more broadly.
- ⁵⁶ Davids and Van Houte, [Remigration, Development and Mixed Embeddedness: An Agenda for Qualitative Research?](#), *International Journal on Multicultural Studies*, Vol 10, No 2, 2008.
- ⁵⁷ AVRR programmes are voluntary. Yet, if migrants have no leave to remain they are by law obliged to leave the country; in this case leaving the host country is a legal obligation, rather than a choice.
- ⁵⁸ Five returnees in KRI did not want to answer this question.
- ⁵⁹ UNU-MERIT, [Comparative Research on the Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration of Migrants](#), January 2015.
- ⁶⁰ See for example: IOM, [Returnee location assessment report](#), October 2016.
- ⁶¹ Collyer, M., Wimalasena, P., Ansar, N., Khan, MA (2009) 'Return Migrant in Sri Lanka', Institute for Public Policy Research.
- ⁶² UNU-MERIT, [Comparative Research on the Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration of Migrants](#), January 2015.
- ⁶³ REACH/MMP, [Separated families: Who stays, who goes and why?](#), April 2017.
- ⁶⁴ IOM, [Migration flows from Iraq to Europe: Main reasons behind migration](#), July 2016.
- ⁶⁵ UNU-MERIT, [Comparative Research on the Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration of Migrants](#), January 2015.
- ⁶⁶ Black, R, Koser, K, Monk, K, Affield, G, D'Onofrio, L, Tiemoko, R (2004) *Understanding Voluntary Return*, Home Office Report 50/04, London: Home Office.
- ⁶⁷ IOM, [Assessing the Risks of Migration Along the Central and Eastern Mediterranean Routes: Iraq and Nigeria as Case Study Countries](#), December, 2016.
- ⁶⁸ IOM, [Migration flows from Iraq to Europe: Main reasons behind migration](#), July 2016.
- ⁶⁹ IOM, [Integrated Location Assessment: Thematic Overview](#), March 2017.
- ⁷⁰ Countries are obliged to assess the situation in the country of origin for enforced returns, and can only be deported if the country of origin is deemed safe.
- ⁷¹ IOM, [Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration Programs \(AVRR\)](#), Accessed 29 May 2017.
- ⁷² See Deutsche Welle, [Next stop Erbil: Iraqi refugees line up to return home](#), January 2016; The New York Times, [Disappointed with Europe, thousands of Iraqi migrants return home](#), 4 February 2016; Time, [Meet the Iraqi returnees who are going back to Iraq](#), March 2016; PRI, [Some Iraqi refugees who made it to Europe are choosing to return home](#), April 2016; The Telegraph, [Migrants return to Iraq after Europe dreams fail](#), February 2016; The Washington Post, [Unhappy in Europe, some Iraqis return home](#), January 2016.
- ⁷³ Iraqi Embassy, [Pass doc](#), Accessed 31 May 2017.
- ⁷⁴ Deutsche Welle, [Next stop Erbil: Iraqi refugees line up to return home](#), January 2016.
- ⁷⁵ REACH, [Migration to Europe through the Western Balkans](#), May 2016.

- ⁷⁶ IOM, [Integrated Location Assessment: Thematic Overview](#), March 2017.
- ⁷⁷ OCHA, [Humanitarian Response Plan: Iraq: Advance Executive Summary](#), December 2016.
- ⁷⁸ The European Reintegration Network (ERIN) is a joint return and reintegration programme available to returnees from 11 countries of origin, including Iraq, which ran until 31 May 2017. See IOM, [European Reintegration Specific Action Program](#), Accessed 29 May 2017.
- ⁷⁹ Action on Armed Violence, [Understanding the Rising Cult of the Suicide Bomber](#), May 2017.
- ⁸⁰ Human Rights Watch, [Iraq: Suicide Attacks Target Crowds in Baghdad](#), May 2017.
- ⁸¹ New York Times, [Major Islamic State Attacks in Baghdad](#), May 2017.
- ⁸² Reuters, [After bombings in Baghdad kill 77, Sadr's forces deploy in some areas](#), May 2016.
- ⁸³ Human Rights Watch, [World Report 2017: Iraq, Events of 2016](#), 2017.
- ⁸⁴ IOM, [Integrated Location Assessment: Governorate Profiles](#), March 2017.
- ⁸⁵ UNU-MERIT, [Comparative Research on the Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration of Migrants](#), January 2015.
- ⁸⁶ See for example: IOM, [Returnee location assessment report](#), October 2016.
- ⁸⁷ See, e.g. Van Houte, M., Davids, T. (2008). 'Remigration, Development and Mixed Embeddedness: An Agenda for Qualitative Research?', *IJMS* 8,2; Van Houte, M., Davids, T. (2014). 'Moving Back or Moving Forward? Return Migration, Development and Peace-Building', *New Diversities* 16,2.
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- ⁹¹ For more information on the concept of 'Return Preparedness', please see: <http://rsc.eui.eu/RDP/research-projects/cris/survey-on-return-migrants/dataset/migration-cycle-and-return-preparedness/>.
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- ⁹³ Van Houte, M., Davids, T. (2008). 'Remigration, Development and Mixed Embeddedness: An Agenda for Qualitative Research?', *IJMS* 8,2.
- ⁹⁴ UNHCR, [Refugees and migrants sea arrivals](#), December 2016.
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- ⁹⁶ Please see below for further detail on how secondary data was used in each research and analysis step.
- ⁹⁷ See overall report: REACH, [Migration to Europe through the Western Balkans](#), May 2016.
- ⁹⁸ Source: Key informant interview, triangulated.
- ⁹⁹ Van Houte, M., Davids, T. (2008). 'Remigration, Development and Mixed Embeddedness: An Agenda for Qualitative Research?', *IJMS* 8,2.
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