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# Iranian Kurds in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq



Centre for Documentation  
and Counter Extremism



Danish National ID Centre  
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This report is not, and does not purport to be, a detailed or comprehensive survey of all aspects of the issues addressed. It should thus be weighed against other country of origin information available on the topic.

The report at hand does not include any policy recommendations. The information does not necessarily reflect the opinion of the Danish Immigration Service.

Furthermore, this report is not conclusive as to the determination or merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Terminology used should not be regarded as indicative of a particular legal position.

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## Executive summary

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Iranian Kurds have long had a presence in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI); they have arrived continuously in small numbers since the 1980's. As of March 2024, they number around 8,500 registered individuals. Many Iranian Kurds are members of the Iranian Kurdish opposition parties, either because they share the same ideology or by pursuit of safety. Their options for residency depend on whether they are affiliated with a party and their mode of entry.

Iranian Kurds, who have entered the KRI legally, can acquire the Iqama residence permit by presenting a passport, paying a fee of approximately 800 USD, and finding a sponsor, an Iraqi citizen who can support the Iranian Kurd during his stay in the KRI. Iranian Kurds, who have entered the KRI illegally without passports, can apply for a humanitarian or political residence permit, but are required to register as asylum-seekers with the UNHCR and receive a UNHCR certificate prior to submitting the application to local authorities. The residence permits are valid up to 12 months. Permanent residence permits do not exist in the KRI.

In most cases, Iranian Kurds receive a political residence permit, as many are members or supporters of Iranian Kurdish political parties. The relevant political party is required to issue a sponsor letter for the application process, and the applicant must achieve a security clearance through the KRG security service, Asayish. Residency procedures vary between Erbil and Dohuk, where the Kurdistan Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) is in control, and Sulaimania, where Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) is in control. In general, the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) lives up to the principle of non-refoulement.

The residence permit grants access to employment in the private sector, rental housing, healthcare, and educational possibilities including high school. For housing, a further security clearance is required along with a sponsor letter from the specific neighbourhood's Mukhtar. Iranian Kurds do not receive the right to vote and run for office, and in practice it is almost impossible for Iranian Kurds to acquire Iraqi citizenship. Both the employment possibilities and housing options are in general affected by the economic crisis in the region following longstanding political conflicts between the KRI and federal government of Iraq.

The Iranian Kurdish opposition parties PDKI, Komala, and PAK are residing in KRI, while the sources differed to what extent these parties have been disarmed. Another Iranian Kurdish opposition party, PJAK, is placed in the border area between KRI and Iran.

PDKI and Komala have been evacuated from the border areas, and possibly disarmed, following a security agreement between Iraq and Iran. Iran conducts covert activities and persecutes Iranian Kurds in the KRI through assassinations, abduction attempts and both physical and digital harassment. Assassinations have been conducted through shootings, missile strikes, drone attacks and improvised explosive devices. Target profiles have included vocal members of Iranian Kurdish parties, peshmergas, activists and journalists, who comment on Iranian internal

affairs and foreign activities. There is also an ongoing military conflict between Türkiye's armed forces and the PKK in mountainous areas of Duhok and Erbil governorates.

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## Introduction and methodology

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The report focuses on Iranian Kurds in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), specifically access to KRI, residence permit, citizenship, socio-economic and political rights connected to a residence permit as well as the security situation in the region.

The report is the product of a mission to Erbil on 2 to 7 March 2024, conducted by the Country of Origin Information Division from the Danish Immigration Service (DIS), the Danish National ID Centre (NIDC) and Norwegian Landinfo.

The purpose of the report is to provide updated background information for the processing of asylum cases in Denmark.

The mission's terms of reference (ToR) was formulated in cooperation with the NIDC and the Danish Return Agency (DRA). In this process, the Centre for Asylum, DIS, and the Danish Refugee Appeals Board have been involved in order to acquire their contributions to the ToR.

The sources had none or very little information on some issues in the ToR: Access for Iranian Kurds arriving to KRI from abroad; foreigners' access to Iraqi ID card and to citizenship in Iraq. The ToR is included in [Annex 2](#).

The EUAA COI Report Methodology has been applied in the writing process.<sup>1</sup> The report is based on a synthesis of information obtained from oral sources complemented by written sources.

In the process of compiling this report, the delegation orally interviewed 11 sources in total. These sources comprised of local KRG authorities (Directorate of Residence, Directorate of Passport, Department of Foreign Affairs), NGOs, international organisations as well as an expert and a scholar. These sources were selected based on their expertise, field of work, merit, experience or, in the case of local authorities, their area of responsibility.

All sources were granted the possibility of being quoted anonymously as not to jeopardise their work conditions and personal security in the KRI. All but the local authorities and one expert source chose to be quoted anonymously.

The delegation requested a meeting with the Directorate of Nationality and Civil Status as well as with the airport authorities; however, the requests were not met. Due to security concerns the delegation did not travel from Erbil to Sulaimania to meet with sources there.

The sources consulted were informed about the purpose of the mission and that the information they provided would be included in a public report.

The minutes from the meetings were forwarded to all sources but the Directorate of Residence and the Department of Foreign Affairs who at the meeting accepted the use of the information

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<sup>1</sup> EUAA, *EUAA Country of Origin Information (COI) Report Methodology*, February 2023, [url](#)



given in a public report. All other sources except the Directorate of Passport gave their approval and comments to the drafted minutes. The Directorate of Passport was given numerous reminders and were informed that the minutes would be used in the report.

The approved interview notes can be found under [Annex 1: Interviewed sources](#).

Some meetings with the sources were conducted in English without the use of an interpreter, however, the meetings with two local NGOs, an Iranian Kurdish scholar, and the KRG authorities were partly conducted in Kurdish language with the use of a Kurdish interpreter.

For the sake of reader-friendliness, transparency and accuracy, paragraphs in the meeting minutes in Annex 1 have been given consecutive numbers, which are used in the report when referring to the statements of the sources in the footnotes. The intention hereby is to make it easier to find the exact place of a statement in the meeting minutes.

This report was peer-reviewed by the Norwegian Landinfo, as they visited the KRI as part of the mission's delegation.

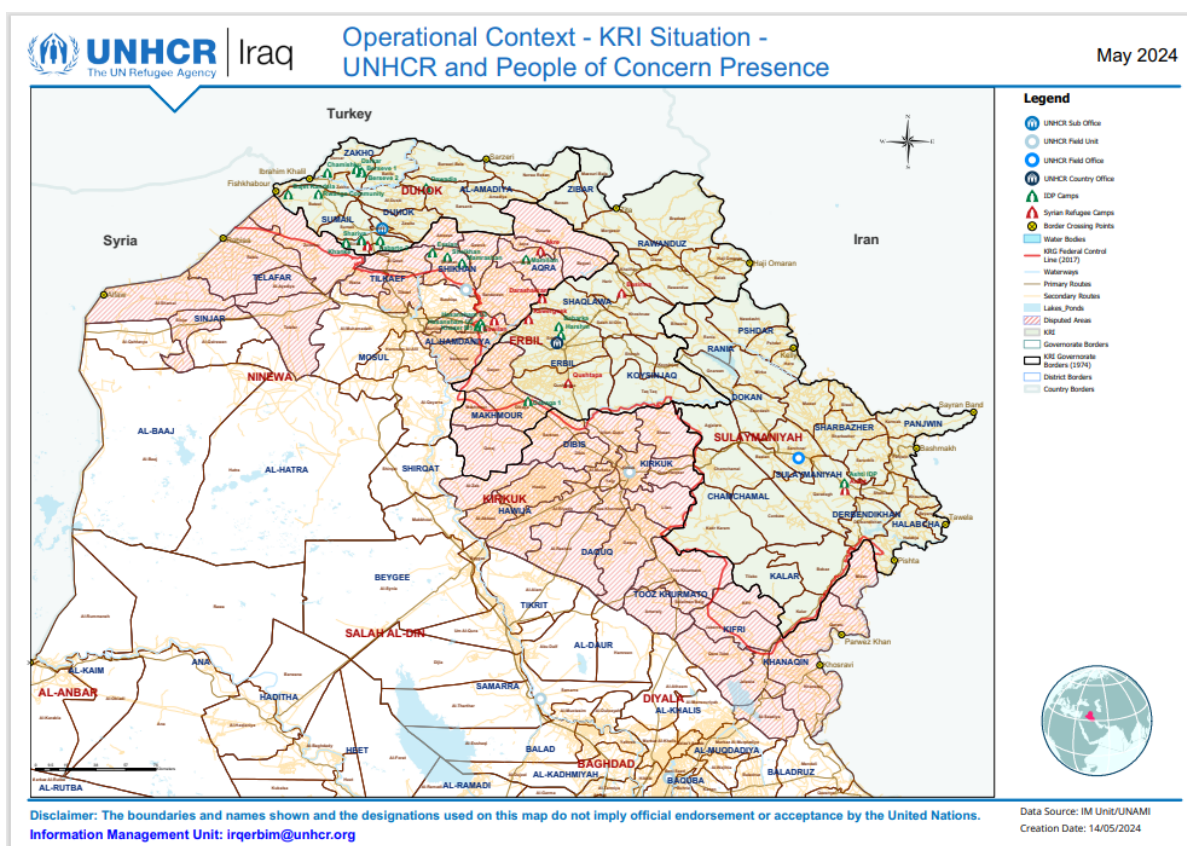
The research and editing of the report were finalised on 1 May 2024. The report is available on the websites of DIS (us.dk) and NIDC (nidc.dk), thus available to all stakeholders in the refugee status determination process as well as to the public.

## Abbreviations

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<b>HRP</b>	Humanitarian Residence Permit
<b>IDP</b>	Internally displaced person
<b>IQD</b>	Iraqi Dinars
<b>IRGC</b>	Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps
<b>ISIS</b>	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
<b>KDP</b>	Kurdistan Democratic Party
<b>KRG</b>	Kurdistan Regional Government
<b>KRI</b>	Kurdistan Region of Iraq
<b>MEK</b>	Peoples Mujahedin Organisation of Iran
<b>NGO</b>	Non-Governmental Organisation
<b>PAK</b>	Kurdistan Freedom Party
<b>PDKI</b>	Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan
<b>PJAK</b>	Kurdistan Free Life Party
<b>PKK</b>	Kurdistan Workers Party
<b>PRP</b>	Political Residence Permit
<b>PUK</b>	Patriotic Union of Kurdistan
<b>UNHCR</b>	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
<b>USD</b>	Unites States Dollars

# Map of Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI)



Source: UNHCR Iraq, *Operational Context - KRI Situation - UNHCR and People of Concern Presence* May 2024, [url](#)

## Background

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### *The Kurdistan Region of Iraq*

In 1992, the KRI was established following the Gulf war.<sup>2</sup> The region has been ruled by two Iraqi Kurdish parties; the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), which is led by the Barzani family, and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK),<sup>3</sup> which splintered from the KDP in the 1970s,<sup>4</sup> led by the Talabani family.<sup>5</sup> From 1994, the two Iraqi Kurdish factions engaged in civil war until the United States brokered a peace agreement in 1998.<sup>6</sup> This led to a power-sharing agreement between the two parties.<sup>7</sup> From then on, KDP controlled Erbil and Duhok Governorates, while PUK controlled Sulaimania, a geographical division which still exists today. In each governorate the controlling party officials are responsible for setting policy. The ministries and administrative institutions run by these parties constitute the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG).<sup>8</sup>

The KRG and KRI were officially recognised by the post-Saddam Iraqi constitution of 2005.<sup>9</sup> As a part of the American-driven reconstitution of Iraq, the KRG relinquished their demands for independence in return for special rights provided by the 2005 constitution. Amongst these special rights, the federal Iraqi government would send the KRG's share of the Iraqi national budget to the region's national bank, from where local authorities would distribute salaries to public employees.<sup>10</sup>

Circumstances changed following ISIS's military campaign in 2014, where their forces reached Samara and Baquba cities approximately 50 km north of Baghdad.<sup>11</sup> Kurdish president Barzani declared his intention to hold a referendum on KRI independence due to Iraq being "effectively partitioned". Kurdish forces took control of oilfields in Kirkuk, and began independently exporting oil.<sup>12</sup> Baghdad responded to these developments by reducing salary payment to

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<sup>2</sup> The Kurdish Project, *Kurdish History*, n.d. [url](#)

<sup>3</sup> London School of Economics Middle East Centre (LSEMEC), '*The Iraqi Kurds' Destructive Infighting: Causes and Consequences*' by Bekir Aydogan, 15 April 2020, [url](#); Washington Institute, *The Rise and Fall of Kurdish Power in Iraq*, spring 2023, [url](#)

<sup>4</sup> Foreign Policy, *Iraqi Kurdistan's House of Cards Is Collapsing*, 22 March 2023, [url](#)

<sup>5</sup> London School of Economics Middle East Centre (LSEMEC), '*The Iraqi Kurds' Destructive Infighting: Causes and Consequences*' by Bekir Aydogan, 15 April 2020, [url](#); Washington Institute, *The Rise and Fall of Kurdish Power in Iraq*, spring 2023, [url](#)

<sup>6</sup> Council on Foreign Relations, *1920 – 2022 The Kurds' Long Struggle with Statelessness*, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>7</sup> Federation of American Scientist, *Transcript: Albright, Talabani, Barzani Remarks*, 9/27/98, 17 September 1998, [url](#)

<sup>8</sup> Foreign Policy, *Iraqi Kurdistan's House of Cards Is Collapsing*, 22 March 2023, [url](#)

<sup>9</sup> BBC, *Iraqi Kurdistan Profile*, 25 April 2018, [url](#)

<sup>10</sup> Wilson Center, *Baghdad's Centralization Push: Two Court Rulings Undercut Kurdish Autonomy and Washington's Role in Iraq*, 25 March 2024, [url](#)

<sup>11</sup> The Guardian, *Iraq Crisis: US considers air assault on Isis as firefights reach Samara*, 13 June 2014, [url](#)

<sup>12</sup> BBC, *Iraqi Kurdistan Profile*, 25 April 2018, [url](#)

KRI,<sup>13</sup> and from 2014 onwards only paid a small share of the total amounts, leading to economic crisis in the KRI.<sup>14</sup> In 2017, Iraqi federal forces recaptured the oilfields,<sup>15</sup> and in 2023 managed to cease KRG oil exports. Baghdad's pursuit of political re-centralisation continued following the Kurdish vote for independence at the referendum in 2017, and in February 2024, the Iraqi Supreme Court revoked the KRG's authority to distribute salaries, nullifying Kurdistan's economic autonomy.<sup>16</sup>

### *Iranian Kurdish parties in KRI*

Following the Iranian revolution in 1979, the Kurdish Iranian parties Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan (PDKI) and Komala waged an armed struggle against the Iranian government for control of the Kurdish areas in north-west Iran. They retreated to northern Iraq during the early 1980s due to military pressure from Iranian forces. They have maintained their bases in Iraq since, and the parties continued their clandestine activities within Iran from their bases in exile in the Kurdish areas of northern Iraq. However, the parties ceased their military activities in the mid-1990s.<sup>17</sup>

In 2015, PDKI and KDP-I re-established their bases in the border areas,<sup>18</sup> and in 2016 declared their resolve to resume the armed struggle. This led to armed clashes between Iranian security forces and PDKI, KDP-I, PAK and PJAK.<sup>19</sup> KDP-I split from PDKI in 2006 to create their own party but reunified with PDKI in 2022.<sup>20</sup> From 2016 to 2018, fighting intensified, and in 2018 the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) struck PDKI bases in KRI with missiles. Following these developments, the scale of the fighting diminished.<sup>21</sup>

Iranian pressure and attacks on Iranian Kurdish parties intensified once more following the mass-protests that erupted in Iran following the death of a young Kurdish woman, Mahsa (Jina) Amini, during custody of Iran's morality police in 2022.<sup>22</sup> Following her death, the Iranian Kurdish parties called for a general strike, leading the Iranian authorities to accuse them of

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<sup>13</sup> Wilson Center, *Baghdad's Centralization Push: Two Court Rulings Undercut Kurdish Autonomy and Washington's Role in Iraq*, 25 March 2024, [url](#)

<sup>14</sup> London School of Economics, *The Collateral Damage of the KRI's Economic Policy*, 17 April 2018, [url](#)

<sup>15</sup> BBC, *Iraqi Kurdistan Profile*, 25 April 2018, [url](#)

<sup>16</sup> Wilson Center, *Baghdad's Centralization Push: Two Court Rulings Undercut Kurdish Autonomy and Washington's Role in Iraq*, 25 March 2024, [url](#)

<sup>17</sup> Landinfo, *Iran: Iransk-kurdiske partier med baser i Nord-Irak – Endret situasjon høsten 2023*, 4 December 2023, [url](#), p. 1

<sup>18</sup> Landinfo, *Respons Iran: Økt kurdist militæraktivitet i Iran*, 13 February 2017, [url](#), p. 11

<sup>19</sup> Combating Terrorism Center, *Iranian Kurdish Militias: Terrorist-Insurgents, Ethno Freedom Fighters, or Knights on the Regional Chessboard?*, May 2017, Vol. 10. Issue 5, [url](#); Landinfo, *Respons Iran: Økt kurdist militæraktivitet i Iran*, 13<sup>th</sup> February 2017, [url](#), p. 3, 7-8

<sup>20</sup> Kurdistan24, *Iranian Kurdish parties unite after 16 years split*, 22 August 2022, <https://www.kurdistan24.net/en/story/29285-Iranian-Kurdish-parties-unite-after-16-years-split> [insert link in browser]

<sup>21</sup> Landinfo, *Iran: Iransk-kurdiske partier med baser i Nord-Irak – Endret situasjon høsten 2023*, 4 December 2023, [url](#), p. 1

<sup>22</sup> Washington Institute, *Iran's Pressure Campaign on Iranian Kurds Continues*, 13 September 2023, [url](#)

inciting unrest in Kurdistan. Even though the protests following Mahsa (Jina) Amini's death were characterised as multi-ethnic<sup>23</sup>, the Iranian government framed the protests as rooted in Kurdish separatism.<sup>24</sup> This narrative led to Iranian attacks targeting Iranian Kurdish parties based in the KRI.<sup>25</sup> Following the protests in Iran, the KRI based Iranian Kurdish parties PDKI, Komala and PAK were attacked by Iran in 2022 and 2023.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Landinfo, *Iran: Iransk-kurdiske partier med baser i Nord-Irak – Endret situasjon høsten 2023*, 4 December 2023, [url](#)

<sup>24</sup> Washington Institute, *Iranian Protests and Attacks on KRI: An attempt to Deflect from Domestic Turmoil*, 21 November 2022, [url](#)

<sup>25</sup> Washington Institute, *Iranian Protests and Attacks on KRI: An attempt to Deflect from Domestic Turmoil*, 21 November 2022, [url](#); Badawi, Tamer, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, *Iran's Security Anxiety in Iraqi Kurdistan*, 8 November 2022, [url](#)

<sup>26</sup> Wladimir van Wilgenburg: 4

# 1. Entry, residency and citizenship

## 1.1. Requirements for entry at airport and land border points

According to the KRG E-visa portal, foreigners can enter the territory of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) through border-control points holding a valid passport, entry visa or residence permit. In case a foreigner arrives in KRI without a valid identity document or visa, or if they are refused a visa, they cannot enter the KRI and must return to their country of origin or the country from which they arrived, unless the aim is to seek asylum.<sup>27</sup> (See section [Refugee status – illegal entry](#))

### 1.1.1. 30 day visa

At any border-control point to the KRI, citizens from 53 countries, including Iranian citizens, have recently been granted the ability to enter the Kurdistan Region without a pre-arranged visa by presenting a passport of at least 6 months validity.<sup>28</sup> The application for a 30 day visa can be submitted online as well as at the border entry point, including the airport.<sup>29</sup> The fee for a 30 day visa is 72.26 USD.<sup>30</sup>

The Directorate of Residence manages extensions of visas. A visa can be extended for 30 days, three times. As such, a person entering KRI can stay legally for four months in total without leaving the country, if they extend their visa. In this case the person gets a stamp in the passport and not a residence permit. It is not a requirement to leave the country between the extensions of visa. The fee for extending the visa is 40 USD.<sup>31</sup>

## 1.2. Residence permits

There are two types of residence permits for foreign nationals in KRI: residence based on legal entry and residence based on illegal entry. Both types of residence permits can be renewed.<sup>32</sup>

The KRG authority responsible for issuing residence permits is the Directorate of Residence, under the KRG Ministry of Interior.<sup>33</sup>

In KRI, there are Iranian Kurds living without being registered. However, the sources did not know the numbers.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>27</sup> KRG E-visa Portal, Travel to Kurdistan Region of Iraq, 2024, [url](#)

<sup>28</sup> GOV KRG, Kurdistan Region of Iraq, *Visa-Free Entry to Kurdistan Region for Citizens of 53 Nations*, 19 February 2024, [url](#); Rudaw, *KRG provides visa on arrival for citizens of 53 countries*, 20 February 2024, [url](#); E-Visa Portal, KRG, *Passport Expiration*, [url](#)

<sup>29</sup> Directorate of Residence: 22

<sup>30</sup> KRG, Representation in the US, 2023, [url](#)

<sup>31</sup> Directorate of Residence: 3

<sup>32</sup> Directorate of Residence: 6

<sup>33</sup> Directorate of Residence: 1-5

<sup>34</sup> A local Human Rights Organisation: 3; A local Human Rights NGO: 23; An International Organisation: 32

### 1.2.1. Residence permit – legal entry (*lqama*)<sup>35</sup>

Upon legal entry to KRI, an applicant presenting a passport can apply for a residence permit. Other documents than a passport are not needed to prove identity.<sup>36</sup> The residence permit gives the right to stay as well as to work in the private sector.<sup>37</sup> The legal entry residence permit costs 780-800 USD (1,175,000 IQD) for first time issuance.<sup>38</sup>

For this type of residence permit, the applicant is required to have a sponsor. The sponsor must be an Iraqi citizen, who is willing to support the applicant while staying in the KRI. Often the sponsor is the employer of the applicant.<sup>39</sup> There is no requirement for the type of job undertaken by the applicant; however, the employer must have a registered business and must obtain a security clearance.<sup>40</sup>

It is a requirement to pass a blood test to start the case handling process. The blood sample will be tested for HIV and different types of Hepatitis. If the blood test is not passed, a residence permit will in most cases not be issued. If the blood test is Hepatitis positive, depending on the type of Hepatitis, a residence permit can in some cases still be issued.<sup>41</sup>

The application for the residence permit can be submitted online, but due to the blood test requirement, it is not possible to have a residence permit issued from abroad.<sup>42</sup>

The residence permit is valid for 6 or 12 months. The only exception is a residence permit obtained by marriage to an Iraqi citizen. This type of residence permit can be valid for a maximum of three years. There is no permanent residence permit.<sup>43</sup>

### 1.2.2. Refugee status – illegal entry

Asylum seekers and refugees, who entered KRI illegally i.e. without a valid passport, can apply for legal stay at the Directorate of Residence.<sup>44</sup> These individuals can be issued a humanitarian (HRP) or a political residence permit (PRP).<sup>45</sup> A requirement for this is a UNHCR certificate, as the UNHCR is responsible for the registration of the asylum seekers.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> *lqama*: the legal residence and working permit (Directorate of Residence: 1)

<sup>36</sup> Directorate of Residence: 10; An International Humanitarian Organisation: 21

<sup>37</sup> Directorate of Residence: 1, 11, 15, 17, 18; A local Human Rights Organisation: 23

<sup>38</sup> Directorate of Residence: 25

<sup>39</sup> Directorate of Residence: 11, 15; A local Human Rights Organisation: 23

<sup>40</sup> Directorate of Residence: 18

<sup>41</sup> Directorate of Residence: 13-14

<sup>42</sup> Directorate of Residence: 12, 15

<sup>43</sup> Directorate of Residence: 21

<sup>44</sup> An International Organisation: 4, 16; UNHCR, *Residency and Freedom of Movement*, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>45</sup> An International Organisation: 3

<sup>46</sup> UNHCR, Registration with UNHCR, n.d., [url](#); Directorate of Residence: 30-31; An International Organisation: 8



Both PRP and HRP require renewal<sup>47</sup> after one year.<sup>48</sup> The PRP is mostly issued to Iranian refugees, while the HRP is issued to Syrian refugees.<sup>49</sup> Since the report at hand is focusing on Iranian Kurds, only the process of issuing PRP is addressed. For information on HRP, please refer to [Annex 1](#).

Having relatives in KRI is not a requirement for obtaining PRP and HRP.<sup>50</sup>

Previous stay in the KRI is not an obstacle for obtaining a residence permit as such; however, if an applicant has previously overstayed and then left KRI without obtaining an exit permit, it might present a challenge for the security clearance.<sup>51</sup>

The process of issuance is different in the three governorates of the KRI: Erbil, Dohuk and Sulaimania.<sup>52</sup> For Dohuk Governorate, information on refugee status for Iranian Kurds could not be found within the deadline of the report.

### 1.2.2.1. The process of PRP in Erbil Governorate

The majority of the Iranian Kurds who enter KRI without a passport are politically active members or supporters of political parties. In order for them to be granted a PRP, they need to present a support letter from the Iranian Kurdish opposition party with which they are affiliated (KDPI, Komala etc.). The next step is the blood test and then the security clearance. The security clearance must be issued by the General Asayish (main headquarters of Asayish in Erbil).<sup>53</sup> An Iranian Kurd will not pass the security clearance, if they have previously engaged in illegal activities such as terrorism, drugs or have pending court cases.<sup>54</sup> The Directorate of Residence stated in 2019 that members of the armed forces of the Iranian Kurdish parties are not given residence permits.<sup>55</sup> More recent information could not be found. Sometimes the applicant is not informed of the reason why they have not passed the security clearance.<sup>56</sup>

An international humanitarian organisation stated that Iranian Kurds who entered KRI illegally and who are not members of any of the Iranian Kurdish opposition parties cannot obtain a political residence permit, nor can they apply for an iqama residence permit. What they can do is apply for a UNHCR certificate, which might help them with housing and at security checks

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<sup>47</sup> Directorate of Residence: 38

<sup>48</sup> An International Humanitarian Organisation: 15

<sup>49</sup> Directorate of Residence: 37

<sup>50</sup> Directorate of Residence: 39

<sup>51</sup> An International Organisation: 17

<sup>52</sup> An International Organisation: 6; UNHCR, Residency and Freedom of Movement, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>53</sup> Directorate of Residence: 35; UNHCR, *Residency and Freedom of Movement*, n.d., [url](#), An International Humanitarian Organisation: 13, An International Organisation: 9-13

<sup>54</sup> Directorate of Residence: 35

<sup>55</sup> DIS, *Iranian Kurds Consequences of political activities in Iran and KRI, February 2020*, KRG, Ministry of Immigration and Displacement, Directorate of Residency, Erbil Province Meeting with Brigadier General Yadgar A. Faraj Erbil, 27 October 2019: 150, [url](#)

<sup>56</sup> An International Humanitarian Organisation: 17

while crossing checkpoints.<sup>57</sup> However, this information could not be corroborated by other sources. For more elaborate information on freedom of movement, [see section 3.6](#).

Having obtained the UNHCR certificate, an applicant is also requested to present the following documents to the KRG authorities: ID document or passport (in absence of documentation, the application can still be processed), proof of residence issued by the local mukhtar (government appointed community leader) and as already mentioned, the applicant must also pass a blood test, receive a security and clearance and a party ID.<sup>58</sup> The process can take one month, if the requirements are fulfilled.<sup>59</sup>

Currently, registration by UNHCR is a required step to obtain legal residence document issued by the government.<sup>60</sup> An international humanitarian NGO noted that the above mentioned procedure is applicable whether or not the person is registered with UNHCR.<sup>61</sup> For Erbil Governorate, UNHCR's website does not mention registration with UNHCR as a requirement for being issued a PRP. However, in Sulaimania, Governorate registration with UNHCR is a requirement.<sup>62</sup>

Children below the age of 18 will not be issued a separate residence permit. The name of the child will be listed in the mother's residence permit. The child's birth certificate from either Iran or Iraq is required as documentation.<sup>63</sup>

### 1.2.2.2. The process of PRP in Sulaimania Governorate

According to UNHCR, foreigners holding a valid UNHCR certificate, any identity document (Nationality ID, Civil ID), and a sponsorship, can obtain residence permits by applying at the Sulaimania Residency Department's Refugee Unit with those documents. Furthermore, a blood test is required as well as a clearance by the local Asayish, who will request a valid address from the applicant, and the local Mukhtar must confirm the applicant's address through a letter. The Residency Department issues a one-year renewable residence permit after obtaining both the results of the blood test and the security clearance by Asayish. In addition, UNHCR states that Iranian Kurdish asylum-seekers are required to bring a sponsorship letter from a Kurdish political party. The issued residence permit will be valid for 6 months.<sup>64</sup>

However, an NGO providing legal assistance to Iranian Kurdish refugees in Sulaimania commented that in practice during the last five years it has become increasingly difficult to obtain PRP in Sulaimania. The source assessed that 80 percent of Iranian Kurds are facing

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<sup>57</sup> An International Humanitarian Organisation: 18

<sup>58</sup> An International Organisation: 9-11, 13; An International Humanitarian Organisation: 13

<sup>59</sup> An International Organisation: 13

<sup>60</sup> An International Organisation: 8

<sup>61</sup> An International Humanitarian Organisation: 13

<sup>62</sup> UNHCR, *Residency and Freedom of Movement*, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>63</sup> An International Humanitarian Organisation: 16

<sup>64</sup> UNHCR, *Residency and Freedom of Movement*, n.d., [url](#)

obstacles in obtaining PRP. Iranian Kurds with political background are no longer asked by the KRG authorities in Sulaimania to provide a support letter that confirms their support or membership of one of the Iranian Kurdish political parties. This used to be one of the conditions to start the process to acquire the refugee permit, once the Asayish approved them.<sup>65</sup> Due to the pressure by the Iranian government on the KRG, the Iranian Kurdish political parties no longer have the influence they used to have on matters related to their members.<sup>66</sup>

The NGO had observed that in some cases applicants were told by the authorities in Sulaimania that they could not issue a permit to them and instead the applicants travelled to Erbil to submit an application. However, the applicants were not necessarily issued a permit in Erbil.<sup>67</sup>

Furthermore, the NGO stated that there is no possibility for appeal if an application for PRP/HRP is rejected.<sup>68</sup>

### 1.3. Registration of Iranian Kurds by local authorities

The Directorate of Residence maintains both a digital and a physical database which stores applications for residence in KRI.<sup>69</sup> The database contains information on the applicants' origin and prior stays in KRI, etc. It is part of the Directorate of Residence's procedure to check the databases for information, when a person applies for residence and when a residence permit is issued.<sup>70</sup>

The online database was established in 2020, whereas the paper database dates back to 2003/2005. The paper database is in the process of being digitalised.<sup>71</sup>

Since the delegation did not get to meet with the Directorate of Nationality and Civil Status, no further information can be provided on this subject.

### 1.4. Access to citizenship in practice

Iraqi nationality law no. six of 2006 outlines how foreigners can obtain Iraqi citizenship.<sup>72</sup> It is limited to certain categories and for all of them legal entry to the country is a prerequisite.<sup>73</sup> It is the sole discretion of the Federal Iraqi Government to issue citizenship. The KRG authorities do not have the authority to issue citizenship.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> A local NGO providing legal assistance: 19-20

<sup>66</sup> A local NGO providing legal assistance: 26

<sup>67</sup> A local NGO providing legal assistance: 25

<sup>68</sup> A local NGO providing legal assistance: 24

<sup>69</sup> Directorate of Residence: 23

<sup>70</sup> Directorate of Residence: 23-24

<sup>71</sup> Directorate of Residence: 23-34

<sup>72</sup> An International Organisation: 46; Iraqi Nationality Law, Law 26 of 2006, 7 March 2006, [url](#)

<sup>73</sup> An International Organisation: 46; Nationality Law, Law 26 of 2006, 7 March 2006, Article 6b, [url](#)

<sup>74</sup> An International Organisation: 48; Directorate of Residence: 41; A local NGO providing legal assistance:

According to the nationality law, ten years consecutive legal stay is a requirement to obtain citizenship in Iraq. If a non-Iraqi citizen marries an Iraqi citizen, this requirement is reduced to five consecutive years.<sup>75</sup> In practice, an NGO observed that sometimes, when an Iranian Kurdish individual, who is married to an Iraqi citizen, applies for Iraqi citizenship, the Iraqi authorities send the applicant back to Iran to interrupt the consecutive stay, which provides the authorities with a reason for not granting citizenship.<sup>76</sup>

There are other requirements, and even if an Iranian refugee fulfils them all, an application for citizenship can be rejected.<sup>77</sup> According to an Iranian Kurdish scholar it is not possible for Iranian Kurds in KRI to obtain Iraqi citizenship.<sup>78</sup> The sources pointed to the reason being that there are political concerns regarding demographic change as stated in the constitution.<sup>79</sup>

In limited cases, some Iranian Kurds managed to obtain Iraqi citizenship via marriage to an Iraqi citizen. However, this is not a systematic or open legal channel for all Iranian Kurds.<sup>80</sup>

### 1.5. Prevalence of deportation to Iran

An International Organisation noted that the KRI authorities live up to principles of non-refoulement in general, although, it can depend on a person's case and profile. There are some individuals that the KRI authorities may be more prone to deport.<sup>81</sup> The source did not elaborate on who this might be.

An International Humanitarian Organisation noted that they did not see examples of deportation to Iran, but they did see deportations to Syria. The source, however, pointed out that there are many Iranian Kurds living in KRI who are not registered as refugees, and for this reason they are unaware of what happens to individuals from this group.<sup>82</sup> The same source elaborated that there are two types of deportations:

- Firstly, there are informal deportations, performed by the local security authorities or the residence office writing a letter expressing the need for deporting a certain person.<sup>83</sup>
- Secondly, in criminal cases, the court can decide to deport a defendant and in these cases the decision is final.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> An International Organisation: 46; A local NGO providing legal assistance: 29

<sup>76</sup> A local NGO providing legal assistance: 29

<sup>77</sup> An International Organisation: 47

<sup>78</sup> An Iranian Kurdish scholar: 24

<sup>79</sup> An International Organisation: 47; A local NGO providing legal assistance: 31

<sup>80</sup> A local NGO providing legal assistance: 30

<sup>81</sup> An International Organisation: 57

<sup>82</sup> An International Humanitarian Organisation: 23-24

<sup>83</sup> An International Humanitarian Organisation: 25

<sup>84</sup> An International Humanitarian Organisation: 25

On the subject of the blood test as a requirement for residence permit, an International humanitarian organisation stated that they have not seen examples of deportation on grounds of not passing the blood test.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> An International Humanitarian Organisation: 14

## 2. Socio-economic and political rights connected to residence permit in KRI

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If a refugee has a legal residence permit (HRP/PRP), they will automatically get access to housing (renting), health services, employment (private sector) and education.<sup>86</sup>

### 2.1. Housing

Regarding the Iranian Kurds' access to housing in the KRI, sources tend to differentiate between two categories of Iranian Kurds: Those with residence permits and those without. If an individual is in possession of a valid residence permit, the sources informed that the residence permit unlocks the possibility of acquiring rental housing.<sup>87</sup>

#### *2.1.1. Housing for individuals with a residence permit*

While a residence permit grants access to rental housing in general, taking residence in a specific neighbourhood might entail further requirements. To rent a house or apartment in a specific neighbourhood, a security clearance is required from the local Asayish office,<sup>88</sup> together with a support letter from the local district chieftain (Mukhtar).<sup>89</sup> Both an International Organisation and an International Humanitarian Organisation stated that a sponsor letter is not required to take residence in a specific neighbourhood.<sup>90</sup>

According to a local NGO providing legal assistance, in Sulaimania it is the case that an Iranian Kurdish refugee with a residence permit cannot freely choose in which neighbourhood to live, but is directed to a residence by the local Asayish.<sup>91</sup>

According to an International Humanitarian Organisation, housing is difficult to obtain in general because of the poor economic situation in KRI,<sup>92</sup> and often two to three families reside together. From 2004 to 2014, the KRI witnessed an economic upturn, which led to a “construction frenzy”. In this period, Erbil more than doubled in size. But when oil prices dropped from 115 USD a barrel in 2014 to 35 USD in 2016<sup>93</sup>, the KRI came close to bankruptcy. The economic uncertainties have continued since.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> An International Organisation: 34

<sup>87</sup> A local Human Rights Organisation: 4; An International Humanitarian Organisation: 1; An International Organisation: 34

<sup>88</sup> An International Humanitarian Organisation: 6; An International Organisation: 35

<sup>89</sup> An International Humanitarian Organisation: 13; A local Human Rights Organisation: 6

<sup>90</sup> An International Organisation: 35; An International Humanitarian Organisation: 3

<sup>91</sup> A Local NGO providing legal assistance: 21

<sup>92</sup> An International Humanitarian Organisation: 4

<sup>93</sup> Washington Institute, *The Rise and Fall of Kurdish Power in Iraq*, Spring 2023, [url](#)

<sup>94</sup> Reuters, *Economic ‘tsunami’ undermines war against Islamic State in Iraq – Kurdish deputy PM*, 16 January 2016, <https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-mideast-crisis-iraq-kurds-interview/economic-tsunami-undermines-war-against-islamic-state-in-iraq-kurdish-deputy-pm-idUKKCN0UU0GQ/> [insert link in browser]; Bertelsmann Stiftung, *BTI 2024 Country Report: Iraq*, 19 March 2024, [url](#)

### 2.1.2. Housing for individuals without a residence permit

According to a local NGO, the Iranian Kurds who are not in possession of a residence permit do not have access to rental housing. This group is searching for other options such as settlements and camps with their friends and families or in different urban areas of the KRI.<sup>95</sup> <sup>96</sup>

When consulting the sources, there appeared to be different definitions of “settlements” and “camps”. An Iranian Kurdish scholar stated that both of these terms are used by NGOs, while locally they are all referred to as “camps”.<sup>97</sup> On the other hand, the International Organisation stated that there are no refugee camps for Iranian refugees, and that most Iranian Kurds live in urban settings and in settlements.<sup>98</sup> The local Human Rights Organisation uses the words synonymously.<sup>99</sup>

Sources mentioned that settlements can be affiliated with or supervised by the Iranian Kurdish parties<sup>100</sup>, such as the Jezhnikan settlement, which is affiliated with the KDPI.<sup>101</sup> Usually these informal settlements are old abandoned military bases and buildings.<sup>102</sup> A local Human Rights NGO explained though that following the Iranian bombing of an Iranian Kurdish settlement in Koye in 2022, many Iranian Kurds left the settlements.<sup>103</sup>

### 2.1.3. Al-Tash

When asked specifically about the status of the remaining population of Iranian Kurdish refugees who settled in the al-Tash camp near Ramadi during the Iran-Iraq war in the 1980's, an Iranian Kurdish Scholar noted that this population came to live in Barika Camp in Sulaimania, Sherewen in Kalar District and Kawa Camp in Erbil.<sup>104</sup> The same source further stated that some of these refugees, mainly elderly people, went back to Iran. However, those who had a chance to travel to a third country did so.<sup>105</sup> Those who stayed in the settlements in KRI still do not have Iraqi documents.<sup>106</sup> For further reading on ID documents for refugees from the al-Tash camp, see report by Landinfo.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> A local Human Rights Organisation: 4; An International Humanitarian Organisation: 1

<sup>96</sup> A local Human Rights NGO: 1

<sup>97</sup> An Iranian Kurdish Scholar: 1

<sup>98</sup> An International Organisation: 35

<sup>99</sup> A local Human Rights Organisation: 4, 7, 8, 9

<sup>100</sup> A local Human Rights Organisation: 4; An International Humanitarian Organisation: 1, 6

<sup>101</sup> An International Humanitarian Organisation: 6

<sup>102</sup> A local Human Rights NGO: 1

<sup>103</sup> A local Human Rights NGO: 6

<sup>104</sup> An Iranian Kurdish Scholar: 1

<sup>105</sup> An Iranian Kurdish Scholar: 5

<sup>106</sup> A Local NGO providing legal assistance: 36; A local Human Rights Organisation: 16

<sup>107</sup> Landinfo, *Temanotat Iran Stadfestelse og dokumentasjon av statsborgerskap – spesielt for al-Tash flyktninger*, 8. februar 2024, [url](#)

## 2.2. Education

Education at elementary, secondary and high school level is generally available to Iranian Kurdish refugees in the KRI, if they can prove their identity as refugees or are holders of a residence permit.<sup>108</sup> Public schools are free of charge.<sup>109</sup> However, an Iranian Kurd needs to provide documentation for the educational level that they have already achieved. This can prove difficult, as an International Humanitarian Organisation informed the delegation that the individual cannot ask their previous place of education in Iran for the necessary, relevant documents.<sup>110</sup> A security clearance from Asayish may also be required.<sup>111</sup>

When it comes to higher levels of education such as access to university studies access for Iranian Kurdish refugees' is rather limited. The requirements for university enrolment include a residence permit, relevant documentation and a sponsorship provided by an individual who has lived in the KRI for a long time.<sup>112</sup> Further information on this could not be found within the deadline.

The procedures for enrolling in education, regardless of level, can vary. Allegedly, an Iranian Kurdish child was recently rejected admittance to elementary school despite the child's father being in possession of a residence permit. In another account, being the holder of a UNHCR certificate may prove to be sufficient documentation for enrolment in university.<sup>113</sup>

An Iranian Kurdish Scholar stated that Iranian Kurds used to have better possibilities when it came to studying at university or getting a teaching job in the KRI. However, non-Iraqi citizens face more challenges in relation to higher education, as Federal Iraq is pressuring the KRI on its autonomy.<sup>114</sup>

## 2.3. Employment

As is the case with housing, a residence permit is necessary for Iranian Kurds seeking employment.<sup>115</sup> Iranian Kurds, who do not possess a residence permit, tend to find employment in the irregular sector.<sup>116</sup> Iranian Kurds are generally inhibited from the public job market, as non-Iraqi citizens are barred from public employment. However, Iranian Kurds with a residence permit do have access to the private sector<sup>117</sup>, where they have equal access and

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<sup>108</sup> A local Human Rights Organisation: 18; An International Humanitarian Organisation: 31; An International Organisation: 40

<sup>109</sup> An International Organisation: 40

<sup>110</sup> An International Humanitarian Organisation: 30

<sup>111</sup> An Iranian Kurdish Scholar: 8

<sup>112</sup> A local Human Rights Organisation: 19

<sup>113</sup> A local Human Rights Organisation: 18, 19

<sup>114</sup> An Iranian Kurdish Scholar: 9-10

<sup>115</sup> An International Humanitarian Organisation: 27; An Iranian Kurdish Scholar: 16; a local Human Rights NGO: 20

<sup>116</sup> A local Human Rights Organisation: 25

<sup>117</sup> An International Organisation: 30



opportunities as the locals.<sup>118</sup> The sectors that most often employ Iranian refugees are restaurants<sup>119</sup>, supermarkets and construction services.<sup>120</sup> Occasionally, it has been possible for Iranian Kurds or other non-Iraqi citizens to be hired in the public sector through contract employments, which are defined as temporary employments. However, since the Iraqi central government cut the KRI's budget in 2014, the public sector has, in general, stopped hiring.<sup>121</sup>

Finding a job in the private sector is difficult due to the declining economy of the KRI. Furthermore, Iranian Kurds seeking employment in the private sector compete with internally displaced persons (IDPs), local Kurds and Syrian Kurds. Work conditions are often tough, as daily working hours can stretch to ten or twelve hours with no over-time pay, and in some places working weekends is required. This is partly due to the Labour Law not being applied at all by companies.<sup>122</sup>

When it comes to geographic variations in employment, most Iranian Kurds find work in the cities of Erbil and Sulaimania rather than in Dohuk.<sup>123</sup> Potentially it is easier to find employment in Erbil, but it is still difficult.<sup>124</sup>

Some Iranian Kurds and Iranians do not apply for residence permits but work on a one-month basis. These individuals cannot afford the residence permit fees, and instead travel to the KRI from Iran on 30-day visas, work as casual labourers for 25 days, then travel back.<sup>125</sup> However, the Directorate of Residence stated that a visa can be extended for 30 days, three times without the applicant needing to leave the country.<sup>126</sup> For information on 30-day visa, please refer to [section 1.1.1](#).

## 2.4. Healthcare services

Iranian Kurds in KRI have the same access as the local Iraqi Kurds to public and private health facilities. Public healthcare facilities charge every patient a small fee (approximately 50 cents<sup>127</sup> or 500 IQD<sup>128</sup>) for health services.<sup>129</sup> In addition to this, emergency services are free of charge; and basic treatment for most diagnosis is available.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> An Iranian Kurdish Scholar: 12

<sup>119</sup> An International Organisation: 39

<sup>120</sup> An International Humanitarian Organisation: 28

<sup>121</sup> An Iranian Kurdish scholar: 15; An International Humanitarian Organisation: 28

<sup>122</sup> An International Humanitarian Organisation: 28-29

<sup>123</sup> A local Human Rights Organisation: 26

<sup>124</sup> An International Humanitarian Organisation: 28

<sup>125</sup> A local Human Rights Organisation: 21-22

<sup>126</sup> Directorate of Residency: 3

<sup>127</sup> An International Humanitarian Organisation: 32

<sup>128</sup> An International Organisation: 36

<sup>129</sup> An Iranian Kurdish Scholar: 17; An International Humanitarian Organisation: 32; An International Organisation: 34, 44

<sup>130</sup> An International Organisation: 36

According to information on accessibility of medical treatment in KRI from EUAA MedCOI database, various specialist treatments in KRI are available in private and/or public health facilities. Most recent reports from KRI stipulate that specialist treatment by a pulmonologist (lungs), internist, gastroenterologist (digestive tract)<sup>131</sup>, and otorhinolaryngology (ear, nose and throat) is available.<sup>132</sup> The list is not exhaustive. A source interviewed by the delegation noted that some more complicated treatments are not available in the KRI, and the patient will need to travel abroad to access this treatment.<sup>133</sup>

The services provided by public healthcare facilities are perceived to be poor in quality and there are long ques for treatments.<sup>134</sup> Waiting times for surgery can reach a year.<sup>135</sup> .

Hospitals are low on medicines, and according to an International Humanitarian Organisation, a doctor at a public hospital is usually required to assess 20 patients an hour. These factors lead to general distrust in public hospitals and drive many to seek treatment in the private healthcare sector.<sup>136</sup> This perception was corroborated by an academic study in Erbil, stating that most patients prefer private clinics or hospitals since those facilities are perceived by the patients to have better access to specialists (in particular for chronic diseases such as hypertension), better quality and quantity of medicines, and laboratory testing.<sup>137</sup> Private healthcare services are, however, expensive.<sup>138</sup>

Private healthcare, or government subsidised semi-private healthcare<sup>139</sup>, might be the only way that individuals suffering from emergency conditions can receive treatment, but it is often too expensive for refugees and most Iranian Kurds.<sup>140</sup>

An NGO providing legal assistance informed the delegation that it has documented 180 instances of Iranian Kurds dealing with health difficulties, of which ten to twelve, usually with breast cancer or eye-sight conditions, can only find medical treatment abroad. As the KRI does not issue travel documents to Iranian Kurds, these individuals cannot access the treatments they require.<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> EUAA MedCOI database, Medical Country of Origin Information ACC 7883, [url](#) [accessible for authorities in EUAA member states]

<sup>132</sup> EUAA MedCOI database, Medical Country of Origin Information ACC 7887, [url](#) [accessible for authorities in EUAA member states]

<sup>133</sup> An International Organisation: 37

<sup>134</sup> An Iranian Kurdish Scholar: 17

<sup>135</sup> A local Human Rights NGO: 32

<sup>136</sup> An International Humanitarian Organisation: 32, 33

<sup>137</sup> Annals of Medicine & Surgery, Ann Med Surg (Lond). 2023 Jul; 85(7): 3409–3417, Kochr Ali Mahmood, MS and Abubakir Majeed Saleh, *Barriers and facilitators influencing access to and utilization of primary healthcare services in Kurdistan-region, Iraq: a cross-sectional study*, [url](#)

<sup>138</sup> An International Organisation: 32

<sup>139</sup> An Iranian Kurdish Scholar: 18

<sup>140</sup> An Iranian Kurdish Scholar: 17, 18, 19

<sup>141</sup> A local NGO providing legal assistance: 10

## 2.5. Food, water and electricity

Access to food, water and electricity is in general the same for everyone, Iraqi and Iranian Kurds alike. It depends on financial capabilities, networks and geographical area of residence.<sup>142</sup>

Electricity and water is provided by government services, and is, according to one source, not expensive. For additional electricity, generators can be purchased as well.<sup>143</sup>

The International Organisation informed the delegation that they provide targeted assistance and protection services, such as a one-year cash support programme, which is available to those who are eligible. However, it is not a sustainable solution to rely on such services. The International Organisation seeks to enhance self-reliance among refugees.<sup>144</sup> Further information on access to food, water and electricity could not be found within the deadline.

## 2.6. Right to vote and run for office

Political rights are granted through citizenship, meaning Iranian Kurds do not have the right to vote, run for office<sup>145</sup> or to receive a passport.<sup>146</sup> Even if an Iranian Kurd marries an Iraqi citizen, they would not receive Iraqi documents, nor would their children receive Iraqi citizenship.<sup>147</sup>

For further information on the access to citizenship in practice for Iranian Kurds, see [section](#)

[1.4.](#)

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<sup>142</sup> An Iranian Kurdish Scholar: 20; An International Humanitarian Organisation: 34; a local Human Rights Organisation: 29, An International Organisation: 41

<sup>143</sup> An International Humanitarian Organisation: 34

<sup>144</sup> An International Organisation: 42

<sup>145</sup> A Local Human Rights Organisation: 30; An International Organisation: 37

<sup>146</sup> An Iranian Kurdish Scholar: 23

<sup>147</sup> An Iranian Kurdish Scholar: 24

### 3. Security in KRI

#### 3.1. Development of the general security situation in KRI since 2022

##### 3.1.1 Iran-Iraq Border Security Agreement

On 19 March 2023, Iran and Iraq signed a border security agreement aimed at disarming the Iranian Kurdish armed parties operating in KRI, and closing their military bases in the KRI-Iran border areas,<sup>148</sup> to prevent them from infiltrating into Iran.<sup>149</sup> A deadline was set for September 2023.<sup>150</sup> The implementation of the agreement was still being discussed by the governments of Iran and Iraq in November 2023.<sup>151</sup> According to Wladimir van Wilgenburg, KRI authorities were not part of the agreement, although, they respect it, and have provided assistance in its implementation. The KRG, however, has not been willing to forcibly remove the Iranian Kurdish parties, because they consist of a mixture of refugees, fighters and their families. According to the same source, the president of KRI has stated that the Iranian Kurds were not creating problems for the KRI authorities.<sup>152</sup>

##### 3.1.2. Evacuation and Relocation of Iranian Kurdish armed parties

According to multiple sources, the relocation of Iranian Kurdish armed parties from their camps and bases in the border areas has been completed, and their inhabitants have been relocated deeper into KRI.<sup>153</sup> The bases at the border were evacuated and in some cases destroyed.<sup>154</sup> PDKI had a camp in Keelashin, and shared two with Komala in Seedakan and Halgurd.<sup>155</sup> The Iranian Kurdish scholar referred to footage released by the Iranian government that showcased that the Iranian Kurdish party camps were empty<sup>156</sup>, and that their inhabitants now live in camps and settlements.<sup>157</sup> Following these developments, the Iran-KRI border has been manned by federal Iraqi border guards.<sup>158</sup>

<sup>148</sup> Reuters, *Iraq and Iran sign deal to tighten border security*, 19 March 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/iraq-iran-sign-deal-tighten-border-security-2023-03-19/> [insert link in browser]; An International Organisation in Iraq: 1-4

<sup>149</sup> Wladimir van Wilgenburg: 2

<sup>150</sup> French Research Center on Iraq, *Iran's goals and strategy for expelling Kurdish opposition groups in the Kurdistan region of Iraq*, 13 September 2023, [url](#)

<sup>151</sup> United Nations S/2024/96, Security Council Distr.: General, 25 January 2024, Implementation of resolution 2682 (2023), Report of the Secretary-General, [url](#), section 40, 49

<sup>152</sup> Wladimir van Wilgenburg: 4-5

<sup>153</sup> A local human rights NGO: 6, 9; Wladimir van Wilgenburg: 2; An Iranian Kurdish scholar: 28; An International Organisation in Iraq: 3

<sup>154</sup> A local human rights NGO: 6; A local Human Rights Organisation; 9; Mehr News Agency, *Anti-Iran armed adversary groups leave shared borders*, 19 September 2023, [url](#)

<sup>155</sup> A local Human Rights organisation 9

<sup>156</sup> An Iranian Kurdish scholar: 31, 32

<sup>157</sup> An Iranian Kurdish scholar: 28

<sup>158</sup> A local human rights NGO: 9

Regarding the current presence of PDKI and Komala, sources agreed that PDKI is located in Erbil Governorate, but their exact location is disputed. A local Human Rights Organisation claimed PDKI is now based outside Erbil<sup>159</sup>, while Wladimir van Wilgenburg stated that PDKI was near Koye and near Baharka in Erbil Governorate.<sup>160</sup> An International Organisation in Iraq informed the delegation that PDKI was relocated to two camps in unspecified locations in Erbil Governorate.<sup>161</sup>

Regarding Komala, Wladimir van Wilgenburg stated that the party was now based in Sulaimania,<sup>162</sup> while an International Organisation in Iraq stated that Komala relocated to Erbil Governorate. The same source did not rule out that they could have a presence in Sulaimania.<sup>163</sup>

### 3.1.2.1. Disarmament of Iranian Kurdish armed parties

Sources differed on whether the Iranian Kurdish parties have been disarmed. The Iranian Kurdish scholar did not have actual knowledge on whether the parties have been disarmed, but stated that official statements from Iran, Iraq and KRG prevail. Iran has thanked both Baghdad and the KRG for their assistance in making the Iranian Kurdish parties disarm, implying that both relocation and disarmament have taken place in accordance with the official announcements.<sup>164</sup> A local human rights NGO also stated that disarmament has taken place, but the source was unaware of the fate of the weapons.<sup>165</sup> An International Organisation in Iraq also stated that the Iranian Kurdish parties made the decision to disarm, have confirmed that they have disarmed, and that there is no evidence that contradicts this.<sup>166</sup> The Iranian Kurdish parties, however, want to keep small arms for personal protection.<sup>167</sup>

In contrast to the above, according to Wladimir van Wilgenburg, most of the Iranian Kurdish parties have not been disarmed.<sup>168</sup> He further specified that PDKI and PAK have retained their weapons.<sup>169</sup> Komala has allegedly been disarmed, however, not as a result of the Iran-Iraq security agreement, but due to Kurdish pressure to end their infighting.<sup>170</sup> An International Organisation in Iraq added that there is an ongoing power-struggle within Komala, and that they are divided amongst themselves.<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>159</sup> A local human rights NGO: 6

<sup>160</sup> Wladimir van Wilgenburg: 7

<sup>161</sup> An International Organisation in Iraq: 8

<sup>162</sup> Wladimir van Wilgenburg: 7

<sup>163</sup> An International Organisation in Iraq: 8

<sup>164</sup> An Iranian Kurdish scholar: 30

<sup>165</sup> A local human rights NGO: 10

<sup>166</sup> An International Organisation in Iraq: 4

<sup>167</sup> An International Organisation in Iraq: 16

<sup>168</sup> Wladimir van Wilgenburg: 1

<sup>169</sup> Wladimir van Wilgenburg: 7, 12

<sup>170</sup> Wladimir van Wilgenburg: 9

<sup>171</sup> An International Organisation in Iraq: 9

### 3.2. Foreign Armed Actors

Regarding the presence of foreign armed actors operating within KRI, this section primarily focuses on the Iranian presence, but Türkiye is also mentioned in [section 3.2.2.](#)

While Iran does not have any military bases within the KRI<sup>172</sup>, sources stated that Iran has a covert presence<sup>173</sup>, through which the Iranian government pressures<sup>174</sup>, harasses<sup>175</sup> or targets Iranian Kurds.<sup>176</sup> A local Human Rights NGO further elaborated that Iranian agents enter the KRI in disguise, or open front companies and businesses.<sup>177</sup>

#### 3.2.1. Iranian persecution of Iranian Kurds within KRI

According to multiple sources, Iranian Kurds in KRI have experienced assassinations<sup>178</sup>, threats<sup>179</sup> and abduction attempts perpetrated by Iran.<sup>180</sup>

##### 3.2.1.1. Assassinations

A local NGO providing legal assistance to Iranian Kurds stated that since 1980, there have been 400 documented cases of politically motivated assassinations of Iranian Kurds in the KRI by the Iranian government.<sup>181</sup> Wladimir van Wilgenburg added that the Iranian intelligence service often carries out attacks and assassination on Iranians living in KRI, regardless of the Iran-Iraq security agreement.<sup>182</sup>

A local Human rights NGO stated that nine Iranian Kurdish refugees, who were either members of a Kurdish party, independent activists or human rights workers have been assassinated in KRI since 2021. Three of these assassinations, as well as a failed assassination attempt on an Iranian Kurdish lawyer in Erbil, Sohrab Ramati<sup>183</sup>, have taken place since January 2023.<sup>184</sup>

Sources provided several examples of assassinations of Iranian Kurds in the KRI. In the following cases, Iran has been accused of being the perpetrator:

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<sup>172</sup> Wladimir van Wilgenburg: 17

<sup>173</sup> A local Human Rights NGO: 23-24; An Iranian Kurdish scholar: 27

<sup>174</sup> A local Human Rights Organisation: 31

<sup>175</sup> An Iranian Kurdish scholar: 26

<sup>176</sup> A local Human Rights NGO: 10

<sup>177</sup> A local Human Rights NGO: 24

<sup>178</sup> Wladimir van Wilgenburg: 16, local Human Rights Organisation: 10; a local Human Rights NGO: 25; USDOS, 2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Iraq, 22 April 2024, [url](#)

<sup>179</sup> An Iranian Kurdish scholar: 26, 27; a local Human Rights NGO: 4; local Human Rights Organisation: 10, USDOS, 2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Iraq, 22 April 2024, [url](#)

<sup>180</sup> A local Human Rights NGO: 4; USDOS, 2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Iraq, 22 April 2024, [url](#)

<sup>181</sup> A local NGO providing legal assistance: 12

<sup>182</sup> Wladimir van Wilgenburg: 16

<sup>183</sup> Kurdistan24, *Kurdish lawyer faces assassination attempt in Erbil*, 17 November 2023,

<https://www.kurdistan24.net/en/story/33175-Kurdish-lawyer-faces-assassination-attempt-in-Erbil> [insert link in browser]

<sup>184</sup> A local Human Rights NGO: 3; A local NGO providing legal assistance: 14

- Behrouz (Rebin) Rahimi, an Iranian Kurdish political activist, who was registered with the UNHCR in Erbil, was killed in Sulaimania in 2021. His wife blamed Iran, and the Kurdistan Human Rights Network states that the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) was behind several killings of Kurdish political activists in Iraqi Kurdistan.<sup>185</sup>
- Siyamand Shaboui, a member of PDKI, was reportedly assassinated in Barhacat on 11 July in 2023.<sup>186</sup> Shaboui was reportedly the third member of PDKI to be assassinated by Iran on 7 July 2023. The two others were named Lokman Aji and Adel Mahajer in Qaladze district.<sup>187</sup> On the same day another political activist, Saadi Moradpour, formerly affiliated with the Democratic Party, was wounded in Sulaymaniya.<sup>188</sup>
- Shoaib Zarei, a cadre in Komala, was assassinated in March 2024 near Sulaimania city. Komala blamed Iran.<sup>189</sup>

It was pointed out by sources that the IRGC commits assassinations, and then returns to Iran.<sup>190</sup>

### 3.2.1.2 Harassment

An Iranian Kurdish scholar explained that Iran harasses Iranian Kurds in the KRI with threats, which affects the whole community. The source presented two examples;

- First, Iran uses online channels, such as a Telegram channel called “Diarunadiar” to spread threats among Iranian Kurds, and telling them that “there is no future for you in KRI”.<sup>191</sup>
- Secondly, sometimes Iranian agents publish pictures of Iranian Kurds’ private residences, and send the inhabitants messages saying “we are very close to you”, in order to show the Iranian Kurds that they are close by.<sup>192</sup>

A local Human Rights NGO added that Iran creates an atmosphere of lack of safety amongst Iranian Kurdish refugees, by conducting threatening phone calls, abduction attempts or by

<sup>185</sup> Kurdistan Human Rights Network, *Unknown offenders kill Iranian Kurdish Activist in Iraqi Kurdistan*, 16 July 2021, [url](#)

<sup>186</sup> A local Human Rights Organisation: 11

<sup>187</sup> Kurdpa, *Assassination of Siyamand Shaboui, the third member of the Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan within six days in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq*, 13 July 2023, [url](#); USDOS, *2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Iraq*, 22 April 2024, [url](#); Hengaw, *Hengaw’s Investigation into the Assassination of Two Members of the KDPI in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq*, 7 July 2023, [url](#)

<sup>188</sup> USDOS, *2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Iraq*, 22 April 2024, [url](#); Hengaw, *Hengaw’s Investigation into the Assassination of Two Members of the KDPI in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq*, 7 July 2023, [url](#)

<sup>189</sup> Rudaw, *Komalab blames Iran in killing of member in Sulaimani*, [url](#)

<sup>190</sup> A local Human Rights NGO: 25; Federal Office for Migration and Refugees, *Briefing Notes Summary*, 31 December 2023, [url](#); Wladimir van Wilgenburg: 16

<sup>191</sup> An Iranian Kurdish scholar: 26-27

<sup>192</sup> An Iranian Kurdish scholar: 26-27

shooting at Iranian Kurdish residences. The source noted that this compels many Iranian Kurds to join political parties to get safety.<sup>193</sup>

### 3.2.1.3 Target profiles of Iranian Persecution

Multiple sources mentioned that members of Iranian Kurdish parties have been targeted by Iranian threats or assassinations. Some of these have been peshmergas or low-level party members.<sup>194</sup> However, not just members of Iranian Kurdish parties are targeted by Iran, as Iranian Kurds who are politically active in the media or comment on politics in Iran, can be targeted by Iranian pressure too. Especially vulnerable are those individuals who have families in Iran. Occasionally, Iranian Kurdish journalists, working for media in KRI, receive threats involving their family members in Iran.<sup>195</sup>

Two local NGOs pointed to the following profiles as being targeted by the Iranian government: Iranian Kurds, who have left Iran and continue their work from exile, i.e. activists, including party members, supporters as well as non-party-affiliated activists, journalists and human rights defenders.<sup>196</sup> For instance, in August 2023, a journalist from Halabja reported receiving death threats from individuals he believed to be from Iranian intelligence due to his reporting on the country's interference in the region's politics.<sup>197</sup>

Iranian Kurdish refugees, who fled Iran in the wake of the 2022-protests, included individuals, who were not members of Iranian Kurdish political parties. However, they were still exposed to threats and warnings from Iran.<sup>198</sup>

According to an Iranian Kurdish Scholar, Iran does not send threatening texts to every Iranian Kurd in KRI, but targets the active ones, which is enough to affect the whole community.<sup>199</sup>

### 3.2.2 Türkiye's military campaign against PKK

As a part of Türkiye's military campaign against the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), Turkish armed forces have constructed military bases in Duhok Governorate, and in Bashiqa in Ninewa Governorate.<sup>200</sup> Apart from their operations against PKK, Turkish forces occasionally strike PJAK.<sup>201</sup> In March 2024, Türkiye and Iraq entered an agreement, leading to Iraq designating the PKK as a banned organisation in Iraq.<sup>202</sup> Also in March 2024, Türkiye announced that a

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<sup>193</sup> A local Human Rights NGO: 4

<sup>194</sup> A local Human Rights NGO: 3; A local Human Rights Organisation: 11, 12; Wladimir van Wilgenburg: 25, 27

<sup>195</sup> Wladimir van Wilgenburg: 25

<sup>196</sup> A local Human Rights NGO: 4; A local NGO providing legal assistance: 14, 15; USDOS, 2023 *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Iraq*, 22 April 2024, [url](#);

<sup>197</sup> USDOS, 2023 *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Iraq*, 22 April 2024, [url](#);

<sup>198</sup> A local Human Rights Organisation: 13

<sup>199</sup> An Iranian Kurdish scholar: 27

<sup>200</sup> Wladimir van Wilgenburg: 19

<sup>201</sup> Wladimir van Wilgenburg: 11

<sup>202</sup> Al-Monitor, *Iraq bans PKK as security ties Turkey gain momentum*, 14 March 2024, [url](#)



comprehensive military operation will be launched in the summer of 2024 against the PKK in Iraq and Syria.<sup>203</sup>

### 3.3 Non-State Armed Actors (PKK and ISIS)

There is some ISIS presence in the disputed areas of Iraq, for instance in Makhmur and Diyala, where they occasionally conduct attacks on Iraqi security forces and extort farmers for money. Recently, however, they have not had the capability to carry out large attacks in Iraq. ISIS sleeper cells do exist, and in February 2024 the authorities in Sulaimania arrested a number of ISIS supporters.<sup>204</sup> The ISIS suspects were arrested by Asayish for “spreading the extremist ideas of ISIS” on social media platforms.<sup>205</sup> In another incident in November 2023, the Sulaimania-based Asayish arrested 55 ISIS suspects in Sulaimania, Halabja and Kirkuk after conducting “tens of raids”.<sup>206</sup>

The PKK maintains a presence in the Qandil Mountains, as well as in Duhok<sup>207</sup>, from where it conducts an insurgency campaign against the Turkish security forces present in the KRI. Fighting has also taken place between the PKK and the KRI’s security forces, and the PKK has targeted oil pipelines within its areas of operations.<sup>208</sup>

Both Wladimir van Wilgenburg and an Iranian Kurdish scholar regard the Kurdistan Free Life Party (PJAK) as a branch of the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK). The sources stated that PJAK is outside of KRG’s influence, and as a result has not been disarmed or evacuated from its bases near Qandil.<sup>209</sup>

### 3.4 Security incidents and the extent and type of casualties

In 2021, missiles struck various places in and around Erbil, injuring a refugee and an IDP. The Shia militia Saraya Awlia al-Dam claimed responsibility for the attack and stated that their target was the U.S. base in al-Harir.<sup>210</sup>

Following the protests in Iran in 2022-2023, Iran accused the Iranian Kurdish parties of inciting unrest in Iran. The IRGC conducted multiple missile and drone strikes against Iranian Kurdish parties in Erbil and Sulaimania. On 14 November 2022, two were killed and ten injured.<sup>211</sup> In another set of strikes that took place on 28 September 2022, 13-18 individuals were killed and

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<sup>203</sup> Washington Institute, *Turkey’s Anti-PKK Operation and “Development Road” in Iraq Are Two Sides of the Same Coin*, 8 April 2024, [url](#)

<sup>204</sup> Wladimir van Wilgenburg: 22; Rudaw, *Sulaimani security forces arrest 30 ISIS suspects*, 23 February 2024, [url](#)

<sup>205</sup> Rudaw, *Sulaimani security forces arrest 30 ISIS suspects*, 23 February 2024, [url](#)

<sup>206</sup> Rudaw, *Sulaimani security forces arrest 55 ISIS suspects*, 18 November 2023, [url](#)

<sup>207</sup> Shafaq, *Duhok governor expects end to Turkey-PKK conflict soon*, 10 March 2024, [url](#)

<sup>208</sup> CSIS, *Examining Extremism: Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK)*, 13 July 2023, [url](#)

<sup>209</sup> An Iranian Kurdish Scholar: 34, Wladimir van Wilgenburg: 11

<sup>210</sup> Rudaw, *Refugee, IDP injured in Erbil rocket attack*, 17 February 2021, [url](#)

<sup>211</sup> USDOS, *2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Iraq*, 20 March 2023, [url](#); Reuters, *Iran strikes dissidents in Iraqi Kurdistan, two dead – officials*, 14<sup>th</sup> November 2022, [url](#)

58-60 wounded, as the IRGC struck Iranian Kurdish parties in the same governorates.<sup>212</sup> UNHCR condemned the attack in which Iranian refugees were killed.<sup>213</sup> In the same attack, U.S. forces downed an Iranian drone en route to Erbil, citing the drone posed a threat to U.S. personnel.<sup>214</sup>

In 2022, the U.S. military base in Erbil was targeted in an Iranian missile strike. The missiles came down close to the U.S. base, but no casualties were reported on the American side. One local civilian was reportedly injured.<sup>215</sup>

In January 2024, three Iranian drones were shot down by missile defence systems, as they targeted the area of Erbil International Airport, where the U.S. base and consulate are located.<sup>216</sup> In the same attack, a ballistic missile struck the home of a local businessman, killing four and wounding six. The IRGC claimed that the house was a “Mossad espionage centre”, which was denied by KRG authorities.<sup>217</sup>

### 3.5 Freedom of Movement within KRI

Iranian Kurds can only travel within the Kurdistan region, but local political dynamics can also inhibit travel within the KRI. An Iranian Kurd with a residence permit from KDP controlled-Erbil, who travels to PUK-controlled Sulaimania, will be stopped, delayed and questioned at the many checkpoints on the routes.<sup>218</sup> Multiple sources including the Directorate of Residence informed the delegation that to pass through a checkpoint, an Iranian Kurd requires a valid residence permit<sup>219</sup> or work-visa issued by the KRG.<sup>220</sup>

Iranian Kurds holding a UNHCR certificate but no residence permit cannot travel from one city to another.<sup>221</sup> A source noted that it might be possible to use a UNHCR certificate to cross a checkpoint.<sup>222</sup>

Checkpoints are not run by regular police units, but by either KDP or PUK-affiliated security forces, who each man their own checkpoints.<sup>223</sup>

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<sup>212</sup> USDOS, *2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Iraq*, 20 March 2023, [url](#); Reuters, *Thirteen reported killed as Iran Revolutionary Guards target dissident sites in Iraq*, 28<sup>th</sup> September 2022, [url](#); DW, *Iran launches fresh strikes on Iraqi Kurdistan*, 28 September 2022, [url](#)

<sup>213</sup> UNHCR, *UNHCR statement, 28 September 2022, Erbil, Iraq*, 28 September 2022, [url](#)

<sup>214</sup> Reuters, *Thirteen reported killed as Iran Revolutionary Guards target dissident sites in Iraq*, 28 September 2022, [url](#); USDOS, *2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Iraq*, 20 March 2023, [url](#)

<sup>215</sup> Reuters, *Iran attacks Iraq's Erbil with missiles in warning to U.S., allies*, 13 March 2022, [url](#)

<sup>216</sup> Politico, *Iran claims responsibility for blasts near US consulate in Iraq*, 16 January, 2024, [url](#), ABC News, *Explosions reported near US Consulate in Iraq; Iran claims responsibility*, 16 January 2024, [url](#)

<sup>217</sup> HRW, *Iraq: Iranian Attack Kills Civilians in Erbil*, 22 January 2024, [url](#), An International Organisation in Iraq: 13, Politico, *Iran claims responsibility for blasts near US consulate in Iraq*, 16 January 2024, [url](#)

<sup>218</sup> A local Human Rights NGO: 12; Wladimir van Wilgenburg: 24

<sup>219</sup> Directorate of Residence: 32

<sup>220</sup> A local Human Rights NGO: 18, 19, 20; Wladimir van Wilgenburg: 31

<sup>221</sup> An International Organisation: 53; A local Human Rights NGO: 14

<sup>222</sup> An International Humanitarian Organisation: 18

<sup>223</sup> A local Human Rights NGO: 21

According to Wladimir van Wilgenburg, Iranian Kurds living in KRI do not suffer ill treatment by the KRG's armed forces.<sup>224</sup> However, in one case, Nazila Maroufian, an Iranian Kurdish journalist, claimed she was tortured for 13 days in January 2023 in Sulaymaniyah prison.<sup>225</sup> Further information on the subject could not be found within the deadline.

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<sup>224</sup> Wladimir van Wilgenburg: 25

<sup>225</sup> USDOS, *2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Iraq*, 22 April 2024, [url](#); IranWire, Iranian Journalist Maroofian Flees Persecution to France, 11 October 2023, [url](#)

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## Annex 1: Interviewed sources

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### Wladimir van Wilgenburg

5<sup>th</sup> March 2023

#### Background

Wladimir van Wilgenburg is a freelance journalist, political analyst and author of several books on Kurds. He has worked on the topic since 2005 and has been based in Erbil since 2014.

### 3. Security situation in the KRI

#### Development of general security situation in KRI – the Iran-Iraq agreement

1. Since the war in Gaza started, there have been more attacks by Iranian proxies on the US base in Erbil which was not directly related to the Iranian Kurds, while other attacks have been related to the Iranian Kurdish. For instance, the PDKI camp in Koye was targeted in September 2018 by a missile attack. But there have been no direct attacks on Iranian Kurdish parties since the security agreement between Iran and Iraq. Since this agreement has not been made public, what is known about it, is only what have been cited in the media. The Iran-Iraq security agreement seeks to remove and disarm the Iranian Kurdish parties and their fighters from the Iran-KRI border areas, which has taken place, and there is still pressure on the Iranian Kurdish parties. On the issue of disarmament, most of the Iranian Kurdish parties have not been disarmed.
2. The parties still have arms, as the agreement primarily seeks to remove them from the border areas, so they cannot infiltrate into Iran. Their bases at the border have been evacuated, and more Iraqi border police have been sent to the border. There is also talk of an iron-fencing of the border between Halabja and Iran, primarily to stop the Kurdish smugglers (Kolbars) from crossing the border.
3. Overall the security situation in KRI has been quiet because of the agreement, but there has been more pressure on the Iranian Kurds groups since the government in Baghdad became more pro-Iran than the previous government. Nevertheless, there have been lot of attacks on US bases in the KRI since the war in Gaza and one businessman was killed. But since February this has stopped.
4. The KRG authorities were not part of the Iran-Iraq agreement, but they respect it and have helped to implement it, though the Kurdish authorities are not willing to forcibly remove the Iranian Kurdish groups, because they are refugees and consist of a mixture of fighter and their families. The position of the Iranian government is to remove the Iranian Kurdish parties to another country as it was done with the Mujahedin-e-Khalq (MEK) members who were moved to Albania. During the nationwide protests in Iran in 2022 and 2023 there was a number of attacks by the Iranian government on the Iranian Kurdish oppositions groups in KRI, i.e. PDKI, Komala and PAK. The parties were, however, not directly part of the protests that were more locally organized.

5. The president of the KRI said, that the Iranian Kurds are not creating problems for the KRI-authorities, and there is mutual respect.
6. Seen from the side of the Iranian government, the agreement between Iran and Iraq has not been fully implemented. However, the agreement should be seen as a response to the protests in Iran in 2022 and 2023 that have largely been oppressed and for the moment Iran seems to be satisfied.

### **Status of the evacuation and disarmament of the Iranian Kurdish parties**

7. Practically PDKI is still armed and are not disarming. They do not though, conduct attacks across the border into Iran. The PDKI still have a presence in the camps in Koye and **near** Baharka. These camps most likely did not fall under the Iran-Iraq agreement; however, the precise content of the agreement is not completely clear. PDKI also used to consist of two different groups, but they have merged.
8. There has also been talks about the Iranian government wanting to build a wall around the PDKI camp in Koya, however, it has not taken place.
9. Recently, the information came out that the Iraqi authorities had revoked the passport of the PDKI leader. With regards to Komala, the source stated that it has been a while since he visited the Komala camps in Sulaimania Governorate and he was not informed about the latest status of the parties. However, to the knowledge of the source, Komala has been disarmed, but not as a part of the security agreement, but due to Kurdish pressure to end their infighting. Komala is more present in the Sulaimania area, and have camps outside the city. But the term "Komala" can be misleading as there are maybe 3 different Komalas, one is Kurdish while one is Iranian-Kurdish, and there is also a splinter group from the Kurdish Komala.
10. Having been evacuated from the border area, PDKI and Komala still have their political offices. They are not very active in Iran, but they still have their supporters in Iranian Kurdistan. **A lot of Iranian Kurds** would like to leave KRI, because they are not given Iraqi citizenship **and have difficulties due to their legal status**. Most of the top leaders of the Iranian Kurdish parties have foreign passports.
11. PJAK is basically a branch of the PKK, and the KRI-authorities cannot exercise their influence to the same degree on PJAK since they are located outside of KRI control **near** Qandil. The Turkish armed forces sometimes strike PJAK as well as the PKK. PJAK follows the same internal rules as the PKK, so marrying is prohibited for fighters, and they **do not have their own** families like the other Kurdish groups. PJAK has several other names, among others it is also known as KODAR.
12. PAK did not have bases in the border area with Iran. PAK played a big role in the fight against ISIS, including when ISIS tried to attack Erbil and for this reason the party has a close relationship with KDP. Recently, an Iranian government media falsely announced that the leader of PAK was killed. The source did not believe that PAK has been disarmed either.
13. The KDP and the PUK are treating the Iranian Kurds differently depending on their alliance with Iran. PUK still operates in the border areas closer to Iran, they feel more

pressured by Iran and is more willing to give concession to Iran than KDP. In January 2024, the Iranian government launched ballistic missiles against an Iraqi Kurdish businessperson and his child in Erbil, they both were killed.

14. There was a rumour on PUK being pressured to give one of the Komala camps to the Hashd al-shabi, however, this was not confirmed.

### MEK

15. Mujahedin-e-Khalq (MEK) was moved to Albania a long time ago and no longer has a presence in KRI. However, a small party named Khabat have said that they are close to MEK. MEK is present in France and in the US. The source did not have further information on MEK.

### Foreign armed state actors:

16. When asked if Iranian intelligence presence has increased, the source did not know. The Iranian intelligence service often carry out attacks and assassinations on Iranians in KRI, regardless of the Iran-Iraq agreement.
17. Iran does not have military bases in the KRI.
18. The Hasd al-Shaabi/PMF is not present within the KRI, but are located outside the borders of KRI. They operate in the disputed areas between KRI and federal Iraq, in Kirkuk and Mosul.
19. The Turkish army have several bases in **Duhok** and in Bashiqa in Ninewa Governorate.

### Non-state actors

20. Syrian Kurds have their parties in KRI, in Erbil and Sulaimania.
21. Regarding non-state military actors, there are 3,000 Syrian Kurdish Peshmerga in the KRI, but they are a part of the official Peshmerga army.
22. ISIS does not have a presence within the KRI and seen from an overall perspective they are dormant. However, sometimes they have sleeper cells. For instance, in February 2024, the authorities in Sulaimania arrested some ISIS supporters. ISIS mostly operate in the disputed areas in Iraq, for instance in Makhmur and Diyala, where they occasionally conduct attacks on Iraqi security forces and extort farmers for money. Recently, ISIS have not been able to carry out big attacks in Iraq. If the federal government in Baghdad agrees with the US that the US Army should leave Iraq, ISIS could get more active.
23. In January 2024, in Iran, ISIS carried out a big attack. **But this comes from ISIS in Afghanistan.**

### Freedom of movement

24. At the border between Erbil and **Suleymaniyah (Slemani)** there are many checkpoints as well as there are checkpoints in the cities. The source did not have information to share on the freedom of movement related to Iranian Kurds.

**KRG forces**

25. When asked if Iranian Kurds suffer ill treatment by the KRG armed forces, the source replied that this was not the case.

**Profiles targeted by Iran:**

26. Iranian Kurds who are politically active, active in the media or comment on politics in Iran can be targeted by Iranian pressure, not just members of Iranian-Kurdish political parties. Especially those with family in Iran are at risk, as Iran can put pressure on their families. Sometimes Iranian Kurdish journalists who are working for media in KRI receive threats when they write critical articles about the situation in Iran. The threats could involve their family members in Iran.
27. Social media are banned inside Iran, and Iranians living abroad using social media are most likely monitored.
28. When asked if low level party members are targeted by the Iranian government in KRI, the source replied that some low level party members were killed.
29. Iranian Kurds involved in opposition parties cannot go back to Iran, due to the risk of being arrested. Iranian Kurds who are not involved in the political opposition parties will not face problems when they go back.
30. On access to information on the situation in Iran, the source noted that all the media in Iran are state controlled which makes it difficult to find valid information. Besides, talking to sources inside Iran online would put them at risk.

**Party documents**

31. When asked if party members can use the party ID or support letter to pass through checkpoints, the source replied that they need a residence permit to pass through checkpoints.

## An Iranian Kurdish Scholar

6<sup>th</sup> March 2024

### Socio-economic and political rights connected to residence permit in KRI

#### Housing

1. The Iranian Kurdish refugees in KRI live either in camps supervised by the UNHCR, in informal settlements supervised by Iranian Kurdish parties or living in the cities. The source said that “Camps” and “Settlements” are NGO terms, locally they are all called camps.  
Barika Camp in Sulaimania, Sherewen in Kalar District and Kawa Camp in Erbil were established to host the Iranian Kurdish refugees, who needed resettlement after the closure of al-Tash camp in Ramadi. These specific Iranian Kurdish refugees came during the Iran-Iraq war, and the source does not know how many live in these camps today. They are supervised by the UNHCR.  
Other camps than those managed by UNHCR are managed by one of the Iranian Kurdish political parties, who according to the source are now civilian and unarmed.
2. There are different, local, procedures for gaining residence in these camps. For Barika, Sherewen and Kawa a UNHCR certificate is required, a residence permit from the KRG authorities. If they wish to take up employment, an approval from the local chieftain (mukhtar) and a security clearance from Asayish is required too.
3. The source did not know how many live in these camps.
4. For those Iranian Kurds that came from Iran directly, the source has not heard that there are any UNHCR supervised camps for them to take residence in.
5. The source has heard that some of the Iranian Kurds that came to Iraq during the Iran-Iraq war went back to Iran, but not in large number; most of those who returned were elderly, but he does not know how many or what happened to them. In fact, most of the refugees from al-Tash who had the chance to go to a third country did so. Of those who stayed in KRI, they were disgruntled that the UN did not support their resettlement to a third country. Those who went back to Iran probably face a life of government pressure and surveillance.
6. Any person from Iranian Kurdistan who comes to the KRI, because they are targeted by the Iranian government, remain under surveillance by the Iranian intelligence service. They often meet obstacles in finding good working opportunities in KRI.
7. There might be people in Barika, Sherewan and Kawa who sympathize with the Iranian Kurdish political parties; however, the source could not confirm the existence of organized political activity in these camps.

### Education

8. It is possible for Iranian Kurds to access public education. The requirements are a residence permit, sometimes a UNHCR certificate, and security clearance from Asayish. If these requirements are fulfilled s/he and his/her children can go to public school.
9. When it comes to higher education, it is getting more difficult even if one has a residence permit. Earlier it was easier for an Iranian Kurd to start studying at university, or get a teaching job in the KRI.
10. But because of pressure from Federal Iraq, it is more difficult now. Baghdad is pressuring the KRI on autonomy, and if the KRI falls more under federal control, then non-Iraqi citizens will face more challenges regarding getting higher education. Federal Iraq only wants Iraqis to work in public sector, so if Baghdad gets more control for KRI, they will start asking questions to why an Iranian Kurdish refugee is on the payroll.

### Employment

11. The job opportunities are even with the locals. There are limited job opportunities for everyone.
12. Iranian Kurds work in the private sector, where they have the same conditions as the local Kurds.
13. Iranian Kurds cannot work in the public sector, as they are not Iraqi citizens, but can sometimes be contract employed. A contract employment is a temporary employment.
14. The source says that it is sometimes possible to find non-locals working in the public sector on a contract-employment.
15. Local Kurds can also work on contractual terms in the public sector, but the public sector stopped hiring people after the Kurdistan budget was cut by the Iraqi Central Government in 2014.
16. A residence permit is needed to get a job, and it functions as a work permit.

### Healthcare

17. When it comes to healthcare, Iranian Kurds have the same access to public healthcare as the locals. It costs the same for both Iranian Kurds and locals. The price is low, and is considered a symbolic fee. There are long queues and wait times for treatment in the public sector. If an individual is in a condition of emergency, private hospitals might be the only way to get help. But these are too expensive for refugees.
18. There are also private hospitals and semi-private hospital, but these are too expensive for most Iranian Kurds.
19. Semi-private falls under the public sector, and is more expensive than regular public healthcare but less expensive than private healthcare.

### Food, Water, Electricity

20. Regarding access to food, water and electricity is the same for everyone in KRI. It depends on where you live and how financially able you are.

21. In Iraq there is subsidized food commodities for local Iraqis, but generally not for non-Iraqis. Sometimes NGOs and humanitarian organization distribute food and help the most vulnerable.
22. There is some assistance in the camps supervised by the UNHCR, but nothing that makes life comfortable.

### Political rights

23. The sources says; no, Iranian Kurds do not have political right, cannot vote and cannot run for office, or get Iraqi documents
24. After years in the KRI, the source had not received a passport or official documents, and he had not heard of anyone who has. He and other Iranian Kurds are a lost generation who cannot get Iraqi citizenship. Even if they marry an Iraqi citizen, they do not get official documents, and their children are not citizens of Iraq either.

### Security

25. Iranian Kurds living in KRI close to Iran, have to be careful when travelling around KRI, even if KRI authorities protect Iranian Kurds.
26. The source also states that Iran conducts online harassment of Iranian Kurds and sends threatening texts. For example there is a Telegram channel called “diarunadiar” that is spreading threats among Iranian Kurds in KRI and telling them that “there is no future for you in KRI”. Sometimes Iranian agents publish pictures from someone’s private house within Erbil or other cities to show the Iranian Kurds that they are close by and send the people living there a message saying (“we are very close to you”).
27. All profiles of Iranian Kurds have been targeted by Iranian covert activities. Sometimes the victims have been members of the Iranian Kurdish parties, and sometimes the victims were not party members. Party members are more vulnerable than other Iranian Kurds.

When asked if an Iranian Kurd, who is not politically active or an activist, can experience persecution by Iran, the source replied that Iran cannot send threatening texts to every Iranian Kurd in KRI, but the idea is to target the active ones, which is enough to effect the whole community. But Iran considers all refugees from Iran dissidents and a threat.

28. The security agreement between Iran and Baghdad has separate phases. The Iranian Kurdish parties have been evacuated from the border areas with Iran and deeper into KRI territory, where they live in camps and settlements now.
29. The source has heard that Iran has pressured Iraq to take the official Iraqi documents away from an Iranian Kurdish political leader in Iraq. So Iran can pressure Iraq to follow Iran’s interests.
30. Regarding the status of disarmament, the source did not have the actual knowledge about the disarmament. The official statements from the Iranian, the Iraqi federal as well as the KRG governments prevail. Iran has thanked Baghdad and the KRG for their



assistance in getting the Iranian Kurdish parties to disarm. This implies that the evacuation and the are disarmed haven taken place according to the official announcements.

31. There where two KDPI camps in Koya, one of them was a headquarter, which has been evacuated. According to the KDPI, those who are evacuated are new lifing in a civil situation. In the other camp civilians are living and they are still there.
32. Concerning the situation in the Komala camps in Sulaimania governorate, the source did not have specific knowledge. It was the perception of the source that the Komala camps have been emptied. The source refereed to footage released by the Iranian government that showcased that the KDPI camps as well as the Komala camps were empty.
33. Regarding PAK, the source did not have information.
34. PJAK are still in the mountains and not disarmed. They are considered part of PKK, and the KRI cannot influence them in the same way as the other groups. This is because they are in areas of KRI, where the Kurdistan Regional Government cannot exercise control.

## An International Organisation in Iraq

Erbil, 6<sup>th</sup> March 2024

### Security situation in KRI

1. Iran and Iraq have entered into a security agreement, which affects the KRI.
2. Iraq and Iran agreed that Iranian Kurdish opposition parties must halt all military activity against Iran, relocate away from the KRI/Iran-border and disarm themselves.
3. The bases along the border have been evacuated and are empty.
4. The Iranian Kurdish political parties have made the decision to disarm, they have confirmed that they disarmed and there is no evidence that contradicts this.
5. The Iranian Kurdish political parties are now looking for solutions to their future.
6. The source says that the Iranian Kurdish political parties have relocated from the border, and the ex-fighters now live in container camps, while their family members do not. The issue now is to find out what happens to them whether they will integrate into the local communities or go back to Iran, if they can do so safely (most would not want to take the risk). They are aware that resettlement to a third country is not a likely option.
7. The camps are physically run by the KRG authorities and their peshmergas.
8. KDPI and Komala live in separate camps. KDPI former peshmergas are placed in one camp, and Komala former peshmergas are in two camps, all three located in the Erbil governorate. There are other camps in the Sulaimaniyah governorates but they go back to the 1990s and include families. . Other families live in settlements, which means they live in villages or towns mixed with the local population.
9. Regarding Komala, the source stated that they are divided amongst themselves, as there is an ongoing power-struggle.
10. Regarding PJAK, the source does not know what their status is, or how they have been affected by the security agreement. PJAK does not seem to be a source of contention with Iran.
11. Iran is suspicious of the Iranian Kurdish political parties and they do not want oppositional political activity. Iran has some long standing requests for extradition of some members of the Iranian Kurdish opposition political parties, but there have been no cases of extradition to Iran from the KRI.
12. Several Komala members were executed last month by Iran.
13. The strike that Iran carried out against the home of a businessman in Erbil, caused a strong reaction from the KR and Baghdad. The Iranian government said that it was a Mossad affiliated place, but both KR and Baghdad authorities said that this was the family home of a businessman.
14. There are also divisions within KRI. PUK is closer to Iran and KDP is closer to Turkey and less sympathetic to Iran, but they try to have a balanced position. Elections for the Kurdistan Region Parliament are due to take place on 10 June 2024 after several postponements because of the disagreements between the two main parties
15. The disagreement between PUK and KDP amongst other subjects concerns the treatment of PKK, which is a Turkish Kurdish opposition group. KDP is more on the Turkish line and want PKK out of Iraq.

16. It has been reported that the Iranian political parties have not carried out military operation for several years. They say they wish to hold on to their personal weapons for their own protection, not for use in military operations.

### ***Rights, residence permit and citizenship***

17. Some party members may have been given a new Iraqi passport as a travel document, but that does not mean that they are or given citizenship. They are not Iraqis.
18. The Iranian Kurds do not have voting rights in KRI.

### ***Perspective***

19. The development in the relationship between Iran, Iraq and the Iranian political parties seem to be inching towards consolidating. However, there is still a lot of distrust between the Iranian Kurdish political parties and Iran, and between the KRG and Iran. The immediate risk of military confrontation has been averted.

## A local Human Rights Organisation

Erbil, 4<sup>th</sup> March 2024

### Background

1. This local Human Rights organisation follows the human rights situation in Iranian Kurdistan. It was founded in December 2019, and it was registered by the UN as a human rights organization following the situation for the Iranian Kurds in March 2022.
2. The organization has offices in the KRI, Switzerland and Canada. Since the establishment of the organization, it has been documenting and reporting on human rights violations against Iranian Kurds inside and outside of Iran.

### Housing for Iranian Kurdish refugees

3. The source did not know the exact numbers of Iranian Kurdish refugees in KRI. A number of refugees are registered by the UNHCR, while other Iranian Kurdish refugees are not registered with the UNHCR.
4. There are two categories of Iranian Kurdish refugees in KRI. One category is close to the Iranian Kurdish parties; they are staying in the camps/settlements that are supervised by one of the political parties. The other category of Iranian Kurds living in KRI are those who are scattered in both urban and rural areas by renting places for those who can afford it, while other stay in affordable hotels or motels.
5. A refugee coming to KRI will need a residence permit. Refugees who are affiliated with one of the political parties, can find assistance from their party. Other Iranian Kurds who are not affiliated with one of the parties, can go to one of the UNHCR offices to apply for asylum with the hope of being granted a UNHCR certificate that might eventually will lead them to gain a KRI residence permit which is a requirement for housing and for working in KRI.
6. With regards to the requirement to register to live in a specific neighbourhood to rent a house/an apartment in the KRI, an Iranian Kurd will need a residence permit for the KRI and a security clearance from the security office (asayish). Furthermore, s/he will need a support letter from the local district chieftain (mukhtar).

### Status of the evacuation of the Iranian Kurdish parties exiled in KRI

7. The members of the political parties live mostly in camps in Sulaymaniya province. There are two camps in Erbil province. They are mainly in Koya and Sulaymaniya. The camps run by political parties are: Amirya (KDPI), Azadi (KDPI), Zergwiz (Komala CPI), Zergwiz Elah (Komala Party), Jezhnikan (KDPI), Zewiaspi (KDPI), Banehgewreh (Komala Party), Topzawa (Khabat), Pak Shar (PAK)
8. Koye is a town between Erbil and Sulaymaniya. There is a citadel-like KDPI headquarters for KDPI fractions that were later reunited. (Zergwiz Elah) is the headquarters for (Komala Party). These two camps were targeted by Iran multiple times. After the protests in Iran in 2022 and 2023 and after the Iranian pressure on the

Iraqi federal government and the KRG there was a security agreement signed between Iran and Baghdad that included closure of the party camps. Being subjected to attacks and pressure, the citadel-like camp supervised by the KDPI was fully closed and the people had to find new shelter, either in the urban area in Koye town or to move elsewhere to find new housing. In the mean time the (Zergwiz Elah) camp was disarmed and only the families and civile organizations sheltered there.

9. The Iranian government requested that party settlements near the Iranian border were evacuated. There was no large settlement of the parties next to the Iranian border, however, smaller settlements for armed members of these parties that were evacuated. All these smaller settlements were evacuated because of Iranian pressure and KRG pushing them. The names of the settlements were: Cheelashin/ Keelashin (KDPI), Seedakan (Komala and KDPI), Halgurd (Komala and KDPI), Saqqar (Komala and KDPI).

Four of these important smaller settlements of Komala and KDPI were evacuated; the settlements were located close to the Iranian border in the Choman district of Erbil Governorate.

### **The Iranian government targeting Iranian Kurds**

10. Threats or targeting by the Iranian government against Iranian refugees and specifically towards the political parties, range from restriction in their access to documents, physical threats, and assassinations. The source added that threats and targeting by the Iranian government towards Iranian Kurds in the KRI was included in the agreement between Baghdad and Teheran.
11. As an example of assassination by the Iranian government, taking place in KRI against a member of the Iranian Kurdish political parties, the source pointed to the KDPI member named Siyamand Shaboui, who was formerly staying at the camp in Koye and was relocated to the camp in Barhacat. He was minding his own business and was not a threat to anyone; he was assassinated by the Iranian government in 2023. The source does not know the exact date. Also, in resent month a member of Komala named Shoaib Zarei 34 years old, was assassinated by an Iranian agent on March 16, 2024, in (Zargwiz Elah) camp near Sulaymaniya.
12. Siyamand Shaboui was a low-profile member of KDPI, and yet he was killed. The source believes that Iran within the agreement with Baghdad has included a list that includes names of high-profile members of political parties and Iran continues to pursue deportation of those members both from Baghdad and KRI. Neither Baghdad, nor the KRG has any intention to deport these people. The source has not seen the list, but it is a threat that is constantly present among Iranian Kurds in KRI, especially for those who are affiliated with the parties.
13. With regards to other profiles of Iranian Kurds than the party affiliated people being targeted by the Iranian government in the KRI, the source pointed to the new wave of Iranian Kurdish refugees who entered the KRI, especially after the Woman, Life, Freedom movement. This wave included many people who were not necessarily

member of a party, but who were protesters and targeted inside Iran, then they fled the country and came to the KRI looking for shelter. The source had heard and seen people who are not members of the parties but who are still being exposed to threats and warnings. These people are constantly taking precautions and keeping a low profile to be protected. The source did not know of names of such people living in KRI being threatened by the Iranian government.

14. Post September 2022 protests, the source pointed to two different categories of refugees coming to the KRI. Almost all of them irregularly. This group includes the ones who were arrested, detained, and released on bail and managed to leave the country. The other group of people who came to the KRI were the ones who were injured mostly by rubber bullets in their eyes and were seeking treatment and protection. Names of the injured Ali Misri, Hero Qadimi, Sora Qadimi and others. The number of people coming in this was above fifty people. They went mostly to Sulaimania.
15. When asked if the source knew of family members of members of parties who were targeted by the Iranian government, the source pointed to an example that took place about three or four years ago: a car owned member of the KPDI was targeted by an IED that was attached to his car allegedly by the Iranian government. The incident led to the injury of the KDPI member and the death of his son who was not a member.

### **Al Tash camp refugees**

16. There is still a camp in Ramadi Governorate that is accommodating more than a thousand Iranian Kurdish refugees, who came to Iraq during the Iran-Iraq war, who are not affiliated with any parties. In Sulaimania, Barika camp, and in Erbil, Qushtepa, there are Iranian refugees who fled war more than thirty years ago and they do not have any naturalization process and no Iraqi documents. In both camps they have UNHCR refugee certificates. Some of them managed to get residence permit. Each camp is run by their own council.
17. Baharka, a district and small town outside Erbil, outside the town there are two camps called Jeshnika and Grdechal. But these are party affiliated people; they are not among the group of refugees fleeing the Iran-Iraq war.

### **Education**

18. Education at the elementary and secondary level and high school appear to be available to Iranian Kurdish refugees living in the KRI, if they can prove their identity as a refugee or if they are holders of a residence permit. The source gave an example that happened two or three days ago in which an Iranian Kurd without residence permit tried to have his child admitted at a school in KRI but he did not succeed.
19. With regards to access to university for Iranian Kurdish refugees it seems to be limited; the requirements for enrolling in university in the KRI seems to be a residence permit as well as a sponsorship by someone who stayed in KRI for a longer period and who has the required documentation. Iranian ID documents will not guaranty being enrolled in

university in the KRI. Being a holder of a UNHCR certificate may sometimes work as sufficient documentation for enrolling in university, depending on how the person is manoeuvring.

### **Employment and residence permit**

20. Iranians and Iranian Kurds coming to the KRI as none refugees can apply for a residence and work permit that is issued for one year. As soon as they are granted a residence permit, they can apply for jobs in the private sector in KRI, but not in the public sector.
21. Some Iranian and Iranian Kurds do not apply for a residence permit; rather they work on a one-month basis. They work for instance for 25 days in KRI and then they cross the border back to Iran, and then they return to the KRI to work for another month. The reason why they do not apply for a residence permit is that they can't afford the fee they need to pay for a residence permit in the KRI. There are many labourers from Iran coming to work in the KRI.
22. The classic situation is that the labourers working for a month, they can only take employment as casual labourers on a daily basis for a month or less. In this situation they cannot legally rent housing. On a thirty-day visa one cannot be hired into a private company which requires a residence permit.
23. In terms of requirements for the regular residence permit for people entering the KRI legally, the applicant needs to present a passport and to pay a fee of some hundred USD for it and a sponsor which could either be a lawyer or an employer. In case, the applicant has a job offer, the employer can act as a sponsor for the applicant; in case not, the lawyer can act as the sponsor. This residence permit gives the right to stay and the right to be employed at the private sector in the KRI; the residence and work permit is one and the same document. This permit is issued for a year and it is renewable.

### **Legal stay in KRI for refugees**

24. For Iranian Kurds who entered the KRI for fear of being targeted or if they are affiliated by the Iranian Kurdish parties and who cannot return to Iran, they are issued political residence permits. The political status is mentioned in their ID, but the refugee does not need to pay a large sum of money for the permit. They only pay smaller fees at the Residence Office. For an Iranian Kurd to be granted the political status, they need the UNHCR certificate and a support letter by of the Iranian Kurdish political parties and then apply at the Residence Office.
25. In terms of employment for refugees who do not have a residence permit, they need to improvise in the sense that they work as casual labour in the irregular sector. The KRG security authorities check the documents of employees at the private sector. If someone does not have residency it is difficult to have employment at a private sector entity.

### Geographical variations in the access to employment

26. For Iranian Kurds who are employed in KRI, mostly work in Erbil and Sulaimania cities, and less in Dohuk.

### Healthcare

27. Previously, Iraqi Kurdish peshmergas as well as Iranian Kurdish peshmergas had access to free healthcare in the Shorish Hospital in Sulaimania along with Peshmerga Hospital in Erbil. The last update of the status of these two hospitals is unknown to the source. In this respect, the source pointed out that the recent agreement between Iran and Iraq regarding Iranian Kurds refugees in KRI has affected a number of elements. For instance in Sulaimania Governorate, it appears that a refugee no longer need a support letter from one of the political parties to obtain refugee status; only a UNHCR certificate is needed. The source mentions this because in the recent package agreement between Iran and Iraq, potentially, the free healthcare for peshmergas could also be affected by the agreement.
28. Access to healthcare for refugees depends on their financial power. Iranian Kurds have the same access to healthcare as the local residence. If they can afford a private hospital, it is more expensive than the public hospitals. The public hospitals that are subsidised only charge symbolic fees. The fees are lower than in private hospitals.

### Food, water, electricity

29. Access to food, water and electricity depends on where the person is located. In KRI, there is not a centre that will provide these services for Iranian Kurds coming without any network. Previously, KDPI and Komala had hostels for people needing these services, however, these hostels no longer exist. For the sake of documentation, a refugee should immediately go to one of the UNHCR offices in Erbil and Sulaimana to be registered. In terms of accommodation, they can only stay in one of the party camps if they are affiliated with one of these. In case they are not affiliated with one of the parties, they need to find a place to rent by themselves.

### Political rights

30. Iranian Kurdish refugees in KRI do not have the right to vote in KRI, nor do they have the right to run for office.

### The general situation for Iranian Kurds in the KRI

31. The general situation for Iranian Kurds in KRI has been worsening due to the pressure of the Islamic Republic of Iran.
32. KRI is a part of Iraq, not an independent state and it is a neighbour of Iran, due to this KRG does not have the tools to resist the pressures coming as a result of the agreement. Baghdad and Teheran have made this agreement with multiple terms to limit Iranian Kurdish refugees and political parties. Baghdad is using pressure against



the KRG to implement this agreement, even at points of suspending salaries for some public servants until KRG submits to implement some of the articles of the agreement. KRG sees itself in a position in which they must meet the agreement at some point.

## A local Human Rights NGO

Erbil, 4<sup>th</sup> March 2024

### Introduction

1. The source's main focus is to document and report on human rights violation in Iranian Kurdistan, but also non-Kurdish areas of Iran.

### Security in KRI

#### *The General security situation*

2. The security situation for Iranian Kurds in KRI has always been tense and with a lot of pressure security wise. At least nine Iranian Kurdish refugees, either affiliated to parties or independent activists, human rights workers have been assassinated in KRI from 2021 until today. The source has noticed traces of Iranian involvement in these politically motivated assassinations. Unfortunately, due to the political relations between KRG and Iran there has not been any follow up of these cases.
3. After the protest and uprising in Iran in September 2022, a number of new refugees are coming to KRI. These are individuals either at risk of execution by the Iranian government or they were imprisoned and released on bail; or they were injured, so they fled Iran to Kurdistan region. These people were involved in a historical protest. This has pushed the Iranian government to continue persecution of these individuals, even outside the country and in KRI. There has been retribution attacks against these new refugees. From January 2023 until today, the source had recorded three assassinations and one unsuccessful attempt of assassination. The three individuals were peshmergas, member of Iranian Kurdish political parties. The last person was an Iranian Kurdish lawyer. It was an unsuccessful attempt of assassination against his life. This lawyer himself was working on the cases of Iranian executions in KRI.
4. Threats against Iranian Kurdish refugees are particularly important for those who continue their activities even in exile: activists, journalists, human rights defenders that left Iran and want to continue their work. These individuals become targets from Iranian government threats. These threats are mainly categorised, and the number one is threatening phone calls, followed by abducting attempts, shooting at the residences or where they stay, creating an atmosphere of lack of safety for refugees that continue their activities. The source knows that several cases for individuals under threats have been compelled or forced to join one of the political parties to get safety. Those who do not join the political parties, continue to live in hiding and have to avoid the public.

#### *Disarmament process*

5. The disarmament process comes as an element of a bigger context. The source took into consideration that refugee settlements have been targeted physically multiple times by the Iranian security forces. Including missiles and drone attacks. The source had seen multiple attacks since 2018, and specifically in 2022 in Sulaimaniya and Koye. Thousands of people had to leave the camp in Koye because it was constantly bombarded. These people had to move to the urban areas and find shelter there. This

created a sort of chaos because these people are not accustomed to live in urban areas, and the responsibility for this people were handed over to the urban areas. Within that context, the Iranian government has been pushing Bagdad to implement some agreements concerning the Iranian refugees. As KRG is not a state, they could not run the process. So that agreement between Iran and Bagdad is still in place.

### ***Status evacuation***

6. The Iranian Kurdish political parties and their bases along the border have been closed according to this agreement. The bases were evacuated, shutdown and some of them were destroyed. That is mostly the case for KDPI and Komala, mainly in Suleimania. Members of KDPI and Komala based on the border, they were all relocated to outside Erbil. These settlements are hosting members of these parties who do not have arms.
7. In the new settlements, they are not armed. The classic camps had women and children. In the new settlements by those evacuated from the border, are mainly single members of these parties, men and women, but not children. That is the latest status.
8. Previously members of these parties could easily travel and had access to cities. This has been restricted. Even wearing Kurdish uniforms have been limited and they cannot carry guns. KRG is monitoring the situation. These measures have been introduced in order to protect their own safety.
9. As far as the source knows, they have not noticed any base or settlements close to the Iranian border. It seems that these locations have been fully evacuated. Another development that relates to the topic is that previously KRG's security forces were responsible for the security along the border. But now it is the Iraqi border guards that have been deployed. Iran has more influence on the Bagdad security bodies.

### ***Locations of the weapons after the disarmament process***

10. The source has tried to understand what happened to the weapons after the disarmament process. The source confirmed that there has been disarmament, but because of confidentiality and security issues of these parties, the Iranian political parties never came back to us on this issue of what happened to the weapons.

### ***Iranian kurds and KDPI / Komala***

11. The Iranian parties have tried to respect the sovereignty of Iraq and not to cause problems for the Iraqi Kurdistan. They have not initiated any attacks against Iran. This has been an historical understanding. One has not seen a military operation started from here against Iran. The parties of Iranian Kurds have members and sympathisers, and the local parties here realised that. The relations seem to be at a good level. Komala and KDPI have offices in Erbil and Suleimania.

### ***Freedom of movements for Iranian refugees, relation between UNHCR and KRG***

12. For Iranian Kurds, refugees and non-refugees, they can only travel within Kurdistan region. When it comes to internal freedom of movement; if a person has a residence permit for Erbil and wants to go to Suleimania, it is most likely that he or she will be

stopped at a checkpoint. They will be delayed and questioned. This has to do with the dynamics between the local parties and these kind of sensibilities.

13. If someone has been granted residency in Erbil, but has a job in another governorate, they have to get another permit - the whole process again. This is mainly relevant when it comes to refugee residency permit. If it is a regular permit, it is not that restricted.
14. Some Iranian Kurds are refugees, but they have not managed to get the residence permit. The only document they have is UNHCR asylum seeker certificate. In that case, it is almost impossible to travel from one city to another. The reason is the local authorities in KRG must recognise the document issued by UNHCR. They cannot use the UNHCR document to pass checkpoints. The same about access to housing. If s/he only has the UNHCR document, it is almost impossible to rent a place. Over the past few years, as an Iranian Kurd s/he must be member of a political party on paper to get residence permit. That is the condition set by the residency office.
15. The KRG-issued document for refugees must be renewed every year.
16. The source did not know how many Iranian Kurds only holding a UNHCR document. However, they assessed that there are many cases. Multiple factors lead to this:
  - Kurds persecuted within Iran, they do not necessarily agree with the ideology of the parties so they do not want to be members. Former members of the parties left the party for whatever reason, and are not members anymore.
  - The services and support provided by UNHCR has very much been imbalanced with the situation of Syrian refugees in KRI. It seems like Syrian Kurds have been involved in processes of resettlement in third countries. That is almost a non-existent status for Iranians.
  - The support for Iranian Kurds from UNHCR has been very limited and not clear. The source pointed to an example that took place in 2021 an Iranian refugee without a job and no hope for resettlement, went to UNHCR for support. As a mean of protest, the refugee set himself to fire and he ended up in hospital.

### ***Situation for Iranian Kurd returning from Europe to KRI***

17. The source has not seen cases of Iranian Kurds returning from Europe to KRI.

### ***Documents and checkpoints***

18. Regular entries with passport if the visa is still valid and they can use their work permit.
19. When it comes to refugees, they need a valid document issued by KRG, political or refugee residency permit for six months or one year. Previously, members of political parties could use their own IDs, but that is no longer the situation. Komala or KDPI members cannot show their own ID, it has to be a valid residence permit. But there might be coordination if it is about a high level individual.

### ***Travel between different parts of KRI and who manages the checkpoints?***

20. There are checkpoints between cities and the requirements are always the same. A foreigner needs to present a valid ID card that could be regular residency or political residency.

21. Checkpoints are not run by the regular police, but by security forces, and there are differences between the areas controlled by KDP and PUK. In PUK-controlled areas, PUKs own security forces manage the checkpoints, and in KDP-controlled areas the forces are from KDP.
22. The source said that it had not heard of Turkish Checkpoints in the areas that they operate, but maybe there are Turkish checkpoints in remote districts in the mountains.

***Iranian intelligence services in KRI***

23. The source has noticed pattern in that IRGC or other security forces such as Ministry of Information do not have open presence.
24. The source stated that the Iranian presence is not open. Iranian agents enter the KRI in disguise, or open front companies and businesses
25. The true intention behind this is about intelligence gathering for the benefit of Iran. The source had seen a number of assassinations. The last one was a member of KDPI, he was approached by someone that wanted to do business. IRGC commit assassinations and go back to Iran. However, things have slightly changed. There is a growing sentiment against Iran. Now local Kurds have more sympathy for Iranian Kurds due to Iran's attack on Iraqi Kurdistan.

***Cross through checkpoints with documents from the parties like Komala and KDPI.***

26. Previously members of Iranian Kurdish political parties could use their own party IDs, but that is no longer the case.

## An International Humanitarian Organisation

Erbil, 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2024

### Background

The organization works with IDPs and refugees in many countries, including Iraq in the following sectors in the sectors of protection monitoring, legal assistance, education and health service.

### Socio-economic and political rights connected to residence permit in KRI

#### Housing

1. Iranian Kurds staying legally in the KRI with a residence permit have the possibility to rent housing. The Iranian Kurds, who are without a residence permit, live in settlements with friends and families or in different urban areas in KRI. These informal settlements are usually old abandoned military bases and buildings. One of these settlements was bombed by Iran over a year ago. The bombing took place in September 2022, in which the bases of Iranian Kurdish armed forces were bombed in several locations in Erbil, and a few civilian Iranian Kurds were killed.
2. When asked if these Iranian Kurds living in the informal settlements have legal stay, the source responded that it is not easy to obtain a residence permit in KRI; however, the KRI is seemingly lenient with Kurdish refugees in that they are not deporting them or detaining them.
3. Iranian Kurds who legally reside in the KRI with a residence permit can move freely around, and can reside in any city or place in the KRI. Though they cannot travel to federal Iraq. In order to take residence in a certain neighbourhood, a security clearance is required by the KRI security agency "Asayish". This clearance is not difficult to get, and a sponsor letter is not required for this process. However, in order to obtain a residence permit a sponsor of a political party is required.
4. But housing is still difficult to get, because of the general housing situation. There are few available houses because of the poor economic and employment situation in KRI. So often 2-3 families will reside together. Informal settlements are an option for Iranian Kurds, and there are 4 in Erbil.
5. Iranian refugees do not live in any formal camps run by the UN or the KRI government, but are scattered across towns and settlements. Many left the settlements in 2022 after Iran conducted a bombing strike by the Iranian government in one of the settlements in Koya town. The source has since this bombing stopped entering the settlements and has stopped the services. The only way to communicate with them is online.

6. The source did not have detailed information on Kawa and Jazhnikan settlements. Kawa camp is a settlement of Iranian refugees situated in Erbil Governorate. Jezhnikan is a settlement of Iranian refugee settlement affiliated with KDPI.

### Entry/exit

7. Most Iranian Kurds who are here are at risk, but the risk differs whether an Iranian Kurd has entered legally or illegally. If you enter legally, then you are fine. Like any other person, an Iranian Kurd entering legally, will be granted a 30-day visa. If an Iranian Kurds is granted his 30-day visa and then a residence permit, the Iranian Kurds will not face any legal problems and will not need to be afraid of deportation or the security forces or the government.
8. But a residence permit issued for the first time, costs at least 500 USD a year or above, which is costly for most Iranian Kurds.
9. There are fines for overstaying a visa at approximately 15 USD a day, some enter KRI legally but exit illegally to avoid paying the fines at the border.
10. In case an Iranian Kurd with illegal stay in KRI left for Europe and then decides to return voluntarily to KRI, s/he can return via the airport legally.

### Residence permits

11. Iranian Kurds who have entered illegally have nothing recorded to their names, and can only access the political residence permit and not the humanitarian residence permit, which requires legal entry. The document for political residence permit is only issued for KRI.
12. To apply for a residence permit, the applicant needs to be present in the KRI.
13. To get a political residence permit in the KRI, some requirements must be met. You need to be a recognised member of an Iranian Kurdish opposition party in Erbil or Soleymania/KDPI or Kumala, present a party ID card and along with an Iranian ID to prove the names and date of birth etc., either original or a copy and finally, as a prove of residential living area in KRI, a housing supporting letter from a governmental focal point, i.e. the local mukhtar in KRI is needed. This procedure is applicable whether or not the person is registered with the UNHCR or not.
14. The process starts at the Directorate of Residence who refers to Asayish for the security check. Biometrics are collected from the applicant as well, including a blood test that is tested for HIV and Hepatitis. In the experience of the source, they did not see anyone with these diseases being deported.
15. The political residence permit is valid for one year, before it needs renewal.
16. For children under 18 years are not going to have a separate residence permit. The name of his child will be listed in his mother's residence permit. The child's birth certificate is required as documentation. A birth certificate either from Iran or Iraq will be accepted.

17. Sometimes Assayish rejects applicants, and the source does not know why. This rejection implies that the applicant will not be able to obtain a residence permit at all.
18. Iranian Kurds who entered KRI illegally and who are not members of any of the Iranian Kurdish opposition parties cannot obtain a political residence permit, nor can they apply for a regular residence permit. What they can do is to apply for a UNHCR certificate, which might help them with housing and at security checks while crossing checkpoints.
19. If family members of an Iranian Kurd are party members, then other members of the family can join the party.
20. The source did not know about members of armed groups and their access to residence permits.
21. In order to obtain a regular residence and work permit, only people who enters regularly with a stamp in the passport can access this.
22. In order to work in the KRI, one needs a sponsorship from the private company and that sponsorship is usually done by lawyers. Some lawyers' main case load is to make fake working contract for people applying for residence and work permit.

### Deportation

23. The source had not heard of any cases of deportation to Iran, nor had they heard of deportations of Iranian Kurds. In this respect, the source pointed to the fact that source only provide services for Iranian refugees and asylum seekers who are registered as such; however, there are many Iranian Kurds who are not registered with the UNHCR and the source does not provide service to these persons and do not have knowledge about them.
24. The source had, however, heard of cases of deportation of Syrian refugees.
25. There are two types of deportations. There are informal deportations, performed by the local security or the residence office writing a letter expressing the need for deporting this person. If this letter is sent by Assayish, it can be directed to the Department of Residency. In these cases, the source can in some cases advocate for the person in order to stop the deportation. In criminal cases, the court can decide to deport a defendant and in these cases the decision is final.
26. If Iranian agents kidnapped an Iranian Kurd from the KRI to bring them back to Iran, these are cases that the source is not aware of. This might happen.

### Employment

27. Kurds must get visa for entry, and then apply for obtaining work residence permits.
28. A political residence permit grants access to the job market, but not in the public sector. Only Iraqi citizens can work in the public sector; however, since 2014, KRG stopped hiring workers. So Iranian Kurds work in the private sector, which is small and there is a lack of opportunities due to the declining economy of KRI. There are IDPs and Syrian Kurds, who also seek employment in this sector. So finding a job in general is



difficult, but it is easier in Erbil than in Sulaimania and Dohuk, but still difficult. The sectors who most often employ Iranian refugees are restaurants, super markets and construction.

29. The working conditions are often hard in that working hours are often 10-12 hours per day without extra pay and in some places weekends are work days too. The source knew of an example in which an Iranian Kurd worked for a full month for 200 USD. Labour law is not being applied at all by the companies working in the private sector.

### **Education**

30. All refugees have access to education, but they still face challenges. An Iranian Kurd needs to provide documentation for the education that he already has achieved, which might not be easy, as they cannot ask their school or university in Iran for documents. But if they can provide these documents, they can enrol in education.
31. Iranian Kurds have access to schools without a residence permit, but for university enrolment, a residence permit is required.

### **Health services**

32. Iranian Kurds have the same access to health service as the host community. Publicly provided healthcare is almost free, there is a symbolic price around 50 cents. But the services are of poor quality in general, and not all treatments are available. Many go to private healthcare for special treatments, but this costs money. If someone needs surgery in a public hospital, s/he will be put on waiting list for a year, less or more. For instance, treatment for diabetes, heart failures and cancer is available for those who can pay the price. For diabetes, the refugees have access to free treatment at the Layla Qasim Hospital in Erbil.
33. In the government healthcare system, they usually only have a few types of medicines and often they do not have the needed medicines. In terms of logistics and quality, the healthcare system in KRI is very poor. The source exemplified this in that a doctor at a public hospital may look at 20 patients during one hour. This is why many people do not trust the public hospitals and prefer to go to the private sector instead even though it is more costly.

### **Food, water, electricity**

34. Electricity and water is not very expensive. It is provided by government services, and generators can be bought as well. The electricity supply is the same everywhere, but in some places there is privately supplied electricity, which can be expensive.
35. Electricity is provided to houses only. One cannot put up a tent a plug into the electricity system.
36. There is no free food or NGO assistance to get food. Maybe the World Food Program can assist but the source is not aware.

## A local NGO providing legal assistance

Erbil, 6<sup>th</sup> March 2024

### Background

1. The purpose of the NGO is to advocate for the rights of the Iranian Kurdish refugees in Iraqi Kurdistan. The NGO provides legal assistance in terms of documents, food and healthcare and legal assistance and advocacy in cooperation with international NGOs on resettlements to third countries. s

### Overview of the situation for Iranian Kurds in KRI

2. There are 12,000 Iranian Kurdish refugees who have been granted a UNHCR asylum certificate. Out of these, the NGO has had interaction with 4,500.
3. The Syrian refugees in KRI have been categorised as refugees who escaped war, while the majority of the Iranian Kurdish refugees have a political background, thus escaping persecution by the Iranian government due to their political activities.
4. The majority of Iranian Kurdish refugees in KRI do not carry passports and the refugees who are in KRI essentially can be divided into two groups: Those who are forced to stay here being granted UN documents or local residence permits and they have not been able to be granted other documents due to legal matters. Those who, due to the lack of legal documents, resorted to leaving KRI through irregular means to a third country.
5. Those who did not find shelter in a third country and are still staying in KRI, their rights to legal documents have always been challenged. This community find themselves in the margins. Due to the complicated nature of the relationship between Iran and Iraq, between Iraq and KRG and due to the policies and practices of the UN, the Iranian Kurds staying in KRI are not given the rights that they are entitled to.
6. Iraqi law does not give rights to Iranian Kurdish refugees. The sole interaction by the UNHCR with Iranian Kurdish refugees in KRI is to register them as asylum seekers and to renew their asylum seeker certificate.
7. When an Iranian Kurd has been registered by the UNHCR, the KRG provides a proof of identity that is a document only recognised by the KRG. The proof of identity does not give the right to buy a SIM-card, to own property, to get a drivers licence for professional purposes, to work in the public sector or to travel outside of KRI. Nor does it give the right to register a business under their own name.
8. The KRG authorities have told the lawyer working for the NGO, that they can only protect Iranian Kurdish refugees to some extent and that it is up to the refugees to protect themselves.
9. The source added that Iranian Kurdish refugees who are disabled or have diseases cannot travel abroad to seek treatment, because they do not have an internationally recognised travel document.
10. The NGO has documented at least 180 cases of refugees dealing with health conditions among which 10-12 cases according to medical doctors can only find treatment

abroad. The main part of these cases are children with rare diseases, breast cancer and eye sight problems. With the lack of travel document from KRG and Iraq, it is not possible for the people concerned to get treatment. The NGO was familiar with cases in which the patients died due to the lack of treatment.

11. Resettlement options for Iranian Kurds in KRI are very limited.

### **Assassinations of Iranian Kurds in KRI committed by the Iranian government**

12. With regards to threats by the Iranian government against the Iranian Kurds in KRI, since 1980 until today there were 400 documented cases of politically motivated assassinations. The assassinations increased significantly in 1992. In most of these cases, no lawsuit was filed at the local court. Only recently, some lawsuits have been filed.
13. The lawyer representing the NGO represented the victim's family in a lawsuit. The victim who was an Iranian Kurdish activist, Behrouz Rahimi, was assassinated on 14 July 2021. Four persons acting on behalf of the Iranian government intelligence authority monitored the victim during six months and killed in Sulaimania. Out of these four, two of them were arrested and detained by the court in Sulaimania. One of them was acquitted and the other one received a life sentence. All four of the accused were Iraqi citizens hired by the Iranian intelligence service.
14. In the past two to three years, the NGO has registered five cases of assassination carried out by the Iranian security agencies against the Iranian Kurdish refugees in KRI; threats in different forms and manners against the Iranian Kurdish communities in KRI.
15. The profile of the assassinated, include members of the political parties, supporters of the political parties and activists who are not affiliated with any of the political parties. If the Iranian government becomes aware that the activists in KRI are continuing their activities in exposing the government, it does not matter to the government if the activist is a party member or not and if they are armed or unarmed, it will still target the activist.

### **Residence permit**

16. It is important to note that the document issued to Iranian Kurdish refugees by the KRG is in legal terms not a residence permit. Technically, it is a document that proves the identity of the holder.
17. The Iraqi law for residence permit is called 'The Law of Residence for Foreigners' that covers foreigner entering the country legally. In the law there is no mentioning of refugees, i.e. those who enter the country without a passport.

### **Residence permit in the governorate of Sulaimania**

18. The reason for the difference in practice in granting permits based on political affiliation between the governorates in KRI is mainly due to political pressure by the Iranian government on different political actors in KRI.

19. Five years ago in the governorate of Sulaimania, it was easier to be granted a permit based on political asylum for Iranian Kurdish refugees in KRI, however, since then it has become increasingly difficult to obtain this type of permit. Almost 80 percent of Iranian Kurdish refugees are facing obstacles in accessing this document through the filters of the local security offices due to the change of political dynamics etc.
20. Previously, the practice was that any Iranian Kurd with a political background, independent or party affiliated, who came to the KRI, the local authorities would with no exception ask them to provide a support letter that confirms either their support or membership of one of the Iranian Kurdish political parties. This was one of the conditions to start the process to acquire the refugee permit, once the Asayish approves him/her. However, the recent situation and the change in the political relations between the countries have implied that the support letter from one of the political parties is no longer a condition in the governorate of Sulaimania. The reason for this is Iran's political influence and pressure exercised over the Iraqi state.
21. Recent practices by the local authorities and the clearance of the security authorities is that even if the person is granted a permit based on political affiliation, the refugees cannot choose freely in which neighbourhood that they want to live. Recently, the security offices tell these permit holders where they can settle.
22. The process of being issued a permit as a political refugee is delayed.
23. Travelling from Sulaimania to Erbil governorate, the source was stopped at the checkpoint for thirty minutes and questioned. This is related to the dynamics of the political situation between the two governorates.
24. The NGO's lawyer noted that there is no space for a lawyer or the refugee himself could appeal a decision on residence permit to the court. Essentially, if a permit is not granted there is no avenue for appeal.
25. The NGO has observed in multiple cases that Iranian Kurds not being able to be granted a permit as a political refugee in Sulaimania. The applicant were in some cases told by the authorities in Sulaimania that they could not issue a permit to him/her and instead they went to Erbil to submit an application. However, the applicants were not necessarily issued a permit in Erbil. The system is unconventional.
26. Because of the pressure by Iran on the KRG, the Iranian political parties no longer have the influence they used to have on matters as for instance the access to residence permit for their members in KRI.
27. The influence of Iran on KRI was exemplified in their attempt on influencing the KRG to build walls around the compounds of the Iranian Kurdish political parties.

### **Citizenship**

28. The sole authority of issuing Iraqi citizenship is the Iraqi Ministry of Interior, Office of Nationality and ID, Baghdad. The KRG does not have the authority to issue citizenship.
29. According to Iraqi law, if an Iranian Kurd marries an Iraqi citizen, they should be entitled to acquire Iraqi citizenship after five consecutive years, or ten years in case two Iranian Kurds are married. However, what the source sees in practice when these

individuals apply for Iraqi citizenship, is that the Iraqi authorities send the Iranian Kurdish individual back to Iran to interrupt the circle of time in order to find an excuse for not granting them citizenship.

30. In terms of being granted citizenship via marriage to an Iraqi citizen, it does not make any difference if the Iranian Kurd is a man or a woman. In limited cases, some Iranian Kurds managed to obtain Iraqi citizenship via marriage to an Iraqi citizen, however, this is not a systematic or open legal channel for everyone.
31. The source stated that there are two reasons why the Iraqi government does not issue citizenships to Iranian Kurds. Firstly, the Iranian government is pressuring the Iraqi government, and secondly the Iraqi government fears that if citizenship is given to Iranian Kurds the percentage of votes in elections given to Kurdish parties in Iraq will rise as will the percentage of votes to parties in Baghdad will fall.

### **Distinction between Syrian and Iranian Kurdish refugees by the KRG authorities**

32. Syrian refugees have been offered a higher level of services in the KRI in terms of housing, media avocation and cash assistance than the Iranian Kurdish refugees. The source was not sure if it was the KRG authorities or the UN who were behind the differentiated treatment.
33. As opposed to an Iranian Kurdish refugee, a Syrian refugee can buy a SIM card and have it legally registered based on his/her UNHCR certificate.
34. An Iranian Kurdish refugee can access a SIM card if an Iraqi citizen is willing to purchase it under his or her own name for the Iranian Kurd, or buy a SIM card without proper legal registration.
35. Most Syrian refugees have their Syrian passport, which means that if they want to travel abroad, this is possible for them.

### **Al Tash**

36. Around the year 1980 during the Iran-Iraq war, 5,000 Iranian Kurdish refugees were accommodated in the Al Tash camp near Ramadi. The remaining of the refugee population now live in Barika in Sulaimania and Kawa outside Erbil. Forty-four years later, none of these Iranian Kurdish refugees have been able to acquire any Iraqi identity document or passport. The children and grandchildren of these refugees are still living on refugee permits issued for one year at a time.

## Directorate of Residence

Erbil, 6<sup>th</sup> March 2024

### ***Responsibilities***

1. The Directorate manages issuance and renewal of Iqama (the legal residence and working permit).
2. They are also responsible for issuance of residence permits to persons without a legal stay/legal entry in KRI, e.g. Syrians.
3. The Directorate also manages extensions of visas. A visa can be extended for 30 days, three times. As such, a person entering KRI can stay legally for four months in total without leaving the country, if he/she extends their visa. In this case the person gets a stamp in the passport and not a residence permit. It is not a requirement to leave the country between the extension of visa. The fee for extending the visa is 40 USD.
4. Lastly, the Directorate manages exit visas. If a person overstays, they will be required to pay a fee.
5. The Directorate of Residence falls under the KRG Ministry of Interior and under Iraqi law.

### ***Types of residence permits:***

6. There are 3 types of residence application at the Directorate of Residence
  - 1: First time application (with proof of legal entry in KRI)
  - 2: Renewal of residence permit
  - 3: Foreigners without a prove of legal entry (with illegal entry in KRI)
7. There are two types of physical documents: A brown card proving legal entry and blue/purple card proving illegal entry [corresponding refugee status]. The documents contains some UV print and have no tactile elements. The document contain information about the holder (Name, surname, DOB, Issue date, expire date, children, passport number, residence type, Sponsor).
8. On the back of the card there is contact information of the sponsor. The document also contains a barcode which is a reference to the Directorate of Residence. It is not possible to have the brown card issued if the persons have not entered KRI legally.
9. The documents are personalised locally, including at the office of the Directorate of Residence in Erbil.

### ***Residence permit with legal entry (Iqama)***

10. Foreigners who enter KRI with a passport can apply for a residence permit issued on a brown ID card. Other document than the passport to prove identity is not needed.
11. It is required to have a sponsor when applying for residence. This is often a company if the persons comes to work. However, the sponsor could be any Iraqi citizen that is willing to support the person while staying in KRI. This goes for both first time issuance and renewal.

12. An Iqama can be applied for through an online system. Documents can be uploaded via this system, and the applicant can review the process online. The system was implanted after COVID.
13. A blood test is required to be submitted the application. If the blood test is passed, the process of residence is started. The test is for HIV and different types of hepatitis. If the blood test is passed, the process can start. If not, the application will not be granted a residence permit and will be send back.
14. However, if the blood test is tested positive for hepatitis the person can in some cases still be issued a residence permit, depending on the type of hepatitis. In these cases the person is referred to the Ministry of Health. When the blood test is passed, the applicant appears for information capture, pay the fee, and their residence card is printed.
15. Because of the result of a blood test is required, and proof of legal entry in KRI, it is not possible to submit the application from abroad. If a person already has a job, their lawyer or a company representative can be the sponsor. If not, a private person can be the sponsor. This person must be an Iraqi citizen. This person and the applicant must also have a contract which states that the sponsor will take care of the applicant.
16. If an applicant has a private sponsor, who is not familiar with the online system, the application can be made offline.
17. If an applicant has a private sponsor and not a job, they can travel to KRI and if they continue to extend their visa, they have four months to acquire a job, and then, they can apply for the residence permit, and if they do not acquire a job, they can obtain a permit with a sponsor.
18. There is no requirement for the type of job. The employer must be a registered business, and must obtain a security clearance.
19. For diplomats, the process goes through the Department of Foreign relations.
20. The residence permit is valid for six months or one year. There exists no permanent residence permit.
21. The maximum is three years and this is only available for persons married to an Iraqi citizen. The fee and process for this residence permit it different.
22. Visa: there is a website where you can apply online before arrival. Some are exempted from visa. If you don't have the visa from online you have to apply at the airport.
23. The Directorates database is renewed every month. It contains information about which country an applicant is from, how many stays they have had in KRI, etc. The Directorate has a paper database and an online database. The paper database dates back to 2003/2005, and the online started in 2020. The physical version is in process of being digitalised in the digital archive. There has been a digitalization process since 2020 (COVID), and the intent is to eventually rely solely on the digital database.
24. Is it part of the procedure to check archives when a residence permit is issued.

### **Fees**

25. The legal residence permit costs 780-800 USD (1,175,000 IQD) for first time issuance. Renewal costs 100 USD, if the applicant has an insurance (the insurance is bought when the application for residence is submitted). A person can choose to pay for an insurance. The price is 50,000 IQD per month. It is optional, but the Directorate recommends it. If accidents happens, they are covered.
26. Without the insurance the renewal costs 500,000 IQD. For citizens that do not require a visa (e.g. Europeans), the fee is less (200 USD).
27. Extension of visas costs 100,000 IQD/70 USD per extension.
28. When a person overstay his/her visa/residence permit the person is fined every day of overstay. The overstay is fined with 20 USD per day. The person is also required to pay for an Exit Visa that costs 40 USD. The same applies if a person has previously had a residence permit. If a residence permit has expired while the person is not in KRI, there is no fee, but the person must obtain a residence permit anew.

### **Previous stay**

29. If a person has previously stayed in the KRI and perhaps overstayed, they can follow the exit visa process, and their present stay will be legal.

### ***Residence Permit for persons who have entered KRI illegally***

30. Syrian refugees without a passport or with illegal entry are stationed in camps, supervised by UNHCR.
31. After getting the UNHCR document, a person will have a blood test and apply for the security clearance. Then they can get the blue/purple residence card.
32. With this card, a person can travel, work and be part of society. However, this permit does not grant travel outside KRI, meaning that the person cannot leave KRI. It is as such a proof of identity, with which a person can work, pass checkpoints etc. inside KRI.
33. In case a person holding a blue/purple card wants to settle in another governorate in KRI than the issuing governorate, then the person needs to transfer their files to this governorate to be issued a new card stating the governorate of domicile.
34. For this type of residence permit, there is a differentiation of nationality. Syrians are a large group. Because of the large numbers of Syrian refugees coming to KRI the Directorate of Residence has set up an office near a camp in Barhaka, which is a town 20 minutes outside Erbil town. At this office UNHCR is present and issues UNHCR documents, the person applies for the residence permit and gets the security clearance. The residence card is also issued there. In addition, the Asayish (KRI intelligence service) also has an office to perform security checks of the refugees.
35. The majority of the Iranian Kurds with illegal entry and without a passport are in KRI because they are politically active (members or supporters of political parties). In order for them to have a political residence permit, they need to show a support letter from



the political party with which they are affiliated (KDPI, Komala etc.). When it is presented, the blood test is made. The security clearance has to be issued by the General Asayish (main headquarters of Asayish in Erbil). The Asayish gives final clearance to the Directorate of Residence to issue the blue/purple card to this group. An Iranian Kurd will not get a security clearance if they have background activities with e.g. terrorism, drugs or having a pending court cases.

36. When asked if the armed members of the Iranian political parties will be granted a blue/purple residence permit as a political refugee, the source replied that she did not have the exact answer. For the case processing of application for political asylum, the Directorate of Residence, the applicant needs to bring the security clearance from Asayish.
37. In the majority of cases on Iranian Kurds, they have been affiliated with one of the Iranian Kurdish parties. However, if an Iranian Kurd claims that s/he has no affiliation with one of these parties, presenting a document that shows affiliation with one of the parties is still a requirement for submitting an application, before they can be sent to the blood test, after which the Directorate of Residence finally refers the person to the final decision by the General Asayish office. The permit given to Syrians, and the permit given to Iranians are the same. However, the reason is different. On the back of the card, it will say whether the permit is given for *political* or *humanitarian* reasons. The Syrian cases are considered refugees fleeing war for which reason they are considered humanitarian cases. In the exceptional cases in which an Iranian Kurd states that s/he is not affiliated with any party, it is still the discretion of the general Asayish to decide whether or not a permit can be granted based on the security check.
38. The blue/purple card has no fee, but needs to be renewed.
39. When asked if residence permit for persons who have entered KRI illegally was required to have relatives in KRI, the source replied that this was not the case.

### ***Iraqi ID card***

40. The Iraqi ID card is only issued to Iraqi nationals and as such it proves Iraqi nationality.

### ***Iraqi citizenship***

41. With regard to the possibility to apply for citizenship, according to Iraqi law, granting citizenship is solely the discretion of the federal Iraqi authorities; the KRG authorities do not have the discretion to grant any foreigner citizenship.

## An International Organisation

Erbil, 5<sup>th</sup> March 2024

### **Background**

There are more than 300,000 refugees and asylum seekers in Iraq out of which the vast majority are Syrians. By end of January 2024 there are approx. 8,500 Iranians in KRI out of which the vast majority of are ethnic Kurds.

### **Legal residence permit**

1. Concerning the registration role of the international organisation vis-à-vis the KRG and Federal Iraqi authorities, the handling of legal residence is in the hands of the government.
2. International organisation undertakes registration of refugees and asylum seekers, but only residence documents from the government entail legal residence in Iraq.
3. In federal Iraq, the entity called PC-Mol (Permanent Committee of Ministry of Interior) issue the PC-Mol card which is the legal residence document issued for refugees and asylum seekers. While in the KRI, there are two types of humanitarian residence permits: political residence permit (PRP) and humanitarian residence permit (HRP) as the basis for protection of refugees and asylum seekers in Iraq. In Erbil most Iranians receive the PRP, but that is not the case in Sulaymaniyah and Dohuk.
4. The type of humanitarian residence card is written on the back of the card. The HRP card and the PRP card is issued by the Directorate of Residence in either Dohuk, Erbil or Sulaymaniyah.
5. The card does not say residence permit, it says: Personal Identification.
6. The process for issuing HRP and PRP is slightly different depending on which of the three Kurdish governorates the application is submitted to: Sulaymaniyah, Erbil or Dohuk.
7. The important point is that that refugees and asylum seekers either have a HRP. PRP or PC-Mol card which provide them protection for them to safely stay in Iraq.
8. Registration by the international organisation is at this moment required step to obtain legal residence document issued by the government.
9. Other documentation needed for applying for residence permit with KRI authorities:
10. Id document: Passport or ID card (in absence of this, the application can still be processed)
11. Security clearance by Asayish (KRI intelligence service)
12. Blood test
13. Proof of residence issued by Mukhtar (government appointed community leader) The process can take one month, if the requirements are fulfilled.
14. There is a restriction to who can obtain HRP and PRP issued by the KRI authorities:
15. HRP is currently not issued by KRG if the person have entered KRI legally with certain exceptions.

16. An asylum seeker can apply for HRP or PRP if s/he entered illegally, but an application can be rejected.
17. Previous stay as refugee in KRI is not a complication for obtaining a normal residence permit. What matters is how they enter, and with which documents, the relevant time around. If an individual was previously a resident of KRI and left without due process (an exit permit) with the authorities, it might present a challenge to obtain security clearance again. A previous residence permit or application for such will be registered with the authorities.
18. Reasons for the KRG authorities to reject an HRP/PRP to a refugee could be if the person entered legally, even though the international organisation has registered the applicant with few exceptions related to family unification and vulnerable/humanitarian cases.

### ***Registration by the international organisation***

19. When registering with the international organisation, the applicant is invited to present any available documents, including identity documents. However, if identity documents are not available, people are registered anyways based on the international organisation's assessment of their identity. This assessment is made at an interview.
20. Physical presence is mandatory for registration with the international organisation.
21. General basic biodata is collected, along with biometric data.
22. There is no data sharing agreement with Iraq authorities, so the international organisation's database is not available to them.
23. Documents submitted are kept in both physical and digital form in the international organisation's archive.
24. The international organisation's registrations are verified every one or two years. If a person fails to present themselves physically for renewal, their registration will become inactive.
25. Resettlement automatically inactivates a registration.
26. By request of the registered person, a registration can also be inactivated.
27. A person or a legal representative can, if requested, and based on legal authorization and consent by the respective applicant can gain access to a person's file
28. If a foreigner has entered legally and therefore cannot obtain HRP, s/he can still register with the international organisation in Erbil and Sulaymaniyah, and in Sulaymaniyah they can receive the international organisation's documentation where in Erbil documents cannot be issued without the security clearance. In Dohuk, applicants cannot access registration in absence of security clearance.
29. If a person has only the international organisation's registration, and not the legal residence permit, they are not protected in the same manner with regard to access to public services and freedom of movement, but the international organisation will intervene if there is a threat of for example refoulement. The international organisation does currently not have data concerning how many refugees and asylum

seekers in KRI who has only the international organisation's registration, and not the legal residence permit.

30. The document provided by the international organisation was previously issued to individuals and families. Lately (since one month) the individual certificate is only issued if needed but not as a general practise anymore.
31. Due to the inherently peaceful, humanitarian and non-political nature of asylum and international protection, active combatants are not admissible to the international organisation's registration procedures. The Civilian Character of Asylum (CCA) is maintained through screening. Where a former member of an armed group approaches for registration and has disarmed, and it has been verified by the international organisation that s/he is a civilian who has genuinely and permanently renounced armed activities, the international organisation will register the person.
32. If a person does not see added value by obtaining the international organisation's registration, they can choose to remain unregistered. Some may not register due to lack of information. The source did not have information on unregistered refugees in KRI.
33. The international organisation's registration is conducted as per global standards. Standard database and system used.

### ***Conditions for Iranian Kurds in KRI***

34. If a refugee has a legal residence permit (HRP/PRP), one can access housing (renting), health services, employment (private sector) and education.
35. In order to rent a house, it is a requirement to register with the local Asayish and to pay the rent. A sponsor is not needed to access housing. There are no camps for Iranian refugees. Most of them are living in urban settings or in settlements.
36. Health services require a nominal fee (500 IQD), except emergency service, which is free. Basic treatment is available, also for most diagnosis. However, treatment for some diseases will only be available in private clinics where it is expensive.
37. Some more complicated treatments are not available in the KRI, and the patient will need to travel abroad to access this treatment.
38. HRP/PRP gives generic right to work in the private sector not to the public sector. However, employment rate in KRI are low.
39. Most refugees work as daily labour in the informal sector, for instance in restaurants.
40. Holders of HRP and PRP have access to public (free) and private schools (tuition fee payed by their families).
41. Refugees living in urban setting have access to food, water and electricity insofar as s/he pays for them.
42. The international organisation provides a targeted assistance and protection services, but relying on this is not a sustainable solution. For example, the multiple purpose cash support is available for a year only for those who are eligible. The international organisation tries to enhance self-reliance of refugees.

43. In terms of access to electricity, for the host community there is not only the city power, there are also private generators where one must pay on a monthly basis based on the amount of amperes used.
44. Holding the HRP or PRP card is the key to stay in KRI with safety and dignity.
45. Refugees cannot participate in elections, general nor parliamentary. It is only for Iraqi citizens.

### ***Citizenship***

46. Iraqi nationality law no. six of 2006 outline how foreigners can obtain Iraqi citizenship. It is limited to certain categories and for all of them legal entry to the country is a prerequisite. Another is ten years consecutive legal stay. If a non-iraqi marries an Iraqi citizen, it's five consecutive years.
47. There are other requirements, and even if an Iranian refugee fulfil them all, an application for citizenship can be rejected. There are for example political concerns regarding demographic change as stated in the constitution. The international organisation is aware of cases where persons have been there for more than 40 years, without gaining citizenship.
48. The Iraqi Ministry of Interior is the sole authority for citizenship. In cases where an applicant fulfil all criteria, the minister still have the discretion to reject an application.
49. There is an Iranian consulate in Erbil.
50. After 2005, there was a group of Iranian Kurds who obtained citizenship issued by the KRG authorities as well as a drivers licence. Most of these passports were later on revoked by the federal government of Iraq, because these cases where not perceived as Iraqi citizens.

### ***Freedom of movement***

51. Is dependent on the type of residence. If a foreigner has legal residence issued by KRI authorities, s/he are free to move around in the KRI.
52. A person registered with legal residence in Erbil can travel to Dohuk and Sulaymaniyah governorates, but if they want to live there, they need to transfer there. In this case, a process is required including obtaining approval from current governorate of residence and security clearance and approvals from security apparatus and residency of the new governorate.
53. A certificate provided by the international organisation is not valid for access through a check point. Neither is a membership card from a party. It also depends on the specific situation, security situation and the person in charge at the specific check point.
54. To ensure free movement, a refugee must have the legal residence permit.
55. KRI check points are manned with KRI personnel.
56. A KRG issued Visa or Residence permit only grants access and freedom of movement in KRI not in federal Iraq.

***Non-refoulement***

57. The KRI authorities live up to principles of non-refoulement in general but it can depend on a person's case and profile. There are some individuals that the KRI authorities may be more prone to deport. The international organisation tries to intervene for refugees at risk of refoulment, and are mostly successful.

## Department of Foreign Relations (DFR), Didar Farhad Head of legal office in DFR, Hardi Head of authentication office in DFR

Erbil, 4<sup>th</sup> March 2024

1. It is not possible for DFR to verify documents (authentication mail) if they only have know the document number, or have an anonymised copy of the document. In order for the DFR to verify documents they require to see the front and the back of the document.
2. Since January 2023: 50.400 documents have been legalised by the DFR: including documents from KRI, central Iraq and documents from abroad.
3. DFR is in close contact with KRG representative offices abroad.
4. Residence permits falls the responsibility of the Ministry of Interior.
5. There has been no change in DFR stamps since NIDC's visit in September 2022. However, there has been a change in signatures. 3 persons are permitted to sign documents. Specimen signatures are shared with KRG representative offices abroad, and from there sent to foreign countries. Specimens of the new signatures (the 3 signing officers) will be distributed within the next week.
6. They do verification of e.g. university degrees, civil documents, driving licenses.
7. There are 3 steps when verifying documents:
  - 1: When an application is submitted, the documents are checked. The stamps and signatures from the responsible ministry are verified (e.g. Ministry of Justice if the document is a marriage certificate). If everything is ok, the document is stamped and signed by one of the three responsible officers at the DFR.
  - 2: The documents are then registered digitally in the DFRs digital system. A file number is generated. The file-number from the system is written into the stamp from step 1.
  - 3: The document is stamped with the round red stamp.

## Directorate of Passport

Erbil, 4<sup>th</sup> March 2024

### Background

The meeting took place with Colonel Abdu Salam: Head of Directorate of Passport in Erbil Governorate.

### Issuance of passports

1. The DoP informs that the process of passport issuance starts by applying for an appointment online.
2. On the day of the appointment, the applicant is required to bring an Iraqi ID-card and an information card, and pay a fee. The fee is paid with credit card and cash are not accepted, which is a new procedure. However, if an applicant does not have a credit card, the directorate will be helpful.
3. The information card is issued to the head of the family, most often the father, and contains information on the holder, spouse and children. The card is not digitalized.
4. The required ID-card needs to be the newest version of the card. But if a person does not have the new version, they can still have a passport issued.
5. Passports cannot be issued by proxy, as the issuance process requires the collection of the applicants fingerprints, facial picture and iris scan, and the passport must be collected by the holder him/herself.
6. If an applicant cannot physically come to the issuance place, the Directorate of Passport have the possibility to come to the applicant. Previously with the old passports, a notary would write a note, and bring it to the issuance place on behalf of the citizen applying for the passport.
7. Since an Iraqi passport and national ID-cards fall under the jurisdiction of the federal government in Baghdad, final approval needs to come from Baghdad, but this usually happens within 1 hour of the request being sent to the Nationality Operation Room in Baghdad.
8. If everything in the application is approved, the passport can be issued within an hour. The passport is then personalised at the DoP office, where the application was submitted.
9. If the passport is issued from Erbil, it will list "Erbil" as issuance authority.
9. The Directorate of passport is currently issuing two different versions of passports. The new version have been issued for a year in federal Iraq, and in Erbil since July 2023. They will stop issuing the old version within a year. The old passport remain valid until their expiration dates.
10. Iraqi citizens can apply for a passport abroad by visiting Iraqi embassies. The requirements are the same.
11. The Iraqi passport cannot be issued to foreigners, including Iranian Kurds, as they do not hold Iraqi citizenship.



12. For applicants above 18 years, the validity of a passport is eight years. If the applicant is below 18 years, the validity is four years.
13. The passport can be issued from the moment an individual is born. The same rule applies for the issuance of ID-cards according to Iraqi law.

#### **Renewal of passports**

14. The DoP states that for a passport to be renewed, the applicant must present his/her previous passport.
15. An application for passport renewal can be submitted, when the passport has less than one year of validity left. If the passport has more than one year of validity left until its expiration, an application for renewal can still be submitted, but for an extra fee.
16. It is not a requirement to have the passport renewed before it expires.

#### **ID-cards**

17. The new ID-card is a digital card, and carries all information about the holder including fingerprints.
18. It is not issued by the DoP, but by the General Directorate of Citizenship.
19. The DoP has access to the digital ID-card database, and can verify an ID-card by checking in the digital system.
20. The DoP states that the new ID-card and its digital database, fraud with ID-cards has become almost impossible.
21. With the old Iraqi ID-card, the process of verification was more difficult.
22. With this new digitalised system, the DoP informs that eventually, the new ID-card will be a requirement for passport application, with the only exception being for elderly citizens or individuals with disabilities.
23. The fee for renewal of a passport is 200.000 IQD. The fee for a new passport is 91.000 IQD.

## Annex 2: Terms of Reference

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### Access, residence permit, access to public services and security in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) for Iranian Kurds

#### 1. ACCESS TO KRI

- a. Requirements for entry at airport and land border points
- b. Types of residence permits available, incl. requirements
  - a. The issuance of ID cards to foreigners
- c. Registration of Iranian Kurds by local authorities
- d. Access to citizenship in practice
  - a. The issuance of documents related to citizenship (nationality certificates and passports)
- e. Freedom of movement within KRI
- f. Prevalence of deportation to Iran

#### 2. SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL RIGHTS CONNECTED TO RESIDENCE PERMIT IN KRI

- g. Housing
- h. Education
- i. Employment
- j. Healthcare
- k. Food, Water and Electricity
- l. Political rights (hold public office, participate in elections)

#### 3. SECURITY IN KRI

- m. Development of the general security situation in KRI since January 2023
- n. Foreign armed actors
- o. Non-state armed actors
- p. Prevalence of security incidents and the extent and type of casualties
- q. Kurdish armed forces and law enforcements