



International Organization for Migration (IOM)  
The UN Migration Agency

# IRAQI RETURNEES FROM EUROPE

A SNAPSHOT REPORT ON IRAQI NATIONALS UPON RETURN IN IRAQ

## DISPLACEMENT TRACKING MATRIX (DTM)

February 2018



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**Iraqi Returnees from Europe: A snap-shot report on Iraqi nationals upon return in Iraq**

*This snapshot report is part of the outputs of the last phase of IOM's project implementation on data collection to enable a better understanding of migration flows from Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Iraq, Nigeria, Pakistan and Somalia towards Europe, a collaborative effort by the DTM support team and relevant IOM field missions funded by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The findings, interpretations and conclusions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the views of IOM or its Member States. The designations employed and the presentation of material throughout the work do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of IOM concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area, or of its authorities, or concerning its frontiers or boundaries.*

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# BACKGROUND

The project “Enabling a better understanding of migrations flows (and its root causes) from Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Iraq, Nigeria, Pakistan and Somalia towards Europe” was designed by IOM’s Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM), and it is funded by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MinBuZa). DTM is a set of tools and methodologies, which enable systematic and regular primary data collection, analysis and dissemination on population movements, human mobility and forced migration (both internal and cross-border). DTM was first conceptualized in 2004 to monitor internal displacement in Iraq and has since been adapted for implementation in over 70 countries. In 2017 alone, DTM tracked over 30 million individuals (IDPs, returnees and migrants) in a broad range of contexts, including conflict, natural disaster, complex emergencies and protracted crises.

The study centres its analysis around four different target populations: potential migrants that have not yet left their country of residence, migrants en route to Europe, migrants in destination countries and migrants upon return to their country of origin. Although the entire study aims to understand the migration patterns of various nationalities, this snapshot focuses solely on Iraqi returnees from Europe in Iraq in the years 2015, 2016 and 2017. In this case, the “Comprehensive Migration Flows Survey (CMFS)” was chosen as the DTM component best suited to obtain a better understanding of migration flows and its root causes. For the implementation of the CMFS, different field locations for data collection activities were chosen to collect data amongst Iraqi nationals in transit, in their final destination country and upon return in Iraq. The data collection and analysis in each of the field locations aim to shed light on six thematic areas that have been designed under this project:

## THEMATIC AREAS

TA 1	TA 2	TA 3	TA 4	TA 5	TA 6
Migrant profiles (Socio-demographic)	Migration drivers and decision making	Vulnerability factors in origin, transit and destination countries	Role of intermediaries	Migrants’ perceptions towards Europe	Migration Choices and Options

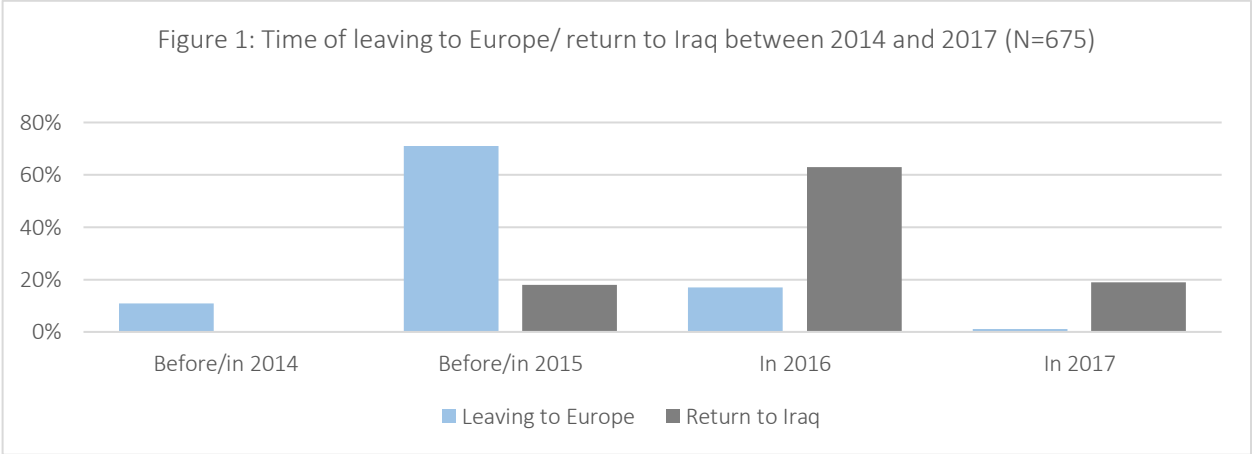
Iraq was chosen as one of the target nationalities under this project because of its consistent presence in European asylum statistics. In the first three quarters of 2017 alone approximately 34,005 Iraqi nationals claimed asylum, while the numbers for the previous years were even higher with 128,620 asylum applications in 2016 and 130,385 in 2015<sup>1</sup>.

In this context it is important to acknowledge that the findings outlined in the next part of this snapshot report are not representative of the Iraqi migrant population that has returned to Iraq since 2015 as a whole. The sample was designed to be representative of the beneficiary profile of the IOM Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) programme. This snap-shot report aims to provide general findings of data collection that took place from August to September 2017 amongst Iraqi nationals upon their return.

# IRAQI RETURNEES

## RETURNEE PROFILES

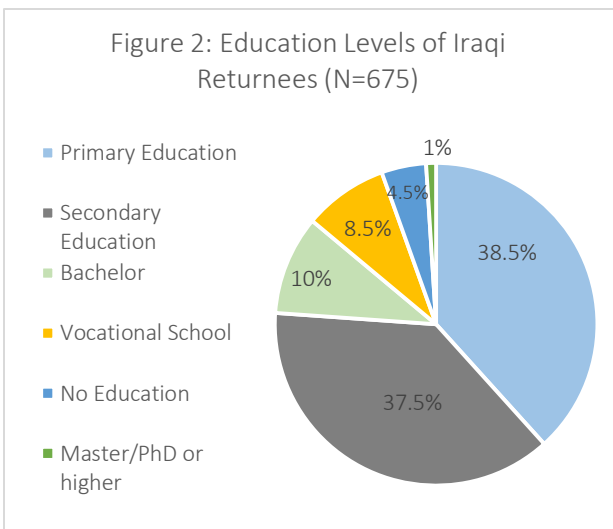
The Iraqi returnee sample consisted of 675 respondents who had migrated to Europe and returned to Iraq after 2015., This section on Iraqi returnee profiles provides the foundation for the further analysis of the other five thematic areas in greater depth.



In the dataset female returnees made up only 8 per cent of the sample. The age range of the returned migrants was between 15 and 70 years, but almost 90 per cent of the sample were between the ages of 18

<sup>1</sup> Eurostat (2017). Asylum and first time asylum applicants by citizenship, age and sex Monthly data. Retrieved from <http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do>

and 45 years, with an average age of 31 years. The large majority of the returnees had left Iraq initially in 2015 (71%), around 17 per cent in 2016 and 11 per cent either in 2014 or before 2014 - a very small share left in 2017 (1%). Looking at the date of return, the majority of the respondents returned in 2016 (63%), while 19 per cent returned in 2017 and 18 per cent returned either in 2015 or before. Although the returned respondents were drawn from all 18 governorates of Iraq, the sampling method was not based on randomization as almost two-thirds were beneficiaries of IOM programs.



In regard to marital status, the data shows that the majority of the respondents are either married (55.5%) or single (40%), while a small share is divorced/separated (3%), engaged (1%) or widowed (0.5%). Of the returned respondents, roughly 49 per cent indicated that they had children (332 individuals). Of these 332 respondents that had children, 95 per cent reported that at least one of their children was living in Iraq, while only 4 per cent indicated that at least one of their children was in Europe or elsewhere in the world (1%) during the time of the interview. Of the returnee sample, only 16 per cent reported still having household members in Europe after their return.

The educational background is diverse among the respondents; roughly 4.5 per cent report not having completed any form of education. Of those that reported not having completed any education level, 70 per cent also indicated that they were illiterate. The distribution of respondents with primary and secondary education levels is equally distributed at roughly 38 per cent. Around 8.5 per cent of the respondents had completed some form of vocational training, and 10 per cent reported having a Bachelor's degree. The share of respondents with a Master's degree or higher was 1 per cent.

## MIGRATION DRIVERS AND DECISION MAKING PROCESS

### *Drivers*

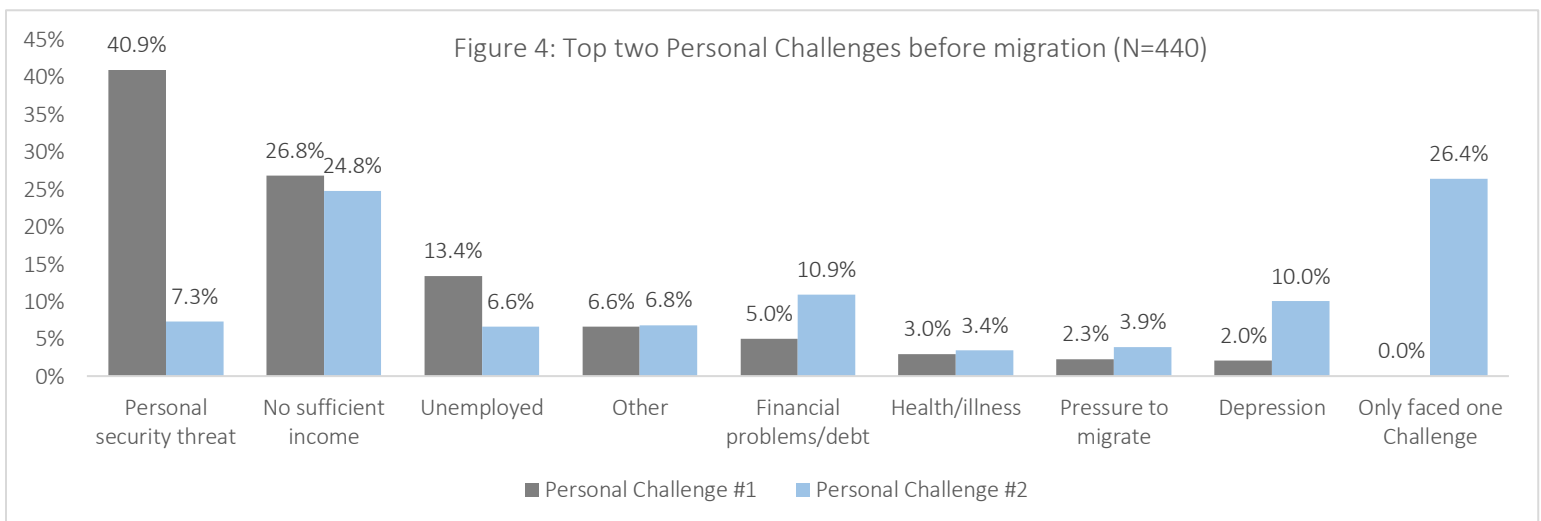
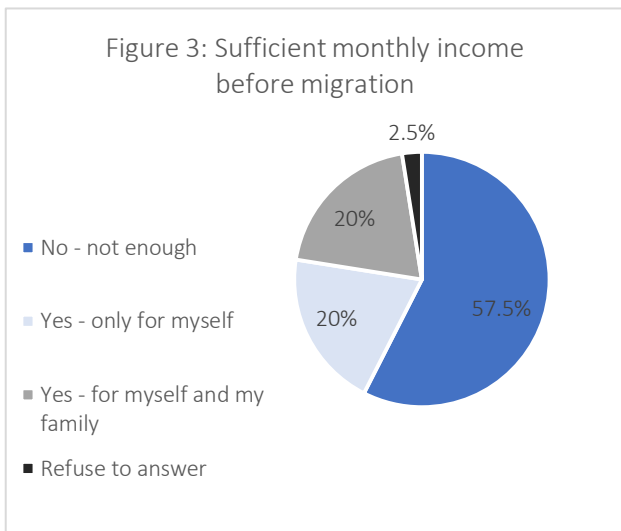
Although the drivers of migration from Iraq are relatively well researched and covered in recent literature, most data tend to look at the drivers from a macro perspective. Therefore, DTM intends to shed light on

the reasons for migration from a micro and meso level perspective, as well as on the different factors that influence Iraqis in their decision-making process prior to migration.

The data shows that of the 675 respondents, 81 per cent were employed before they left Iraq and conversely 19 per cent reported they were unemployed. Comparing the different age groups, there does not seem to be a correlation between employment status and age group, as the rate of

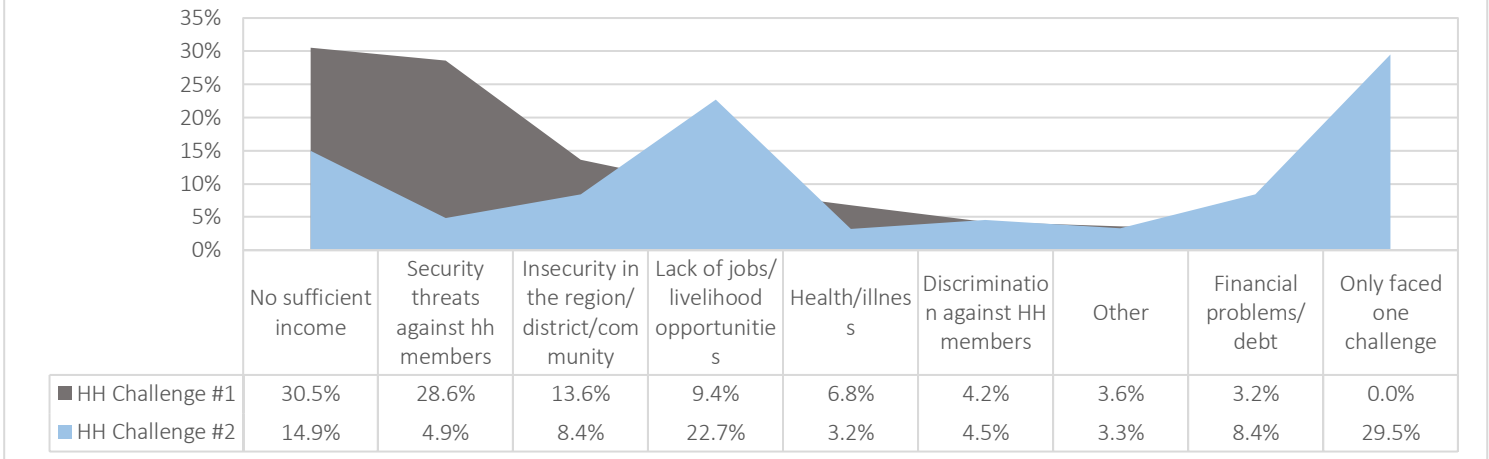
unemployment hovers between 10 and 15 per cent among all age groups. In order to better understand the socio-economic profile of the population, Iraqi returnees were asked if their income (before migration) was sufficient to meet monthly expenses. Almost 58 per cent indicated that their income was not sufficient, while 20 per cent reported that their income was sufficient, however only for themselves, and another 20 per cent indicated that the income was sufficient to cover monthly expenses for themselves and their families.

In order to better understand the drivers of migration on a micro and meso level, the respondents were asked to name their top two personal, household and community challenges during the six months before their departure. Overall 65 per cent of the respondents reported having faced personal challenges (see Figure 4). The primary challenges cited were the presence of personal security threats (41%) and the lack of sufficient income (27%).



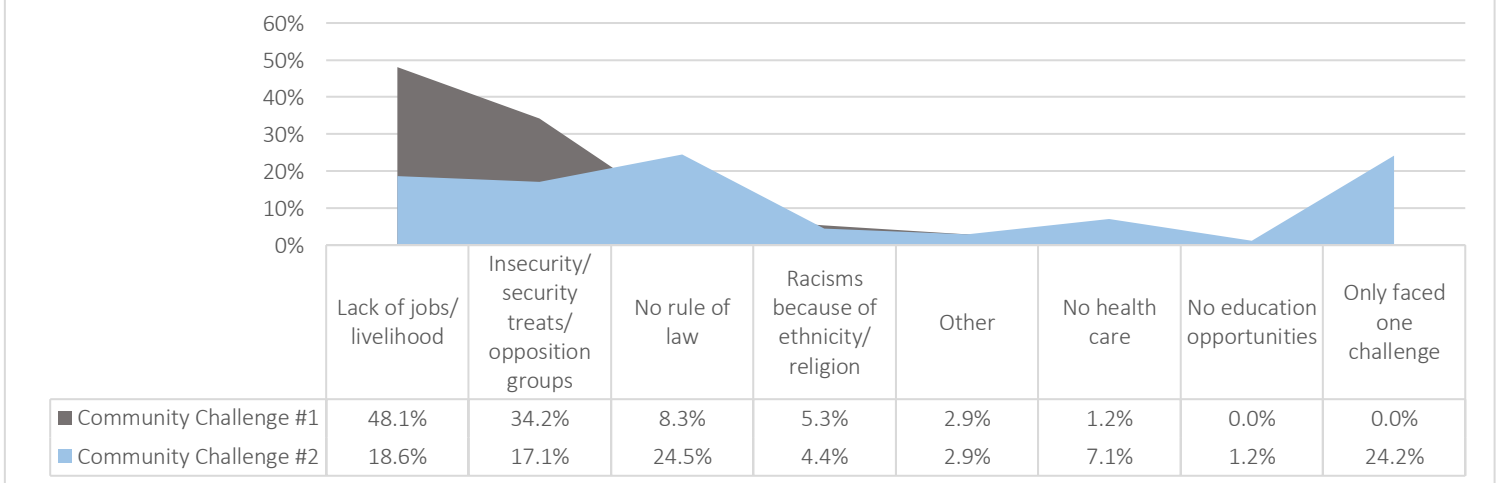
Around 46 per cent of the respondents reported having faced household challenges (see Figure 5). The primary household challenges reported were the security situation in the community, as well as security threats against individual household members and the lack of sufficient income. As secondary challenges, the matters of economic wellbeing and livelihoods appear to be most pressing.

Figure 5: Top two Household Challenges before migration (N=308)



To understand the full picture respondents were also asked what they considered to be the two primary community challenges. As Figure 6 shows, security standards as well as the lack of livelihood opportunities were reported as the most pressing issues on the community level. The absence of rule of law as well as the lack of proper health care were mentioned most frequently as the second main challenge.

Figure 6: Top two Community Challenges before migration (N=339)



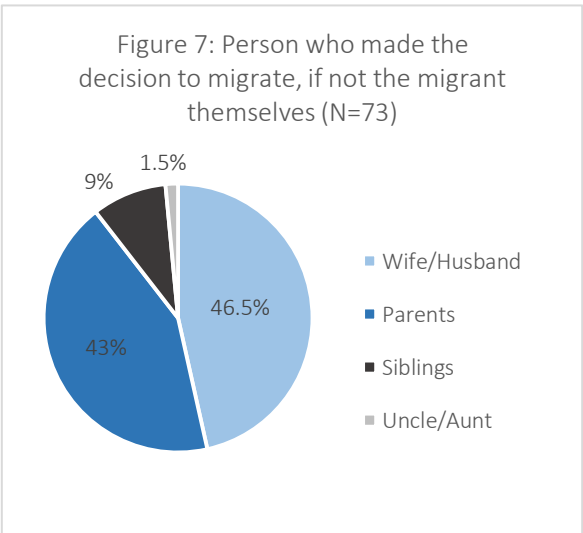
In addition to the previous questions, respondents were also asked about their main reasons for leaving. In line with the main challenges, the two most reported reasons for leaving were “lack of jobs/livelihoods” (31%) and “personal/family level insecurity/security treats” (21%). The remaining 48 per cent of respondents cited several different reasons, such as no hope for a future (10%), no economic growth/prosperity (9%), absence of human rights (6%) and the presence of war and conflict in the country (5%). Furthermore, respondents were asked about the event or events that led them to make the final decision to migrate. Although the most commonly named triggers were related to a security incident that occurred (30%), chronic unemployment (27%) and the loss of jobs (19%), several other triggers were named as well.

When looking at the drivers of migration, previous migration patterns can help to understand the incentives to migrate again. Therefore, the survey included a question on internal displacement as well as on previous migration movements. Of the returnees interviewed, 25 per cent reported that they had been previously displaced within Iraq and 12 per cent confirmed that they had migrated across an international border before. Of those respondents that had migrated before, the large majority (72%) had migrated within the Middle East while 26 per cent had migrated to Europe and 2 per cent to Africa.

***Decision making process***

Next to the drivers, the research study also intends to enhance the understanding of the decision-making process, migrants go through before their departure. Similar to the section on migration drivers, the questions related to the decision-making process are mainly directed at a personal/household level.

Diasporas and networks abroad are known to have an influence on migrants’ decision-making process where to go. The respondents were asked if they had family and/or friends in Europe before they left. Results shows that more than half of the respondents (55%) had family in one of the European countries and 58 percent reported to have friends somewhere in Europe. Respondents were also asked if they made the decision to migrate themselves or if someone else decided for them. Of the respondents only 11 percent indicated that they did not make the decision to migrate themselves.

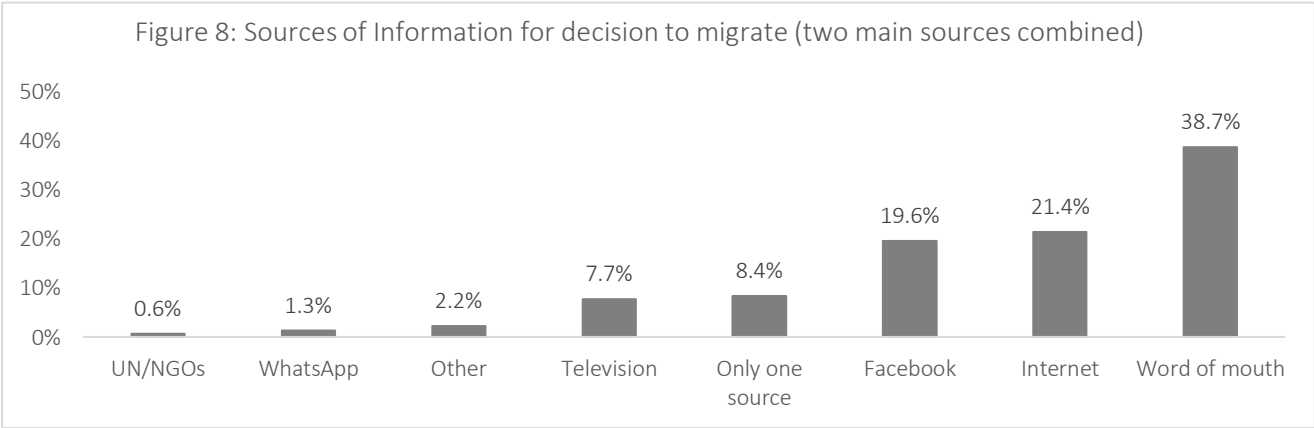


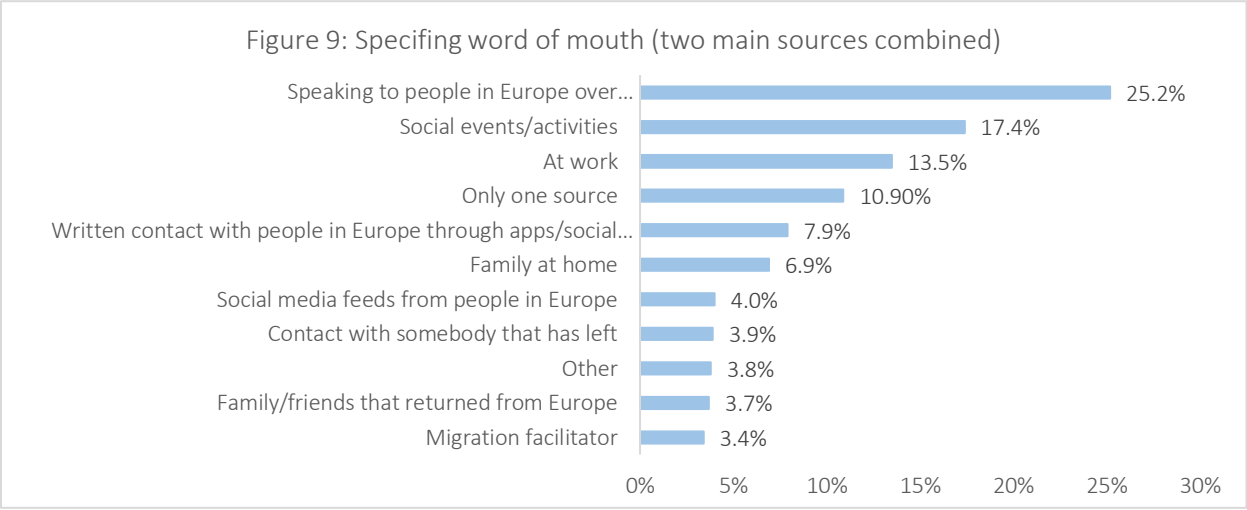


For those that did not make the decision themselves, it was predominately the parents or the spouse that made the decision (Figure 7). Looking at the age groups, it appears that the largest share of those that did not make the decision themselves are in the age range between 15 and 24 years. In terms of the gender distributed the data also indicated that the share of women who did not make the decision themselves (33%) is larger than the share of men (9%). For both correlations, age groups as well as the gender distribution it has to be acknowledged that this result is based on rather small sample sizes and is therefore not necessarily representative.

Those that indicated to have made the decision themselves were asked if they had discussed their plans to migrate with anyone and if so with whom and whether they support the respondent’s decision. The data shows that 65 percent reported to have discussed their plans beforehand. The large majority, namely 59 percent, discussed with family in Iraq, while 27 percent discussed with friends in the Iraq and another 10 percent reported to have discussed the plans with friends in Europe. The remaining 4 percent discussed either with family in Europe or village/community elders. The respondents also stated that of the people they discussed the migration with, over 80 percent supported their decision to leave Iraq.

In order to understand the actual decision-making process respondents were asked “what were the sources of information on which you based your decision to migrate to Europe?” As figure 8 and 9 below show, most people reported that they based their decision to migrate on information received through channels of “word of mouth”. The most often mentioned sources for word of mouth are the contact with friends and family in Europe over the phone/WhatsApp/Skype etc. (25%), as well as through social events and activities back in Iraq (19.5%) and combined communications related to social media (12%).



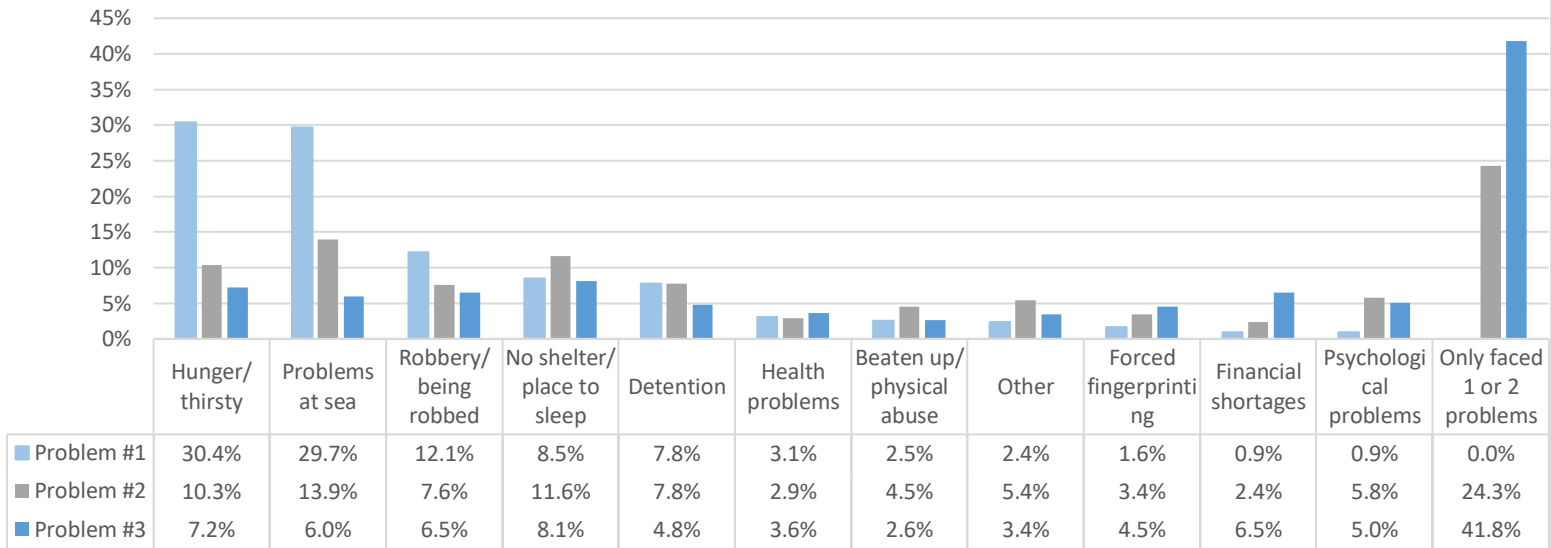


**VULNERABILITIES EN ROUTE TO EUROPE**

Before addressing the main challenges and problems Iraqi migrants faced along the route, the respondents were asked who they travelled with. Respondents gave multiple answers to this question, which is not unusual as migrants can travel with different people for different parts of the journey. The data shows that 36 per cent travelled alone, 28 per cent travelled with friends and/ or 15 per cent travelled with a group for at least part of the journey. The largest share (47%) however travelled parts of the journey with direct family members (spouse or children) and relatives.

Respondents were then asked about their main problems while travelling to Europe. Of the returnee respondents, 82 per cent reported having faced at least one problem while travelling to and within Europe. Looking at the gender distribution of the data, no obvious relation can be established between the likelihood of facing a problem and a specific gender. The same can be said about marital status. Respondents with different marital statuses appear to be at the same risk of facing challenges and problems. Respondents were asked to provide the three primary problems they encountered during their migration (in order of severity). As *Figure 10* shows, the main problems Iraqi returnees faced were hunger and thirst, problems at sea, as well as being robbed and not finding shelter or a place to sleep.

Figure 10: Problems faced en route (n=552)

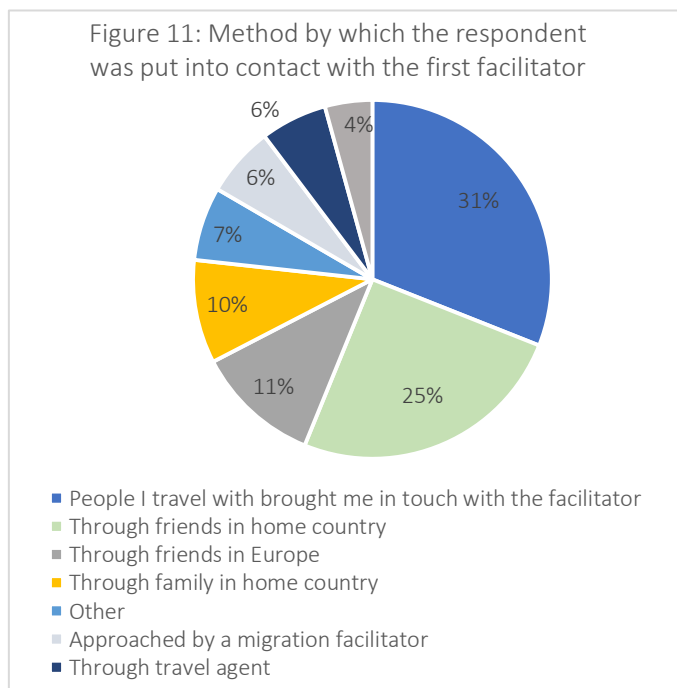


The problems of being hungry and thirsty, as well as problems faced at sea are most often linked to the countries of Greece and Turkey. The lack of shelter, as well as being detained seemed to be most common in relation to Bulgaria, Macedonia and Serbia. For the destination countries such as Germany or Sweden the most named problems were financial shortages, as well as psychological/health problems and in some cases detention.

## ROLE OF INTERMEDIARIES

Although data regarding the use of migration facilitators/smugglers from Iraq to Europe does exist, the literature does not clearly identify the smuggling network structures or the means by which migrants first come into contact with smugglers. Furthermore, neither the funding methods of migration journeys nor the means of payment have been studied in greater detail. Amongst the sample of Iraqi returnees, 94 percent of respondents reported having used a facilitator for at least part of the journey. When asked about how the respondents got in contact

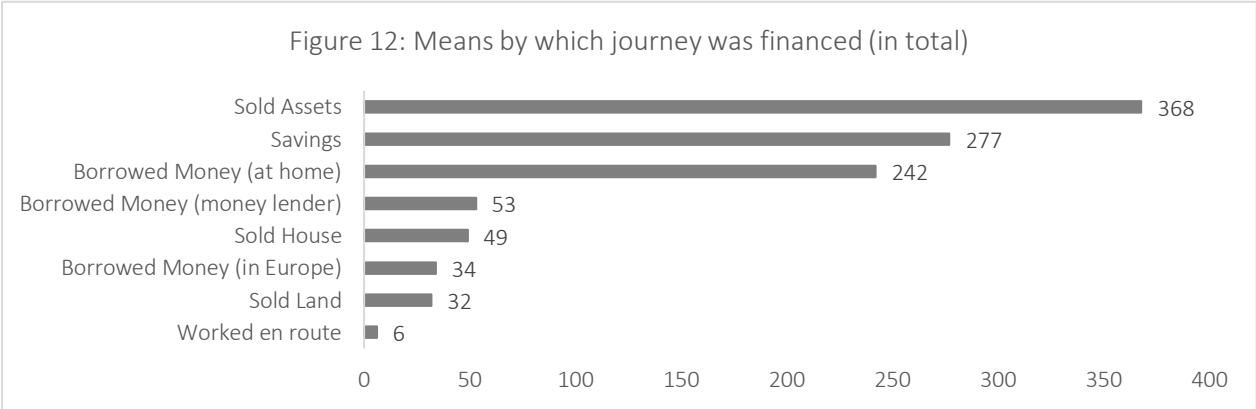
Figure 11: Method by which the respondent was put into contact with the first facilitator



with their first migration facilitator, 31 percent reported that fellow travelers had initiated the contact, followed by 25 percent who had found the facilitator through friends in Iraq (see figure 11). On average, approximately 2 to 3 intermediaries or facilitators were used throughout the journey – the lowest being one smuggler used and the highest being 11.

The average cost to get from Iraq to Europe is estimated to be around 5,500 USD, based on the price provided by the 664 respondents who used a facilitator and remembered the price of the journey. When asked about how the money was paid to the facilitators, 43 percent answered that they had paid the full amount up front, prior to departure. Another 36 percent reported that payment had been made through a third party, while 9 percent paid only upon arrival in Europe, 5 percent through the hawala system and 6 percent in cash installments throughout the journey. Only 1 percent indicated that they made use of official channels such as Western Union or Money Gram.

In order to understand the full picture of the migration journey, respondents were also asked how they were able to finance their journey. Most respondents named several sources of how they were able to pay for the journey. Around 55 percent were able to afford the journey because they sold assets, 41 percent also named saving as one of their source as well as people borrowing money from friends/family at home (29%), from money lenders (8%) and from family/friends in Europe (5%).



Respondents were also asked if they arranged other preparation before they left Iraq (next to coming up with the money and finding and a facilitator). Data shows that 58 percent of the migrants obtained an original passport before they migrated. 36 percent however also reported that they did not make additional preparations. Overall it took the majority of migrants (52%) less than a month to prepare the migration journey, around 32 percent took between one and two months, another 8 percent indicated it took them between three and four months until they had everything in order and for 7 percent it took 5 months or longer.

**PERCEPTIONS TOWARDS EUROPE**

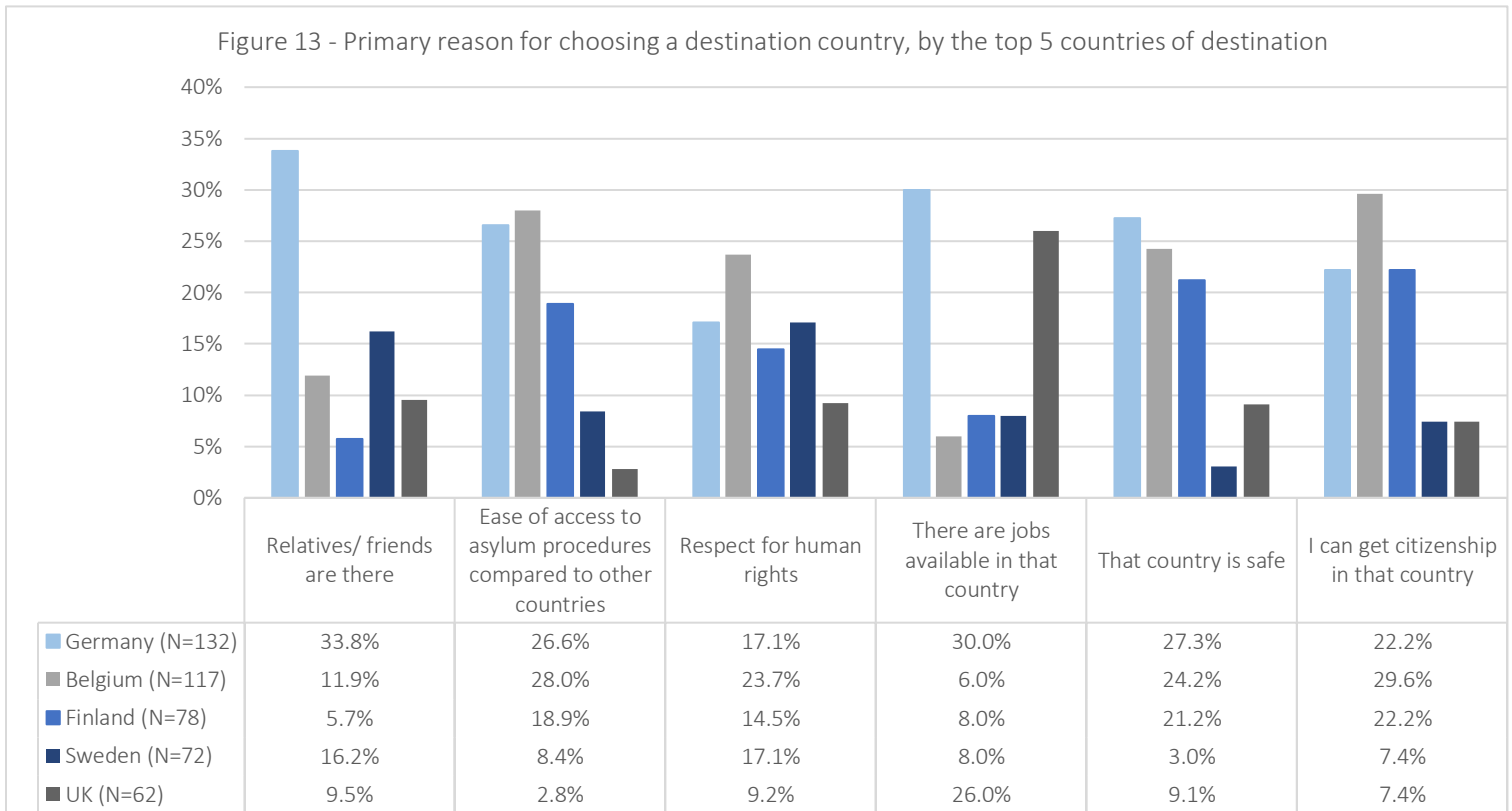
The survey included several questions about migrants’ perceptions of Europe before they left Iraq. The respondents were asked about their intended destination country and why they had chosen that country in particular. The top five destination countries were Germany (25.5%), Belgium (17%), Finland (11.5), Sweden (11%) as well as the UK (9%).

*Table 1: Intended Country of Destination*

Intended Destination	Total	Percent
<i>Germany</i>	172	25.5%
<i>Belgium</i>	117	17.3%
<i>Finland</i>	78	11.6%
<i>Sweden</i>	72	10.7%
<i>UK</i>	62	9.2%
<i>I do not know, I just want to reach Europe</i>	45	6.8%
<i>Norway</i>	33	4.9%
<i>Netherlands</i>	27	4%
<i>Switzerland</i>	24	3.5%
<i>Austria</i>	17	2.5%
<i>France</i>	6	1%
<i>Other</i>	19	3%

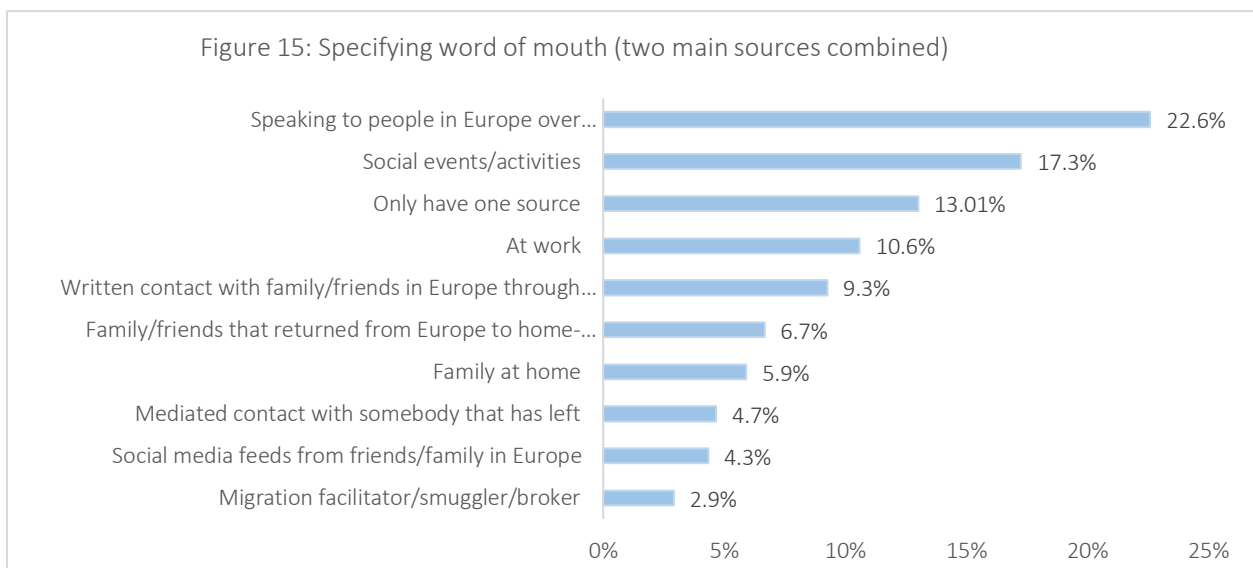
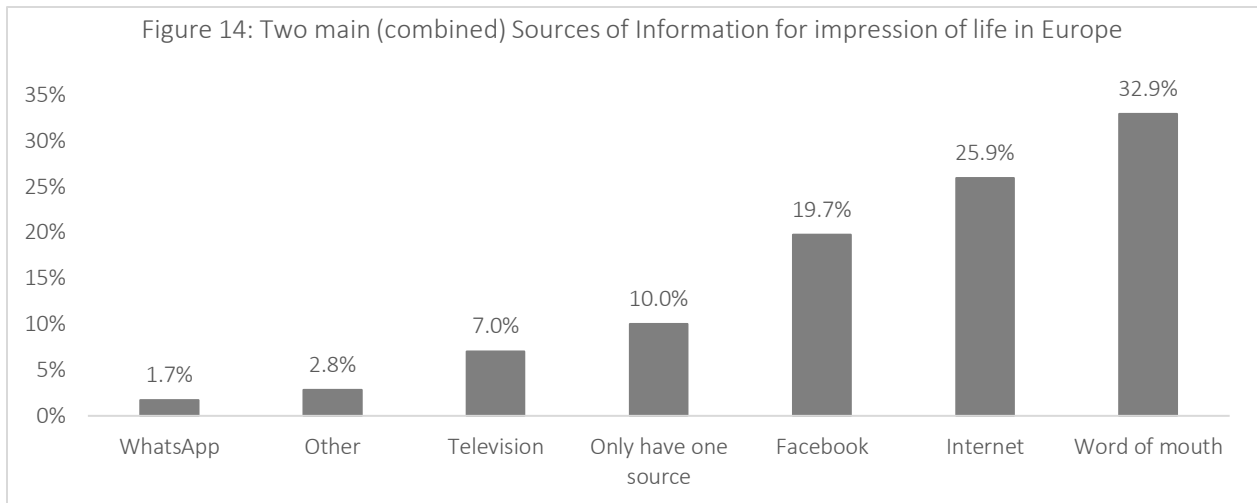
In order to understand why some countries are more popular than others, the respondents were asked to give the two main reasons for choosing a certain country. The largest share (31%) indicated they wanted to go to their intended country of destination because they had relatives and/or friends in that country. The second most prominent reason given was the ease of access to the asylum procedure in that particular country (21%). Other reasons named were the respect for human rights (11%), the availability of jobs in that country (8%) as well as the safety standards prevailing in the country (5%). Germany, the main destination country named by respondents, is particularly associated with the presence of friends/relatives as well as the availability of jobs, while most of the respondents who indicated the wish to go to Belgium gave the ease of access to the asylum procedure as well as the access to citizenship as the main reasons

for choosing that country. Access to citizenship and the strong safety standards were the primary reasons given by respondents who has chosen Finland as the country of destination.



Around 70 percent of the respondents indicated that their initial intended destination country was also the country from which they had returned. For the remaining 30 percent, the majority had changed plans and were unable to reach the intended country of destination, either because they could not afford the high travel costs, they had been caught or detained in another country or because it had become physically impossible to reach the chosen country (most often mentioned for Germany and the UK).

In order to understand migrants' perceptions in its full extent, respondents were asked about the source of information from which they formed their impression of Europe. Figure 14 shows that similar to the sources on which respondents based their decision to migrate, word of mouth seems to be most common (33%) followed by the internet (26%). The main sources of word of mouth are outlined in figure 15

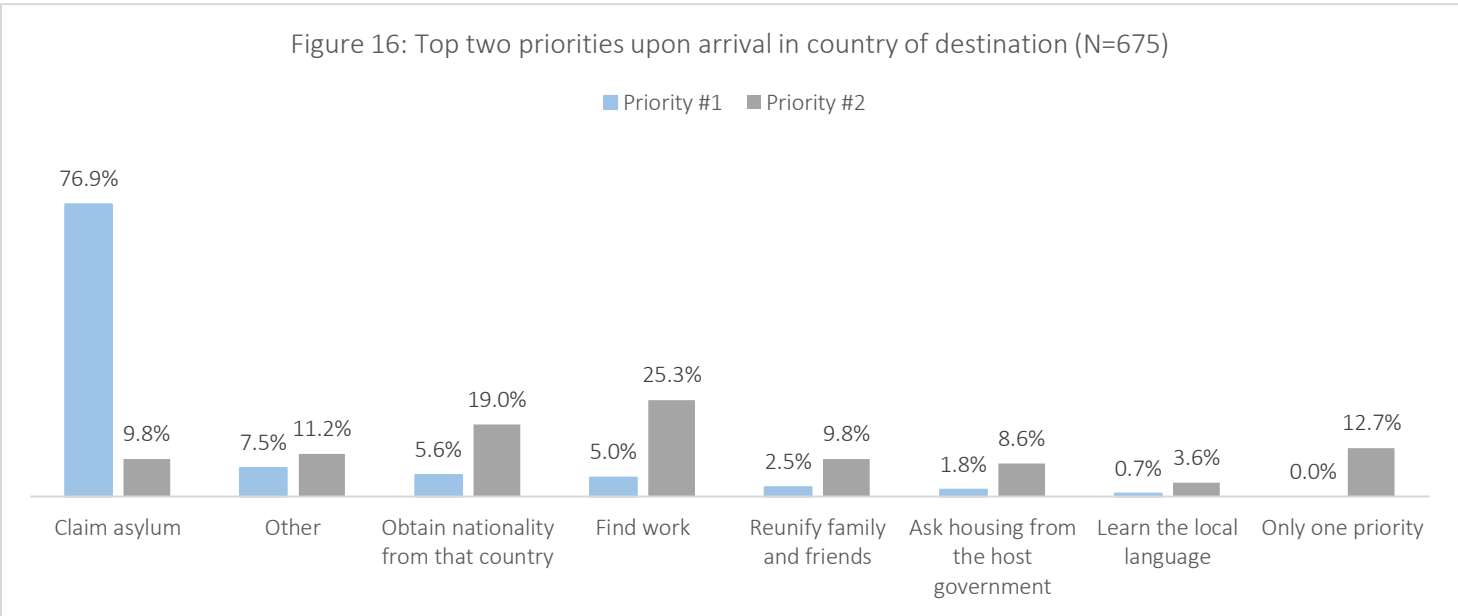


Because social media and communication by phone, WhatsApp and Skype conversations seem to play such an important role and have the most outside influence on migrants' perceptions towards Europe, the survey included several questions on smartphone usage during the migratory journey. Results show that 76 percent of respondents had a smartphone while travelling. Approximately 90 percent of respondents indicated that they used their smartphone to communicate and stay in touch with family and friends in the country of origin, while 36 percent used it to communicate with friends and family in the destination country or Europe in general. Migrants also used smartphones to gather information on the migration journey (11%) or to communicate with intermediaries and co-travelers (13%).

A range of different apps used during the journey were named by respondents. The main apps used were Viber (75%), Facebook (57%), WhatsApp (36%) as well as Google Maps (10%). Some migrants also mentioned an App called Imo, which is used for calls and chats.

When asked about the type of information they had collected before departure, the majority of the respondents (66%) indicated that they first informed themselves about associated costs. In terms of information of second-tier priority, the majority (53%) reported to have gathered information on migration routes. Means of transport were another topic on which respondents said they had collected information (37%).

As previously revealed, migrants make decisions based on specific expectations they have of a certain country. For that reason, respondents were asked specific questions about their expectations, more specifically about what their priorities upon arrival had been, the support they had expected from the host government, as well as the problems they expected to face in the new host community.

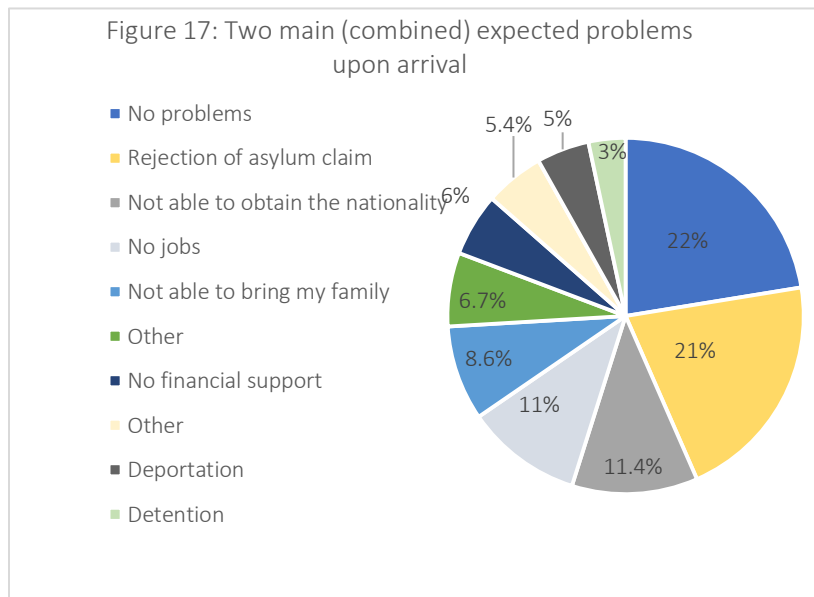


The vast majority of respondents said that their first priority had been to apply for asylum. Respondents indicated a wider array of second-tiered priorities– while claiming asylum was still a priority, migrants were also focused on finding work (25%), reunite with family (10%) as well as asking for housing (9%).

Respondents indicated that they had primarily expected assistance from the host government with the asylum application (41%), gaining access to citizenship (16%), and obtaining free housing (10%). Another 16 percent reported that they did not have any expectations with regards to support from the host government. Respondents were also asked whether their expectations had been met. Results show that the biggest discrepancy relates to the reception of the nationality of the country: 84 percent indicated that they were not granted any support in that respect. In addition, 77 percent of respondents who had expected support to obtain refugee status said they had not received support.



The largest number of respondents (22%) reported that they had not thought they would face any problems in the host community. The primary problems which migrants had expected to face were the rejection of their asylum claim (21%), the inability to obtain the nationality of the host country (11%), and the inability to find employment (11%).



As highlighted throughout the study, many respondents faced problems and encountered challenges- not only en route, but also in the country of destination: expectations remained for many unfulfilled, support was not always provided and migrants were sometimes not able to reach the intended destination country. Nevertheless, when asked if they would advise friends or family members to migrate, more than half of respondents (57%) reported that they would indeed advise others to migrate. When asked for the reasons why they would advise others to migrate, the majority of returnees indicated that they did not see a future in Iraq (73%). A large fraction of returnees mentioned the better standards in Europe, such as European welfare systems (43%), the protection of human rights (35%), the relative safety (30%) as well as the opportunity to get better jobs (12%) as reasons to advise others to go to Europe. Those 43 percent that would not advise others to leave Iraq mainly cited reasons such as the route being too dangerous (61%), life in Europe not meeting expectations (39%), facing too many difficulties along the way (29%) as well as it being too difficult to obtain a legal status in European countries (15%).

Because the asylum procedures play such an important role in the priorities and expectations of migrants, interviewees were asked whether they knew what an asylum procedure was, and to describe the procedure if they did. Only 12.5 percent of the sample population reported knowing what an asylum procedure was. Many of the respondents who indicated knowing what an asylum procedure was showed a general understanding of the procedure. Several respondents correctly described the process involving several steps, such as: surrendering to the authorities, registration with the immigration department, meeting with the relevant committees, going to a medical examination, interviews with the police and the immigration services, and waiting for a response to the asylum claim. Some also noted that the asylum procedure entailed being provided with accommodation and a monthly salary.

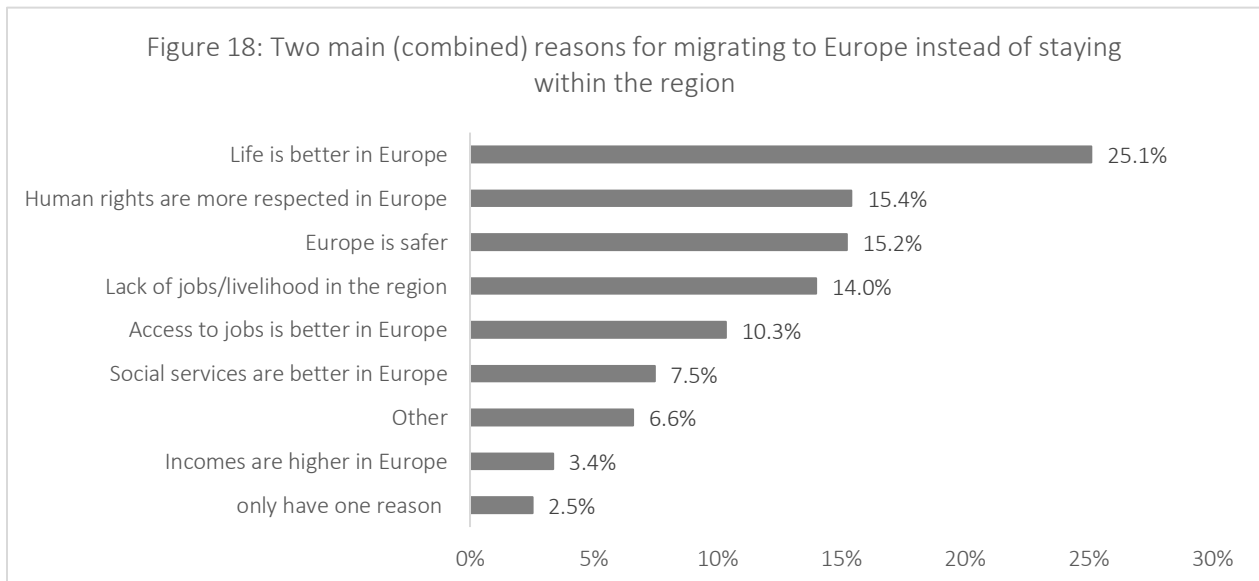
*“Go to the immigration office to seek asylum and then stay at Camp until interviewing and accepting the asylum application” (Iraqi returnee)*

*“An interview shows the causes of migration and the problems I have experienced in my addition to threats that I cannot stay in because of them” (Iraqi returnee)*

*“This is done through interviews in the European country in which they ask about the circumstances that led you to emigrate and after convincing them of all the circumstances and difficulties I experienced” (Iraqi returnee)*

## MIGRATION OPTIONS AND CHOICES

To understand why migrants decide to leave for Europe instead of migrating within the region and shed light on certain decisions made by migrants (such as their decision to migrate in regular or irregular fashion), the survey included questions on what options were available to migrants in the region. These questions, when combined with questions on migrants’ perceptions of Europe and expectations before migration, provide a comprehensive picture of the migration process.



Respondents provided multiple reasons for migrating to Europe, rather than one single motive. “Life is better in Europe” were mentioned by the largest share of respondents (25%), followed by the reason of

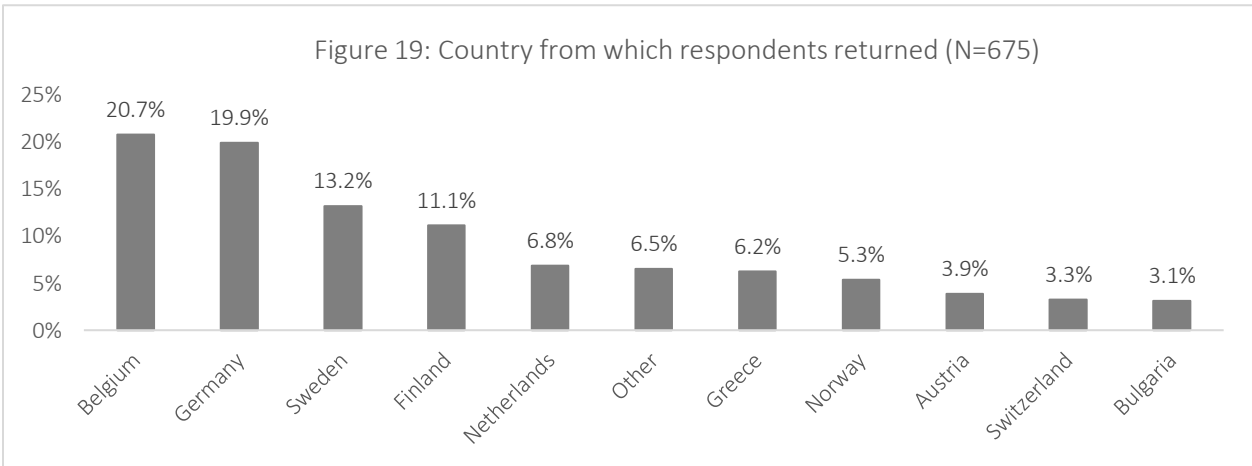
Europe being safer (15%) and the greater respect for human rights (15%). The lack of livelihood or jobs in the region, named by 14 percent of respondents was another important factor behind the decision to migrate to Europe.

When asked if they would have stayed in the region had they had access to equal work opportunities, 50 percent of respondents answered that they would have remained in the region. Similarly, 42 percent of the respondents indicated that they would have stayed in the region if they had had equal opportunities to study in the region as found in Europe.

Only 21 percent of the sample indicated that they knew about legal channels for migration before they left Iraq. The most well-known channels (multiple answers possible) were applying for asylum (84%), obtaining a Schengen visa (16%), and acquiring a residence permit through family reunification (15%).

## RETURN

The largest share of the respondents returned to Iraq from Belgium (21%), followed by Germany (20%), Sweden (13%) and Finland (11%). Interestingly, Germany, Belgium, Sweden and Finland were all top countries of intended destination as well as the main countries from which respondents returned. In contrast, only 1.5 percent of respondents said they had returned from the United Kingdom, despite it being a major country of intended destination (mentioned by 10% of interviewees).



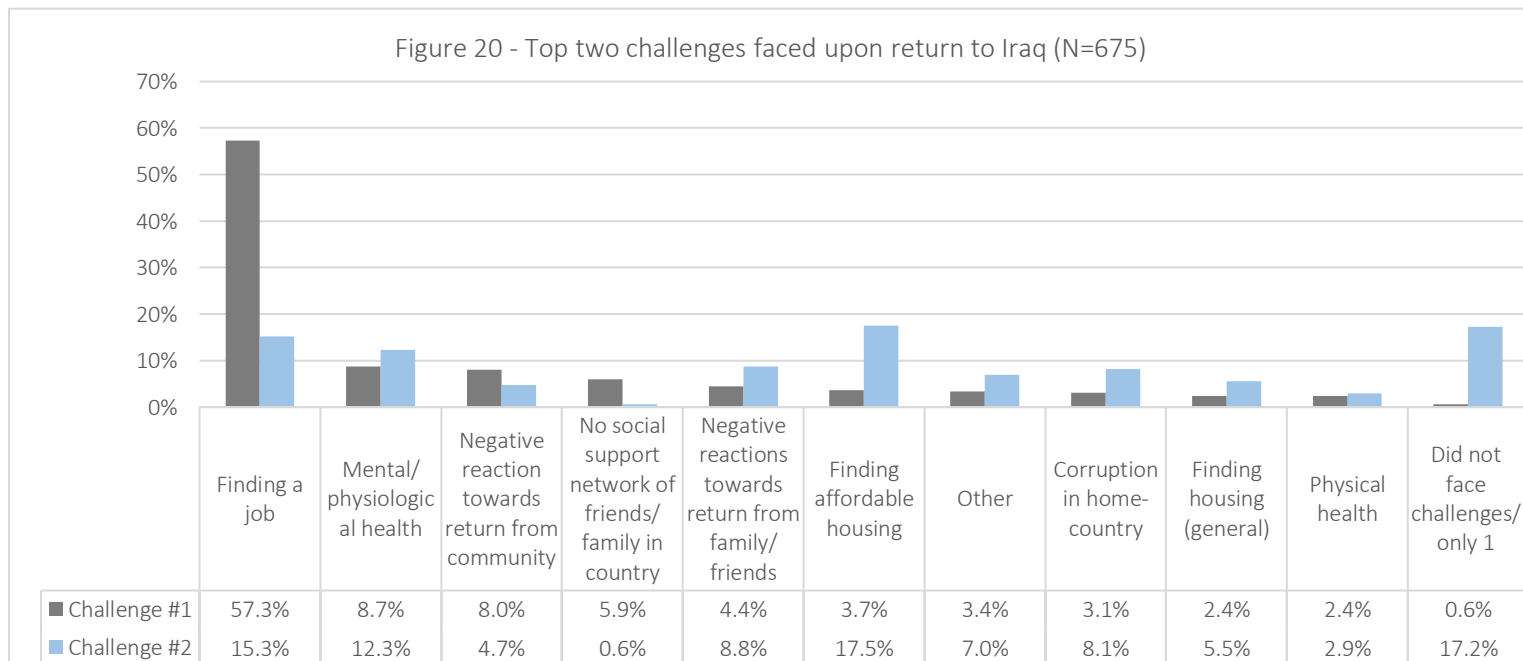
While the majority of respondents returned with IOM (64%), a relatively large share (26%) also arranged for their own return. The remaining 10 percent either returned through a different organization (NGO) or

through the government of the host country (either forced or voluntary return). The majority of respondents returned in 2016 (63%).

When asked about the reasons for returning, the majority was not able to pin point one particular reason but rather named multiple ones. Many respondents indicated that they were simply tired of waiting (42%), while others said that their family had wanted them to come home (38%). Twenty-six percent of respondents said they returned following the rejection of their asylum application, and 9.5 percent mentioned the lack of job opportunities in Europe as the reason for return.

Migrants are known to face challenges upon their return to their home country. Some returnees lived outside their country of origin for a long time before coming back, and situations or circumstances at home might have changed, or migrants' views and perceptions might have shifted in the course of the journey. Respondents were therefore asked about the two main challenges they had to face when returning home. The overwhelming primary challenge faced by returnees was finding a job or income generating activity (57%). Respondents indicated a more evenly balanced array of second-tiered primary challenges faced- while employment remained the primary challenge, migrants were also faced with other obstacles, such as finding affordable housing (17.5%), mental and psychological issues (12%) as well as facing negative reactions from the friends and family back home in Iraq (9%).

Figure 20 - Top two challenges faced upon return to Iraq (N=675)



The returnee population was also asked if they would consider migrating again. Twenty percent said they would not migrate again, while 47 percent indicated their willingness to migrate, however, only through legal channels. Twenty-seven percent of the sample said that they would be ready to migrate, whether regularly or irregularly, and 6 percent specifically stated they would only migrate in an irregular manner. The presence of close family members in Europe does not seem to have an influence on the incentive to migrate another time to Europe.

## CONCLUSION

### SUMMARY

The survey conducted with Iraqi nationals who have returned to their country of origin after migrating to Europe has shown that the sample size predominately consists of men between the age of 18 and 45 years. More than half of the respondents has completed either secondary education, vocational training or university-level education. The majority of respondents left Iraq in or before 2015, and the largest share returned to Iraq during the course of 2016. Respondents mentioned a variety of reasons for their return, the most frequently cited being the lassitude from the wait, the respondents' families wishing them to return, and the rejection of the asylum application. The main countries from which respondents returned were Belgium, Germany, Sweden and Finland. Although the UK was one of the favored intended destination countries of migrants, only few returned from the UK. The main challenge upon return noted by respondents were the difficulties faced in finding a job or income generating activity.

In terms of personal drivers and the decision-making process of Iraqi migrants, the analysis has shown that for the majority of the respondents, the main challenge at the personal, household as well as community levels were all related to security threats and the lack of sufficient income and jobs. Financial problems, the absence of rule of law as well as health-related issues were other important challenges faced by migrants. Transiting through a multitude of countries and changing smugglers can enhance the vulnerabilities of migrants along the route. Indeed, three quarters of respondents reported having faced some problem during their migratory journey. The most common problems encountered by respondents were hunger and thirst, problems at sea, as well as being robbed and not finding shelter/a place to sleep.

Intermediaries play a vital part in the migration journey: almost all of the returnees used an intermediary to reach Europe. On average, a migrant used between 2 and 3 smugglers. The average cost to reach Europe appeared to be between USD 5,000 and 5,500. The largest share of the sample had either paid the money up front before leaving Iraq or had paid through a third party. In order to finance the journey, many migrants sold assets, saved money beforehand or borrowed money from family and friends at home.

The choice of a particular country of intended destination largely depended on the presence of family/friends in that country as well as the perceived ease of access to the asylum procedure. In addition, answers to questions on information gathering show that contact with people through apps and social media was crucial for both the decision-making process as well as migrants' perceptions towards Europe.

Results from the survey also showed that many people were misinformed about the asylum process in European countries. The large majority of respondents indicated that getting asylum had been a priority once they arrived in the destination country and that they had expected the governments of the host countries to support them with their claim. However, very few respondents said that they had actually received support with their asylum application. There also appears to be a discrepancy between expectations and reality in terms of the assistance provided by the host government to obtain the nationality of the host country, housing, or work.

Understanding the options open to migrants in their own region and as well as their decision to choose one destination over another is crucial to understanding migration patterns to Europe. The primary motives of Iraqi returnees for migrating to Europe rather than moving within the region were the better living standards in Europe as well as the respect for human rights and the greater safety standards. Roughly half of the sample did indicate, however, that they would have considered staying in the region if equivalent work or study opportunities had been available to them.

## **IMMEDIATE NEEDS AND VULNERABILITIES**

From the data collection activities on Iraqi returnees it became clear that Iraqi migrants face immediate needs and challenges prior to departure, en route as well as in the destination country.

While the literature suggests that migrants are aware of potential risks, this study has demonstrated that many (potential) migrants also often believe they will not be faced with potential risks and challenges en route to Europe. Yet three quarters of respondents faced at least one problem along the route. Nevertheless, the problems faced by Iraqi migrants could have potentially been avoided had they been

informed about where to access basic necessities such as food, shelter and legal assistance, both en route and in the destination country. In particular, referral mechanisms appear to be largely missing at many transit points on the migration route to Europe.

Access to information could be drastically improved. Indeed, migrants often receive ill-advised information about their chances to obtain legal status, find work, and gain access to social services in Europe. The survey showed that there is a significant gap between migrants' expectations of the support they would receive from host governments in European countries and the services that governments are actually able to provide to migrants. Furthermore, only a small share of the respondents knew about safe and legal channels for migration to Europe. Migrants should be better informed, both in their home country as well as in transit countries, about potential destination countries in the EU, and what services and rights they will be entitled to in these countries. Systematic dissemination of information and awareness raising on the Dublin and Schengen systems and on the procedures to receive legal documentation could be enhanced to increase migrants understanding of different legal migration options and asylum procedures in Europe.

In addition, the study brought to light the importance of social media and mobile apps in the decision-making process and the shaping of perceptions towards and expectations of life in Europe. Studies focusing on means of communication in the migration context should recognize the role played by apps and social media, and information campaigns should make use of mobile apps and social media to effectively communicate with and disseminate information among migrants.