



International Organization for Migration (IOM)
The UN Migration Agency

ENABLING A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF MIGRATION FLOWS (AND ITS ROOT-CAUSES) FROM IRAQ TOWARDS EUROPE

FINAL REPORT

DISPLACEMENT TRACKING MATRIX (DTM)

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FINAL REPORT: ENABLING A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF MIGRATION FLOWS (AND ITS ROOT-CAUSES) FROM IRAQ TOWARDS EUROPE.

This 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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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AVR	Assisted Voluntary Return
AVRR	Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration
BAMF	Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge Federal Office for Migration and Refugees
DTM	<i>Displacement Tracking Matrix</i>
EU	<i>European Union</i>
EUR	<i>Euro (€)</i>
FMS	<i>Flow Monitoring Surveys</i>
IDP	<i>Internally Displaced Person</i>
IOM	<i>International Organization for Migration</i>
ISIL	Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant
KRI	<i>Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI)</i>
MMP	<i>Mixed Migration Platform</i>
NGO	<i>Non-Governmental Organisation</i>
TIP	<i>Trafficking in Persons</i>
UN DESA	United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UK	United Kingdom
US	United States
USD	United States Dollars (\$)
USDS	United States Department of State (DoS)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents the main findings extrapolated from the analysis of data relating to the characteristics and experiences of Iraqi migrants in, on their way to, or upon return from Europe. The data was collected within the framework of IOM's Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM). Specifically, the present analysis focused on six thematic areas: (1) socio-demographic profiles of migrants; (2) migration drivers and decision-making; (3) migrant vulnerabilities in origin, transit, and destination countries; (4) the role of intermediaries; (5) migrants' perceptions of Europe; as well as (6) migrants' choices and options. These thematic areas were investigated at different stages of the migration journey of Iraqi migrants and in different country contexts: in transit countries (Greece and Bulgaria), in a destination country (the Netherlands), and in Iraq, the country of return. To delve deeper into the thematic areas and to respond more comprehensively to this report's research questions, the data analysis was, where possible, complemented with a review of the existing literature on migration from Iraq to Europe.

THEMATIC AREA I – MIGRATION PROFILE

Throughout the different migration phases, a large proportion of the Iraqi respondents were male. The proportion of males was highest amongst the returnees (92.3%) and lowest amongst respondents in the Netherlands (69.7%). In transit,¹ respondents were also most commonly male, though relatively more often in Greece (81.5%) than in Bulgaria (70.5%). Most of the Iraqi respondents throughout the different migration stages were single, without children, and between the ages of 30 and 36 years. With regards to the socio-demographic profiles of Iraqi migrants, it can be observed that Iraqi migrants transiting in Greece and Bulgaria are the youngest (average age of 30 years), while respondents in the Netherlands are significantly older (average age of 36 years). Respondents in Greece were least likely to be single (24.8%)², while respondents in Bulgaria most likely to be single (46.1%).

Most respondents had obtained some form of basic education (mostly primary or secondary education) or, to a lesser extent, higher education. Iraqi migrants in transit are also significantly less likely to have an education level compared to their counterparts in other stages of the migration journey. Of those migrants without education, respondents in Greece were still able to read and write while those in the other stages (in the Netherlands, Bulgaria and returnees) of migration were not. In comparison to respondents in other phases of the migration journey, Iraqi returnees have the lowest proportion of respondents without an education (4.4%).

Respondents in Bulgaria and upon return in Iraq were least likely to have children, while respondents in Greece were most likely to have children. This could be attributed to changing marital status during the journey. The majority of the respondents that reported to have children, reported that their children were with them in the current location, including in transit. Respondents in the Netherlands and Greece were most likely to be heads of household (even if their families may not necessarily be with them); ; this

¹ Transit in this report refers to Iraqi national en route to Europe regardless of their reasons for migration.

² When survey questions allowed for only one response, percentages are expressed as a proportion of the respondents for the question. It should be noted that, throughout this report, percentages are expressed as a proportion of 'all answers given' when the survey question allowed for more than a single answer (e.g. two or multiple answers). In some cases, total percentages might exceed 100 per cent.

aligns with their marital status (generally in a relationship) and age (36 years) too. Overall, Iraqi transit migrants are less likely to be household heads in comparison with migrants in other parts of the migration journey.

Transit respondents have similarly sized households³, which generally comprise of six to seven household members. In comparison with migrants in other parts of the migration journey, there is statistically significant evidence that transit migrants have the largest household size under the CMFS sample. Household sizes of Iraqi migrants in the Netherlands are observed to be significantly smaller than all other phases of the migration journey (transit – destination – return) under this study.

Iraqi respondents started their migration journey across varying time periods. For example, those in transit reported to have left Iraq in 2017 whereas returnees and Iraqis in the Netherlands generally left between July and December of 2015. Returnees frequently reported returning home in 2015 and 2016, considering when they left Iraq, it seems that returnees did not stay for long in Europe. Many Iraqi returnees returned from Belgium (20.7%), Germany (19.9%) and Sweden (13%). In 64 per cent of cases, these returns were made with the help of IOM.⁴

THEMATIC AREA 2 – MIGRATION DRIVERS AND DECISION-MAKING

During the six months prior to departure to Europe, most of the Iraqi respondents throughout the migration phases (transit – destination – return) indicated to face challenges at the personal, household, and community levels. In general, a mix of insecurity and economic instability were most common reasons for migration. Reports of these challenges were highest amongst respondents in Bulgaria. This study found that the key challenges faced for most Iraqi respondents were predominantly security issues at the personal, household and community level. Conversely, returnees were least likely to experience challenges at the three different levels prior to migration. For returnees, the lack of economic opportunities was more challenging than issues of insecurity prior to migration. This also runs parallel with perception of fewer challenges at the individual, household and community level. In terms of triggers for initial migration, Iraqis in the Netherlands cited security incidents, while returnees cited economic reasons.

With regards to employment status in the six months prior to their migration to Europe, the respondents across the different migration stages tended to be seeking employment opportunities. Average personal income before migration was highest amongst respondents in Greece (USD 1,111.58) and lowest amongst returnees (USD 452.50). Respondents in Bulgaria were most likely to report that their personal average income was not sufficient to meet their needs (75.9%) prior to migration. On the other hand, Iraqis in the Netherlands were most likely to report that prior to migration their income had been sufficient for supporting their family too (69.2%).

This study found that most respondents had not experienced internal displacement or international migration previously. This challenges the assumption that migrants with previous migration experience are more likely to migrate internationally. However, this study finds that prior migration experience is not

³ Household: Within this study the term 'household' refers to a group of family members that live in the same house and share a meal on a daily basis.

⁴ This may also be selection bias, if the returnees were identified by IOM it is more likely to have returned through IOM.

necessary as individuals facing security-related challenges at different levels (micro, meso and macro) migrate as a coping strategy to ensure their survival and livelihood. Nonetheless, it is worth highlighting that those reported to have internationally migrated before, mainly reported to have migrated within the region (Middle East).

In general, many respondents reported to have existing networks of family and friends in Europe prior to their migration. However, this study found that transit migrants in Greece and Bulgaria have greater access to transnational networks than respondents in the Netherlands and returnees.

Although Iraqi respondents generally reported to make their migration decision independently, they still discussed the decision with family members (primarily in Iraq). In some cases, the migration decision was made by the spouse. This could underline how migration may be viewed as a household strategy. The main sources of information that influenced migration decision varied depending on the migration phase. Nonetheless, among Iraqis in all stages of their migration journey, word of mouth is the main information source upon which respondents based their decision.

THEMATIC AREA 3 – CHALLENGES AND RELATED VULNERABILITIES

Some of the problems experienced by Iraqi migrants en route to Europe included hunger and thirst, detention⁵, biometric registration⁶ and problems at sea. Iraqi returnees were significantly more likely to report having faced problems during their migration journey (81.8%) in comparison to Iraqis in the Netherlands (43.6%). Iraqi return migration could possibly also be linked to the high number of problems experienced on the migration route. This also goes hand in hand with many other factors such as the situation in the country of origin, policies in the countries of final destination, asylum recognition rates, experience of other migrants etc. For Iraqis in Greece, the most common problems for onward journeys were financial and regulatory impediments whereas respondents in Bulgaria primarily expected to face detention and deportation. In terms of the relationship between sex and migration journeys, female Iraqi respondents in transit in Bulgaria and Greece were more likely than their male counterparts to experience problems en route. Conversely, male respondents in the Netherlands and male returnees were more likely to experience problems than their female counterparts. Males were also more likely to travel alone than females, especially in the case of returnees and respondents in the Netherlands.

Different ways and means of travelling (e.g. alone, with friends, with family members) entail different vulnerabilities. Under this study, males were more likely than females to travel alone, particularly those respondents that were returnees or in the destination country.

The use of smartphones during the journey is also considered to be an important tool that migrants can use to gather information about the potential risks and challenges associated with certain migration routes. Smartphone use along the journey was high amongst Iraqi respondents in all stages of their

⁵ Detention by official authorities is legitimate part of the migration management. From the migrants' perspective, detention may be the deprivation of liberty based on their migration status and without committing any crime as such.

⁶ The collection of biometric information and registration is part of the Dublin Agreement whereby biometric information is collected at the first port of entry. However, from the perspective of Iraqi migrants it may be viewed as coercive because Iraqi migrants are aware that registering their biometric information in transit, (but technically their first port of entry to Europe) may hinder the asylum processes in their preferred destination country. Hence, from the migrants' perspective it was reported as a problem encountered in the journey.

migration journey. Among transit migrants, smartphones were mainly used to communicate with contacts in Europe or to stay in contact with home. Respondents in the Netherlands and returnees primarily communicated with contacts at home. This also aligns with the findings that, prior to their migration, returnees had less established transnational networks (e.g. friends and family) in Europe than their Iraqi counterparts in transit. The main smartphone apps used by respondents were diverse, especially in transit, with Viber being most often used throughout the different migration phases.

THEMATIC AREA 4 – THE ROLE OF INTERMEDIARIES

Comparing the role of intermediaries⁷ in the migration journeys, the use of a migration facilitator⁸ was significantly less common amongst Iraqi respondents in the Netherlands than amongst returnees. The use of a migration facilitator was especially common amongst Iraqi respondents in Bulgaria (99.6%), while respondents in Greece (77.6%) reported the lowest use of migration facilitators. An average of one to three migration facilitators had been used by Iraqis across the different migration stages, with numbers being the lowest among respondents in Bulgaria (approximately one facilitator) and highest amongst those in the Netherlands (approximately three facilitators).

Respondents encountered migration facilitators mostly through their network of family (either in Iraq or in Europe) or through people with whom they travelled. To finance their journeys, many respondents paid their migration facilitator in full prior to their migration journey. For this, they used their savings, borrowed money from their family, or sold their assets (e.g. cars and furniture).

Respondents relied on different sources of information to obtain information on costs, routes, transportation and job markets. In this regard, a great variance in the actual and expected costs of migration is found across the different stages (from USD 1,947.75 up to USD 13,997.66). Furthermore, most respondents reported not making any other preparations, while some obtained an Iraqi passport. The time needed to prepare for the migration varied, some respondents needed less than one month, while respondents in Bulgaria needed more than six months (54.6%).

THEMATIC AREA 5 – MIGRANT PERCEPTIONS OF EUROPE

Throughout the different migration stages, some Iraqi respondents did not have a specific intended destination country but wanted to reach Europe more generally. For the ones that had a specific intended destination country, the main reasons for choosing it included having existing network of relatives and friends in that specific country and safety-related reasons (e.g. security, respect for human rights). This reflects the insecurity-driven migration of Iraqis and the importance of existing transnational social networks. Iraqi respondents primarily relied on word of mouth, in addition to the Internet to inform

⁷ Intermediary: Within this study the term ‘intermediary’ refers to a person that makes arrangements between people that do not deal with each other directly.

⁸ Migration facilitator: Within this study the term ‘migration facilitator’ refers to anyone that is involved in the facilitation of migration services (irregular and regular) via air, land or sea routes in exchange for money. Those services can reach from consultative services for visa application and acquiring (fraudulent) documents, to transportation arrangement, to the facilitation of border crossings. The term used does not intend to neglect the differences in services and often used terms for those persons providing the migration services.

migration decisions. Word of mouth mainly entailed verbal contact (via phone, Viber, Facebook, and/or Skype) with friends and family in Europe.

Most respondents in the other migration stages, discourage migration to Europe based on the difficult and dangerous nature of the migration journey. Among the returnees the main reasons to discourage migration are linked to the gap between expectations and reality of life in Europe and economic reasons. As an exception, Iraqi respondents in Bulgaria – may advise others to migrate (63.0%) based on security-related factors such as perceptions of safety and respect for human rights in Europe. This finding correlates to security related reasons for migration cited by respondents. Similarly, returnees, may be likely to advise others to migrate because of poor security and economic conditions at home.

This study found that most Iraqi respondents cited asylum as their first priority upon arrival to Europe. From the migrant perspective, receiving refugee status is the main form of support expected from the host government, while the greatest problem expected upon arrival in Europe was rejection of the asylum claim and deportation. Contrary to these expectations, respondents reported not receiving their expected forms of support from the host government. Many Iraqi respondents reported not knowing what an asylum procedure entails. This was reported to be the highest amongst those in Greece (22.4%) and lowest amongst respondents in Bulgaria (4.2%). The analysis of the qualitative follow-up question on the description of asylum procedure incorporated in this study shows that there is still a great lack of information as migrants tended to provide a vague description of the asylum procedure. Migrants also noted frustration with lengthy and slow asylum procedures.

THEMATIC AREA 6 – MIGRANT CHOICES AND OPTIONS

Nearly half of the returnees (49.8%) reported that they would not have migrated to Europe if they had been offered a job in their region. This aligns with the lack of economic opportunities, perceived safety and improved human rights as reasons for choosing migration to Europe over regional migration.

In terms of information on legal options for migration to Europe, Iraqi migrants in the Netherlands (76.9%) were significantly more likely than migrants in the returnee (21.5%) and transit phases (23.4% Bulgaria, 40.2% Greece) to be aware of legal options. Of those respondents, Iraqis in transit were generally aware of the Schengen and tourist visas, while those in the Netherlands and upon return were most familiar with claiming asylum. In terms of expected forms of support in Europe, respondents mainly expected to obtain legal permission to stay in Europe by claiming asylum. Even though respondents were relatively unaware of the exact asylum procedure, Iraqi respondents were aware of the importance of asylum in gaining legal status in Europe.

Many Iraqi returnees reported to return because of the long asylum process or for family reasons back home. The main challenges they experienced when returning to Iraq were finding a job or income-generating activity and affordable housing. Notably, most returnees that expressed an interest to migrate to Europe again, cited the legal/regular route as the means for this choice.

I. INTRODUCTION

I.1 PROBLEM STATEMENT, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND OBJECTIVES

Migration is a historical phenomenon that continues to shape Europe in different ways. Legal protection, employment and education are some reasons for migration in recent decades. The International Organization for Migration's (IOM) Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) is a system to track and monitor displacement and population mobility. It is designed to regularly and systematically capture, process, and disseminate information to provide a better understanding of the movements and evolving needs of displaced populations. Initially conceptualized in 2004 in Iraq for the assessments of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and monitoring exercises, the DTM has been continuously refined and enhanced through years of operational experience across different countries in both conflict and natural disaster settings. It provides primary data and information on displacement and mobility on the individual, household, community, national, and regional level. Currently, a variety of activities are implemented under DTM operations to monitor mixed-migrant and refugee flows to Europe.

To obtain a better understanding of migration flows from Iraq to Europe and the drivers of such migration movements, this project aims to answer ten research questions using data collected within the framework of the DTM. This study is based on six thematic areas identified by IOM, which also represent the core chapters of this report:

1	2	3	4	5	6
Migrant profiles (socio-demographic)	Migration drivers and decision-making	Migrant vulnerabilities in origin, transit, and destination countries	The role of intermediaries	Migrant perceptions towards Europe	Migrant choices and options

These six thematic areas serve as the framework to answer the following ten research questions, which are addressed in this report:

- **Q1.** What contextual factors on the national and regional levels drive Iraqi nationals to make the decision to migrate to Europe?
- **Q2.** What contextual factors at European level drive Iraqi nationals to make the decision to migrate to Europe?
- **Q3.** What particular individual, household, or community level “events” and circumstances trigger Iraqi nationals to make the decision to migrate to Europe?
- **Q4.** What are the socio-demographic profiles of migrants that move from Iraq to Europe?
- **Q5.** How do migrants from Iraq prepare for migration to Europe?
- **Q6.** What role do “intermediaries” play in facilitating (irregular) migration to Europe for Iraqi nationals?

- **Q7.** What challenges and vulnerabilities do Iraqi nationals face before and during migration to Europe?
- **Q8.** How do migrants from Iraq select a final destination country in Europe, what influences this decision, and why do they select “that” particular final destination country?
- **Q9.** What perceptions and/or knowledge do migrants from Iraq have on potential risks and vulnerabilities migrants could face during migration to and in Europe?
- **Q10.** What perceptions and/or knowledge do migrants from Iraq have of Europe, and what are their sources of information? What is the view of Iraqi (irregular) migrants on socio-economic opportunities in Europe and what knowledge do they have of European asylum procedures?

1.2 BACKGROUND ON MIGRATION FROM IRAQ

The Republic of Iraq has a population of 37,202,572 people within its borders and is in the Middle East, neighbouring Turkey, Syrian Arab Republic, Jordan, Islamic Republic of Iran, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia (World Bank, 2016). Over the past few decades, economic instability, internal conflicts, and war have been wrecking the human and social development of the country and its citizens. As a result, migration is key coping strategy for those in search of a better livelihood in terms of security, economic factors, and environmental degradation (Castles, de Haas & Miller, 2014). According to the Human Development Index (HDI), which accounts for the three most basic human development indicators (health, economic standards, and education), Iraq ranked 120th out of 188 countries in 2015 (UNDP, 2016).

Iraq has been affected by conflicts and violence over time. This has taken its toll on the country by transforming it from a country of immigration to a country of emigration since the 1970s (Batatu, 1978). More recently, Iraq has been struck by complex problems including civil war and insecurity that has, in some cases led to human rights violations and abuses, this is accompanied by poverty, as well as environmental degradation (Sirkeci, 2005; HRW, 2003). Between 1990 and 2002, Saddam Hussein’s regime and the First Gulf War led to approximately 1.5 million people leaving Iraq (Castles et al., 2014). The US invasion in the country, which started in 2003, triggered a second wave of forced migration that resulted in 2.2 million Iraqis fleeing the country and caused an additional estimated 2.7 million people to be internally displaced by 2007 (IOM & UNHCR, 2008).

More recent emigration from Iraq has been caused by multiple factors such as a lack of security and the threat of ISIL (Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant) insurgency, economic instability, and a lack of employment opportunities. Overall, these drivers have resulted in an international migrant stock of 353,881 (as of 2015) and a refugee population of 315,998 (as of 2016) (IOM, 2016a; World Bank, 2016). Many Iraqis have migrated to destinations such as Syrian Arab Republic, Jordan, the USA, Lebanon, and Sweden (UNDP, 2016) The continuous conflict caused by ISIL forced more than 80 per cent to opt for irregular migration to destinations such as the European Union (EU) (UNHCR, 2015). Over the past years, the EU has been assisting Iraqi nationals to return to their origin country.

1.3 METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

The methodological framework of this project is based on the collection of primary data, which provides information on migration flows towards Europe from Iraq whilst focusing on the six thematic areas

outlined above: (1) migrant profiles, (2) migration drivers and decision-making, (3) migrant vulnerabilities, (4) the role of intermediaries, (5) migrant perceptions towards Europe, and (6) migration choices and options. The data DTM collected amongst Iraqi nationals was based on three⁹ tools, each surveying a different target group; data was collected among Iraqi migrants en route to Europe (Tool 2), Iraqi migrants in their final European destination country (Tool 3), and Iraqi migrants who returned to Iraq from Europe (Tool 4). Specifically, Tool 2 covered Iraqi migrants surveyed in Greece and Bulgaria, while Iraqi migrants in the Netherlands were questioned under Tool 3. Iraqis who had returned to their origin country from Europe were included within Tool 4. Due to the nature of the target groups, respondents for these surveys were sampled using basic random sampling in combination with snowball sampling in main target locations (e.g. migrant reception centres). Samples sizes of Iraqi respondents were as follows:

- Tool 2, Bulgaria: 976 respondents
- Tool 2, Greece: 254 respondents
- Tool 3, the Netherlands: 195 respondents
- Tool 4, returnees: 675 respondents

To best identify the target population and develop a more robust interviewee-interviewer relationship, surveys of the Iraqi, the data collectors that conducted the surveys were also Iraqi nationals.

The data collection took place in the origin country (return), Iraq; in the transit countries, Bulgaria and Greece; and one main destination country, the Netherlands. The output of the data collection was mainly quantitative via surveys; however, one descriptive question (i.e. *What is an asylum procedure?*) was also included in the surveys. In this study, this question is analysed qualitatively to complement the quantitative data. The quantitative analysis within this report is based on cross tabulations and means comparison analyses (t-tests). The different phases of the migration journey – transit migration (Tool 2), destination country (Tool 3), and return migration (Tool 4) – have been analysed to observe statistical mean differences in variables of interest between the studied migration trajectories. Reported significance differences are based on independent samples t-tests; where significant outcomes are noted within the report, this indicates a significance level of $p \leq 0.10$.

In preparing this report, an extensive literature review was conducted to provide contextual information and situate the statistical analysis of the DTM data, and gain a comprehensive understanding of the migration journeys of Iraqi nationals to Europe, including their migration routes, the roles of intermediaries and the diaspora, the challenges and risks migrants face pre-migration, along the route, and in their destination and upon return, as well as the factors influencing their decision-making process.

1.3.1 Limitations

Please find below a concise list of data limitations to consider when reading this report and its findings.

- Owing to low number of female migrants, the available data exhibits a low representation of females. This is a limitation means that the findings of this report mainly provide insights into the perspective of male Iraqi migrant population.

⁹ The CMFS funded project covers Ethiopia, Nigeria, Somalia and Iraq, survey tool 1 was not used for Iraqi nationals.

- It has been observed that the populations sampled often share similar characteristics, which may be a consequence of snowball sampling. When interpreting results, it is important to recognise that the findings of this report are limited to the studied Iraqi migrants. Hence, one should be cautious when generalising about the total Iraqi migrant population.
- Sample sizes should always be considered, and observations less than 30 (N<30) are also generally indicated within the report. This is important to note as small sample sizes come with a higher margin of error and lower statistical power that makes drawing definite conclusions difficult. These findings can provide an interesting indication of observed trends within the studied population, but that these are not necessarily generalizable to the broader Iraqi migrant population.
- While the distinction for terminology for categories such as ‘migration facilitators’, ‘smugglers’ and ‘intermediaries’ are clear in the literature, respondents in this study do not distinguish between these categories. Although this study does not equate these actors, it uses the term ‘migration facilitator’ to encapsulate and present migrant perspectives.
- This report presents problems and vulnerabilities from the perspective of migrants, as a result legal and regulatory processes such as detention and biometric registration are cited as problems. It is important to note that these are the perspective of migrants.

Despite these discussed limitations and the fact that the reported findings cannot be considered representative of the total Iraqi migrant population, this report does provide key insights on migration processes of Iraqis to Europe. The findings also allow for the identification of important elements to inform policy and decision-making in Europe, Iraq, as well as in transit countries.

I.4 STRUCTURE OF THE STUDY

This study is divided into six thematic areas, each section focuses on the different parts of the migration trajectory. Thematic Area 1 provides an overview of the general migration profile of Iraqi nationals in transit in Bulgaria and Greece, Iraqi nationals in the destination country (the Netherlands), and those that have returned to their country of origin. Thematic Area 2 outlines the factors that have driven Iraqi nationals to migrate to Europe. This section identifies challenges at the individual, household, and community level and looks at the decision-making process and actors involved. Thematic Area 3 focuses on migrants' vulnerability factors in origin, transit, and destination countries. More specifically, it examines the problems, locations and associated actors. It furthermore examines the use of smartphones and if respondents travelled alone or in a group. Following that, Thematic Area 4 examines the role of intermediaries in the migration process and the preparations for undertaking the migration journey. Thematic Area 5 focuses on migrant perceptions towards Europe. This includes, among others, their impression of Europe, their intended destination country, expected support upon arrival, and the channels and sources of information. Lastly, Thematic Area 6 seeks to understand migrants' choices and reasons for migrating to Europe rather than regional migration. It also looks at migrants' legal options and how migrants (plan to) obtain permission to stay. Important findings from each thematic area is summarised at the end of the section while the conclusions combine key findings of the report.

2. THEMATIC AREA I – MIGRATION PROFILE OF IRAQ

The following section provides a demographic profile of Iraqi migrants during the three different phases of the migration journey: in transit, in the destination country, and in the country of origin upon return.

2.1 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1.1 Profile of Iraqi nationals leaving their home country

Over the past two decades, Iraq has been affected by several devastating events that have resulted in significant insecurities affecting the country causing both international migration and internal displacement. According to the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) (2015), the total international migrant stock of Iraqis was 1,479,966 as of 2015. Of these Iraqi migrants, 52 per cent (770,671) were living in developed regions, while the remaining 48 per cent (709,295) were residing in developing regions. Iraqi males made up a larger proportion (54.3%) of the international migrant stock than Iraqi females (45.6%). Table 1 illustrates the top destination countries of Iraqi migrants: Syrian Arab Republic, the USA, Sweden, Lebanon, and Germany. It should be noted that these statistics from UN DESA (2015) cover the entire Iraqi migrant population, not only asylum seekers and refugees.

Table 1: Top destination countries of Iraqi migrants, 2015

<i>Iraq</i>	
1. <i>Syrian Arab Republic</i>	<i>253,609</i>
2. <i>USA</i>	<i>175,566</i>
3. <i>Sweden</i>	<i>133,118</i>
4. <i>Lebanon</i>	<i>120,668</i>
5. <i>Germany</i>	<i>115,041</i>

Source: UN DESA, 2015.

Taking a closer look at available data on refugees, asylum seekers, and IDPs, a recent report by DTM Iraq reports that there were 2,317,698 IDPs as of February 28, 2018 (IOM DTM Iraq, 2018). It is important to contextualize these figures of internal displacement within the 2016 and 2017 efforts of the Kurdish and Iraqi militaries to push ISIL out of Mosul as well as the rest of the Nineveh governorate. These efforts contributed to both the displacement and the inability to return for a significant number of Iraqis (IDMC, 2018). This internal displacement should not be ignored in the context of this report because these IDPs are potential future refugees and irregular migrants.

Additionally, there were more than 260,000 Iraqi refugees hosted in countries in the region as of November 2017, of which almost 30,000 were hosted in camps in Hassakeh, Syrian Arab Republic (UNHCR, 2017a). More recent numbers from March 2018 indicate that the number of Iraqi refugees hosted in countries in the region had risen to 280,014 (UNHCR, 2018). Owing to the violence in Iraq over the past decade, many Iraqi refugees sought asylum and livelihood opportunities in Europe. Notably, approximately half of the refugees in the EU, Norway, and Switzerland in 2015 were from Syrian Arab Republic, Afghanistan, and Iraq alone. The number of Iraqi asylum seekers in the EU increased from 9,000 in 2013, to 15,000 in 2014, and over 127,000 in 2015 (Connor, 2016).

The majority (75%) of all Iraqi asylum applicants in Europe in 2015 were male, while only 25 per cent were female (Connor, 2016). These findings share findings with a DTM study titled *Migration Flows from Iraq to Europe* on Iraqi migrants in 2016 whereby (2016a) DTM reported 93 per cent male and 7 per cent female respondents. DTM (2016a) also reported that the median age of respondents was 28 years and the average age was 29 years, with 72 per cent of the respondents being under 30 years of age. Moreover, 66 per cent of the Iraqi migrant respondents were single, and only 32 per cent were married (IOM, 2016a).

The DTM (2016a) study further reports that 37 per cent of the respondents reported completing undergraduate education, and only 4 per cent held a postgraduate degree (IOM, 2016a). Furthermore, 29 per cent reported completing secondary/intermediate school, 18 per cent secondary/preparatory education, and 11 per cent primary school. With regards to employment status, DTM's (2017b) *Analysis: Flow Monitoring Surveys June 2017* suggests that almost half (48%) of the Iraqi respondents travelling along the Eastern Mediterranean Route were employed in Iraq before departure. In addition, 17 per cent reported being self-employed and 5 per cent were students.

Feminization of migration

According to recent reports, it has been found that, globally, almost half of all migrants are now females (UN DESA, 2016). As females are increasingly deciding to migrate, the term 'feminization of migration' exemplifies the changing role of female migrants from passive to active participants in migration practices (Kastner, 2010). Yet, the sex ratio among migrants differs across regions and countries. In the case of Iraq, Eurostat (2017) data on asylum applications by Iraqi migrant females in the EU countries in 2016, shows that females accounted for only 12 per cent of all applications. This share is relatively low to the share of females among the total number of asylum applications in EU countries – 32 per cent of the total – in the same year (Eurostat, 2017). Notably, while it is still small, the proportion of female Iraqi asylum applicants increased by 47 per cent between 2015 and the period from January to October of 2016 (MMP, 2016).

In addition to the increase in intentional and autonomous migration of females, IOM (2017a) report suggests that certain female-specific forms of migration also continue to exist. Moreover, patriarchal relations, or the so-called 'migration culture', also limit the opportunities for women and girls to migrate in contrast to men (Majidi, 2016; MMP, 2016; RMMS, 2016).

2.1.2 Profile of Iraqi nationals in transit

As part of DTM's (2017b) *Analysis: Flow Monitoring Surveys June 2017*, between February and June of 2017, 5,329 interviews were conducted with migrants in six transit countries: Italy, Greece, Bulgaria, Hungary, Serbia, and the former North Macedonia. These surveys revealed that, of a total sub-sample of 1,374 respondents, Iraqis (8%) are one of the top five nationalities travelling along the Eastern Mediterranean Route, along with Afghans (29%), Pakistanis (20%), Syrians (18%), and Iranians (5%) (IOM, 2017b). Cummings, Pacitto, Lauro, and Foresti (2015) also suggest that, in the first half of 2015, the Eastern Mediterranean Route became the most frequented maritime route for migration to Europe. The usage of the route by Iraqis has also increased between 2012 and 2015, with 76,878 Iraqis moving along the route in 2012, 43,002 in 2013, 77,163 in 2014, and 911,471 in 2015. These figures then dropped in 2016, with 166,857 Iraqis using the route between January and September of that year (IOM, 2016b).

For the Iraqi respondents travelling along this route, IOM FMS data (2017b) suggests that their average age was 29 and that 22 per cent were female, representing the largest share of females among the nationalities travelling along the route. Moreover, half of the Iraqis travelling along the Eastern Mediterranean Route were married, while 47 per cent were single and 3 per cent were divorced or widowed. In general, females were more likely to be married (61%) than single (31%), while males were more likely to be single (52%) than married (47%). With regards to education level, 27 per cent of the Iraqi respondents had completed primary school, another 27 per cent per cent had completed secondary-lower education, 17 per cent had completed secondary-upper education, and 6 per cent had a tertiary degree. While, 23 per cent reported not having completed any formal level of education. The data further shows that many Iraqis travelling along the Eastern Mediterranean Route tended to travel in groups with family members (60%) or with non-family members (19%).¹⁰ Only 21 per cent of the Iraqi respondents were travelling alone (IOM, 2017b).

2.1.3 Profile of Iraqi nationals in Europe

As this research focuses on migration from Iraq towards and within Europe, Eurostat’s (2017) asylum application statistics provide a general overview of the most prevalent destination countries. First, the Eurostat (2017) data reveal that a total of 131,705 Iraqi nationals applied for asylum in the EU in 2016, an increase from the 121,600 first-time asylum applications in 2015 (Eurostat, 2016). An overview of the countries of asylum applications for Iraqis in Europe is shown in Table 2. The majority (73.7%) of Iraqi asylum applicants applied for asylum in Germany. The other countries where Iraqi asylum applicants mainly applied for asylum were Bulgaria, Greece, the UK, Hungary, and Austria (Eurostat, 2017).

Table 2: Iraqi asylum applicants in Europe, 2016

Country of asylum	# of asylum applicants
Germany	97,125
Bulgaria	5,350
Greece	4,810
UK	3,780
Hungary	3,450
Austria	2,860
Other	14,330
Total	131,705

Source: Eurostat, 2017.

¹⁰ The IOM (2017b) report does not define “non-family”, so it is unclear whether non-family members include friends, fellow citizens, or individuals of other nationalities.

Moreover, the data show that the gender distribution of Iraqi asylum seekers is male dominated, with 80,090 (60.8%) of the 131,705 asylum applications in 2016 being filed by males. The remaining 50,395 (39.2%) Iraqi asylum applicants were female. In general, many of the applicants (57,840; 43.9%) were between the ages of 18 and 34 years old. In addition, 41,550 (31.5%) were under 14 years of age, 9,850 (7.48%) were between the ages of 14 and 17 years, 21,320 (16.2%) were between 35 and 64 years of age, and the remaining 1,030 (0.78%) were above 65 years old (Eurostat, 2017).

2.1.4 Profile of Iraqi nationals returning to their country of origin

In addition to increasing number of Iraqis leaving their country of origin, the number of Iraqi nationals returning to their country of origin is also increasing (IOM, 2016b). This is found when analysing the number of individuals who received assisted voluntary return (AVR) and reintegration assistance from IOM between 2012 and 2015. A total of 2,472 individuals received assistance in 2012. While these figures dropped to 1,930 in 2013 and 1,280 in 2014, it is reported that 3,607 returned to Iraq through IOM's AVR programme in 2015. In 2015, many beneficiaries were from Belgium (927), Austria (673), Germany (652), Finland (231), Greece (195), Norway (174), and the Netherlands (145) (IOM, 2016b).

Information is also available on the education level and source of income of Iraqi returnees. Most of the Iraqi respondents (n=50) in an MMP (2017b) study had obtained secondary education, more than 50 per cent a university degree, and less than 20 per cent had only obtained elementary education. The primary source of income for returnees prior to their migration was from a business or the sale of goods (40%). The second most common forms of income were skilled daily labour as well as a reliance on savings. Fewer returnees were dependent on formal, contracted employment, and unskilled, uncontracted daily labour for income (MMP, 2017b).

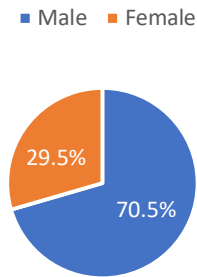
2.2 THEMATIC AREA I – DATA ANALYSIS OUTCOMES

2.2.1 Iraqi nationals in transit in Bulgaria

The majority (53.7%)¹¹ of the 976 Iraqi migrants surveyed while being in transit in Bulgaria, had been in the country for less than two months and had arrived between July and September of 2017 (62.0%). Looking at the demographic profiles of these migrants, the majority (70.5%) were male while less than a third (29.5%) were female. The average age of respondents was 30 years and, in terms of marital status, 46.1 per cent were single and 50.7 per cent in a relationship (namely married, engaged, or in a civil union); the remaining respondents were either divorced, separated, or widowed. These findings are similar to those of the IOM (2017b) DTM FMS data from Bulgaria in June 2017, which revealed a similar sex distribution and average age (29 years). In terms of marital status, the DTM FMS data also showed that 50 per cent of the respondents reported being married, while 47 per cent reported being single (IOM, 2017b). Prior to their migration to Europe, more than half (51.4%) of the Iraqi transit migrants in Bulgaria lived in Ninewa, another 15 per cent in Dahuk, and 8 per cent in Baghdad.

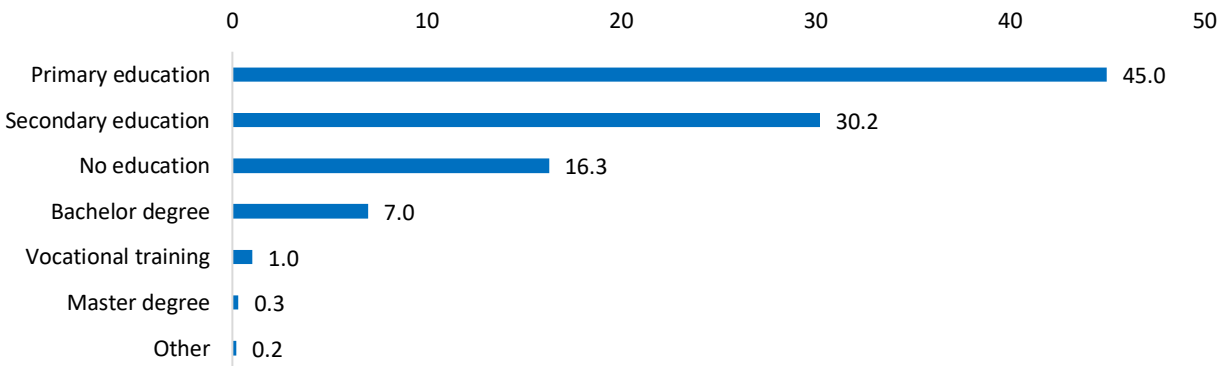
¹¹ When survey questions allowed for only one response, percentages are expressed as a proportion of the respondents for the question. It should be noted that, throughout this report, percentages are expressed as a proportion of 'all answers given' when the survey question allowed for more than a single answer (e.g. two or multiple answers). In some cases, total percentages might exceed 100 per cent.

Figure 1: Gender distribution of Iraqi respondents in Bulgaria, in per cent



With regards to education, most respondents indicated that they had attended primary (45.0%) or secondary (30.2%) school. Moreover, only 7 per cent of the respondents reported having attained a Bachelor’s degree, while less than half of one per cent (N=3) of the respondents had a Master’s degree and none had a PhD (see Figure 2). Of the 16 per cent of respondents without any education, nearly 89 per cent reported being unable to read and write.

Figure 2: Education levels of Iraqi nationals transiting in Bulgaria, in per cent



In terms of household characteristics, 27 per cent of the respondents reported being the head of a household. Though the average household consisted of approximately seven members, the Iraqi respondents in Bulgaria frequently reported not having children (50.4% of all answers given). On the other hand, among those respondents who indicated having children, the children tended to live with the respondent in Bulgaria (36.2% of all answers given), while respondents less frequently reported having children living in Iraq (4.16% of all answers given), in Europe (3.58% of all answers given), or elsewhere (5.61% of all answers given).

2.2.2 Iraqi nationals in transit in Greece

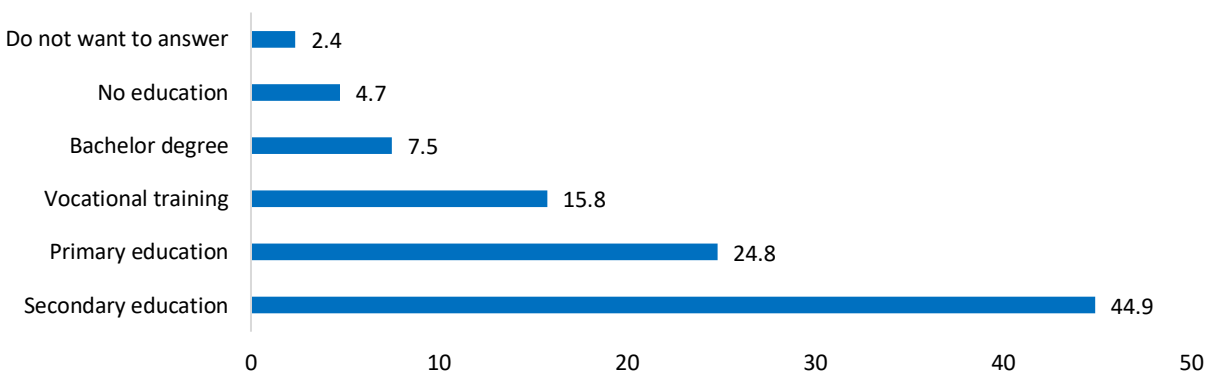
The 254 Iraqi migrants surveyed in Greece showed greater variation regarding the date they left their country of origin: 16 per cent left between July and September 2016; 14 per cent between October and December 2016; 18 per cent left between January and March 2017; and 15 per cent left in between July and September 2017. In Greece, 82 per cent of the respondents were male. As such, the

overrepresentation of males among the Iraqi migrants is also found in both Bulgaria and Greece, but relatively more females are represented among the transit migrants in Bulgaria.

The average age among the Iraqi respondents in Greece was 33 years, which makes them slightly older than those in Bulgaria. At the same time, 71 per cent of the migrants in Greece indicated being in a relationship (namely married, engaged, or in a civil union) and 25 per cent being single. Unlike migrants in Bulgaria, this difference is not notable.

Before migrating to Europe, most respondents in Greece lived in Ninewa (42.1%) as well as in Kirkuk (21.3%). With regards to education, most respondents in this study reported having either primary (24.8%) or secondary (44.9%) education. These findings are similar to those reported in the IOM FMS data (2017b). Slightly under 5 per cent (N=12) of the Iraqis in Greece reported not having any education (see Figure 3); However, of those without education, more than half (58.3%, N=7) reported still being able to read and write.

Figure 3: Education levels of Iraqi nationals transiting in Greece, in per cent



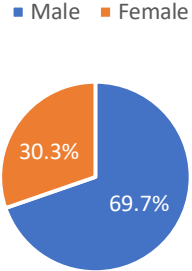
In terms of household characteristics, 63 per cent of the respondents reported being the head of a household, representing a more than two-fold increase over Iraqi respondents in Bulgaria. The average household consisted of approximately six members, and the Iraqi respondents in Greece commonly reported having children living with them (59.7% of all answers given) or not having children (29.1% of all answers given). In this regard, it should be noted that respondents transiting in Greece and Bulgaria had similarly-sized households, and that their children most commonly lived with the respondents in their respective countries of transit.

2.2.3 Iraqi nationals in the destination country (the Netherlands)

Of the 195 Iraqi respondents surveyed in the Netherlands, 42 per cent left Iraq between July and December 2015 and 14 per cent (N=28) left Iraq between January and June 2015. Respondents in the Netherlands departed from Iraq earlier than those in transit in Bulgaria and Greece. Consequently, most of the respondents arrived in the Netherlands between July and December of 2015 (36.9%). Others arrived more between April (16.9%) and September (16.4%) of 2017. Very few respondents arrived in the Netherlands between the end of 2015 and the April 2017. In terms of migrant origins, slightly over one-third (35.9%) lived in Baghdad before their migration to Europe, while another 17 per cent lived in Ninewa.

In terms of demographic profiles, most respondents were male (69.7%). This reflects the 60 to 40 per cent male to female ratio reported for Iraqi asylum seekers by Eurostat (2017). This sex distribution is also indicative of Iraqi respondents transiting in Bulgaria and Greece, though Iraqis in the Netherlands were slightly more likely to be female than their counterparts in transit. However, in this study, no statistically significant differences can be identified for the sex representation among Iraqis sampled in the Netherlands, in transit, and upon return.

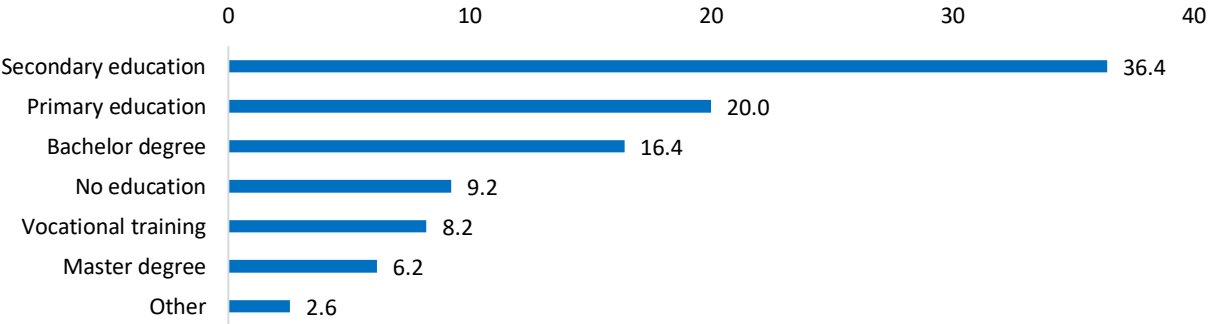
Figure 4: Gender distribution of Iraqi respondents in the Netherlands, in percent



The average age of respondents was 36 years, a significantly higher age than Iraqis in transit and upon return as well as the average age of Iraqi asylum seekers, with many them being between 18 and 34 years old, as reported by Eurostat (2017). Moreover, these figures also show the current respondents to be older than the average respondent in existing DTM work from 2016 (IOM, 2016a), where Iraqi respondents in Europe had an average age of 29 years and a median age of 28 years.

As shown in Figure 5, more than one-third of the respondents (36.4%) in this study had completed secondary education, 20 per cent had completed their primary education (20.0%) and 16 per cent had Bachelor’s degree (16.4%) respectively. Of the 9 per cent (9.23%, N=18) of respondents without an education, the majority (61.1%, N=11) reported being unable to read or write. This study found that Iraqi respondents were less likely to have an undergraduate Bachelor’s degree than those in the February 2016 DTM research (IOM, 2016a), but were more likely to report primary education.

Figure 5: Education levels of Iraqi nationals in the Netherlands, in per cent



Many of the respondents (78%) in the Netherlands reported being the head of a household, relatively more often than Iraqis in transit and upon return. The average household consisted of three members, a

significantly smaller number than that reported by Iraqi respondents transiting in Bulgaria and Greece and return. Among the respondents, there was a relatively equal division between those without children (37.6% of all answers given) and those who had children living with them in the Netherlands (43.7% of all answers given).

2.2.4 Iraqi returnees

Among the 675 Iraqi returnees included in the dataset, the majority returned from Belgium (20.7%), Germany (19.9%), and Sweden (13.0%) (see Figure 6).¹² Belgium, Finland, and the Netherlands were also the most common countries of return in a DTM report on the reasons driving migration flows from Iraq to Europe (IOM, 2016c).

Figure 6: Countries of return for Iraqi returnees, in per cent

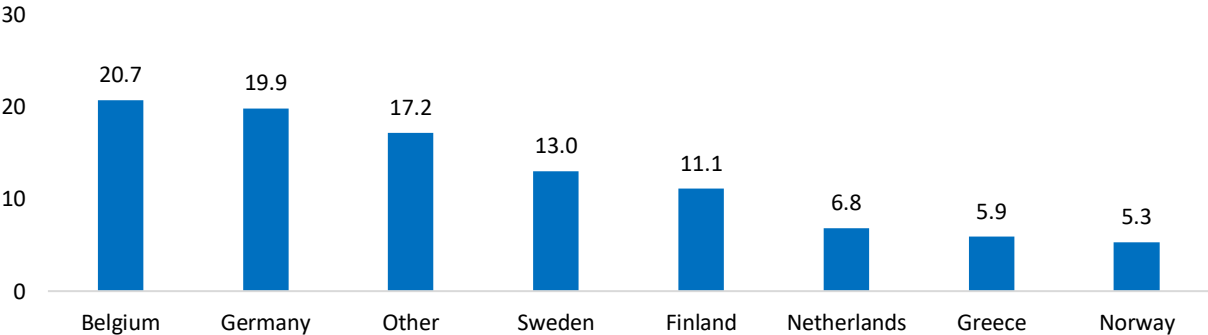
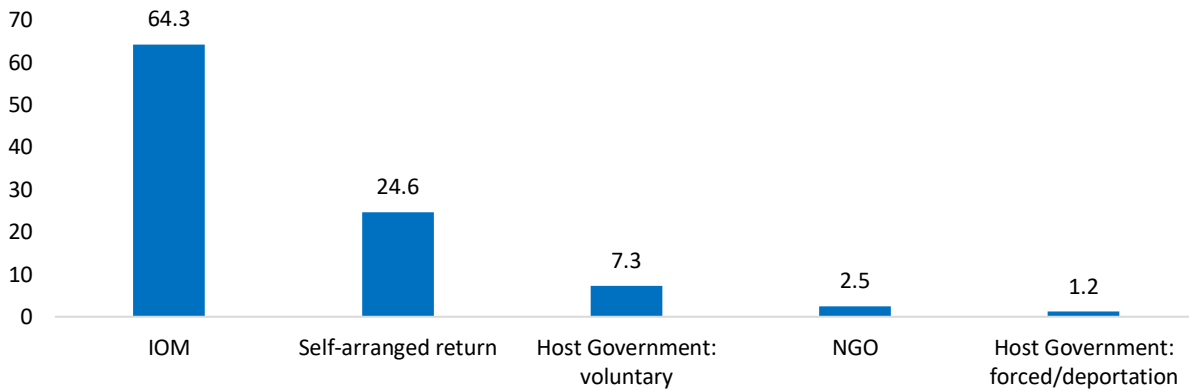


Figure 7 shows that 64 per cent of the respondents reported to have returned with IOM support, though a smaller percentage (24.6%) relied on self-arranged return to get back to Iraq. The largest proportion of returnees left Iraq for Europe in the first (20.7%) and second (49.9%) half of 2015 and returned to Iraq either in 2015 (16.9%) or between October and December of 2016 (17.6%). In terms of areas of origin, 14 per cent of the respondents lived in Baghdad, 14 per cent in Dahuk, and 13 per cent in Sulaymaniyah prior to migration.

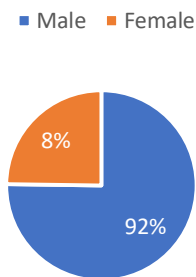
¹² These countries are also beneficiaries of IOM’s AVRR programme in 2015, who mainly returned from Belgium, Austria, Germany, Finland, Greece, Norway, and the Netherlands (IOM, 2016b).

Figure 7: Return types of Iraqi returnees, in per cent



In terms of religion of returnees, most respondents reported being Arab Shia Muslim (36.9%) and Kurd Sunni Muslim (35.9%). Another 17 per cent of the returnees were Arab Sunni Muslim and 7 per cent Kurd Yazidi (see Figure 8).

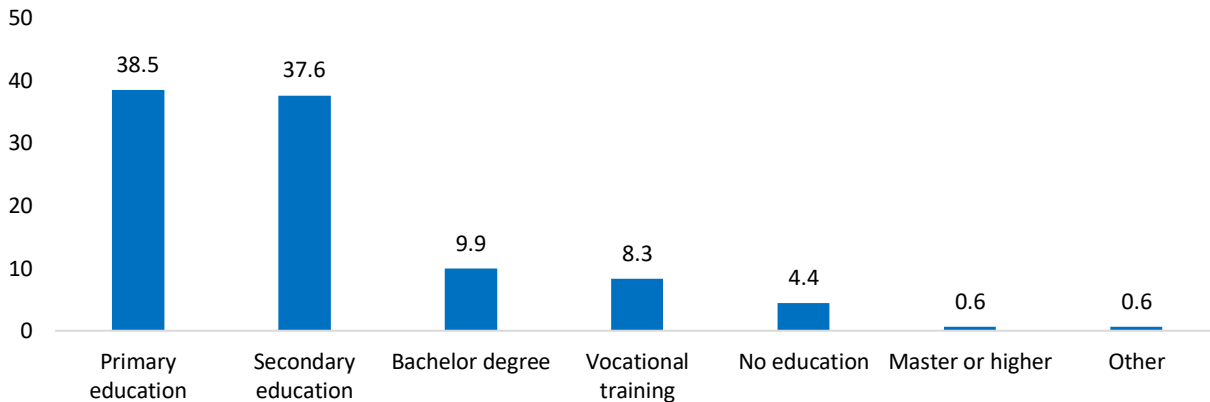
Figure 8: Gender distribution of Iraqi respondents upon return, in per cent



Demographically, 92 per cent of the respondents were male. The average age of the respondents reported was 32 years. This suggests that the respondents are slightly older than the Iraqi returnees surveyed by MMP (2017b), who report a median age of 27 years. This still aligns with the common age group of returnees previously reported by IOM (18-45 years) (2017d).

As shown in Figure 9, respondents with primary (38.5%) or secondary (37.6%) education is relatively similar. Slightly under 10 per cent reported having obtained a Bachelor's degree, while almost none had a Master's degree or PhD. Of the 4 per cent without education, 70 per cent (N=21) reported being unable to read and write. This level of education is also reported by Iraqis in transit and in the Netherlands.

Figure 9: Education levels of Iraqi returnees, in per cent



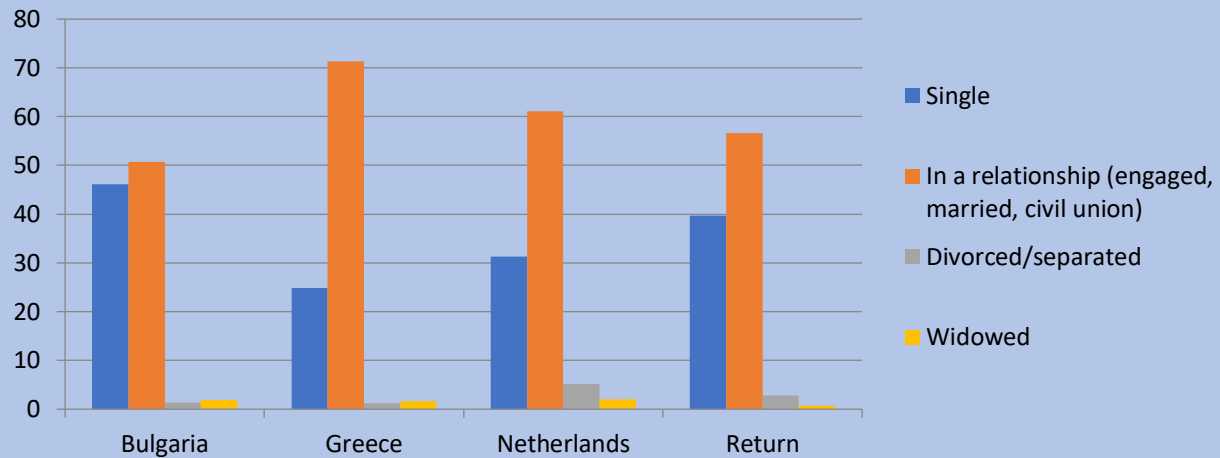
Household data suggests that 57 per cent of Iraqi returnees were in a relationship (56.6%). While 50 per cent of respondents frequently reported not having children (50.3% of all answers given), or having children living with them in Iraq (35.9% of all answers given). On average, households reportedly consisted of six members, and the majority (57.3%) of the respondents reported being the head of their household. It should also be noted that 16 per cent of the returnee respondents said they had household members that were still living in Europe.

HIGHLIGHTS: Profiles of Iraqi migrants

Socio-demographic characteristics:

- **Throughout the different migration phases, most of the respondents were male.** The proportion of males was highest amongst the returnees (92.3%) and lowest amongst respondents in the Netherlands (69.7%). In transit, respondents were also most commonly male, though relatively more often in Greece (81.5%) than in Bulgaria (70.5%).
- **Across migration stages, Iraqi transit migrants in Bulgaria have been identified as being the youngest (average age of 30 years) while respondents in the Netherlands were the oldest (average age of 36 years).** The average age of Iraqi respondents in Greece was 33 years, while returnees reported an average age of 32 years.
- With regards to their marital status, more than seven out of ten Iraqi migrants in Greece were in a relationship (namely married, engaged, or in civil union), Location-wise, **respondents in Greece were least likely to be single (24.8%), while respondents in Bulgaria (46.1%) were most likely to be single.** (see Figure 10).

Figure 10: Marital status among Iraqi respondents (across stages), in per cent

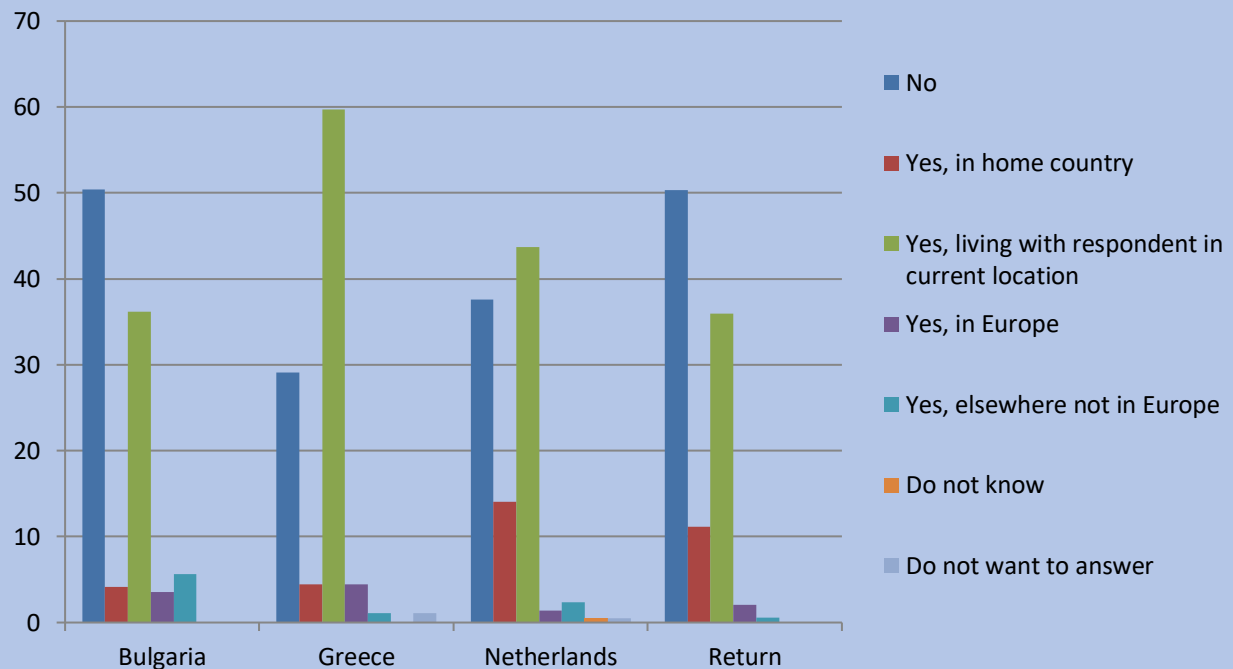


- **Across the different migration stages, this study found that most migrants have primary or secondary education.** Of those without formal education, respondents in Greece were still able to read and write in comparison to those in the other stages of migration.
- Migrants in Bulgaria appeared less likely to have any education (16.3%) and were also unable to read and write (88.7%) than those in Greece (4.7% (N=12) and 58.3%, respectively). **Generally, Iraqi migrants in transit are significantly less likely to have an education compared to their counterparts in other stages of the migration journey.**
- **Iraqi returnees have the lowest number of respondents without an education in comparison to other phases of the migration journey (4.4%).**

Household characteristics:

- **Respondents in transit in Bulgaria and upon return were least likely to have children, while the respondents in Greece were most likely to have children. When respondents had children, they mostly lived with respondents in the current location (see Figure 11).**

Figure 11: Iraqi respondents with/without children (across stages), in per cent

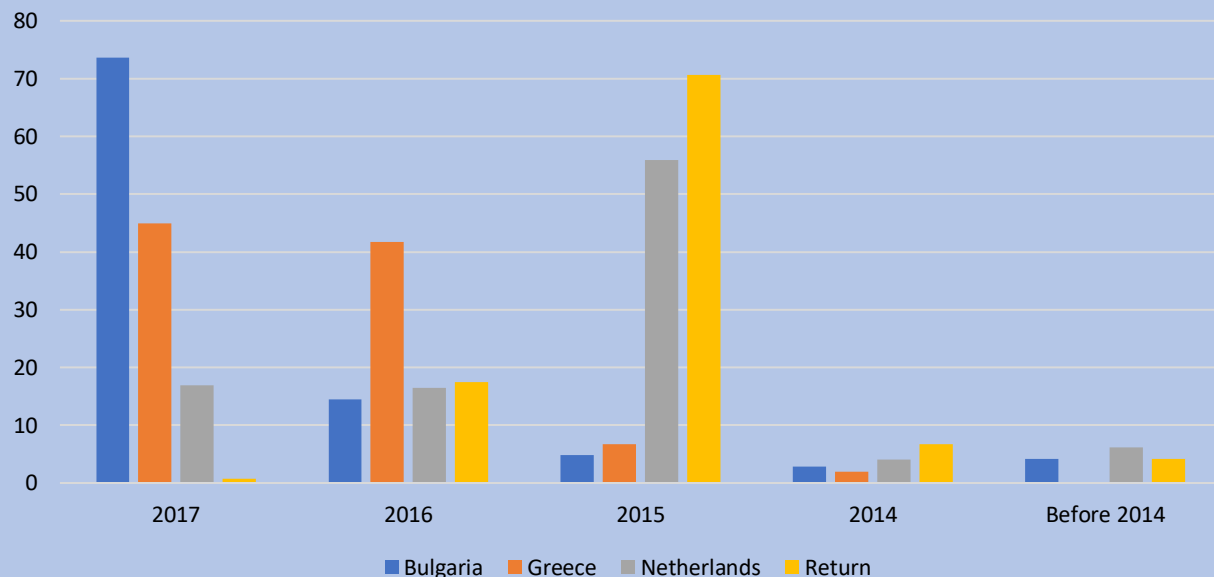


- **Respondents in the Netherlands and Greece were most likely to be heads of household; this may be partially explained by their marital status (generally in a relationship) and age (36 years).** Almost 80 per cent of the Iraqi migrants in the Netherlands report to be the head of the household, significantly more often than respondents in transit or upon return.
- On the other hand, respondents in Bulgaria were least likely to be heads of household (26.8%). **Overall, Iraqi migrants in transit were less often reported to be household heads in comparison to migrants in other parts of the migration journey.**
- **Transit respondents have similarly sized households, which generally comprise of six to seven household members.** In comparison to migrants in other stages of the migration journey, transit migrants have the largest household size. Children also most often tend to live with the respondents in their respective countries of transit.
- **Household sizes of Iraqi migrants in the Netherlands are observed to be significantly smaller than those in the other phases of the migration journey (transit and return) under this study.** Specifically, the average household consists of approximately three members.

Characteristics of migration and return:

- In terms of when Iraqi respondents left their home country, **those in transit left in 2017** (see Figure 12). **Returnees and Iraqis in the Netherlands left Iraq between the July and December of 2015.** In this regard, returnees reported returning home in 2015 and 2016. **These findings suggest that returnees did not stay in Europe for a long period of time.**

Figure 12: When Iraqi respondents left origin country (across stages), in per cent



Note: For 2017, only the first three quarters (January-September) are included.

- **Majority of Iraqi returnees under this study returned from Belgium (20.7%), Germany (19.9%), and Sweden (13.0%).**
- Since 64 per cent of the returns from Europe were undertaken with assistance from IOM, there may be a selection bias.

3. THEMATIC AREA 2 – MIGRATION DRIVERS & DECISION-MAKING

There are many factors that cause Iraqis to consider migration to Europe, these may relate to challenges at the personal, household, and/or community levels. This chapter explores the factors that have shaped migrants’ decision-making at different stages of the migration journey, including their decision to return.

3.1 LITERATURE REVIEW

Previous research on the drivers behind migration from Iraq to the EU demonstrates that there is a combination of factors that play into the decision-making processes of Iraqi nationals (see IOM, 2016a; IOM, 2016c; Cummings et al., 2015). By classifying such factors, the different pressures to migrate can be understood at individual, household, and community levels (Cummings et al., 2015; Timmerman, De Clerk, Hemmerechts & Willems, 2014). Since migration is never driven by one factor alone nor is it always planned (Loschmann, Kuschminder, & Siegel, 2017; IOM, 2016; Schapendonk, 2012), it is important to note that the decision-making process as well as the “drivers of migration are often [...multi-layered] and complex; individual migration decisions and flows can be affected by a number of intertwined drivers influenced by the economic, political, social, demographic and environmental context” (REACH, 2017).

While there is no single factor that drives Iraqi nationals to migrate from their country of origin, it is possible to identify common patterns that shape migration.

3.1.1 Individual level

This study found that Iraqi migrants are highly likely to leave their country of origin due to armed conflict, political instability, personal threats and targeted violence, a lack of social justice, and persecution based on religious, ethnic, or political grounds. Moreover, a lack of law and law enforcement is also often cited as a driver of migration for individuals (IOM, 2016c). Nonetheless, it is important to note that conflict is often experienced differently among individuals from different regions of Iraq.

At an individual level, other reasons for emigrating from Iraq include general insecurity, limited access to education, and economic factors. Reflecting the variety of drivers of migration from Iraq, Iraqi migrants often reported to choose their destination country based on safety, familial ties, as well as the availability of employment opportunities and the quality of social services (e.g. health care, education) (IOM, 2016a). With regards to familial ties, Iraqi migrants reported that having an existing network of friends and family in Europe is also a reason for their own migration (IOM, 2016a; IOM, 2016c).

With regards to economic conditions, Iraqi migrants are often driven to leave their origin country for financial reasons and due to a lack of livelihood opportunities caused by high unemployment rates (IOM, 2016c). The national unemployment rate is 11 per cent (13% for females, 7% for males), with youth unemployment rates as high as 18 per cent (27% for females, 17% for males) (UNDP, 2018). Further still, Iraqi migrants often report that prior to their migration to Europe, they did not earn enough money to sustain themselves (IOM, 2016c).

3.1.2 Household level

At the household level, factors such as violence and conflict, financial insecurity, and persecution based on religious, ethnic, or political grounds do not only put individuals in danger but put entire households at risk as well. In fact, Iraqi migrants leaving their country of origin have cited leaving after the safety of their family was threatened and could no longer be guaranteed (REACH, 2017).

The study *Migration Flows from Iraq to Europe* by IOM DTM (2016a) also suggest that households influence migration drivers and the decision-making of individuals. The study notes that many respondents not only informed their households, friends, and extended families about their intentions to migrate but also relied on family and friends to finance their journey to Europe (IOM, 2016a). Moreover, the financial difficulties and high unemployment rates not only affect individual decisions but affect the condition of household. Hence, financial difficulty is a challenge at the individual and household level. To add nuance to these perspectives, however, it is important to recognize that families are not always supportive of the migration decisions of their family members (IOM & Foreign & Commonwealth Office, 2013).

3.1.3 Community level

More broadly, community level factors influence migration beyond the individual and household levels. Community level factors are closely related and often intertwined with factors affecting individual and household levels. Within Iraq, drivers of migration at the community level are especially tied to the country's security situation, political instability, and the ISIL-related conflict, and resultant poor economic conditions, and lack of economic opportunities, the lack of law enforcement and social justice (IOM, 2016c). This lack of a "system" for law enforcement in the country and social justice leads to unequal access to social services (such as the education, healthcare, and workforce systems) among Iraqi citizens (IOM, 2016c). Owing to these economic and security factors Iraqi migrants often report a low quality of life in their home country, experiencing no improvements to their living conditions, and having little or no hope for a better future (IOM, 2016a; IOM, 2016c).

3.1.4 Individual, household and community level drivers of return migration

Among returnees to Iraq, the choice to return to Iraq is a family decision or a personal decision, rather than a tribal or community decision (IOM, 2017c; IOM, 2016b). Drivers of migration at the individual level can be related to a rejection of an asylum request and slow asylum processes, being unable to attain legal residence in Europe (IOM, 2016c). Another factor for return migration is the lengthy family reunification process, which can (unexpectedly for the migrants) take much longer than a year (IOM, 2016b). Moreover, Iraqi respondents in other studies reported returning after running out of personal financial savings (IOM, 2016c).

Individual drivers of return migration may also stem, for example, from a medical situation that is untreatable in Europe (IOM, 2016b). Deteriorating medical conditions of family members back home is also often a driver of return movements (IOM, 2016b). In this sense, the location of origin, as well as the experience of the migration journey, has a significant impact on whether an Iraqi national considers returning home. Concurrently, IOM (2016b) suggests that "the riskier and more challenging the exit from Iraq, the less likely the asylum seekers are to consider a return" (p. 43).

3.2 THEMATIC AREA 2 – DATA ANALYSIS OUTCOMES

3.2.1 Iraqi nationals in transit in Bulgaria

The reasons for migration are often complex and intertwined. To understand the circumstances under which an individual chooses migration, it is important to recognize three distinct yet linked concepts: the challenges migrants face pre-migration, the reasons for which they left Iraq, and the specific trigger points that led an individual to make the decision to leave when they did.

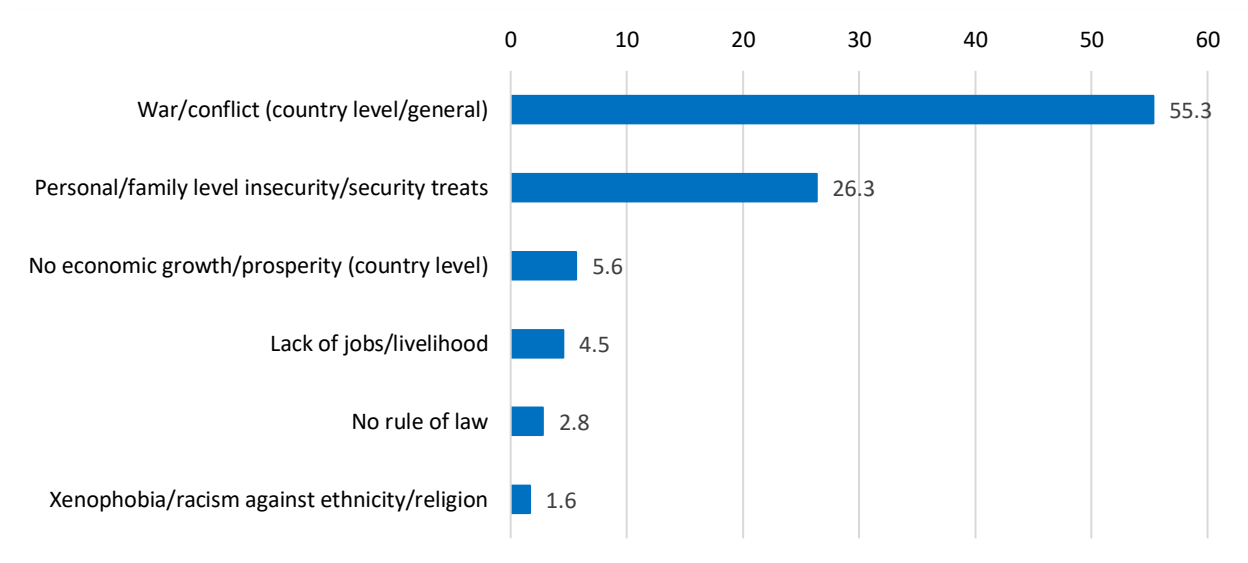
Prior to their migration to Europe, 74 per cent of the Iraqi respondents in Bulgaria reported facing challenges at the personal level, and 92 per cent and 99 per cent reported challenges at the household and the community levels respectively. These figures are reflective of the pre-migration challenges mentioned by Iraqi respondents in existing IOM DTM reports. In this study, a lack of safety was reported by many respondents as a primary or secondary challenge at the personal, household, and community level prior to migration.

At the personal level, threats to personal safety were reported as a primary challenge for 75 per cent of the sample and as a secondary challenge for 12 per cent. Moreover, 18 per cent of the respondents reported facing only one challenge on the personal level before migrating. On the household level, threats to members of the household were a primary challenge for 47 per cent of the sample and the secondary challenge for 29 per cent. Given the pervasiveness of insecurity for individuals and families, insecurity was also reported as the primary challenge for 44 per cent. When asked what obstacles their community had faced prior to their migration, 23 per cent of the respondents also reported insecurity as a secondary challenge. General insecurity in the region, district, or community was a further primary household challenge identified by 16 per cent of the sample, and for a further 28 per cent it was indicated as a secondary challenge. Insecurity may also reflect lack of rule of law, which was identified as a primary challenge on the community level for 17 per cent of respondents and as a secondary challenge for almost half (45.5%).

Within a context of heightened personal and societal insecurity, community institutions and infrastructure are also likely to face disruption. Many respondents indicated that a lack of sufficient income – which is a likely by-product of disrupted livelihood opportunities and the general socio-economic situation in Iraq – was a key challenge prior to their movement. Lack of sufficient income was a primary challenge on the personal level for 12 per cent of respondents (and a secondary challenge for 39.4%), and for 25 per cent of respondents (with 13.8% indicating it as a secondary challenge) on the household level. The lack of jobs and livelihood opportunities was further identified as a primary challenge on the community level by 28 per cent of the respondents. The context of high insecurity and poor economy may also potentially link to intra-group tensions and limited social mobility for specific population groups. While a small share of respondents (4.4%) reported that discrimination as a primary personal challenge prior to migration, a much larger share (15.1%) indicated discrimination as a secondary challenge. Xenophobia and racism based on ethnicity were also reported secondary challenges at the community level by 14 per cent of the respondents.

The reasons for which an individual eventually decided to migrate often corresponded with the challenges they had reported. More than half (55.3%) of Iraqi respondents in Bulgaria cited war and conflict at the country-level as their Reason 1 for leaving Iraq for Europe, while 26 per cent suggested that personal- and family-level insecurity had prompted them to leave their country of origin (see Figure 13).

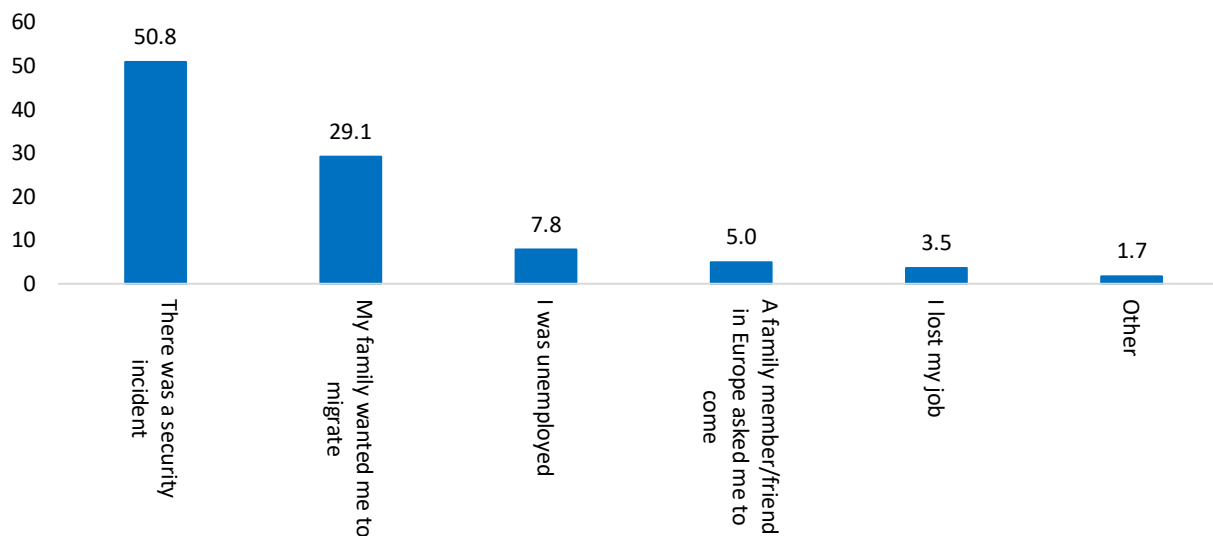
Figure 13: Reason 1 for Iraqi nationals transiting in Bulgaria to leave origin country for Europe, in per cent



War and conflict (18.0%) as well as personal- and family-level insecurity (36.8%) were also cited by many respondents as their secondary reasons for leaving. The role of conflict and insecurity in prompting displacement is not new and, coincides with the literature that underlines the link between financial challenges, security-related factors combined with a lack of law and social justice in Iraq are key motivations for Iraqi migrants to leave their country of origin (REACH, 2017; IOM, 2016a; IOM, 2016c). Moreover, civil war and conflict are also intertwined with other reasons for migrating as they prevent individuals from having financial security, social justice, and effective law enforcement. However, the challenges an individual faced does not necessarily correspond to the reasons for migration. In this study, respondents were more likely to mention economic factors as challenges in Iraq than as the reasons for leaving.

In terms of a trigger event that led to migration, 51 per cent of the Iraqi respondents in Bulgaria, (50.8% of all answers given) indicated that they migrated following the occurrence of a security incident. Highlighting the importance of the household and extended family in the migration decision-making process, 29 per cent of respondents reported that their migration decision was influenced by their family.

Figure 14: Main triggers for the migration of Iraqi nationals transiting in Bulgaria, in per cent



Rather than a specific event, the poor economic conditions could be considered as a key trigger for migration. Most of the respondents (75.9%) stated that they were unable to meet their monthly expenses with their personal average income (USD 373.93 per month). In terms of economic status, 40 per cent of respondents relied on daily wages and 26 per cent were unemployed prior to migration. This trend is in line with previous DTM work; a previous study (IOM, 2016c) indicated that Iraqis often reported inadequate income as a reason for leaving Iraq.

Despite the duration of the conflict and the economic instability that has accompanied it, 96 per cent of respondents had not migrated internationally for a period of six months or longer before. Of those individuals who had previously migrated (3.89%), the majority had moved within the Middle East region (69.2% of all answers given, N=27), and 31 per cent (30.8%, N=12) had previously migrated to Europe. Despite the lack of previous international migration experience, almost all respondents had relatives (91.3%) and/or friends (94.9%) that lived in Europe.

The role of social networks in supporting and facilitating movement has been long established in both theoretical and empirical literature. According to the migrant network theory (see, e.g., Massey et al., 1993), the presence of migrants in potential destination countries can help defray the costs and risks associated with migration because of the flow of country-and corridor-specific information and assistance. Nonetheless, most of the respondents (61.0%) in this study made the decision to migrate independently. This included Iraqi migrants in transit in Bulgaria between the ages of 36 and 49 (72.5%) who were in comparison to Iraqi migrants between the ages of 26 and 35 (67.5%) and 18 and 25 (46.4%). Of the Iraqi migrants in Bulgaria that were single or in a relationship (e.g. married, in a civil union) 61 per cent and 60 per cent respectively, made the decision to migrate independently.

Of those that did not make their own migration decision, 51 per cent reported that their parent/s and 48 per cent of spouses made their migration decision for them. Of those individuals who made the decision to migrate independently, 75 per cent discussed their potential migration with others, most commonly with their family in Iraq (91.0% of all answers given) or their family in Europe (16.2% of all answers given). Of all respondents, 76 per cent of respondents did not discuss their migration with more than one contact.

In this regard, the role of a migrant's network of family and friends in shaping individual decisions suggests that the migration decision is not made by a migrant alone but is embedded within small social units such as families.

In terms of sources of information and migration decision, 44 per cent of respondents (43.3%) often relied on "word of mouth". and 50 per cent relied on the television as a key source of information. While 44 per cent of the respondents reported having only one source of information, the most popular secondary sources of information were Facebook (25.3%) and the Internet (19.7%). Prior to migration, respondents reported that the primary channels for information about life in Europe included "word of mouth" from family members at home (36.5%), verbal contact (via phone, Viber, Facebook, and/or Skype) with family and friends in Europe (36.5%), and work settings (11.8%). These were also the main secondary channels of "word of mouth", while 15 per cent of the respondents also reported having only one channel of "word of mouth" information.

These sources of information that respondents accessed underlines the role and value of technology — especially social media channels — in facilitating information exchange. Many of the respondents in the survey relied on transnational information sources, including from family and friends living elsewhere to shape their migration decisions. There are both opportunities and challenges inherent to these information channels. High rates of mobile phone penetration and internet access via smart phones has provided greater access to contemporary information sources to migrants.

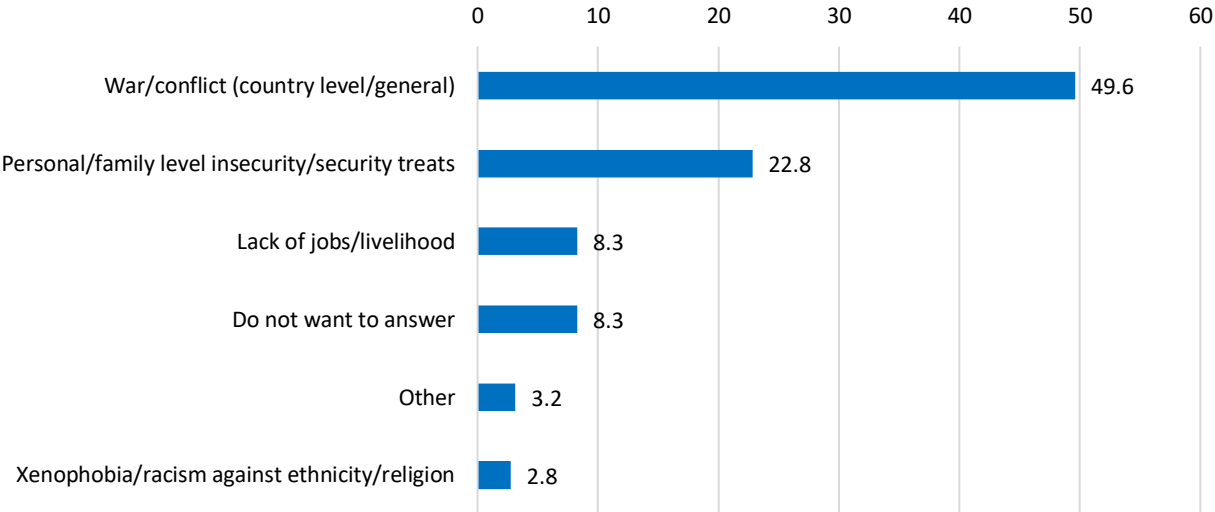
3.2.2 Iraqi nationals in transit in Greece

As noted previously, the demographic profiles of Iraqi migrants transiting through Bulgaria and Greece were very similar. Across the migration route, this study found that the areas of origins of migrants are predominantly Ninewa, and Baghdad in Iraq. Migrants in Greece reported similar challenges prior to migration from Iraq as the migrants in Bulgaria. Most of the Iraqi nationals surveyed in Greece reported facing challenges at a personal (71.6%), household (66.5%), and community (82.3%) level in the six months prior to their departure to Europe. At the personal level, the primary challenges were related to a personal security threat (41.8%) and unemployment (11.5%). Similarly, personal security threats (14.3%, N=26) and experiencing discrimination and xenophobia based on ethnicity or religion (14.3%, N=26) were reported as the most common secondary challenge at the personal level, while 33 per cent of the respondents reported facing only one challenge at the personal level.

At the household level, insecurity and security threats in the region, district, and/or community were mentioned as a first (38.5%) and second (13.0%, N=22) challenge. While 44 per cent of the respondents reported facing only one household challenge such as discrimination and xenophobia against household members, for 12 per cent of respondents it was reported as an additional secondary problem. At the community level, insecurity, security threats, and opposition groups was the primary challenge indicated by almost half (46.9%) of all respondents. The same insecurities (12.0%, N=25) as well as a lack of rule of law (13.9%, N=29) were also reported as secondary problems at the community level. As suggested in the literature (REACH, 2017; IOM, 2016a; IOM, 2016c), these challenges are also indicative of the combination of the various economic and security-related factors at the individual, household, and community levels that contribute to the drivers of migration for Iraqi nationals.

In addition to the personal and societal insecurities that respondents perceived as challenges, conflict and insecurity were also identified as reasons that led to migration. Half of all respondents (49.6%) identified country-level war and conflict as the major driver, and 23 per cent identified personal- and family-level insecurity or security threats as their Reason 1 for choosing migration (see Figure 15).

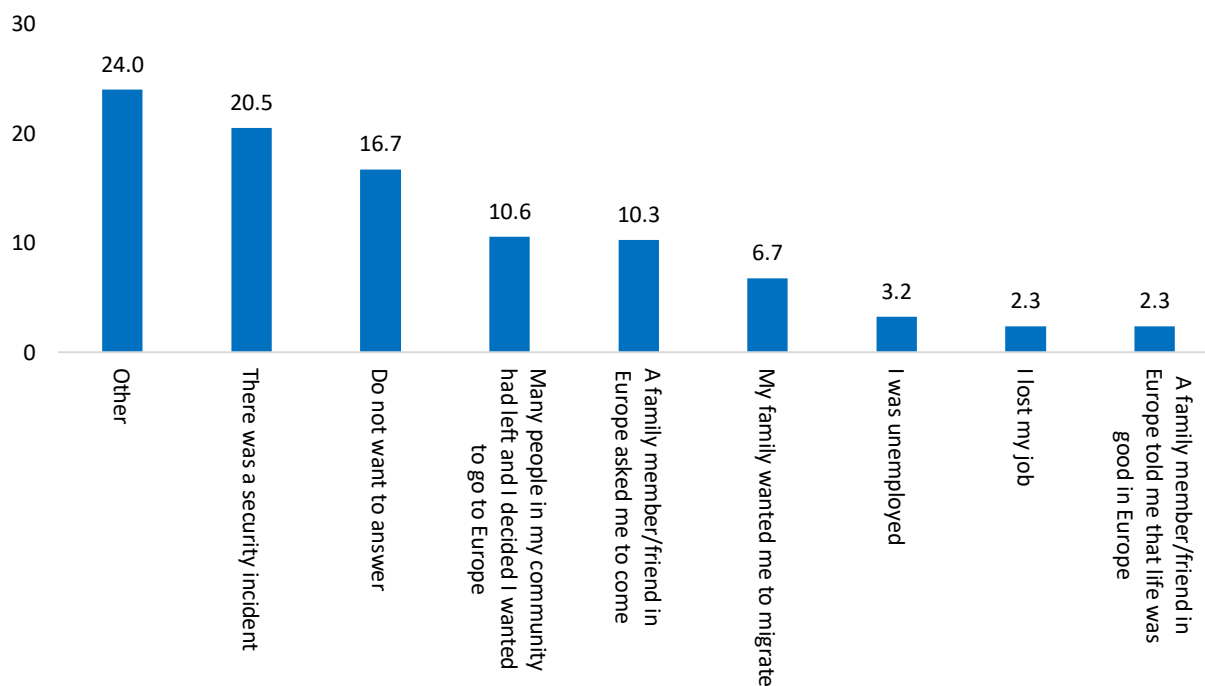
Figure 15: Reason 1 for Iraqi nationals transiting in Greece to leave origin country for Europe, in per cent



Country-wide insecurity and conflict were also the secondary reason cited by 17 per cent of respondents to leave Iraq, and 14 per cent of respondents identified personal-and family-level insecurity or security threats as the secondary reason, while another 26.4 per cent reported having only one reason for deciding to leave Iraq for Europe. These findings are shared by Iraqis transiting in Bulgaria, and they are also in line with existing DTM reports (IOM, 2016a; IOM, 2016c). There are, nevertheless, some notable differences in trends between migrants in Bulgaria and Greece: fewer respondents in Greece reported economic reasons (e.g. a lack of jobs or economic prosperity) than security-related factors as reasons for leaving Iraq.

Like Iraqi respondents in Bulgaria, the occurrence of a security incidence (20.5% of all answers given) was the specific trigger most commonly reported by respondents for deciding to migrate to Europe (see Figure 16). While 17 per cent of respondents did not want to what specific event triggered their migration, 24 per cent respondents (24.0% of all answers given) reported ‘other’ reasons including Iraq’s political problems, war and conflict, poor quality of life, and health problems (e.g. sick child, death of a family member) as main triggers for migration.

Figure 16: Main triggers for the migration of Iraqi nationals transiting in Greece, in per cent



While Iraqis in Greece did not emphasize financial reasons as a trigger for leaving Iraq, 34 per cent reported that their personal average income had not been sufficient to meet monthly expenses. Most respondents reported being privately employed (26.8%), self-employed (24.0%), or unemployed (34.3%) before migration. The average income among respondents was USD 1,111.58 per month, a significantly higher reported income than that reported by Iraqi respondents in Bulgaria. In this context, 27 per cent of the respondents did not want to answer if their personal average income had been sufficient to cover expenses. The higher income level and limited role of economic insecurity in prompting migration among Iraqis in Greece may suggest that the migrants in the two transit corridors have different resources and networks to assist their movements. There were more male migrants in long-term relationships in Greece than Bulgaria. Migrants in Greece were also slightly older than their counterparts in Bulgaria. Taken together, this may suggest that migrants interviewed for this study in Greece are better established and have the resources to make the longer journey.

Slightly less than one-third of the respondents in Greece reported having lived abroad for a period of at least six months in the past. For migrants with previous migration experience, 72 per cent had lived in the Middle East (71.9% of all answers given), and 26 per cent had previously lived in Europe (25.8% of all answers given, N=23). Among the respondents, 34 per cent had been internally displaced in the past, a similar proportion to respondents transiting through Bulgaria. Many of those that had experienced previous internal displacement reported Ninewa (35.8%), Kirkuk (10.2%, N=14), or Baghdad (8.8%, N=12) as the region in which they had lived prior to migration.

Many Iraqis transiting through Greece had friends (67.7%) and relatives (68.9%) in Europe before their migration, although the proportions were smaller than Iraqi respondents in Bulgaria. Nonetheless, the figures demonstrate the importance of family and friends as sources of information contributing to

migration decisions. Iraqis transiting through Greece relied on their family and friends for advice and support in their decision-making. Most of the respondents (55.9%) made the decision to migrate independently were between the ages of 36 and 49 (85.1%). This is not unexpected, especially when compared to those between the ages of 26 and 35 (50.5%) and 18 and 25 (21.0%). The percentage of respondents who were married or in a civil union who made the decision to migrate independently (66.1%) is more than double the percentage of single Iraqi migrants that did so (25.4%). Male Iraqi migrants transiting in Greece (67.1%) were also more likely than females (6.38%) to make their own migration decision.

Of the respondents that had not made their own migration decision, a parent (36.6%) or spouse (42.7%) took the migration decision. Of those who made the decision to migrate independently, 60 per cent still discussed their potential migration with others, including with their family in Iraq (63.5% of all answers given). Almost all respondents (97.7%) noted that their families were supportive of the migration decision. As a second contact, respondents reported talking to family members in Europe (35.3% of all answers given), 98 per cent of whom were supportive of the migration decision.

When making their decision to migrate to Europe, respondents commonly relied on “word of mouth” (21.7%), WhatsApp (16.6%), and the Internet (9.5%). While 63 per cent of respondents reported having only one source of information, the most popular secondary source of information was “word of mouth” (18.1%). Verbal contact (via phone, Viber, Facebook, and/or Skype) with friends and family in Europe was reported by 66 per cent of the respondents. Though 42 per cent of the respondents reported having only one channel for “word of mouth”, the most common secondary channel of “word of mouth” was family in Iraq (35.6%).

3.2.3 Iraqi nationals in the destination country (the Netherlands)

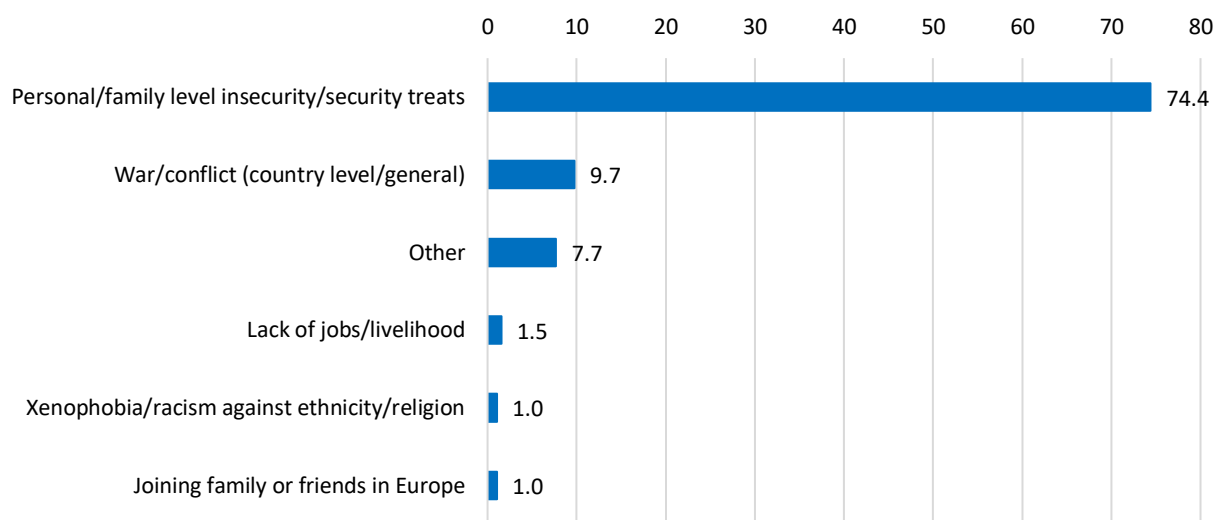
Like respondents in Greece and Bulgaria, 93 per cent of the respondents in the Netherlands reported facing challenges at the personal level (93.3%), 74 per cent at the household level (73.9%), and the community level (65.6%) during the six months before their departure to Europe. Individual-level challenges were primarily associated with personal security threats (79.1%). Such security threats (9.34%, N=17), in addition to discrimination and xenophobia (26.9%), were the most frequently reported secondary challenges at the personal level. Another 9 per cent (N=16) of the Iraqis surveyed in the Netherlands described their Challenge 1 at the personal level as ‘other,’ which mainly referred to specific personal security threats (e.g. persecution for journalism or due to a change in/non-adherence of religion) as well as health issues (e.g. disability, deaths of family members/friends). Among the 14 per cent (N=26) of the respondents who reported the same for Challenge 2 on a personal level, ‘other’ was especially associated with personal persecution, war and conflict, forced marriages, non-adherence/change of religion, as well as threats from ISIL.

In addition to personal challenges, security threats against household members, as well as general insecurity in the region, district, and community, were reported as primary challenges (56.3% and 34.0%, respectively) and secondary challenges (13.9% (N=20) and 25.7%, respectively) for households. Similarly, both primary and secondary community level challenges were described as insecurity (53.1% and 28.9%, respectively), as well as xenophobia and racism based on religion and ethnicity (39.8% and 26.6%, respectively). It should be noted that significant proportions of the Iraqi respondents in the Netherlands

only reported facing one challenge at the personal (42.3%), household (34.7%), and community levels (23.4%). Similar to the challenges reported by respondents in Greece and Bulgaria, these challenges described by respondents in the Netherlands are also cited in previous DTM research (IOM, 2016a; IOM, 2016c).

When asked about their Reason 1 for leaving Iraq and moving to Europe, the majority (74.4%) of Iraqi respondents in the Netherlands cited personal-and family-level insecurity. Nearly 10 per cent (9.74%, N=19) also cited insecurity and conflict at the country-level as a primary driver of their migration (see Figure 17). Another 8 per cent (N=15) reported ‘other’ reasons such as religious problems, security threats, family issues, and differences in ideology with the community in Iraq for leaving Iraq.

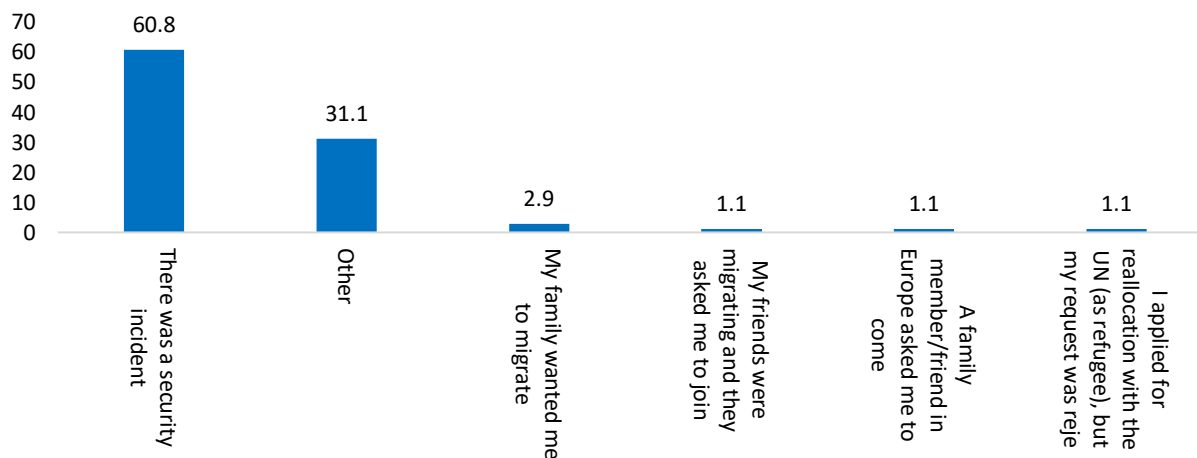
Figure 17: Reason 1 for Iraqi nationals in the Netherlands to leave origin country for Europe, in per cent



Secondary reasons for leaving Iraq included war and conflict at the country-level (20%), though xenophobia and racism (15.9%) were also reported. For 27 per cent of the Iraqi respondents in the Netherlands, they reported only one reason for leaving Iraq. These reasons for leaving Iraq are also reflective of findings of existing DTM reports with regards to security-related factors (IOM, 2016a; IOM, 2016c). However, it should be noted that the current respondents were much less likely than those surveyed by DTM in February 2016 to report a lack of hope for a better future as a reason for leaving Iraq (IOM, 2016a).

Like Iraqis in Bulgaria and Greece, respondents reported that their trigger for migration was a security incident (60.8%) (see Figure 18). For 30 per cent of Iraqis in the Netherlands ‘other’ reasons generally referred to health reasons (e.g. depression, child with cancer), facing security threats because of non-adherence to or a change in religion, security threats (e.g. Daesh, targeting Yazidis, different political opinions), and forced marriages.

Figure 18: Main triggers for the migration of Iraqi nationals in the Netherlands, in per cent



Most respondents did not report financial concerns as their trigger for deciding to leave Iraq. However, 35 per cent of the respondents reported that their personal average income was sufficient to cover their own monthly expenses. With regards to their employment status prior to migration, 34 per cent of the respondents were employed in the public sector, 19 per cent relied on daily wages, and 21 per cent were unemployed. The unemployment rates reported by the respondents were lower than the unemployment rate of Iraqis found in a previous DTM study on migration flows from Iraq to Europe. In this study, some respondents are students, retired, or self-employed. Like Iraqi respondents in Greece, the average personal income among respondents was 1089.08 USD per month; this is a higher estimation compared to the income reported by the Iraqi respondents surveyed by DTM in February 2016 (IOM, 2016a). This study found that 51 per cent of the respondents did not their average personal income prior to migration, and 10 per cent (N=19) did not want to answer this question.

Like respondents in Greece, slightly more than 33 per cent of respondents in the Netherlands had previously migrated internationally, however, 53 per cent of this migration was in the Middle East (52.9% of all answers given). Fewer respondents (19.5%) reported having been internally displaced in the past. Half of the respondents (51.8%) reported having family in Europe, while only 33 per cent of the respondents had friends in Europe prior to their own migration.

Like the respondents in Greece and Bulgaria, more than half of the respondents suggested that they had made the decision to migrate independently, 64 per cent of whom were between the ages of 26 and 35. Similarly, 75 per cent of single Iraqi migrants in the Netherlands were more likely to have made the decision themselves (75.4%). Relatedly, the percentage of migrants that were married or in a civil union who made their migration decision independently is relatively low (31.6%). Similarly, 15 per cent of female Iraqi migrants in the Netherlands and 65 per cent of males made their migration decision independently.

Despite making migration decisions independently, 61 per cent reported discussing their potential migration with another party, particularly with family in Iraq (83.3% of all answers given). Additionally, 97 per cent of respondents did not discussed their decision with anyone else. Of those that reported not making their own migration decision, 74 per cent of the respondents in the Netherlands suggested that their spouse made the decision to migrate for them. In this regard, the behaviour of the current

respondents is like that of Iraqis previously surveyed by DTM, who relied primarily on their respective household and social circle (e.g. friends) for decision-making support (IOM, 2016a).

When making their migration decision, some respondents in the Netherlands relied on “word of mouth” (38.5%) and television (12.8%, N=25) as their primary source of information. Many respondents reported that their migration decision was based on a sudden security threat whereby they had no time to base their migration decision on any source other than their own knowledge.

While 61 per cent of the respondents reported having only one source of information, the most popular secondary sources of information included the Internet (16.4%) and “word of mouth” (13.3%, N=26). “Word of mouth” included verbal contact (via phone, Viber, Facebook, and/or Skype) with friends and family in Europe (45.5%), as well as contact with a migration facilitator, (12.9%, N=13). The most common secondary channels of “word of mouth” were family at home (13.9%, N=14), mediated contact with somebody that had left (13.9%, N=14), as well as contact with a migration facilitator (14.9%, N=15). For 39 per cent of respondents, “word of mouth” was the only a source of information.

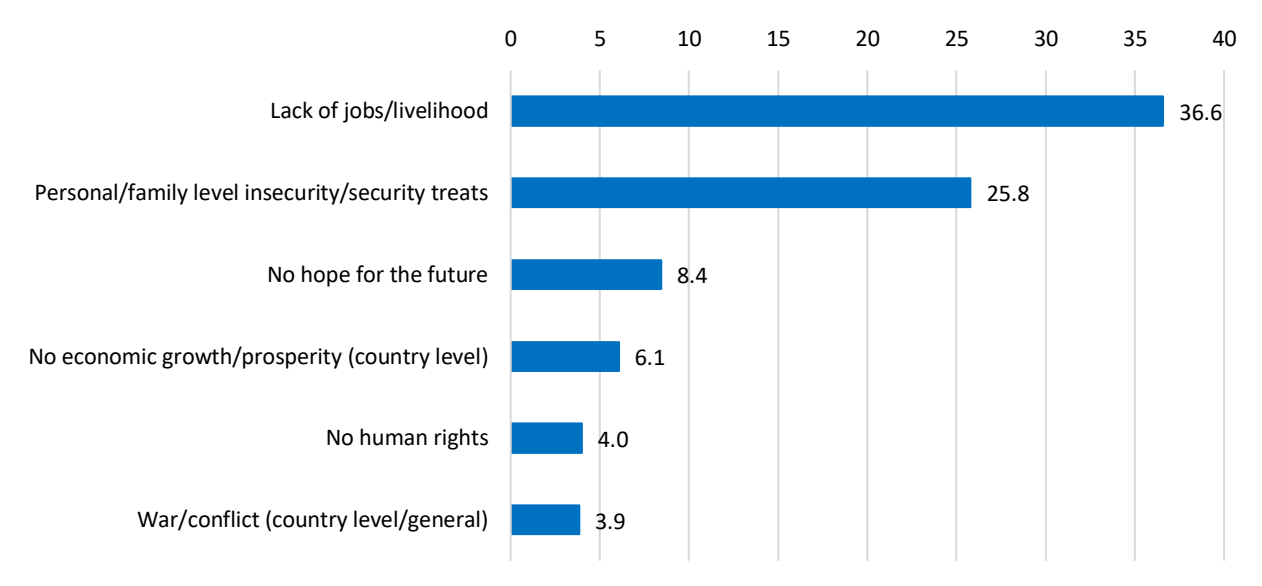
3.2.4 Iraqi returnees

Like the case of Iraqi respondents in transit and at their destination and existing literature (IOM, 2016a; IOM, 2016c), a majority of the Iraqi returnees in this study reported facing challenges at the personal level (65.2%), household level (45.6%), and the community level (50.2%) during the six months prior to their departure. Personal security threats (40.2%) and lack of sufficient income (26.8%) were reported as primary personal challenges. For an addition 25 per cent, the insufficient income levels were also reported as a secondary personal problem.

At the household level, primary challenges included insufficient income levels (30.5%), and security threats against household members (28.6%). The lack of jobs and livelihood opportunities (22.7%) was reported as a secondary household challenge in addition to insufficient income levels (14.9%). At a community level too, lack of jobs and livelihood opportunities (48.1%) and insecurity (31.8%) were the primary drivers among community challenges. Secondary challenges at the community level also included lack of jobs and livelihood opportunities (18.6%), as well as the absence of rule of law (24.5%). While less than one per cent suggested that they only had one challenge at the personal level, 30 per cent reported only one challenge at the household level and 24 per cent indicated only one challenge at the community level.

Returnee respondents lack of jobs (36.6%), as well as personal-and family-level insecurity (25.8%) as reasons for leaving their country of origin (see Figure 19).

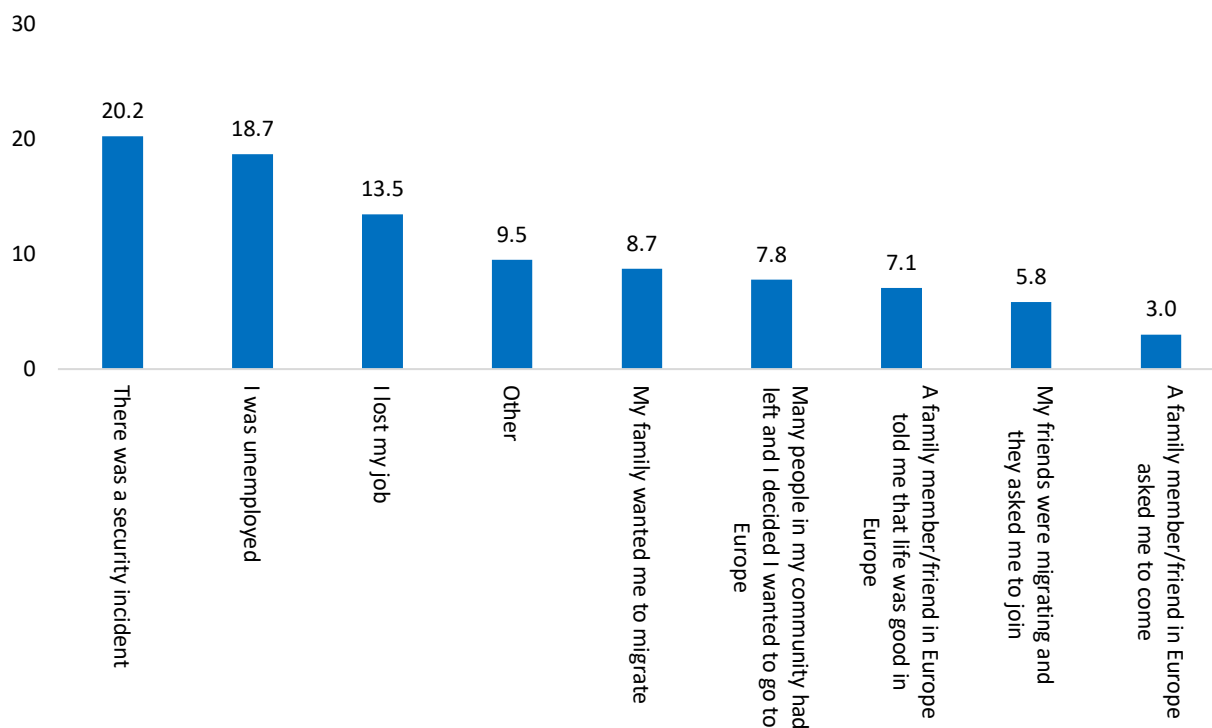
Figure 19: Reason 1 for Iraqi returnees to leave origin country for Europe, in per cent



Though 15 per cent of the respondents cited only one reason for leaving Iraq, secondary reasons for migration were again lack of jobs (14.1%), no economic growth (13.3%), and no hope for a better future (10.2%). These reasons differ from what was reported by Iraqis in transit and in the Netherlands, who mainly referred to insecurity.

As a reason for leaving, financial insecurity was reported by 58 per cent of respondents who found their average personal income as insufficient to cover their monthly expenses. The average personal income among respondents, prior to migration, was 452.50 USD per month. This income level correlates to the findings reported by Iraqis in Bulgaria, but it is lower in comparison to the income reported by respondents in Greece and in the Netherlands. Prior to migration, 27 per cent reported relying on daily wages and 25 per cent were self-employed. While there was no specific event that triggered their initial migration from Iraq, respondents reported financial and security-related concerns, namely a security incident (20.2% of all answers), unemployment (18.7% of all answers), and job loss (13.4% of all answers given) (see Figure 20). Another 10 per cent of respondents also reported 'other' triggers such as financial problems, personal security threats, health issues, having family in Europe, as well as a lack of livelihood opportunities in Iraq for their migration.

Figure 20: Main triggers for the migration of Iraqi returnees, in per cent



While slightly more than 25 per cent of the respondents reported previous internal displacement, 11 per cent of the respondents reported being previously engaged in international migration for a period longer than six months. These internal displacement figures contrast with a previous DTM study (IOM, 2016c). However, 72 per cent of previous migration occurred in the Middle East (71.6% of all answers given) and comparatively only 26 per cent to Europe (25.9% of all answers given). This data suggests that Iraqi returnees from Ninewa and Baghdad were more likely to have experienced previous internal displacement.

Like Iraqis in the Netherlands, 55 per cent of the returnee respondents reported having relatives and 58 per cent had friends in Europe prior to their own migration.

In comparison to Iraqis in transit and in the Netherlands, 89 per cent of respondents made the decision to migrate independently. Returnees were between the ages of 18 and 25 (84.4%), 26 and 35 (92.5%), and 36 and 49 (89.1%). This contrasts with Iraqis in the Netherlands, and in transit, where respondents in younger age groups were less likely to have made their own migration decision. For returnees, most of the respondents that were single or married/in a civil union had made their own decision to migrate to Europe (87.5% and 91.8%, respectively). In terms of sex, 91 per cent of male Iraqi returnees (91.2%) and 67 per cent of females made the decision to migrate independently.

Of the 11 per cent of respondents that reported not making their own migration decision, many returnees suggested that their spouse (46.5%) or parent (42.3%) had made the decision to migrate for them. Of the 89 per cent that had made their own migration decision (89.3%), 65 per cent discussed their potential migration with another party, particularly with family (68.5% of all answers given) and friends (21.6% of all answers given) in Iraq. In general, respondents reported that their migration decision was supported

by their first contact (79.3%). Other parties contacted include friends in Iraq (27.0% of all answers given), family in Iraq (15.8% of all answers given), and friends in Europe (11.5% of all answers given); 84 per cent of whom were supportive of the migration decision. However, 39 per cent of respondents did not discuss their migration with anyone else other than the first contact.

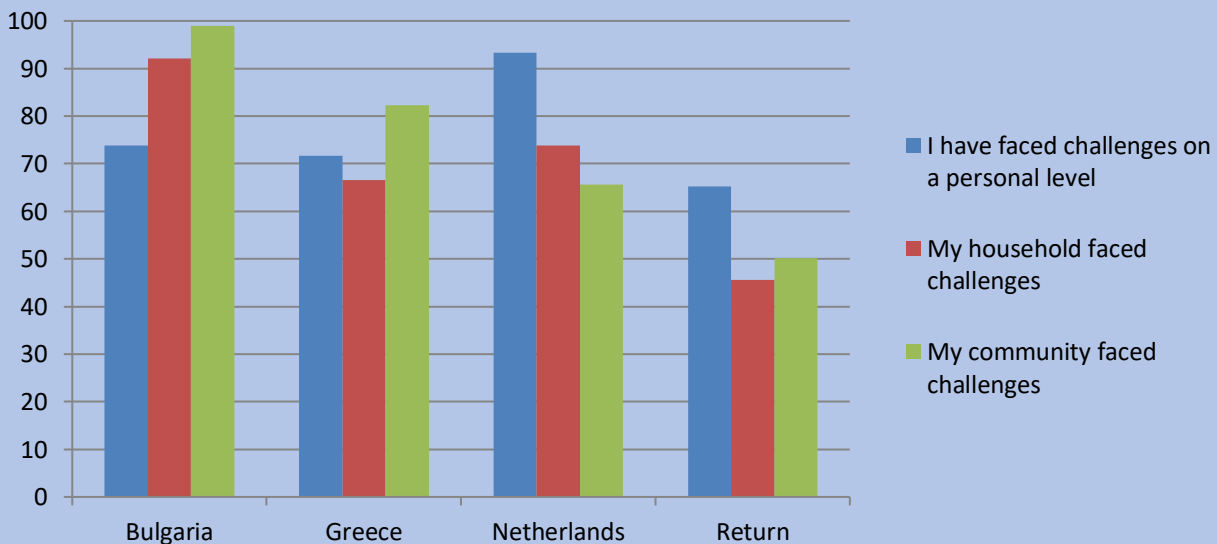
The primary source of information for informing migration decision was “word of mouth” (46.1%), Facebook (22.1%) and the Internet (20.0%). Slightly more than 25 per cent of the respondents reported having only one source of information. However, “word of mouth” (24.0%) and the Internet (24.3%) were also reported as the second primary source of information. The primary and secondary channels of “word of mouth” were verbal contact (via phone, Viber, Facebook, and/or Skype) with friends and family in Europe (31.9%; 11.6%) and contact at social events and activities, such as weddings, restaurants, and sports clubs (19.9%; 12.5%). Another secondary channel of “word of mouth” was family at home (9.3%). Almost 33 per cent of respondents reported having only one channel of “word of mouth” information.

HIGHLIGHTS: Migration drivers & decision-making

Pre-migration challenges and reasons for migration:

- **Most Iraqi respondents at different stages of the migration journey (transit – destination – return) indicated that they faced challenges at the personal, household, and community level in the six months prior to their departure to Europe (see Figure 21).**

Figure 21: Pre-migration challenges among Iraqi respondents (across stages), in per cent



- **In general, insecurity and economic instability was reported as main causes for migration. This reflects the mixed reasons for migration across the migration stages.** However, Iraqi transit respondents were significantly more likely to indicate security-related reasons for migration, in comparison to returnees who reported economic-related reasons for migration. **This is also reflected**

when ascertaining the specific event that triggered their initial migration from Iraq. Iraqis in the Netherlands mainly cited a security incident, while returnees reported an economic reason.

- **Respondents in the Netherlands were most likely to have experienced a personal challenge prior to migration, while returnees were least likely to do so** (see Figure 21).
- **Across migration stages, at the personal level, respondents reported personal security threats as the main challenge.** This was the highest for respondents in the Netherlands and lowest for returnees. **For respondents in Greece and the Netherlands, the secondary challenge was general insecurity as well as economic factors (e.g. insufficient income).** This shows that migration is caused by a combination of factors at different levels.
- Most respondents also reported facing household challenges prior to their migration to Europe. **At the household level, general insecurity in the region and security threats against household members were the two main challenges. This correlates to insecurity also being the main reason for migration amongst Iraqis.** Reflecting previous outcomes, returnees were also likely to report economic-related factors (e.g. a lack of sufficient income, a lack of jobs) as challenges at the household level.
- Similarly, many respondents also reported facing community challenges in the six months prior to their migration to Europe. Rates of facing such challenges were highest amongst respondents in Bulgaria. At the personal and household levels, returnees were least likely to experience challenges at the community level before migrating. **The main challenges at the community level were related to the general insecurity in the country.**
- **Insecurity challenges on personal, household, and community levels for all Iraqi migrants were unanimously reported for Iraqi in Greece, the Netherlands, and Bulgaria. For returnees, the challenge was also economic.**
- **Considering the specific event that triggered their migration, respondents primarily reported security-related factors.** This reflects both the challenges and reasons for migration amongst Iraqis across different migration stages.

Economic influences on migration:

- With regards to employment status in the six months prior to migration to Europe, unemployment before migration was most amongst respondents in Greece (34.3%) and lowest amongst respondents in the Netherlands (21.0%).
- **Average personal income prior to migration to Europe was highest amongst respondents in Greece (1,111.58 USD per month) and lowest amongst returnees (452.50 USD per month).** Respondents in Bulgaria were most likely to report that their personal average income before migration was insufficient to meet monthly expenses (75.9%). On the other hand, Iraqis in the Netherlands were most likely to report insufficient income levels for themselves and their family (69.2%) prior to migration.

Previous internal displacement and international migration:

- **Across the different migration stages, around 33 per cent of respondents had previously been internally displaced or migrated internationally.** Previous migration was most common amongst

Iraqis in Greece and the Netherlands and was least common among respondents in Bulgaria (3.89%). Previous internal displacement was also common among transit migrants, but least likely to have been reported by Iraqis in the Netherlands (19.5%).

- **It should be noted that much of the previous international migration of Iraqis occurred within the region.**

Role of friends and family on the decision-making process:

- **In general, large proportions of the respondents had relatives and friends in Europe before their migration** (see Figure 22). Transit migrants in Greece and Bulgaria have greater access to transnational networks than their counterparts in the other stages of migration.

Figure 22: Friends/relatives in Europe among Iraqi respondents (across stages), in per cent



- **Most Iraqi respondents reported having made the decision to migrate on their own**, this was highest among returnees (89.3%) and lowest among respondents in the Netherlands (50.3%). **In cases where the migrants did not make migration decisions themselves, their spouse had generally done so.** In some cases, this suggests that migration decisions can be a household decision.
- **Even though most respondents made their own migration decision, migration is still discussed with family (primarily in Iraq).** Those in transit also discussed their migration with family in Europe, and returnees with friends in the home country. Many of whom supported the migration decision; this support was slightly lower for returnees than for migrants in other stages of the migration journey.

Sources of information:

- The main sources of information that informed migrant decision differed slightly by migration phase. **“Word of mouth” was the main source of information for Iraqis in all stages of their migration journey.**
- While transit migrants most often relied on the television as a primary source of information, **migrants in the Netherlands and returnees often relied on “word of mouth” in the form of verbal contact (via phone, Viber, Facebook, and/or Skype) with their friends and family in Europe.**

- Returnees report a combination of verbal contact (again via phone, Viber, Facebook, and/or Skype) and social events and activities (e.g. weddings, restaurants, sports clubs) as their channels of word of mouth.

4. THEMATIC AREA 3 – CHALLENGES AND RELATED VULNERABILITIES

This chapter provides an overview of the different problems, challenges, and vulnerabilities that interviewed migrants from Iraq reported to have faced during their migration journey. To provide a comprehensive overview of such characteristics, the vulnerabilities of respondents are considered in their country of origin as well as in their countries of transit and destination.

Within the context of this report, it should be noted that different ways of travelling (e.g. alone, with friends, with family members) may entail different vulnerabilities. The use of smartphones during the journey is an important source of information that migrants can use to inform themselves of the risks and challenges possibly associated with their migration journey along certain routes.¹³

4.1 LITERATURE REVIEW

4.1.1 Challenges, vulnerabilities and risks in the country of origin

The main risks Iraqi migrants said to have faced in their country of origin prior to the migration process are associated with their departure from Iraq. Based on an IOM (2016b) study *Assessing the Risks of Migration along the Central and Eastern Mediterranean Routes*, there were three primary exit routes for migrants leaving Iraq during the time of that study:

- (1) Flying to Istanbul or Bodrum in Turkey from a selection of Iraq's international airports
- (2) Moving through the Kurdistan Region of Iraq to reach Turkey by land or air
- (3) Moving through Syrian Arab Republic to reach Turkey by land

Each migration journey gives rise to unique challenges and risks that Iraqi migrants must navigate to reach their destination countries, either alone or with friends and/or family members. The first option is limited to the few Iraqis who find themselves residing in relative proximity to one of these airports and have access to a visa. Based on new visa requirements established in September 2016, migrants must apply for visas to enter Turkey in advance.¹⁴ Therefore, this option requires that Iraqi migrants possess valid travel documents (i.e. valid passport and visa) to enter Turkey (IOM, 2016b).

¹³ The link between smartphones and use of technology vs more traditional ways of information and how do they relate to the vulnerability is not sufficiently explored.

¹⁴ Official passport holders are exempted from visa for their travels up to 90 days. Ordinary passport holders are required to have visa to enter Turkey. Ordinary passport holders with a valid Schengen members or USA, UK, Ireland visa or residence permit may get their single entry e-Visas valid for one month e-Visas via the website www.evisa.gov.tr, provided that they meet certain conditions.

The second option that entails moving through the KRI to reach Turkey by land (crossing the Ibrahim-Khalil border) or by air (from Sulaymaniyah or Erbil) poses many challenges. This option is mainly available to residents of the KRI.

The last – and most risky – option for Iraqis seeking to migrate to Europe entails traveling to Turkey by land through the Syrian Arab Republic (IOM,2016b)

4.1.2 Challenges, vulnerabilities and risks in transit

Although the flows through the Western Balkans route dropped upon the closure of the route, available DTM data shows that there are still migrants who are trying to reach Western Europe by using the Balkan routes. As a result, Iraqis transiting in Europe potentially face risks when travelling to Europe. Therefore in some cases, male heads of household migrate alone, intend for family reunification in Europe.¹⁵ Cases of family separation were still common when travelling through the Balkans, this could be because of losing contact in crowded reception centres or complications with identification documents (IOM, 2016b).

Migrant women and girls – not only those who originate from Iraq – are also particularly vulnerable and face additional risks during their journey. According to MMP (2016), these specific risks include sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), accompanied by the risk of having to engage in transaction sex, increased risks of sexually transmitted infections and unwanted pregnancies. Pregnant women are also at risk of health complications and complications during delivery.

Routes and vulnerabilities through Bulgaria and Greece

In Bulgaria and Greece, harsh winter conditions along the migration route are an added vulnerability for migrants and refugees (UNHCR, 2017b; UNHCR, 2017c). Reported risks – exacerbated by a lack of proper clothing, food, shelter, and medical attention – included hypothermia, frostbite, and death (Frontex, 2016).

Owing to increasing movement restrictions, many migrants have been exposed to very precarious journey conditions. Iraqi nationals have, for example, drowned attempting to cross the Danube at the Bulgaria-Romania border in the past (UNHCR, 2017b). Drownings of Iraqis between Turkey and the Greek Islands and the Evros River in the Balkans (Frontex, 2016). The danger of drowning – which is especially a risk for children and the elderly – is a consequence of overcrowded boats that are made of poor inflatable material and that fail to withstand the harsh conditions at sea. In addition to the risk of drowning, many migrants are exploited and ill-treated by smugglers from Turkey to Greece (IOM, 2016b).

4.1.3 Challenges, vulnerabilities and risks in the destination countries¹⁶

Based on IOM data(2016b), there are several risks associated with the migration from Iraq to Europe, and part of them are reported in the destination countries. The IOM (2016b) study specifically considers the challenges faced by the increasing numbers of Iraqis in Germany between 2015 and 2016 linked to uncertainties regarding outcomes of the asylum application and the asylum appeal process.

¹⁵ This often places the left-behind family at increased risk, especially with regards to the personal safety of women and children family members.

¹⁶ It should be noted that, while the Netherlands is a focus country of this report, there is limited existing research on the vulnerabilities and risks faced by Iraqi migrants, refugees, and/or asylum seekers upon arrival to this country.

Moreover, there are often difficulties associated with settling and integrating in the destination country that can take longer than expected. Iraqi respondents in the IOM (2016b) study highlighted housing difficulties such as moving from the temporary accommodation centres into their own housing subsidized by the government due to the reluctance of landlords and high demand for such support from other asylum seekers.

Moreover, the challenges faced by Iraqi migrants and asylum seekers in their country of destination are often exacerbated by a lack of information or misinformation about the asylum and integration processes. While accurate information is received from official sources, misinformation may also come from the use of non-official sources such as migration facilitators or other Iraqis migrants encountered at destination, in transit or who returned to Iraq. In some cases, Iraqi migrants and asylum seekers face difficulties with their identification documents – which are often forged, invalid, or missing altogether – upon arrival in their destination country (IOM, 2016b).

4.1.4 Challenges, vulnerabilities and risks related to return

Economic challenges, social and security challenges, are reported by individuals returning to Iraq. This study found that Iraqis face several challenges upon return, the primary challenges include limited access to livelihoods (46.1%), a lack of safety and security (36.9%), a lack of services, particularly in Baghdad (21.5%), and precarious housing (13.8%). With regards to security, returnees were concerned with the safety in their daily lives – especially on their way to and from work – and reported fearing terrorist attacks in Baghdad. The majority also reported their economic situation to be similar or worse upon return than prior their migration, with 17 per cent being unemployed and 28 per cent citing precarious employment. Others were unsatisfied with the employment they were able to find upon return and hoped for a job that paid a higher salary or was more closely related to their previous educational and occupational experiences (REACH, 2017).

Nonetheless, many returnees do not have intentions of returning to Europe or their previous host country. In a study on the return of Iraqi migrants and IDPs, IOM (2017c) found that returnee respondents were generally satisfied with their decision to return to Iraq: “This positive perception is reflected by a very low intention to leave the area again” (p. 25). It should also be noted that IOM (2017c) reports that, “all returnees feel comfortable upon return to their area of origin except for those who came back to Markaz Sinjar, where one third of interviewees were neutral about their return. The unstable security situation in the area certainly contributes to this feeling” (p. 31). In this regard, the DTM data from IOM (2017d) also suggests that 95 per cent of returns to Iraq in 2016 were permanent.

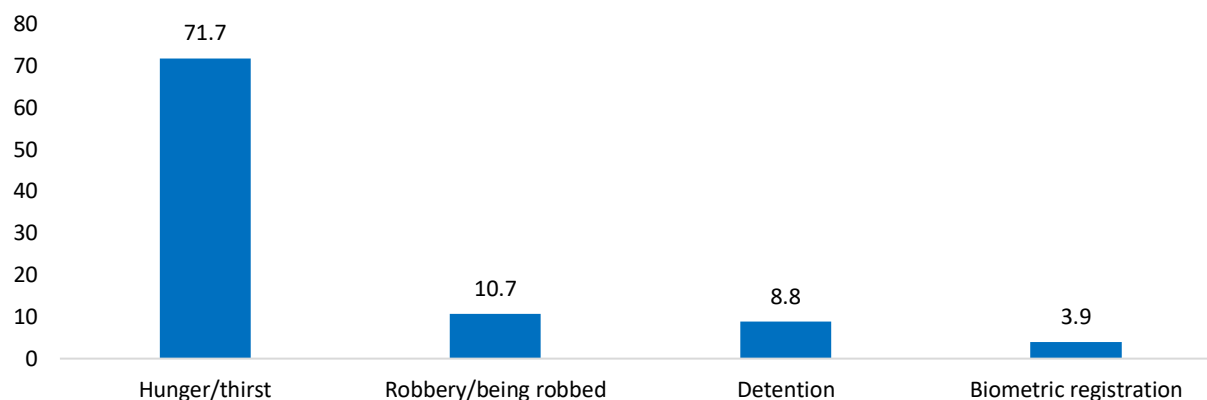
4.2 THEMATIC AREA 3 – DATA ANALYSIS OUTCOMES

4.2.1 Iraqi nationals in transit in Bulgaria

Iraqis were asked about challenges and therewith related problems they had so far faced en route to Europe. Of all Iraqi respondents in Bulgaria, 65 per cent suggested that they had experienced problems during their migration journey so far. Females (72.6%) were more likely to have experienced problems than males (62.2%) en route to Europe. The biggest problem referred to facing hunger and thirst (71.7%),

being robbed (10.7%), and detention (8.8%) (see Figure 23). More females experienced hunger and thirst (79.9%) than males (67.8%).

Figure 23: Primary problems encountered en route to Europe (Iraqi respondents in Bulgaria in per cent)



Problems reported in figure 23 were generally experienced in Bulgaria (77.2%) and were encountered for various reasons.

Secondary problems reported en route to Europe were detention¹⁷ (60.3%) and biometric registration¹⁸ (57.1%) It should be noted that very few (2.20%, N=14) of the respondents in Bulgaria reported having only one problem, while 12 per cent reported facing two problems.

In terms of anticipated problems during the onward migration journey, respondents reported detention (41.1%) and deportation (8.91%) as the primary expected challenges. Deportation (73.2%) was also reported as a secondary problem. Almost half of the respondents (46.8%), did not expect to face any additional challenges in their journey.

Most Iraqi respondents in Bulgaria travelled to Europe in a group (85.9% of all answers given) and 52 per cent of the respondents brought a smartphone with them during the journey. These smartphones were mainly used by the respondents to communicate with family and friends in Europe (38.1% of all answers given) and back home (56.2% of all answers given), using apps such as WhatsApp (87.8%), Viber (83.5%), and Facebook (78.0%). Very few, if any, used their smartphones as a source of information about their migration journey or for migration advice.

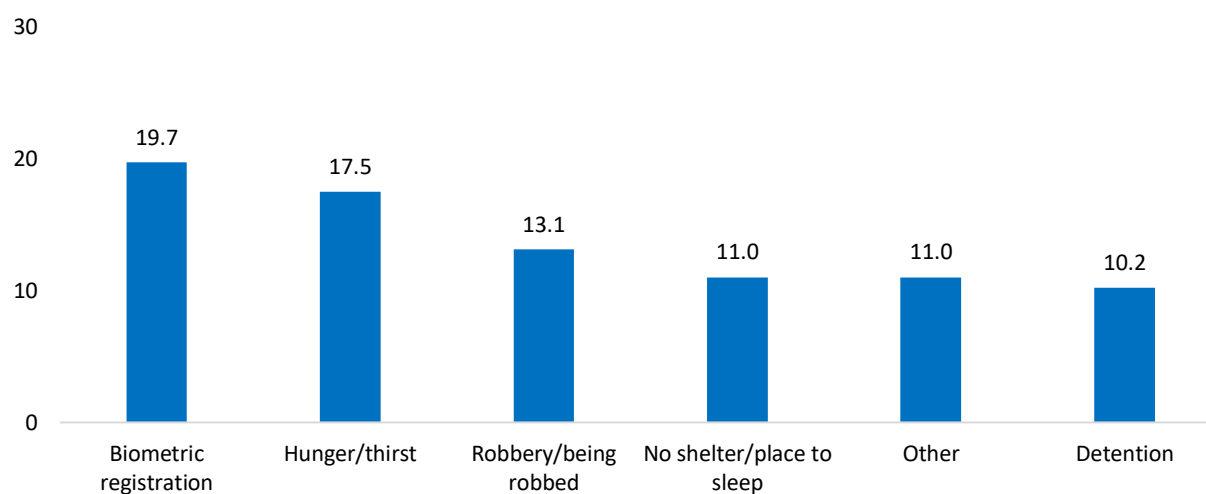
¹⁷ Detention by official authorities is legitimate part of the migration management. From the migrants' perspective, detention may be the deprivation of liberty based on their migration status and without committing any crime as such.

¹⁸ The collection of biometric information and registration is part of the Dublin Agreement whereby biometric information is collected at the first port of entry. However, from the perspective of Iraqi migrants it may be viewed as coercive because Iraqi migrants are aware that registering their biometric information in transit, (but technically their first port of entry to Europe) may hinder the asylum processes in their destination country. Hence, from the migrants' perspective it was reported as a problem encountered in the journey.

4.2.2 Iraqi nationals in transit in Greece

Iraqi respondents in Greece also reported facing vulnerabilities and challenges along the migration journey. More than half (53.9%) had already faced problems en route to Europe. Females (57.5%, N=27) were slightly more likely than males (53.1%) to have already experienced such problems. In comparison to the respondents in Bulgaria, a slightly lower percentage of Iraqis in Greece had reported facing problems en route to Europe. Out of the total respondents in Greece, 26 per cent preferred not to give an answer this question. Further still, females (31.9%, N=15) were more likely than males (24.2%) not to answer this question. Iraqis in Greece gave similar responses to the respondents in Bulgaria, who cited hunger and thirst, detention, and biometric registration as problems encountered during the migration journey. For the respondents in Greece, the primary problem was primarily associated with biometric registration, (19.7%, N=27), hunger and thirst (17.5%, N=24), as well as being robbed (13.1%, N=18), seen in Figure 24.

Figure 24: Primary problems encountered en route to Europe (Iraqi respondents in Greece), in per cent



Insufficient funds (17.5%, N=24) and lack of shelter and place to sleep (10.2%, N=14) were characteristic of the secondary problem reported. Secondary problems were generally experienced by respondents in Turkey (55.0%).

Iraqi respondents expected to face challenges such as financial shortages (10.6%, N=27) and detention (9.45%, N=24) in their onward journey, while 24 per cent did not want to answer. Almost 28 per cent of the respondents did not expect to face any more challenges en route to Europe and 52 per cent expected to face only one additional problem. The second expected challenge was primarily associated with biometric registration (11.0%, N=20) and detention (9.34%, N=17).

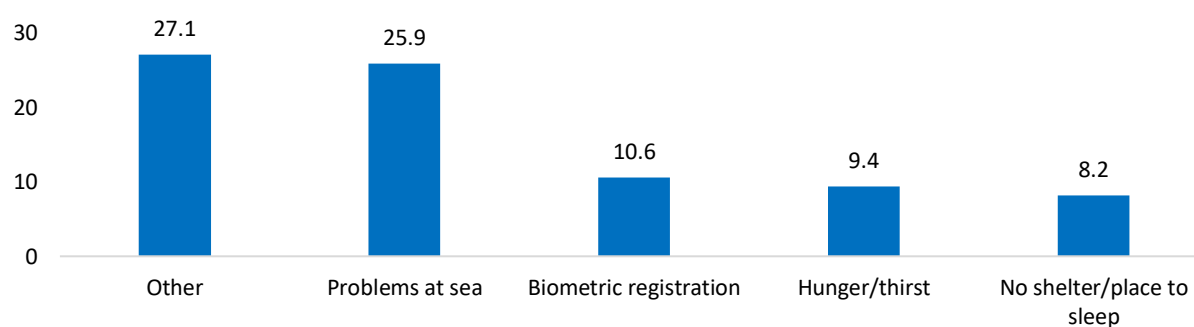
When respondents were asked about whom they had travelled to Europe with, 28 per cent reported to have travelled with their spouse

Iraqi respondents in Greece (80.7%) were more likely to have a smartphone during the journey in comparison to those in Bulgaria. Respondents primarily used their smartphone to communicate with family and friends in Iraq (26.8% of all answers given) and in Europe (31.6% of all answers given). In this regard, the use of Facebook (66.3%), WhatsApp (60.5%), and Viber (51.7%) was most commonly reported.

4.2.3 Iraqi nationals in the destination country (the Netherlands)

Comparatively lower than respondents in transit and return, Iraqi respondents in the Netherlands (43.6%) also reported facing problems en route to Europe. More males (50%) than females (39.9%) reported facing such problems. In terms of top three problems encountered during the migration journey, primary reported problems included problems at sea (25.9%, N=22) and biometric registration (10.6%, N=9) (see Figure 25). Another 27 per cent (N=23) of the respondents reported their primary problem as being 'other,' this included forced separation from family members.

Figure 25: Primary problems encountered en route to Europe (Iraqi respondents in the Netherlands)), in per cent



Most problems were experienced at sea (30.6%, N=26) and in Greece (18.8%, N=16). Problems at sea (95.5%, N=25) were most commonly associated with migration facilitators (38.1%, N=10).

The majority (61.2%) of the respondents reported facing only one problem, while an additional 9 per cent of the respondents (N=8) reported health problems as secondary problems. This problem was generally experienced at sea (27.3%, N=9) and in Greece (24.2%, N=8). More than half of the respondents (54.6%, N=18) reported only facing two main challenges.

For Iraqis in the Netherlands that reported 'other', 27 per cent of respondents cited forced separation (e.g. from children, a spouse, and family) and xenophobia during migration. When respondents associated the primary problem with an 'other' party (23.5%, N=20), this problem was generally associated with safety on board (e.g. fear of drowning) and the circumstances and conditions of travel. For example, an interviewee cited an example when she was about to lose one of her children but managed to save her child.

Many respondents reported travelling to Europe either alone (41.5% of all answers given), with their children (41.5% of all answers given), and/or with their spouse (38.5% of all answers given). Of the Iraqi migrants in the Netherlands that reported travelling to Europe alone, most were between 26 and 35 years of age (57.4%). Relatively more males (56.6%) than females (6.78%, N=4) travelled alone. These responses suggest that Iraqis in the Netherlands were significantly more likely to report travelling alone than respondents in Bulgaria (who travelled primarily in groups) and in Greece (who travelled primarily with their spouse and/or children) as well as returnees (who also travelled primarily alone, though to a lesser extent).

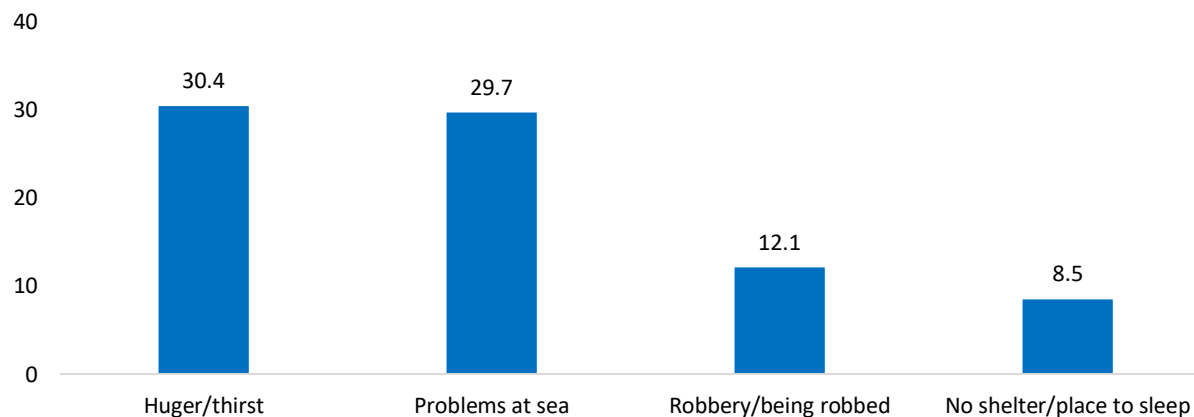
Moreover, 72 per cent of the respondents reported having a smartphone on their journey to communicate with family and friends in Iraq (72.4% of all answers given) and in their destination country (21.3% of all answers given, N=27). Respondents reported Viber (48.0%), Internet browsers (18.9%, N=24), and Skype (14.2%, N=18) as their most used apps.

4.2.4 Iraqi returnees

Many Iraqi returnees reported that they had travelled to Europe alone (35.7% of all answers given). Those who travelled alone were mostly between the ages of 26 and 35 years (37.8%), 36 and 49 years (35.5%), and 18 and 25 years (28.9%). Furthermore, 38 per cent of the male returnees reported having travelled alone. On the other hand, females were much less likely (9.62%, N=5) to travel alone. Unlike the respondents in Greece, Bulgaria, or the Netherlands, returnees also commonly reported having travelled with friends (28.4% of all answers given). Also, 59 per cent of respondents reported having a smartphone – used primarily to communicate with friends and family in Iraq and in the destination country (13.3% of all answers given) – during their journey. Similarly, Viber (75.2%), Facebook (57.4%) and WhatsApp (36.1%) were reported as the commonly used apps among respondents.

In comparison to Iraqis in transit and at their destination, 82 per cent of Iraqi returnees (81.8%) reported facing problems en route to Europe. Slightly more males (82%) than females (78.9%, N=41) faced problems en route. The top three problems encountered during the migration journey included problems at sea (29.7%) and hunger and thirst (30.4%), as also seen in Figure 26.

Figure 26: Primary problems encountered en route to Europe (Iraqi returnee respondents), in per cent



Hunger and thirst was common in Greece (29.2%) and associated with other migrants (28.6%); Bulgaria (28.6%) and associated with migration facilitators (72.9%); and Turkey (25.0%) and associated with migration facilitators and migrants equally (31.0%). These findings are also found in the existing literature that highlights drowning, overcrowded boats, and harsh conditions as issues in the sea crossing between Turkey and Greece along the Eastern Mediterranean Route (IOM, 2016b).

Of the total respondents, 24 per cent reported facing only one problem during their migration journey. Secondary problems included problems at sea (14.0%), a lack of shelter or place to sleep (11.6%), or hunger and thirst (10.3%). These problems were encountered to some extent in Greece (33.7%) and in

Bulgaria (19.1%) and was associated with migration facilitators (25.6%) and other migrants (25.1%). Almost 42 per cent of the respondents reported facing two challenges, a few tertiary challenges included a lack of shelter and place to sleep (8.13%), hunger and thirst (7.18%), robbery (6.46%, N=27), and financial shortages (6.46%, N=27).

HIGHLIGHTS: Challenges, vulnerabilities & risk factors

Problems experienced en route to Europe:

- The **most frequently reported problems** that Iraqis experienced throughout their migration journey were: **hunger and thirst, problems at sea, detention, and biometric registration.**
- Among respondents in Bulgaria, the primary problems experienced during the migration journey were hunger and thirst, detention, and biometric registration.
- Among respondents in Greece, the primary problems faced en route to Europe included biometric registration, hunger and thirst, as well as financial shortages and were mainly experienced in Turkey and Greece
- Respondents in the Netherlands mainly encountered problems at sea because of their migration facilitator, while returnees faced a combination of problems (including problems at sea, hunger and thirst, and a lack of shelter) in Turkey and Greece.
- **While 82 per cent of Iraqi returnees reported facing problems during their journey, only 44 per cent of Iraqis in the Netherlands reported having problems en route to Europe.**
- **Iraqis in transit in Greece and Bulgaria did not expect any more problems en route to Europe or only one problem. Among respondents that did expect future problems during the journey, detention and deportation were most commonly cited among those in Greece and biometric registration was cited among those in Bulgaria.**
- Female Iraqi respondents in transit in Bulgaria and Greece were generally more likely than their male counterparts to experience problems en route to Europe. On the other hand, male respondents in the Netherlands and among returnees were more likely to have experienced problems than their female counterparts. Especially in the case of returnees and respondents in the Netherlands, males were more likely than females to travel alone.

Smartphone use + travel companions:

- **Many Iraqis in the Netherlands that reported to not travel alone, had travelled with children.** Most of whom that **travelled with children were frequently females.**
- **Iraqis in transit in both Bulgaria and Greece mostly travelled in groups, while returnees, on the other hand, often travelled alone.** In other words, Iraqi transit migrants travelled with a relative or with a group significantly more often than Iraqi migrants in the Netherlands or returnees.

- **Smartphone use along the journey was common among Iraqis in all stages of the migration journey.** Rates of smartphone possession during the migration journey were highest amongst respondents in Greece (80.7%) and lowest amongst respondents in Bulgaria (52.3%).
- **Among transit migrants, smartphones were mainly used to communicate with contacts in Europe and contacts in the home country.** However, **respondents in the Netherlands and returnees primarily communicated with contacts at home**; this aligns with the finding that, prior to migration, they had less established transnational networks (e.g. friends and family) in Europe than Iraqis in transit.
- **The smartphone apps mainly used by respondents were diverse, especially in transit. In general, Viber is used most often across the different migration phases.**

5. THEMATIC AREA 4 – THE ROLE OF INTERMEDIARIES

The term *migration facilitator* refers to anyone involved in the facilitation of (irregular and regular) migration services via air, land, or sea routes. This can include a wide range of services: consultative services for visa application and acquiring (fraudulent) documents, transportation arrangements or the facilitation of border crossings. The definition used does not intend to neglect the differences in services and of other commonly used terms for those persons providing the migration services. Therefore, whenever useful and necessary for the understanding of the given context, the study distinguishes between different forms of facilitators, such as smugglers or brokers. Utilizing this definition of migration facilitators, this section will discuss their role on the migration journeys of Iraqi migrants to Europe.

5.1 LITERATURE REVIEW

Whilst not all irregular migrants utilise the assistance of irregular migration networks, a large share of Iraqi migrants are dependent on the intervention of migration facilitators throughout the duration of their migration journey to Europe. Smugglers can provide transportation and fraudulent documents (Reitano, Adal & Shaw, 2014). The estimated costs of the journey to Europe were reported to be high by Iraqi respondents in a previous IOM (2017b) study: 38 per cent estimated the costs of their journey to be higher than USD 5,000, 37 per cent indicated an estimated cost of between USD 2,500 and 5,000, 18 per cent between USD 1,000 and 2,500, and only one per cent below USD 1,000. Only a small percentage (6%) either reported no costs or no information about the cost of their journey (IOM, 2017b). Citing slightly different figures, another IOM (2016c) study suggests that, while the cost of the journey from Iraq to Europe can range between USD 2,500 and 35,000, the average cost was USD 7,000 per person.¹⁹

Although the use of a smuggler is considered consensual, migrants are often taken advantage of and forced, tricked, or threatened into exploitative activities such as forced and sexual labour or trafficking (Carling, 2006). Along the journey, Iraqi migrants use migration facilitators to navigate checkpoints when leaving their villages and towns and to reach and cross the Syrian border into Deir Ez-zor or Al Mayadeen

¹⁹ It is, however, important to consider the IOM surveys are conducted in different locations, samples and time periods. Since costs are subject to changes and fluctuations, they may vary.

(IOM 2016b). From these locations, migration facilitators are used to reach the city of Raqqa, to move towards and cross the Syrian-Turkish border, and to travel by boat from the coastal cities of Izmir and Bodrum to islands in Greece (IOM 2016b). Following the 2016 EU-Turkey Statement, migration facilitators may also be required for the journey from Greece to Germany through the Balkans (IOM, 2016b). This migration is generally driven by local smuggling operations of each country, though smuggling rings on the Turkish coast tend to be larger and more organized. It should also be noted that, according to Europol (2016), Iraqi, Syrian or Afghan smugglers – “tend to be young irregular migrants themselves and are involved in arranging the facilitation services for fellow nationals” (p. 10).

The on-going violence and the conflict that Iraq is witnessing due to the presence of ISIL has only served to continually increase the vulnerability of the Iraqi migrant population – particularly women and children – to trafficking. As the annually published *Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report* by the US Department of State (DoS) reported in 2017, ISIL has been known to kidnap and hold captive thousands of women and children as well as migrants caught trying to enter or leave a controlled territory. Often, these women and children face rape, forced marriage, sex slavery, and domestic servitude and are sold to ISIL fighters in Iraq and Syrian Arab Republic (DoS, 2017). Moreover, while smugglers play a role in facilitating the migration of Iraqis to Europe specifically when leaving Iraq and in transit countries, they can also subject migrants to abuse, torture, rape, kidnapping, and financial exploitation. In interviews with IOM (2016b), migrants reported having been tortured, held in transit by smugglers who waited for improved weather and security conditions or “for enough migrants to amass for the journey to be profitable,” and charged more money than was initially agreed upon (p. 34). Even though irregular migration facilitators pose many safety challenges, irregular migration is sometimes considered as the easiest way to ensure a fast journey to Europe.

Social networks of family members, friends, and acquaintances are also influential in the migration journey. As seen in the case of Iraq, the general presence of contacts – whether they be family, friends, or acquaintances – can act as intermediaries and are often a main reason for Iraqi migrants to choose a specific country of destination (IOM, 2016c). Social networks may also act as intermediaries in supporting Iraqi migrants through financial means (IOM, 2017a). For example, IOM (2016a) research found that more than half of the Iraqi respondents relied on financial support from their household to finance their journey to Europe. Some also relied on financing from their extended family to make the journey (IOM, 2016a).

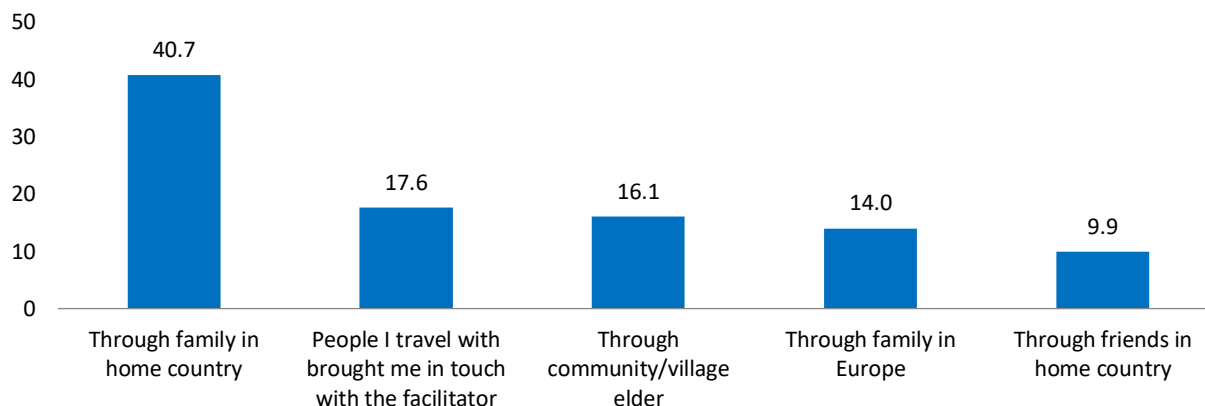
5.2 THEMATIC AREA 4 – DATA ANALYSIS OUTCOMES

5.2.1 Iraqi nationals in transit in Bulgaria

As discussed in the literature review section above, intermediaries are an important part of the migration process for migrants before and during their journeys for providing transport and creating fraudulent documents (Reitano et al., 2014). In this regard, almost all (99.6%) of the Iraqi respondents in Bulgaria reported making use of a migration facilitator. The use of migration facilitators was equal between males (99.6%) and females (99.7%) respectively. On average, Iraqi respondents reported that they used one migration facilitator during their journey to Europe. Compared to their counterparts in Greece, the Netherlands, and upon return – respondents in Bulgaria reported the highest rates of migration facilitator use, even though they used the lowest number of (different) facilitators.

Respondents contacted their facilitator primarily through family in Iraq (40.7%), fellow travellers (17.6%), a community or village elder in Iraq (16.1%), or family in Europe (14%) (Figure 27).

Figure 27: First contact with the migration facilitator among Iraqi nationals transiting in Bulgaria, in per cent



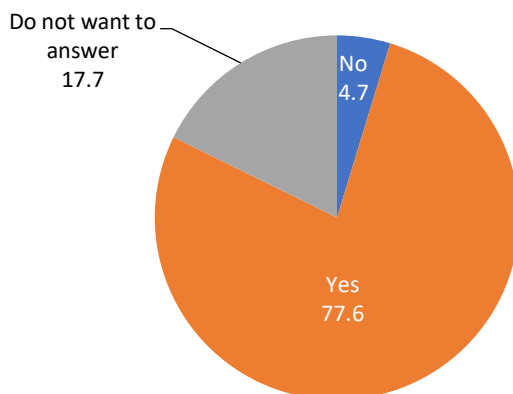
Payment to the migration facilitator made in full prior to the departure (62%) or in instalments through hawala (31%) by respondents. Like findings reported in existing literature (IOM, 2017b; IOM, 2016c), the average costs for the Iraqi respondents to reach their current location in Bulgaria was USD 5,722.

To finance their journeys, Iraqis transiting in Bulgaria reported relying on their own savings (30% of all answers given). Respondents also sold assets such as cars and furniture (28.1% of all answers given) and/or borrowed money from family and friends in Europe (27.0% of all answers given). Other preparations included obtaining a passport (39.7% of all answers given) and informing friends and family in Europe (27.8% of all answers given). Reliance on family and friends as intermediaries during the migration journey, especially with regards to financing the migration journey, has also been cited in the literature (IOM, 2017a; IOM, 2016c). Prior to migration, respondents also gathered information related to the potential costs (56.5%); routes (84.9%); and transportation options (72.2%).

5.2.2 Iraqi nationals in transit in Greece

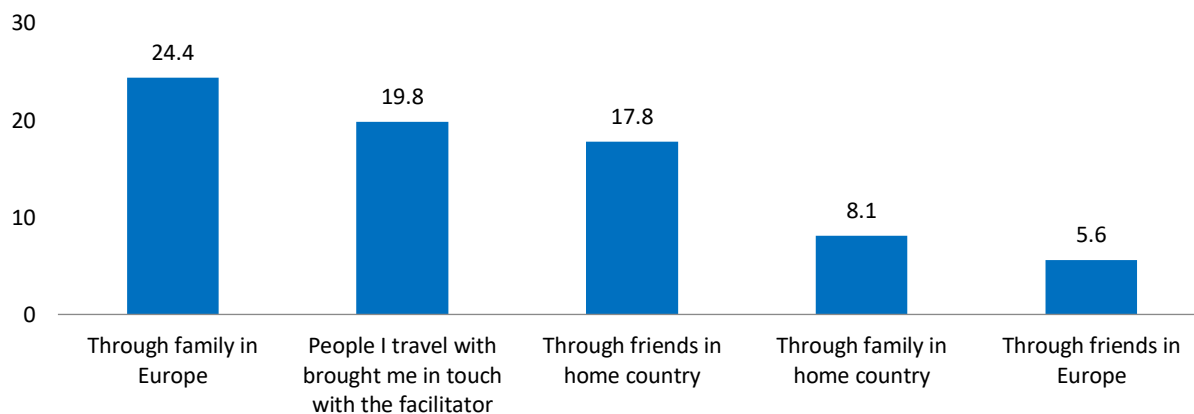
In comparison to Iraqis in Bulgaria, more Iraqis transiting in Greece had already used a migration facilitator en route to Europe (77.6%) (see Figure 28), this figure illustrates the use of migration facilitators.

Figure 28: Use of a migration facilitator among Iraqi nationals transiting in Greece, in per cent



Of those Iraqi in Bulgaria that reported to have used a facilitator, the average was 2 and this is different from Bulgaria. Of the respondents that had already used a facilitator, various respondents contacted the facilitator through family in Europe (24.4%), through friends in Iraq (17.8%), or through fellow travellers (19.8%) (see Figure 29). Although not unexpected, it appears that respondents contacted migration facilitators through social relations.

Figure 29: First contact with the migration facilitator among Iraqi nationals transiting in Greece, in per cent



Like respondents in Bulgaria, payment to the migration facilitator was for the most part made in full upfront before the start of the journey (34.7% of all answers given). Other payment arrangements included cash instalments (10.1% of all answers given, N=21) and instalments through an official money exchange (e.g. Western Union, 17.9% of all answers given). Moreover, respondents reported that the average cost for the journey to their current location was USD 1,947.75, while the average expected total cost to reach the final destination was USD 4,375.22. These reported costs are like those reported by DTM FMS data (IOM, 2017b). Yet, these expected costs are much lower than those reported by Iraqi respondents in Bulgaria. At the same time, previous DTM reports (IOM, 2017b; IOM, 2016c) have also

found the cost of journeys from Iraq to Europe to vary. This study also found that 22 per cent of the Iraqi respondents preferred not to answer how much they had paid to reach Greece.

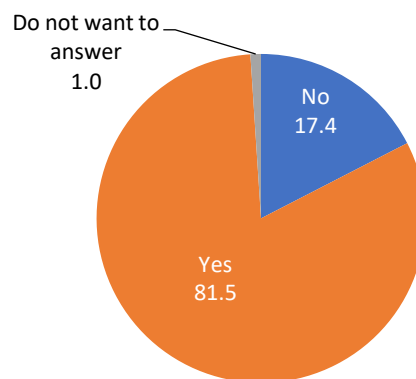
Mirroring the answers of respondents in Bulgaria, Iraqis transiting in Greece reported financing their journey primarily by relying on savings (20.6% of all answers given) as well as borrowing money from family and/or friends in Europe (17.6% of all answers given). Respondents reported that other preparations included obtaining an Iraqi passport (25.4% of all answers given) as well as informing friends and family in Europe (14.1% of all answers given). Some respondents did not make any other preparations before their departure to Europe (28.9% of all answers given). Respondents primarily collected information on costs (31.5%), followed by, information on routes (28.3%), and lastly on transportation (33.3%) and job markets (22.2%, N=24).

In general, preparations took between one and two months (20.1%) or more than six months (17.3%), showing that a greater percentage of Iraqis transiting in Greece needed less time for their migration preparations than respondents surveyed in Bulgaria.

5.2.3 Iraqi nationals in the destination country (the Netherlands)

As shown in Figure 30, many of the Iraqi respondents (81.5%) in the Netherlands reported making use of a migration facilitator en route to Europe. Of the Iraqi migrants in the Netherlands, slightly more males (82.4%) than females (79.7%) made use of a migration facilitator. On average, the respondents used three migration facilitators during their journey to Europe. Statistically, Iraqis in the Netherlands were significantly less likely than respondents in transit (collectively) and upon return to report the use of a migration facilitator. Respondents in this study still reported a slightly higher usage of migration facilitators than Iraqis in Greece, while 29 per cent of the respondents did not know how many migration facilitators they had used to reach the Netherlands.

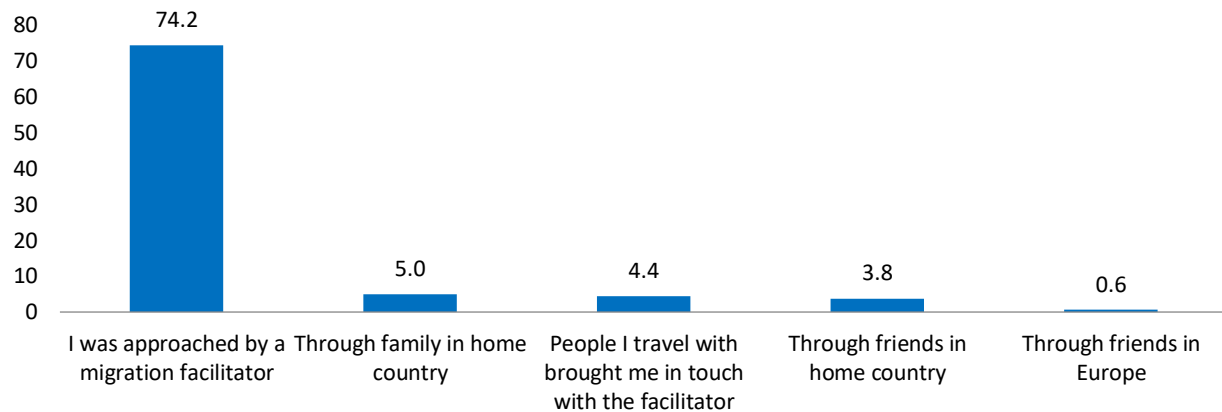
Figure 30: Use of a migration facilitator among Iraqi nationals in the Netherlands, in per cent



Instead of searching for a migration facilitator, 75 per cent of respondents reported being approached by a migration facilitator (see Figure 31). Of the Iraqis in the Netherlands that had been approached by their migration facilitator, the majority were males (69%), married (60%), and had diverse levels of education.

Respondents had either primary or secondary education (60%), while another 16 per cent (N=19) of this cross-section of individuals reported having a Bachelor’s degree. It is also observed that 36 per cent of these individuals originated from Baghdad.

Figure 31: First contact with the migration facilitator among Iraqi nationals in the Netherlands, in per cent



Most respondents reported making a payment to the migration facilitator in full before departure (65% of all answers given) like Iraqi respondents in transit, while others also reported paying in instalments in cash (26.8% of all answers given). Like Iraqis in Greece and in Bulgaria, most respondents in the Netherlands reported relying on savings (52.6% of all answers given) to pay the fees. The average reported cost to reach the Netherlands from Iraq was USD 8,557. The costs reported by the respondents in the Netherlands are higher than respondents in the current study to reach Greece and Bulgaria; they are also higher than the costs expected by respondents in Greece to reach their final destination. Another 23 per cent of the Iraqi respondents did not know how much money they had spent to reach their current location.

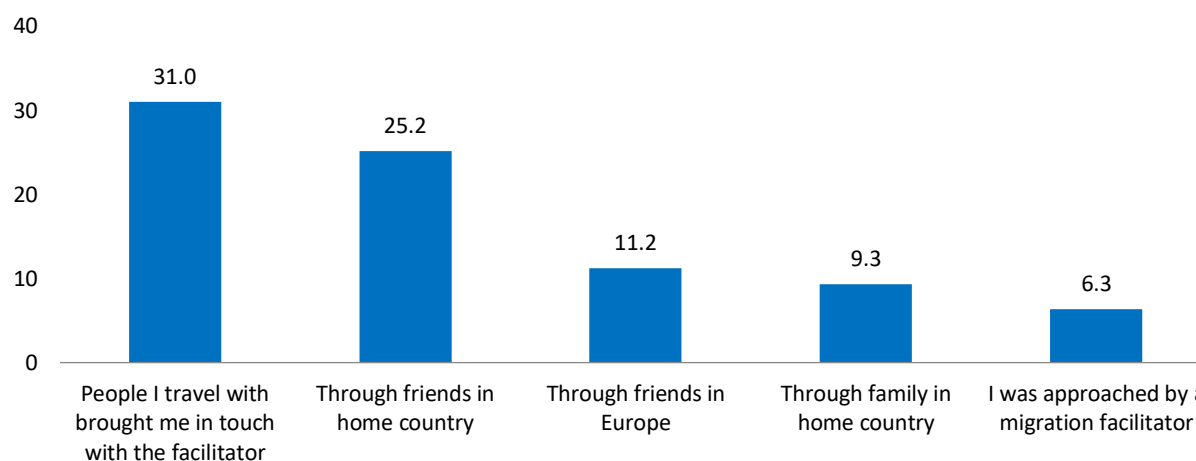
Respondents also reported on the primary, secondary, and tertiary types of information they collected prior to departure. When asked about their primary forms of information, 91 per cent of the respondents reported that they were not looking for additional information while 3. per cent (N=6) sought out information on legal possibilities. In terms of secondary information, 18 per cent (N=3) investigated the legal possibilities of migration and 12 per cent (N=2) the transportation options. In this regard, 53 per cent (N=9) reported not looking for additional secondary information, and another 63 per cent (N=5) did not look for additional tertiary information.

Respondents generally reported not making any other preparations before their departure other than financing (74.4% of all answers given). Few respondents informed their friends and family in Europe (6.76% of all answers given, N=14) of their migration. For slightly over three-fourths of the respondents, preparations for migration took less than one month while 13 per cent (N=26) of the respondents needed one to two months for their preparations, and 5 per cent (N=10) needed more than six months to prepare for the journey.

5.2.4 Iraqi returnees

Almost all the returnee respondents (93.6%) reported making use of a migration facilitator, like Iraqis transiting in Bulgaria. Like respondents in the Netherlands, male returnees were more likely to make use of a migration facilitator than female returnees (94.2% as compared to 86.5%, respectively). On average, they used two migration facilitators in their journey from Iraq to Europe. Respondents established contact with their facilitator primarily through people with whom they travelled (31.0% of all answers given) or through friends in Iraq (25.2% of all answers given) (see Figure 32).

Figure 32: First contact with the migration facilitator among Iraqi returnees, in per cent



Many returnees made the payment to their facilitator in full before departure (42.5% of all answers given) –or through a third party (35.2% of all answers given). Respondents also reported to have paid an average of USD 13,998 to reach their final destination in Europe. In contrast to their counterparts in transit and in the Netherlands, Iraqi returnees reported financing their migration primarily by selling assets (e.g. car, furniture, 34.2% of all answers given). Nonetheless, respondents also reported relying on savings (25.8% of all answers given) and/or borrowing money from family and friends in Iraq (22.5% of all answers given).

Other primary preparations included obtaining an Iraqi passport (49.9% of all answers given). Returnee respondents were also asked about the three types of information that they had collected before departing for Europe. In this regard, information on costs (66.1%) took precedence, while information on routes (53.9%) was sought out secondarily. For the third type of information, returnees primarily collected information on transportation (37.1%) and asylum procedures (15.8%). Similar to what was reported by respondents in the Netherlands, migration preparations took less than one month for more than half of the respondents (52.0%).

HIGHLIGHTS: The role of intermediaries

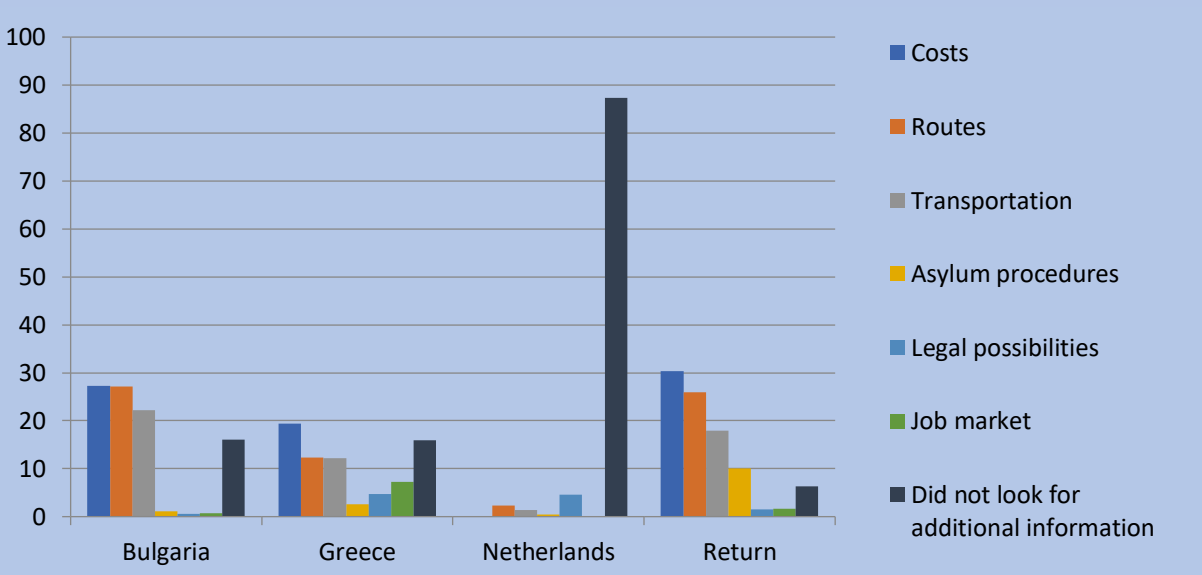
Use of migration facilitators:

- The use of a migration facilitator was especially common amongst Iraqi respondents in Bulgaria (99.6%), while respondents in Greece (77.6%) reported the lowest use of migration facilitators. Migration facilitators were significantly less common amongst Iraqi respondents in the Netherlands (81.5%) than amongst returnees (93.6%).
- On average, one to three migration facilitators were used by Iraqis across the different migration stages, with numbers being the lowest among respondents in Bulgaria (approximately one facilitator) and highest amongst those in the Netherlands (approximately three facilitators).
- Respondents encountered migration facilitators through existing social networks of family (either in Iraq or in Europe) or people they travelled with. Conversely, respondents in the Netherlands appear as exceptions to this, as they were mainly approached by their migration facilitator.
- Respondents across the migration stages most often paid their facilitator in full and up-front before the start of their migration journey.

Preparations for migration:

- Considering the types of information collected prior to their journey, Iraqis in the Netherlands tended not to collect information before migrating to Europe (see Figure 33). Transit migrants and returnees, on the other hand, reveal a specific pattern of looking for information on costs, routes, and transportation.
- In general, obtaining an Iraqi passport was common among respondents.

Figure 33: Types of information collected pre-migration (across stages), in per cent



Financing the migration journey:

- **There is a great variance in the actual and expected costs of migration between the migrants in different stages of their migration journey.** Returnees and Iraqi nationals in the Netherlands reported higher costs to reach their European destination (USD 13,997.66 and USD 8,556.53, respectively) than those reported by respondents in Greece (USD 1,947.75) and Bulgaria (USD 5,722.43) to reach their current location.
- **Before leaving Iraq, most Iraqis financed their journey by relying on savings, borrowing money from family, or selling their assets.**

6. THEMATIC AREA 5 – MIGRANTS’ PERCEPTIONS TOWARDS EUROPE

Migrant perceptions of Europe are important to understand migrant decisions more thoroughly. These perceptions could also elucidate possible preconceived notions about Europe, reasons for choosing destination countries, and sources of information.²⁰

6.1 LITERATURE REVIEW

The IOM study (2016c), *Migration Flows from Iraq to Europe – Reasons Behind Migration*, investigates migrants’ perceptions of Europe. According to this report, participants reported to associate Europe with higher levels of security and social justice than Iraq and, therefore, as presenting benefits in comparison to Iraq or over other potential destinations for migration. Common keywords used to describe Europe were “security, safety, law, freedom, human dignity, human rights, system and welfare,” while Iraq was more frequently described with words associated with social relations: “family, friends, food, and social life” (IOM, 2016c, p. 12).

IOM DTM’s (2016a) report entitled *Migration Flows from Iraq to Europe*, respondents most frequently cited Germany, Finland, Sweden, Austria, Belgium, and the Netherlands as intended destinations. In addition, expected services and forms of support of respondents in European destination countries included free or subsidized accommodation, refugee status, cash assistance, legal assistance for asylum applications, support in the search for employment, and free or subsidized healthcare. However, these expectations were not always aligned with the reality of what migrants received in their destination countries.

Similar discrepancies are also detailed in the aforementioned IOM (2016c) study, where participants noted being especially disappointed by restrictive immigration policies, limited employment opportunities, being far away from family and home, and difficulties in accessing social services and financial support as well as in gaining a residence permit: With regard to Europe in general, regardless of the specific country of destination, there was a general consensus among respondents that the reality was very different from what they imagined (IOM,2016c). All participants, across all locations, reported—and this was a widespread feeling—that Europe had somehow been idealized and that initial

²⁰ During data collections respondents could provide more than two priorities and expected forms of support. In this chapter, these priorities and expected forms of supported are ranked in order of importance.

expectations were too high. They frequently referred to “Europe’s myths” or to other false expectations, such as the one that “before travelling, migrants imagine Europe like paradise” (p.18) (IOM,2016c).

A mismatch between expectations and realities may also, to a certain extent, influence the decisions of some to return to Iraq. For example, the decision to engage in return migration can be traced to the rejection of an asylum request, delays in the asylum process, being unable to attain legal residence in Europe, reportedly unendurable living conditions in the reception centres, as well as the inability to find work and establish a livelihood in Europe (IOM, 2016b; IOM, 2016c).

6.2 THEMATIC AREA 5 – DATA ANALYSIS OUTCOMES

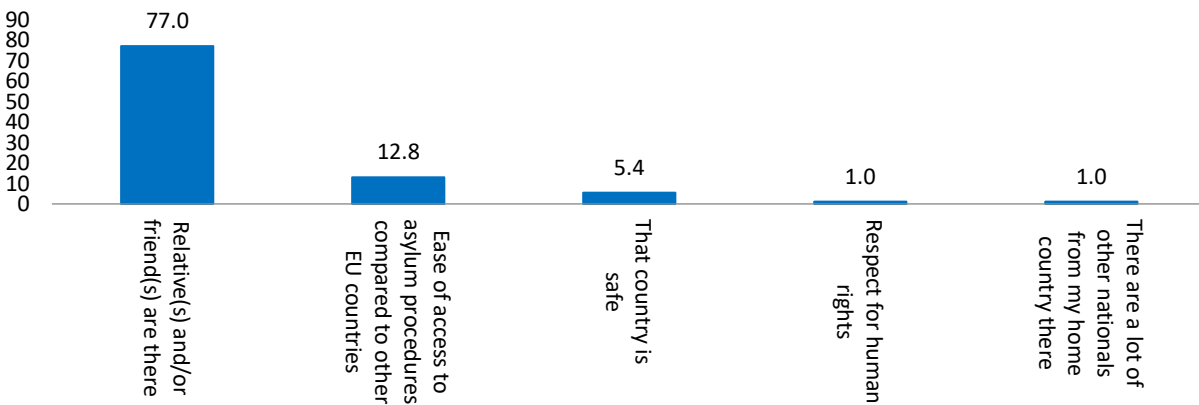
6.2.1 Iraqi nationals in transit in Bulgaria

Although 84 per cent of respondents reported that Bulgaria was not their intended destination, 94 per cent still wished to apply for asylum there. For 13 per cent of the respondents did not know whether Bulgaria was their intended destination country, but more generally wanted to reach Europe.

Of the 3 per cent (N=29) that did report Bulgaria as their intended destination, the main reasons for choosing Bulgaria was safety (62.1%, N=18). Half of the respondents reported that they would go to another country in Europe even without legal status while 22 per cent were undecided about what they would do once their asylum procedure was completed.

Instead, Germany (60.0%), the Netherlands (9.8%), and the UK (4.9%) were other intended destinations reported by respondents. The main reason for choosing these intended destinations was the existence of transnational networks (e.g. friends and family) in those countries (Germany: 77.6%, Netherlands: 80.0%, and UK: 82.5%). General primary and secondary reasons for choosing their intended European destination country were based on having family and friends there (77.0%; 11.4%), the perceived ease of access to asylum compared to other EU countries (12.8%; 28.2%), as well as the safety of the country (5.43%; 22.6%) (see Figure 34). While these reasons indicate the importance of social ties in a destination country for migrants, the security in a country is also commonly mentioned in the literature – especially amongst previous IOM research (IOM, 2016c) – as a reason for choosing a specific intended destination. Iraqis surveyed in a previous DTM study on migration flows from Iraq to Europe (IOM, 2016a) gave similar intended European destination countries (IOM, 2016a), including Germany, Finland, Sweden, Austria, Belgium, and the Netherlands.

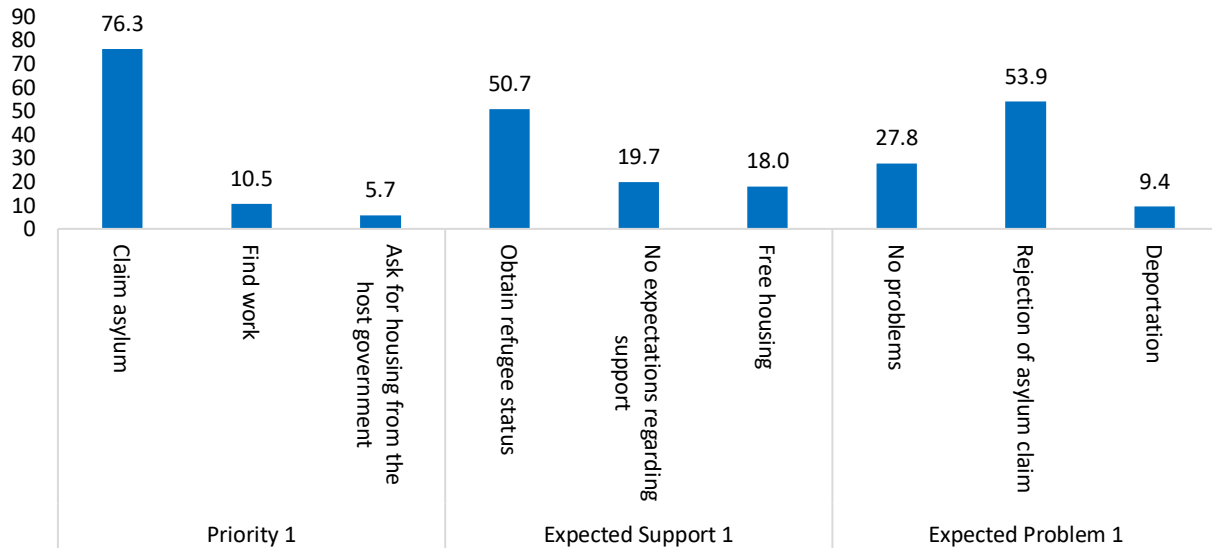
Figure 34: Reason 1 for choice of intended destination country among Iraqi nationals transiting in Bulgaria, in per cent



As shown in Figure 34, the main reason for choosing the intended destination was linked to the existence of social networks (77%). For example, 81 per cent of Iraqi respondents in Bulgaria who left because of personal insecurity or general conflict wanted to go where they had family and friends. In contrast, 84 per cent who left Iraq because of insecurity were more likely to cite safety as a reason for wanting to move to the intended destination. To a much lesser extent, the same can be said for 10 per cent of respondents who migrated due to economic concerns, given the lack of job opportunities and general economic prosperity in Iraq.

Once they arrived in their intended European destination country, 76 per cent of the respondents indicated that their first priority would be to apply for asylum, other priorities included finding work (10.5%) and social housing (5.74%). In terms of expected support in destination countries, half of the Iraqi respondents transiting in Bulgaria expected to receive refugee status (50.7%) and free housing (18.0%) as primary support. Free housing (35.1%), a monthly living stipend (21.9%), and access to free education (9.18%) were characteristic of the expected secondary support. On the other hand, 20 per cent of the respondents had no expectation of support from the government in their future host country and 18 per cent expected to receive only one type of support. The same expected forms of support had previously been reported by Iraqi migrants on the way to Europe in existing DTM research (IOM, 2016a; IOM, 2016c).

Figure 35: Priority 1 upon arrival + Support 1 expected from host government + Expected Problem 1 in the destination among Iraqis transiting in Bulgaria, in per cent



When correlating the expected forms of support with the main reason for choosing a destination country, respondents who stated having family and friends in the destination country were more likely to expect obtaining refugee status (54%) and to a lesser degree free housing (17%) than other forms of support. Similarly, almost all (96.0%) respondents who reported the perceived ease of asylum procedures expected to receive refugee status.

Notably, 28 per cent of the Iraqi nationals transiting in Bulgaria did not expect to face problems at their destination country. Of those that did expect problems, rejection of their asylum claim (53.9%) was considered the primary challenge expected (Figure 35). While expectations of support and expected problems are based on respondents' perceptions of their intended destination country, the reality of support received is very different. The gap between perceptions and realities of life in Europe have been reported amongst Iraqi migrants in previous DTM studies on migration flows from Iraq to Europe (IOM, 2016a; IOM, 2016c).

Access to and use of information sources play an important role in the migration process. Having contacts in the potential country of destination or along the route can give migrants a more accurate impression of what to expect, potentially encouraging or discouraging certain decisions. In this regard, the Iraqi respondents in Bulgaria also provided insight into the sources of information which formed perceptions of Europe before leaving Iraq. Nearly half stated that "word of mouth" (47.6%), the Internet (24.3%), and television (17.7%) had been their primary source of information. Notably, 47 per cent of respondents only had one such source of information. When considering the main channels for word of mouth, most respondents relied on family at home (51.3%) as well as verbal contact (via phone, Viber, Facebook, and/or Skype) with friends and family in Europe (39.6%). An additional secondary channel consisted of contacts at work (21.6%).

To a varying extent, reliance on secondary sources of information included television (26.2%), Internet (11.9%), and word of mouth (8.30%). Moreover, almost half of the respondents suggested having only one source of information on which they based their perceptions of Europe.

Based on these perceptions of Europe, 63 per cent of respondents reported that they would encourage others to migrate to Europe through regular means (35.3% of all answers given). The main reasons for this would be security and safety in Europe (26.7% of all answers given) combined with a lack of hope for a better future in Iraq (27.0% of all answers given). Males were more likely to advise others to migrate to Europe than females (66.3% and 55.2%, respectively). Conversely, main reasons for respondents to discourage such migration included the difficulties faced during the migration journey (48.2% of all answers given), the dangerous nature of the travel route to Europe (32.1% of all answers given), and the obstacles in obtaining a legal status, including asylum (13.2% of all answers given).

Of all respondents that faced problems en route, 89 per cent would not advise others to migrate to Europe. Moreover, Iraqi migrants in transit in Bulgaria who already had relatives living in Europe prior to migrating were more likely to advise others to migrate to Europe (65.0%) than those who did not (42.4%). The same holds for the Iraqi migrants that already had friends living in Europe (63.9%) as compared to those that did not (46.0%, N=23).

Even though refugee status was frequently reported as expected support from the host government, only 4 per cent of respondents reported knowing what an asylum procedure was. This study's understanding of the term *asylum procedure* stems from UNHCR's definitions and principles regarding refugee and asylum status. Particularly, the 1951 Convention definition of the term *refugee* is relied on. It should be noted that "the emphasis of this definition is on the protection of persons from political or other forms of persecution. A refugee, according to the Convention, someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion" (UNHCR, 2010, p. 3).

However, the operational definition of the asylum process was described by Iraqi respondents transiting in Bulgaria as involving interviews, biometric registration, being held in camps, and waiting for a decision from the government for at least six months. Unfavourable and dangerous conditions in the home country – such as injustice, a lack of safety, war, religious problems, terrorism – were suggested as being grounds for applying for asylum.

"They did interviews with us here in the camp, we are waiting for the decision, but it will not be before six months" (Iraqi national in Bulgaria)

"When they do the interview with you they will give you the decision after 6 months at list [sic], in general there is no hopes for Iraqi people here, but I will wait for the decision" (Iraqi national in Bulgaria)

"When you apply for asylum you should talk about your problems and what reason did make you to leave your country, after that immigration will decide to give a positive decision or negative decision" (Iraqi national in Bulgaria)

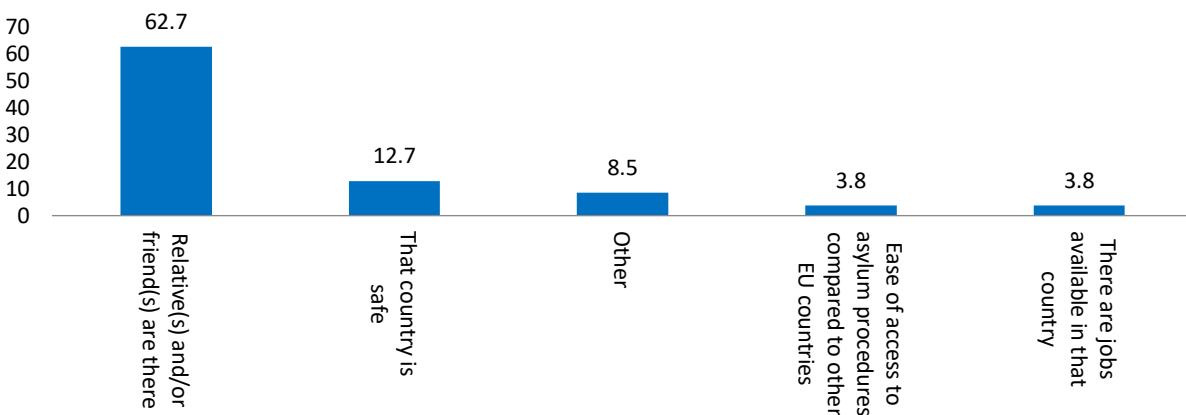
6.2.2 Iraqi nationals in transit in Greece

Like Iraqi respondents in Bulgaria, 44 per cent of the Iraqi nationals in Greece reported Germany as their intended destination country in Europe, and 10 per cent (N=24) reported wanting to reach Europe more generally. Again, similar intended European destination countries – especially Germany – were reported among Iraqi migrants in DTM Iraq study on their migration to Europe (IOM, 2016a).

It should be noted that more than 70 per cent of the respondents in this study reported not planning on going to another country than their initially intended destination country. Of the 12 per cent (N=26) that did report this, 54 per cent (N=14) chose Germany. Iraqi respondents in Greece mostly chose Germany as their intended destination country because of existing social networks (72.1%).

Interestingly, Iraqi respondents in Greece primarily based their choice of their intended European destination country on the presence of family and friends (62.7%) as well as on the safety there (12.7%) (see Figure 36), 9 per cent of the respondents reported ‘other’ reasons like healthcare or livelihood opportunities. These reasons relate closely to the perception migrants have of Europe. Considering secondary motivations, the country’s safety was also repeated cited as playing a key role in the choice of destination country, while 39 per cent indicated that they only had one reason for choosing a specific destination country.

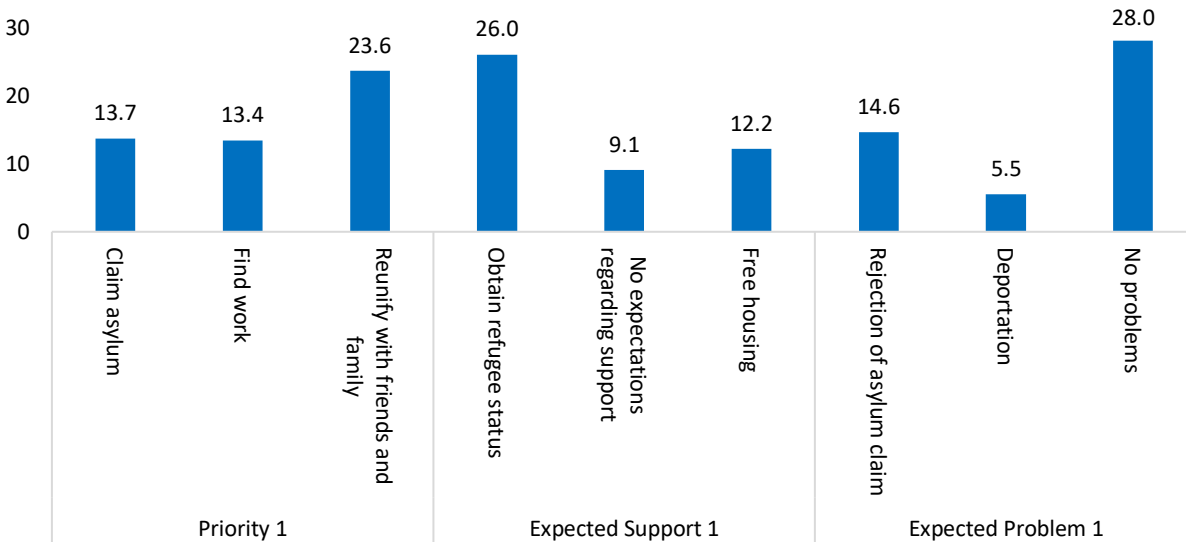
Figure 36: Reason 1 for choice of intended destination country among Iraqi nationals transiting in Greece, in per cent



Comparing the main reason for leaving Iraq with the main motivation for wanting to migrate to the intended destination, it is observed that social networks in the destination country is an important factor when choosing a destination country. This result holds regardless of the initial driver of migration. Those respondents who migrated because of personal or general insecurity (92.6%, N=25) were more likely to cite safety at destination as a primary reason for choosing their destination.

Iraqi respondents in Greece reported that upon arrival, their first priority would be to reunite with friends and family (23.6%), apply for asylum (13.7%), and find work (13.4%) (see Figure 37). While more than half (56.3%) of the respondents reported having only one priority upon arrival, claiming asylum (19.2%) and finding work (5.51%, N=14) also topped the list of secondary priorities.

Figure 37: Priority 1 upon arrival + Support 1 expected from host government + Expected Problem 1 in the destination among Iraqis transiting in Greece, in per cent



The priorities of Iraqi respondents in Greece are similar to those of respondents in Bulgaria, who reported claiming asylum is their main priority. Again, like Iraqi respondents in Bulgaria, the majority of Iraqi migrants transiting in Greece expected to receive refugee status (26.0%) (see Figure 37). Another 12 per cent expected to receive free housing. More than half (57.6%) of the respondents only reported one type of support which they expected to receive from the host government in their destination country. However, monthly living stipend (16.0%) and free housing (12.1%, N=28) were also the frequently mentioned as expected secondary support.

Looking at expected forms of support in relation to the main reason for choosing a destination country, Iraqi respondents in Greece who migrated because of family and friends in that country were most likely to expect refugee status (41.4%). They also expected to receive, though to a lesser extent, free housing (12.0%, N=16) and free education (5.3%, N=7). While 9 per cent (N=12) of that group had no expectations of support.

As shown in Figure 37, 28 per cent of respondents expected to face no problem in their destination country, while 61 per cent expected to face only one problem. Primary expected challenges included the rejection of the asylum claim (14.6%) and deportation (5.51%, N=14). As secondary challenges, Iraqis transiting in Greece expected to face a lack of financial support (12.0%, N=22) upon arrival. Another 31 per cent of respondents did not wish to answer when asked about the primary problems they expected to face at their destination.

As was also found in previous DTM research on Iraqi nationals migrating to Europe (IOM, 2016a; IOM, 2016c), the priorities, expectations of support and expected problems are based on respondents' perceptions of their intended destination country and are shaped by the transnational networks and information sources of the respondents.

In terms of sources of information, the Iraqi nationals surveyed in Greece suggested they relied on WhatsApp (20.9%) and word of mouth (16.1%), as primary and secondary source of information (22.4%).

With regards to word of mouth, the primary channels were verbal (via phone, Viber, Facebook, and/or Skype) (34.7%) or written contact (via smartphone apps and/or social media) (22.5%, N=22) with friends and family in Europe. Mediated contact with somebody in Europe (28.6%, N=28) as well as family at home (11.2%, N=11) were the main secondary channels for word of mouth. One-third of respondents (33.7%) reported having only one channel for word of mouth as a source of information.

Based on their existing perceptions of Europe and their own migration experiences, 40 per cent (39.4%) of Iraqi respondents in Greece reported that they would encourage others to migrate to Europe. 40 per cent of males were likely to advise others to migrate to Europe than 36 per cent females. (40.1% and 36.2%, N=17; respectively). Respondents in Greece were less likely to encourage others to migrate to Europe than respondents in Bulgaria.

The main reasons for migration, however, were particularly related to the absence of safety and security (39.7% of all answers given) and economic opportunities (36.3% of all answers given) in Iraq. The main reasons for respondents to discourage migration was because of the gap between expectations and reality of life in Europe (19.7% of all answers given, N=23) and the many difficulties along the migration route to Europe (26.5% of all answers given).

In terms of advising others, 37 per cent of Iraqi migrants in Greece that faced problems whilst travelling en route and would not advise others to migrate to Europe while 52 per cent of respondents would advise others to migrate,). Respondents in Greece were also more likely to advise others to migrate to Europe if they had relatives living in Europe prior to migration (45.1%), as compared to those that did not already have relatives living in Europe (31.3%, N=21). A similar pattern is seen for respondents who had friends living in Europe and would advise other to migrate (44.2%) and those that did not (34.3%, N=24).

In contrast to what was reported by Iraqis in Bulgaria – 22 per cent of respondents in Greece reported knowing what an asylum procedure was, and 30 per cent chose not to answer. Several Iraqi respondents transiting in Greece described the asylum procedure as asking the host government for permission to stay in a country, as having the right to stay in a country without fear of deportation, and as being able to go to the desired country. They described the steps of the asylum procedure as: going to a government office, participating in an interview, as well as receiving help from UNHCR.

“A procedure under UNHCR which helps someone to live in a country” (Iraqi national in Greece)

“To ask the permission to live in a country” (Iraqi national in Greece)

“Have the right to stay in the country without fear of deportation” (Iraqi national in Greece)

Furthermore, some Iraqi respondents suggested that asylum was associated with living in a country legally, safely, and freely with rights as well as having prospects for stability and a future. Others presumed that their asylum application would be accepted due to war in their home country.

“We are refugees from a war country, so I think they will accept us in Norway” (Iraqi national in Greece)

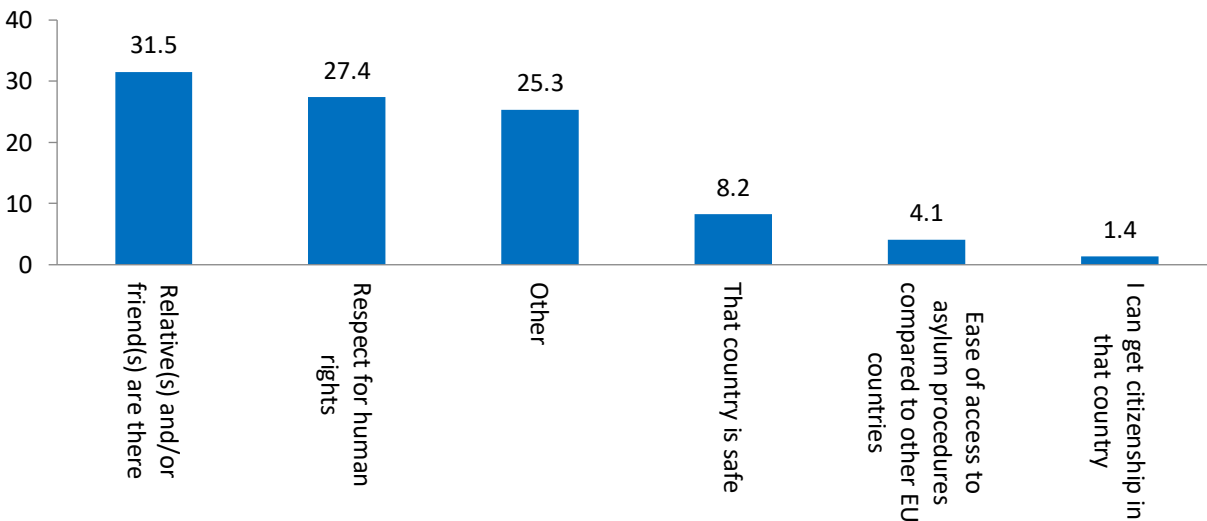
“As we are coming to EU from a war country, they accept our application for asylum” (Iraqi national in Greece)

6.2.3 Iraqi nationals in the destination country (the Netherlands)

Of the Iraqi nationals in the Netherlands, the majority reported the Netherlands (49.7%), the UK (6.67%, N=13), Sweden (5.64%, N=11), or Germany (4.10%, N=8) as their intended destination country in Europe. Similar intended European destination countries – especially Germany, Sweden, and the Netherlands – had been reported among Iraqis in previous DTM research (IOM, 2016a). These responses are in contrast with most Iraqis transiting in Bulgaria and Greece, who reported Germany as their intended destination. In the Netherlands, 25 per cent of the Iraqis reported that, before their migration wanted to reach Europe more generally rather than a specific intended destination.

Respondents cited various reasons for intended country of final destination in Europe, including existence of social networks (31.5%) and respect for human rights (27.4%) (see Figure 38). Iraqis in the Netherlands (25.3%) also commonly reported an ‘other’ reason associated with ease of access to the asylum system as well as a positive perception of the country linked to freedom of expression (e.g. with regards to religion and sexuality), respect of children’s rights, and healthcare systems.

Figure 38: Reason 1 for choice of intended destination country among Iraqi nationals in the Netherlands, in per cent



While 39 per cent of the respondents reported having only one reason for choosing their destination country, those respondents who gave multiple reasons also cited safety of the country (19.2%, N=28) and respect for human rights (14.4%, N=21) as their principal secondary reasons. Safety and security were also common descriptors of Europe given by Iraqis in a report by DTM Iraq (IOM, 2016c). Looking more specifically at those respondents who had originally intended to move to the Netherlands, the main reason was the respect for human rights, social networks also played a role. Iraqis in the Netherlands were significantly less likely than Iraqi returnees or those in transit to report having chosen their intended

destination based on the ease of access to the asylum procedure. Rather, they were significantly more likely to consider their intended destination's respect for human rights than respondents in transit or upon return.

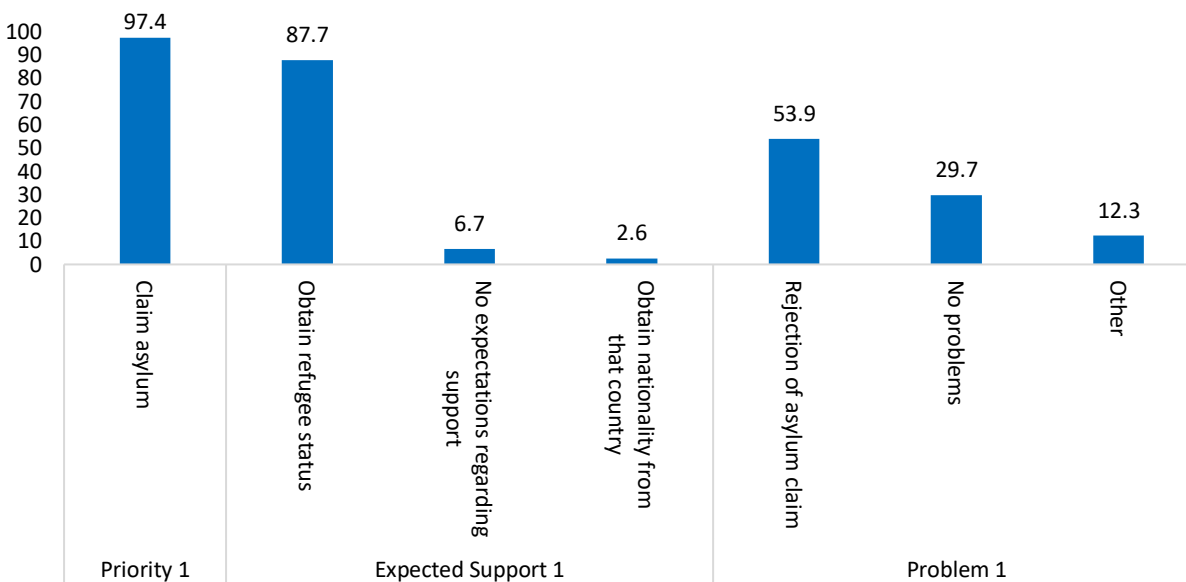
As discussed in Thematic Area 2 on migration drivers and decision-making, personal-and family-level insecurity is the main reason why Iraqis migrate. Reasons for choosing a specific destination country Iraqis in the Netherlands, were based on existing social networks for 31 per cent of respondents, and human rights for 30 per cent of respondents. This finding speaks to the importance of existing transnational networks during migration, the need for safety and human rights.

Of those that did not report the Netherlands as their intended destination, respondents reported that their migration facilitator had changed plans (13.2% of all answers given, N=7); 15 per cent reported of all answers given (N=8) Almost all respondents (98.0%) suggested that, once they had received a status, they planned to stay in the Netherlands.

Like Iraqis in Bulgaria, many of the respondents in the Netherlands (97.4%) reported that their first priority upon arrival was to claim asylum (see Figure 39). The majority (81.5%) reported that they had only one first priority upon arrival in their destination, though secondary priorities were also indicated by some, and included finding work (4.62%, N=9) and reuniting with family and friends (4.10%, N=8). Again, like the Iraqis surveyed in Bulgaria and Greece as well as those cited in existing DTM work (IOM, 2016a; IOM, 2016c), 88 per cent of respondents in the Netherlands also reported expecting to obtain refugee status in their destination country. In this context, most respondents (82.4%) specified that they only expected one type of support from their host government.

However, only 14 per cent (14.3%, N=26) of respondents reported having received the support they had expected to get and only 20per cent reported receiving a partial amount of the support they had expected to obtain.

Figure 39: Priority 1 upon arrival + Support 1 expected from host government + Problem 1 in the destination among Iraqis in the Netherlands, in per cent



When cross-tabulating the types of support expected by Iraqis in the Netherlands and the reasons behind their choice of destination country, the expectation of family reunification was based on the existence of transnational networks (e.g. relative(s) and/or friend(s) in the intended country of destination) (31.0%) and respect for human rights (30.2%) in the intended destination country. Moreover, when cross-tabulating the expectations for support and the reception of the same, it can be observed that Iraqis in the Netherlands expected to receive a legal permit to stay in the country, either via nationality or refugee status (88.8%). However, 91 per cent of respondents reported not receiving this type of expected support. Existing DTM research on Iraqi migrants to Europe shows that there the greatest discrepancy lies between expectations of obtaining support to get refugee status and actual support provided in the asylum process (IOM, 2016a). This is a clear example of the differences between the realities and the migrant perceptions of Europe.

Iraqi respondents were also asked about problems they faced in the Netherlands, wherein more than half (53.9%) stated that their primary problem was the rejection of their asylum claim (see Figure 39). The rejection of the asylum claims and the inability to obtain legal status, in addition to the long waiting period associated with receiving a decision on an asylum application, are frequently cited in the literature as difficulties faced by Iraqi migrants in Europe (IOM, 2016b). Another 12.3 per cent of respondents reported 'other' reasons when asked about the major problem faced in the Netherlands, where responses were particularly associated with restricted life in camps, not being able to work, health problems and being unable to reunite with family. It should also be noted that 29.7 per cent of the respondents suggested that they faced no problem in the Netherlands, while 61.3 per cent only faced one challenge. Of the 19.7 per cent (N=27) of the Iraqis in the Netherlands that reported 'other' reasons pertained to untreated severe psychological problems arising from stress, feelings of powerlessness, restrictions in centres and the absence of opportunities for self-development or the ability to work – all this while feeling in limbo due to the system and having to wait for their asylum status determination.

Nearly half (44.1%) of respondents indicated that they would advise others to migrate to Europe. Unlike respondents in transit, female Iraqis in the Netherlands were more likely to advise others to migrate to Europe than males (47.5% and 42.7%, respectively). Safety and security in Europe (34.3% of all answers given) as well as the respect for human rights (23.0% of all answers given) were the primary reasons given by respondents as their reason to advise others to migrate. Iraqis in the Netherlands encouraged others to migrate for reasons of security and safety significantly more often than Iraqis in the other migration phases. Of those that discouraged migration, respondents reported the gap between expectations and reality of life in Europe (12.2% of all answers given, N=15), that there were too many difficulties along the way (11.4% of all answers given, N=14), and that it was very difficult to obtain legal status (including asylum) in Europe (12.2% of all answers given, N=15).

Similarly, Iraqis in the Netherlands that indicated 'other' (45.5%) usually explained that migration was an individual decision to make and that it was hard to live in the uncertainty associated with the asylum procedure.

A majority (55.3%) of Iraqi respondents in the Netherlands who had faced problems during their journey would not advise others to migrate to Europe. In contrast, 40 per cent of Iraqi migrants that faced problems whilst travelling but would still advise other to migrate. Respondents were more likely to advise others to migrate to Europe when they had relatives living in Europe (50.5%), as compared to those that did not have any relatives living in Europe (37.0%); respondents that already had friends living in Europe were also slightly more likely to advise others to migrate (46.2%) than those that did not (42.6%).

Iraqi respondents in the Netherlands, had varied sources of information including word of mouth (39%), the Internet (20.5%), and television (14.9%, N=29) were the primary sources.

While more than half of respondents (59%) reported having only one such source of information, word of mouth (18.0%) and the Internet (13.3%, N=26) were also mentioned as secondary sources. Specifically, the main channels were verbal contact (via phone, Viber, Facebook, and/or Skype) with friends and family in Europe (35.1%), contact with migration facilitators (16.2%, N=18), and family at home (15.3%, N=17). Again, a little over half of respondents (51.4%) reported only one channel for word of mouth, respondents who gave secondary information channels when receiving information through word of mouth also reported migration facilitators (13.5%, N=15) as the main secondary information channels.

To a lesser extent than Iraqis surveyed in Greece, 28 per cent of Iraqi respondents in the Netherlands reported knowing what an asylum procedure was prior to migration. When asked to explain the asylum procedure, a few Iraqi nationals in the Netherlands said the procedure consisted of obtaining a residence permit to stay in the host country. Some respondents emphasized that the stay was only temporary, and others noted that asylum was a right to protection. Reasons for applying for asylum included well-founded fears to stay in the origin country for political or religious reasons; in this regard, some respondents mentioned the 1951 Refugee Convention.

When describing the asylum procedure, respondents in the Netherlands noted that the process involved interviews and waiting to receive an answer from the Dutch authorities. In this regard, individuals also expressed frustration with the waiting time for case assessment during the asylum procedure; others were unaware that the process could take more than two years. The asylum procedure, however, was also associated with being able to live in peace and safety and starting a new life.

“Asylum is safety and peace. Nothing less and nothing more” (Iraqi national in the Netherlands)

“Asylum is a way of safety - representing the idea of peace, but also a process that requires waiting time. Based on the status and decision the person will attain permit to stay, can be able to work and participate in the community/society” (Iraqi national in the Netherlands)

“Asylum procedure is a process wherein which the person who has applied for asylum seeks protection for a temporary period of time. The actual process represents a long waiting time, and the person may be in risk of receiving a rejection” (Iraqi national in the Netherlands)

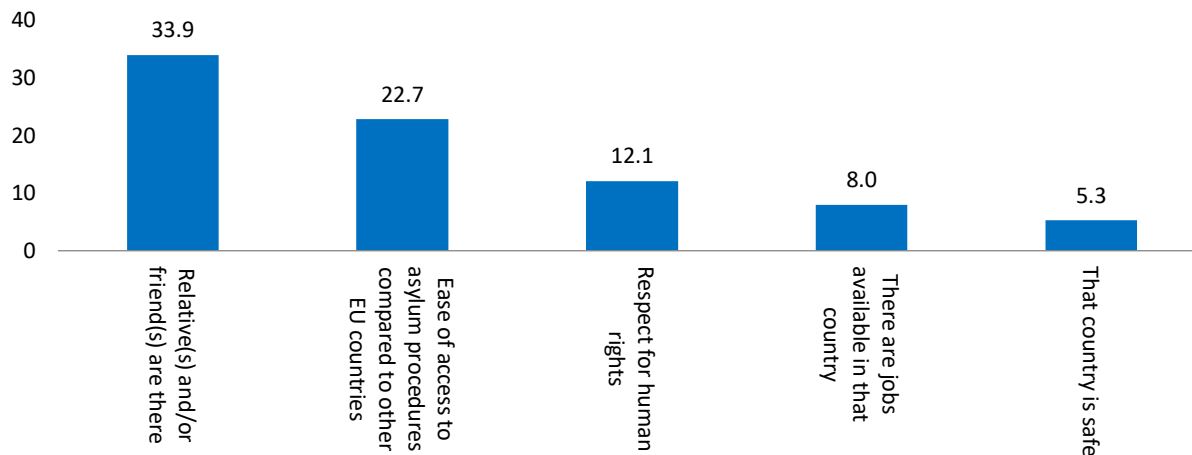
Some respondents also linked the asylum procedure to obtaining citizenship, or with the feeling of being a citizen, with humanitarian assistance, as well as with staying in a refugee centre.

6.2.4 Iraqi returnees

As for Iraqis in transit, most returnees reported that Germany (25.5%), Belgium (17.3%), Finland (11.6%), Sweden (10.7%), and the UK (9.33%) were their intended destination country during their initial migration to Europe. More than two-thirds (69.5%) of returnees reported that they had returned from their initially intended destination country.

Many Iraqi returnees attributed their decision to social networks in the country (33.9%), the perceived ease of access to the asylum procedure in the respective country compared to in other European destinations (22.7%), as well as respect for human rights (12.1%) (see Figure 40).

Figure 40: Reason 1 for choice of intended destination country among Iraqi returnees, in per cent



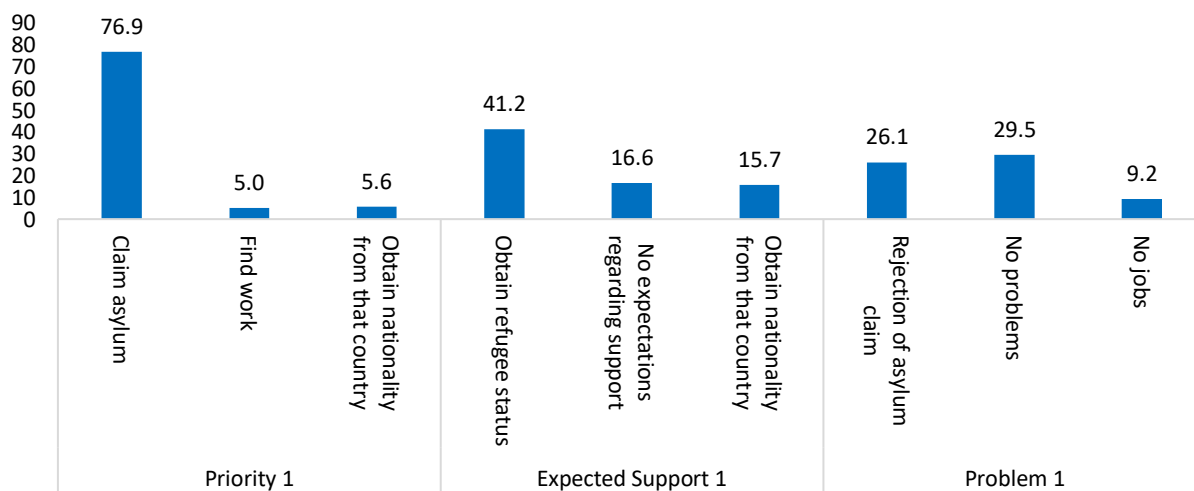
The same factors (6.84%, 14.3%, and 19.1%, respectively) were also reported by respondents when asked about secondary reasons for choosing a specific destination country. Based on the data, Iraqi migrants chose Germany as their main intended destination country because of existing relationships with family and friends in the destination (41.3%) as well as the expected ease of access to the asylum procedures (22.7%). Likewise, Iraqi migrants choose Belgium and Finland primarily because of ease of access to the

asylum procedures (34.2% and 34.6%, respectively) as well as social networks there (21.4% and 15.4%, respectively). In comparison to Iraqis in transit or in the Netherlands, returnees had chosen their intended destination country based on the ease of access to the asylum procedure.

In terms of the correlations between the reasons for leaving Iraq and the reasons behind the choice of a destination country, having relative(s) and/or friend(s) in the country (33.9%) and perceived ease of access to the asylum procedures (22.5%) are cited.

Some respondents also indicated that they had not being able to reach their initially intended destination because the costs to reach that country were too high (27.9% of all answers given), or it was no longer physically possible to reach the destination (12.9% of all answers given), or because their migration facilitator had changed the plan (10.0% of all answers given, N=24). Another 28 per cent of the respondents reported having arrived in a country other than their first intended destination for another reason. Like the respondents in Bulgaria and the Netherlands, many Iraqi returnees cited their first priority as asylum (76.9%) (see Figure 41) once they had arrived in Europe. Finding work (25.3%) as well as obtaining nationality from the destination country (19.0%) were second priority according to respondents.

Figure 41: Priority 1 upon arrival + Support 1 expected from host government + Problem 1 in the destination among Iraqi returnees, in per cent



In terms of expected support from destination country, 41per cent of the Iraqi returnees expected to obtain refugee status, 16 per cent of respondents reported nationality, while another 16.6 per cent had no expectation of support (see Figure 41). Yet only 16.8 per cent reported actually receiving the support they expected. In addition to obtaining refugee status (17.2%), Iraqi returnees also mentioned free housing (17.2%) and a monthly living stipend (14.9%) as secondary support measures they had expected to receive from the government upon arrival in their host country. Moreover, it should be noted that 17 per cent did not have any expectations of support from the host government and 20 per cent expected to only receive one type of support.

When comparing the expectations of obtaining a support and actually receiving that support, it was found that 38 per cent of Iraqi returnees expected legal support such as refugee status to stay in their previous destination country. Despite these expectations, 52 per cent of Iraqi returnees had not received refugee status. However, when cross-tabulating the types of support expected by Iraqi returnees and the reasons behind their choice of destination country, the expectation to receive refugee status was linked to transnational networks) in the destination (33.5%). Such expectation can also be traced to the expected ease of access to the asylum procedure (24.7%) as well as the belief in the respect for human rights in the intended destination country (12.9%).

In terms of problems faced in the destination country, some 30 per cent did not face any problems. However, like respondents in the Netherlands, 26 per cent experienced a rejection in their asylum claim (see Figure 41). Rejection, alongside long waiting periods associated with the asylum decision are also cited in the literature as difficulties faced by Iraqi migrants (IOM, 2016b). For 14 per cent of Iraqi returnees finding employment was a problem in the destination. Overall, only 27 per cent of respondents (28.6%) reported facing only one problem in the Netherlands.

More than half of Iraqi returnees (57.3%) indicated that they would advise others to migrate to Europe, especially because of a lack of a better future in Iraq (42.1% of all answers given), respect for human rights (19.9% of all answers given), and to the safety and security in Europe (17.1% of all answers given). Like their counterparts in the Netherlands, female Iraqi returnees were slightly more likely to advise others to migrate than males were (59.6% and 57.1%, respectively).

Of those that faced challenges when traveling to Europe, 38.8 per cent would not advise others to migrate, while 56 per cent would still advise others to migrate. Having friends and family in Europe also seems to be an indicator of whether respondents would encourage others to migrate. Respondents with relatives living in Europe, for example, were a bit more likely to advise others to migrate to Europe (59.2%) as compared to those with no relatives in Europe (55.1%). Those that had friends living in Europe seemed, however, much more likely to advise others to migrate to Europe (64.0%) than those that did not (48.1%).

Of those that would not encourage others to migrate to Europe, the majority reported that the travel route to Europe was too dangerous (35.7% of all answers given) and that the life in Europe was not as expected (22.7% of all answers given). The Iraqi returnees also provided insight into the sources of information which their impressions of life in Europe were based upon before leaving Iraq. Considering the statistical significance of these variables, it can be concluded that a significantly greater share of Iraqi returnees encouraged migration because they did not see a better future in Iraq than Iraqis in the other migration phases. Reasons provided by migrants to discourage migration to Europe were also different for each part of the migration journey, with returnees being significantly more likely to mention that the travel route was too dangerous than respondents in transit or in the Netherlands.

Reliable sources and access to information play influential roles in the decision-making of migrants. Knowing how to navigate migratory routes, as well as knowledge of the processes in the destination country, can affect a migrant's prospects of remaining abroad. Returnees cited several sources of information including word of mouth (39.3%), WhatsApp (26.7%), and Facebook (21.9%) as the primary sources, while the Internet (24.3%) and Facebook (15.3%) were reported as secondary sources.

In terms of word of mouth, verbal contact (via phone, Viber, Facebook, and/or Skype) with friends and family in Europe (28.8%) as well as contact at social events and activities such as weddings, restaurants,

and sports clubs (22.5%) were primary sources. Verbal contact (again via phone, Viber, Facebook, and/or Skype) (10.25%) and written contact (via smartphone apps and/or social media) (8.75%) with friends and family in Europe were secondary, while 39 per cent of the respondents reported only one channel of word of mouth.

Like respondents in Bulgaria, majority (86.2%) of the Iraqi returnees reported not knowing what an asylum procedure was, although accessibility to the asylum system influenced their migration decisions. Based on the qualitative data analysis, persecution as well as lack of personal freedom, insecurity, being personally threatened, and difficulties in finding a job were cited as reasons for applying for asylum. Iraqi respondents described the asylum procedure as involving several steps: 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)

“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)

“After my arrival in Germany, I surrendered to the temporary camp. I remained for 4 days. I was transferred to another temporary camp. On the same day, I was interviewed by the court. My stay was approved for 3 months” (Iraqi returnee)

“I think you should have a case or reason to leave your country and you have proof to persuade the host country authorities to give you asylum” (Iraqi returnee)

Several respondents stated gaining information about asylum procedures from friends and lawyers as well as from the Internet. Frustration with the lengthy and slow procedures was also reported

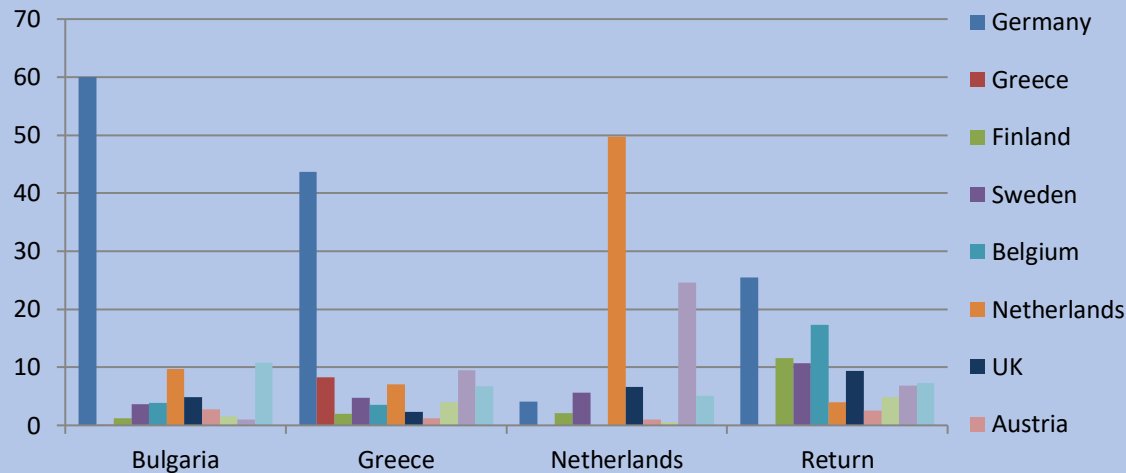
HIGHLIGHTS: Perceptions of Europe

Choosing an intended destination country:

- **Iraqi migrants did not have a specific intended destination country but generally wanted to reach Europe.** Respondents in the Netherlands are an exception (49.7%).
- Of those in the other migration stages, Germany was a common intended destination country (see Figure 42).
- **When asked about the reasons for choosing a specific destination country, Reason 1 was having relatives and friends there. Reason 2 were mostly safety-related factors, namely that the country of destination was safe and that human rights were respected.**

- Most often, Iraqi migrants chose their intended destination country based on safety and to a lesser extent, existing transnational networks. When comparing the migrants in the different migration stages, returnees chose their intended destination because of the perceived ease of access to asylum procedures (22.7%), while Iraqis in Greece considered this reason the least (3.8%, N=8).
- Iraqi migrants in the Netherlands were significantly more likely than their counterparts to consider respect for human rights (27.4%). Respondents in Bulgaria, on the other hand, were most likely to choose their destination country based on having family and/or friends there (77.0%).

Figure 42: Intended destination countries among Iraqi respondents (across stages), in per cent



Priorities, problems, and expected forms of support from host government:

- **Iraqis across the migration stages reported their first priority included asylum. In line with this, refugee status was most commonly expected form of support from the host government in the destination country. Moreover, the most commonly expected problem upon arrival in Europe is the rejection of the asylum claim and deportation.**
- For respondents in the Netherlands, the expectation of family reunification was based on existing transnational networks (e.g. relative(s) and/or friend(s) at the intended destination) and respect for human rights
- Moreover, cross-tabulation between the support expected from the host government and its receipt shows that for both Iraqis in the Netherlands as well as returnees the forms of expected support were especially linked to being able to stay in the host country (e.g. nationality, refugee status, a visa). However, **these expected forms of support were mostly not received.**

Sources of information for perceptions of Europe:

- **Sources of information on which respondents had based their perceptions of Europe included “word of mouth”, the Internet and WhatsApp among Iraqis across the different migration stages.**
- **Verbal contact (via phone, Viber, Facebook, and/or Skype) with friends and family in Europe was the main channel for “word of mouth”.**
- **A small proportion of the Iraqi respondents could explain the asylum procedure.** Such knowledge was lowest amongst respondents in Bulgaria (4.2%) and highest amongst those in Greece (22.4%). In

their descriptions, migrants mostly indicated a vague understanding of the asylum procedure. In addition, frustration was often expressed about the waiting times during lengthy and slow case assessments.

Advising others to migrate to Europe:

- **Most Iraqi respondents would not advise others to migrate to Europe, however 63 per cent of respondents in Bulgaria (63.0%) – indicated that they would advise others to migrate to Europe.**
- **Respondents would mainly encourage migration to Europe only for security-related factors, which directly links to migration migrations decision to security.**
- **Iraqi migrants in the Netherlands were significantly more likely to encourage migration based on Europe’s safety and security, while Iraqi transit migrants only encouraged migration to Europe through regular channels. Returnees, on the other hand, were most likely to advise others to migrate because they did not see a better future in their home country.**
- **Returnees who would not advise others to migrate cited the difficulty of the asylum procedures, economic reasons and the gap between expectation and reality of life in Europe.**
- **Respondents in the transit countries also emphasized the barriers and the dangers faced throughout the migration journey.**

7. THEMATIC AREA 6 – MIGRANT CHOICES AND OPTIONS

This thematic area focuses on the different migration choices and options that are available to migrants, both within their own region and in Europe. It also focuses on the different options that motivate migrants to migrate to Europe or opt for regional migration instead.

7.1 LITERATURE REVIEW

7.1.1 Legal options

There are several directives in place that allow third-country nationals (not only Iraqi nationals) to enter the EU regularly. Highly qualified immigrant workers can access the EU labour market based on the so-called Blue Card. Students, volunteers, and interns are bound by rules for entry into the EU territory which are specifically designed for young(er) immigrants. Moreover, when already residing in the EU, immigrants may have the opportunity to bring family members to Europe on the grounds of family reunification. In addition, the Seasonal Workers Directive ensures the rights of third-country nationals working in the EU on a seasonal basis. These and other EU directives are designed to prevent irregular immigration and simultaneously differentiate between those who have the means to navigate the legal channels and those who do not (Addis, 2014; Mberu & Pongou, 2010).

Limited data concerning the knowledge of regular migration channels are available for Iraqi nationals. In the study *Assessing the Risks of Migration along the Central and Eastern Mediterranean Routes*, IOM (2016b) considers the perceptions of regular migration by Iraqis with regards to third-country

resettlement to Germany and family reunification. The study reports that, between 2005 and 2014, Iraqi nationals were the second most likely to be submitted for resettlement by UNHCR. Based on IOM (2016b), family reunification has also been seen “as a legal pathway to asylum and also the only viable legal pathway” by Iraqis in Germany (p. 76). Despite this, the study also reports Iraqis being unsatisfied with the family reunification process as the application, in addition to the individual asylum application, often requires a number of years to be processed (IOM, 2016b).

7.1.2 Regular vs. irregular migration from Iraq

While there is not much data available on the motivation(s) of Iraqi nationals to migrate either regularly or irregularly, some insight can be derived from research on the rationales of Iraqi migrants for choosing regular versus irregular migration. Though some Iraqi migrants are aware of the possibility to migrate regularly, Iraqi migrants generally face a lack of information as well as a limited access to regular migration pathways (MMP, 2017b). MMP (2017b) finds that a limited number of the Iraqi respondents of its study knew about regular means of migrating to Europe. Many participants only indicated knowledge of irregular migration channels. The few that were aware of regular migration channels chose to migrate irregularly, due to the anticipated costs and time required for a visa application (MMP, 2017b). As such, the option of travelling regularly is not a feasible option for many Iraqi migrants.

In some cases, irregular migration is often perceived as being much faster and cheaper than regular migration. It could be suggested that migration facilitators play a role in migrants believing that it is cheaper to migrate irregularly than it would be to migrate regularly (IOM, 2017a).

7.1.3 Choosing Europe over regional migration

IOM’s (2016c) *Migration Flows from Iraq to Europe: Reasons behind Migration* report provides relevant insights on the choice between regional and European migration. Respondents in the study were specifically “asked to explain why they chose European countries over others, including countries in the Middle East such as Jordan, Lebanon, Syrian Arab Republic, Egypt or the Gulf countries, which had hosted hundreds of thousands of Iraqis in the past, or extra-regional destinations such as Australia, the United States or Canada, which could potentially be as attractive as Europe” (IOM, 2016c, p. 12). In general, the study found that Iraqi migrants chose to migrate to Europe due to a lack of alternative options for migration within the region and due to Europe’s perceived advantages over other destinations. In this regard, the study also reports that the “way to Europe was perceived as open, which, for migrants, implied lower risks and lower costs” and that “European countries were perceived as implementing welcoming immigration policies” (IOM, 2016c, p. 2).

7.2 THEMATIC AREA 6 – DATA ANALYSIS OUTCOMES

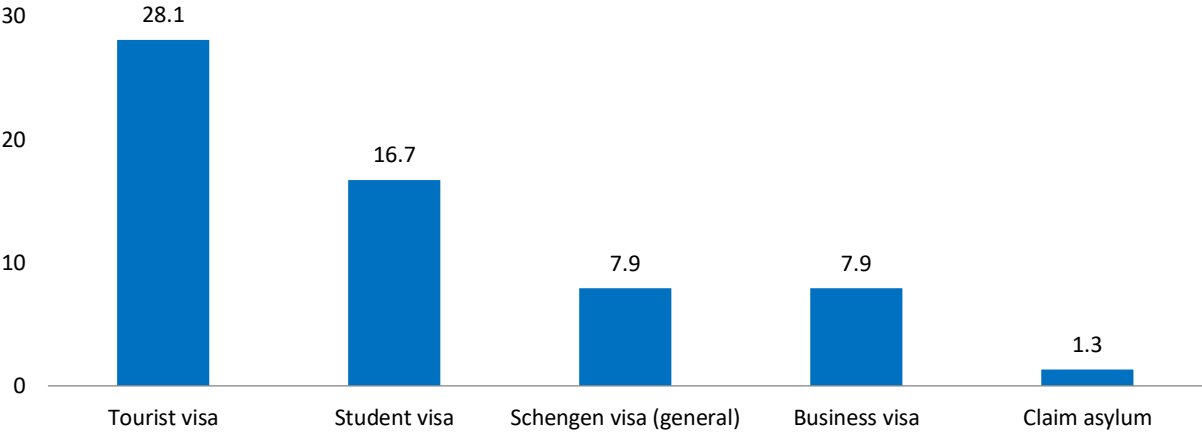
7.2.1 Iraqi nationals in transit in Bulgaria

Iraqi respondents transiting in Bulgaria chose migration to the EU because of the perceptions that Europe is safer (33.6%) and that human rights are more respected in Europe (21.6%), as well as because of having family in Europe (35.1%) in comparison to regional migration. Secondary reasons for choosing Europe were again associated with the perceived safety (45.7%) and respect for human rights in Europe (24.5%). These reasons for migration are also supported by the existing literature.

Considering their options for regional migration, all the respondents (99.3%) indicated that, if they had been given the opportunity to work in the region, they would still have chosen to migrate to Europe. Similarly, almost all the respondents (99.9%) stated that had they been given the opportunity to study in the region, they would have still considered migrating to Europe. Given these figures, Iraqi respondents in Bulgaria were least likely compared to their counterparts – other than respondents in the Netherlands, which reported similar answers – to stay in their region if offered a job or study opportunity.

At the same time, more than 77 per cent of the respondents reported not being aware of legal options for migration to Europe. Existing literature also finds that Iraqi migrants have limited knowledge of legal options for migration due to a lack of information and lack of access to regular migration channels (MMP, 2017b). Of the 23per cent that were aware of legal options for migration to Europe, most reported being aware of tourist visas (28.1%) and student visas (16.7%) (see Figure 43).

Figure 43: Known legal options for migration to Europe among Iraqi nationals transiting in Bulgaria, in per cent



To obtain permission to stay in their European host country, more than half of the respondents reported planning to claim asylum (55.4%). Another 44 per cent reported having not thought about obtaining permission to stay.

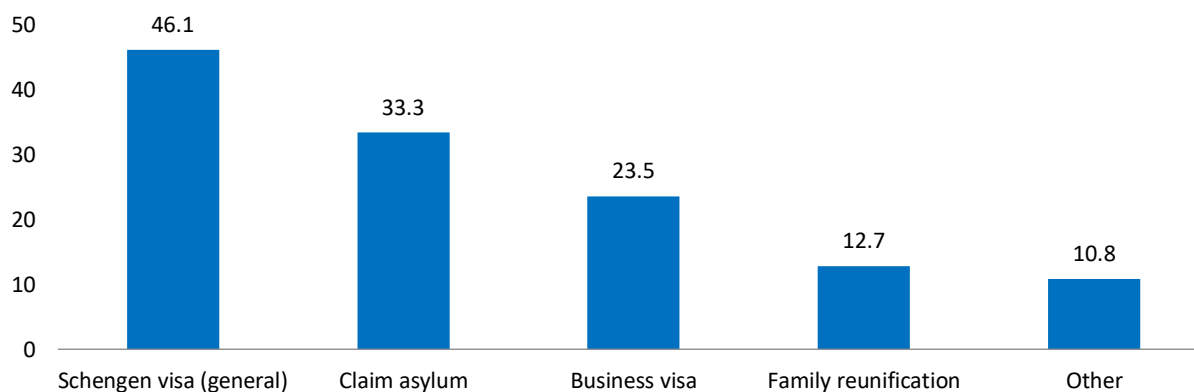
7.2.2 Iraqi nationals in transit in Greece

Among Iraqis transiting in Greece, the primary reasons for choosing migration to Europe over regional migration were associated with the perception that Europe provides more safety (37%) and opportunities for a better standard of life (13.4%) and While 40.2 per cent of the Iraqi respondents reported having had only one reason for deciding against regional migration, another 15.4 per cent again mentioned Europe’s safety as a secondary reason for choosing Europe. In this regard, some respondents suggested that, had they been given the opportunity to work (13.0%) or study (14.2%) in their region, they would have considered not migrating to Europe.

To obtain permission to stay in their European host country, 32 per cent of respondents reported planning to claim asylum (31.9%). In comparison to Iraqi respondents in Bulgaria, a higher proportion of

respondents (40.2%) in Greece reported being aware of legal options for migration to Europe Figure 44 illustrates that – of those aware of legal options for migration to Europe – respondents were generally aware of possibilities to apply for a general Schengen visa (46.1%), claim asylum (33.3%), and apply for a business visa (23.5%); this is unlike their counterparts in Bulgaria, who were more likely to report being aware of tourist visas and business visas.

Figure 44: Known legal options for migration to Europe among Iraqi nationals transiting in Greece, in per cent



Of Iraqi migrants in transit in Greece and who were unaware of legal options, 82 per cent were male and 44 per cent originated from Ninewa. Of this cross-section of individuals, the majority (69.1%) had never migrated across international borders for at least six months before their current migration to Europe. Almost half (48.5%) had finished secondary education and another 35. per cent (N=24) had completed primary education. In line with this, respondents aware of legal options were generally male (88%), married (87%), and from Ninewa (40%). It is observed that 36 per cent of the respondents reported having obtained vocational training and another 33 per cent secondary education. On the other hand, of the respondents that did not answer when asked about their awareness of legal options for migration to Europe, 73 per cent were male, 65 per cent married, and 43 per cent from Ninewa. In general, respondents in this cross-section reported having either primary or secondary education (83%).

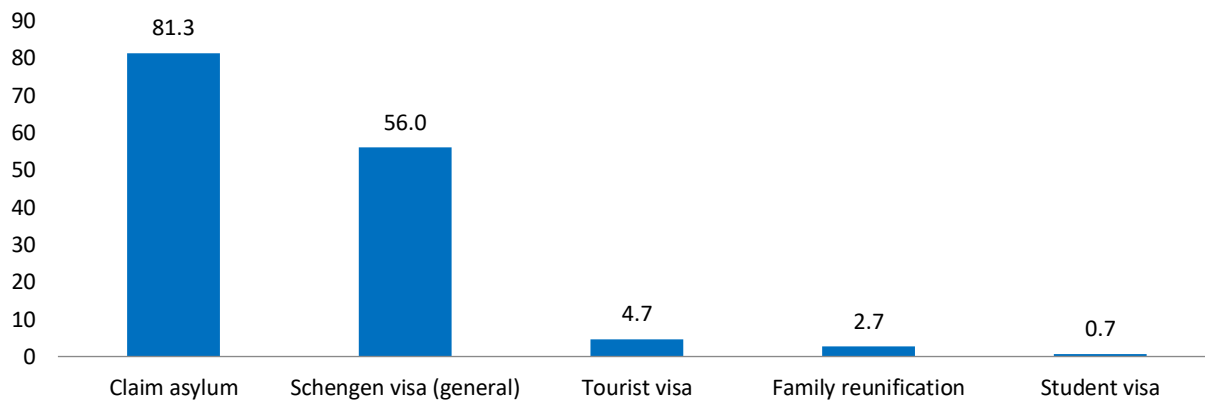
7.2.3 Iraqi nationals in the destination country (the Netherlands)

In terms of migration to Europe rather than regional migration, 49 per cent of Iraqi respondents in the Netherlands cited safety and 33 per cent cited respect for human rights as main reasons were also the most common secondary reason (24.6% and 34.9%, respectively) and were also frequently mentioned by Iraqis in Bulgaria for choosing Europe over regional migration. Safety and security in Europe are also highlighted in the literature as reasons for Iraqi migrants to choose migration to Europe. Furthermore, 94 per cent of the respondents suggested that, had they been given the opportunity to work in the region, they would have still chosen to migrate to Europe; the same was true for 99 per cent of the respondents when asked about study opportunities in in the region. In this context, it is observed that the Iraqi

respondents in the Netherlands are least likely compared to their counterparts – other than respondents in Bulgaria – to stay in their region if offered a job or study opportunity.

The majority (92.3%) of the respondents obtained permission to stay in their host country by claiming asylum, like to the respondents in Greece and Bulgaria (though to different degrees). This is also cited in the existing literature which suggests that Iraqi migrants are more likely to rely on asylum for migration to Europe (MMP, 2017b). Of Iraqis in the Netherlands, 77 per cent of respondents (76.9%) stated being aware of legal options for migration to Europe. This is a significantly higher than transit and returnee respondents. As shown in Figure 45, the respondents in the present study that were aware of legal options for migration to Europe primarily reported being aware of claiming asylum (81.3% of all answers given) and Schengen visas (56.0% of all answers given).

Figure 45: Known legal options for migration to Europe among Iraqi nationals in the Netherlands, in per cent



Of the Iraqis in the Netherlands that reported being aware of the legal options for migration to Europe, 70 per cent were male and 60 per cent married. This cross-section of individuals was generally highly educated, with the majority having obtained either secondary education (37%) or a Bachelor’s or Master’s degree (25%). In contrast to respondents in Greece (in the context of being aware of legal options for migration to Europe) who generally were from Ninewa, 35 per cent of those in the Netherlands were from Baghdad. When asked about their intentions to return, only 9.23 per cent (N=18) of the Iraqi respondents in the Netherlands expressed a desire to return to their home country. Among those that wanted to return, many wanted to do so because their asylum claim had been rejected (21.2% of all answers given, N=7) and because of the perception that the culture and customs in Europe were different from those in Iraq (18.2% of all answers given, N=6).

For 91 per cent of the respondents that did not want to return to Iraq, this wish to stay in Europe was associated with a lack of safety (37.4% of all answers given) and lack of hope for the future in Iraq (15.9% of all answers given), as well as risks of displacement (12% of all answers given). Almost one-quarter (24%) of the respondents did not want to answer why they did not want to return to their home country. Within the context of the current study, most of the individuals never wanted to return to Iraq (58.7% of all answers given) or would only consider it after the conflict and violence there would end (13.2% of all answers given).

Of the respondents that reported wanting to return home, more than half (61.1%, N=11) of the respondents suggested that a job or an income-generating activity would be their primary need upon return to their home country. Physical healthcare (27.3%, N=3) was described as the second primary need among respondents. It should again be noted that 38.9 per cent (N=7) of the respondents reported not to expect having any needs upon return, while 36.4 per cent (N=4) reported expectations of only one primary need.

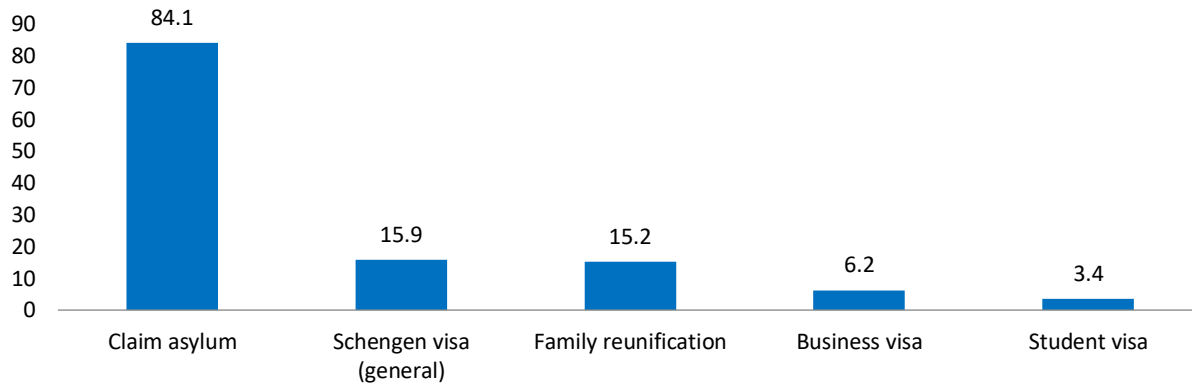
7.2.4 Iraqi returnees

Many respondents indicated that the main reasons for choosing migration to Europe rather than regional migration included the perception of better quality of life in Europe (27.4%), the lack of jobs and livelihood opportunities in their region (18.5%), as well as the higher degree of safety in Europe (13.9%). The higher degree of quality of life (20.4%) and safety in Europe (17.8%), in addition to respect for human rights in Europe (19.9%), were also reported by respondents as secondary reasons for opting against regional migration. These reasons are also shared in the literature (IOM, 2016c).

Almost half of the respondents (49.8%) suggested that had they been given the opportunity to work in the region, they would have considered not migrating to Europe. Slightly over half of the participants (54.4%) reported that, had they been given the opportunity to study in the region, they would have still considered going to Europe. The majority of the Iraqi returnees who reported that they would have considered not migrating to Europe if provided an opportunity to work in the region were male (93%) and had primary or secondary education (80%).

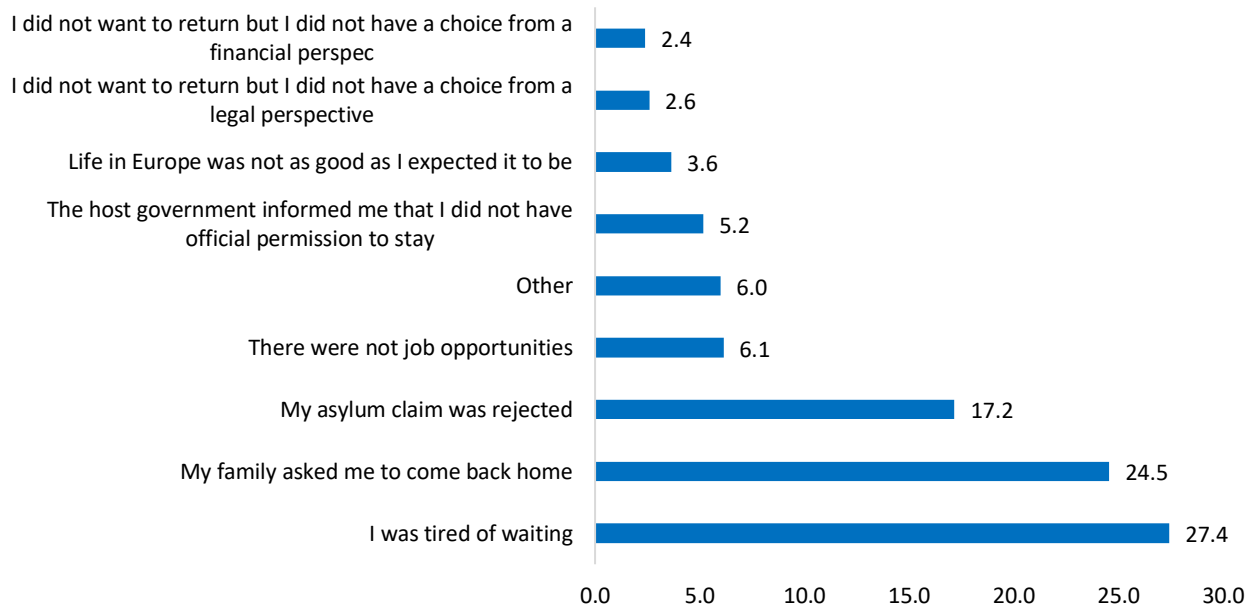
Again, like respondents in transit and in destination countries, more than half of the respondents (54.2%) obtained permission to stay in their host country by claiming asylum. Another 31 per cent reported not obtaining any type of permission to stay in their host country. As also supported by literature (MMP, 2017b), a limited number of Iraqi respondents (21.5%) stated being aware of legal options for migration to Europe before arriving at their final destination. Of those aware of the legal options for migration to Europe in this study, 84 per cent of respondents reported being aware of the ability to claim asylum (84.1%), 16 per cent to apply for a general Schengen visa (15.9%, N=23), and 15 per cent to participate in family reunification (15.2%, N=22) (see Figure 46).

Figure 46: Known legal options for migration to Europe among Iraqi returnees, in per cent



When respondents were asked about their reasons for returning to Iraq, many of the returnees reported being tired of waiting (27.4% of all answers given) and being asked to return home by their family (24.5% of all answers given) (see Figure 47). Of the 6 per cent of Iraqi returnees that reported ‘other’, these responses related to family circumstances, long waiting times in centres influencing mental health, nostalgia, insufficient income, and security issues en route to Europe.

Figure 47: Reasons for return among Iraqi returnees, in per cent



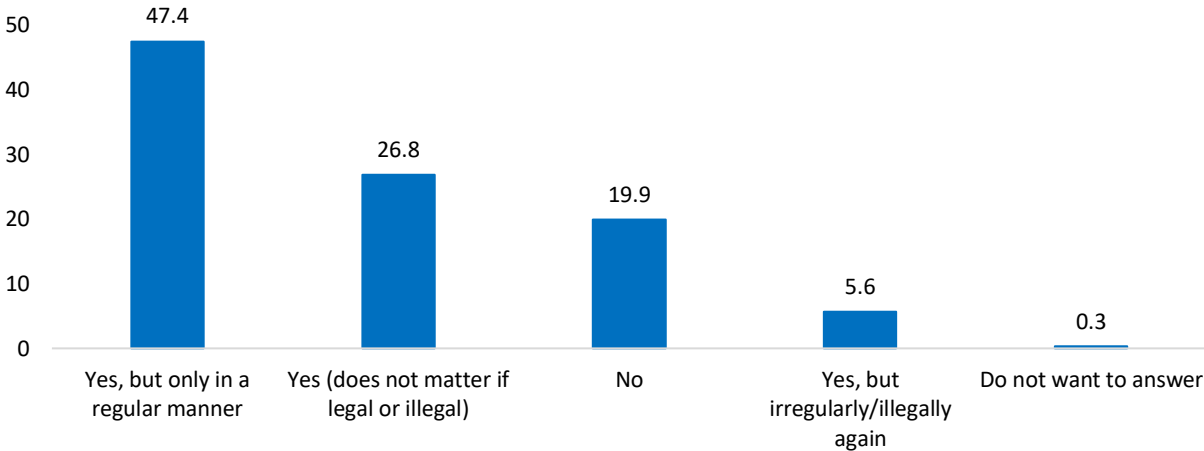
These reasons for return to Iraq are supported by the existing literature on return migration to Iraq (IOM, 2017c; IOM, 2016b), whereby Iraqi migrants cite the difficulties in attaining legal status or engage in family reunification, lacking sufficient savings, and having a personal or family-related medical issue leading them to return. Importantly, as respondents also report being asked to return home by their family, the decision

to migrate back to the country of origin is often described as a family decision in the literature. In fact, the functioning of the household as an important influence for emigration, and more specifically return migration, is especially confirmed by an existing DTM (IOM, 2017c) assessment on return migration to Iraq.

Returnee respondents were also asked about the two primary challenges they experienced upon returning to Iraq. Majority of respondents reported that the first challenge as finding a job or income-generating activity (57.3%) and the second one as finding affordable housing (17.5%).

Despite these challenges, 47 per cent of Iraqi respondents in this study expressed a desire to migrate to Europe again only through regular means as is illustrated in Figure 48. With these considerations in mind, it is important to note that – as also supported by existing literature (IOM, 2017c) – not all migrants intend to return to Europe again. In this regard, 47.4 per cent of the respondents who reported wanting to migrate to Europe again but only through legal avenues, 26.8 per cent through either legal or irregular means, and 5.6 per cent irregularly.

Figure 48: Intention to migrate to Europe again among Iraqi returnees, in per cent



HIGHLIGHTS: Migration choices and options

Awareness of legal options for migration to Europe:

- Iraqi migrants in the Netherlands (76.9%) were significantly more likely than migrants in the returnee (21.5%) and transit phases (23.4% Bulgaria, 40.2% Greece) to be **aware of legal options to migrate to Europe**.
- **Schengen visas and family reunification** were most often cited by transit migrants. Respondents in the Netherlands and returnees were most aware of processes related to claiming asylum.

- **Respondents mainly planned to obtain official permission to stay in Europe by claiming asylum.** Even though their knowledge about the asylum procedure is not high, Iraqis emphasise the importance of seeking asylum to legally stay in Europe.

Choosing migration to Europe over regional migration:

- In terms of reason(s) for **migration to Europe rather than within the region**, Iraqi transit migrants and those in the Netherlands emphasized **perceived safety and improved human rights** in Europe.
- Returnees, on the other hand, again emphasized **economic reasons** (e.g. a lack of jobs in the region) for deciding against regional migration.
- **Almost all transit migrants and Iraqis in the Netherlands would still consider migrating to Europe, even if they were provided with opportunities to work or study in their region.**
- As an exception, returnees slightly more often suggested that had they been offered a job in the region, they would have not migrated to Europe (49.8%); this could be explained by their seemingly more economically focused migration or the fact that their ‘failed’ migration experience may retrospectively influence the responses of the returnees.

Reasons for return migration:

- Main reasons for return included the lengthy asylum process and been asked to return by their family in Iraq.
- The **main challenges** they experienced **upon return** included finding a **job or income-generating activity** and finding **affordable housing**. Almost half of the returnees would consider **migrating to Europe again**, but only through legal/regular channels.

CONCLUSION

This report presented the main findings extrapolated from the analysis of data relating to the characteristics and experiences of Iraqi migrants in, on their way to, or upon return from Europe. The data was collected within the framework of IOM’s Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM). Specifically, the present analysis focused on six thematic areas: (1) socio-demographic profiles of migrants; (2) migration drivers and decision-making; (3) migrant vulnerabilities in origin, transit, and destination countries; (4) the role of intermediaries; (5) migrants’ perceptions of Europe; as well as (6) migrants’ choices and options. These thematic areas were investigated at different stages of the migration journey of Iraqi migrants and in different country contexts: in transit countries (Greece and Bulgaria), in a destination country (the Netherlands), and in Iraq, the country of return. To delve deeper into the thematic areas and to respond more comprehensively to this report’s research questions, the data analysis was, where possible, complemented with a review of the existing literature on migration from Iraq to Europe.

Thematic Area 1 – Migrant profiles

With regards to the socio-demographic profiles of Iraqi migrants, it can be said that, overall, most of the Iraqi respondents throughout the different migration stages were single males between the ages of 30 and 36. The proportion of males was highest amongst the returnees (92.3%) and lowest amongst respondents in the Netherlands (69.7%). Respondents in transit were mostly male, relatively greater

degree in Greece (81.5%) than in Bulgaria (70.5%). The youngest respondents, on average, were Iraqi migrants transiting in Greece and Bulgaria, while respondents in the Netherlands were on average older than other respondent groups. With regards to marital status, respondents in Greece were less likely to be single, while respondents in Bulgaria had the greatest share of single individuals, a finding which might be related to the relatively younger age of migrants interviewed in Bulgaria. The distribution of age, gender, and marital status of this study's respondent is also reflective of the existing literature (Eurostat, 2017; IOM, 2017b; IOM, 2016a).

In line with findings from previous IOM research (IOM, 2017b; MMP, 2017b, IOM, 2016a), the majority of the respondents in the present study had some basic form of education (either primary or secondary education), and to a lesser extent, higher education. In this regard, of those respondents without education Iraqi migrants in transit were significantly less likely to have completed any form of education compared to their counterparts in other stages of the migration journey. This was particularly true for Iraqi respondents in Bulgaria, who frequently reported having no education. Despite not having completed any education, respondents in Greece without an education were generally still able to read and write, while those in the other stages of migration were not. Returnees have the lowest share of respondents without education relative to respondents in other phases of the migration journey.

Migrants generally did not have children; this finding is also confirmed by existing literature on the household characteristics of Iraqi migrants in or on the way to Europe (IOM, 2016a). Respondents in Bulgaria and returnees were least likely to have children, a fact likely correlated with their marital status (mostly single) and age (mostly young). Respondents in Greece, on the other hand, were the most likely to have children, which also can be traced to their marital status. Children of respondents mostly lived with them in the current location, including in transit countries.

In terms of household composition, respondents in the Netherlands and Greece were most likely to be heads of household; this once again related to the fact that these respondents were more likely to be in a relationship and older (36 years old on average).

Migrants in transit left their home country to migrate to the EU in 2017. On the other hand, returnees and Iraqis in the Netherlands left Iraq in between July and December 2015. Returnees mostly reported returning home in 2015 and 2016, this suggests they did not stay in Europe for a long period of time. Many of the Iraqi returnees returned from Belgium, Germany, or Sweden, and did so most frequently with the help of IOM²¹.

Thematic Area 2 – Migration drivers & decision making

Iraqi respondents, at all stages of their migration journey, reported on a wide range of factors that can be described as drivers of their migration and that, as such, were influential in their decision-making. This list includes, among others, challenges faced prior to migration at the personal, household, and community levels, such as security threats, lack of employment opportunities and insufficient income, having family and friends in Europe, or previous experiences with international migration and internal displacement.

²¹ This may also be selection bias, if the returnees were identified by IOM it is more likely to have returned through IOM.

In general, a combination of security threats and economic challenges were the most cited reasons for migration. Many of the respondents reported facing personal, household, and community challenges in the six months prior to their migration to Europe. Rates of facing such challenges were highest amongst respondents in Bulgaria, while returnees were least likely to have had experienced challenges at any of these levels before migrating. Notably, factors related to insecurity were the primary drivers of migration for migrants in transit and in the destination country, but not for returnees, who emphasized economic-related reasons for migration.

This pattern is also reflected when considering the specific event that triggered Iraqi respondents' initial decision to migrate. In this regard, Iraqis in the Netherlands were more likely to cite a security incident, while returnees more often reported an economic trigger. Respondents faced an array of challenges at different levels, this points to the complexity of the political and socioeconomic situations in the origin country as well as of the migration decision-making and preparation process. These challenges are also indicative of the various economic and security-related factors at the individual, household, and community levels that contribute the drivers of migration for Iraqi nationals, which have been described in the existing literature (REACH, 2017; IOM, 2016a; IOM, 2016c). While these challenges cut across different levels of society, they are most starkly felt at the personal and household level, the same levels at which migration decision are generally made.

With regards to migrants' employment status in the six months prior to their migration to Europe, respondents across the different migration stages indicated that they were often unemployed. Average personal income before migration to Europe was highest amongst respondents in Greece and lowest amongst returnees. At the same time, respondents in Bulgaria were the most likely to report that their personal average income before migration was not sufficient to meet their needs, while Iraqis in the Netherlands surveyed for the present study were the most likely to report that their income had been sufficient for themselves as well as for themselves and their family. A previous study (IOM, 2016c) found that Iraqis often reported not having enough money to sustain themselves as a reason for leaving Iraq.

While the literature argues that previous international migration or international displacement is positively correlated with the propensity to migrate internationally. Previous experience of displacement might reflect vulnerabilities to conflicts and violence of a population, and therefore their likelihood of migrating once again. However, this study challenges this notion, as evidence from the respondents suggest that many respondents claimed to have no previous experience of internal displacement. Few respondents had also previously migrated internationally. It may, however, be that individuals facing security-related challenges on different personal, household, and community levels, migrate to ensure their survival and livelihood and, therefore, previous migration experiences are not relevant. Nonetheless, many respondents who had previously migrated internationally had migrated regionally, within the Middle East, and many had not attempted to go to Europe.

Transnational networks in destination countries or diaspora groups very often offer an incentive to migrate, in addition to providing support throughout the process. Indeed, large proportions of

respondents had relatives and friends in Europe prior to migration. Transit migrants in Greece and Bulgaria had greater access to transnational networks than the respondents in the Netherlands and the returnees.

Despite having transnational networks, Iraqi respondents generally reported having made the decision to migrate on their own. However, the decision was often discussed with family (primarily in Iraq). According to respondents, the great majority of those consulted supported their decision to migrate. When respondents did not make the decision themselves, it was generally their spouse that did so. This reflects that – within the context of the current study – migration might not necessarily be a household decision per se, but part of a household strategy that is influenced more often by a personal (final) decision to migrate.

For Iraqis at all three stages of the migration journey “word of mouth” was one of the most important information sources upon which respondents based their migration decision closely followed by television and internet/apps. However, this differed slightly depending on the migration phase in which respondents were: where transit migrants most often consulted “word of mouth” and television as a primary source of information, migrants in the Netherlands and returnees most often relied on “word of mouth” in the form of verbal contact (via phone, Viber, Facebook, and/or Skype) with their friends and family in Europe. Returnees reported a combination of verbal contact (again via phone, Viber, Facebook, and/or Skype) and social events and activities (e.g. weddings, restaurants, sports clubs) as the primary channels for “word of mouth”. The high reporting of “word of mouth” via networks of family members and friends, a normal strategy to gain more information on important life choices, is not surprising.

Thematic Area 3 – Challenges and related vulnerabilities

Different ways and means of travelling (e.g. alone, with friends, with family members) entail different vulnerabilities. The use of smartphones during the journey is also considered to be an important tool that migrants can use to gather information about the potential risks and challenges associated with certain migration routes. In this respect, the study found that smartphone use along the journey was high amongst Iraqis in all stages of their migration journey. Among transit migrants, smartphones were mainly used to communicate with contacts in Europe and contacts in the home country. Respondents in the Netherlands and returnees, on the other hand, primarily communicated with contacts at home; this aligns with the finding that, before their migration, these groups had less established transnational networks (e.g. friends and family) in Europe than their Iraqi counterparts in transit did.

Respondents used a variety of smartphone apps, especially migrants in transit. In general, Viber was the app most often used throughout the different migration phases.

From the perspective of migrants, the main problems experienced en route to Europe were biometric registration, hunger and thirst, detention, as well as problems at sea. Iraqi returnees were significantly more likely than their counterparts in previous migration stages to report having faced problems during the migration journey; in comparison, significantly fewer Iraqis in the Netherlands reported such problems. The fact that Iraqi returnees were substantially more likely than their counterparts (especially those in the destination country) to have experienced problems in transit may lead to the conclusion that

the problems experienced by returnees en route to Europe may have been one of the contributing factors to their decision to return.

Under this study respondents reported various problems they encountered along the route. Respondents perceived biometric registration²² as one of the problems they faced and was primarily experienced in Greece. Respondents also reported problems at sea, primarily associated with smugglers. Indeed, many migrants are exploited and maltreated by smugglers who organize boat trips from Turkey to Greece (IOM, 2016b). As the literature suggests, the danger of drowning is generally a consequence of overcrowded boats that are made of poor inflatable material that fail to withstand the harsh conditions at sea. Hunger and thirst, for their part, were primarily experienced in Greece, Bulgaria, and Turkey and attributed to both migration facilitators as well as other migrants. Other problems which Iraqi respondents in Greece expected to come across later in their journey were financial issues and biometric registration, while respondents in Bulgaria primarily expected to face detention and deportation. Female Iraqi respondents in transit in Bulgaria and Greece were generally more likely than their male counterparts to experience problems en route to Europe. On the other hand, male respondents in the Netherlands and returnees were more likely to have experienced problems than their female counterparts. Males were also more likely than females to travel alone, particularly if they were returnees or in the destination country.

Thematic Area 4 – The role of intermediaries

As discussed in the literature, intermediaries are an important part of the migration process for migrants, both before and during their journey, particularly when it comes to providing transport and creating fraudulent documents (Reitano et al., 2014). In the context of this study, the use of a migration facilitator was significantly less common amongst Iraqi respondents in the Netherlands than amongst returnees, while use of a migration facilitator was especially common amongst Iraqi respondents in transit in Bulgaria. A high percentage of respondents in Bulgaria planned to rely on a migration facilitator in the next parts of their journeys; this is not surprising, given that use of a migration facilitator in several legs of the migrants journey, from Turkey to Greece via boat or from Greece to Germany via the Balkans, is common amongst other Iraqis en route to Europe (IOM, 2016b).

Respondents at all migration stages used one to three migration facilitators on average, with respondents in Bulgaria making the least of use migration facilitators (approximately one facilitator on average) and respondents in the Netherlands migration facilitators (approximately three facilitators on average). Respondents first encountered their migration facilitators through family members in Iraq or in Europe, as well as via the people with which they travelled. To finance their journeys, respondents generally paid their migration facilitator in full upfront before the start of their migration journey with money from their savings, money they borrowed from their family, or money generated from the sale of assets (e.g. cars and furniture). Considering the importance of both friends and family to finance and prepare for the

²² The collection of biometric information and registration is part of the Dublin Agreement whereby biometric information is collected at the first port of entry. However, from the perspective of Iraqi migrants it may be viewed as coercive because Iraqi migrants are aware that registering their biometric information in transit, (but technically their first port of entry to Europe) may hinder the asylum processes in their destination country. Hence, from the migrants' perspective it was reported as a problem encountered in the journey.

journey to Europe, the role of social networks in migration processed should be highlighted (IOM, 2017a; IOM, 2016c).

Whilst preparing for the journey, migrants also reported seeking information related to (travel) costs, routes, transportation, and job markets. In this regard, a great variance in the actual and expected costs of migration are cited between the different stages. Besides finding a migration facilitator and obtaining basic information related to routes, costs, and modes of transport, respondents generally claimed not to have made any additional preparations for their journey; if they did make additional preparations, obtaining an Iraqi passport was common. Respondents often only needed a short preparation time to prepare for their journey to Europe, unsurprisingly since insecurity was cited as an important driver of migration towards Europe.

Thematic Area 5 – Migrant perceptions towards Europe

Throughout the different migration stages, Iraqi respondents often did not have a specific intended destination country, instead they wanted to reach Europe more generally. Germany, however, was commonly mentioned as an intended destination country. The main reasons for choosing their intended destination countries were having relatives and friends there, as well as safety-related reasons (e.g. safety, respect for human rights). This reflects the insecurity-related reasons for the migration of Iraqis, as well as the importance of existing transnational social networks for migrants. Considering the sources of information, Iraqi respondents primarily relied on “word of mouth”, in addition to the Internet. “Word of mouth” mainly entailed verbal contact (via phone, Viber, Facebook, and/or Skype) with friends and family in Europe.

In general, Iraqi respondents often advise others to also migrate to Europe. Of those that advised others to migrate, respondents encouraged such migration based on security-related factors such as perceptions of safety, and respect for human rights in Europe. Returnees, on the other hand, were most likely to advise others to migrate because they did not see potential for a better future in their home country. Among respondents in the other migration stages, there is an emphasis on the barriers (e.g. dangers, difficulties) en route to Europe as main reasons to not advise the migration of others. On the other hand, among returnees the main reasons to discourage migration are linked to “life in Europe not being as expected” and related economic reasons.

Among the respondents in the current study, it is generally observed that the first priority of Iraqi respondents upon their arrival to Europe is to claim asylum. Receiving refugee status is the main form of support expected from the host government, while the main problem expected upon arrival in Europe was the rejection of the asylum claim and deportation. Generally, respondents in the Netherlands, as well as returnees, highlighted that they did not receive their expected support from the host government. It should also be noted that frustration was often expressed about the waiting times for lengthy and slow case assessments. Many Iraqi respondents reported not knowing what an asylum procedure is and entails. Moreover, when this knowledge was reported, analysis of the qualitative follow-up question shows that while there is still a lack of understanding of the asylum procedure, migrants were able to provide a vague description of the asylum procedure and were aware of its importance

Thematic Area 6 – Migrant choices & options

Iraqi respondents generally indicated that they still would have considered migrating to Europe had they been given an opportunity to work or study in their own region. This is not unexpected, considering the emphasis placed by respondents on security-related reasons for leaving Iraq; nonetheless, it is important to recognise that security concerns alone do not explain why respondents did not move to neighbouring countries, as seen in most displacement situations. Perceived safety and improved human rights were also mentioned as reasons why the respondents chose migration to Europe over regional migration. Such reasons for migration have also previously been identified in the literature, which overall suggests that Iraqi migrants generally choose migration to Europe for reasons of finding safety and security (IOM, 2016c). Other reasons indicated by Iraqis in previous DTM research (IOM, 2016c) for choosing Europe over a regional destination, though less mentioned by the current respondents, are related to the lower risks associated with migration to Europe, as well as the perceptions of welcoming immigration policies.

Nonetheless, many Iraqi respondents were not aware of legal options for migration to Europe. Of those that were aware, Iraqis in transit generally knew about the Schengen visa and tourist visas, while those in the Netherlands and returnees were most familiar with asylum claims. In line with the previous questions concerning their priorities and expected forms of support in Europe, respondents mainly planned to obtain official permission to stay in Europe by claiming asylum. Even though their knowledge about asylum procedures is not high, Iraqis nonetheless emphasise asylum to legally stay in Europe.

When questioning Iraqi returnees about their reasons for return, the largest proportion of respondents reported the lengthy asylum procedure and family pressure to return. However, respondents being asked to return home by their families, is in line with existing literature where the decision to migrate back to the country of origin is often reported to be a family decision; the role of the household as an influence on emigration, but also return migration, is especially confirmed by an existing DTM (IOM, 2017c) assessment on return migration to Iraq. The main challenges returnees experienced when returning were finding a job or income-generating activity, and affordable housing. Almost half of the returnees expressed a desire to migrate again to Europe, but mainly through legal/regular channels.

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