



# Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) – Comprehensive Migration Flow Survey (CMFS)

## CMFS BRIEF: IRAQI MIGRANTS (TO EUROPE)

Children walking in Mosul, Iraq. © Photo: Muse Mohammed/IOM (2018)

## INTRODUCTION

For decades, Iraqi migrants have arrived in Europe through different channels and for various reasons that have ranged from obtaining legal protection to seeking livelihood opportunities. The unique data collection exercise carried out by DTM in 2017 sought to explore the diversity of such flows by interviewing migrants at different stages of their migration journeys to help policymakers design human-centric and evidence-based solutions. The results of this study indicate that migrants' needs differ at different stages of their journeys highlighting the necessity for the provision of context specific support to ensure that migrants receive timely and relevant assistance, as well as further research on the evolving migration flows to Europe.

## METHODOLOGY

The Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) Comprehensive Migration Flow Survey (CMFS)<sup>1</sup> provides a comprehensive evidence base on migration flows from Iraq to Europe and return migration to Iraq. This was achieved by collecting data on three different Iraqi migrant groups: 1) transit migrants in Bulgaria and Greece travelling to Europe; 2) migrants in a final destination country, the Netherlands; and 3) returnees to the origin country (Iraq). The data collection explores six key thematic areas (1) migrant profiles, (2) migration drivers and decision making, (3) migrant challenges and related vulnerabilities, (4) the role of intermediaries, (5) migrant perceptions towards Europe and (6) migration choices and options. The main outcomes of the DTM CMFS report and resulting recommendations are summarized in this CMFS brief.

<sup>1</sup> International Organization for Migration (2018). [Final CMFS Report: Enabling a Better Understanding of Migration Flows \(and its root-causes\) from Iraq to Europe](#). Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM).

## SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC MIGRANT PROFILE

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*Understanding migrant demographic characteristics provides an evidence-base upon which tailored interventions can be built.*

**Demographic profile:** The DTM CMFS study indicates that throughout the different migration phases, a large proportion of the Iraqi respondents were male. Most of the Iraqi respondents throughout the different migration stages were single, without children, and between the ages of 30 and 36 years.

**Previous international migration:** This study found that most respondents had not experienced international migration previously. Nonetheless, it is worth highlighting that those reported to have internationally migrated before, mainly reported to have migrated within the region (Middle East).

## MIGRATION DRIVERS AND DECISION-MAKING

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*Understanding drivers of migration is key to developing relevant programming and policies in the origin country.*

**Challenges before migration:** In 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.

**Migration trigger:** The specific event that triggered Iraqi respondents' initial decision to migrate were mainly linked to security and economic reasons. 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.

**Migration decision making:** 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 migration decision. When respondents did not make the decision themselves, the migration decision was generally made by their spouse.

**Information and networks:** 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, this was closely followed by television and internet/apps.

In addition, family and friends in Europe were frequently consulted prior to departure. They were also important sources of information for Iraqi migrants.

**Information to prepare for the journey:** Before migration, Iraqi migrants primarily sought information on the costs of migration to Europe, routes for the journey, as well as transportation options.

## CHALLENGES AND RELATED VULNERABILITIES

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*Understanding the challenges and related vulnerabilities migrants face en route to Europe could enhance targeted interventions to increase migrant protection.*

**Travel:** Iraqis in transit, in Bulgaria, and Greece, mostly travelled in groups, while returnees often travelled alone.

### ***Problems and challenges en route to Europe:***

The main problems and challenges reported by Iraqi respondents en route to Europe were biometric registration<sup>2</sup>, hunger and thirst, detention<sup>3</sup>, and problems at sea. Female Iraqi respondents in transit in Bulgaria, and Greece, were generally more likely than their male counterparts to experience problems en route to Europe.

***Expected (onward) problems:*** Other problems which Iraqis respondents reported in their onward journey included financial issues, biometric registration, detention and deportation.

***Smartphone usage along the route:*** 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 social networks in Europe and in the home country. Respondents used a variety of smartphone apps, especially migrants in transit. In general, Viber was the most popular app throughout the different migration phases.

## **THE ROLE OF INTERMEDIARIES**

*Understanding the role migrant facilitators is key to enhancing regular, voluntary and orderly migration.*

***Use of migration facilitators:*** The majority of the Iraqi respondents used an average of one to three migration facilitators during their migration journey to Europe.

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<sup>2</sup> 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, this legal process 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

***Costs of migration:*** There was a great variance in the actual and expected costs of migration between the different Iraqi migrant groups. Returnees and Iraqi nationals in the Netherlands reported higher costs to reach their European destination (USD 13,998 and USD 8,557, respectively) than the respondents in Greece expected to pay to reach their final destination (USD 4,375).

To finance their journeys, respondents generally paid their migration facilitator in full before the start of their migration journey. Respondents relied on savings, financial support from their family, or sold assets (e.g. cars and furniture) to finance their migration to Europe.

## **MIGRANT PERCEPTIONS OF EUROPE**

*Understanding perceptions of migrants towards Europe could address information and communication gaps, and better address migrant needs across different migratory stages.*

***Intended destination countries*** Throughout the different migration stages, Iraqi respondents often did not have a specific intended destination country but wanted to reach Europe more generally. Among respondents that knew their intended destination country, Germany, Netherlands, and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland were cited. The main reasons reported for choosing their intended destination countries included; i) having social networks in that country and ii) security-related reasons (e.g. general safety, respect for human rights).

destination country. Hence, from the migrants' perspective it was reported as a problem encountered in the journey.

<sup>3</sup> 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. Since this report provides data and research on migrant perception, it is presented here as a 'problem'.

**Perceptions of Europe:** Sources of information on which Iraqi respondents based their perception of Europe included word of mouth (incl. social networks in Europe), internet and WhatsApp.

**Advising other potential migrants:** Some Iraqi respondents would advise others to migrate, this is mainly based on perceptions of safety and respect for human rights in Europe.

**Priorities and expectations upon arrival:** In general, the first (intended) priority of Iraqi respondents upon their arrival to Europe was to claim asylum. Receiving refugee status is the main form of expected support reported by the respondents, while the primary (expected) problem upon arrival to Europe was rejection of the asylum claim.

## MIGRATION CHOICES AND LEGAL OPTIONS

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*Understanding migrant choices and legal options could enhance global, regional, and national policy development and further strengthen migrant opportunities and rights.*

**Regional migration:** 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. Safety and respect for human rights were cited as main reasons for choosing migration to Europe over regional migration.

**Awareness of EU migration options:** 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. The importance of asylum as a legal method to stay in Europe was emphasised by Iraqi migrants. Yet, the knowledge about asylum procedures amongst respondents was rather low.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

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*Drawing on the results of the DTM CMFS report highlighted in the previous sections, it is possible to suggest the following recommendations.*

### **Information tailored to the different migration stages:**

This study found that the role of information is central in shaping migrant decisions and perceptions. Hence, the variety of information channels used, and the relevance of word of mouth, television, social media and the internet should be acknowledged when designing information campaigns.

The following information is of importance during the different stages of the migration journey to further enhance safe, orderly, and regular migration:

**Iraqi potential migrants:** primary information should focus on i) safe and regular migration pathways (incl. asylum procedures), ii) potential challenges and vulnerabilities related to the migration journey, and iii) realistic expectation of life in Europe.

**Iraqi transit migrants:** primary information should focus on i) available referral mechanisms, ii) available support and services (temporary shelter, food, [emergency] health care, protection etc.), iii) safe and regular migration pathways (incl. asylum procedures), and iv) migrant rights in transit and final destination.

**Iraqis in final destination:** upon arrival in the final destination country, primary information should focus on i) migrant rights (incl. asylum procedures), ii) available referral mechanisms, iii) available support and services (temporary shelter, food, [emergency] health care, protection etc.).

**Iraqi returnees:** upon return in home-country primary information should focus on i) available referral mechanism, ii) livelihood opportunities, iii) housing market and iii) access to relevant national services such as health care and education.

For developing targeted information for migrants during the different stages of the journey, it is important to address:

1. The socio-demographic characteristics of Iraqi (potential) migrants to ensure that the right beneficiaries are identified.
2. The diverse sources of information (e.g. social media, intermediaries, religious centres) used by Iraqi migrants at different stages of the journey.
3. The usage of smart-phones and the importance of (social media) apps at the different stages of the journey for Iraqis.
4. The different types of information that Iraqi migrants investigate during the different stages of their migration journey

5. Iraqi migrants are often not visible and can be difficult to reach (e.g. along informal transit routes).
6. The potential role transnational networks.

**Stability and peace in Iraq:** Given the intersectionality of conflict, livelihoods and economic opportunities, relevant stakeholders in Iraq should continue to work on providing long term stabilization measures that address security and economic challenges.

**Additional research:** Migration flows continuously evolve, and further research into the drivers of migration and decision-making processes among Iraqi migrants would allow researchers to identify patterns over time that could be utilized to better inform interventions and assistance. Challenges faced among other specific sub-populations – namely, females, children and unaccompanied minors, and elderly persons – during transit, at their destination, and upon return should also be considered in more depth.

While the Netherlands is the only destination country of focus within this research study, similar studies should be conducted to understand the differences and similarities between the experiences of Iraqi migrants in other European destination countries.

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## REFERENCES

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