



# **An Assessment of the Iraqi Community in Greece**

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**Commissioned by the UNHCR Representation in Greece  
and supported by the Evaluation and Policy Analysis Unit**

**JANUARY 2004**

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# Executive Summary

As a gateway to Europe, Greece has attracted large numbers of Iraqi refugees and asylum seekers, many of whom have remained in the country, unable either to proceed with their intended journey northwards or to return to their country of origin. With the changed circumstances in Iraq, the issue of Iraqi refugees in Greece has assumed more importance as the possibility for repatriation has opened up greater prospects for durable solutions for the majority. Gaining a better understanding of their situation in Greece and, above all, their hopes and expectations for the future, serves as the current study's primary aim. Through nearly 80 in-depth interviews with Iraqi refugees and asylum seekers, undertaken during a three-month period in the summer of 2003 at state facilities as well as in private homes, complemented with meeting various NGO staff, many Iraqis have been found wanting to repatriate when the situation in Iraq is conducive to sustainable return, while smaller numbers look for different solutions.

This assessment has focused on those refugees and asylum seekers from Iraq who are registered with Greek authorities. They number approximately 2,600 individuals, but the undocumented bulk of Iraqis that for various reasons remains outside of the asylum system is believed to number in thousands. In such a statistically uncertain environment, particular attention has gone into identifying actors that would do justice to the great diversity of the Iraqi nation, which is reflected among those in Greek exile. Avoiding a narrow focus, it is believed that the findings of the study are adequately representative of the larger Iraqi community in Greece.

## Profile of Iraqis in Greece

Most Iraqi refugees and asylum seekers are male, either married, with their families still in Iraq, or, as the majority, single. Overall, the target group constitutes young individuals – overwhelmingly in their twenties and thirties. The level of education tends to be high among Iraqis, many of whom have completed secondary schooling, hold university degrees and in numerous instances also possess considerable work experience, relevant to their studies. Kurds dominate the Iraqi demographic landscape in Greece, but also Turkmen and Arabs are found among disproportionate numbers of Christian Assyrians and Chaldeans. Generally, very few Shi'a Muslims reach Greek territory. The general assumption that the vast majority of Iraqis in Greece originally come from Kurdish-held Northern Iraq is challenged by the finding that two thirds originate in former central government-controlled areas, and notably the northern city of Kirkuk.

## Push and pull factors

Many left the country due to political reasons. Some were victims of torture, others army deserters, and most experienced problems with the Iraqi intelligence services, harassment that often led to imprisonment. For others, acute difficulties were caused by non-state actors. Also socio-cultural problems related to tribal politics are not uncommon among the Iraqi refugee population. Unattended medical needs, or fear of the oncoming war prompted others to leave, but many went abroad simply looking for a better future for themselves and their children.

A considerable amount of Iraqis view Greece as a necessary country of transit, and plan to use it as a launch pad for further travel into Europe, while others in need of protection from persecution have

approached Greek territory as the first safe country they were able to reach. Only a limited few seek family reunion or medical treatment, amidst the larger numbers driven by economic motives.

### Current situation

The study examines the current situation of Iraqi newcomers as well as long-term residents. Their legal status in Greece ranges from the initial administrative “police note” to the asylum seeker “pink card”, and includes a few with convention and humanitarian status, as well as Iraqis with no legal status.

The assistance available to refugees and asylum seekers in Greece fails to meet the expectations of most Iraqis. Knowledgeable as many are about socio-economic conditions in north western Europe, the lack of accommodation and what many perceive as inadequate counselling and sometimes difficult access to staff at NGOs, are sources of great frustration. Instead they turn to their own communities – especially Kurds and Christians – for information-sharing and guidance, including employment opportunities, to a greater extent than do other refugee groups. Employment, which is difficult to find at the best of times, is elusive for those with expulsion papers, as a work permit is a necessary asset in the challenging Greek job market, further complicating an already difficult existence.

In general, Iraqi refugees and asylum seekers consider Greek people friendly and compassionate. However, they view the Greek interest in learning about their Iraqi nationality and ethnicity with certain wariness, as it always precedes the question of religion, to which the Christian society of Greece attaches great importance. As a consequence, Muslim Iraqis have a sense of being less well received than do Assyrians and Chaldeans, and Iraqi Kurds, in addition, perceived as pro-American, are less favourably regarded than Kurds from Turkey.

Iraqis have long felt reasonably safe in Athens, as Greek police have been known for its leniency, and although no deportations take place to Iraq, Iraqi nationals have on occasion been returned to Turkey, a practice that under present circumstances of regional uncertainty is disputable. Iraqis with unclear or no legal status watch the situation unfolding with great anxiety.

### Durable solutions

Resettlement, desirable as it may be (particularly among Assyrian/Chaldean Iraqis), has become difficult, if not impossible, to obtain from Greece. The numbers of refugees accepted by receiving countries have dropped sharply in the recent past and culminated in the expected closure of the last refugee/humanitarian resettlement programme out of Greece.

Integration is not viewed by many Iraqis as a durable solution, despite the cultural familiarity experienced with Greek society. This is largely due to the difficulties encountered in the process and the reluctance of Greek authorities to facilitate efforts to integrate, even for convention refugees. Notwithstanding the similarity in physical appearance owing to the Anatolian features of the host population, only the most determined among Iraqis appear to be successful at integration. One group that has achieved de facto integration without any assistance from the State is long resident Iraqi Christians, who have unofficially integrated despite their lack of legal status. Measures to legalise the status of such well-integrated long residents appear long overdue.

With the overthrow of former Iraqi president Saddam Hussein, some Iraqi refugees and asylum seekers contemplate returning to Iraq, while for others, the changed political scene is of less significance. Iraqi

Christians, who fear a radicalisation of the Shiite Arab population in a post-Saddam Iraq, feature heavily among those who are categorical in their refusal to consider repatriation, as are those who fled the country on socio-cultural grounds. While Chaldeans and Assyrians appear the least willing to repatriate, the Kurds, in contrast, are generally eager to return to Iraq. Despite of, or due to the changed circumstances in their country of origin, some may still experience continued protection needs, which has to be acknowledged and taken in consideration by Greek authorities.

Few spontaneous returns of Iraqis have already begun, movements that may be useful to monitor for purposes of preparing the ground for a general voluntary repatriation programme, in addition to assessing conditions of returnees, including possible protection needs. Among the larger group of potential returnees, some are more enthusiastic than others, but most want one or more conditions met before they are ready to return, some expressing a desire to undertake “go and see visits”. First and foremost, they demand at least a basic level of security restored to the country, followed by an improvement in Iraq’s economy. The presence of American/British troops on Iraqi soil is disconcerting for many Iraqis, and some go as far as rejecting the notion of return until all foreign forces have departed. Above all, there is a need for a comprehensive voluntary repatriation programme, as the majority of Iraqis are essentially stranded in Greece, having neither valid travel documents nor the financial means to go home. Those who do have the means to self-finance their return journey to Iraq would once in their areas of origin be in need of re-integration assistance, which has to be put together in a way so as to also benefit returning IDPs. Prior to reaching this stage, however, while still on Greek soil, the Iraqi community needs continuous information about the situation, including when a repatriation programme may see the light of day (and the likelihood of phased returns in certain key areas) from specially appointed, well-informed staff in competent NGOs.

Significant is that not only do most Iraqis in Greece come from areas formerly controlled by the central government, but the majority notably originate in Kirkuk, a oil-rich city in the north of Iraq that is claimed by Kurds, Turkmen and Arabs alike. It sits atop vast oil fields that are of critical importance to Iraq’s economy. In the early 1970s Baghdad launched a policy of Arabisation, which involved the mass deportation of Kurds (and later Turkmen), confiscation of their properties, and implantation of Arabs in their houses. This well-calculated ethnic cleansing, which remained in force for more than three decades, not only produced tens of thousands of refugees and IDPs, it also created ethnic tensions in an area that previously had been spared similar manifestations. Social engineering of this magnitude will take years of efforts and patience to tactfully reverse. The inflow of returnees from exile, combined with returning IDPs, all eager to retrieve occupied property and claim compensation for losses endured from possibly unwilling Arab settlers, may further de-stabilise an already fragile situation. If the number of natives of Kirkuk among Iraqi exile communities in other countries of asylum resembles that of Greece, return movements to this particular city and its surrounding areas must be managed very carefully by competent authorities, who need to be assisted by an impartial institution trusted with the delicate task of adjudication of property claims.





# Recommendations

The general thrust of the research concerns durable solutions and above all repatriation, which calls for the following recommendations:

## **To UNHCR:**

1. Recognise the importance of regional differentiation and security conditions when assessing areas of return in Iraq, as related to a future repatriation programme, with particular attention paid to the disputed city of Kirkuk, the area of origin for a large number of Iraqis in Greece.
2. Conduct a profiling exercise in other countries of asylum, in order to assess to what extent refugees and asylum seekers originating in Kirkuk constitute part of the Iraqi refugee community, in view of the urgent measures (as mentioned below) needed to be taken for that specific area of return.
3. Promote the establishment of an international independent body to adjudicate property claims with particular emphasis on Kirkuk, in order to enable the large number of returnees to the city and its surroundings to re-enter the area without exacerbating existing tensions.
4. Place particular emphasis on shelter assistance in Kirkuk, where it would be crucial in reducing animosity over property and thus contribute to reconciliation between communities.
5. Facilitate sustainable returns through careful examination of the absorption capacity in return areas, so that when a large-scale return programme gets under way, return movements are sensibly phased.
6. Ensure a balanced approach in the provision of humanitarian/re-integration assistance to refugees returning from abroad and IDPs returning to their area of origin. In addition, make sure that assistance packages also benefit local communities in the area of return.
7. Undertake the monitoring of early returns of Iraqis from Greece to their country of origin as follows:
  - A. In Greece, monitor and assess expressions of interest in voluntary repatriation and, to the extent possible, spontaneous returns already undertaken.
  - B1. In Iraq, conduct border monitoring through registration of spontaneous returnees at Iraqi entry points.
  - B2. Monitor conditions of return, including possible protection needs in the area of origin.
8. Encourage the many Iraqis with higher education to return to Iraq in order to contribute to the rebuilding of their country, and place such an initiative within the framework of a more general Voluntary Repatriation Programme.
9. Clearly identify the role of each agency involved in future repatriation, notably between UNHCR and IOM, as well as other NGOs represented in the country.

## **To the Greek Government:**

10. Action by Ministry of Public Order (MPO)/Ministry for Foreign Affairs (MFA): Actively promote comprehensive international efforts regarding returns, and advocate the establishment of a Eu-

ropean Union-funded Iraq voluntary repatriation programme.

11. Action by MPO/MFA: Set up a sufficiently financed national repatriation programme for Iraqis in Greece, as a complement to efforts on an EU-level.
12. Action by MPO: Give some Iraqi heads of households or community leaders within the asylum system the opportunity for “go-and-see-visits” (leaving the family in the CoA), in order to explore conditions in the area of origin, retaining the right to come back to Greece and stay until conditions are conducive to sustainable return.
13. Action by MPO: Adopt a constructive approach to the management of a potential residual caseload of Iraqi nationals in Greece, after a voluntary repatriation programme has been completed.
14. Action by MPO: Commit to competent handling of those cases with continued protection needs resulting from the changed circumstances in Iraq.
15. Action by MPO: Respect the UNHCR requested ban on forced returns to Iraq until further notice, including the appeal not to return Iraqi nationals to neighbouring countries, notably Turkey, where they risk deportation to Iraq.
16. Action by MPO: Grant some form of temporary protection for Iraqi nationals, including rejected asylum seekers as well as those undocumented, until the situation in Iraq becomes more conducive to proper evaluation.
17. Action by Ministry of Labour (MOL): Issue temporary work permits in connection with permission to stay for those Iraqis in possession of expulsion papers, pending durable solution.
18. Action by Ministry of Interior (MOI): Consider granting permanent residence on humanitarian grounds to Iraqi families, including rejected asylum seekers, who have lived in Greece for many years, become fully integrated into Greek society and whose children are fluent in Greek to the detriment of Arabic.

### **To Non-Governmental Organisations:**

19. Aim to improve the level of access by Iraqis to offices and staff of the competent NGOs, and as an outcome of recommendation number 9:
20. Appoint focal points on Iraq at each agency to serve Iraqis seeking information and guidance, in order to aptly address their needs.
21. Ensure adequate counselling on voluntary repatriation, including provision of informed and objective advice on the situation in Iraq and the repatriation package, as well as the registration of applications for voluntary return (in co-ordination with UNHCR and IOM).
22. Respond to the interest among the Iraqi community in repatriation, by providing an easily accessible and regularly updated information note on the issue (in co-ordination with UNHCR).

### **To the Iraqi refugees and asylum seekers:**

23. Assess own situation realistically in view of new circumstances and (for the majority) mentally prepare to go back to Iraq when the situation there is conducive to return.

# Table of Contents

• Executive Summary and Recommendations .....	3
<u>1. Introduction</u> .....	11
<u>2. Profile of the target group</u> .....	13
2.1 Gender, Age and Civil status .....	14
2.2 Ethnic and Religious Composition .....	15
2.3 Place of origin .....	18
2.4 Educational level.....	21
2.5 Vulnerabilities .....	22
<u>3. Push Factors: Reasons for leaving Iraq</u> .....	23
3.1 Political.....	23
3.1.1 Victim of torture.....	25
3.1.2 Brief imprisonment.....	25
3.1.3 Harassment by authorities.....	26
3.1.4 Targeted by other political groups .....	26
3.1.5 Army deserter .....	27
3.2 Socio-cultural.....	27
3.3 Economic .....	28
3.4 Fear of war .....	28
3.5 Medical .....	29
<u>4. Pull Factors: Reasons for choosing Greece</u> .....	30
4.1 Protection from persecution .....	31
4.2 Economic .....	31
4.3 Family reunion .....	31
4.4 Transit country .....	32
4.5 Unintended destination.....	33
4.6 Medical .....	33
<u>5. Current situation in Greece</u> .....	34
5.1 Length of stay .....	34
5.2 Legal status.....	35
5.3 Prior knowledge of Greece: Expectations vs. Reality .....	37
5.4 Being Iraqi in Greece: .....	38
5.4.1 Interrelations and communal support systems.....	38
5.4.2 Attitude of Greek public.....	40
5.4.3 Experience with Greek authorities .....	40
5.4.4 Assistance provided to Iraqis.....	42
<u>6. Prospects for durable solutions</u> .....	45
6.1 Resettlement.....	45
6.2 Integration .....	46

6.3 Repatriation.....	47
6.3.1 Willingness to return.....	50
6.3.2 Thoughts on war in Iraq and future of the country .....	55

• Appendices:

I. Map of Iraq.....	57
II. Map of the autonomous Kurdish region of Northern Iraq .....	58
III. List of Figures .....	59
IV. List of Abbreviations.....	60
V. List of meetings and relevant facilities .....	61
VI. Interview themes .....	62
VII. References .....	64
VIII. Asylum statistics for Greece .....	67
a. Asylum statistics - Greece (1997-2002) .....	67
b. Asylum applications for Greece (by percentage) – main countries of origin .....	68
c. Iraqis – status of recognition in Greece .....	69

# I. Introduction

This assessment was undertaken with the aim to obtain a clearer picture of the largest, and possibly most diverse, group of refugees and asylum seekers in Greece, namely the Iraqis. Given the radical transformation that has taken place in Iraq in the spring of 2003, it is essential to gain a better understanding of the situation of the many Iraqis in Greece, and what their needs and desires are for the future, in view of the changed circumstances in their home country. In order to examine prospects for durable solutions, including their possible wish to repatriate in an orderly and dignified manner, gauging their willingness to return to Iraq is imperative for the planning and implementation of an Iraq voluntary repatriation programme.

This aim required thorough fieldwork, which was largely based on participant observation. The methodology has mainly been that of interviews, of which 79 have been carried out with refugee households<sup>1</sup> during a three-month period, stretching from May to July 2003. Interviews included single member as well as multiple member households, and so the above-mentioned number refers to the actual interviews conducted, not the total of individuals encountered. The in-depth interviews undertaken have been structured but informal, and in some cases, depending on the interviewee, have assumed the shape of consulting conversations with focus more on listening than questioning. To guarantee anonymity, all names of Iraqi refugees and asylum seekers throughout the report are pseudonyms.

With the focus being on Iraqis within the asylum system, fieldwork was carried out at reception centres, entry and exit points, as well as in homes of Iraqi refugees and asylum seekers, in order to get as full a picture as possible about Iraqis in Greece. Capturing the diversity of the group studied was considered vital, and while this represents a relatively small sample, particular efforts have gone into ensuring as wide a representation as possible from the large spectrum of Iraqi nationals, with the intention to adequately reflect the overall Iraqi community in Greece. Efforts have also gone into expressing divergence where the findings of the sample are thought to fail to reflect the overall Iraqi population.

Individual interviews with Iraqis were complemented with meeting a range of different people, who had direct contact with Iraqis through legal/social welfare services, religious services, or were dealing with the issue in a way relevant for the research.<sup>2</sup> Further adding to these secondary sources has been the extensive use of literary material.

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<sup>1</sup> The definition of a household being those who live together and share income and expenditure.

<sup>2</sup> The broad support given this research by a variety of actors is gratefully acknowledged. Unhindered access to asylum seekers has been provided to the researcher by the following non-governmental organisations: Greek Council for Refugees (GCR), Social Work Foundation (SWF), Voluntary Work Athens (VWA), Hellenic Red Cross (HRC), Medecins du Monde (MdM), Social Solidarity (SS) and Hellenic Institute of Solidarity and Co-operation with Developing Countries (ELINAS). Lawyers, social workers and volunteers have liberally shared their time and experiences, and provided valuable information and knowledgeable insights. Important contributions towards assisting and facilitating the research have crucially come from staff at UNHCR Representation in Greece. Last but not least, these thanks also extend to the Iraqi respondents themselves, who were friendly, helpful and eager to relate their experiences. Many individual destinies were deeply moving, and it is hoped that this research will go some way towards finding durable solutions to the long-suffering Iraqi refugees.

The total number of Iraqis in the country is exceedingly difficult to get a firm grip on. In several reception centres alone, numbers fluctuate greatly over short periods,<sup>3</sup> and in the wider community people come and go on such a frequent basis that no one would attempt an estimate. Asylum statistics from 2002 reveal that out of the approximately 5,700 registered asylum seekers in Greece, Iraqis account for 45 per cent, or 2,300 individuals.<sup>4</sup> The indicators of the first half of 2003 show an almost identical trend, with Iraqis accounting for 43 per cent of all asylum seekers.<sup>5</sup> These figures, however, do not reflect the actual size of the Iraqi population, as there is reluctance among many Iraqis to lodge applications for asylum in Greece, wishing to retain the right to apply for asylum elsewhere in Europe.<sup>6</sup> It is believed that the number of undocumented Iraqis is at least the same as the number of registered, and guesstimates vary from 5,000 up to 40,000 individuals.<sup>7</sup> The constant arrivals and departures among documented asylum seekers and unregistered Iraqis alike also complicate any credible population count.

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<sup>3</sup> During the month of May, for instance, the number of Iraqis at Lavrion refugee camp totaled 115. In June the number was down to 71, only to increase again in July, reaching 102 individuals. More often than not, residents would just disappear without informing the management of the camp of their intentions and plans.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Appendix VII. UNHCR Asylum statistics for Greece.

<sup>5</sup> See UNHCR statistics on Applications for asylum in Greece for 2003 [January – July].

<sup>6</sup> Kurdish Hoshiyar from detention in Evros in July 2003 spoke of his plans to join that large group of unregistered Iraqis in Athens. He revealed that he does not intend to apply for asylum in Greece, but like so many before him – the previous week some 40 Iraqis after completion of their three months in detention had departed for Athens with the intention of travelling to northern/western Europe – plans to remain illegally in the country until he is able to leave Greece for his preferred destination, the UK.

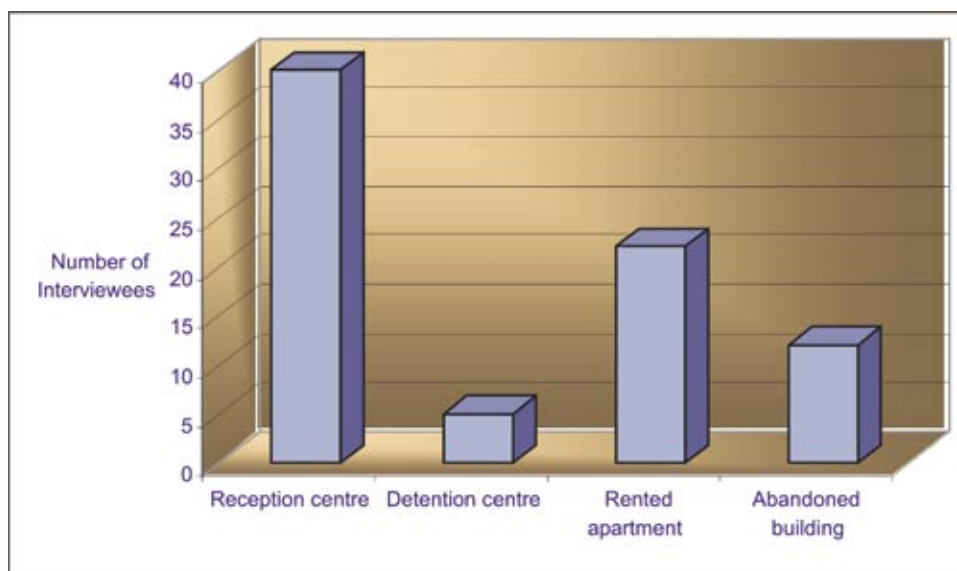
<sup>7</sup> While the lower estimate was provided by an Iraqi Kurdish intermediary, lawyers Panagiotis Papadimitriou and Yiannis Papageorgiou at GCR gave the figure of “30,000+, not more than 50,000”.

## 2. Profile of the target group

Concerning the profile of the target group, the following basic data has been documented: gender, age and civil status, ethnic and religious composition, place of origin, educational level and the prevalence of vulnerabilities. The settings of the interviews have varied greatly, as figure 1 (*Location of interviews*) illustrates. Reception centres constitute the most common location. Nine such centres were visited throughout the period of the research; those far from Athens being far less popular with asylum seekers than the facilities in the capital. Location is exceedingly important for Iraqis,<sup>8</sup> who prefer lodging in an abandoned house in the city centre to proper accommodation at a reception centre in a site far from their Athens-based communities. The preference of asylum seekers to remain in centres near Athens and resist efforts to be dispersed around Greater Athens or even inland towns, appears to have less to do with close proximity to available services than with being near their own communities.

Only three out of six detention centres visited in the Greek-Turkish border area of Evros held Iraqi detainees. A partial explanation to this is that Turkish police have enforced stricter border controls, which has sharply brought down the number of Iraqis reaching Greece. That the anticipated outpour of refugees from Iraq resulting from the American-led invasion of Iraq did not come about, also contributed to the low number of Iraqis in detention. A number of house visits were made in addition to the reception and detention centres. Own housing characterise both those with proper living conditions and those who squat in old derelict houses. While figure one shows an emphasis on reception centres concerning accommodation, the larger Iraqi population in Greece is believed to live in their own housing.

**Figure 1: Location of interviews**



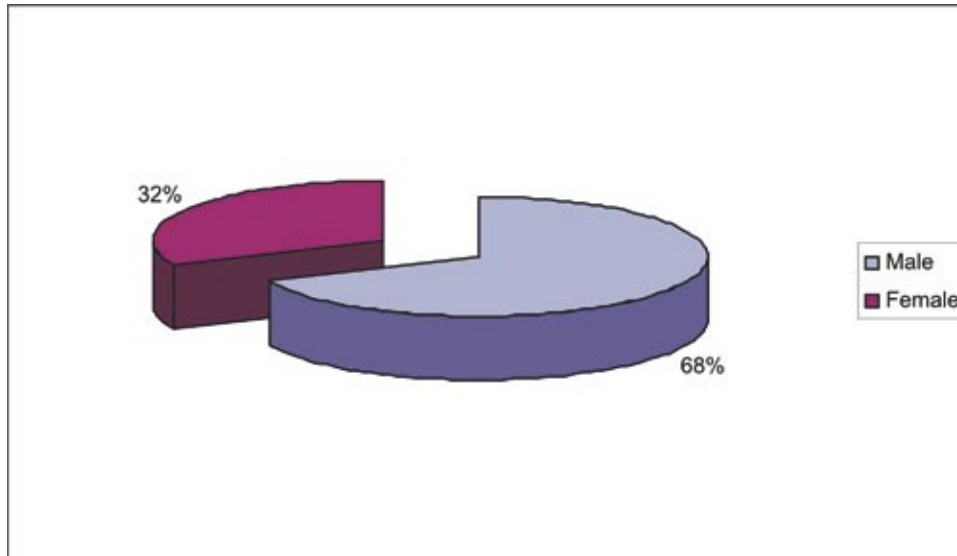
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<sup>8</sup> This point was stressed by GCR social worker Iota Karadima, adding that “if there was a camp in Patras, it would be full”.

## 2.1 Gender, Age and Civil status

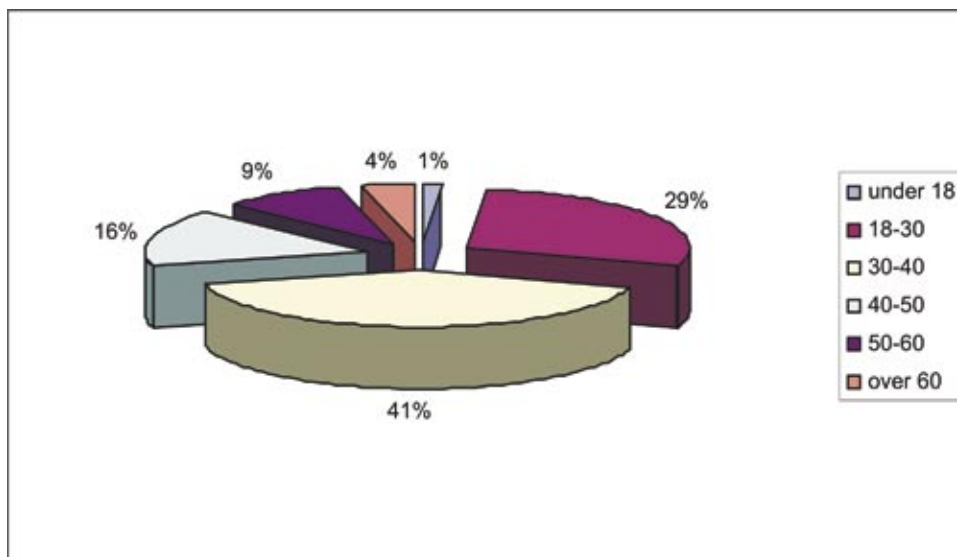
As figure 2 (*Gender*) shows, there are more males (68 per cent) than females (32 per cent) among Iraqi refugees and asylum seekers in Greece, which certainly reflects the larger Iraqi community.

**Figure 2: Gender**



According to the following chart, figure 3 (*Age*), 70 per cent are young, signifying individuals in their twenties and thirties. Only some 10 per cent are over 50 years of age, again reflecting well the greater population of Iraqis in Greece.

**Figure 3: Age**

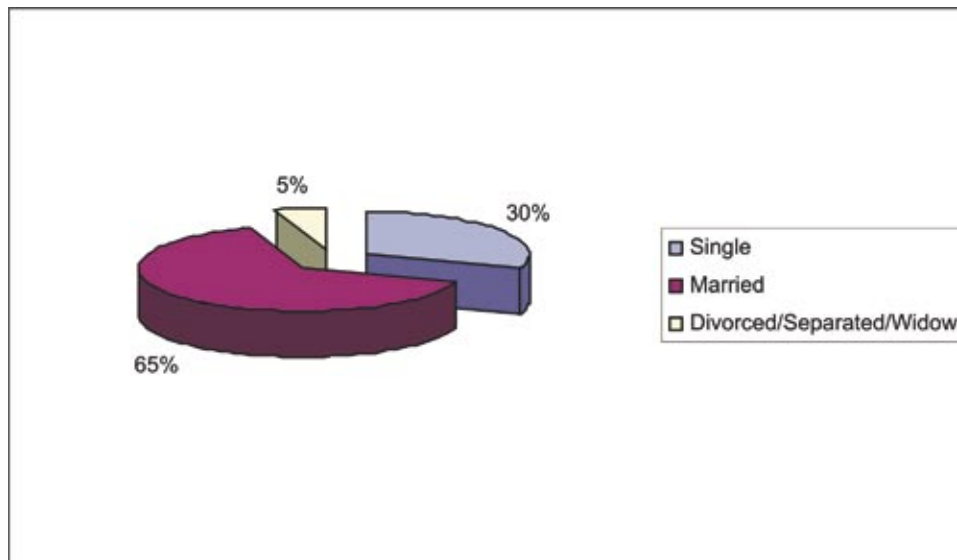


Whereas most are married, 65 per cent, as indicated in figure 4 (*Civil Status*) - they tend to leave their wives and children behind in Iraq, often with the initial intention of bringing them here for family reunion when the practical arrangements are in place. A smaller number are widows and divorcees. Plenty of cases featured mixed marriages: Sunni and Shiite, Turkmen and Kurd, Chaldean and Assyrian.



While in this sample barely a third of interviewees constitute single men, it is believed that among the mass of unregistered Iraqis, young single men form the majority.

**Figure 4: Civil Status**

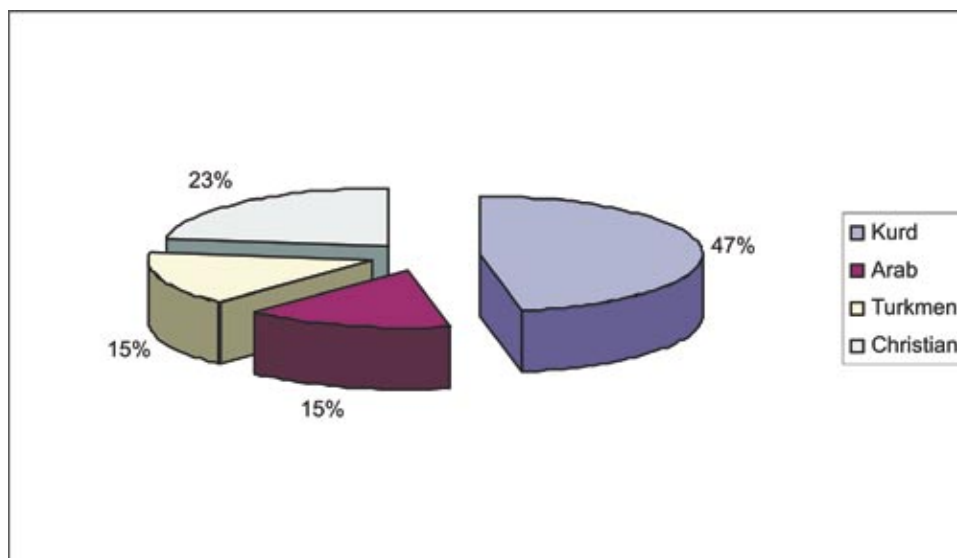


## 2.2 Ethnic and Religious Composition

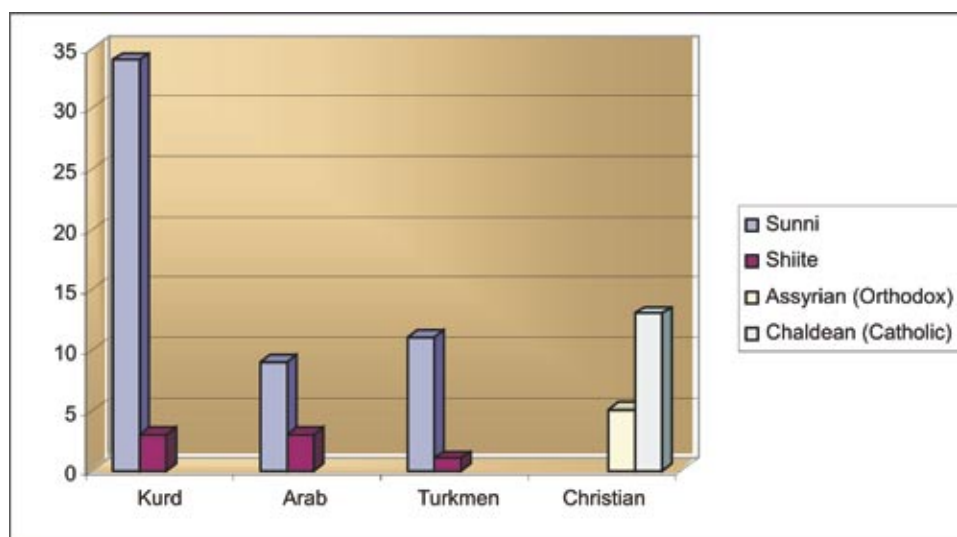
Figure 5a (*Ethnic and Religious Composition: Proportion of total constituted by each group*) shows domination by Kurds among those interviewed (close to 50 per cent), followed by Christians (at around a quarter), with Turkmen trailing behind (at some 15 per cent) and an equal number of Arabs. Also this ethnic and religious division is believed to be by and large mirrored in the larger Iraqi community, where particularly among the unregistered of Iraqi origin, Kurds dominate.

Among the Kurds, Sunni Muslims form the majority (see figure 5b *Ethnic and Religious Composition: Religious denominations of each group*) – as they do in Iraq/Kurdistan - but also Shiite Feylis are represented.

**Figure 5a: Ethnic and Religious Composition: Proportion of total constituted by each group**

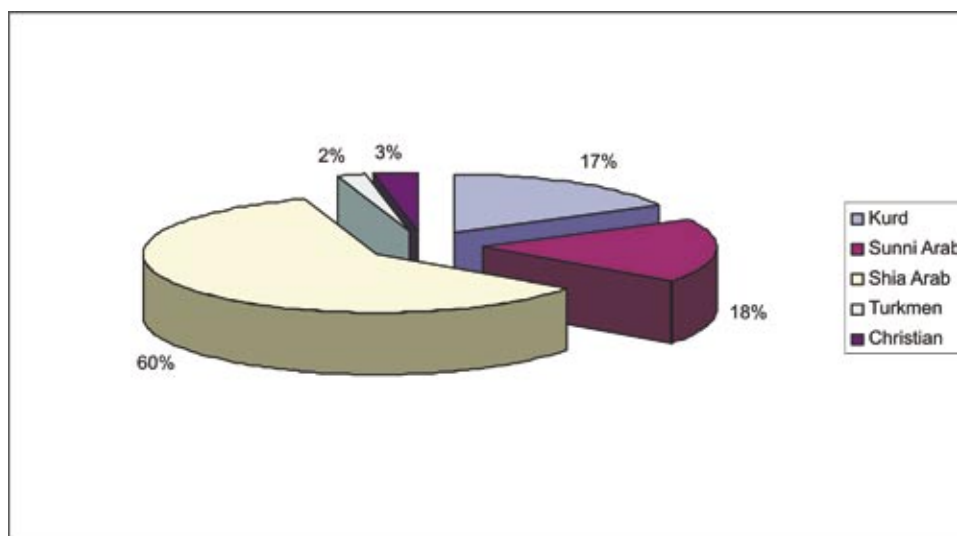


**Figure 5b: Ethnic and Religious Composition: Religious denominations of each group**



As indicated by figure 6a (*Population of Iraq in ethnic and religious groupings*), the Kurds constitute almost a fifth of Iraq's population<sup>9</sup> and number about four and half to five million people. They have suffered national oppression since the establishment of the Iraqi State in 1932, and their continuous resistance to central Arab control made Iraqi Kurdistan the centre of gravity for the Kurdish national movement for large parts of the past century.<sup>10</sup>

**Figure 6a: Population of Iraq in ethnic and religious groupings**



<sup>9</sup> Iraq has a total population of about 24 million. (Economist Intelligence Unit Country Profile Iraq, 2002.)

<sup>10</sup> Good sources for background reading on the Kurds are Jonathan Randal *Kurdistan: After such knowledge, what forgiveness?*, London: Bloomsbury 1998, David McDowall *A modern history of the Kurds*, London: I.B. Tauris, 1996. and Gerard Chaliand *A people without a country: the Kurds and Kurdistan*, London: Zed Books, 1993.

Feyli Kurds<sup>11</sup> are Shi'a Muslims with origins in the south-east of Kurdistan, the Iran/Iraq border area. This has been an unfortunate location in geopolitical terms, as it largely accounts for their continuing problems with Arab Sunni nationalists, who have denied them Iraqi citizenship on the grounds that they were Iranians. The Feylis have experienced particularly harsh conditions under the rule of Saddam Hussein, under whose tutelage in 1970 a systematic deportation of tens of thousands Feyli Kurds began. It took the shape of an intensive campaign lasting some two months, following which Arabs were settled in the deserted houses. In early 1980, during the prelude to the Iraqi invasion of Iran, another deportation campaign of Feylis began. This continued for up to two years and even those who were born in Baghdad and for four-five generations had lived in the Iraqi capital were deported. Iraqi authorities designated Iran as birthplace, a registration that did not conform to Iran's records. Many of those Feyli Kurds deported in 1970 did become registered in Iran and subsequently received Iranian citizenship, but the larger numbers deported in the 1980s' campaign during the war have been left in a state of limbo and many have emigrated or attempted to emigrate to Europe.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, one Feyli interviewee in Athens recounted that his family was expelled to Iran twice, the first one in 1970 - from which they successfully returned three years later - was followed by another, permanent, expulsion in 1980.

The largest non-Kurdish minority in Northern Iraq constitutes the Turkmen community. They are mainly Sunni Muslims, speaking a Turkish dialect and most have live in the area since Ottoman times. As with all minorities in Iraq, the number of Turkmen has be both inflated and understated, but a reasonable estimate would be between 500,000 to 800,000 people.<sup>13</sup> In this sample Turkmen form 15 per cent of the total, and although they have arrived in greater numbers during 2003, they still constitute a smaller part of the Iraqi community in Greece.

Iraq's Sunni Muslim Arab population comprises approximately 20 per cent of Iraq's population against some 55 per cent Shi'a Muslim Arabs. (Cf. figure 6b *Religions in Iraq*.) Despite their majority within Iraq and severe repression by the former regime,<sup>14</sup> few Shiites make it to Greece in search of protection from persecution.<sup>15</sup> Instead, those Iraqi Arabs who arrive in Greece are Sunni Muslims from central and northern parts of Iraq. At 17 per cent, Arabs form an almost equal number of Turkmen in the sample, but there is an important factor to take into account when assessing Arabs originating in Kirkuk. As examined further below, non-Arab residents in this key-city were pressurised to change their nationality to Arab, a policy known as "nationality correction", and while Kurds more often than not refused, Turkmen were less unlikely to cave in to the pressure in order to be granted stay in the area and in continued possession of their property and land. It has been suggested to UNHCR that some Arab Iraqis in Greece are in fact Turkmen who unwittingly continue the habitual denial of their true ethnicity.

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<sup>11</sup> The name Feyli Kurd derives from the town Pehle in southern Iranian Kurdistan, by Arabs pronounced "Fehle".

<sup>12</sup> For more background on Feyli Kurds, see for instance David McDowall's *A modern history ... op. cit.*

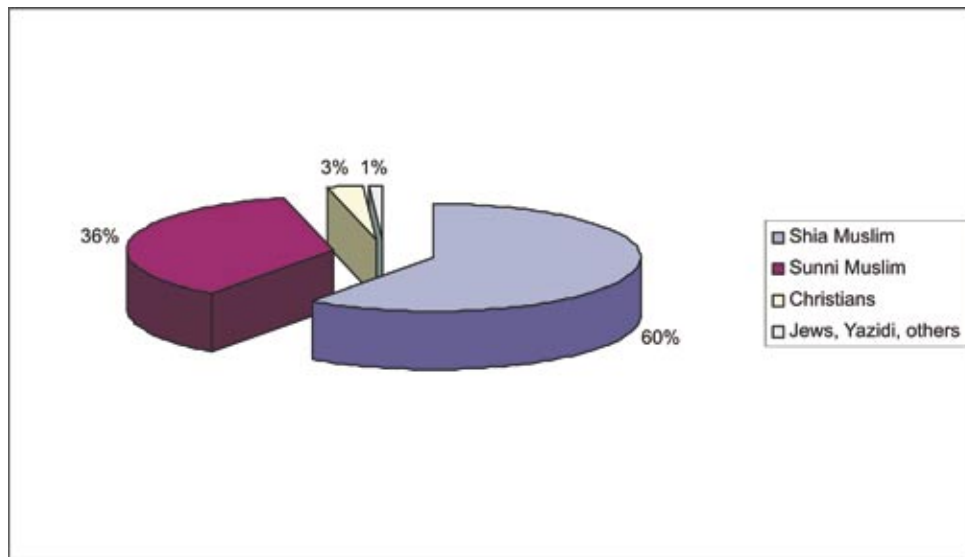
<sup>13</sup> E.g. *Iraq: a country study*, edited by Helen Chapin Metz (1990, Library of Congress: USA), gives more background to the Turkmen (or Turkoman) of Iraq.

<sup>14</sup> For an account of the suppression of Iraq's Shiites, see chapters nine and ten in *Iraq since the Gulf War: Prospects for Democracy*, Fran Hazelton (ed.), London: Zed Books (1994).

<sup>15</sup> Neighbouring Iran, which gives refuge to the largest Iraqi refugee population in any country, is host mainly to Shiite Iraqis. At the end of 2002 the registered population of Iraqis in Iran numbered just over 200,000, down almost 50 per cent from the beginning of the year. See "Refugee population and major changes" of the *2002 Annual Statistical Reports*, UNHCR Population Data Unit, PGDS.

Another minority in the region constitutes the Christian Assyrians and Chaldeans, who are concentrated in and around Baghdad and Mosul with their presence in the autonomous Kurdish region being in the Badinan-area close to Arbil. Some would not seldom describe themselves as being first and foremost an ethnic minority, not primarily a religious minority. Assyrians and Chaldeans stress their sense of “feeling like one community”, adding that the Iraqi government tried to create divisions between the two.<sup>16</sup> They both speak Syriac and while the Chaldeans (accounting for 80 per cent) are Catholics and in union with Rome, the Assyrians (constituting 20 per cent) have an independent church that belongs to the Orthodox Church of the East. Merely constituting a few per cent of Iraq’s population, the Christians have a disproportionately large representation among Iraqis in Greece. Forming a quarter of the total in this sample, Iraqi Christians make up the majority of Christians from the Middle East, who have arrived in Greece in the 1990s.<sup>17</sup>

**Figure 6b: Religions in Iraq**



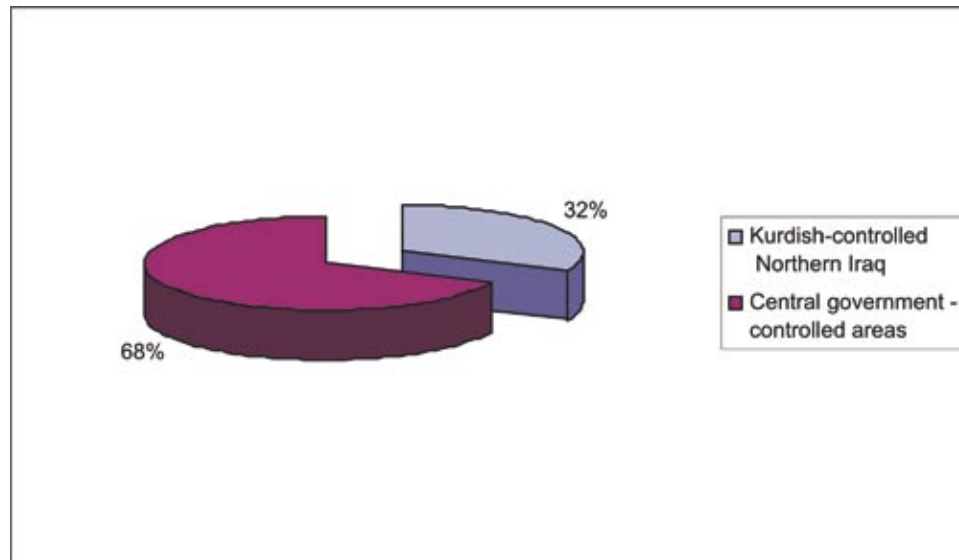
### 2.3 Place of origin

The place of origin of refugees and asylum seekers from Iraq is a very significant factor, particularly in view of future return movements. Figure 7a (*Place of origin*) focuses on this important issue, and reveals that Iraqis have left central government-controlled areas in greater number than the Kurdish-held region. The widely-held belief that the vast majority of Iraqis in Greece come from the Kurdish-controlled areas may be true only insofar as the many of the thousands of IDPs expelled from northern Iraqi areas under the control of the central government, have made their way to Greece after years of dull existence in the Kurdish self-ruling entity.

<sup>16</sup> The Assyrian scholar Naby Eden, sheds some light on this: “there have been attempts on the part of several Middle Eastern governments to categorize Christian groups by their churches in an attempt to break up an ethnic category along religious lines”. See “Sounds of silence: Iraqi Assyrians speak the language Jesus spoke – but for how long?”, ABC News, 6 November 2002.

<sup>17</sup> During the 1970s, Christians arrived mainly from Lebanon, while Iran was the main country of origin in the 1980s. The Assyrian Union of Greece estimates that over the past few years some 5,500 Christians have arrived in Greece, of whom approximately 90 per cent come from Iraq.

**Figure 7a: Place of origin**



This division of territory was created in the aftermath of the Gulf War in 1991, when Saddam's brutal suppression of the Kurdish uprising caused the international community to intervene decisively on behalf of the Kurds.<sup>18</sup> A safe haven was established, enforced by a no-fly zone for Iraqi aircraft above the 36<sup>th</sup> Parallel, and when Iraqis forces unilaterally withdrew from the three northern provinces of Suleimaniya, Arbil and Dohuk in the autumn of 1991 the Kurds were left in charge of their own affairs.<sup>19</sup> Elections were held in May 1992, and a government was established, which was a 50-50 arrangement between the two main Kurdish parties in Iraq, the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK). They jointly ruled the area until internecine fighting broke out between them in 1994, largely due to disagreements over finances, which effectively cut the region into two halves; the south-eastern half controlled by the PUK, while the KDP took full control of the northeast. This factual division has continued despite a formal peace accord signed between the parties in 1998.<sup>20</sup> In spite of this inter-Kurdish unrest, the north has offered relative personal and political freedom in an otherwise totalitarian Iraq that has produced a steady stream of refugees seeking political asylum abroad. However, the economic stagnation in the late 1990s made many leave for Europe.

In view of this division into reasonably free Kurdish-held northern parts<sup>21</sup> and authoritarian Iraq proper, Figure 7b (*Analysis of Iraqis from central government-controlled areas*) shows the break-down of numbers of those Iraqi refugees in Greece originating in government-controlled areas. It discloses that as many as 45 per cent have fled from the city of Kirkuk, with only some 30 per cent from Baghdad, while the northern city of Mosul accounts for 20 per cent. It is significant that the figures are so much lower for the capital, a city with some 5 million residents as well as for Mosul, Iraq's third largest city with an estimated 1,8 million inhabitants, than Kirkuk, with population of approximately 800,000.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> This intervention, however, did not happen until after more than one and a half million Kurds had left their homes, fleeing the approaching Iraqi army.

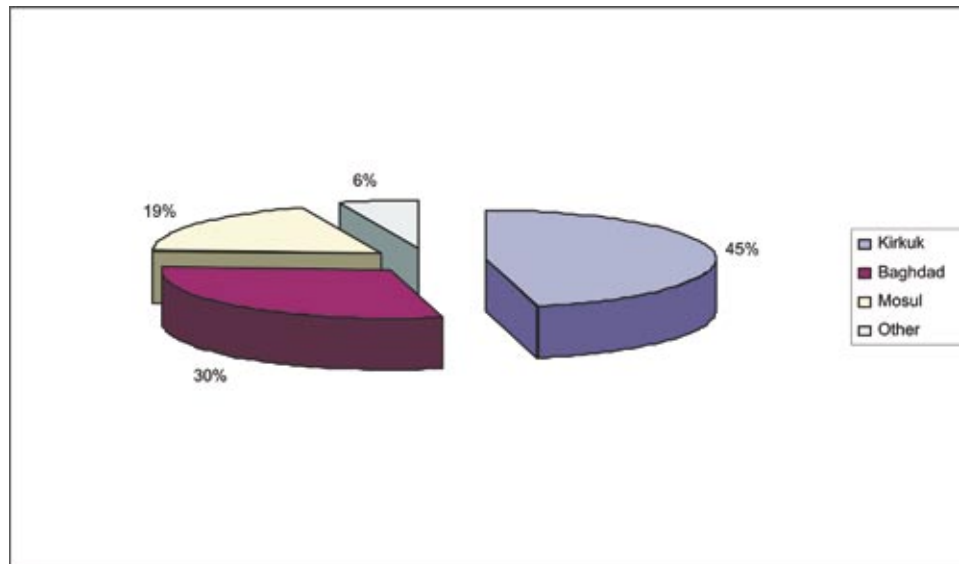
<sup>19</sup> For a detailed account of events following the end of the Gulf War, see pp. 45-52 in Dilip Hiro *Neighbours, not friends: Iraq and Iran after the Gulf Wars*, London: Routledge, 2001.

<sup>20</sup> Gareth Stansfield examines the intra-Kurdish party dynamics of the PUK and the KDP in *Iraqi Kurdistan: Political development and emergent democracy (2003)*, London: Routledge Curzon.

<sup>21</sup> For a map on this Iraqi Kurdish area of self-rule, see Appendix II.

<sup>22</sup> See Appendix I for a full map on Iraq.

**Figure 7b: Analysis of Iraqis from central government-controlled areas**



With its vast resources, Kirkuk has always represented a strategically important area for the central government.<sup>23</sup> Originally predominantly Kurdish in character,<sup>24</sup> it has been the heart of Saddam Hussein's policy of Arabisation, begun in mid-1970s and intensified in the 1990s, aimed at changing the demography of the city and its surroundings. Initiated on a rather small scale, these forced population movements eventually developed into one of the most important and sustained non-military Iraqi measures aimed at the Kurds, and later also included Turkmen and other minorities.<sup>25</sup> Under its related program of "nationality correction" Kurds and Turkmen alike were not allowed to rent a house, let alone buy property.<sup>26</sup> Baghdad pursued pure ethnic cleansing of the city, and even Baathist sympathisers of the wrong ethnic make, were forced away if not agreeing to change their nationality.<sup>27</sup> The emptied houses were inhabited by Arabs from the south of Iraq, who were given economic incentives to settle in the north.

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<sup>23</sup> For an account of oil resources in the Kurdish parts of Iraq, and particularly the economic importance of Kirkuk, see pp. 221-223 in Mehrdad Izady *The Kurds: A concise handbook*, London: Taylor & Francis, 1992.

<sup>24</sup> An official Iraqi census of 1957 indicated a Kurdish population of 49,1 per cent, against 28,7 per cent Arabs and 21,8 per cent Turkmen. Twenty years later, the Arab population had increased to 44,4 per cent, while the number of Kurds had been brought down to 37,5 per cent and Turkmen to 16,3 per cent. The census figures are from Nouri Talabany, *Iraq's Policy of Ethnic Cleansing: Onslaught to change national/demographic characteristics of the Kirkuk Region*, London 1999.

<sup>25</sup> Only since 1991, approximately 120,000 Kurds, Turkmen and Christians have been expelled to the self-ruling Kurdish entity in the north or to the south of Iraq, as reported by Human Rights Watch *Iraq: Forcible Expulsion of Ethnic Minorities*, March 2003.

<sup>26</sup> The full extent of the Arabisation policy on Kirkuk is examined in detail on pp. 54-66 in Nouri Talabany (2001), *Arabization of the Kirkuk region*, Uppsala: Kurdistan Studies Press.

<sup>27</sup> For instance, a retired army officer of Kurdish origin who had served the Iraqi military for over 30 years had to give up his home and belongings when refusing to have his Kurdish nationality 'corrected'. (As related to author in a conversation with IDPs from Kirkuk, in Bazian camp outside Suleimaniya, 23 August 2002.) It was further explained that the expulsion carries with it two initial choices: either the family heads for the autonomous region in the north leaving all belongings behind, or they are taken to southern Iraq in possession of their personal effects.

Given the strategic importance of Kirkuk and the flood of refugees generated by the policy of Arabisation, most of whom are likely to desire a return when circumstances allow, particular attention must be given the returnee process. It is therefore highly significant that considerable parts of the Iraqi community in Greece are believed to originate in Kirkuk. Although these numbers are based on a sample of Iraqis randomly selected, through further research into the subject, there are grounds to believe that natives of Kirkuk are well-represented also in the larger community of Iraqis in Greece. While many unregistered Iraqis are thought to originate in the Kurdish-controlled Northern Iraq, many there are also natives of Kirkuk, having been expelled over the last decades and seeking their fortunes abroad until the day they can return to their areas of origin. The significance of Kirkuk, a tinderbox of ethnic tension between brought-in settlers and expelled and displaced natives, as created by the former regime, must not be underestimated when return movements get under way.

**Figure 8: Urban vs. rural areas of origin**

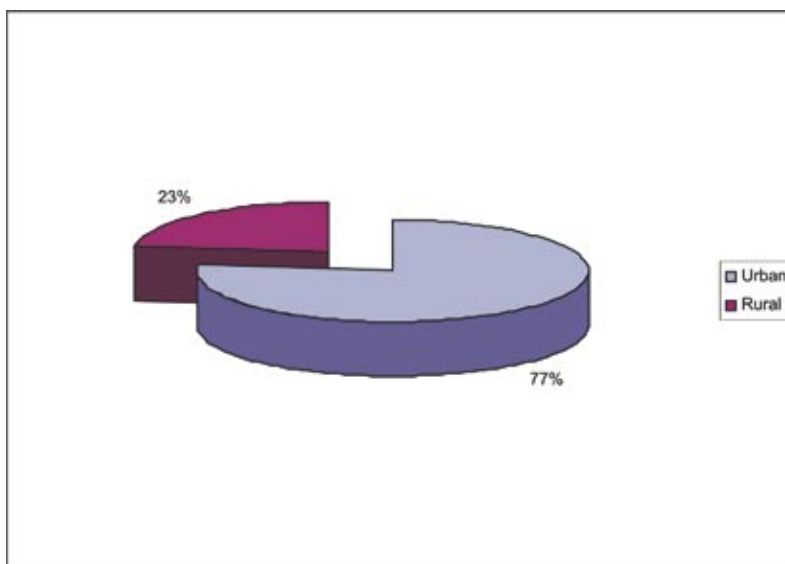


Figure 8 (*Urban vs rural areas of origin*) outlines the number of Iraqi refugees and asylum seekers who originates in urban versus rural areas across Iraq, and together with the previous chart on area of origin analysis for Iraqis from government-controlled areas, it could be regarded as an indication where shelter assistance may be needed the most when the rebuilding of the country gets under way. If these figures could be extrapolated to the total refugee population of Iraqis in Greece it would mean that the vast majority of Iraqis originate in urban areas, but that cannot be said with any high level of certainty.

## **2.4 Educational level**

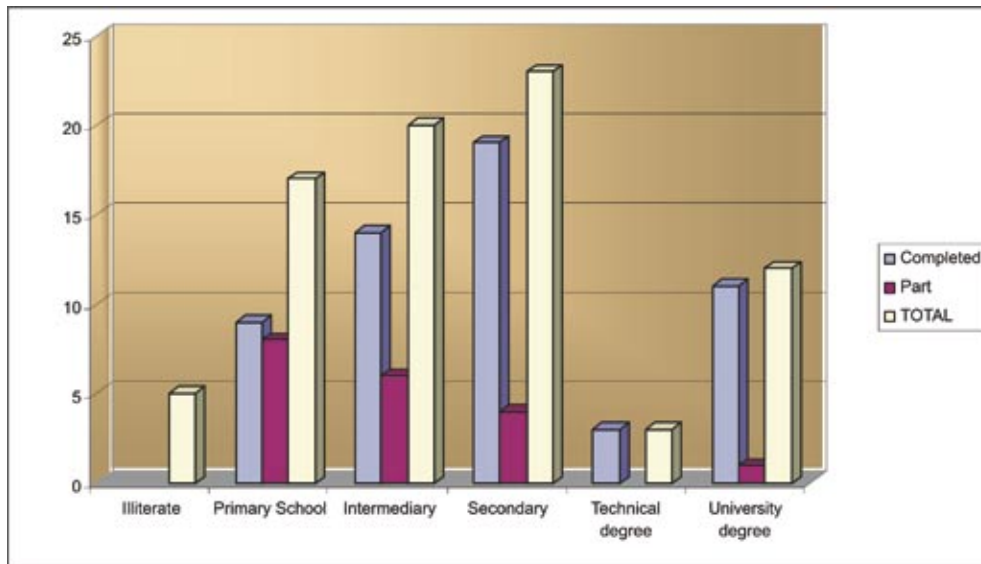
The educational level among Iraqis is in general high. With reference to figure 9 (*Educational level*), Iraqis are in relative terms and in comparison with other refugee groups in Greece (such as for instance the large Afghani population), well-educated.<sup>28</sup> The few Iraqi illiterates in the sample came from a rural background, whereas most interviewees had at least primary school education, and many more intermediary and sec-

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<sup>28</sup> This was particularly confirmed by Roula Poulou, co-ordinator of an unemployment-programme for refugees and asylum seekers.

ondary schooling. It is not unusual for Iraqi refugees to hold university degrees. This is a general feature of the Iraqi people, whose country during the 1970s and 1980s, hosted students from all over the Arab world seeking higher learning. Many interviewees have completed higher education, but as the average age of Iraqi refugees and asylum seekers is relatively low, the majority has as of yet not had any opportunities to work in their chosen profession and hence their theoretical knowledge remains undeveloped.

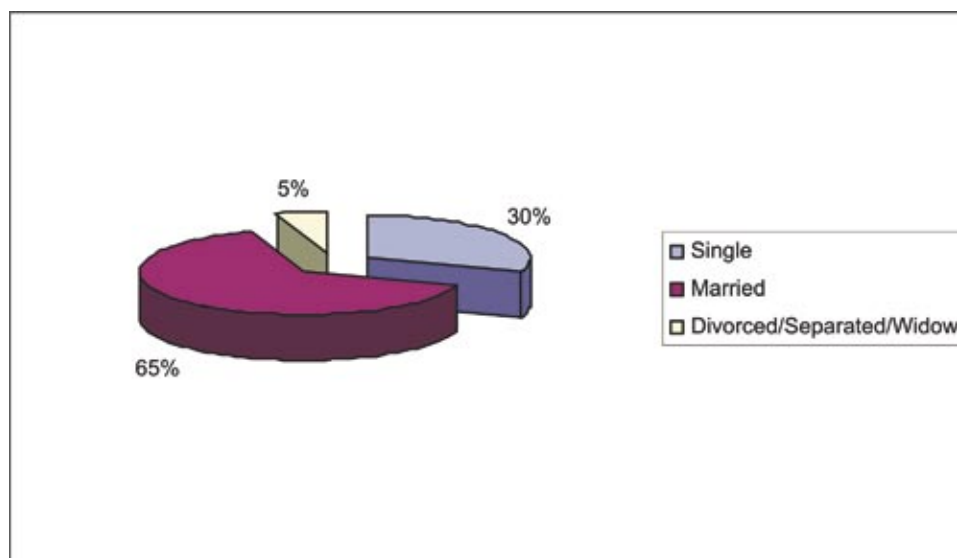
**Figure 9: Education level**



## 2.5 Vulnerabilities

Figure 10 (*Vulnerabilities*) shows the prevalence of vulnerabilities among the Iraqis in the sample, singling out torture victims, unaccompanied minors and single-head families. However, out of the sample, only 16 per cent of interviewees displayed any one of these vulnerabilities, so the percentage is neither representative of the whole sample, nor of the larger community of Iraqis in Greece.

**Figure 10: Vulnerabilities**



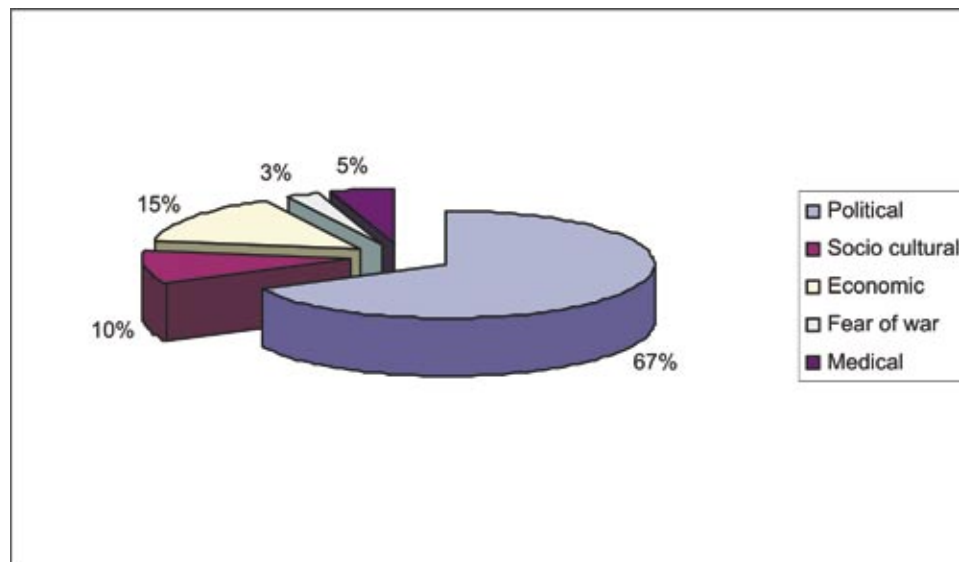


### 3. Push Factors: Reasons for leaving Iraq

Iraqi refugees and asylum seekers cite a variety of reasons as to why they left their country of origin, as shown in Figure 11a (*Push factors*). In many instances, there is a combination of factors that contributed to the decision to leave, although one factor tends to dominate.

Political reasons – i.e. fear of persecution - are claimed by an overwhelming two thirds of Iraqis in the sample. 15 per cent cited economic motives, while some 10 per cent referred to compelling socio-cultural grounds on which their departure from Iraq was deemed necessary. Finally, a few per cent asserted strong medical reasons for going abroad and the remaining few per cent feared the oncoming war. Among the larger Iraqi population in Greece, economic factors are believed to feature heavily.

**Figure 11a: Push factors**



#### 3.1 Political

Political reasons can mean a great many different things. Figure 11b (*Political reasons analysis*) clarifies the major causes.

The political activities of relatives have landed many innocent Iraqis in trouble with the Iraqi intelligence services.<sup>29</sup> Khaled, an Arab Shiite from Baghdad, frequented the mosque but did not join his brother-in-law, who got involved with the banned opposition party Da'wa.<sup>30</sup> After the latter's arrest, torture and

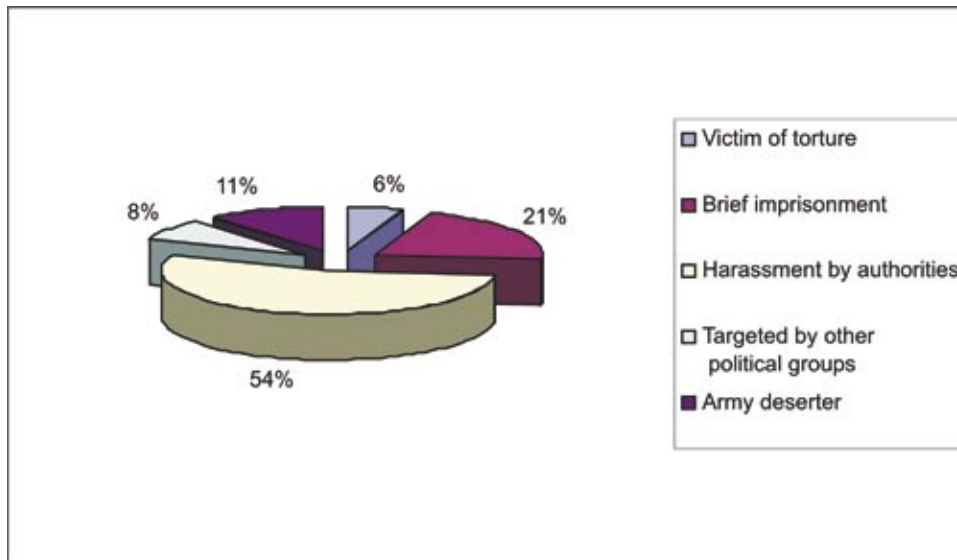
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<sup>29</sup> The two intelligence services that normally feature are the *Mokhabarat* (General Intelligence service) and *Istkhbarat* (Military Intelligence service).

<sup>30</sup> During the rule of Saddam Hussein *Da'wa* was a clandestine movement, a nationalist party with a defined political program based on a strict Islamic interpretation of the nation's history and social structure. It recruited its members from the Shiite intelligentsia of the modern urban middle class, students and modern professionals. For more on this party, see Juan R. Cole and Nikki Keddie (eds.) *Shi'ism and Social Protest* (New Haven, 1986).

death, Khaled was himself imprisoned on the same grounds, and when released in Saddam Hussein's general amnesty in November 2002, he fled the country with his pregnant wife and young daughter. Chaldean Anita experienced a similar situation when her politically active brother left the country, exposing her and her family to government reprisals. Sunni Arab Adnan from Baghdad, moreover, was taken prisoner after his brother-in-law, a high-ranking general in the army, was killed by Saddam on charges of plotting a coup. Upon temporary release, Adnan did not take his chances on his hastily acquired freedom, but swiftly decided to leave.

**Figure 11b: Political reasons analysis**



Those who flee Baghdad-controlled areas stay a while in the Kurdish area of self-rule while making their travel arrangements. They do not, however, contemplate remaining there, as Saddam's secret service operated also in that region, making it unsafe for those in search of protection from the former president's repressive system. For non-Kurds the environment is not conducive to indefinite stay. Adnan worked for some time at a private Kurdish television station, but as an Arab from Baghdad he was regarded with deep suspicion by the Kurds, and amidst pressure from KDP to join its ranks, he decided to seek a more secure living conditions elsewhere.

Kurds, having resided for a while in northern Kurdish-held territory often add to their general sense of vulnerability in that region, that they would not want to remain there, appalled as many Kurds were by the Kurdish civil war in the mid-1990s. Disappointed by the deep divisions between the KDP and the PUK, Mohammad from Kirkuk, says of the state of affairs in the enclave: "Kurd only kills Kurd". In addition, Kurds from Kirkuk with no geopolitically "natural" allegiance to either one of the two parties are, once in Kurdish-controlled territory, courted by both KDP and the PUK to join respective party, and this pressure further motivated them to leave the area.

Also Kurds residing in the area of self-rule were pushed out of the region during or as a result of the Kurdish infighting in the mid-1990s, as the hostilities caused displacements of people supporting or perceived to support one of the warring factions.

### **3.1.1 Victim of torture**

No ethnic or religious group has an exclusive claim to suffering in Baathist Iraq, as large parts of the population endured exceptional ill-treatment under the former regime.<sup>31</sup> Torture was routine in a society characterised by fear of the State, and those torture victims who could, fled Iraq to seek refuge abroad. In the sample, six per cent of the interviewees were victims of torture.

The rehabilitation centres for torture victims in Athens and Thessaloniki both report a decrease in the number of Iraqi victims of torture over the past couple of years. The percentage of Iraqis of the total clientele at the Athens Medical Rehabilitation Centre for Torture Victims (MRCT) has gone from 65 per cent in 1998 to 20 per cent in 2002. Of those torture victims Iraqi Christians were in majority, followed by Kurds.<sup>32</sup> At the Rehabilitation Centre for Victims of Torture and Other Forms of Abuse in Thessaloniki (CRTV), a similar trend has been observed. Out of a total of 137 cases since 2001, only 13 have been of Iraqi origin, but all of them Kurds, whose problems resulted from the KDP-PUK infighting. These Iraqi Kurdish victims of torture did not reach Greece until the end of the 1990s, as they had to stay in Turkey to work and collect money for their onward journey.<sup>33</sup>

Just as there are fewer Iraqi torture victims, there is also evidence of less torture and far fewer cases of systematic torture, as those politically active are believed to have left Iraq earlier. What have emerged lately are fabricated torture-stories, and maltreated persons have shown a tendency to exaggerate their cases in order to strengthen their claims for asylum.<sup>34</sup>

It is, however, important to note that not all torture victims are examined at the rehabilitation centres, as its existence is not known to all and information about it somewhat scarce among asylum seekers. Of the four cases of torture victims encountered during the research for the current study, only one had visited MRCT.

### **3.1.2 Brief imprisonment**

Imprisonment is often the result of harassment by the authorities, and some 20 per cent of interviewees have been imprisoned for a period of time. Many of those who for one reason or another caught the attention of Iraqi intelligence ran the risk of being imprisoned on questionable grounds.

Then there was the strong pressure to become a member of the ruling Baath party,<sup>35</sup> the persistent refusal to which often equalled imprisonment for an unknown period of time. Omid, a Turkmen from Kirkuk, was one of those continuously pressured to join the Baathist ranks, and as he stubbornly resisted recruitment, he was imprisoned for three months.

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<sup>31</sup> Detailed accounts are provided by Amnesty International in *Iraq: Systematic Torture of Political Prisoners*, August 2001. See also Kanan Makiya's *Cruelty and Silence: War, Tyranny, Uprising, and the Arab World* (1993), Norton: London.

<sup>32</sup> Data provided by psychologist Dimitris Pantazis at MRCT, Athens.

<sup>33</sup> Data and experiences with Iraqis provided by CRTV lawyer Fani Galatsopoulou in Thessaloniki.

<sup>34</sup> As related by both MRCT and CRTV.

<sup>35</sup> Membership in the Baath Party was common, as it provided incentives for a career, economic advantages, foreign trips, access to university, and other privileges. Even if they did not share its ideology, many professionals, such as officers, high-ranking officials, scientists, journalists, teachers and university-staff were often required to join the Baath Party. See for instance Kanan Makiya's *Republic of Fear: The Politics of Modern Iraq*, 1998 (1st ed. 1989) Berkely, Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Others were accused of involvement in banned opposition parties, and suspicions of underground political activities often resulted in a prison sentence. Moreover, a number of Iraqi male interviewees had been under strong pressure to join the Jerusalem Brigade, a militia whose stated *raison d'être* was to liberate Jerusalem from Zionist control.<sup>36</sup> Similarly, Hosniya and her husband, Sunni Arabs from Mosul, decided to leave after pressure (and due imprisonment) was applied on her husband to join the Fedayeen, a militia led by Saddam's late son Uday.

### **3.1.3 Harassment by authorities**

Over 50 per cent of Iraqis in the sample cited different forms of harassment by Iraqi authorities as their basis for an asylum claim. Included are many who had a close family member assassinated by Saddam's regime and were themselves targeted after the killing.

Kurdish Diyar was because of his father's activities as a peshmerga<sup>37</sup> with the PUK in the early 1980s imprisoned at the age of 11 together with his pregnant mother and younger brothers. After their release, they fled to the Kurdish mountains and later on to Iran to escape the chemical warfare Baghdad unleashed on the Kurds in 1988.<sup>38</sup> Afraid of Tehran selling them out to Baghdad the family fled abroad, with the intention of going to England.

Iraqi Christians emphasise that they were not targeted as a religious minority as such, but that repression was on individual level. After the Gulf War in 1991, however, many of them began to feel overall more pressure from fellow Iraqis as they were considered to be associated with the Americans and as such had a role in the sanctions regime imposed on Iraq by the international community. As Youra, a Chaldean from Baghdad and mother of seven, says: "they [other Iraqis] accused us of being with Bush".

No Iraqi Christian spoken to had experienced any systematic repression on religious grounds. Like so many other Iraqis, Chaldeans and Assyrians had problems with Iraqi intelligence. Youlios, 17, from the Chaldean community, admits to having been bullied in school by Arab students, but rejects the suggestion that he was singled out on religious grounds or that it was a case of institutionalised maltreatment. Most Iraqi cities feature mixed neighbourhoods and in no case did the interviewee relate anything but good relations and friendships, even marriages, with those of different ethnicity and religious denomination.

### **3.1.4 Targeted by other political groups**

There are also Iraqis who seek asylum after having been targeted by non-state actors (reaching almost 10 per cent in this sample). Radical Islamist groups, such as Ansar al-Islam,<sup>39</sup> have on occasion vehe-

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<sup>36</sup> As Tim Judah writes, "in Kirkuk, Kurds were reportedly being targeted for the draft [...] but nobody believed that the Jerusalem Brigade was really about "liberating Jerusalem"; it had more to do with controlling people." See his article "In Iraqi Kurdistan", *The New York Review of Books*, 26 September 2002.

<sup>37</sup> Denoting a Kurdish guerrilla fighter, the term is Kurdish for 'the one who faces death'.

<sup>38</sup> For a thorough analysis of this operation, termed the Anfal campaign, see Human Rights Watch *Iraq's crime of genocide: The Anfal Campaign against the Kurds* (New Haven and London, 1995).

<sup>39</sup> *Ansar al-Islam* represents a small group of radical Islamist fighters, mostly Kurdish but also including Arab and Afghan elements, operating on PUK-controlled territory in a small mountainous area on the border with Iran, believed to be partially supported by a faction in Iran's ruling circles. For information on this group and its activities, see International Crisis Group briefing *Radical Islam in Iraqi Kurdistan: The mouse that roared?*, 7 February 2003.

mently pursued individuals throughout the autonomous region perceived to oppose their agenda or restrict their activities.

Islamists have a particular strong dislike for communists, and even family members of an assassinated sympathiser are exposed to their aversion, as related by Nasrin whose husband was threatened by the radicals after his brother had been murdered. She recalls how good life was in Kurdistan in the 1990s, “but”, she sighs, “the Islamists destroyed it. The recent war didn’t change this reality. Radical Islamists are still around and I don’t think it will get better in the future.”

In the 1990s, a foreign-financed Islamic charity organisation began erecting mosques in depopulated Christian villages in Northern Iraq.<sup>40</sup> Kurds who opposed this policy were considered enemies of the Islamic cause and dealt with accordingly. Rahman, a Sunni Kurd, who had temporarily moved into an Assyrian village after his house in Kirkuk had been destroyed by the central government, began having problems with Islamic radicals as he took a stand against their building a mosque in the midst of the Christian community. The dispute escalated and after they killed his brother, Rahman himself was in critical need of a safe haven and fled the country.

Iraqi Kurds have also sought refuge in Greece after having fallen out of favour with one of the Kurdish parties in the northern autonomous region.

### **3.1.5 Army deserter**

A soldier who deserted his post in Saddam’s Iraq was punished in the harshest way possible – by death. Ten per cent of those interviewed were army deserters and feared a return for as long as Saddam remained in power.

## **3.2 Socio-cultural**

Iraq is a tribal society, and as Saddam Hussein sought to broaden his power base during the 1990s, his regime encouraged tribal practices and norms and thus strengthened the powerbase of many tribes.<sup>41</sup> In some areas this resulted in tribal law replacing the Iraqi penal code, which has had great consequences for those condemned of any wrongdoing. 10 per cent of those interviewed referred to some form of tribal difficulty as reason for their seeking protection.

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<sup>40</sup> In the process of reconstructing the villages a large number of mosques were built, and those invited back were not the Christian communities concerned but Muslim Kurds. A prominent example is Fyish Khapur, a traditional Assyrian village close to the Syrian border, whose identity was changed completely. (Author’s own interview with William Warda, member of the political bureau of the Assyrian Democratic Movement (ADM) in northern Iraq, August 2002.) Most non-Arabs in Iraq have had problems with Saddam Hussein’s policy of Arabisation, but for Muslim Kurds and Turkmen there has been no religious dimension attached in that there is no change of identity of villages when land has changed hands.

<sup>41</sup> In order to reaffirm his grip on power at a time when the popular uprisings of 1991 had seriously challenged his authority, Saddam Hussein approached the old tribal chieftains and sought to strengthen his position through allegiances with these local notables. This focus was primarily on the Sunni-dominated central parts of the country, but also the Shia south was important as tribal recruiting ground. This is painstakingly examined by Amazia Baram in his article ‘Neo-tribalism in Iraq: Saddam Hussein’s Tribal Policies 1991-96’, *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 29, 1997, pp. 1-31.

Marrying in a traditional society without the blessing of the extended families concerned can be hazardous, as experienced by Azad, a Kurd from the tribal strongholds of traditional KDP-areas. He was forcibly divorced from his wife and subsequently nearly killed by a car in a premeditated hit-and-run incident, which was followed by further threats on his life while recovering in hospital. Similar fates await those who engage in extramarital affairs, the consequence of which can only be death if the family's honour is to be restored.

### **3.3 Economic**

Jobs have become increasingly scarce in Iraq and many people have come to a dead end, where departing for another country is viewed as the only way to provide, in most cases, for an extended family. The many agriculture workers have seen their livelihood taken away from them with the severe draught that befell the region in the late 1990s, and a fair amount of those have made their way to Greece. 15 per cent of interviewees made finding work their primary objective for coming to Athens.

While Turkmen Hülia, a 38-year old mother of four, came to Greece to ensure her children a better future that she did not see materialising in Iraq, for others, politics have shaped the economic misfortunes of people. Abdullah, a Sunni Arab native of Kirkuk, was after the death of his father left to support a family of nine, which he was able to do through his job as assistant engineer in the construction sector. However, while working on a presidential palace, the timeframe demanded by the Iraqi president was impossible to meet, which resulted in the collapse of the structure after a hurried completion. As the Iraqi State had the monopoly in construction (as in so many other areas), Abdullah was after that "failure" unable to find another job and was forced to look elsewhere for work in order to shoulder his responsibility as the family's breadwinner.

Another politically motivated case of lack of opportunities is that of Mahmoud, a Sunni Arab from Baghdad and member of a major Arab clan, which during the 1980s supported Saddam. Following a change of positions, the clan attempted a failed coup to bring down the Iraqi president, after which all its members were regarded with suspicion and denied opportunities.

### **3.4 Fear of war**

The people of Iraq have lived in a war-like situation since the comprehensive sanctions were imposed on the country after Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait 1990. Before then, they had to endure the eight-year-long war with neighbouring Iran. Threat of another war has been hanging over the Iraqi people for an excessively long period of time. The prolonged uncertainty of living with this threat combined with a well-founded fear of its consequences, made many families with young children pack their bags and sell all their belongings and property in order to seek physical safety abroad. A few per cent among interviewees— all families with several children – cited this reason. Afraid to put their children through yet another battle, they had taken the decision to leave.

One example is Bafrin and her husband, weary from the two major wars, feared for the safety of their five children, ranging from 1½ to 10 years of age, and left Iraq three weeks before the outbreak of the recent war.

### **3.5 Medical**

Victims of torture and of landmines, unable to get treatment in Iraqi hospitals, with the help of relatives and friends collect money to travel abroad to obtain the necessary surgery.

Barez, 23 years of age, stepped on a landmine when he was 15, in the process losing one leg and severely injuring the other. As Kurdish doctors told him that in a few years' time he would no longer be able to walk, he decided to borrow money from relatives to travel to Europe to seek treatment.

Some people go to great lengths in order to have their medical problem attended to by specialists abroad. In order to bring his 9-year-old paraplegic and mentally retarded son to Europe where he believed a cure was available, Mostafa sold his small shop and taxi in Arbil and left his wife and two young children behind to have his son restored to health by European doctors.

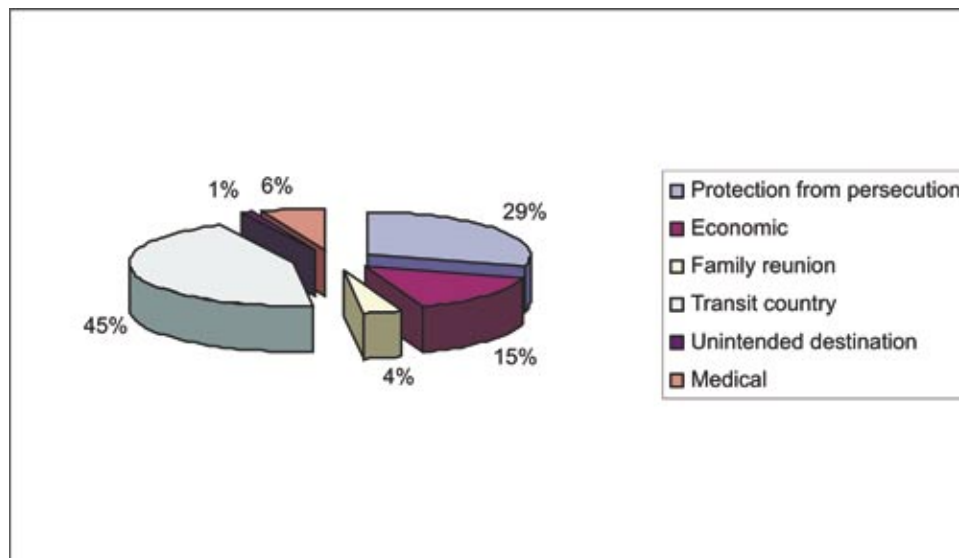
## 4. Pull factors: Reasons for choosing Greece

The motives for prospective asylum seekers to come to Greece vary, as do their methods and routes for reaching Greek territory, which is demonstrated by figure 12 (*Pull factors*). Just as with the previous push factors, there are overlaps and combined reasons for the journey to Greece, for instance transit and economic, the former being the most common factor and one that can be assigned the larger Iraqi population in the county.

Iraqis interviewed had entered Greece exclusively from Turkey, either across the Evros river that marks the Greek-Turkish border in the north-eastern Thrace region, or by boat to one of the eastern-most Greek islands.

Judging from the responses of the interviewees, it would appear that the arrival of many Iraqis in Greece less reflected the pull of Greece itself, but were more due to push factors in their area of origin and en route.<sup>42</sup> While some Iraqis travelled to Greece as part of a deliberate strategy, the decision for most, however, was in the hands of the traffickers, as they tend to choose transit countries. It is more often than not necessary to follow routes set up by smugglers, although their final destination country may not be that of first arrival.

**Figure 12: Pull factors**



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<sup>42</sup> Greece is of course part of the European Union, which in itself represents a strong pull factor. As Stephen Castles, Sean Loughna and Heaven Crawley write; “the high level of human rights and economic and social development in the EU constitutes a powerful attraction for people from the conflict zones”; page iv. in their report *States of Conflict: The Causes of Forced Migration to the EU*, Institute for Public Policy Research, April 2003.



## **4.1 Protection from persecution**

When I left my country I didn't think I'll go to this or that country, I only wanted personal safety and freedom. This I found in Greece. I am ready to fight to stay here.

The above words of Keywan, a Kurd fleeing persecution in Kirkuk, stresses a point many persecuted Iraqis make: almost 30 per cent of the interviewees refer to Greece as the first safe country they were able to reach, and many who have continued security concerns hope and pray to remain. Many spent time in Turkey, where a sense of security is elusive. It is impossible for Iraqis to apply for asylum in Turkey,<sup>43</sup> which in practice means that Turkish territory merely serves as a transit for further travel. In addition, Turkish police are very vigilant, harassing illegals incessantly and deny them their basic human rights, particularly those of Iraqi nationality.<sup>44</sup>

Some couples cite economic reasons for explaining why Greece became their chosen destination for protection purposes. Kurdish Halkawt and his Arab wife Leyla initially wished to seek protection further into Europe but their savings got them only to Greece, and as their first safe destination, that is where they wish to stay.

## **4.2 Economic**

Many were hoping to find work in Turkey and earn money until they could return to Iraq, but due to the intolerant Turkish police, many made their way to Greece, as interviewees say – “a different world from Turkey”. 15 per cent of Iraqis interviewed came to Greece looking for economic opportunities.

## **4.3 Family reunion**

Four per cent of interviewees came to Greece for the purpose of reuniting with their families. Often the male head-of-household would leave first, having his family linking up with him when all practical arrangements were in place. However, in some cases encountered, the wife and children had been the first to leave, later joined by the husband and a younger child who had stayed behind.

Chaldeans Yoaannes and his teenage son Youlios from Baghdad were after several years able to travel to Greece to reunite with the rest of the family, the wife and three other sons, who have lived in Athens for five years. Eager to be released from detention in Evros, Youlios was markedly enthusiastic for having reached “the paradise”, as his brothers have described Greece.

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<sup>43</sup> In the aftermath of World War II when Turkey signed international conventions granting political refuge to asylum seekers, Ankara specifically excluded refugees coming from countries on its southern and eastern borders. This geographical limitation imposed in 1951 remains to this day.

<sup>44</sup> This description of the Turkish police was related by nearly all interviewees, who cited fear of remaining in Turkey as an additional factor for entering Greece. Living conditions for illegal transit migrants in Turkey, including their regular problems with Turkish police, are examined in Celia Mannaert's *Irregular migration and asylum in Turkey*, May 2003, UNHCR Working Paper No. 89.

#### 4.4 Transit country

Greece is viewed as an interim phase by a considerable 45 per cent of all Iraqis interviewed: Christians want to go to Australia or North America, whereas Kurds mention northern/western Europe as their choice of destination. There are several reasons for this thinking. First and foremost, all Iraqis are told beforehand that once they reach Greek territory, it is very easy to move further north in Europe. Many also have friends and/or relatives in countries like Great Britain, Germany and Sweden, and their tales of social benefits enjoyed make many of their fellow Iraqis want to follow in their footsteps. Greek authorities also appear to tacitly encourage the transit character of the country and thus force asylum seekers to move on and settle in another country.<sup>45</sup>

That an estimated 50 per cent of all Iraqis in Europe have passed through Greece, according Diyar, who since 1990 has been active in the Greek and European refugee-community, does seem plausible. Says Hormous, "Greece is just the stop on a longer journey to Europe – everybody knows that." Indeed, Greece was intended as the brief sojourn on the road to family reunification in Canada for the elderly Turkmen couple Noushad, 65, and his wife Shirin, 60, who were the last in the family to leave northern Iraq.

For those in transit, Greece is looked at in much the same way as previous transit countries, in that it represents a provisional location, where money has to be collected for further travel. Bakhtiyar, like many other Kurds, spent a couple of years in Iran working before making his way to Istanbul and another few years of construction work saving up for the next leg of the journey, Greece. Having been deported six months earlier by Greek police from Patras to the Turkish border, he made another attempt to cross into Greece and is back at the same detention centre in Evros in northern Greece to serve another three months before determinedly again try to exit the country through Patras.

Some have tried more ways than others to reach their country of choice and Greece was the transit country on the European continent where they succeeded. Soran, a Feyli Kurd, unsuccessfully tried to cross into Bulgaria, and his horribly scarred arm underpins his account of ruthless border patrols with aggressive dogs. Discouraged from re-approaching the Bulgarian border, Soran entered Greece, from where he hopes to continue his journey north- and west-wards.

In many cases, what was intended as a transit country, became the country where many decided to stay and present their claim for asylum. Turkmen Öglü planned to proceed with his family of six to Germany, but one as one child fell ill in Greece, they took the decision to stay in Greece. A similar case is that of Khaled, whose preferred destination of Holland (where his sister-in-law has lived for many years as a recognised refugee), could not be reached as his wife's diabetes worsened upon arrival in Greece, and her need for constant medical attention forced them to stay in Greece and apply for asylum in Athens.

Many try their luck at the exit point of Patras, but after being caught, either in the port by Greek police before departing or by Italian coast guard and returned to Greek territory, they eventually give up that

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<sup>45</sup> Based on UNHCR statistics on refugee status determination, such a suggestion would appear plausible. In terms of recognition rates for refugee status in 2002, Greece reached rock-bottom globally with 0.4 per cent. Including humanitarian status, Athens placed itself third from bottom with a recognition rate total of 1.1 per cent, above the United Arab Emirates and Ukraine. See "Asylum applications and refugee status determination" of the 2002 *Annual Statistical Reports*, UNHCR Population Data Unit, PGDS.

ambition and settle for a life in Greece, and only when the reality sinks in do they apply for asylum in the country. Kurdish Kawa has made two serious attempts to reach Italy, but when it failed on both occasions he decided to stay in Greece and build his future there.

Greece also becomes the permanent place for those who cannot afford the smugglers' fees for a northern/western European destination. Mariwan decided after six months of indecision regarding further travel to stay in Greece and there apply for asylum.

Diyar and his family intended Greece to be a short interim phase, but at their arrival in 1990, a Greek court sentenced them to 14 months in jail for illegal entry, so their plans to proceed to England were put on hold. After their phased releases, secured through private donations by local people, they applied for asylum in Greece.

That many asylum seekers choose to leave Greece through illegal channels for northern European countries, in many cases appear to owe more to the practical difficulties encountered in Greece than an overwhelming pull of the relative wealth in other countries. The intentions of many to move on elsewhere mainly reflect the difficulty of gaining recognition to remain in Greece, as the majority of interviewees acknowledge that if their application for asylum in Greece was accepted they would be prepared to stay here. Sunni Arab Ali voices the oft-heard opinion that "I want to stay in Greece, if only they allow me to remain. If not, any country that gives me legal status I will call home."

#### **4.5 Unintended destination**

Dishonest smugglers or intercepting coast guard has made Greece the unintended and unwanted destination for some Iraqis. An family from Baghdad interviewed, had paid to be smuggled to Italy but instead found themselves on the shores of a Greek island, devoid of their passports and other documentation that with difficulties had been obtained from Iraqi authorities before departure.

#### **4.6 Medical**

Those who leave Iraq for medical reasons are keen to reach Greece as the first country where they can apply for asylum and as a "pink card"-holder have their medical needs attended. Some six per cent of Iraqis interviewed were handicapped due to torture or accidents involving landmines, and they had with great efforts made it to Athens with the view to obtain medical help.

Most cases of handicapped and cancer-stricken refugees and asylum seekers in Greece originate from Iraq, which is not surprising considering that the Iraqi Kurds have been subject to chemical and biological warfare by the former regime in Baghdad, exposure that causes various forms of cancer.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Rapidly growing untreatable cancers in the affected Kurdish areas of northern Iraq have been researched by British doctor Christine Gosden. For a detailed account of what weapons were used against the Kurds and what the horrible effects were, see e.g. *Washington Post* 20 August 1999, "Lessons from Halabja" by Christine Gosden and Mike Amitay.

## 5. Current situation in Greece

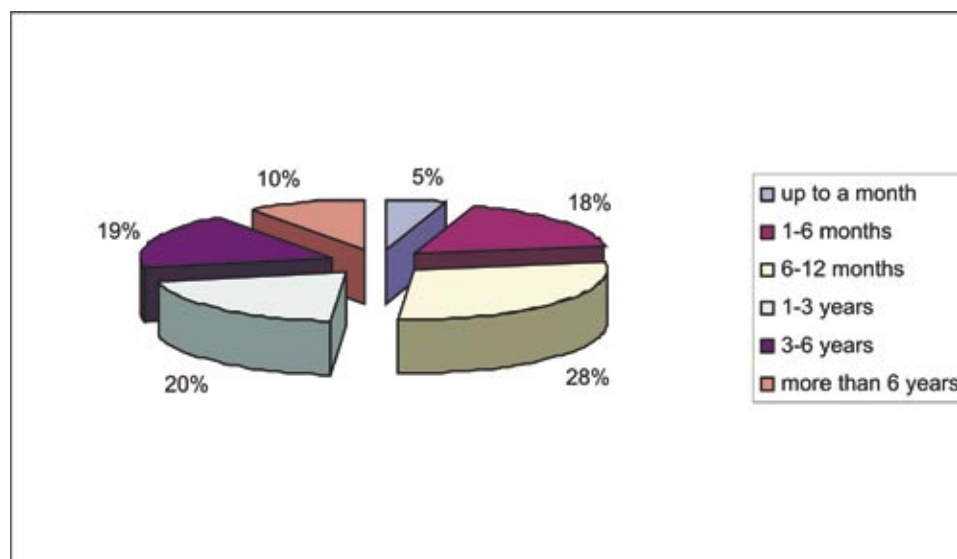
Greece has a significant experience concerning refugees, with the historical refugee flows from Asia Minor in the 1920s and the more recent inflow of Pontians (with origins in the mountainous areas of Turkey's Black Sea coast) to Greek territory. This familiarity with the plight of refugees is not, however, evident to most Iraqi refugees and asylum seekers, whose situation in Greece is by and large defined by their length of stay and legal status.

### 5.1 Length of stay in Greece

As figure 13 (*Length of stay in Greece*) indicates, the sample covers new arrivals as well as long residents. One interviewee had spent only two days on Greek territory, while at the other end of the scale, one Iraqi man had 16 years of experience of life in Greece. Of those interviewed, 5 per cent form recent arrivals, while almost 20 per cent have been in the country for up to half a year. 28 per cent of interviewees have spent six months up to a year in Greece, while a good 20 per cent have remained up to three years in the country. Approximately 20 per cent have lived in Greece for up to six years and 10 per cent longer still. This range is believed to bear adequate similarities with the larger Iraqi population in Greece.

Some of the long residents intended to stay only a short time but have found themselves remaining in Greece for various reasons. The formation of personal relationships is one of few strong pull factors to stay in the country. Following his family being granted refugee status in Australia after a failed application for asylum in Greece, Diyar opted to stay in Athens and finally obtained convention status on his own after two years. However, after a decade in Greece, with fluency in its language and secure employment, he nevertheless decided to join his family in Australia, now together with his wife.

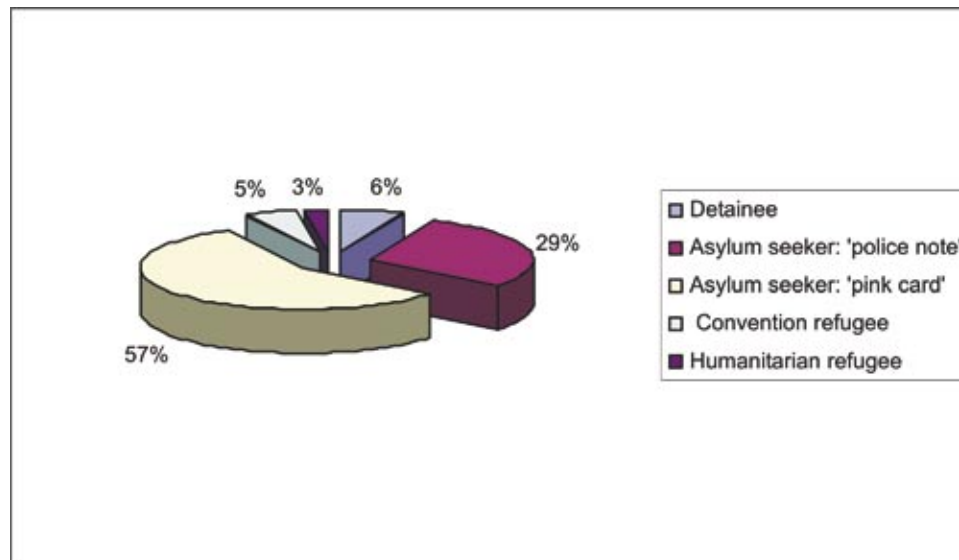
**Figure 13: Length of stay in Greece**



## 5.2 Legal status in Greece

The legal status of the Iraqis interviewed is shown in Figure 14a (*Legal status in Greece*). Almost 60 per cent of interviewees have the “pink card”, while more than a quarter are in possession of the “police note”. Moreover, 6 per cent were detainees, and while five per cent held convention status, only 3 per cent had humanitarian status.

**Figure 14a: Legal status in Greece**



An analysis of the document most asylum seekers possess, the “pink card”, is provided in Figure 14b (*Pink card analysis*). Among those with “pink card”, more than half are waiting for their first decision, while 13 per cent await an answer to their appeal. While an almost 20 per cent are termed unknown, (they may have moved and not notified the relevant authorities of their change of address) more than 10 per cent have had their applications for asylum rejected. Rejections of asylum application appear small in sample but in the larger population, the vast majority of Iraqis have seen their cases for asylum rejected.<sup>47</sup> Unable to return to Iraq, they remain without any legal status and measures to protect this group were taken by UNHCR in the run-up to the recent war. On 7 March 2003 UNHCR counselled states to suspend all forced returns to Iraq, a recommendation that was upheld on 26 June for another three-month period.<sup>48</sup> The continued processing of asylum claims by Iraqi nationals was advised against, as governments were encouraged to provide some form of temporary protection. This also applied to

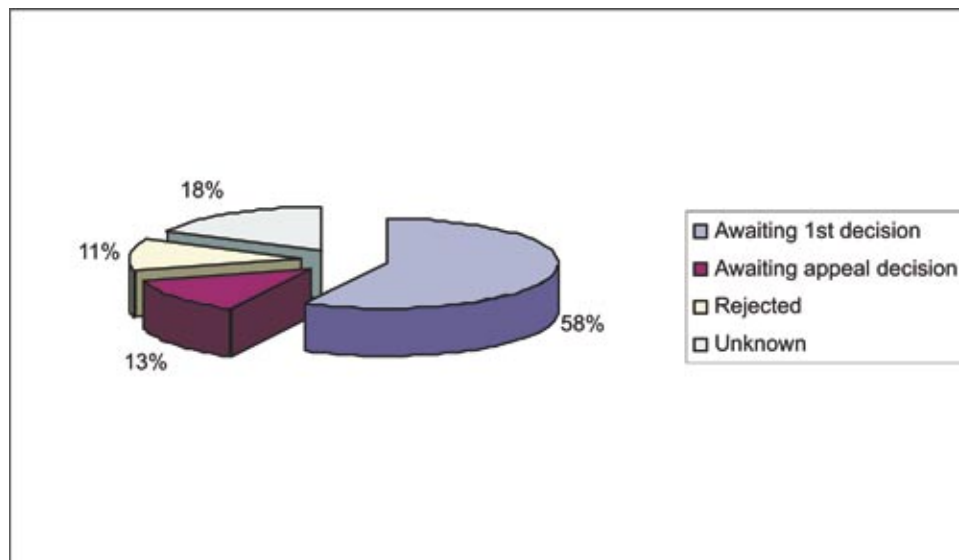
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<sup>47</sup> From the period of 1980 to 1998, the Greek State gave refugee status to just 430 Iraqis. See *Cumulative figures on recognition of asylum by the Greek Authorities*, as provided to UNHCR by the Ministry of Public Order. More recently, in 2002, a total of 9,278 asylum seekers of all nationalities had their applications rejected against the recognition (convention and humanitarian) of a mere 100 cases. During the first six months of 2003, 2,729 asylum seekers saw their applications for asylum rejected and only 22 individuals recognized (for either refugee or humanitarian status). See Appendix VIII, *Asylum Statistics for Greece*.

<sup>48</sup> Despite UNHCR's extended freeze on the processing of applications of Iraqi asylum seekers still in place, MPO as of July began taking decisions on the large backlog of Iraqis.

those Iraqis who have exhausted the asylum procedure but have remained in the country, yet do not benefit from any form of legal status.

**Figure 14b: Pink card analysis**



Many Iraqi Christians have lived in Greece for a number of years in a refugee-like situation.<sup>49</sup> Employed in the informal economy, they have survived without depending on any official assistance programs, and largely ignored by authorities, have become well-integrated into Greek society. Their legal status, however, is uncertain, and needs to be regularised, as it poses serious problems for them. One long-resident, Assyrian Susan, worries about her eldest child, soon to graduate from school, but with no identification-card will be unable to claim her study certificate. “We’re not asking the government for any money”, she says, “all we want is the papers to normalize our situation”.

What is known as “the ping-pong practice” between Greece and Turkey, informal deportations, has affected a number of Iraqi single men interviewed. Many have entered Greece several times, (one interviewee had crossed the border on 12 occasions before succeeding) only to be returned across the frontier onto Turkish territory at dawn, in the absence of Turkish police. In cases where the group of returned migrants consists mainly of Iraqis, the Turks would transport them directly to the country’s south eastern border and unload them on the Iraqi side. “From there”, says Kurdish Sherzad, “I made my way to Iran and crossed into Turkey again, (since the border with Iran is less well-guarded than that with Iraq), and was subsequently lucky in my third attempt to reach Greece and lodge my application for asylum”.

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<sup>49</sup> An estimated 90 per cent of Iraqi Christians in Greece are said to be without papers. “Iraq’s forgotten Christians face exclusion in Greece”, *Athens News*, 2 May 2003.

An attempt to formalise this procedure was made in November 2001, when Greece and Turkey signed a re-admission treaty, which would enable Athens to return irregular migrants to Turkey.<sup>50</sup> Although the agreement has failed to live up to the expectations of the Greek government,<sup>51</sup> it nonetheless represents a threat to many would-be asylum seekers in that it does not recognise their particular situation and disregards the regularly mixed flows of economic migrants and asylum seekers. The treaty ensures no protection against refoulement,<sup>52</sup> and there are fears that it indeed could be used pre-emptively to deter those attempting to enter Greece. The extent to which the re-admission agreement has affected those of Iraqi origin seeking to apply for asylum in Greece is unclear, but according to the deputy police director of the Alexandroupoli Police Directorate, Ankara re-admits Turkish nationals and nationals of countries bordering Turkey. (No re-admissions are said to be made of other third country nationals.)<sup>53</sup>

### **5.3 Prior knowledge of Greece: Expectations vs. Reality**

Expectations by Iraqi refugees and asylum seekers at arrival in Greece are often unrealistic. Not only do smugglers provide too rosy a picture of the country of reception, refugees and asylum seekers themselves entertain idealistic hopes after friends and relatives residing in north-western Europe relate what is believed to be the overall European socio-economic reality.

Many arrive with the prior knowledge that they will be arrested at the border, but have no knowledge about the asylum process. On this issue, the person's level of education does not matter. Others, such as Hosniya and her family were told that they would be received by a committee from the UN upon arrival to Greece, so the encounter with Greek police and time served in detention with three small children came as a unpleasant surprise for the family.

Those who seek protection from persecution, having no demands of the country of reception but it being a safe place, view Greece in favourable light. Says Mohammed, 28 years old, "Greece is a beautiful, tranquil place". Azad, who throughout northern Iraq was pursued by vengeful clan-members, states that in Iraq he heard that Greece is a country where you can enjoy your human rights.

Many have lived in Turkey for several years and there tried to make their living until the time that they could return to Iraq. With painful experiences from Turkey, where police have near zero levels of

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<sup>50</sup> According to the International Crisis Group, there are over 100 such agreements, mostly bilateral, between west-European and non-European countries, aimed at reducing the number of "persons with no legal right to remain (including rejected asylum-seekers) who are residing illegally on its territory". *ICG Report on Readmission Agreements, Inter-Governmental Consultations for Asylum, Refugee and Migration Policies in Europe, North America and Australia*, Geneva, August 1999. For more on this Greco-Turkish treaty, see pp. 61-63 in N. Sitaropoulos *Immigration law and management in Greece: Towards an exodus from underdevelopment and a comprehensive immigration policy*, Athens: Ant. N. Sakkoulas Publishers, March 2003.

<sup>51</sup> In the late spring of 2003, Greece was reported to charge Turkey with deliberate disregard of the bilateral accord. Since the signing of the treaty, Greece has requested the return of some 2,500 illegal immigrants to Turkey. Of these requests, 2,486 have been rejected by Ankara on the grounds that 'there is no conclusive evidence the migrants make their way to Greece from Turkey'. *Athens News*, "Take 'em back", 25 April 2003. (This number, 2500, would appear to be a rather conservative estimate.)

<sup>52</sup> UN parlance for the involuntary return of asylum seekers to the border of their country of origin.

<sup>53</sup> Ioannis Kharoudis, deputy police director of Alexandroupoli Police Directorate, Evros region, 2 July 2003.

tolerance towards Iraqis illegally in the country, many are relieved to trade their uncertain existence in Istanbul for the relative peace and quiet of Athens.

Safety and security in Turkey is elusive even for Iraqi Turkmen, whose cause features prominently in the Turkish regional foreign policy.<sup>54</sup> Damir, a Turkmen from Kirkuk, was appalled by the second-rate treatment he and his pregnant wife received while in Ankara. “Turkmen are not accepted in Turkey”, he says angrily, “the Turkish establishment cares only about the oil”. Greece and its people, by contrast, he considers are welcoming but while “Greece is better than Turkey, north-western Europe is better than Greece”.

## **5.4 Being Iraqi in Greece**

Sub-identities of suppressed minorities are often strengthened in exile at the expense of the “national identity” forced upon them in their home country. It is said that non-registered Iraqis have developed a stronger sense of “Kurdishness” in exile, in other words, to a greater extent stating that they are Kurds, not Iraqi Kurds.

A fair proportion of Iraqis interviewed had lived a comfortable life in Iraq, but even so, having sold off all of their belongings and property, few had been able to bring any substantial amounts of money (jewellery, or other assets) with them to Greece after paying their fees to traffickers.<sup>55</sup> As a result, the financial needs for most are pressing already upon arrival in Greece and therefore a search for sources of income tend to define their lives in the new country.

### **5.4.1 Interrelations and communal support systems**

Many Iraqis, particularly Kurds and Christians, have personal contacts in Athens before arriving in Greece. They often stay with these friends or relatives during the first few months, who also serve as initial sources of advice and guidance in the new environment. Greek NGOs are more often than not approached until a few months into the stay.

A significant part of the Iraqi Kurds interviewed acknowledged past ties with the KDP or the PUK, but very few had any interest in reviving such affiliations in exile. One of few to have resumed work (in public relations) for one of the two in Athens, long term resident Diyar, spoke of the difficulty to maintain the local party organisation, vulnerable to loss of party members through settlement elsewhere in Europe, and attract Kurds to re-engage and work politically in the Greek context, as so many are in transit. As a result, official and political networks take the backseat to the more informal set of contacts and connections used and maintained.

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<sup>54</sup> For a background and analysis of the Turkmen factor in Turkish foreign policy, see part 2 in the International Crisis Group report *War in Iraq: What's next for the Kurds?*, 19 March 2003.

<sup>55</sup> The costs extracted by the smugglers for guided illegal entry into Greece have skyrocketed. Kurdish Delshad arrived in Greece in 1996, and paid the sum of \$500 to be taken from Istanbul across the border onto Greek territory. The same river crossing cost \$1000 for Doghan two years later, and for entry some eight months ago, Sardar was reportedly charged \$2000 per person.



While Turkmen generally are close to Kurds, the Iraqi Christians tend to interact and make no distinction between Chaldeans and Assyrians. Keeping certain distance to other Iraqi nationals, Iraqi Christians, in addition to their own informal networks, are organised in two associations; the Assyrian Union of Greece, and the Mesopotamian Iraqi Organisation.

The Kurdish and Christians groups of Iraqis also have a clear transnational dimension and they more often than not maintain networks across state borders, mainly through family relations.<sup>56</sup>

Considering the large numbers of Iraqis that are in transit, interrelations often appear have a short-term perspective, and are based on shared aims to meet basic needs. As one social worker with SWF observed, there seems to be a certain level of secrecy between Iraqis – “if they didn’t have to, they wouldn’t tell the others much at all about each others’ backgrounds”.<sup>57</sup>

The community of Iraqis in Greece display little or no internal disputes. They are regarded as a rather harmonious community, amidst the prevalence of identity divisions. Despite difficulties many had in Iraq due to their ethnicity or religion, in exile it is highlighted that these problems were caused by the regime, not inherent in people’s perceptions of the other. As Chaldean Anita puts it, “all Iraqis have experienced lots of suffering, so when we meet abroad we are happy and feel joy about being out of Iraq”. The number of mixed marriages among Kurds, Turkmen and Arabs (also between Shiites and Sunnis) in Greece underlines the relaxed attitude Iraqis in general have towards issues of ethnicity and religion. As Rowaida, a Sunni Arab married to Shiite Ahmad (both from Baghdad), put it: “mixed Muslim marriages are not problematic if both families are modern”. It is, however, less common among those from a rural background, and does not include Christians.

All Iraqi Arabs interviewed made a point in de-emphasising differences between Sunni and Shi’a. While ties with other Iraqis in Greece may not be actively nurtured or inter-Iraqi relationships move beyond that of acquaintances, there appears to be no hostility between the different ethnic and religious groups.

Having said that, however, not everybody discloses an interest in interaction with fellow Iraqis in Athens. One of the few Arab Shiites come across, Hassan believes that “nothing good could come from it”, since all are in a similar desperate state and nobody is in a position to support others.

Those Kurds permanently settled in Greece tend not to interact with new Kurdish arrivals, most of whom are in transit and as such care little for familiarising themselves with Greece, oriented as they are towards other destination countries. As Diyar says, “they are too traditional in their thinking [mainly concerning socio-cultural issues]”, to which Keywan adds: “my mentality has changed as I have tried to fit into this society”.

Those with persistent fear of persecution have a low opinion of fellow Iraqi nationals who arrived in Greece looking for work. “Many leave Iraq on economic grounds”, complains Rahman, 47 from Kurdistan, “but I’ve got a real reason”. Troubled by these economically-driven individuals and the possibility that they may be granted what he desperately desires, namely permission to stay in the country, he, and others

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<sup>56</sup> The neglected role of transnational social networks of asylum seekers is highlighted by Jeff Crisp in his paper *Policy challenges of the new diasporas: migrant networks and their impact on asylum flows and regimes*, UNHCR Policy Research Unit, 1999.

<sup>57</sup> Georgia Spiliopoulou, social worker at SWF’s intercultural community centre in Neos Kosmos.

in similar positions, choose not to engage socially in the wider Kurdish community in Athens, the majority of which arguably look more for economic opportunities than protection from persecution.

#### **5.4.2 Attitude of Greek public**

Greeks are generally tolerant, broad-minded people, much due to the concept of refugeeness so strongly part of the Greek collective memory. It has to be noted though that the Christian dimension of the Greek concept of refugee is very strong and religious prejudice does appear to exist.

Diyar, based on his decade-long stay and multifaceted experiences in the country, asserts that Greeks display racist tendencies: “I would always be asked where I come from, and they do behave differently towards me when they learn that I am Iraqi and Muslim.” This mandatory question, in particular its religious component, has faced every Iraqi interviewed. Assyrian and Chaldeans in this respect have fewer difficulties than fellow Kurds, Turkmen and Arabs in Greece. Also within the Christian community, distinctions are being made and it is not uncommon for orthodox Assyrians to receive preferential treatment over Catholic Chaldeans.

Khosrat, in Greece since 1995, admits that “their reaction [to my being Iraqi] was better before”. When it is learnt that somebody is Muslim, s/he is taken for a Turk and adverse reaction follows.

On a different basis, many Iraqi Kurds have been victims of the strong anti-American sentiments in Greece that progressively grew over the past year, culminating in the massive opposition to the war in Iraq that began in late March 2003. Due to their co-operation with American forces in bringing about the downfall of Saddam Hussein, the Kurds of Iraq are viewed as pro-American, and hence unsympathetic in the eyes of many Greek people. Kurds from Turkey, by contrast, are anti-American, both in perception and in reality, and thus Greeks tend to identify more closely with them. This distinction is displeasing many Iraqi Kurds, who feel that their suffering under the former tyrannical president is not duly observed by the population in their host state, and as a result has in many instances adversely shaped their opinions of Greek people. The Fayli Kurds interviewed, for instance, revealed that they identify themselves as Arabs rather than Kurds when interacting with Greeks, explaining that approach with the fact that it presents them with less problems.

To newcomers and families with young children, however, Greek people often come across as empathetic and compassionate, and are generous with sympathy and spontaneous help, often in the form of material assistance. The fact that their children are offered gifts and even money, however, makes some proud Iraqi parents feel ashamed. Many feel an unease of being at the receiving end of charitable deeds, as most of all parents would like to be given the chance to support their families themselves through honest work.

Newly arrived Chaldean Anita does not want to return to Iraq, and she likes “the Greek atmosphere: I don’t feel like a stranger here”, she says and adds that she wants to remain in Greece and bring her extended family here for a reunion.

#### **5.4.3 Experience with Greek authorities**

The way we treat refugees reflects the European values we hold in such high regard.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Foreign Minister George A. Papandreou “A Turning Point for EU Migration Policy”, *IHT/Kathimerini*, 17-18 May, 2003.

The sympathetic sentiments Iraqi refugees perceive coming from the Greek public sharply contrast the position taken by the State. A common statement is: "Individual Greeks are good, official Greece is bad." Many witness to problems with police regarding the renewal process of the "pink card", which can take several weeks and even months, exposing them to arrest and complications concerning work and medical care.

With its exceptionally low recognition rates for refugees, the current policy of the Greek State promotes temporary stay in the country and encourages permanent settlement elsewhere.<sup>59</sup> Often, the reception centres that are supposed to be a transit for integration into Greek society have become transit to exit the country.

Generally, asylum seekers who have had their applications for asylum rejected by the authorities are rarely pursued and consequently remain in the country illegally, planning their onward journey. This has particularly applied to Iraqi nationals. Consequently, Iraqis without a legal status have long felt safe in Greece because of the knowledge that police will not attempt to round up and deport them. There have therefore been little or no efforts to hide, as opposed to the previous existence in Turkey. Apprehension and deportation of undocumented Iraqis to their country of origin has been low, which is likely to have been a result of stated government policy and, to a lesser degree, the related high costs for the enforcing agencies. (On the other hand, returning Serbs and Bulgarians, for instance, is logistically easy and a low cost policy, transporting them in buses to the border.)

However, as of 2003 Greek police have reportedly become more uncompromising and more willingly arrest those without valid documentation. As Kurdish Sherzad explains, while earlier police had a relaxed attitude, now detention (for an unspecified time) is certain if one now is caught without documentation. This development has reportedly made many long-term unregistered Iraqis - mainly Kurds - enter the asylum system. It may also account for the rise in applications for asylum by Iraqi nationals during the spring of 2003 compared to the same period in 2002,<sup>60</sup> in spite of the significant downturn in numbers of Iraqis entering Greek territory, as observed at entry points in the Greek-Turkish border area of Evros.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> As Aspasia Papadopoulou writes: "Asylum policy in Greece is still in its infancy, with severe administrative, social and legal protection shortcomings, and a temporary/reactive perspective discouraging permanent settlement." The issue is thoroughly examined in her article "*Give us asylum and help us leave the country!*" *Kurdish asylum seekers in Greece and the politics of reception*, as presented at the conference on 'Middle East and North African Immigrants in Europe', Oxford, May 2002.

<sup>60</sup> For comparative purposes, statistics reveal that in February 2003, 372 Iraqis applied for asylum, compared to 117 in 2002. In March, the number was similarly up from 250 the previous year to 345 in 2003. April recorded an even greater rise from 58 to 267. The upward trend continued for May from 111 to 428 and into the summer with figures up from 210 in June 2002 to 379 a year later. This is notable, as the overall number of Iraqis entering Greece is believed to have been higher in 2002 than in 2003. See UNHCR monthly statistics on applications for asylum in Greece for 2002 and 2003 by country of origin.

<sup>61</sup> Not only did the widely expected influx of Iraqi refugees following the recent war fail to materialise, Turkish authorities have also cracked down heavily on smuggling networks and arrested some 800 smugglers in 2003. (Estimate by Secretary General of East Macedonia and Thrace Regional Government Aris Papadopoulos, 2 July 2003.) According to Kyriakos Batsaras of the Assyrian Union of Greece, many Iraqi Christians are believed to be in Turkey, waiting for border restrictions to ease in order to enter Greece.

#### 5.4.4 Assistance provided to Iraqis in Greece

Counselling and other services are provided by the seven Greek NGOs previously mentioned, namely GCR, SWF, ELINAS, VWA, MdM, HRC and SS, often within the framework of the reception centres run by the same organisations. In the perception of Iraqis interviewed, however, the assistance provided is very limited, often compounded by lack of access to staff. Sometimes criticism is openly aired, sometimes it is veiled. Ali says that even though he and his family have received assistance from an NGO and stay in a decent reception centre, he notes that “one hand doesn’t clap alone” – the NGO can only respond to his and his family’s immediate survival needs, and cannot serve long-term goals; the government needs to provide more support.

The quality of life of most Iraqis in Greece is centred almost solely on the issue of work.<sup>62</sup> Sardar sums it up as follows: “If I have a job, Greece is great.” Disillusionment is common among the numerous unemployed Iraqis interviewed. “I go crazy sitting at home all day”, says Ismael.

The lack of opportunities for work is indeed a deep source of frustration for Iraqi asylum seekers. Hawzin has been in Greece for three years but only worked 50 days, and the frustration of not finding work has had a physical toll on the once muscular man, who indignantly says: “I was a big, strong man when I came here – now look at me.” Anxious to bring his family out of current transit in Turkey, he fears that if he cannot sustain himself in Athens, regardless of the outcome of his asylum application, he will try to go elsewhere.

Those who have a job appear to find it almost exclusively among contacts within networks of relatives and friends of the same ethnic group. Little or no assistance in that respect had been forthcoming from any agency or NGO for those who had approached them with such a query. Although Kurdish convention refugee Khoshrat had taken part in a vocational training program, aimed at facilitating entry into the labour market, he had had to rely on own contacts to find employment.<sup>63</sup>

Employment for Iraqis interviewed had for the most part been in low-skilled jobs, even for the significant numbers that have professional qualifications and significant experience from a career pursued in Iraq. Low-income employment in the informal economy that Iraqi households thus are forced to rely upon (such as agriculture and construction) tends to be insecure in nature with availability of work depending on the season of the year. Work also has to be sought on a daily basis, occasionally lasting a week or two. The difficult circumstances many face now with regard to finding a job, however, compare favourably with the situation in 1998, when Keywan arrived in Athens. At that time, unskilled work was even more scarce than it is today, which suggests that all the construction works that now take place in the city within the framework of the 2004 Olympic Games provide work opportunities that in a year’s time will no longer be there, exacerbating the desperate situation for many Iraqi asylum seekers remaining in Greece.

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<sup>62</sup> This makes EU state Greece no different from Jordan, as a study on Iraqi forced migrants shows that the concerns of Iraqis on Jordanian territory centres primarily on work. See Geraldine Chatelard’s *Jordan as transit country: semi-protectorist immigration policies and their effects on Iraqi forced migrants*, 2002, UNHCR Working Paper No. 60.

<sup>63</sup> It is unclear to what extent Khoshrat’s experience is representative of other Iraqi refugees who participate in a vocational training program. A survey conducted in 2001 concerning such training found that 65 per cent of participants (mixed nationalities) find a job after completing the program. See *Survey for the Evaluation of the Vocational Training Programs for Refugees, 1999-2000, according to the Refugees’ Opinion* by Aspasia Papadopoulou, UNHCR Athens.

Female Iraqi asylum seekers look for employment and work to lesser extent than their male counterparts. Cultural restrictions are, however, less the cause than absence of relatives to care for young children or, in their place, a lack of childcare facilities in the host country.

Hopeless is the situation for those like Adnan, in Greece for almost four years, having received his expulsion papers after a negative decision on appeal. Due to this, his “pink card” has been discontinued and his work permit withdrawn, without which he is not accepted at most workplaces. Desperate to be able to have access to even the menial jobs he previously undertook, albeit on an irregular basis, until he can return to Iraq, some temporary arrangement is anxiously sought until future options, including repatriation, can be clarified.

Even those with jobs do not lead an extravagant lifestyle in Greece; either they save as much money as they can with the intention to leave the country, or they send their earnings to their family back in Iraq. Kurdish Behez is one of few having a permanent job and with a salary of 30 € per day he is able to send a monthly sum of 500 € to his family in Kurdistan.

Due to the weak reception infrastructure in Greece,<sup>64</sup> the same strategies employed for finding work are in place for meeting another basic need, namely that of shelter.<sup>65</sup> The lack of assistance from the Greek State in this regard is something to which Iraqis express considerable discontent.<sup>66</sup> Says Kurdish Sherzad, who recently saw an Iraqi friend returned to Greece under the Dublin convention from an unsuccessful attempt to apply for asylum in a northern European country: “You are sent back to Greece and told that you are free to go. But free to do what? Free to walk the streets and sleep in public parks?” For a majority of Iraqis in Greece, the only alternative available is to accommodate themselves in old abandoned buildings, (of which there are many in Athens), as most cannot afford the rent of a proper house.

The mentality of being in transit hampers many efforts by NGOs to encourage Greek language learning among the Iraqi community. Even those with a pronounced interest in studying the language are discouraged by the clear signals sent by the Greek government through its asylum statistics that there is no future for them in this country. Greece is effectively pushing these people to leave for Europe.

Hosniya, a Sunni Arab from Mosul, does not only want to learn Greek but also wishes to continue with her university studies, to obtain a degree in computing. After more than a decade of sanctions and erosion of the education system in Iraq, she is, like so many of her fellow Iraqis, hungering for access to modern technology and up-to-date facilities.

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<sup>64</sup> Reception conditions for asylum seekers in Greece are described in a report by Medecins du Monde-Greece, titled *Reception and detention of economic refugees and asylum seekers in Greece: A major violation of human rights*, August 2001.

<sup>65</sup> With reference to a report on Iranian and Iraqi refugees in Greece compiled some 10 years ago, little appear to have changed in this regard: housing and employment are still in short supply. Richard Black’s observations from 1992 are still relevant: “although social workers do provide information and assistance to individuals on an ad hoc basis, the main source of ‘assistance’ in these areas [i.e. housing and employment] comes from within the refugee community itself”. See Black (1992), *Livelihood and vulnerability of foreign refugees in Greece: A preliminary report of research on Iranian and Iraqi refugees in Greater Athens*, Occasional Paper No. 33, Department of Geography, King’s College, London.

<sup>66</sup> Only 1,300 places are available in nation-wide reception centres run by NGOs and/or the Greek government, clearly inadequate to cover the needs of almost 6,000 asylum seekers.

As far as non-governmental organisations and their roles are concerned, beyond the provision of Greek language courses (which appeal only to those Iraqis intent on staying in Greece) and assistance with medical services, most Iraqis interviewed do not feel that the organisations available have the capacity to assist much, neither in terms of counselling nor financially. Head of household and mother of four young children, Chaldean Maria states that she no longer approaches the NGO to ask for economic help, even though she constantly struggles to make ends meet; “during two particularly bad crises over the past 18 months, I got no help from them despite desperate pleas, so now I would not bother to go there”.

Long resident Diyar says: “As a refugee in Greece, everything you do, you have to do yourself. Sure, the lack of money and resources is a problem, but even so, they could do better.” He reflects that the situation for refugees in early 1990s Greece was financially better than now, as UNHCR then provided welfare assistance in the form of monthly payments to those it had issued with a Blue Card.<sup>67</sup> This relative safety net pulled him and his family through the crucial first 12 months as asylum seekers in Greece. The UNHCR-provided welfare assistance for refugees is clearly over, and the Greek State has shown itself unwilling and/or unable to shoulder its responsibilities.

Iraqis are said to approach competent NGOs to seek counselling in far lower numbers than other groups of asylum seekers, such as Afghans. The proportion of Iraqi clients at GCR is approximately 25 per cent of the total caseload, despite this group of asylum seekers constituting as much as 45 per cent of the total. When they irregularly do appear, they tend to present a specific problem, such as if their application for asylum failed in the first instance.<sup>68</sup>

Greek NGOs are regarded with indignant resignation by many. Money is admittedly a major issue, but it is felt by many Iraqis interviewed that services could and should be improved. Ahmad, a victim of torture and in need of an artificial limb, received little help upon visiting one of the organisations. Timid and quiet, having no friends to advise or support him, he contrasts with Rasoul, also he a Kurd needing a prosthesis. Rasoul who lost his leg in a mine accident, is an assertive and forceful character, who made repeat visits and eventually had arrangements made for a new leg to be fitted. Rasoul differed from Ahmad in yet another important way: he had a friend who was able to lend him the money to cover half of the cost of the prosthesis, while money for the remaining part could be found through fund-raising activities. This example, one among many, shows that determination and persistence is needed in the approach, qualities that many torture victims by the nature of their terrifying experiences do not possess.

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<sup>67</sup> This UN document stated that its holder had been recognised as a refugee under UNHCR Mandate.

<sup>68</sup> As related by lawyers Panagiotis Papadimitriou and Yiannis Papageorgiou at GCR.

## 6. Prospects for durable solutions

A durable solution undoubtedly represents the most successful form of refugee protection.<sup>69</sup> Of the three durable solutions identified by UNHCR, repatriation appears to be the most suitable option for large parts of the Iraqi population in Greece. Opportunities for resettlement from Greece are extremely limited and local integration a difficult undertaking in a climate where the Greek State regards the presence of an overwhelming majority of Iraqis on its territory merely as temporary.

### 6.1 Resettlement

Refugees for whom neither local integration nor repatriation is a viable option, resettlement represents a durable solution to their protection needs. It may take place in the context of family reunion, but also without any family connections in the new country. Chaldeans and Assyrians tend to stand out from other Iraqis as having had a firm determination from the moment of their departure from Iraq to seek resettlement from Athens either in Australia or North America. Indeed, Iraqi Christians have a long record of migration to these countries, but this possibility has all but disappeared from Greece.

The USA, Canada and Australia are the third countries that have operated resettlement programmes out of Greece, and while the American programme was phased out during 2001 and Canada's immigration unit re-located to the Italian capital, Australia's refugee/humanitarian programme, which has been the only one of its kind left operating in Greece, has gradually winded down, with closure expected shortly. For the 2002/2003 programme, which ended on 30 June 2003, the Australian embassy in Athens issued 200 humanitarian (family-linked) and 80 refugee visas to Iraq nationals. This number was considerably smaller than previous years. The intake has been largely Assyrian/Chaldean and they tend to be well-educated, affluent and have claims for family reunion in Australia. Iraqi Kurds, on the other hand, have had poor resettlement prospects and in the past couple of years no Iraqi Kurd has been accepted within the programme. Generally, the overall resettlement programme is said to have deteriorated and given rise to credibility concerns, as clients reportedly have become weak, tend to fabricate stories and repeat applications, which has prompted the closure of the programme.<sup>70</sup>

Assyrian Anisa indeed persists in applying for resettlement with the Australian embassy, and despite four rejections, she recently launched yet another request for legal immigration.

The extremely low recognition rate trend (more as a result of political directives from the Greek government than based on valid legal reasons), has left genuine Iraqi refugees without international protection, and seemingly in need of third country resettlement. However, it must be noted that Greece is

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<sup>69</sup> An interesting analysis of comprehensive solutions to protracted refugee situations is offered on pp. 609-615 in "The missing link: the need for comprehensive engagement in regions of refugee origin" by Gil Loescher and James Milner, *International Affairs* 79, 3, 2003.

<sup>70</sup> This information was related by immigration officers at the Australian embassy and the USA embassy in Athens in telephone conversations on 20 June 2003.

an EU member state and as such should not be country from where resettlement is deemed necessary. Iraqi refugees may (and to some extent have) durably settle(d) in Greece, as examined below, hence the minimum of requests that are submitted for resettlement to a third country relate to mainly family reunification and exceptional cases of concern to UNHCR.

## 6.2 Integration

Although repatriation represents the favoured solution to the unclear situation of most Iraqis in Greece, it is important to recognise that integration may be the preferred refugee solution in some cases, particularly when the refugees themselves view their stay in the host country as permanent.

The case of many long-resident Iraqi Christians has already been mentioned (see 5.2). Their religious and cultural affinity with Greek society has facilitated the acceptance by the local community, encouraged formation of social relations and resulted in inclusion with the general population. The attaining of self-sufficiency has hastened and strengthened this unofficial, or de facto, integration.

As refugee children become integrated within the Greek primary school system,<sup>71</sup> a gap emerges between them and their parents. Children easily learn the Greek language and tend to settle in more effortlessly than the older generation. Ritta, a Chaldean from a village outside Mosul, says of her four children that “Greece is the only home they know”.

Not only the Assyrians and Chaldeans, but the vast majority of Iraqis in Greece would admit to experiencing a cultural familiarity with Greek society, which may be expected to support integration on a broad basis. However, this appears to encourage integration only in individual cases.

For Muslim Iraqis and newcomers, it seems to take a great deal of effort to integrate into Greek society and only very determined individuals succeed at it. With the lack of assistance from the State, and the inadequate funds available to competent Greek NGOs, the main means with which to achieve integration seem limited to many Iraqis interviewed. Meaningful social relations (including working relations) with natives create a sense of inclusion, so necessary for a continued existence in the new county of residence,<sup>72</sup> but in the overall climate of uncertainty and difficulties in securing their basic needs, this aspect tends to receive less attention by most Iraqis interviewed.

It is often said by those interviewed, (based on accounts from compatriots in other EU countries), that it is easier to integrate in a north western European country with its very different culture (but with state support structures for refugees), than in Greece, with its “Eastern qualities” [denoting the similar mentality and strength of family relations]. “Greek society is not inviting, we are considered outsiders”, reflects Kurdish Diyar.

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<sup>71</sup> As concerns schooling for Iraqi refugee children, Greek schools are said to have taken a flexible stand and despite official requirements for proper documentation, which no Iraqi parent interviewed had obtained prior to departure (mostly due to unwillingness to publicise their exit from Iraq), arrangements are made on individual basis.

<sup>72</sup> As Brian Ray puts it; ‘Integration is bound to the nature and quality of long-term encounters between newcomers and private institutions, organisations and individuals.’ See his “*The Policy Challenges of Intervention in Local and Private Integration Processes*”, *Policy Brief 18 in Policy Briefs and Recommendations: The Greek Presidency Conference on Managing Migration for the Benefit of Europe*, Athens Migration Policy Initiative, May 2003.



De facto integration, however, does not happen in a flash. The Chaldean family headed by Monira, in Greece since 1998, enjoys convention status but in everyday life still faces an uphill struggle. Despite their secure legal status, the ultimate prize for so many other Iraqi refugees, evidence for the severe difficulties faced even by recognised refugees in Greece is her husband's departure for the USA, with a view to seek employment for supporting the family of eight. Similar break-up of families were narrated by several other interviewees, highlighting the problems encountered in the Greek integration process. As expressed by asylum seeker Warda, a young Chaldean mother of four, whose husband is awaiting an application for asylum in America: "Greece gives us nothing, the government makes us leave by ourselves, they don't want us to become part of the Greek society".

Countries with a traditional base, such as Greece, admittedly present greater difficulties for integration, that do "younger nations", such as the United States or Australia. The rather limited scope and reach of integration programmes also compound the sense of predicament among Iraqi long residents that they will remain a separate group in Greece. Many Iraqis, and in particular among those who have been in the country for more than a year, feel that Greek society is not especially inviting, not accepting of them, and that severely hampers their chances of successful integration. Made to feel like an outsider, Ahmad says "I like Greece but Greeks don't like me."

It thus takes a very determined individual to succeed in fully becoming a member of the Greek community without succumbing to assimilation. Rather uncharacteristic of the Iraqi population in Greece, the ambitious single Keywan is convinced that many of his fellow nationals presuppose that Greeks are racially prejudiced and xenophobic before it can be substantiated. He believes that it is crucial to have the right attitude, which he does not see among fellow Iraqis: "If I believe that they hate me I will feel the same about them." Motivated by a desire to be accepted he goes on by saying: "I didn't show the bad Muslim face. I don't show people that I am something different." He himself has experienced no problems with Greeks, but in addition to being a very driven individual he obviously makes great efforts to integrate, something not everybody is able to do without assistance and guidance from the host state.

The predominant view among NGO workers that Iraqis are "not here to stay" is true only to a certain extent. Many Iraqis do arrive with the intention to go elsewhere in Europe, but when they realise the difficulties of moving on, and also become aware of problems existing in their preferred countries of destination, they begin to entertain the idea of remaining in Greece. Others who wish to stay in Greece easily become disillusioned with the lack of prospects in the country, and as a result lose enthusiasm to invest time and efforts in language training.

One exception is Yalchin, a Turkmen a car mechanic from Kirkuk, who has adapted well to his new country of residence and aspires to open his own garage in Athens in the future. His reasons for wishing to remain in Greece are threefold: it is geographically close to Iraq, it has a nice climate, and the fact that the country is not as modern as north-western Europe he finds it an easier society into which to integrate. For Yalchin these are strong motivations to stay in Greece, outweighing bureaucratic difficulties and lack of welfare provisions. However, Yalchin and other who do stay are clearly disadvantaged by an ostrich-like attitude by the Greek State, which silently attempts to push Iraqis along with other asylum seekers out of the country.

### **6.3 Repatriation**

The four million Iraqis living abroad include around one million refugees and asylum seekers and for many of them the changed circumstances in their home country bring new opportunities for return.

The repatriation process of Iraqi refugees and asylum seekers to their country of origin is planned within the framework of United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 1483 (8b), “promoting the safe, orderly and voluntary return of refugees and displaced persons”.<sup>73</sup>

Ensuring a safe and lawful environment, where basic services (electricity, water, health care, food) are regularly provided, is a prerequisite for the commencement of a repatriation programme. Return movements of Iraqis have to be managed with great sensitivity to avert further displacement and conflict. For this to be achieved, Iraq needs to see restoration of security and basic services in return areas, in addition to the establishment of an efficient system to deal with disputed property. Some time is likely to pass before these fundamentals are in place throughout the country. In their absence, UNHCR can only facilitate small-scale voluntary returns of non-contentious groups of refugees from the neighbouring countries of Saudi Arabia and Iran.<sup>74</sup> Until the situation is stable in Iraq, it is not sustainable to promote large-scale returns from countries outside the region, such as Greece.

Not only on the political front, but also economically, there must be improvements before large-scale returns can be advocated. Unemployment was a major push factor for many to leave Iraq, and the situation has worsened by the disbandment of the Iraqi army and massive redundancies from the civil service to purge it from Baathist loyalist elements.

Food hand-outs from the Oil for Food programme are keeping well over 60 per cent of the Iraqi population afloat,<sup>75</sup> and this dependency is also prevalent in the Kurdish north, which used to be the country’s breadbasket. Hence, access to food may become a concern to returnees, and risk placing support structures under great strain.

Ensuring a basic level of security in Iraq naturally constitutes the starting point of a viable repatriation programme. With US troops still engaging in combat operations, many parts of the country experience confrontations between ethnic and religious groups, particularly the provinces of Kirkuk and Mosul,<sup>76</sup> of which the former represents the most serious challenge. Property restitution is particularly important in Kirkuk where an uncontrolled and hasty reversal of Saddam Hussein’s Arabisation policy could create additional numbers of IDPs and refugees. The issue of Kirkuk needs to be handled very carefully to prevent it from becoming the epicentre of internal conflict.

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<sup>73</sup> For the full text of the UNSC Resolution 1483, (22 May 2003) see <http://www.un.org/documents/scres.htm>.

<sup>74</sup> While as of yet no organised returns have been undertaken from Iran, UNHCR on 29 July began the repatriation of Iraqi refugees from a frontier camp in Saudi Arabia, which has held approximately 5,200 refugees since 1991. (Reuters 29 July 2003.)

<sup>75</sup> The Oil for Food programme, or UNSC Resolution 986, was passed in April 1996 and came into effect one year later. It allows Iraq to sell oil and buy food with the profits, of which the Kurds are entitled to 13 per cent. Essentially a humanitarian program, it also allows for certain rehabilitation and reconstruction. In accordance with UNSC Resolution 1483, the Oil for Food programme will be phased out by 21 November 2003, with the American administration in Iraq, the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA), assuming the remaining responsibilities.

<sup>76</sup> Concerning Kirkuk, see for instance *AFP* “Uneasy truce in northern Iraqi ethnic flashpoint town”, 24 August 2003, and *Kurdistan Observer* “Kurds, ethnic Turks sign agreement to prevent clashes”, 29 August 2003. Ethnic strains in Mosul are examined in “Fearful of Kurds, Mosul loyal to Saddam”, *AP*, 23 July, 2003.

The issue of internally displaced people is one of great significance for Iraq and its future.<sup>77</sup> With between 700,000 and 1,1 million internally displaced within the country,<sup>78</sup> the shortage of housing on a national scale is a further complicating factor in the return process of people to their areas of origin. The accommodation needs of large numbers of IDPs, many originating in Kirkuk, many having sheltered in makeshift facilities in the Kurdish-controlled areas for several years, have to be seriously addressed before the inflow of Iraqis from European countries begins in earnest. This is of particular importance, considering the large numbers of refugees originating from this disputed city and its immediate environs. Moreover, the homes of most natives of Kirkuk made IDPs or refugees, as related by numerous interviewees, have been occupied by Arab settlers from the south, in a number of cases for many years, who in turn need to have their housing needs addressed if evicted from Kurdish/Turkmen property in Kirkuk.<sup>79</sup>

In the area of justice, great efforts must be made in order to facilitate the re-integration of internally as well as externally displaced people to their area of origin. Many residents of Kirkuk interviewed in Greece harbour a grudge against the occupier of their property, and do expect such past injustices as misappropriation of property to be properly redressed. Many Iraqis from Kirkuk complain of Arab settlers brought in from the south (some of whom were also harassing Turkmen/Christian girls), and unanimity is expressed about the position that these Arabs must be made to leave Kirkuk. In view of this infected situation, it appears reasonable to assume that the area will, at least initially, have a low capacity to absorb returning refugees and IDPs, which will call for careful, phased return movements.

Should assisted returnees go back en masse to contended property, it may create additional numbers of IDPs. Only if small scale returns prove successful in terms of sustainable re-integration can larger operations get under way. Crucial to such a development is the establishment of a property adjudication system that functions efficiently and fairly.

In addition to the 800,000 or so internally displaced Iraqis, the needs of another 110,000 refugees inside Iraq from other countries – mainly Palestinians<sup>80</sup> – must be carefully assessed when planning for the repatriation of Iraqi returnees. As the former regime in its Arabisation policy favoured resettlement of Palestinian refugees in Kirkuk's Kurdish and Turkmen properties, the authorities may come to face further complicating factors in property disputes.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> The Global IDP Project concluded in July 2002 that the vast majority of the 1,5 million internally displaced people in the Middle East is to be found in Iraq. (See "Internal displacement in the Middle East" at [www.idproject.org](http://www.idproject.org)).

<sup>78</sup> UNHCR estimates of IDPs in Iraq reach 600,000 – 800,000 Kurds in the north of the country and 100,000 – 300,000 Shiite Marsh Arabs in the south. See *UNHCR Iraq facts & figures*, 10 July, 2003.

<sup>79</sup> The decision of the UN Development Program (UNDP) to allocate \$400 million to fund the return of displaced people to Kirkuk is indeed beneficial, and activities within that framework should be co-ordinated with an eventual UNHCR voluntary repatriation program to maximise UN agency output. See *AFP* "UNDP Allocating 400 Million Dollars to Return Displaced to Kirkuk", 18 August, 2003.

<sup>80</sup> According to UNHCR figures, there are approximately 80,000 Palestinians living in Baghdad and central Iraq, but also sizeable Iranian and Turkish refugee communities (many of Kurdish ethnicity) in central and northern Iraq. (See *UNHCR Iraq facts ... op. cit.*) These Palestinians were provided for by the former regime (hence unsympathetically viewed by Iraqis) and with the removal of concerned governmental support structures, they have been left in a vulnerable state.

<sup>81</sup> See for instance Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) *Iraq Report 31 March 2000*, Vol. 3, No 8.

Willingness to return (as examined below) should also be coupled with ability to do so, particularly for natives of Kirkuk and its immediate environs. Considering that the number of natives of Kirkuk currently residing in Greece, which, as previously mentioned, constitutes a significant part of all Iraqis in the country, is just a fraction of all those displaced, their repatriation must be harmonized with the return movements of the hundreds of thousands of IDPs within Iraq - many of whom also originate from this crucial area. There may be complications arising from this difficult process, and it is of vital importance that the Iraqi population in Greece is kept informed about developments that may cause a potential delay of their eventual facilitated returns. The provision of counselling and support for those wishing to repatriate or having no other option, is likely to require more attention by competent organisations than has so far been the case.<sup>82</sup>

### **6.3.1 Willingness to return**

As concerns repatriation of Iraqi nationals from Greece, the community demonstrates various levels of willingness to return. Common for all, however, is the high level of assistance necessary to bring about repatriation. The majority is stranded in Greece, without travel documents and money for the journey, which highlights the significance of a sufficiently funded return programme.

As opposed to other EU countries, Greece has never had a repatriation programme. Denmark, for instance, has its own bilateral agreement with Afghanistan tied to developmental aid, but no similar initiative has been taken by the Greek government concerning a general return programme for Afghan refugees, (constituting the second largest group of refugees and asylum seekers in the country). While the Greek government needs to promote the establishment of an Iraq voluntary repatriation programme on an EU-level,<sup>83</sup> it is also necessary to set up a national agenda, assisting Iraqi nationals to return to their country of origin.

A small number of Iraqis do have the financial means to return on their own, but may still want to explore various options. Turkmen Öglü retains his house in Kirkuk, and wants to repatriate with his family and also has the money to materialise his plans, but says “we heard that Afghans get financial help to return, so we want that too”. A repatriation package is thus awaited for various reasons. A fellow Kirkuki, Shiite Turkmen Doghan and his heavily pregnant wife are also keen to return but being less well off noting that “we can manage money for the trip back, but once there, what will we do?”

Generally it is difficult to get a full understanding of the scope of voluntary repatriation departures, as many refugees return spontaneously, informing only the own community of their plans. A few hundred Iraqis are estimated to have returned to Iraq since the end of the war, mainly unregistered individu-

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<sup>82</sup> IOM has as yet begun no registration of those willing to return, but approximately a hundred Iraqis have so far approached IOM requesting information about the option of assisted returns. As IOM attaches no importance to the legal status of the immigrant, it tends to be more commonly approached by Iraqis than GCR, which, according to the current focal point lawyer Kenneth Hansen, has seen only some tens of individuals register an interest in repatriation to Iraq. Of these, a majority originated in Kirkuk, and they had all asylum cases still pending.

<sup>83</sup> Perhaps to be carried out within the framework of discussions for a common asylum system. For background information on harmonisation in asylum policies in the EU (and UNHCR's opinion thereof), see UNHCR Bureau for Europe *Towards a Common European Asylum System: A View from UNHCR*, European series January 2003.

als,<sup>84</sup> reaching Iraqi territory through Jordan, Syria and Turkey. Passports have been acquired by some from the Iraqi embassy in Athens before it closed down, but not all attempting transit through Turkey have been successful, despite travel documents being in order, as Ankara on a number of occasions has refused entry to Iraqi passport holders. Many of these returnees simply reversed their strategy of entering Greece, boarding the train to the north eastern town of Alexandropoli and from there walking across the Greek-Turkish border.

Unlike many refugees in reception centres or in temporary accommodation (i.e. derelict old houses) in the city, few integrated Iraqi refugees would express instant willingness to repatriate, particularly since their country of origin still needs to move beyond the conflict phase. Iraqi Kurds with convention status in Greece, who in Iraq were politically active to different extents, are unlikely to return in the near future, but see a return to Iraq as a long-term possibility. 31-year-old Diyar's statement reflects this well: "When I get older and with the arrival of true peace, democracy and security, I want to return – it's my duty to help my country."

The fall of Saddam Hussein and the expected democratic changes to take place in Iraq are likely to remove the principal source of persecution that forced so many Iraqis to seek refuge abroad, but expectations must be moderate and allow recognition for the fact that there are likely to be those who may come to experience continued protection needs.

Some of those whose political activities forced them to leave Iraq are hesitant to return, as they continue to be in need of protection. Keywan, for instance, was involved in a new party, founded in Kirkuk in the mid-1990s, which catered for the educated elite of all political, ethnic and religious hues. The agenda, to remove the idea of separateness on the basis of religion and ethnicity, was and still is viewed as a threat by the established groupings (the majority of which are indeed based along ethnic and religious lines), and it remains to be seen how a party of this liberal character will be accepted as a player in a new Iraq.

The majority of Iraqis wishing to return will make for their area of origin. Delshad, as one exception, who as the Kurdish body guard of a high-ranking Baath party official in Kurdistan, killed in the uprising of 1991, fears return to his native Suleimaniya. Instead, he says, if forced to leave Greece he would approach Baghdad, where he could keep a low profile.

Many of Iraq's highly skilled professionals who have fled the country, some in search of protection from persecution, others seeking better opportunities, should be encouraged to repatriate, stopping the brain drain that Iraq has suffered. They are represented across the ethnic, religious, gender and age spectrum of Iraqis in Greece, and cover most subjects, including natural science, medicine, technology, and teachers of all levels (primary school up to university).

There is both great enthusiasm and great reluctance to the prospects of return, as shown in Figure 15 (*Willingness to return*). Often there are sharp differences between the generations, as parents may wish to return while their children, quick to embrace the new society and language, abhor the thought of going back to Iraq. As Susan from Mosul admits that "Greece will never be Iraq [i.e. home], but it could

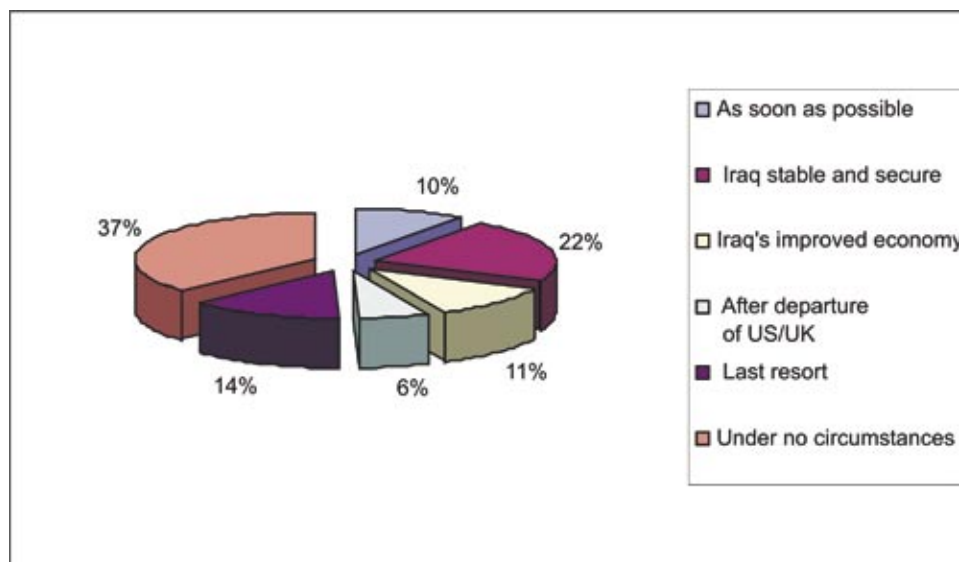
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<sup>84</sup> The number of some 300-400 Iraqis, mostly single men, was provided by a long resident Iraqi intermediary with extensive contacts throughout the community.

be good”, she also quotes her eldest daughter as saying that she would rather die than return to Iraq.

Some 10 per cent of Iraqis interviewed want to return to Iraq as soon as possible. Often the sense is that their living conditions in Greece have reached such substandard levels that going back to Iraq presents the only viable option.<sup>85</sup> “At least in Iraq I will have a proper roof over my head and sufficient food to eat”, says Turkmen Soweila, referring to the possibility of temporarily co-habit with relatives in her native Kirkuk. It is, however, of great importance that premature repatriations, as may be generated by pressure from the Greek State and/or impatience by returnees, do not occur. Untimely return movements may be followed by further displacement, likely to carry even more distress for the refugee and in addition bring greater costs for the country of reception, than would the delay of the repatriation process until conditions in Iraq are favourable to return. Not only is it vital that the Greek government shows willingness to co-ordinate Iraqi return movements with UNHCR, Greece must also be encouraged to support sustainable return and reintegration plans, focusing on UNHCR’s stated ‘4 Rs’; namely repatriation, reintegration, rehabilitation and reconstruction.

**Figure 15: Willingness to return**



14 per cent are eager to go back, but they prefer to wait for Iraq to get stable and secure. These Iraqis are enthusiastic to repatriate but not as desperate as many in the previous category. They are willing to wait, some heads of households expressing the interest of individual “trial returns” before their family (sometimes extending to own community) is brought back to the area of origin. Initial impressions of little or no intention of returning to Iraq in the near future, as signalled by the fact that nearly all respondents sold all their belongings and/or properties before leaving Iraq, in many instances counts for little when changed circumstances in their country of origin render it possible for many of them to return home.

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<sup>85</sup> This may have prompted the voluntary repatriation departure of 170 Iraqi nationals, who reportedly returned to Iraq from Patras in early August. (See UNHCR Press Review, Athens 8 August 2003.) Patras is a port city in western Greece that serves as the exit point for those intending to travel to north western Europe, mainly Iranians, Iraqis (in particular Kurds) and Afghans, attempting to illegally board ships bound for Italy. For an account of conditions for migrants in Patras, see Behzad Yaghmaian’s article “Welcome to the Land of Plato: A Story of Human Rights Violations of Muslim Migrants in Greece”, *Counter Punch*, 3 March 2003.

Waled, a native Arab of Kirkuk, is impatient to go back, even though he and his family will face economic problems there, having sold all of their belongings and property to enable their trip to Europe. His impatience is, however, mixed with concern about the country's political future, as he says: "The only important thing is for us to return, but what if another Saddam emerges?"

Another Iraqi who wants to have as firm assurances as possible about the sustainability of his repatriation before he commits to going back is Hassan, a Shi'a Arab from Baghdad. Hassan, who spent 14 years in Iran after deserting from the Iraqi army, hopes to return to Iraq one day, but, as keen as he may be about returning to his own country, he fears repatriating too soon, finding himself in post-Saddam-chaos.

More than 10 per cent of those interviewed want to wait until Iraq's economic situation has improved. These naturally tend to be those who came to Greece for economic reasons, for whom Saddam Hussein's departure is of less relevance. Kurdish Sardar, who does want to return and has no obstacles to returning, however, stresses that "I need a better life if I go back to Iraq". Abdullah, in financial terms responsible for a nine-member family, does not consider return imminent, as he sees no prospects in the foreseeable future to find work in Iraq. "Why", he adds about the current situation, "even those who have jobs receive no salaries".

Others still plan to return, but that only after the Americans and the British have departed from Iraqi territory. Iraqis are very proud people and abhor being under occupation. Even in exile it is clearly evident how uncomfortable many are with their country being occupied, largely by US forces.

Some 20 per cent view repatriation as an option to be taken only in the last resort. This usually means if the Greek government does not allow them to stay, and all other options of going to north western Europe have been exhausted.

Ahmad, a torture victim with missing limbs, explains his resistance to returning to Iraq by saying that there are no rights for handicapped people in Iraq. "Besides", he adds, "even if my most pressing needs are seen to, I will need continuous medical attention, and that will not be available in Iraq for a long, long time." Another young Iraqi Kurd, Barez, would agree with that; not only is he disabled after the mine accident, he also lost his entire family during a bomb raid on his village in the late 1980s, so he has no family to return to. If he had no choice but to go back, Barez reflects that he would need substantial economic assistance in order to do so. Not only does he require contributions to the homeward journey and a regular allowance to render his re-integration possible – a great challenge considering his physical handicap - he is also burdened with a debt of \$3,500 – money borrowed to enable his journey to Greece.

Still there are those – 37 per cent - who state that under no circumstances would they consider returning to Iraq. Most expressed fear about a possible return and revealed a lack of trust in the ability of the occupying powers to direct the country onto a stable path leading to long-term peace, stability and prosperity for all its ethnic and religious communities.

The reasons for this rigid stance vary. Many Iraqi women, and Christians in particular, worry about the lawlessness that has made sexual violence and abduction of women and girls common place in Iraq.<sup>86</sup> It is feared that the negative implications for their safety and freedom are long-term and will hamper their re-integration in post-conflict life in Iraq.

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<sup>86</sup> This heightened vulnerability is examined in Human Rights Watch report *Climate of Fear: Sexual Violence and Abduction of Women and Girls in Bagdad*, July 2003.

Many Christians do not envisage going back, much due to what they perceive as the radicalisation of the Iraqi Shiites.<sup>87</sup> “Saddam Hussein did something good”, says Monira: “he kept them [the Shiites] under control and kept criminality very low.” She adds that “even if they give me a palace of gold I won’t return”. While most Christians in Iraq mixed freely socially, and any serious problems experienced were with the authorities, they almost unanimously believe that with the political changes now taking place, the era of amiable relations between Iraq’s peoples is but a memory. The days of officially preached religious tolerance during Saddam’s rule are gone and freedom to worship now gives way to fear about an impending Islamisation of Iraq. There is a feeling among the Iraqi Christian community in Greece that the current harassment of Christians in Iraq<sup>88</sup> will continue for as long there is no strong authority in place to prevent it. As for repatriation, few Chaldeans and Assyrians state any reasons to return. One of few motives, here expressed by Youra, is the wish to go back in order to visit her parents’ grave, but Iraqi Christians rarely consider a permanent return to Baghdad.

Also among torture victims, few want to return to Iraq.<sup>89</sup> The harrowing experiences of these Iraqis tend to provide a solid enough reason not to return to their home country in which they have endured such suffering, regardless of the change of regime. One exception is the Turkmen academic Sardar. Despite having endured horrendous torture for extended periods of time in Iraq, his enthusiasm for returning to his country now that Saddam’s regime has been removed from power is palpable, as he with a broad smile states his intention of erecting a statue of George W Bush in Kirkuk after returning to his home city.

As mentioned above, many Iraqis who refuse repatriation indefinitely base their decision on a strongly held belief that the situation in the country simple will not get better. “Saddam’s legacy will remain for a long time”, warns Mustafa, who like so many Kurds also is bitter towards the Kurdish parties and their regretful fratricidal war in the mid-1990s that did little to advance the Kurdish cause. “It will take decades for things to improve”, he continues and makes the prediction that “in 30 years time [Iraqi] Kurdistan will be like today’s Greece”.

Those who fear return for socio-cultural reasons are unlikely to favour return even when offered a generous economic package, since for them, the change of regime did not solve their problem. Hoshiyar, a Kurd from Badinan in northern Iraq, was blamed for his cousin’s death, and sought by rival clan-members far into Turkey, will not contemplate a return until clan elders negotiate a solution. Also for Turkmen-Kurdish couple Damir and Niyan, there is no going back as both families opposed their marriage and threaten to kill them upon return.

In cases where political reasons have been combined with socio-cultural motives for leaving the country, Saddam Hussein’s removal from power has solved only half the problem. For Khaled, who was harassed by Iraqi intelligence due to a relative’s banned political activities, would be free to return to Iraq with his family, but complications arise as Khaled is also threatened by revenge killing due to his

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<sup>87</sup> The political re-awakening of Iraq’s long repressed Shiites is examined in the International Crisis Group report *Iraq’s Shiites under Occupation*, 9 September 2003.

<sup>88</sup> As recently reported by Reuters; “Christians feel ‘vulnerable’ in post-Saddam Iraq”, 22 September 2003.

<sup>89</sup> As emphasised by Dimitris Pantazis at MRCT-Athens, these Iraqis are psychologically ready to start something new. Their decision to leave Iraq was a final one. (Interview 24 June, 2003, Athens.)



nephew's murdering of a Baathist official. "It's blood for blood", he says, "either I or one of my children will be targeted for the settling of scores."

The continued existence and operation of dubious non-state actors, such as the militant Kurdish Islamist grouping Ansar al-Islam, serves to discourage repatriation for some Iraqi refugees. The American-led assault on the zealous group during the recent war has not calmed the fears of those who escaped the extremists. Islamist radicals that forced people away from the Kurdish-controlled areas are still believed to be alive and well.<sup>90</sup> Rahman, fleeing their repression, says the following: "I hear that they are still making problems in all of Kurdistan. Iran supports these people, and as long as they do that I can't go back."

Those who harboured Baathist sympathies or were closely identified with high officials within the former regime feel unease about returning to Iraq, citing fear of reprisals. Although his escape from Iraq was preceded by disobeying orders in preventing a number of state assassinations, as a former fairly high-ranking Baathist employee, Hormous worries about acts of vengeance if he were to return to Iraq.

Fayli Kurds, moreover, are generally opposed to the idea of repatriation to Iraq, particularly in view of the fact that few if any of them have lived there for any longer period of time. After having spent most of their lives in Iran, the language they speak is Persian, not Arabic, and they have no or little recollection of life in their place of origin. Some say that they do not wish to return to Kurdistan, alluding to big differences between mainstream Kurds and Faylis, in the areas of culture and religion.<sup>91</sup> Clear is, however, that repatriation for stateless people such as the Fayli Kurds is a difficult undertaking, and particular attention must be paid to the creation of preconditions for their reintegration in Iraqi society upon return.

A final category of Iraqis opposed to return are the young men who feel they have yet to achieve something tangible in the European context, an accomplishment that would enable them to live up to the high expectations of relatives and friends in Iraq. It would be regarded as disgraceful to return home with no achievement to speak of. These individuals, however, must be encouraged to recognize the unsuitability in opposing facilitated repatriation to their country of origin when offered, and realise the futility of looking for greener pastures elsewhere against all odds.

### **6.3.2 Thoughts on war in Iraq and future of the country**

All Iraqis, regardless of level of interest in repatriation, display considerable interest in developments in their home country. There is close to unanimity on the subject of Saddam Hussein's ouster being a positive thing. From there, however, views diverge. Some believe that the overthrow of the despot brings better future prospects for the Iraqi people. A more widespread view is that the recent war created a dangerous power vacuum, which will be difficult for anyone to fill, in which local powers decide each for his own, heightening

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<sup>90</sup> In its *Iraq Report* of 15 September 2003, Vol. 6, No 38, RFE/RL described Ansar al-Islam to be regrouping after the recent war, preparing to resume its activities. Also see AFP "Kurdish Deputy Security Chief killed by Ansar al-Islam", 29 August, 2003. Roundups of these militant Islamists have been repeatedly reported recently; see e.g. RFE/RL *Iraq Report* 25 September 2003, Vol. 6, No 40.

<sup>91</sup> Such differences, however, may be more a result of perceptions than actual reflections of reality. In addition, the reception of Faylis, is likely to depend on the specific area of return. Upon a visit to Kurdish-controlled Northern Iraq in late August 2002, the author met with and interviewed a Minister in the PUK government in Suleymaniya, himself a Fayli Kurd, who reported good relations between the community of Faylis in the area and Sunni Kurds, also mentioning that PUK-leader Jalal Talabani encouraged the formation of a Feyli Association in Suleimaniya where there is a community of Feyli Kurds.

the risk of long term instability and even civil war. What many see from their exile in Greece is that the “freedom” brought to Iraq is relatively unimportant for as long as chaos rules.

Many Iraqis consulted (and in particular those who fled the country due to socio-cultural problems) regret that traditional forces have been unleashed as a result of the sudden power vacuum brought about by the quick removal of the former regime. As Sunni Arab Qader states, “there was stability in Iraq before, now tribal politics and with that instability is gaining ground”. Similar sentiments are expressed by the new arrival Hamchid, who says that “most of the problems in Iraq are related to clans and tribal matters, and rather than disappearing, this problem has grown in scope and intensity”. There is a general unease about the strengthening of tribal forces in Iraqi politics and society, and many interviewees question the wisdom of the CPA to empower tribal leaders.

Most of all, Iraqi refugees and asylum seekers do not believe that things will improve in the foreseeable future and there is a deep suspicion about the real motives of the American-led intervention in Iraq. Sunni Arab Rowaida expresses a widely held belief, when she says that “the US came only for the oil and has no genuine concern for the Iraqi people and their human rights”.

Kurdish mother of five, Bafrin, is very sceptical about normalcy returning to Iraq for at least five years. A native from Mosul, which has seen a rise in ethnic tensions since the end of the recent war, she says: “We love Iraq and want to return, but what future is there for our children there?”

That the future status of Kirkuk is a bone of contention between the various communities in Iraq is evident also among Iraqi refugees and asylum seekers in Greece. Kurds are keen to see it incorporated into a future Kurdish federal entity and even the most apolitical Kurd entertains the idea of Kirkuk being properly attached to a Kurdish component in a new Iraq: “After all”, says Ali, “historically Kirkuk is Kurdish and history decides”. Some Turkmen, on the other hand, deplore the prospect of Kurdish control of the city and contemplate return to city only if Arabs, in other words the central government, remain in charge of the strategically so important Kirkuk. A similar opinion is voiced by those Arabs who are natives of the contested city and anxious to return.<sup>92</sup>

Above all, despite strongly-held misgivings and pessimistic forecasts, Iraqi refugees and asylum seekers in Greece are anxious to see their country prosper again, and most are ready to individually contribute to that end.

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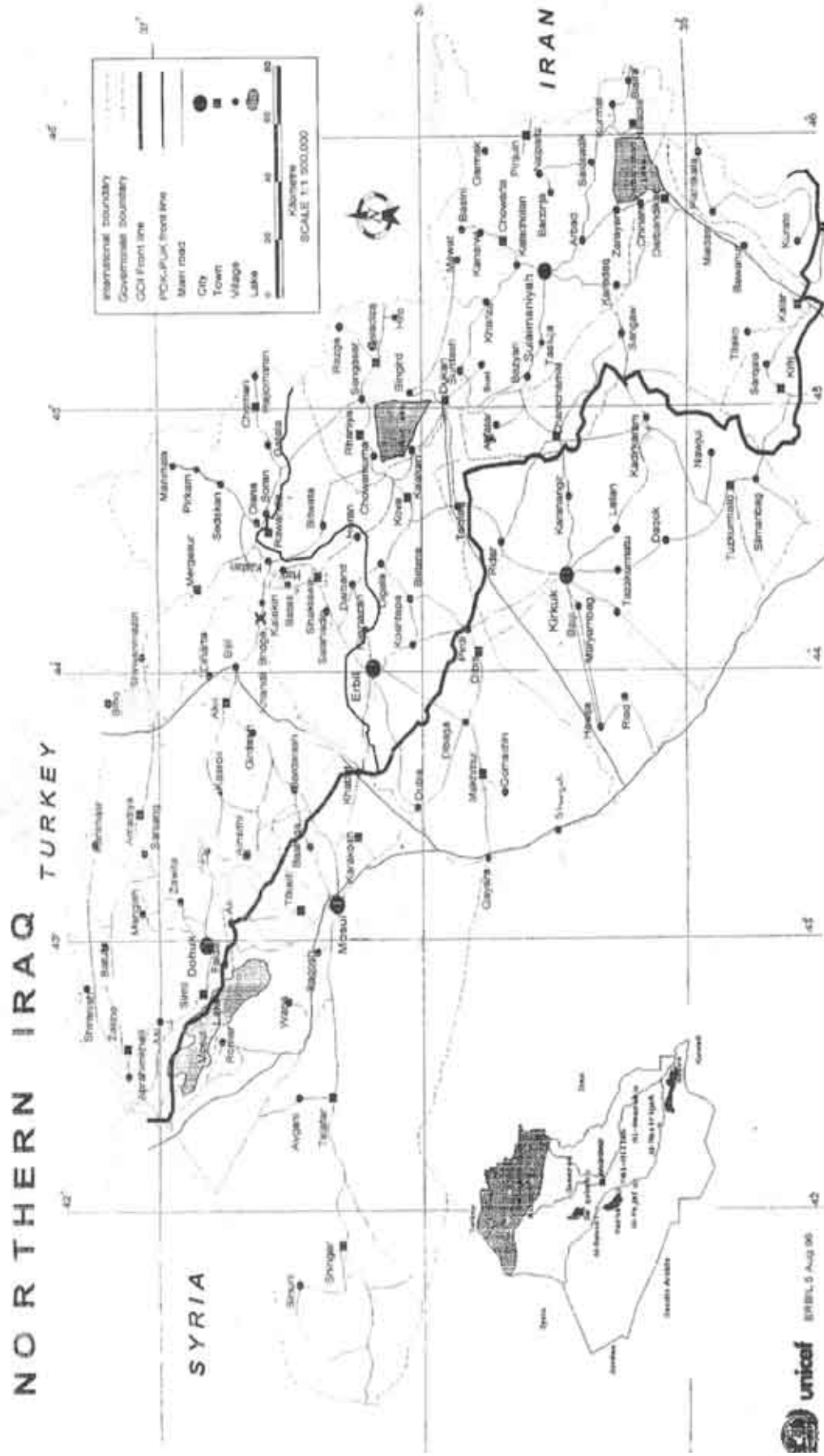
<sup>92</sup> Although it is deemed highly improbable that Kirkuk would fall under exclusive Kurdish control, it should be mentioned that if past practice in the area of Kurdish self-rule is anything to go by, the needs of minorities such as the Turkmen and Assyrians/Chaldeans, are likely to be fully acknowledged. These ethnic and religious minorities that live within the autonomous region experienced positive changes after 1991, when they became free to get involved in social and political activities, open TV and radio-stations and publish their own papers and magazines (mostly capitalised on by Assyrians and Turkmen). The Kurdish authorities in the area of self-rule have encouraged diversity, as noticeable in the area of education, where the Kurdish government fully supplies Turkmen and Syriac schools for the Turkmen and Assyrian communities. (See for instance “Interview: Abdulaziz Ta’ib Ahmed, Minister of Education, Kurdistan Regional Government (Erbil)”, *Middle East Intelligence Bulletin (New York)*, 4 February 2002.) According to a Turkmen official, throughout the entire autonomous region there are as many as 14 Turkmen schools, both primary and secondary. (Jawdat Najar, leader of the Turkmen Cultural Organisation, author’s own interview 27 August 2002 in Arbil, northern Iraq.)

*Appendix I. Map of Iraq*



**United Nations Department of Public Information, Cartographic Section**  
**Map No 3835, December 2002**

Appendix II. Map of the autonomous Kurdish region of Northern Iraq



### **Appendix III. List of figures**

<b>Figure 1.</b> Location of interviews .....	13
<b>Figure 2.</b> Gender .....	14
<b>Figure 3.</b> Age .....	14
<b>Figure 4.</b> Civil status .....	15
<b>Figure 5a.</b> Ethnic and Religious Composition: Proportion of total constituted by each group.....	15
<b>Figure 5b.</b> Ethnic and Religious Composition: Religious Denominations of each group.....	16
<b>Figure 6a.</b> Population of Iraq in ethnic and religious groupings .....	16
<b>Figure 6b.</b> Religions in Iraq .....	18
<b>Figure 7a.</b> Place of origin .....	19
<b>Figure 7b.</b> Analysis of Iraqis from central government-controlled areas .....	20
<b>Figure 8.</b> Urban vs rural areas of origin .....	21
<b>Figure 9.</b> Educational level .....	22
<b>Figure 10.</b> Vulnerabilities .....	22
<b>Figure 11a.</b> Push factors .....	23
<b>Figure 11b.</b> Political reasons analysis .....	24
<b>Figure 12.</b> Pull factors .....	30
<b>Figure 13.</b> Length of stay in Greece .....	34
<b>Figure 14a.</b> Legal status in Greece .....	35
<b>Figure 14b.</b> Pink card analysis .....	36
<b>Figure 15.</b> Willingness to return .....	52

#### ***Appendix IV. List of Abbreviations***

AFP	Agence France Presse
AP	Associated Press
CoA	Country of Asylum
CPA	Coalition Provisional Authority (US-led administration in Iraq)
CRTV	Rehabilitation Centre for Victims of Torture and Other Forms of Abuse (Thessaloniki)
ELINAS	Hellenic Institute of Solidarity and Co-operation with Developing Countries
EU	European Union
GCR	Greek Council for Refugees
HRC	Hellenic Red Cross
IOM	International Organisation for Migration
KDP	Kurdistan Democratic Party
MdM	Medecins du Monde
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Greek government)
MHW	Ministry of Health and Welfare (Greek government)
MOI	Ministry of Interior (Greek government)
MOL	Ministry of Labour (Greek government)
MPO	Ministry of Public Order (Greek government)
MRCT	Medical Rehabilitation Centre for Torture Victims (Athens)
NGO	non-governmental organisation
PUK	Patriotic Union of Kurdistan
RFE/RL	Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty
SS	Social Solidarity (Thessaloniki-based NGO)
SWF	Social Work Foundation (Athens-based NGO)
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
VWA	Voluntary Work Athens

## ***Appendix V. List of meetings and relevant facilities visited***

### **Meetings and Interviews:**

- Rehabilitation Centre for Victims of Torture and Other Forms of Abuse (CRTV) , Thessaloniki, 5 June, 2003:
  - Director Dr. Theofano Papazissi
  - Lawyer Fani Galatsopoulou
- Greek Council for Refugees (GCR) 9 June, 2003:
  - Director Petros Mastakas
  - Lawyers Yiannis Papageorgiou, Panagiotis Papadimitriou, Kenneth Hansen
  - Social Workers Iota Karadima, Roula Poulou
- International Organisation for Migration (IOM) Representation in Greece, Director Daniel Esdras, 17 June, 2003
- Medical Rehabilitation Centre for Torture Victims (MRCT) Athens, 24 June, 2003:
  - Director Ioanna Babassika
  - Psychologist Dimitris Pantazis
- Deputy Police Director Alexandropouli Police Directorate, Ioannis Kharoudis 2 July, 2003
- Secretary General of East Macedonia and Thrace Regional Government, Aris Papadopoulos, Komotini, 2 July 2003
- Assyrian Union of Greece, President Kyriakos Batsaras, 3 July, 2003

### **Reception centres visited:**

- Nea Makri centre (operated by HRC), Attika, 7 May
- Pikermi (operated by GCR), Attika, 8 May
- Lavrion centre (operated by HRC), Attika, 27 May and 7 July
- Nefeli Housing Project (operated by SWF), Athens suburb, 28 May
- Voluntary Work Athens Centre (operated by VWA), central Athens, 4 June
- Thessaloniki Centre (operated by SS), Macedonia, northern Greece, 6 June
- Epikorou centre (operated by MdM), central Athens, 12 June
- Aspropirgos camp, (operated by ELINAS), Attika, 17 July
- Pendeli camp (formerly operated by MdM), Pendeli suburb of Athens, 1 August 2003

### **Detention centres visited in Evros:**

Dikea Detention centre, 1 July  
Isakaio Detention centre, 1 July  
Soufli Police Station, 1 July  
Peplos Detention Centre, 2 July  
Venna Detention Centre, 2 July

## **Appendix VI. Interview themes**

### **Basic data**

Name, age, family status  
Number of members of household  
Ethnic and religious composition  
Birthplace and area lived in for most part of life  
Educational and professional background

### **A. Prior to arrival in Greece: routes, methods and motives**

Reason(s) for leaving hometown and Iraq  
Route taken and methods employed  
For traffickers' fee; own assets sufficient or loan required  
Motive(s) for choice of Greece  
Greece intended and final destination  
Prior knowledge of Greece and its asylum procedures  
Expectations at arrival  
Any relatives/friends in Greece before arrival  
Any relatives/friends elsewhere in Europe – if yes, their status

### **B. Analysis of the current situation**

Length of stay in Greece  
Current status  
Employment: in possession of work permit  
Job(s) had, wage, length of time employed  
Other sources of income  
Strategy for finding work and shelter  
Level and intensity of relations with other Iraqis (/co-ethnics)  
Experience with Greek authorities  
View of Greek NGOs and services provided  
Assistance received (financial or other)  
Attitude of Greek people  
Expressions of racism, xenophobia or intolerance experienced  
Contact with refugee organizations or religious groups



### **C. Future prospects for durable solution**

Level of interest in events in Iraq

Thoughts on the US-led invasion of Iraq and the future of the country

Views on Kurds'/Christians' future in post-Saddam Iraq

Willingness to return

If yes, spontaneous return or as part of an organized voluntary repatriation plan

If no, obstacles to returning

Still own any property in Iraq

Aspirations for the future

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Associated Press (AP)

Athens News

*CounterPunch*

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*International Affairs*

*Kurdistan Observer*

*Middle East Intelligence Bulletin*

*Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL)*

*Reuters*

*Washington Post*

*The New York Review of Books*

**Appendix VIII. Asylum statistics for Greece**

**A) ASYLUM STATISTICS – GREECE (1997-2002)**  
(figures concern number of persons - not cases)

Year	A Applications (source: MPO)	B Recognitions Convention Status (CS) (source: MPO)	C Humanitarian Status (HS) approvals* (source: MPO)	D Total Recognitions (CS and HS)	E Rejections on Convention Status**	F Final Rejections (CS & HS)*** (source: MPO)	G Cases for which final decision was reached (G=B+C+F)	H Recognition Rate for Convention Status (G=Bx100:G)	I Overall Recognition Rate (CS and HS) (H=Dx100:G)
1997	4,376	130	94	224	2,216	2,122	2,346	5.5%	9.5%
1998	2,953	156	287	443	3,748	3,461	3,904	3.9%	11.3%
1999	1,528	146	407	553	1,570	1,163	1,716	8.5%	32.2%
2000	3,083	222	175	397	1,748	1,573	1,970	11.2%	20.1%
2001	5,499	147	148	295	1,165	1,017	1,312	11.2%	22.4%
2002	5,664	36	64	100	9,342	9,278	9,378	0.3%	1.0%
2003 (till Aug)	5,467	3	25	28	2,754	2,729	2,757	0.1%	1.0%

\* Those granted humanitarian status (HS) are in most percentage rejected convention cases.

\*\* Those rejected on convention status, either on 1<sup>st</sup> or on 2<sup>nd</sup> Instance (appeal). Some have been granted humanitarian status (column C)

\*\*\* Those finally rejected, on both convention and humanitarian status.

**B) ASYLUM APPLICATIONS FOR GREECE (BY PERCENTAGE) – MAIN COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN**

<b>Country of origin (figure in brackets concerns number of applications in 2002, for easy reference)</b>	<b>1997</b>	<b>1998</b>	<b>1999</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>2002</b>
Iraq (2,268)	87.02%	73.35%	59.29%	43.27%	35.86%	45.32%
Afghanistan (1,199)	0.77%	6.84%	7.59%	14.47%	26.53%	21.86%
Iran (383)	3.17%	3.18%	4.84%	4.38%	3.86%	7.26%
Turkey (192)	3.93%	10.43%	12.76%	19.17%	14.55%	3.73%
Pakistan (244)	0.11%	0.03%	1.37%	4.57%	4.58%	4.41%
Nigeria (161)						3.25%
Morocco (9)	0.22%	0.00%	0.00%	0.54%	2.69%	0.18%
Sierra Leone (64)	0.00%	0.16%	0.91%	1.69%	2.96%	1.24%
DRC (ex-Congo) (64)						1.15%
Somalia (67)						1.22%
Sudan (52)						1.02%

**C) IRAQIS - STATUS OF RECOGNITION IN GREECE**

	<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>E</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>G</b>	<b>H</b>
<b>Year</b>	<b>Applications</b>	<b>Recognitions (CS)</b>	<b>Humanitarian Status</b>	<b>Total Recognitions</b>	<b>Rejections on Convention status</b>	<b>Cases for which final decision was reached</b>	<b>Recognition Rate for Convention Status</b>	<b>Overall Recognition Rate (CS and HS)</b>
2000	1,334	39	66	105	835	874	4.46%	12.0%
2001	1,972	46	55	101	404	450	10.2%	22.4%
2002	2,567	9	18	27	4,131	4,140	0.2%	0.6%
2003 (till Aug.)	2,252	0	16	16	1,317	1,317	0%	1.2%







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