

# VIEWED FROM THE OTHER SIDE: Media Coverage and Personal Tales of Migration in Iraqi Kurdistan



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## Abbreviations

COSIT	Central Organization for Statistics and Information Technology, Iraq
CPJ	Committee to Protect Journalists
DNO	Det norske oljeselskap
GOI	Government of Iraq
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IFIR	International Federation of Iraqi Refugees
IMCK	Independent Media Centre in Kurdistan
IMS	International Media Support
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IPS	Inter Press Service News Agency
IREX	International Research and Exchanges Board
IRRINI	Information, Return, and Reintegration of Iraqi Nationals to Iraq
KDP	Kurdistan Democratic Party
KIU	Kurdistan Islamic Union
KNN	Kurdish News Network
KRG	Kurdistan Regional Government
MUF	Iraqi nationals with temporary work permits in Norway but without rights for family reunion
NRT	Nalia Radio and Television
NSD	Norwegian Social Science Data Services
PU	International Police, Immigration Service, Norway
PUK	Patriotic Union of Kurdistan
RFS	Reporters Without Borders
NTB	Norwegian News Agency
UDI	Norwegian Directorate of Immigration
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

## Executive summary

This report analyses the discourse on Iraqi Kurdish migration. The reach and role of the media for people's knowledge of migration policies and for their decision to emigrate is assessed. The media coverage of migration in Kurdish mass media in Iraq as well as the beliefs among media professionals, their key sources and the perceptions among people with different types of personal migration experiences are explored. The normative arguments evoked both in media coverage and personal stories are analyzed and compared to the dominating and well-known perspectives in Western, European and Norwegian immigration debates.

Knowledge has until present been very sparse regarding the focus and frames in migration debates in countries with large-scale emigration to the West. Addressing this lacuna, this study sheds light on perspectives, arguments and experiences related to migration in a region dominated by waves of emigration to Norway and other European countries in the last decades. The study assesses how interpersonal communication and messages appearing in the mass media interfere to influence people's decisions to emigrate.

The main focus of this study is on *irregular* migration; that is, it explores the media coverage and the personal stories pertaining to undocumented emigrants and, subsequently, the discourse on European return policies pertaining to rejected asylum seekers. In accordance with the call from the Norwegian Ministry of Justice, we have a Norwegian bias: we have looked for references to Norway in the Kurdish news and a substantial portion of our informants have migration experiences from Norway.

The study gives voice to the untold stories – to the experiences and perspectives appearing in neither the Norwegian and Western media debate on immigration nor in the Iraqi Kurdish media. Shedding light on these questions, the report has improved the knowledge of the type of factors that motivate or inhibit emigration on the one hand and the conditions propelling or restraining the return of people to their original home country on the other.

News media analysed in Iraqi Kurdistan includes news reports, op-eds and commentaries related to migration in six newspapers and four TV channels from May to September 2011. A total of 48 informants participated in this study. 36 interviews with Iraqi Kurds in Norway and Iraq with migration experiences of their own or within their family were conducted. Vital informants in this group are people who have been deported from Europe and are now back in Iraqi Kurdistan. Another 12 key informant interviews were conducted with government officials, NGOs and media professionals.

Our research confirms the importance of the media for people's perceptions of migration. The communication revolution in the last decade, especially the influx of Western popular culture through satellite TV, has been decisive in shaping people's images of life in the West, and has as such been a major pull factor for migration to Western countries.

The conclusion, however, is that the abundance of information does not mean that, in general, people who left for Europe in the last decade had realistic perceptions of the chances of gaining asylum. The popular claim that changes in Norwegian and Western asylum policies

today quickly and with ease reach potential groups of emigrants around the world due to new information technology was not confirmed in this study. Instead, we found that the complex and partly conflicting premises of Western asylum policies are poorly understood among most people. This conclusion is based on one case study, exploring transnational communication and media coverage in one single region. It can be argued, however, that this conclusion has more wide ranging value, applicable to the knowledge of how information in a digitally connected world is disseminated in general: Abstract information about immigration regimes premised on complex and partly conflicting principles are not easily included in neither the typical formats of modern mass media nor in the stories people tell in personal communication.

### ***The coverage of migration in Iraqi Kurdistan***

The analysis of the media coverage of migration in Iraqi Kurdistan reveals that migration policies do not attract heavy attention in Kurdish media, although migration is a central experience for large parts of the population, and migration is a topic much talked about in society. We found almost 300 items related to migration over a 5-month period, which is an indicator that the topic is significant, but not at the forefront of media attention.

Migration coverage in Kurdish media focuses predominantly on South-South migration. Although the focus of this report is on South-North migration – on *emigration* from Iraqi Kurdistan to Western countries – a main finding is that half of the Kurdish media articles included in the study focus on *immigration*, from within Iraq (IDPs), and from neighbouring countries.

The topic of migration is not a subject that provokes open political disagreement in Kurdish society; rather, it seems that the overall discourse is dominated more by consensus than conflict. Despite the contested situation of the press in Iraqi Kurdistan, the analysis did not reveal any systematic difference in the coverage of migration between independent and party-aligned media outlets.

The coverage of irregular migration in Kurdish news has two main focuses. The first covers the destinies of irregular immigrants to Europe, focusing on their travels and sojourns there. Some reports focus on the hazards and dangers awaiting those helped by smugglers, while others describe the unbearable situation for those who live in European reception centres and detention camps without having achieved legal status in their destination country.

The second focus of the irregular migration coverage in Kurdish news is on deportations. The deportations of failed asylum seekers back to Iraq attract relatively substantial coverage in both newspapers and on television. The coverage is, predominantly, very critical. There are reports of families with small children that are sent back to unsecure conditions in Kirkuk, and stories about deportees who have gone missing or who have committed suicide after their arrival in Iraq. The coverage mainly presents the views of actors advocating to halt the deportations or the voices of those risking deportation from different European countries and Australia.

Many articles and TV-reports refer to the fact that the Kurdish Government is against deportations, that they regard them as a violation of human rights and that, hence, no planes carrying deported people will be allowed to land at international airports in Iraqi Kurdistan.

The internal split and growing political tension between the Government of Iraq in Baghdad and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in Erbil is reflected in the debate over deportations within the Kurdish media. The Iraqi Government is criticized for accepting deportations, while the Kurdish Government is against them.

There is no coverage of repatriation through government assisted return programmes in our sample, neither on how returnees are received after they return. This is surprising, given the fact that people have been returning to Iraqi Kurdistan on a considerable scale over recent years.

Whereas there is a significant focus on deportation, there is no systematic or specific media coverage of the underlying premises of Western migration policies in Iraqi Kurdistan. Kurdish media is not only ignorant of the reasoning behind Western migration policies, and in particular Western governments' arguments for deportation, they evoke normative arguments that run directly counter to the perspectives dominant in European, Australian and American immigration debates.

An argument commonly invoked by Western governments is that, in order to protect people with a legitimate right to asylum, it is necessary to have an efficient return policy towards those not in need of protection. Contrary to this, coverage in Kurdish media evokes types of arguments unheard of in Western coverage of deportations: mainly, that deportations are violating human rights, people should be free to move, and, more implicitly, decent and well-integrated people do not deserve deportation.

The terror attacks in Norway on 22 July 2011 coincided with the period covered in the content analysis of Kurdish media. Thus, reports related to Norway are quite frequent in the material. However, none of the stories from Norway mention Norwegian immigration policies or focus on Kurdish immigration to Norway as such.

There was no coverage of deportations from Norway in the Kurdish media covered in this report, despite the fact that such deportations took place in that period. This finding corresponds with the relatively little media attention these deportations get in Norwegian media. Initially, the agreement from May 2009 between the governments of Iraq and Norway, allowing Norway to return, by force, Iraqis without legal residence in Norway, spurred some media coverage. However, after February 2010, the media attention on deportations to Iraq declined sharply in Norwegian media.

### ***Why certain frames and stories dominate in the news – findings from elite interviews***

Most of the findings from the content analysis of the coverage of migration in Kurdish media were confirmed through the interviews with government officials, NGOs, and media professionals.

Interviews with officials confirmed that the Kurdistan Regional Government is against deportations of failed asylum seekers back to Iraq. Their position seems to be based partly on a belief that the freedom to move is part of indispensable human rights, and partly that Western governments need to deal directly with the KRG, not only GOI, about the return of citizens from the Kurdistan region. They also called for encouraging voluntary returns to Iraqi Kurdistan.

The majority of media professionals stated that they were against the deportations. They followed a line of argument about fairness: emigrants to the West have sacrificed a lot, sold everything before leaving, many are now in debt to relatives and friends, have suffered harsh conditions in Europe and simply do not deserve to be sent back by force after many years in Europe.

All media professionals were, however, critical of the coverage on migration by the Kurdish media, and in particular the coverage of irregular migration. In their view, the Kurdish mass media had not sufficiently covered the real conditions that meet emigrants on their journey to Europe, or the situation for Kurds living in Europe without legal status.

The lack of any systematic difference in the coverage of migration between independent and party-aligned media outlets was confirmed in the interviews with media professionals. The issue of emigration seems, unlike topics related to corruption and power abuse, not to be a subject provoking censorship from the ruling parties and, is as such, not a *politically* delicate subject.

Although not politically sensitive, the interviews with media professionals, showed that migration is a highly sensitive topic on an individual and family level: to return empty-handed from Europe is strongly related to shame and failure. This was also given as an explanation for the low coverage of the subject in Kurdish media.

A closer look at sources of the media coverage related to irregular migration and deportations revealed that many of the stories were direct outcomes of two media campaigns with rather different goals that took place in 2011.

The critical media coverage of deportations to Iraq relies heavily on one source: the Iraqi Federation of Refugees (IFIR). This organization launched a campaign in 2011 with the aim of stopping deportations from Europe and Australia. The campaign involved networking and lobbying of the Government of Iraq in Baghdad and the Kurdistan Regional Government as well as Western governments, NGOs and Kurdish and Western media. The content analysis of Kurdish media, and the interviews in this report confirm that the campaign was largely successful with regard to influencing Kurdish media and the Kurdistan Regional Government.

Most of the reports on the dangers of migrating with the help of smugglers, and the unbearable situation for asylum seekers living in reception centres and detention camps in Western countries, seem to be the direct result of a campaign in 2011 carried out by a Hong Kong-based company called STATT. Research showed that Western governments clandestinely sponsored the campaign. The stated goal of this media campaign was to prevent people from going to Europe and Australia. In cooperation with a local organization, the company trained journalists, translated articles from Western media, and arranged interviews

with smugglers, people who had embarked on unsuccessful journeys to Europe, as well as with people who regretted going to Europe. The campaign was a success insofar as it managed to get through to Kurdish journalists and resulted in a number of articles and videos.

### ***The main motivations of migration in Iraqi Kurdistan***

This study shows that mass media, especially TV, have been decisive in shaping people's impressions of life in Western countries, and for people's motivation to migrate from Iraqi Kurdistan. The influx of Western popular culture such as fiction in the form of films, TV serials and pop music, is paramount, and also influenced popular long-running Kurdish TV productions focusing on the life of Kurdish people in Europe. Despite the improved security situation and economic development in the Kurdistan region after 2003, the interviews in this study revealed at least three factors that were decisive for, in particular, young people's continued urge to leave the region:

- 1) Nepotism, the perceived lack of possibilities for those without contacts and influential networks in Kurdish society.
- 2) Political oppression, including power abuse and the lack of equality before the law.
- 3) Lack of individual freedom, especially for young people in regard to love relations.

The lack of individual freedom in particular was a recurring topic in many interviews. Young people describe Iraqi Kurdistan today as a place widely exposed to other lifestyles, values, and ideas through transnational and global communication, but where the actual access to this type of life and these values is highly restricted.

### ***The experiences of those who have returned from Europe – expectations and disappointments***

The experiences of those who managed to receive protection in a European country and those whose applications were finally rejected are distinctly different.

Those who received protection in Europe and have returned with a European citizenship have generally positive stories to tell about Europe. European citizenship stands out as a distinction in Kurdish society, providing possibilities of choice, the freedom to move, and the entitlement to resources.

Many of those who did not receive protection and who were required to repatriate express great disappointment over a Europe different from what they had envisaged before leaving. Their stories centre on humiliation, psychological problems, idle waiting, fear, and despair.

The disappointment with the Europe where they had thought they would find universal human rights is deep among many. Nevertheless, many do also point out that they actually experienced a type of respect from government agencies and officials they were not used to back home.

Amongst those who had signed agreements of return with the IOM, it became apparent that this type of agreement is not regarded as voluntary. It is, in fact, often referred to as a deportation and surrounded by stigma and shame.

To some extent, the interviews confirm the notions conveyed by the media professionals that to come back empty-handed from Europe is related to shame and social stigma. Some informants tell that they have not been able to take up their life in a good way when back, and many report problems with readapting to Kurdish society. Others report that they live in isolation from their former network and families. The picture is complex, however. Quite a few of those who were denied asylum in Europe also tell that they are content with their present life in Kurdistan and that they were welcomed by their families.

### ***Knowledge and evaluation of European immigration and return policies***

Knowledge or actual understanding of the European asylum system among the people interviewed for this study is very poor. This finding is parallel to the finding from the media analysis showing no systematic coverage of the underlying premises of European migration policies in Kurdish media.

There is, however, a very clear perception by most interviewees that the system for accepting and rejecting migrants in European countries is arbitrary and unjust. This perception is partly based on their observation of how people with similar backgrounds can have a totally opposite outcome to their asylum cases, and partly on what are perceived as unpredictable and constantly changing policies.

This study also shows that trying to deceive migration authorities with incorrect information seems to have been a common practice; most of the people interviewed for this study talk about this as something almost everyone, including themselves, have been doing. As long as people see that some are successful in tricking the system, it will motivate others to try. The underlying discourse in many of the accounts is not about right or wrong but about being lucky or unlucky and about taking a chance.

Partly in line with the content analysis of Kurdish media and arguments from the media professionals, many of the interviewees in this study bring a more meritocratic approach into the discourse of justice in the migration system. They point at a work ethic, an education, the ability to integrate into society, and being a law-abiding citizen as other important criteria for considering whether or not to grant immigrants the right to stay. This represents an actual challenge to some of the fundamental beliefs in Norwegian migration policies.

## **Main conclusions**

The main empirical findings from this study are as follows:

- Media coverage of migration-related issues is limited in Iraqi Kurdistan. When covered, it is predominantly related to internal migration inside Iraq or migration from neighbouring countries.
- The limited but existing media coverage of Western migration policies focuses primarily on return policies and their consequences.

- Coverage of deportations to Iraq from Western countries is predominantly very critical. It is mostly described as a humiliating practice, and as a violation of the right to the freedom of movement. The Kurdistan Regional Government also shares this view.
- The communication revolution in the last two decades, especially the influx of Western popular culture through satellite TV, has been decisive in shaping people's images of life in the West, and has, as such, been a major pull factor for migration to Western countries.
- Iraqi Kurds have very little understanding of the policies behind rejection decisions in the West, despite a prevalent realization that rejection rates for their compatriots have risen since 2003. Generally, knowledge and understanding of Western migration policies seems very poor among Iraqi Kurds.
- There seems to be a clear perception among the interviewees that the system for accepting and rejecting migrants in European countries is arbitrary and unjust. Gaining the right to stay in a European country is perceived as a question of luck, not of justice or complex policy-making with domestic and international considerations.

## **Recommendations**

The following recommendations are based on the findings from this study:

1. Information about Norwegian migration policies must be more targeted and adapted to specific audiences. Availability of information about laws and regulations, in itself, will rarely lead to this being conveyed through media or personal communication. Media campaigns targeting journalists directly can be useful. However, it needs to be clear for journalists that the Norwegian Government sponsors it.
2. In order to lift the stigma of returns assisted by government-sponsored programmes, groundwork providing stories about returnees who have been able to take up their life and resettle in a successful way could be distributed to the Kurdish news media and within the Kurdish public sphere.
3. Although better ways of communicating Norwegians asylum policies are important, communication alone cannot solve the general dissatisfaction with Norwegian immigration policies. As long as asylum is the only way available to most people applying for residency in Norway, persons without a real need for protection will continue to come. The normative arguments conveyed in this report invite a broader principal discussion about the regulation of immigration from countries outside EU/EEA. Both systems of work permits for non-specialists as well as residence permits based on virtue, merit and the ability to integrate into society are vital measures that should be considered in a long term perspective.

4. Dignity and social acceptance is crucial for returnees. Norwegian authorities should consider different measures in addition to cash incentives to motivate rejected asylum seekers to return. A system should be considered where rejected asylum seekers who sign up for voluntary return are granted a time-limited work permit before returning, thus enabling them to return in dignity with money they have earned, and with valuable experience. To avoid abuse, the majority of their salaries can be kept in a restricted bank account and disbursed after arrival in Iraq.
  
5. Considering the federal structure of the Iraqi state, and the strong split between KRG and GOI, Norway should enter into direct discussions on both forced and voluntary return with the Kurdistan Regional Government rather than just relying on agreements with the Government of Iraq.



## 1. Introduction

Today, information is crisscrossing the world, connecting people living far from each other and exposing them to continuous streams of images and messages. There is a rising acknowledgement of how a communication revolution has extended the reach and impact of information, influencing the perceptions and decisions of potential emigrants. According to a former state secretary in the Norwegian Government, ‘only hours after the Norwegian Government announces changes in the Norwegian asylum policy, the news reaches the streets in Mogadishu’. Such a belief in the reach of information is predominant, but is it correct?

Even if a few studies exist on peoples’ motivation and decision to emigrate (Brekke & Five Aarset, 2009; Gran, 2008), and on illegal journeys to Europe (Nome, 2005) we lack substantiated knowledge of the factors influencing the perceptions of potential emigrants, what their most important sources of information are, and how they are connected through transnational and global information networks (Brekke, Five Aarset, Andenæs, & Lidén, 2010). Furthermore, we know the incendiary nature of the media debates over migration in Western countries, but the literature is close to silent regarding the arguments evoked and the frames used in migration debates and migration coverage in countries with large-scale emigration to the West.

To address this lacuna, this project explores the discourse on migration as seen from the other side: from a country and a region, Iraqi Kurdistan, which has been dominated by waves of emigration to Norway, Europe, and other Western countries. A ‘discourse of migration’ as it is defined here, subsumes both the news and commentaries on migration in the Iraqi Kurdish mass media, the perspectives of media professionals and key sources in the news as well as the personal tales of people of Iraqi Kurdish origin with different types of migration experiences. Vital informants in the last group are those who have been deported from Europe and are now back in Iraqi Kurdistan. A central aspiration is to assess how interpersonal communication and messages appearing in the mass media interact to influence people’s perceptions. Further, it is an ambition to give voice to the untold stories – to the experiences and perspectives appearing in neither the Norwegian and Western media debate nor in the Iraqi Kurdish media. Shedding light on these questions, we aim to improve the knowledge of what type of factors motivate or inhibit emigration on the one hand and, on the other, what conditions propel or restrain the return of people to their original home country.

The main focus of this study is on irregular migration; that is, we explore the media coverage and the personal stories pertaining to undocumented emigrants arriving in Europe or other Western countries as asylum seekers and, subsequently, on the discourse on European return policies pertaining to irregular immigrants. In the course of this project, we realized that the destinies of irregular migrants arriving in Western countries as asylum seekers, and the policies of European governments related to these emigrants, is a highly potent issue in Iraqi Kurdistan. The migration flows from Iraq to Europe and other Western countries in the last decades have to a large extent been of an irregular nature. For most Iraqi nationals, including the Iraqi Kurds, the only option, in order to leave their territory and enter a new country, is to go ‘illegally’ and to apply for asylum in their destination country.

To handle the arrival of asylum seekers who do not fulfil the asylum criteria, return policies, including enforcement and deportations, have become a central tool for both the Norwegian and other Western governments. The rationale for these policies, as well as the critique in their wake, is documented in a range of studies from the US, Europe and other Western countries (De Genova & Peutz, 2010). The reactions and the reception in the countries receiving these forced and mandatory returnees are, however, very sparsely discussed in the literature. In a Norwegian context, an assessment of the functioning of the Norwegian IRRINI program is the only exception (Strand, Bendixsen, Paasche, & Schultz, 2011) but we do not know how deportations or the return of rejected asylum seekers through government-assisted return programmes are regarded – in either the media or among people in general.

## Research questions and research design

The overarching main research question guiding the project is the following:

- *What are the main characteristics of discourses and narratives related to migration in Iraqi Kurdistan?*

This discourse is researched from three different angles. We first ask *what* are the central topics and frames of the media coverage of migration in Kurdish media. Second, through elite interviews with media professionals and their key informants, we ask *why* the media coverage is as it is. Third, through interviews with people with different types of migration experiences in Kurdistan and Norway, we explore what people's knowledge, experiences, and perceptions are regarding emigration to Europe and the West, what type of media they use, and how they regard and experience the return and repatriation of former emigrants.

In our analysis of the media coverage on irregular migration in particular and migration in general we first ask:

- *What are the main topics in Kurdish news related to migration?*
- *What are the frames related to irregular migration and irregular migrants in Kurdish news and who are their sources?*
- *What are the normative arguments related to irregular migrants in the Kurdish mass media and how do they differ from the rationale conveyed in the Western and Norwegian immigration debate?*

Secondly, through key-informant interviews with media professionals and sources central in the news on irregular migration in Iraqi Kurdistan, we ask:

- *Why do some type of frames and stories on irregular migration dominate in the news and why are other types of information absent or silenced?*

In the third part of the analysis, we explore personal stories from people with different types of migration experiences in Iraqi Kurdistan and Norway. Our informants include people who have emigrated from Iraq and now reside in Norway, people who have returned to Iraqi Kurdistan, voluntarily or by force, and people in Iraqi Kurdistan with close relatives who have emigrated to Norway or a different European country.

These interviews add to the media analysis, providing the stories not told in the media and shedding light on *why* certain perspectives dominate in the public debate and why some are largely absent. These stories also shed light on the role of the media and on what types of information is decisive for people's motivations to leave or – just as vital – to stay. Finally, yet importantly, they bring new perspectives on how returnees experience the repatriation to their original country and how these returns are in general regarded in the Iraqi Kurdish society.

This part of the analysis focuses on the following sub-questions:

- *What types of media do people use and to what degree do they stay in contact with relatives and friends who have emigrated?*
- *What have been people's motivations for leaving Iraqi Kurdistan in the last decade?*
- *What were their sources of information and what type of message did they build their perceptions on?*
- *How do perceptions and knowledge of Europe and European immigration policies guide strategies and choices when entering Europe as asylum seekers?*
- *How do personal experiences with immigrating to Europe clash with expectations and knowledge before leaving?*
- *How do people understand and evaluate European immigration and return policies?*

Our research is not restricted to transnational relations between Norway and Iraq, to the discourse in Kurdistan on Norwegian migration policies or on migrant's experiences from Norway. However, in accordance with the call from the Ministry of Justice, we do have a Norwegian home country bias: we have looked for references to Norway in the Kurdish news and a substantial portion of our informants have experiences of migration from Norway, some now residing permanently in Norway, some without legal status, and some have returned from Norway to Kurdistan.



## 2. Analytical framework

The overarching analytical framework informing our research questions and focus builds on the following generalized claim:

Modern migration patterns are premised on many different factors, but two distinct axes stand out as vital in the world of today. The first hinges on a communication revolution that has brought forth ubiquitous high-speed flows of information, connecting people and crisscrossing the world and its national borders. The other formative axis of migration marks continuity and intensification rather than transformation or eruptive change. It works in the opposite direction from that of the first axis of the information revolution: in a world with unforeseen technological and economic opportunities to move, travel and resettle, migration is governed, regulated, inhibited, and stopped by a state system built on the sovereignty of the nation state. It lies within the basic mandate of the nation state to protect its borders and the access to territorially-defined resources and rights. States, even if curbed by regional and international agreements and institutions, still define who are to become permanent or temporary members of their spatially-defined communities and what type of access to resources these new members are allowed. At the end of the day, they govern peoples' basic ability to move and traverse the world.

In the last decades, the access to information – images, stories, fact and fiction, dialogues and debates – has, in a revolutionary way, been democratized and distributed across borders and classes. The free flow of information contrasts the highly asymmetrical distribution of vital rights and obligations based on nationality. Some types of national citizenship provide degrees of freedom and opportunities out of reach of less fortunate citizenries. While the information axis connects people, the state axis sets up barriers between them. This schism forms the point of departure for our investigations. We explore how conditions formed by waves of global information and transnational communication, on the one hand, and the limits and barriers of national borders and national citizenships, on the other, influence people's perceptions, values, opinions and actions.

In the next section we discuss the significance of the information revolution for migration in broad terms, and present some vital qualifications regarding its reach and significance. We then argue for the importance of keeping in mind the state perspective, emphasizing the power of the state to govern people's ability to move in times seemingly characterized by globalization and transnationalization. In the last part of this chapter we position the media debates over migration and argue that they reflect in broad terms two countering perspectives: one argues for the exclusion of new members of the nation state and the protection of its borders, the other argues for the inclusion and acceptance of worthy immigrants.

### **The unbound flow of information.**

The digital revolution has led scholars to employ the concept of *flow* to describe contemporary societies. Our era is held to be constructed around these flows – flows of capital, flows of information, flows of technology, of images, sounds, and symbols (Castells, 2000: 442). In a digitally connected world, streams of all kinds of information – political

discourse, scientific research, corporate data, personal communication and media entertainment – circulate around the world at a speed unimaginable even a decade ago (Thussu, 2007). The proliferation of satellite and cable television, and online networks, enabled by the availability of increasingly-sophisticated and affordable digital technologies, have transformed global, regional, and national media landscapes. People are exposed to the messages and images of dominant global mass media on an unprecedented scale. Transmitted images may be an important source of information for potential migrants. Images of wealth, and the free and relaxed lifestyle in the ‘West’ or in the ‘North’ are commonplace, and the constancy of these images in global media – in films, television, magazines and advertisements – tends to reinforce their messages (Appadurai, 1990, 1996; King & Wood, 2001). People can now follow the local, national or regional mass media from different parts of the world, no matter where they are themselves located. In that way they can stay up to date on the conditions in their home communities and the countries where they used to live. Moreover, new technology, such as mobile phones and the Internet, has not only transformed the reach of the mass media, *personal* communication between migrants and their original networks has also fundamentally broadened the scope of available information (Mainsah, 2009).

Our argument is that, in an interconnected world filled to the brim with information, what we have called the flow perspective might be too broad and superficial, overestimating what type of knowledge people possess, and what type of information they actually have access to, understand and share with each other. In order to better understand how the abundance of information in the today’s world influences people’s motivation to emigrate, we wish to qualify and specify the type of information that is actually, and with ease, spread to most people. The first qualification is that language barriers, as well as literacy in particular and education in general, still limit what type of information people can make use of. For very many, their mother tongue or regional language(s) define their access to information. Education and literacy are crucial. Moreover, access to a computer with Internet access is by no means universal; many people are still not digitally connected (Thussu, 2007) .

The second qualification is that, independent of language and literacy, some forms of information spread more easily than other types. It is a fact that the dominant messages of the mass media are of a certain nature, favouring the simple, the unambiguous, the dramatic, clear-cut morality, and one-dimensional conflict; rather than the complex, detailed and laborious propositions (Thorbjørnsrud, Figenschou, & Ihlen, 2012). Moreover, images (still and live) and the sounds of music, spread in a way that written complex texts do not. Last, but not least, fiction is powerful, employing archetypical and captivating stories envisioning values and lifestyles in an alluring manner.

Not only are certain types of information more easily spread through the *mass media* than others, the same applies for personal communication. The ways most people explain, justify and recount their experiences to others do not take the form of intricate accounts shedding light on all the different factors, coincidences and incremental causes that finally lead them to where they are today. Rather, we make sense of the world through personal narratives – stories – highlighting what has happened to us in a way that both simplifies and provides rationalization and moral arguments for our actions (Tilly, 2006). These types of narratives will seldom do justice to the complex realities and premises of contemporary societies.

The governance of migration in the world today is built on a complex set of principles, regulations and practices. It is developed from conflicting moral and judicial arguments based

on international conventions, *realpolitik*, and the sovereignty of the nation states (Brochmann & Kjeldstadli, 2008). The assertion that incremental changes in the policies, practices and premises of these systems will reach people in distant places far away and influence their perceptions and decisions in a coherent way is definitely open to investigation. Technology enhances enormously the spread of information, connects people and exposes them to messages and images; but what peoples' motivation for migrating actually are, what their sources of information are, and what arguments they evoke regarding the governance of migration is, nevertheless, an empirical question to which we seek new answers in this project.

### **Transnationalism vs. the state as the primary definer**

The means of communication today is not only of a text-based and symbolic type. To an unprecedented scale, people are on the move in the world today; they physically resettle in new countries, while staying in contact and travelling between their new home and their original networks and countries of origin. This type of diverse belongings and flexible lifestyles led in the 1990s to the call to move away from a narrow, nation-state-centred focus on immigrant integration: migration should no longer be seen as a one-way movement from the sending area to the host society, but more as a back-and-forth or circular movement of people, goods, symbols and ideas (Georgiou & Silverstone, 2007). A central assumption was that migrants' lives cut across national boundaries and link migrant communities with communities in their country of origin. (Gran, 2008; Koser & Al-Ali, 2002; Schiller, Basch, & Blanc-Szanton, 1992). To shake off the role of the national and the nation states, and in an attempt to determine what was actually new about globalization, a range of concepts such as the "post national" (Soysal, 1994), "flexible citizenship" (Ong, 1999) "cosmopolitanism" (Linklater, 1998), "cultural citizenship" (Rosaldo, 1994) "creolized cultures" (Hannerz, 1996) "ethnoscapes" (Appadurai, 1996) and "global citizenship" (Dower, 2003) were introduced.

The perspectives arguing for a change of focus away from the nation state in favour of a broader transnational or global perspective have recently been criticized for underestimating the degree to which most people actually stay immobile within territories defined by the nation state. It is exactly their nationality and the type of national citizenship they possess that is the determinant of their ability to move into, out of, or across various national, international and sometimes even sub-national spaces (De Genova & Peutz, 2010; Peutz, 2010). The intensified focus on return policies and the increase in number of deportations in many countries accentuates the vital role of the nation state in determining peoples' ability to take part – physically – in a transnational or global mode of life.

In this light, the discussion around transnationalism has come to argue that it is necessary to distinguish between a narrow elite of immigrants who are actually able to travel across borders on a regular basis, and a broader group of people who are not physically crossing borders but are nevertheless affected by the globalization of information and the transnational lives of those who are entitled to it through their citizenship and resources (Faist, 2000; Guarnizo, Portes, & Haller, 2003; Itzigsohn, Cabral, Medina, & Vazquez, 1999; Kivisto, 2001; Koser & Al-Ali, 2002; Levitt, 2001; Portes, Guarnizo, & Landholt, 1999). We have provided some caveats about the perspective of the flow of information and pointed to some qualifying factors regarding the reach, substance and function of modern communication flows. This is not to say that we do not recognize its revolutionary transformatory power in connecting the world and its inhabitants, accentuating the deep split between a free flow of

information and highly restricted physical movements of people. The flow of information exists in parallel with strict immigration policies, new types of regional and national border controls and the deportation of people who are defined as ‘illegal’, unwanted and sent back to where their citizenship defines their belonging to be.

### **The media discourse on irregular migration**

The coverage of irregular immigration in the Western media, can, in very broad terms, be regarded as a two-sided debate involving arguments for exclusion and control on the one hand and inclusion and individual protection on the other. Implicitly or explicitly, the media debate lays bare the tension between principles of universal human rights and values on the one hand and the legitimacy of the regulatory regimes of nation states, restricting the access to welfare resources for non-citizens on the other.

In the type of coverage arguing for the need of stricter control, irregular immigrants are predominantly framed as *villains* or criminals threatening the established majority culture and societal order. The focus on the need for control and exclusion seems to have magnified in the recent years. In many Western countries, migrants are regarded “as an embodiment of danger” threatening the sustainability of the welfare state (Greenberg & Hier, 2001, p. 563). In the US, the debate seems largely dominated by the issue of illegal immigrants and studies have shown how this issue is linked to crime to the extent that immigrants are depicted as “*pathologically lawless*” [original emphasis] (Kim, Carvalho, Davis, & Mullins, 2011, p. 311). In Europe, it has been argued that ‘a generally narrow range of communitarian and cosmopolitan arguments are employed by the press’ (Balabanova & Balch, 2010, p. 382).

In line with this overall trend, it is demonstrated that whereas the Norwegian press during the 1990s focused on refugees and asylum seekers as victims deserving protection, contesting what was framed as a too-strict immigration policy, the press since 2000 increasingly focuses on illegal immigration as a crime and on the need for immigration control (Lindstad & Fjeldstad, 2005). In some cases, the role of the press towards the immigration authorities changed fundamentally, with parts of it now criticizing the government for pursuing an over soft immigration policy, and the bureaucracy for being too lax (Brochmann & Kjeldstadli, 2008).

It should, however, be noticed that this development is not uniform: through different frames indirectly arguing for inclusion, migrants are also been portrayed as *victims* or *heroes* with dramatic destinies, escaping hardship in their countries of origin, as suffering victims of racism and xenophobia in their new countries; and as individuals contributing positively to their new local societies (Benson, 2009; Cottle, 2000; Eide & Simonsen, 2007; Hafez, 2000; Hervik, 1999; Lindstad & Fjeldstad, 2005; Malik, 2002; Van Dijk, 1993). This type of coverage will often have an emotional focus, telling the stories of well-integrated people with a high standing in their new local communities and a high emotional appeal, playing on identification and cultural resonance. The arguments conveyed in these stories relate mostly to the individuals in focus, and do not attend to a need for general changes in Norwegian immigration policies.

With regard to the existence and nature of the public debate and news discourse on irregular migration in sending countries of emigrants, the literature is conspicuously silent (one exception is Wu, Zeng, & Liu (2012) on the coverage of irregular emigration in Chinese news). Aware of the general traits of the Western coverage of migration, we therefore ask

how migration is discussed and understood in the news media at “the other end”, in a region characterized by large-scale migration to Europe and other Western countries. The central characteristics of this coverage are compared to the dominant traits of the Western and Norwegian coverage of irregular immigration. The possible interactions and exchange between the Western/European discourse and the Kurdish discourse are discussed. In particular, we explore what types of normative frames and arguments are evoked in the Kurdish news discourse as compared with the dominant Western pool of normative arguments.



### 3. Background

The following sections give an overview of the historical, political and social context for the analysis later in the report. There is also a brief background on Kurdish media and migration in Iraqi Kurdistan and Norway.

#### **Historical and political context**

This report focuses mainly on migration from a specific part of Iraq, namely the three Northern provinces Duhok, Erbil and Sulaimaniyah. The majority of the population of 4-5 million people living in this area consists of ethnic Kurds, although small minorities of Turkmens, Assyrians and Arabs also live there. Often referred to as Northern Iraq, people there mostly refer to the area as Kurdistan Iraq or Iraqi Kurdistan. In administrative terms, the area is referred to as the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), an autonomous region with a regional government within the federal Iraqi state.

In the 1920s, the former Ottoman province, the Mosul Vilayet – mostly corresponding to present day Iraqi Kurdistan – was assigned to the newly-established state of Iraq under British mandate (McDowall, 2000). Since then, consecutive Kurdish movements have largely opposed central administration from Baghdad. From the 1960s the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) headed by Mullah Mustafa Barzani engaged the central government in armed conflict. From 1975 the Iraqi Government started campaigns to control the recruitment to the Kurdish nationalist movement by a systematic destruction of the Kurdish countryside. This culminated in 1988, in the Anfal campaigns when both chemical and conventional weapons were used. An estimated 182,000 civilians disappeared. Simultaneously, from the 1970s, the government of Iraq carried out Arabization campaigns aimed at tipping the demographic balance by expelling Kurds and Turkmens and encouraging Arabs to move into urban and rural areas of, especially, the oil rich province of Kirkuk, but also Diala and Mosul. Arabization continued up until the US-initiated regime change in 2003.

The autonomous region in the north of Iraq was established as a consequence of the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990. When Iraqi forces were defeated in Kuwait in 1991, a popular uprising broke out in the Kurdish region. Saddam Hussein's attempt to crush the uprising created a humanitarian crisis that eventually led to international intervention. The UN announced a 'safe haven' and a US-led coalition established a no-fly zone. This eventually led to the central government withdrawing its troops and administration from the Kurdish north at the end of October 1991 and, at the same time, imposing an economic blockade on the region.

General elections were held in the three Kurdish provinces of Duhok, Erbil and Sulaimaniyah in May 1992. The Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) headed by Masoud Barzani, and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) headed by Jalal Talabani, emerged as the main winners with an almost equal outcome, and the Kurdistan Regional Government was formed, with a parliament in Erbil. However, old rivalries soon escalated into new conflicts and a civil war between the two major Kurdish parties, the PUK and the KDP, haunted the region between 1994 and 1998. This conflict effectively partitioned the Kurdish region into two separate administrations, a situation that continued until after the Iraqi elections in 2005.

As the closest allies of the US in Iraq, the Kurds played a central role when the Ba'th regime was overthrown in 2003 and have continued to play a significant role in post-Saddam Iraqi politics as an important political force to balance the Shi'a-dominated new political order. In the new Iraqi constitution, the Kurdistan region is acknowledged as a region with its own government within a federal Iraq. After the 2005 national elections, the PUK leader Jalal Talabani was appointed president of Iraq, while Masoud Barzani from the KDP became president of the Kurdistan region.

Despite the fact that the Kurdish region has been the most peaceful and economically-prosperous region in post-Saddam Iraq, there is continual tension between the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) and the central Government of Iraq (GOI). A central part of this conflict has been over disputed areas in provinces bordering the KRG that was subject to the Arabization campaigns during Saddam Hussein's rule – areas that are both claimed by the KRG and the GOI. While the KDP and PUK have continued to be the major political forces in the Kurdish region, they have been accused of corruption, clientalism and oppression of free media. Ahead of the regional elections in 2009 a new political opposition emerged. The Change List (*Goran*) challenged the traditional Kurdish parties, but was not able to change the power balance dramatically.

In February 2011 a wave of protests broke out in Iraqi Kurdistan, with its centre in Sulaimaniyah. Inspired by the Arab Spring in neighbouring countries, popular protests against the lack of electricity and demand for jobs soon turned into harsh criticism of the government for its lack of transparency, corruption and nepotism. The atmosphere soon turned very tense as the authorities responded with armed force against the protesters. On the first day of the protests, security forces of the KDP in Sulaimaniyah opened machine gun fire on stone-throwing youths. At least 10 people, mostly youths, were killed and dozens injured during the two months the protests lasted. Kurdish media, reporting on the disproportionate use of force by the government against the protesters, also became targets: media institutions were attacked, even burned down, and journalists threatened and severely beaten up. The protests and the Kurdish Government's reaction attracted little international attention, probably because events were unfolding on a much bigger scale in Egypt and Libya at the same time.

### **Social context: The legacy of tribalism**

Traditionally, Kurdish society has been organized into tribes, often subdivided in clans (Bruinessen, 1992). The tribes are patrilineal, and there was traditionally a strong social pressure to marry within the lineage. Although the tribal system partly declined in the last part of the twentieth century, marriages between close kin are still common (COSIT, 2005; Gran, 2008). Marriage as a way of settling conflicts or strengthening ties between families has also been part of tribal society. Although marriage practices are changing, many youths in Iraqi Kurdistan still experience strong social pressure to marry someone chosen by their family. Forced marriage is a serious problem for an unknown number of Kurdish youths, both in Iraq and in the Diaspora.

Closely linked to the tribal system is the concept of honour. Honour in this context is a collective social capital that is achieved through courage, generosity and control of female sexuality (Bruinessen, 2003). Honour is a collective entity that everyone has a part in and is obliged to defend. Most interesting in this context is the type of honour that is linked to the female body, most significantly to virginity before marriage and chaste behaviour throughout

the life cycle. It is the duty of men to look after the chastity of the women in their family. It is expected of men to control women and to sanction breaches of norms related to chastity. If the breaches are considered grave, killing a female family member to re-establish honour may be expected. Because of this, teenage girls and young women are particularly vulnerable to rumours questioning their honourable behaviour. Although claims to 'honour' are no longer a mitigating circumstance in courts in Iraqi Kurdistan, honour-related crime is still a significant problem. However, as discussed in Gran (2008), reliable statistics on honour killings do not exist and the figures given vary considerably.

Despite the decline of the tribal system, gender-based violence is still a well-known and documented problem in Iraqi Kurdistan (Gran, 2008). As a consequence of decades of war and conflict and the lack of effective government, traditional patriarchal power structures were partly strengthened and to some extent reinforced in the 1990s. Later, rapid societal change from a traditional rural society into a modern urban society, often fuelled by influences from Kurdish migrants living in Western countries, challenged family structure and gender values, often leading to reactions from traditional tribal and religious power holders in order to regain control.

Although there are huge differences in how different families and parts of society relate to gender norms – both liberal elements and reactionary tendencies are clearly visible in Kurdistan today – everyone is affected by this in one way or another. Even women from liberal families may behave conservatively in public in order to avoid rumours and to protect their reputation. Young people have to keep a fine balance between obeying the traditional norms and adapting a lifestyle and behaviour more associated with Western youth culture. Having relationships before marriage is generally not accepted and has to be hidden, and pre-marital sex is taboo.

Another legacy of the tribal system is to be found in the prevalence of nepotism in all parts of Kurdish society. Most resources, both political and economical power, have been controlled by people linked to the two dominant political parties: the KDP and the PUK. A common criticism of the Kurdish Government by the opposition is that they have distributed power positions based on party affiliation as payback for loyalty during decades of guerrilla warfare, or simply based on family or kinship relations with the ruling families of the two parties. Not only government jobs and public positions but also business contracts are said to be distributed according to the same principals.

### **Economic development**

The economy in the Kurdistan region has been relatively well developed compared to the rest of Iraq after 2003. This has also led to a significant improvement in living conditions for large parts of the population. However, lack of transparency and any reliable statistics makes it hard to measure actual development and distribution of wealth.

The economy relies heavily on oil revenues. The Kurdistan region receives 17 percent of revenues from oil production in all of Iraq. The government has become the major employer and public sector employment has expanded unprecedentedly in recent years. Some sources in opposition parties and independent media estimate that more than 70 percent of the KRG budget is used to pay public sector salaries.

Extractive industries, in particular the petroleum sector, have the potential of becoming a major driver for economic growth in Iraqi Kurdistan. However, due to negligence of the Kurdistan region by the previous regime, explorations of the reserves in the region have just recently started. DNO (Det norske oljeselskap) was the first foreign oil company to start explorations in Iraqi Kurdistan after the fall of the Baath regime. Disagreements between the Kurdistan Regional Government and the Government of Iraq over a 2007 draft hydrocarbon law, including major disputes over the right to sign contracts with foreign oil companies and distribution of revenues from the newly discovered reserves in the region, have slowed down the development of the extractive industries.

The construction industry has been booming in later years, and has been a major contributor to economic development and job creation in the private sector. The agricultural sector in Iraqi Kurdistan has been hampered by decades of conflict and negligence by the government. Almost all basic staples are imported, something that puts Kurdistan in a dependency relation to neighboring countries. Relatively open borders and no quality control have resulted in a market for substandard and often contaminated goods.

### **History and background of Kurdish media**

The first Kurdish newspaper, *Kurdistan*, was published in 1898 in Cairo, Egypt, by Miqdad Madhat Badirkhan (KurdishMedia.com, 2008). It emerged during the last decades of the Ottoman Empire. Compared to other nationalities within the empire, Kurdish journalism started quite late. Some argue this late manifestation was due to the late development of political awareness among Kurdish elites compared to the elites of other ethnic groups in the vast Empire (The Kurdish Globe, 2010).

As a disadvantaged and suppressed minority – whose homeland has been divided among the countries of Iraq, Turkey, Iran and Syria – Kurds have always faced serious restrictions in using their own language or expressing their cultural identity. Kurdish-language publications and media have long been severely cracked down upon by the governments that rule the Kurds. This has meant that many of the Kurdish publications were printed in exile, such as *Kurdistan* (The Kurdish Globe, 2010). The Kurdish media have flourished in periods when Kurds enjoyed freedom from the control of the states that occupy their homeland. That was the case during the short-lived Kurdistan Republic in Mahabad, Iran, in 1946 (Bejan, 2012).

Kurdish media have since 1991 prospered and developed in Iraqi Kurdistan on a scale never experienced by the Kurds in Turkey, Syria or Iran, although dominated by the region's two major parties, the PUK and the KDP.

The media scene in the Kurdistan Region is very diverse. There are over 800 printed media outlets and over 100 radio and television stations. Most of them are directly or indirectly funded by a political party (Rudaw, 2010). A study of Iraqi media in 2012 by the International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX) and D3 Systems shows that television is the medium of choice for Kurds. According to the study, 96 percent of the people surveyed from Erbil, Dohuk, Sulaimani and Kirkuk provinces (i.e. the Kurdistan Region plus the Kurdish-dominated Kirkuk Province) said they watch television for news on a weekly basis. Interestingly, 63 percent of the respondents said they watch more than 45 minutes of news per day. And 26 percent of those surveyed said they read a newspaper on a weekly basis. The study also showed that 30 percent of the people in northern Iraq use web to access news

(IREX, 2011).<sup>1</sup> In line with a global trend of decline of print media, around 40 Kurdish print publications have reportedly gone out of print in the first half of 2012 (Niqash, 2012).

Some of the media outlets in Kurdistan describe themselves as private or independent, although officials from the ruling parties and their media would dispute that. They often accuse the self-described 'independent' media of siding with the opposition and constantly publishing negative stories about the Government (Hama-Saeed, 2010).

Despite international recognition of relatively-free expression and tolerance in Kurdistan, in the recent years there has been increasing criticism about press freedom conditions and the treatment of journalists by authorities. Some of the leading politicians and political parties have filed lawsuits against journalists and media outlets demanding hefty fines. In one case, the KDP demanded \$1 billion in damages from Rozhnama, a major newspaper currently out of print owned by opposition party Gorran. The KDP alleged that Rozhnama had defamed it when it published a story about Kurdistan's oil being sold to Iran illegally by the authorities (Rubin, 2010).

In 2008, the Kurdistan Parliament passed a press law that was described as highly progressive by regional standards (IPS, 2007). It prohibits the Government from shutting down newspapers and media outlets and asserts that journalists should not be jailed for doing their work (Niqash, 2008). But while the law seems protective of journalists, the reality on the ground has been significantly different. In a report published by Metro Center for the Defense of Journalists, the organization documented over 350 violations and attacks against journalists and media outlets in the Kurdistan Region. That was seen as 'an escalation of aggressive incidents against journalists' in Kurdistan. In February and April 2011, 200 violations against journalists were registered. During those two months, Sulaimaniya province witnessed widespread protests that left around ten people dead and dozens injured (IMS, 2012).

Journalists complain that members of security forces frequently harass them without being held accountable (Niqash, 2010). In May 2010, a Kurdish journalist, Sardasht Osman, was abducted in the Kurdish capital Erbil and his dead body was dumped on the streets of the nearby, volatile city of Mosul. Although a government report blamed an extremist Islamist organization for killing him, his family and the press community have refused to believe the narrative (CPJ, 2010).

The France-based Reporters Without Borders (RSF) has said that Iraq's rank in the press freedom index in 2011 dropped from 130 to 152. The ranking also includes Kurdistan (IMS, 2012).

Kurdish authorities accuse the media of demonstrating poor professional and ethical standards. Some critics also say that some of the local journalists more often than not practice "yellow journalism" and write stories based on 'assumption' without 'verifying' them (Hama-Saeed, 2010). The situation for the media can be best described as an ongoing struggle. It mostly resembles a 'half full, half empty glass' where there are frequent violations and also quite a significant margin of freedom.

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<sup>1</sup> For the study, 3,502 Iraqis across all provinces were surveyed, of which 16 per cent were from the four provinces mentioned above and 13 per cent were from the Kurdistan Region proper. The margin of error was +/- 1.66 per cent (IREX & D3 Systems, 2012).

With Kurdish authorities often invoking the rhetoric of democracy in their public statements, some have been calling on them to match up to their rhetoric. In a statement published by the New York-based Human Rights Watch, the organization's Middle East Director Sarah Leah Whitson said, 'The Kurdistan Regional Government promised a new era of freedom for Iraqi Kurds, but it seems no more respectful of Kurdish rights to free speech than the government that preceded it. (...) In a time when the Middle East is erupting in demands to end repression, the Kurdish authorities are trying to stifle and intimidate critical journalism' (Human Rights Watch, 2011).

## Migration

According to estimates from the UNHCR, approximately 1.4 million Iraqi refugees were residing outside Iraq, and approximately 1.3 million people were internally displaced inside Iraq (IDPs) as of January 2012.<sup>2</sup> In addition to this are labour migrants and people who have left the country through family migration. As Iraqi Kurds are not recognized in statistics, it is not possible to say anything specific about migration figures for this group. However, according to a survey from 2004, 22 per cent of the population in Iraqi Kurdistan had close relatives living abroad (COSIT, 2005, p. 56). This is an indicator that migration is a phenomenon that has affected a large part of the population.

Emigration from Iraqi Kurdistan in the decades before the establishment of the autonomous region in 1991 consisted mainly of people being expelled or fleeing persecution by Saddam Hussein's Baath regime, people going abroad to study, or families with youths escaping from military service during the Iran-Iraq war between 1980 and 1988. In the 1970s, almost half a million Iraqi Shiite Kurds were expelled by the Baath regime and fled to Iran. Later, in the 1980s, it was especially the Anfal campaign in 1988 that produced many internally-displaced people and refugees.

When Saddam Hussein initially tried to crush the Kurdish uprising in 1991, an estimated 1.5 million people fled to Turkey and Iran (McDowall, 2000, p. 373). After the establishment of the 'Safe Haven' most of them returned. However, some were also accepted as refugees by the UNCHR and resettled in third countries, Norway amongst others.

The establishment of the semi-autonomous region in Iraqi Kurdistan in 1991 and the regional elections held a year later created an atmosphere of hope and patriotism, despite the severe humanitarian crisis. It was with the outbreak of the civil war between the KDP and PUK in 1994 that people first started leaving the region in larger numbers. The main group to leave initially was the educated, urban middle classes. A whole new business of smuggling and corrupt officials issuing passports and exit visas emerged. According to figures from the UNHCR, 12,937 Iraqis were registered as applicants for asylum in industrialized countries in 1994. In 1995 the number of new applicants was 18,672, in 1996 the number rose to 27,139, and then there was a significant jump in 1997 to 43,187, a level that remained more or less stable in the following years (UNHCR, 2004, p. 124). While these figures are for all Iraqis, it can be assumed that a large proportion of them came from the Kurdish region. One should also calculate a one or two years delay for many from when they left Iraq until they sought asylum, because many stayed for a while in transit countries like Turkey or Greece in order to

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<sup>2</sup> According to UNCHR's country profile on Iraq: <http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49e486426.html#> (accessed 29.08.2012)

work and earn enough money to continue the journey. Since the 1990s, family migration is another type of migration that has contributed to this development.

The Kurdish economy had already started growing before the toppling of the Baath regime in 2003, and the region has remained politically stable, relatively secure and almost untouched by the violence and unrest that has affected the rest of Iraq. Despite this, people still continued migrating to Europe and elsewhere after 2003. Reasons for this will be discussed later in this report. However, seeking a better life, especially among those who have not benefitted from the new economic wealth in the region because of lack of contacts and access to patronage networks, is a plausible explanation for parts of this continued flow of migrants from the region. The decrease in asylum seekers from Iraqi Kurdistan in the last few years must, nevertheless, be partly attributable to the opportunities within the new flourishing economy as well as the tightening of migration policies in Western countries, including the forced return of failed asylum seekers.

Although emigration from Iraqi Kurdistan is the main focus of this report, it should be mentioned that the area itself is also a destination for immigrants from elsewhere. Already, before the toppling of the Baath regime, people from other parts of Iraq sought refuge in Kurdistan when fleeing Saddam Hussein's regime. Since 2003 the Kurdistan region has received internally-displaced people (IDPs) from other parts of Iraq, especially Christians who have fled violence and persecution in cities like Baghdad and Mosul. Shelling of the border areas in the KRG by Turkey and Iran – targeting PKK and other Kurdish guerrillas – has also led to internal displacement of villagers from these areas inside the KRG. In 2011-2012, refugees fleeing the escalating crisis in Syria also sought refuge in the KRG.

Labour immigration into the flourishing Kurdistan region of Iraq is a later addition to the migration history of this area. Ethiopians, Filipinos, Nepalese, Chinese and Egyptians – to mention some – are increasingly seeking opportunities in hotels and restaurants, as construction workers, or as cleaners and maids in private homes. In addition, businessmen and contractors from neighbouring Turkey, Iran and Lebanon, as well as European countries, are increasingly looking for opportunities within the strong Kurdish economy.

### **Migration from Iraqi Kurdistan to Norway**

The number of Iraqi asylum applicants to Norway in the four-year period from 1993 to 1997 was 747; in the next four years, 1998–2002, the number of new applicants rose to 8815 (UNHCR, 2004, p. 419). As the following tables show, Iraqi asylum seekers have continued to come to Norway since the toppling of the Baath regime in 2003, with a significant decrease, however, from 2011. Again, these are figures for all Iraqis, not only people from Iraqi Kurdistan.

Table 1: Iraqi asylum seekers to Norway 2006-31/07/2012 <sup>3</sup>

Categories	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	31/07/12	Total
Asylum	16	54	113	145	137	89	32	586
Other protection / humanitarian grounds <sup>4</sup>	274	469	452	202	239	56	17	1709
Rejected <sup>5</sup>	233	395	942	1559	752	203	57	4141
Dublin II Regulations <sup>6</sup>	114	215	216	335	143	97	37	1157
Withdrawn/Dropped <sup>7</sup>	114	83	121	188	140	65	28	739
Other <sup>8</sup>	0	2	0	20	6	2	0	30
<b>Total</b>	<b>751</b>	<b>1218</b>	<b>1844</b>	<b>2449</b>	<b>1417</b>	<b>512</b>	<b>171</b>	<b>8362</b>

Iraqi Kurds have played a significant role in the Norwegian migration debate and, indirectly, in Norwegian migration politics since 2000. With the strong increase in asylum seekers from Iraqi Kurdistan at the end of the 1990s, a special type of protection regime was implemented and soon abandoned, but its impact is still notable. A group of around 2,000 Iraqi Kurds who arrived in Norway between 1998 and 2000 was granted temporary protection for a year, without the right to family reunification. This is, in Norwegian, referred to as MUF. The full story with its political implications falls outside the scope of this report. However, the practice was abandoned, and different governments and ministers have changed the policies on how to deal with the group of people already in Norway who, at the time, could not be returned to Iraq. While probably half of the original group left Norway during the next 10 years, many remained and went through years of uncertainty, with work permissions being redrawn and decisions reversed. Final decisions in the last cases were made in 2011.

The migration authorities in Norway have had a more-or-less unchanged policy and practice towards asylum seekers from Iraqi Kurdistan since 2000. Just a few per cent have been granted asylum or protection. People granted protection have mostly had asylum claims related to honour crimes and forced marriage. In addition, a small number of journalists, political activists and authors who have criticized and been persecuted by the authorities have

<sup>3</sup> UDI homepage, available at <http://www.udi.no/Oversiktsider/Statistikk-og-analyse/Statistikk-/Asyl/Asylvedtak-fordelt-pa-statsborgerskap-og-arstall/>, <http://www.udi.no/Oversiktsider/Statistikk-og-analyse/Statistikk-/Ars--og-periodestatistikk/Tall-og-fakta-2007/> and <http://www.udi.no/Oversiktsider/Statistikk-og-analyse/Statistikk-/Ars--og-periodestatistikk/Tall-og-fakta-2006/> (accessed 13.08.2012).

<sup>4</sup> Includes applicants that has been granted a residence permit on grounds of strong humanitarian considerations or connection to the country, as well as applicants that do not come under the UN Refugee Convention but who nevertheless have a background similar to a refugee, and therefore have been granted a residence permit.

<sup>5</sup> Includes applicants whose application for protection have not been granted, as well as applicants that have residence in safe third country, or rejection pursuant to Nordic Passport Convention; cf. Section 17-af of the Immigration Act.

<sup>6</sup> Applicants who have received a decision pursuant to the Dublin II Convention.

<sup>7</sup> When cases have been dropped. The reason for such a decision may be that the applicant has disappeared or that the application is withdrawn.

<sup>8</sup> Includes applicants who have been granted a residence permit due to the 15-month rule, and unaccompanied minor asylum seekers who have been granted a temporary residence permit until they turn 18.

been given protection. Although many of the asylum claims have been related to honour crimes, it is only in a few cases that the authorities have found the claims reliable. While the policy practice and rate of acceptance has been higher for asylum seekers from other parts of Iraq, checking the reliability in the claims of where people come from has constituted a significant part of the work in asylum cases. Language tests have been used to determine where people come from, in addition to checking authenticity of ID documents. Around 40 percent of Iraqi ID documents are allegedly forged, according to Norwegian migration authorities.

During the first half of 2008, and especially during the summer months, there was a significant increase in asylum arrivals in Norway. Iraqis were among the top five groups. It has been suggested that the increase in Iraqi asylum seekers to Norway in this period may be associated with restrictions in Swedish asylum policies (Brekke & Five Aarset, 2009). In response to the surge in arrivals in 2008, and in response to criticism from the opposition of having lost control of the immigration policy, the Norwegian Government announced at the beginning of September 2008 a list of 13 restrictive measures, amongst others a fast-track policy for groups with high rejection rates. Whether or not this announcement of restrictive measures in the migration policy achieved the intended effect is not clear, as discussed by Brekke & Five Aarset (2009). Interesting, however, is that the announcement of the measures seems to have been based on a belief that communicating restrictions in asylum policies will have more or less immediate effect on arrivals.

Amongst the 13 measures was also the intention to assess the possibility of entering into a return agreement with Iraqi authorities. It was believed that, with the prospect of forced returns, more people would be motivated to return voluntarily. Such an agreement was entered into in May 2009. This enabled Norway to forcibly return to Iraq asylum seekers with final rejections.<sup>9</sup> In December 2009, based on this agreement, the first 30 Iraqis were deported to Baghdad airport (Strand, Bendixsen, Paasche, & Schultz, 2011, p. 18). In 2010, another 140 Iraqis were deported and in 2011 a total of 234 (see table 2 below).

Over the years, different governments have tried to motivate failed asylum seekers to return voluntarily to their country of origin by giving cash grants. In 2008, Norwegian authorities established a comprehensive return programme for Iraqis called the Information, Return, and Reintegration of Iraqi Nationals to Iraq (IRRINI). The International Organization for Migration (IOM) has had the main responsibility for implementing the programme. An evaluation of the IRRINI programme from 2011 gives a partly positive verdict on the programme, especially in terms of giving failed Iraqi asylum seekers a dignified alternative to forced return (CMI 2011). Many other European countries have, or have had, similar return programmes for rejected Iraqi asylum seekers: amongst others, France, Belgium, Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden, Switzerland and the UK (Strand et al., 2011, p. 20).

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<sup>9</sup> Press release from the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs:  
[http://www.regjeringen.no/nb/dep/ud/presesenter/pressemeldinger/2009/irak\\_avtale.html?id=562738](http://www.regjeringen.no/nb/dep/ud/presesenter/pressemeldinger/2009/irak_avtale.html?id=562738) (accessed 10.08.2012).

Table 2: Return to Iraq 2006 to 31/07/2012<sup>10</sup>

Categories	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	31/07/12	Total
Forced returns <sup>11</sup>	12	14	20	63	140	234	56	539
Voluntary returns <sup>12</sup>	28	39	83	374	495	531	Missing	1550

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<sup>10</sup> PU (International Police Immigration Service, Norway) homepage, available at [https://www.politi.no/politiets\\_utlendingstenhet/statistikk/aktuell\\_statistikk/](https://www.politi.no/politiets_utlendingstenhet/statistikk/aktuell_statistikk/) (accessed 14.08.2012) and IOM homepage, available at [http://www.iom.no/publications\\_no.htm](http://www.iom.no/publications_no.htm) (accessed 14.08.2012)

<sup>11</sup> Include forced returns of people who have had their application for asylum rejected, as well as forced returns of people that have been expelled from Norway.

<sup>12</sup> Up until 2009 the figures are taken from PU. From 2010 the figures are taken from IOM.

## 4. Research Methodology

The methodological design for this project is derived from our research questions and theoretical framework. We build our analysis of two main types of data pools: Media texts and interview data. The first data pool includes data from a content analysis of the media coverage of migration in Iraqi Kurdish newspapers and television and data from a content analysis of Norwegian news on immigration. The second pool includes two types of interview data. The first are opinions and stories conveyed by people of Kurdish origin with different types of migration experiences. The second subsumes elite interviews with journalists, editors and their key sources: representatives from NGOs and the regional Kurdish Government in Iraqi Kurdistan. Additionally we rely on new survey data, reviews of documents and statistics describing overall migration and return patterns from Iraq to Norway and Europe, and literature on media, migration and return policies in general.

This report focuses in particular on the discourse of *irregular* migration and the return and repatriation of irregular migrants to Iraqi Kurdistan. Irregular emigrants in this context are defined as those who have left or intend to leave Kurdistan unauthorized or undocumented to apply for asylum in Europe or other Western countries. We choose throughout the report to refer to this type of migration as *irregular* and not “illegal”. We avoid the term illegal since it connotes to crime and illegitimacy without paying justice to the basic right to flee a country and to seek asylum in a safe place.

We have further chosen to avoid the term “voluntary return” to describe the return of people who come back to Iraq after they have had their asylum application rejected and then agreed to sign an agreement of return within different types of assisted return programs organized by IOM. We find, in concordance with an earlier study (Strand et al. 2011), that the informants in general do not regard this type of repatriation as optional. Moreover, we find that people do not distinguish clearly between deportations and IOM-assisted returns. One of our central conclusions is that “true” voluntary returns, that is the return of people possessing a European citizenship, is regarded in a totally different way than the return of people assisted by IOM. When we use the word voluntary we describe the first phenomenon, when we refer to government assisted returns we use the term “mandatory”.

### Research ethics

To follow a strict research ethic has been vital in this project. We interview particularly vulnerable groups of people both in Norway and Iraq, hence, it has been paramount to secure informed consent and full anonymity. The methodology, interview forms and information templates, were registered with, and approved by NSD. The same applies for the procedures for data handling and data storage. Informed consent was obtained from all informants prior to any interview. Storage procedures ensured that private information was kept separate from the interview transcripts (with a code for identification) and that sound recorded files were deleted.

We did in particular stress the need to inform the informants about the purpose of the research project, that we operated independently of Norwegian or Kurdish Authorities, and that only the research team would have access to the raw data. We furthermore paid close attention to

the central tenet of research ethics to protect informants from any harm caused by the research. We carefully assessed the possible impact of the information we got access to when reporting the results (NESH 2006).

### **Qualitative interview data**

The interview data consists of semi-structured qualitative interviews. The most of them were recorded and transcribed in full. When recording was not possible, or when the informant preferred it, we took notes that were later typed.

A total of 48 informants participated in this study. We accessed two groups of informants. The first group consisted of people of a Kurdish Iraqi background with different types of migration experience in Norway and Iraqi Kurdistan. We included people with varied types of migration experiences, citizenship and legal status. 12 informants participated in Norway and 24 informants participated in Iraqi Kurdistan. The second group of informants participated because of their professional position as journalists and editors, or because of their role as key sources in the Kurdish news (see Appendix II for complete lists of informants).

### ***Informants with migration experiences in Iraqi Kurdistan***

In Iraqi Kurdistan we interviewed 24 informants, 19 men and 5 women, belonging to three different groups. The first group consisted of people who had not emigrated themselves but who had close relatives who had arrived as asylum seekers in Norway, or in a different European country and now resided there permanently. The second group included people who had emigrated to Europe as asylum seekers, received protection there, and obtained a European citizenship, but who had chosen to resettle in Iraqi Kurdistan. This applied to 5 informants, of which 4 had returned from Norway. The third and biggest group subsumed 13 informants who had applied for asylum in Europe, many of them had stayed in Europe for several years, but had finally had their application for asylum turned down. They had either gone back mandatory through return programs organized by IOM or they had been deported.

The informants in this latter group had all left Iraqi Kurdistan to go to Europe as asylum seekers in the past ten years, a majority of them in the years 2005-2008. Most of them left with only low levels of education, and many of them had dropped out of school. Within this group 9 were deported from different European countries and 1 was deported from Norway. 5 went back through return programs assisted by IOM, 3 of these returned from Norway.

The informants were recruited through personal and professional contacts. Different persons, among them local research assistants, were involved in the process, assuring that we would approach informants in different milieus. To get in contact with the better part of the people who had returned mandatory or by force from Europe we were aided by the Federation of Iraqi Refugees (IFIR) in Sulaimaniyah. The recruitment process was not straightforward. Many people were hesitant to take part, some because they suspected that the interviewer was related to the governments in the countries where they had applied for asylum. The opposite problem also occurred: Some informants hoped we could in some way help them with their cases. We had to repeat that we had no influence on European immigration policies in general or Norwegian cases in particular.

### ***Elite interviews in Iraqi Kurdistan***

The elite interviews conducted in Iraqi Kurdistan served to shed light on the media discourse on migration. We interviewed 12 informants within this group, of which 8 were journalists, and or/editors. They worked for a combination of independent and party aligned media institutions (see Appendix II B). The other informants in the elite group were representatives for Kurdish Immigration Authorities, The Federation of Iraqi Refugees (IFIR), The Independent Media Centre in Kurdistan (IMCK) and a consultant working for the global company STATT. The media professionals were recruited through personal contacts. The selection was based on the aim to represent the views from journalists working both for the party press, the opposition, and for independent media outlets. The other informants were selected either because they represented the most important sources in the Kurdish news on irregular immigration or because they could provide expert knowledge on the media situation in Iraqi Kurdistan.

### *Interviews with immigrants of Iraqi Kurdish origin in Norway*

In Norway we interviewed two main groups of immigrants. The first group were informants with a permanent residence permit, some of them with a Norwegian citizenship. The informants had arrived in Norway between 1999 and 2002. They had received individual protection or residence permits based on family reunion with a relative who had received individual protection. 4 men and 2 women were interviewed in this group. These informants were recruited by two research assistants who, independently of each other, used their network and contacts in the Kurdish community to contact people and inform them about the project.

The second group of informants interviewed in Norway subsumed people with a rejected asylum application who were not willing to return to Iraq and lived in reception centers. The Norwegian Directorate of Immigration (UDI) helped us with picking reception centers and informing the staff about our project. It was then up to the centers staff to contact relevant informants. It proved difficult to recruit informants within this group. We contacted three reception centers: In the first the director refused to assist us, in the second no one were willing to talk with us. In the last reception centers we conducted six interviews with Iraqi Kurdish informants who all had got their application for asylum rejected. They had arrived in Norway between 2008 and 2010, 3 men and 3 women were interviewed. It is likely that their situation affected their type of answers to us, as their stories were markedly different from those of the informants who had actually returned to Iraqi Kurdistan mandatory of by force.

### **Survey data**

A new survey (N=901) studying media use, transnational contact and participation in the public sphere among the ten largest minority groups in Norway supplements our qualitative data. The survey includes respondents with an Iraqi background and the findings of the survey enhance generalization of our conclusions (See Appendix III for Questionnaire).

### **The content analysis of Kurdish news on migration**

For the content analysis of Kurdish news on migration, 12 print and broadcast media outlets were selected. The outlets' editorial orientation and political affiliation were taken into consideration, the aim was to choose a diverse array of outlets.

6 major Kurdish newspapers, some of them dailies and some weeklies, were chosen. All their copies from May 1, 2011 to August 31, 2011 were thoroughly examined. The newspapers included Aso, Awene, Hawler, Kurdistani Nwe, Rozhnama and Rudaw.

4 television channels, KNN, Kurdsat, NRT and Speda, were also singled out for analysis. One major nightly newscast from each television channel was recorded from July 20, 2011 to September 10, 2011.

### *Newspapers:*

*Aso:* The newspaper was one the few daily newspapers in Iraqi Kurdistan until it was closed down in October 2011. Based in Sulaimaniya, Iraqi Kurdistan's second largest city, Aso was widely believed to be supported by the former prime minister of KRG, Dr. Barham Salih. Despite its regular support for Salih, Aso tried to provide a platform for diverse views on its pages. Aso's first edition was printed in 2004. The newspaper's circulation was 10,000 copies per day. Aso literally means Horizon in English.

*Awene:* Its first edition was printed in 2006. It was founded by the renowned Kurdish journalist Asos Hardi and a group of his friends. It is a respected newspaper often touted by many as independent and balanced. The 20-page newspaper is published once a week out of Sulaimani. The term Awene means Mirror in English. The newspaper's circulation is 4,500 copies per each edition. It claims to be independent and privately-owned without any funding from political parties.

*Hawler:* This daily is published in Kurdistan Region's capital, Erbil. The tabloid-size newspaper is close to the KDP, currently Iraqi Kurdistan's largest political party. However, it also publishes articles that are critical of the Kurdish Government. It claims to have a circulation of 26,000 copies making it Iraqi Kurdistan's largest daily and it is distributed free of charge. Hawler is the Kurdish word for the city of Erbil.

*Kurdistani Nwe:* This daily is the official mouthpiece of the PUK and has been in circulation since January 1992. Depending on whether or not its leaders run the government, the newspaper can have a more or less, critical or friendly attitude toward the KRG. It is published out of Sulaimaniya. Kurdistani Nwe means New Kurdistan.

*Rozhnama:* The newspaper was published by the Gorran Movement, Kurdistan's largest opposition party. It started in June 2007 as a daily but later became a weekly until its closure in September 2011. The circulation of Rozhnama varied between 1350 and 1852. Rozhnama was known for its highly critical coverage of the ruling parties and the government in Iraqi Kurdistan. At one point, the ruling KDP brought a \$1 billion lawsuit against Rozhnama on charges of "defamation" (Rudaw, 2010). Rozhnama is Kurdish for Newspaper.

*Rudaw:* The weekly was founded in 2008 and has been seen as an influential newspaper. It is said to be close to the current prime minister of the KRG, Nechirvan Barzani. The newspaper often reflects a variety of views and opinions in both its reports and editorial pages. It has a version that is printed in Europe for the large Kurdish community living there, and its Kurdish version also dedicates at least one page to the coverage of Kurds in Europe. Rudaw translates into "The Happening" in English. Rudaw is the most read Kurdish newspaper in Iraq with a reading rate of 6 percent on a regular basis (IREX 2011).

### ***Television Channels:***

*KNN:* Launched in 2008, the channel belongs to the main opposition group, Gorran. When first launched, it revolutionized the Kurdish television scene as it brought about a different type of coverage that was highly critical of the ruling parties and government in Kurdistan. The Kurdish News Network (KNN) has been effectively used during election campaigns to rally support for Gorran.

*Kurdsat:* Kurdsat was launched on January 1, 2000, it belongs to the PUK and reflects the party's stances on various issues in the Kurdistan Region, Iraq and the broader world. Its headquarters are based in Sulaimaniya, a long-time stronghold of the PUK that currently has a major opposition presence.

*NRT:* NRT was launched on February 17, 2011, the day Sulaimaniyah witnessed an outbreak of a two-month long protests. However, three days later it was set ablaze by assailants whose identity the courts have not established yet, but who are believed to be close to certain high-ranking officials. In April same year, NRT resumed broadcasting after rebuilding its studios (Aknews, 2012). Its newscasts are regarded as the most representative and balanced among television channels in Iraqi Kurdistan. NRT stands for Nalia Radio and Television, the name of the company that owns the television channel.

*Speda:* Speda was launched in 2009 and belongs to Kurdistan Islamic Union (KIU), the largest Islamist party in Iraqi Kurdistan. Since the KIU has been an opposition party in Iraq, Speda has maintained a critical coverage of the ruling parties and government both in Kurdistan and Iraq. Speda means dawn in English.

According to a recent media survey (IREX 2012), among the TV channels monitored here, Kurdsat fared better than the rest with a viewership rate of 57 percent. However, only 40 percent of those questioned said they trust Kurdsat's news. Speda came second as it enjoyed a 54 percent viewership rate but with only 6 percent of the respondents saying they trusted its coverage of news and information. KNN came third with 48 percent viewership, with 34 percent saying they trusted its news coverage. NRT ended up at the bottom of the ten Kurdish television channels of which the participants of the IREX study were asked. The study showed that NRT has a viewership rate of 43 percent with 16 percent of the respondents trusting its coverage.

### ***Sampling and analysis***

The researchers read or looked through the newspapers and television news bulletins at full length, selecting items relating to migration in a broad sense, looking for key words such as *migration, emigration, immigration, immigration policy, refugees, asylum seekers, work migration, migrants, emigrants, immigrants, trafficking, internally displaced persons (IDPs), deportation, forced returns, Norway and Kurds in the West.*

Based on an extensive codebook (see Appendix IV), variables such as format, genre, type of media outlet, length, sources (gender, ethnicity, position of sources), titles, picture texts and headlines were coded. For each item a synopsis in English were made. Based on these synopses, together with titles and picture texts, the news items were grouped into nine categories related to different aspects of migration. Two more categories subsumed news

items reporting incidents in Norway, and a last category included “other” articles, that could not be meaningfully categorized in any of the other categories.

This selection process resulted in a sample of totally 328 broadcast and print reports. The project has a Norwegian leaning, and as opposed to the selection criteria for other items, all cases concerning Norway were selected, no matter whether they focused on topics related to migration or not. Our sample period covers the terror attacks of July 22 and their aftermath. This influenced the size of our sample a lot, 38 items, or 11 percent of the whole material was related to July 22. We regard this incident as exceptional in every sense and do not go into further detail about its content here. Ten other articles were related to Norway but not to topics linked to migration. They varied in content, some reporting a conference to be held in Norway on the Genocide of Kurds, others focusing on the parliamentary visit of a delegation from the Iraqi Ministry of Foreign Affairs. None of the stories from Norway mention Norwegian immigration policies, or focus on Kurdish immigration to Norway as such, neither are there any reports on Norwegian repatriation policies or the deportations of Kurds from Norway in our material. Discarding the “general news” from Norway from the material, leaves us with 280 news items for further analysis. Of the 280 news items on migration, 10 articles focusing on irregular migration were translated in full and studied and analyzed qualitatively in depth.

### ***Reliability***

The sample is too small and the process of coding, involving translations from Sorani to English too complicated and time consuming to allow for traditional statistically based coder reliability tests. However, to secure the overall validity of the analysis, the sampling and coding of the material by several research assistants was supervised and examined carefully by one of the key researchers of the team. All synopses were read and compared with the original texts, their headlines and their picture texts to secure that they gave a precise summary of the content of the articles and reports.

### **Norwegian news on return migration**

Through a key word search of the national media data base in Norway, Retriever, we surveyed Norwegian news on the repatriation and deportations of Iraqi nationals from May 15 (when the agreement between Norway and Iraq, enabling forced returns of Iraqis was entered) until present. The search included all main regional and national newspapers as well as news bulletins from the main Norwegian news agency NTB, and the search queries were the following: Irak\* AND tvangsretur\*, Irak\* AND deportasjon\*, Irak\* AND uttransport\*.

## **5. The Kurdish media discourse on migration: Dominant perspectives and absent stories**

In this chapter, we explore how migration is covered in the Kurdish mass media. The topics, voices, arguments, and normative principles appearing in the news related to migration are mapped. Aware of the general traits of the Western coverage of migration and its central frames and conflicts, the aim is to explore how migration is discussed and understood in the news media at ‘the other end’, in a country characterized by large-scale migration to Europe and other Western countries. To our knowledge, no published research exists on the content of Kurdish news media, not in general and not regarding the coverage of migration in particular.

A central question is whether the principles and practices of migration policies in the Western world are covered in the Kurdish news, and whether Western immigration regimes are discussed in terms of justice/injustice, fairness, and human rights. Based on the assumption that stories of the lives of emigrants residing in a European or other Western countries could be formative for people’s perceptions and their aspiration to emigrate, we further asked whether this type of news was dominated by success stories of emigrants building a new life in the West or whether stories of discrimination, failures, problems and forced returns were reported.

During the course of the research project, we noticed that irregular migration in general and the rejection and return of a high number of irregular migrants from Europe were not only dominating the Western debate, it was also, even if with a very different approach, an inflammatory topic in the Kurdish discourse on migration. For this reason the findings related to the coverage of irregular migration in Kurdish mass media is discussed in more detail. The central characteristics of this coverage are compared to the dominant traits of the Western and Norwegian coverage of irregular immigration. The possible interactions and exchange between the Western/European discourse and the Kurdish discourse are also touched upon.

Before this specific focus on the destinies of irregular emigrants, on the policies of Western countries towards them and the reception of rejected asylum seekers in Iraqi Kurdistan, it is important to provide a broader mapping of the Kurdish media discourse on migration, revealing that migration in an Iraqi context has many shades. In particular, it is important to notice that this is a discourse not restricted to emigration, it also reflects the fact that Iraqi Kurdistan, in the last decades, has become a region that receives many immigrants and IDPs. Actually, as we will show, the bulk of the coverage in current Kurdish news on migration focuses on *immigration*; on immigrants from neighbouring countries and on refugees (IDPs) from other parts of Iraq.

Even if our sample of Kurdish news provides a unique database, we acknowledge that covering only a limited time period and restricting the focus to news reports and commentaries/op-eds does not provide the full picture of how the media in general provide images vital for people’s perceptions of what life for emigrants in Europe and other Western countries is like. As we will see in the next chapters, both media professionals and the general audience point to the media as a decisive factor in motivating people to emigrate to Europe. In particular they point to TV and certain popular entertainment and infotainment programmes

as important in this regard. In Chapter 6, describing people's perceptions of Europe and their motivation for leaving Iraqi Kurdistan, we will return to the existence of this type of popular culture and entertainment formats.

### **The media discourse on migration in Iraqi Kurdistan – general traits**

The analysis of the content of the media discourse on migration in Iraqi Kurdistan is based on an analysis of news reports and op-eds/commentaries related to migration in six main newspapers and four TV channels in a period of five months. Six major Kurdish newspapers, some of them daily and some weekly, were selected for analysis. All copies from May 1 to August 31, 2011 were thoroughly examined. The newspapers included: *Aso*, *Awene*, *Hawler*, *Kurdistani Nwe*, *Rozhnama*, and *Rudaw*. Four television channels were also singled out for analysis. One major nightly newscast from each television channel was recorded from July 20 to September 10, 2011. The television channels were KNN, Kurdsat, NRT, and Speda. The outlets' editorial orientation and political affiliation were taken into consideration with the intention of choosing a diverse array of outlets.

280 news items were selected for further analysis. They were all broadly related to migration, encompassing cases on the life of Kurdish emigrants permanently settled in the West; the situation for rejected asylum seekers in Western countries; different types of immigration to Kurdistan; and the situation for IDPs (see Chapter 4 for detailed description of method). The analysis of almost 300 articles and TV reports for this study does show that the Kurdish media is diverse in its coverage of immigration. The material was systematized into 11 categories according to their topic. The first type of category focuses on different types of immigration to Iraqi Kurdistan, the second type subsumes topics focusing on relations in the West, on the life of emigrants in Western countries in general and on conditions for rejected asylum seekers in particular. The third main category covers articles focusing on the return of emigrants back to Kurdistan, both voluntary and by force.

The listed categories cover the whole material except for 4 items coded as 'other'. The relative share of the material provides an indication of the composition of the topics in the Kurdish news discourse in general, but their percentages are no more than indications – a sample covering a different or longer period could have resulted in different results. To substantiate and nuance the findings, we include interviews with media professionals and dominant sources in the following chapter.

Table 3: Categories in Kurdish news on migration

Categories: news on migration	Frequency	Percent
IDPs	131	47
Work immigration	14	5
Illegal immigration/trafficking	9	3
Reasons for emigrating to Western countries	2	1
Reports about life of Kurdish emigrants settled in the West	52	19
Conditions for rejected asylum seekers in the West	19	7
Conditions for refugees around the world – non-Kurds	6	2
Deportations of rejected emigrants /asylum seekers	34	12
Voluntary return to KRG	9	3
Other	4	4
Total	280	100

Being aware of the contested situation of the press in the KRG, and the possible split between outlets close to the ruling parties on the one hand and outlets associated with the opposition or independent outlets on the other, we looked for variance in the coverage that could be associated with migration being a conflicted party-political topic. We did not, however, find any systematic difference between independent, semi-independent or party-aligned newspapers. As we will see in the section on the coverage of irregular emigration and the return of rejected asylum seekers, it seems that the topic of migration is not a subject that provokes great political disagreement in Kurdish society. On the surface, the impression is that the discourse overall is dominated more by consensus than conflict, even if criticism against the government's insufficient support for those returning appears in the coverage. However, even if we do not see any clear party political divisions in this coverage, the sparseness or absence of certain types of stories indicates that some topics touch upon sensitive issues surrounded by information barriers in Kurdish society.

The study reveals that the Kurdish media relies heavily on Kurdish sources. In a few stories, foreign (i.e. non-Iraqi) sources were used, but, even then, a good number of those sources were taken from international news outlets; i.e., they were not directly interviewed or contacted by the Kurdish media. Some of the stories, especially the ones dealing with the Iraqi government, are unbalanced. There is often no source to represent the Iraqi Government's view, which could be partly explained by the fact that most Kurdish media outlets have either

a weak presence or none at all in Baghdad. In addition, in many cases where a source represents Baghdad's view, it is mostly that of Kurdish officials or lawmakers in Baghdad.

### *Immigration to Kurdistan*

The analysis shows that the media discourse on migration in Iraqi Kurdistan is definitely not restricted to a focus on emigration to the West. The coverage reflects that Iraqi Kurdistan is the destination for many immigrants, both immigrants from other countries arriving as refugees or as work migrants and a high number of IDPs, seeking shelter in a relatively safe and stable part of the country (even if they are Iraqi nationals they are referred to as 'refugees' in the Kurdish news).

Reports focusing on the situation for IDPs actually constituted the largest part of the material, comprising 47 percent of all the stories related to migration, i.e. 131 items. Among the 10 media outlets monitored here, Kurdsat television, the channel with the highest audience rate and associated with one of the main ruling parties, the PUK, had most stories on this subject (21). The newspaper *Hawler*, associated with the other main ruling party, the KDP, came second with 22 items. *Rudaw*, a semi-independent newspaper, came last with only one story on IDPs.

The extensive focus on IDPs is not surprising, given the unstable conditions in Iraq and the high number of refugees having fled their home since the fall of the old regime in 2003. The IDPs covered are mostly Kurds who live in the mountainous border areas of the region. They have been displaced as a result of the ongoing conflict between the guerrillas of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and PJAK (Free Life Party of Kurdistan, the Iranian equivalent of PKK) and the Iranian and Turkish militaries. Some of the stories in the sample also focus on Arab IDPs who have fled the other parts of Iraq and taken refuge in the Kurdistan Region.

Coverage of immigration proper, e.g. stories of the immigration of people arriving from other countries, is also part of the Kurdish coverage, even if this phenomenon does not receive heavy attention. There are many refugees arriving in Kurdistan from countries like Syria and Iran, but we did not find many reports on their situation; the great focus was on IDPs – refugees from the border areas in Kurdistan, or from Iraq outside the Kurdish area. This picture changed in 2012, as the conflict in Syria escalated and larger numbers of people started fleeing to Iraq and especially the Kurdistan Region.

A number of reports (14) focus on work migration and the high number of work migrants in Kurdistan. The reports have two main frames: The first focuses on exploitation of guest workers and the need for better regulations of their conditions. The other focuses on the high unemployment rates in Kurdistan; it argues against large-scale work immigration to the region and favours a policy of providing jobs for unemployed Kurds.

The last type of immigration news in the Kurdish mainstream media focuses on illegal immigration linked to trafficking and prostitution: These are mainly stories on the existence of illicit clubs and brothels involving prostitutes from abroad, and campaigns to stop their activities (9 articles).

Interestingly enough, even if Kurdistan does receive many immigrants, we saw few signs of the type of coverage on immigrants often seen in European and other Western countries,

focusing on immigrants as threatening to the established societal values and as illegitimately laying claims to its resources. Except for a few critical reports on trafficking and a handful reports relating work migration to the difficulties for Kurdish people to find work, we did not see any anti-immigration advocacy in the Kurdish news, so pronounced in the Western immigration debate.

### ***Life of emigrants in the West***

As a country where a large number of former inhabitants have emigrated, an expectation was that there would be substantial coverage of the life of emigrants residing in other countries in general in the Kurdish news. Our initial research questions thus asked whether we would find coverage focusing on questions of integration in new countries, of adapting to a different culture and norms, or of conflicts associated with individual freedom, gender, religion and lifestyle. As we will see in the next chapter, these are factors that stand out as important in people's decision or urge to leave Kurdistan and in people's opinion on why others choose to leave. Many informants refer to the success stories of Kurdish emigrants in the West as typical of the coverage of emigration by the Kurdish media but most of them point out different types of television shows and documentaries featuring these stories as the most important source.

In our news material we found quite a few stories on the life of Kurdish emigrants in the US and Europe. The second largest category, 19 percent or 52 items, dealt with this subject. This category includes all type of reports on the life of Kurds settled permanently abroad. In this category, there were three stories from Norway: two about crimes committed by anonymous men of Kurdish origin and one about the case of Mullah Krekar.

We found, however, that reports on life in the West were largely restricted to one particular newspaper, *Rudaw*. It is distinguished from the other news outlets by its dedication of one page to news about emigrants in the West, aimed at the large Kurdish community in Europe in particular. 47 of the reports in our sample actually appeared in *Rudaw*, most of them short articles or notices, describing many types of incidents and situations. *Awene*, KNN and *Hawler* each had one item only in this category, *Rozhanma* two. The other media outlets had none.

Many of these articles told the stories about particularly successful Kurds, like winners of different types of rewards, or successful entrepreneurs and business people. A large part of these reports, however, covered crimes committed by Kurds abroad or Kurds having put themselves in difficult situations through what is framed as bad behaviour.

We rarely found news coverage that discussed the broader questions of how Kurdish emigrants adapt to new cultures, lifestyles or political systems. The stories sampled focus on the personal lives of immigrants in the West, with no particular focus on the systems and values of the Western societies where the Kurdish immigrants live, and are, typically, short and episodic articles reporting single events.

### ***Reasons for leaving Iraqi Kurdistan***

Even if no reliable statistics exist, apparently there has been a decrease in people leaving Iraq "illegally" for Europe in the last few years. Nevertheless, as we will see in subsequent chapters, central factors propelling people to leave are still present in Kurdish society. The

feeling of being locked up, both by physical borders and strict norms and codes of conduct is a part of the habitus of many young Kurds today, leading them to long for something different and, for some, to look for options to emigrate.

We find little trace of this larger discourse in the Kurdish news media. The coverage touching on the wider issue of emigration amounts to only three articles. Two appeared in *Hawler*, a daily close to the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP). One article, published 8 July 2011, reports that, during the last 6 months, more than 150 young men have left the Pishdar area in the eastern part of Sulaimaniyah Province due to the scarcity of job opportunities for the young. One other article, published 21 May, describes how 'Europe is no longer Kurdish girls' heaven' (title). It refers indirectly to a trend in the 1990s and at the beginning of the first decade of 2000 when many Kurdish women wished to marry Kurdish men residing in the West (Gran 2008). The message of the report is that this is not the case now; Kurdish girls do not wish to emigrate to Europe anymore because all of their needs are fulfilled in Kurdistan. Another article, appearing on 26 July in *Awene*, an independent weekly, focuses on problems related to emigration. The report makes the claim that many men emigrating to Europe have left behind their wives and children in search of better work- and life opportunities. One of these wives, 'Sharmna', an anonymous source, has not seen her husband in 11 years. When her husband left, Sharmna moved to her parents' house with her daughters. After waiting for years, her husband divorced her over the phone. Her older daughter says she cannot recall her father and only knows him through photos. This last report is, as we will see in the next chapter, a type of story that journalist must struggle to make people tell in public.

### ***Returns of emigrants***

People who have formerly emigrated from Iraqi Kurdistan are returning to Kurdistan on a large scale. No reliable statistics exist, but many go back as voluntary returnees after having resided in the West for many years. Other returns are mandatory: after failure to gain legal status in Europe, people return through different types of so-called voluntary repatriation programmes, organized by the IOM. The analysis did not reveal any type of coverage of these repatriations. Nor can we find any reports on activities related to the IOM or different types of reintegration and assistance programmes sponsored by Western governments.

What we do find, a point to be treated in depth in the next section, is substantial coverage of de facto deportations from Europe. However, we find little or no coverage of what type of reception these deportees actually receive when they are back in Iraqi Kurdistan, or what type of life they are able to take up. A hypothesis we will pursue in the following chapters is that both mandatory returns assisted by different types of repatriation programmes and de facto deportations are associated with failure and shame and, therefore, not much spoken of in public and in the mass media.

When we *do* see reports on the conditions for returnees to Iraqi Kurdistan, they are restricted to the situation facing the returnees from other parts of Iraq (IDPs) or from the neighbouring countries of Syria or Iran. These reports often involve claims from stakeholders that the Kurdish Regional Government should do more to improve their situation.

### ***Irregular emigration and forced returns in Kurdish news***

The last and vital categories in the Kurdish coverage of migration subsume those new items, directly focusing on the conditions facing irregular immigrants without legal status in Europe and Australia and the subsequent return policies of Western governments pertaining to this

group. The coverage of the situation for irregular immigrants consists of news items that describe illegal journeys, their risks, routes and organization, as well as the situation for rejected asylum seekers in detention camps and reception centres in Europe and Australia. The stories on Western return policies and their consequences focus on protests against deportations and campaigns to stop them.

### **Perils and hardship: Stories on the destinies of irregular migrants in the West**

19 stories in our data material focus on the conditions facing asylum seekers when they embark on illegal travels and/or on their sojourns in Europe and Australia.

We will see in the next chapter that journalists and editors, as well as informants with different types of emigration experiences, complain that the Kurdish media have done a poor job informing the public of the destinies of those travelling illegally to Europe, regarding both their journeys and how they are received in Europe. They hold that people are not told the truth and have unrealistic perceptions of the opportunities in Europe.

From our news material, however, we do find stories describing both the perils of journeys organized by smugglers as well as the heart-wrenching stories of people trying their luck in Europe. The tough conditions facing those who are not accepted as legitimate asylum seekers in Europe are outlined, some reports describing unlawful practices at reception centres and detention camps, followed by public protests from their inhabitants. It must be added that the number of these types of stories is not high. During the five-month period we sampled news, we found 19 news stories on the travels and sojourns of irregular immigrants in Europe. All were in printed news; no such stories appeared on television in this period.

The dominant perspectives that appear in this category cut across the party alignment of the media outlets, with stories of disappointment and suffering appearing in both independent and party-affiliated newspapers. It is, however, important to note that a great share of the stories in this category stems from *Rudaw*, which, as mentioned, differs from the rest of the news outlets by having a whole page dedicated to the stories of emigrants in the West.

An example of this type of story is an article appearing in *Rozhama* 26 July 2011, beginning thus:

*When Ismael Pirbal, now 26, embarked on his journey from Shaqlawa, Kurdistan, to Europe, he had many colourful dreams of a new life in Finland: easy living, easy money, easy love. Ismael had already dropped out of school one year before finishing high school.*

*He was only 17 when he joined the security forces (Peshmarga) to help his family out financially. He stuck with it for four years. He had his own excuse for leaving Kurdistan. Life in the Peshmarga was not the kind of life he dreamed of. In Europe, he could live well and provide for his family too. Hearing all the stories of success from his friends, he could not wait to go.*

*'I decided to go for it, I no longer wanted to stay in Kurdistan', Ismael said with a sigh, 'I struck a deal with someone [a smuggler] whereby he would take me there for US\$4,500.'*

The story continues with an account of how Ismael, after several failed attempts to go to Europe, finally crossed the European border, and that he has now lived for four years in

Germany in a type of limbo, without legal status and under harsh economic circumstances. The article ends like this:

*Ismael is just one of the many migrants who went through a great deal to make it there: 'I suffered so much that I will never forget it as long as I live. Even now as I recall this, I feel like it is happening all over again.'*

Other news stories focus on the conditions in European detention camps, reporting both about hunger strikes and of suicide attempts among the residents. This story, appearing in *Rudaw*, 13 June 2011, is representative. It has the following title:

*Life in camps is like living in a dustbin*

It continues:

*Erbil, Rudaw – Kurdish asylum-seekers in Western camps say life in camps is like living in prison and not the heaven they were expecting to see in Europe. The head of an immigration organization (STATT) says people need to be told about the conditions awaiting them before heading to Europe.*

*Ali Mohammed, 28, is originally from Sulaimani and has been living in the UK for 11 years. He has a British girlfriend who is pregnant. However, Ali is now placed in a camp in preparation for his deportation to Iraq.*

*'Life in the camp is full of misery. It is like life in a dustbin. The guards treat us in a racist way. We live inside four walls and are only allowed to go out to a small garden here, which is surrounded by an eight-metre-high wall. The top of the wall is covered with barbed wire. In some of the camp's rooms there are seven or nine people living. This is very unfair. The food is very bad too and sometimes we don't even eat it,' Ali told Rudaw.*

The report further informs us that not only is the journey to Europe dangerous, the conditions in a European country for Kurdish immigrants often prove very difficult, ranging from difficulties with finding a job, to home sickness and the anxiety related to not being granted asylum and the risk of deportation. The source of this information is a representative of STATT, a company whose activities we will come back to in the next chapter.

Other stories focus on the problems many irregular immigrants to Europe have in proving their identities to European governments and that many, even if they have escaped civil war and hardship in Kurdistan, fail to achieve legal status in different European countries because they arrived with false ID papers or have used false names. The one report mentioning the conditions in Norway for Kurdish immigrants has this type of focus: it concerns the fact that very many Iraqis, a large portion of them Kurds, are not granted citizenship even if they have lived in Norway for more than 10 years because of the problems verifying their identities.

Most of the stories on the conditions facing irregular immigrants without a formalized or legal status in Europe tell the stories viewed from the perspectives of the emigrants themselves – or from those of the smugglers. The type of stories we see in this category carry an implicit message of deterrence: they appear as warnings, describing the risks and dangers related to irregular emigration to Europe. They present an emphatic stance regarding the situation for the many emigrants in a difficult situation, but do not criticize Western governments.

Many news items do mention that the situation facing Kurdish emigrants did change after 2003, and that Kurds in general now have few chances to gain residency in Europe. Even so, they do not go into detail about why Iraqi Kurds are denied asylum. Most of the sources in these stories are asylum seekers, followed by smugglers, Kurdish NGOs and Kurdish politicians at different levels. Only two articles represent the view of Western governments. An op-ed appearing in *Rudaw* 16 May 2011, conveys the view of Dutch immigration authorities.. It is written by a spokesperson for the Dutch Government and explains that Iraqi Kurds have fewer chances than other Kurds to gain asylum in the Netherlands due to the relative stability and security in Iraqi Kurdistan, whereas Iranian and Turkish Kurds have better chances of gaining asylum. The other report in our sample representing the view of a Western government is a piece appearing in *Aso* on 5 May 2011, stemming from the international news agency AFP. Its focus is Europe's need for better border control to prevent illegal immigrants from getting into Europe and with the title: 'Immigration creates an obstacle for "borderless Europe"'. Sources are Cecilia Malmstroem, EU commissioner for domestic affairs, and Olivier Bailly, EU commission speaker.

### **Reports on deportations**

The deportation of failed asylum seekers back to Iraq from Europe and Australia attracts quite substantial coverage in the Kurdish news media, even though it hardly dominates the Kurdish public agenda in general.

In our sample, 34 news items have deportation as their focus. Deportations are also mentioned in other articles with the conditions for irregular immigrants in the West as their central focus. In the period from May to August, 24 articles appeared in Kurdish Newspapers. From July to September, 10 reports appeared on Kurdish TV. The formats included both news reports and op-eds, even if most were news reports. The material ranged from full-page reports to news briefs.

The coverage of deportations is predominantly very critical. It directly or indirectly presents the views of actors advocating to halt the deportations or the perspectives of the 'consequence experts' themselves: people risking deportation in different European countries and in Australia. Some articles provide statistics on deportations of Kurds. Numbers replicated in the news state that 5–6000 asylum seekers have been deported to Kurdistan since 2005, while 50,000 Iraqis residing in Europe are held to run the risk of being deported from Europe. The sources for these numbers are not provided, and they are hard to confirm.

Many news articles and TV reports refer to the fact that the Kurdish Government is against deportations, that they regard them as a violation of human rights and, hence, that no planes carrying deported people are allowed to land at the international airports in Kurdistan.

Some reports mention that Iraqi Kurdistan today is regarded as a safe area by Western governments and that, therefore, asylum seekers from here are not accepted. This is not, however, the focus of these reports and there is no specific information about the principles guiding European asylum regulation or elaborate discussion of European or Western return policies.

The reports are marked by a heavy dominance of Kurdish sources. European and Australian official sources can be counted on one hand, and they are in general referred to indirectly. The reason given for deportations as voiced by European immigration authorities, so outspoken in

the Western coverage of unauthorized immigrants, is negligible. Western governments are referred to as ‘not willing’ to stop the deportations, or determined to continue them in order to crack down on illegal immigration, period.

One article, from May 24, 2011, appearing in *Hawler*, a newspaper associated with the Kurdistan Democratic Party, is representative of these news items. The title runs:

*No asylum-seekers are accepted at Erbil and Sulaimani airports: The Kurdistan Region is against the deportation of asylum-seekers*

The article mentions the agreement between Baghdad and European countries to receive the Iraqi asylum-seekers rejected by European countries and that asylum seekers who have applied for asylum after Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2003 will be deported back to Iraq, unless they can provide “strong documents” to support the application. The article then refers to a campaign launched by the International Federation of Iraqi Refugees (IFIR) aiming to stop the deportation of asylum-seekers. IFIR asserts that “while the right-wing governments of Europe, in order to respond to the economic crises they are facing, are overlooking their international covenants and agreements, the Iraqi Government has turned the issue of asylum-seekers into a political card for its benefit and for achieving some privilege and has as such accepted the deportation of asylum-seekers. They have put the Baghdad airport at the service of such an inhumane policy.’

The critique of the central Government of Iraq is followed by information provided by IFIR claiming that deportees are abused during transportation and that the deportations have led to several suicides among deportees. The article further repeats the message of the title that the KRG and Kurdish Parliament are against the deportation of asylum seekers, that they consider it a violation of human rights, and that they support the campaign launched by IFIR. The KRG is further reported to claim that ‘individuals are free to choose where they want to live.’ The article then reports on the frustration in the Kurdish Government: it has made efforts to stop the deportations but all countries speak to the central Government in Baghdad on such a matter.

Finally, the report makes reference to protests among 25 Kurdish asylum seekers in Britain awaiting deportation and their call to the Kurdish Regional Government, Parliament and intellectuals to work to revoke the agreement between the central Baghdad Government and European countries. A letter from the 25 asylum seekers states:

*We do not want to be deported because each of us has our life in Britain and we do not want to be deported to our home country. We all have our own work and life here.*

This article epitomizes in many ways the general coverage of deportations in Kurdish media: It briefly mentions that, since the KRG is regarded as safe, Kurdish asylum seekers, in general, are not accepted by European governments. It then proceeds with the claim that IFIR and the Kurdish Regional Government and Parliament are against the deportations and regard them as a violation of human rights. Deportations, it is also claimed, break international agreements and conventions. We see a type of argument, unheard of in Western coverage of deportations regarding what are defined as an inviolable human right: ‘Individuals are free to choose where they want to live.’

The frames of this new item are repeated in many other news reports on television and in the press. It is worth noting that the dominant source here is IFIR. Different representatives from IFIR are, by far, the most frequent occurring sources in the stories on deportation. IFIR

launched a campaign against deportations in 2011, and they succeeded in dominating the public media discourse on this topic in Kurdistan during the period we cover in this analysis. The other type of sources most frequently appearing are representatives of the Kurdish Regional Government or Kurdish representatives in the central Iraqi Parliament. The view of the central Government of Iraq is not represented, but criticism of the agreements is rampant and speculations that the Iraqi Government has economic motivations for accepting them are aired.

Besides the criticism of the deportations voiced by NGOs and the Kurdish Government, the other main perspective in the coverage of deportations stem from the ‘consequence experts’ themselves: the irregular immigrants in danger of, or awaiting deportation in different European countries. Quite a few stories focus on protests among asylum-seekers waiting to be deported. The news items report protests in the Netherlands, Germany, Sweden, the UK and Australia, with the last two countries on top of the attention scale. In the UK there are reports of several protests, among them hunger strikes, supported by different types of humanitarian organizations and spokespersons. Australia receives much attention because of an agreement between the Australian Government and Malaysia about deporting rejected asylum seekers who first arrived in Malaysia back there from Australia. Kurdish media cover the protests against this agreement extensively, and also report that the deportations from Australia to Malaysia were finally halted by an Australian federal court.

Some stories focus on single cases and destinies in particular: We find critical reports of families with small children that are sent back to unsecure conditions in Kirkuk; of deportees who have gone missing after their arrival in Iraq; and stories of deportees who committed suicide after arrival. Other reports tell the story of people who have lived for a long time in Europe, succeeded with their life there but are deported. An example is the story of a Kurdish asylum-seeker who had once won a 4,000-EUR prize in a TV contest in the Netherlands for his knowledge of Dutch culture. He had lived in the Netherlands for eight years and finished high school there. He planned to study law, but was deported.

The coverage of deportations are marked by the dominance of certain categories of sources: IFIR, Kurdish politicians and ‘consequence experts’. The main arguments put forward are that deportations are violating human rights, people are free to move, and, more implicitly, decent and well integrated persons do not deserve deportation.

### **The Kurdish discourse on deportation compared to the Western debate**

The *Western* coverage of deportations rarely focuses on public opinion and reactions in the countries receiving the deportees, or on what type of reception deportees receive when they are back home. Our research surveys this response. Interestingly, we see a type of coverage ignorant the reverse way. European official sources and their arguments are largely absent in Kurdish news on deportations. Not only is the coverage ignorant of Western arguments, the framing of deportations in Kurdistan evokes normative arguments that run directly counter to the perspectives dominant in Europe, Australia and the US. In the West, deportations are often framed in a manner relating them to the cracking down on so-called ‘bogus’ asylum seekers and criminals (Balabanova & Balch, 2010; Greenberg & Hier, 2001; Kim, Carvalho, Davis, & Mullins, 2011). Rejected asylum-seekers are repeatedly linked to the committing of crime in

general or to the violation of immigration laws in particular. Irregular immigration is represented as threatening both to a functioning society regulated by law in general, and to the status of the asylum institute in particular. Hence, an argument repeated in Western coverage, purported by many European governments, is that, in order to protect people with a legitimate right to asylum, it is necessary to run an 'effective' immigration policy involving deportations. It is further claimed that this policy is based on a certain type of humanism: a strict immigration policy combines 'humanism' with 'realism', guaranteeing protection for those worthy of it while demonstrating a 'tough' and efficient return policy towards those not in need of protection. The Norwegian Government is among those who have succeeded in getting this type of message through in the national mainstream media. This type of argumentation is not seen in the coverage of deportations in the Kurdish media. No reports focus on crime or false identities and incorrect information as a reason for deportation. The way failed asylum seekers are portrayed as criminals in Western coverage is not a component in the Kurdish debate.

We actually find only two articles which, to a certain extent, purvey the view of Western governments. One is an interview with the British Minister for Immigration and Citizenship, Chris Bowers, who at the time, he was the UK Consul General in Iraqi Kurdistan. It appeared in *Hawler* on 24 July. The report is titled: 'Britain has the right to deport "the illegal immigrants" to Kurdistan.' The focus of the interview is that all asylum seekers have their cases thoroughly examined, and according to due processes, and that Kurds who immigrate legally are welcome. The other article is an op-ed article written by a representative of the Dutch immigration authorities, explaining that Iraqi Kurds, as opposed to Kurds of other nationalities have few chances of receiving asylum due to the relative stability and security in Iraqi Kurdistan.

One of the questions guiding this project was whether knowledge of European immigration policies was circulating in the Kurdish discourse on migration and disseminated through the mass media. We found that even if conditions for asylum seekers are covered in the media, in particular the rejection of asylum seekers and subsequent deportations, the coverage is not systematic, and specific information regarding the premises underlying European migration regimes is not provided. This is not a surprising finding: as referred to in Chapter 2, the messages of the mass media in general have a tendency to be episodic and short, focusing on single cases and simplified messages rather than discussing attributes of abstract systems and general trends. To expect precise descriptions of highly-complex systems characterized by continuous incremental changes would be unrealistic. However, the type of coverage we find in the Kurdish media not only reflects a type of media logic shared with mass media in general, it also strongly reflects the essential discrepancy between the norms and principles guiding the discourse on return migration in Kurdistan and in Western countries. Both discourses seek to legitimate central claims through the reference to human rights and international conventions – they nevertheless reach very different conclusions and interpret what is an inviolable human right differently.

In recent years, Norway has been one of the European countries deporting a substantial number of Iraqi nationals, among them many Kurds. Since 2009, close to 500 Iraqi nationals<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> PU homepage, available at [https://www.politi.no/politiets\\_utlendingsenhet/statistikk/aktuell\\_statistikk/](https://www.politi.no/politiets_utlendingsenhet/statistikk/aktuell_statistikk/) (accessed 14.08.2012) and IOM homepage, available at [http://www.iom.no/publications\\_no.htm](http://www.iom.no/publications_no.htm) (accessed 14.08.2012)

have been returned by force from Norway, and many are still awaiting deportation. It is rather striking that deportations from Norway are barely mentioned in the coverage of deportations in Kurdish news. Norway is listed a few times among other European countries, but in our sample, as opposed to the UK, Netherlands, Germany, Australia and Sweden, there are no reports on any type of protests or campaigns aimed at stopping the deportations from Norway.

When a return agreement between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Iraqi authorities was signed in May 2009, implying that Iraqis without legal residence in Norway could be returned to Iraq by force, it did initially spur some coverage in the Norwegian news. In December of the same year, the first group of Iraqi nationals was deported to Iraq by the Norwegian police.<sup>14</sup> The group consisted of 30 Iraqi men, all sent to Iraq by chartered aeroplane. The following day, all the biggest newspapers in Norway brought out news stories on the deportation. The focus in the largest tabloid daily, *VG*; was that Mullah Krekar was still in Norway, despite the fact that Norway had started to deport Iraqis. *Dagbladet*, another central national tabloid, focused on the economic cost of the deportation, and reported that 66 policemen were used to transport the 30 Iraqis. *Aftenposten*, the main Norwegian broadsheet, focused on the fact that some of the Iraqis came from areas in Iraq where the UN did not recommend that people were returned to. In the next months *Aftenposten* published several stories focusing on the UN recommendations and the fact that Norway was still deporting Iraqis back to Iraq. The subject was also debated in chronicles, letters to the editor and commentaries in *VG* and *Dagbladet*. After February 2010, the media attention on deportations to Iraq declined sharply. In 2011 and 2012 the subject received very little attention in the national dailies. Most of the deportations to Iraq were covered through news briefs from NTB with titles such as ‘9 Iraqis deported’, ‘52 Iraqis deported on Saturday’ and ‘Norway has not stopped deportations to Iraq’. Apart from the occasional news briefs, the subject was not debated or discussed in the newspapers.

The deportations from Norway, then, take place at a high rate but are in general not followed by protests or campaigns to stop them; no counter voices are heard, either from the immigrants themselves, or from humanitarian organizations or grass root campaigners. When cases from the UK, Netherlands, Germany and Sweden are reported in the Kurdish news, they are, in general, based on different types of organized protests, involving both the rejected asylum seekers themselves (e.g. hunger strikes, sewing of lips) and different types of grassroots movements and NGOs. As for the current public debate on deportation in Norway, we see that only very special single cases, most often involving children or minors profoundly integrated into the Norwegian society and with a strong network, make it into the news with their claims to avoid deportation. Otherwise, we see no protests, not even from the organizations working for the right of asylum seekers. It seems that the silence in Norway is followed by a relative silence in the Kurdish media: The general opposition is strong and the criticism outspoken, but deportees from Norway stay anonymous – and silent.

### **Conclusion and main findings**

We have seen that the media coverage of migration in the Iraqi Kurdish news media is varied, but with a large proportion of it focusing on the situation for IDPs arriving from other parts of Iraq or living in the unstable border areas of the Iraqi Kurdish region. The coverage of

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<sup>14</sup> <http://www.regjeringen.no/nb/dep/jd/pressecenter/pressemeldinger/2009/uttransportering-av-irakere-2.html?id=587881> (accessed 14.08.2012)

immigration to the region otherwise focuses on work migration and illegal immigration linked to prostitution or trafficking. In spite of the fact that Iraqi Kurdistan receives a high number of immigrants, we see no trace of a type of anti-immigration advocacy known from the Western coverage of migration.

We did not find any systematic difference between independent, semi-independent or party-aligned newspapers in their coverage of migration. On the surface, the discourse is dominated more by consensus than conflict, even if criticism against the Government's insufficient support for people returning from other countries appears in the coverage. However, even if we do not see any clear party-political divisions in this coverage, the sparseness, or absence of certain types of stories indicates that some topics touch upon sensitive issues surrounded by information barriers in Kurdish society. We find that the life of emigrants in Europe gets some attention in the news but we do not find any substantial coverage of why people have left Iraqi Kurdistan or what types of challenges they meet when adapting to a different society and culture in a new country. Neither do we find news items discussing why some people still wish to go to a European country. Further, stories on how people adapt and how they are welcomed when they return from Europe is conspicuously absent from the news. The reports on the conditions for returnees are restricted to the situation for IDPs and people returning from the neighbouring countries like Syria and Iran.

Our study reveals that the Kurdish media relies heavily on Kurdish sources. Some news stories appear unbalanced, with no sources representing the Iraqi Government's view or the view of the immigration authorities of the Western countries in focus. In the next chapter, this phenomenon is related to the professional level of journalism in the region and the working conditions for Iraqi Kurdish journalists.

We have focused in particular on the coverage of the destinies of irregular emigrants in the West and on the return policies of Western countries. We find several examples of stories describing the perils and dangers that face irregular emigrants when they embark on journeys to Europe. We likewise find reports on the very difficult situation for asylum seekers in Europe.

Most of the stories on the conditions facing irregular immigrants without a formalized or legal status in Europe tell the stories viewed from the perspectives of the emigrants themselves, or from those of the smugglers. The type of stories we see in this category carry an implicit message of deterrence: they appear as warnings, describing the risks and dangers related to irregular emigration to Europe. They present an emphatic stance regarding the situation for the many emigrants in a difficult situation, but do not criticize Western governments. In the next chapter, we will show that their frames are the result of sponsored campaigns towards Kurdish journalists, with a Western government as the likely client. This might be part of the explanation for the lack of critique.

An important finding is that deportations of former asylum seekers from Europe and Australia receive heavy and very critical attention. The arguments raised are that deportations represent a break with human rights, that people are treated in an inhuman and unfair way, and that deportations lead to suffering and even suicide. The dominant sources in this coverage are representatives from the Kurdish Regional Government, the International Federation of Iraqi Refugees (IFIR), and people risking deportation in Europe. Coverage representing the view of European governments or the rationale of European immigration policies is very scant. The dominant normative arguments are, moreover, very different from those dominating the Western debate on asylum policies and asylum seekers.



## **6. Media professionals and their sources on the coverage of irregular migration and forced returns**

In this chapter we advance from asking *'what'* the news discourse in Kurdish media is like to ask *'why'* it is like it is. Through elite interviews with journalists and editors in central Kurdish television companies and newspapers as well as with representatives from NGOs and Kurdish regional migration authorities, we relate our findings from the content analysis to the perspectives of the central *'senders'* of information and arguments in the Kurdish migration discourse.

As in the last chapter, the main focus is on irregular migration to the West and the subsequent return and repatriation of emigrants in Iraqi Kurdistan. We ask what factors inhibit the appearance of certain types of stories and certain types of information as well as why some perspectives dominate in the Kurdish discourse on migration. Through the interviews, the arguments appearing in the news in Kurdish mass media regarding irregular migration and the return of migrants are put in context. Nuances and differences in how the media elite and their sources argue are explored.

We finally take a closer look at the origin of a few stories on illegal journeys and conditions for asylum seekers. Their message, as mentioned, has a clear *'deterrence'* slant; our research shows that they are the result of the work of a commercial enterprise, STATT, working on behalf of clients, probably one or more Western governments, in order to prevent people from embarking on illegal travels to Europe and Australia.

### **The official views of the Kurdish Government and IFIR**

The two most important types of sources in the Kurdish news on irregular migration in general and deportations in particular are, on the one hand, those representing the official views of the regional Kurdish Government and, on the other, the views of the International Federation of Iraqi Refugees (IFIR).

The interviews with the head of the migration office in Iraqi Kurdistan and with the leader of the Kurdish part of IFIR both confirm and expand the arguments attributed to them in the Kurdish news coverage. The head of the immigration office confirms that the Kurdish Government is against deportations. He uses two different types of arguments to defend this position, one referring back to basic human rights the other to a notion of fairness based on an ethics of virtue and merit. The first type of rights-based argument can, as described in the last chapter, be found in abundance in Kurdish news on irregular migration. As we will see, we also find it in the argumentation among journalists and people in general (Chapters 7 and 8). It holds that the freedom to move is an essential human right. The claim is that this type of right is part of the UN Convention of human rights. The government official says:

We want international protocols to be respected. It must be respected that people have human rights and that they want to better their lives. Countries with powerful democratic systems have a special duty to respect these rights. To deport people, to

set them on a plane to Kurdistan, this is not right. We, the Kurdish Regional Government are against this policy.

A concern of the government official is that people, through the media, can get the mistaken impression that the KRG is involved in the deportations. His complaint is that European governments are deporting people without informing the KRG and he calls for Western governments to cooperate with the Kurdish Regional Government in enhancing the voluntary returns of emigrants to Iraqi Kurdistan.

When asked why deportations are so problematic, the second type of normative argument, based on an ethics of virtue and merit, is evoked:

When someone has imagined reaching paradise, sold everything he has here to reach it, his house, his car, gone through a very difficult situation, the paradise is not there, he has lost everything. He has maybe children, who have learnt a new language, he has a wife. He has lost a job, he has problems psychologically, social problems. He has nothing to return to. In our society, when a child, a son has left his family, his father will not open his door for him again, he will not receive him. That is how it is here, it is a cultural thing. It's different in Europe, more individualized, here family is everything.

Interviewer: Are people who return voluntary welcome?

Of course, people with skills, who have an education, they are welcome.

The Iraqi Federation of Refugees (IFIR) launched a campaign in 2011 with the aim of stopping deportations from Europe and Australia. The campaign involved networking and lobbying aimed at the central Government of Iraq, the Kurdish Regional Government, Western governments, NGOs, and Kurdish and Western media. The lines of reasoning behind this campaign are based on the same type of arguments, involving a concept of fairness rooted in human rights and fairness based on virtue and merit. These are the words of the head of the Kurdish branch of IFIR, his arguments are familiar from the news coverage of the conditions for rejected asylum-seekers in Europe:

I can't understand – why is such a thing happening? Especially in Europe. In the last ten days, planes from Sweden and the UK have landed in Baghdad. People are mistreated on the plane; they have been jailed in Baghdad and have been mistreated and beaten there. People have committed suicide after arrival. The government should not allow this to happen; it is an atrocity, against human rights.

We have a good relation with the Kurdish Regional Government, they are all against it. We try to convince the central Baghdad Government that they must go against it. (...) It is against principles of human rights, people are free to live wherever they like. Under Saddam, people always lived under threat, they fled the country. And, later, life has been very difficult here, economic crisis, unemployment, lack of freedom of speech, people have left the country for all these reasons.

The IFIR representative further criticizes the Kurdish Regional Government for not doing enough – or nothing at all – to help those who are actually deported and are back in Kurdistan:

We must also do something for those who have come back – help them with housing, jobs, with shelters, integrate them in society again, many of them have skills, they master languages, are specialists, they are valuable to society. We must work on both sides, this is the reality.

Interviewer: Do people still leave?

Yes! The deported try to leave again. The Government has done nothing for them. These people have nothing here, they have sold their house to go to Europe, sold everything, there is nothing for them here. (...) There are awesome things about Europe that makes people try to emigrate illegally. People hear from relatives, watch television, that people enjoy life. (...) There is a great inequality in this country, if you don't have contacts, if you don't know the right people, there are no ways.

The last argument from the IFIR representative – describing why people might still wish to leave Kurdistan today, and moreover, that people deported will try to leave again – is, as mentioned, not to be found in the Kurdish news coverage in our sample. As discussed earlier, the conditions for those emigrants that have returned mandatory or by force are not an issue in the news. In the next section, presenting the views of journalists and editors, we will take a closer look at why this absence might be more than a coincidence. We will also elaborate on this question in the next chapters describing the motivation of informants that did chose to leave – or to stay – in Kurdistan during the last decade.

### **The views of the media professionals**

News journalism in Iraqi Kurdistan is still at an early stage, the profession vulnerable and the struggle to build independent news coverage free from repression and undue liaisons to powerful stakeholders, ongoing. What all journalists pointed to as paramount for the quality of the Kurdish news discourse in general, and also pertaining to the coverage of migration, was the lack of resources and what the journalists themselves regarded as a low degree of professionalism. Most journalists work part time and do not have the resources, and maybe not always the skills, to do research involving information in other languages or sources outside the Kurdish region. Further, inside the region, it is very difficult to get access to reliable statistics on Kurdish migration. For most journalists, research trips to Europe are out of reach, both because of the costs and also because the process of getting a visa is very slow, expensive and sometimes outright impossible to achieve. This lack of resources and skills explains the heavy dominance of solely Kurdish sources in the news.

From the analysis of Kurdish news, we could not see any clear-cut divide between the coverage of migration in independent and party-affiliated outlets, even though we found the greatest quantity of news stories related to migration in some of the independent outlets. Deportations were covered from largely the same perspectives in both the party press and the independent newspapers. Our impression from the content analysis was largely confirmed through the interviews. The issue of emigration is not, unlike topics related to corruption and power abuse, a subject provoking censorship from the ruling parties and not, as such, a

*politically* delicate subject. Rather, it is an issue that cut across party divisions, revealing a shared Kurdish approach to deportations where the split is not to be found among Kurdish parties but in the opinions carried by the Kurdish Regional Government versus the policies of the central Government of Iraq. However, we soon found that emigration, and the return of emigrants, are certainly sensitive topics, even if not directly challenging the Kurdish Regional Government. To come back empty-handed and to have ‘failed’ in Europe are strongly related to shame and social stigma. It is, hence, very difficult to make people tell their story in public.

The journalists we spoke to, both from the party press and from independent outlets, from television as well as newspapers, were rather critical with regard to the status of the coverage on migration, in particular the coverage of irregular migration. In their view, the Kurdish mass media had not sufficiently covered the ‘real’ conditions meeting emigrants on their journey to Europe, or the situation for Kurds living in Europe without legal status. Many of these informants believed that Kurds in general had a very unrealistic picture of the opportunities in Europe, and that their dreams of life in Europe were largely a product of the exposure to the explosion of media outlets and channels in the first decade of the new millennium. For instance, when asked about the importance of the media, an editor of an independent newspaper responded:

Interviewer: What type of source of information do you think influenced peoples perceptions of life in the West mostly?

The media! Internet, satellite TV channels, globalization, contact. They see a beautiful picture of Europe, but they do not see the backstage, they do not see behind the curtains.

When asked about the realism in people’s perception of Europe, a journalist in a TV channel linked to the Change Movement held that:

People’s vision about Europe is a positive vision. Because through Internet, through their relatives, through TV-channels, through the series, they see that there is a positive life compared to what we have here, in Europe. And they think that there are more human rights in the European countries. And they feel that people’s life there is better in terms of human rights, than what we have here. Generally, it’s a positive picture.

Another journalist from a semi-independent newspaper, linked to the opposition movement Gorran, shared the assessment of Kurdish coverage of issues linked to irregular migration:

Information on the real conditions in Europe has been lacking in the Kurdish news picture. People still believe that Europe is a paradise. (...) I think this is a weakness of Kurdish media. We should tell how it is to discourage people from leaving. Inform them about the conditions you face if you migrate illegally to the West. That you have no rights.

In the view of these journalists, the main exception to the poor coverage of the negative aspects of emigration has been the focus on deportations in Kurdish news. Most people we talked to, both media professionals and ordinary people, regarded deportations as ‘a big issue’. The great majority, moreover, both journalists and editors, said that they were personally against the deportations. Many point to the desperate situations of those deported.

They follow a line of argument about fairness related to virtue and merit that we have seen among other actors in the Kurdish discourse of emigration: Emigrants to the West have sacrificed a lot, sold everything before leaving, many have debts to relatives and friends, and they have suffered through harsh conditions in Europe. They simply do not deserve to be sent back by force after many years in Europe. Many informants also evoke arguments of human rights. A journalist representing a party-affiliated daily newspaper explains the critical coverage of deportations like this:

Interviewer: My impression is that the media here and people in general are very critical towards deportations. Is this the right picture?

Yes, that is absolutely true. And the reason is, we still have great problems with shelter, with standard of living, the basic things of life. Many people, they sold every single thing they had, just to get to Europe. And now when Europe are sending them back, they have nothing here. They have nothing left.

Interviewer: So, what do you think personally about deportations going on from Europe?

I think it is a bad thing, because if you look at the human rights articles, you see that one of the articles says that human beings are free to live wherever they want. And what the European governments are doing is exactly opposite to this. Because people are free to live wherever they want. The thing is, these people have lived in Europe for a really long time. For example, you have people who have lived there for ten years. So, throughout these ten years they've become a part of the European culture. The thing is, when you send them back, you sort of break that relation between them and their culture, which is the European culture. And you send them back to a country where they do not want to be. Where they have a problem with their culture. We have examples of suicides. People who have been deported have killed themselves. We have many cases of people who have mental diseases; they cannot accept the idea of adapting to the Kurdish culture again, they have become a part of the European culture.

Even if the informants commit themselves to the objective ideals of journalism, their personal views on the matter of deportations is nevertheless clear-cut, illustrated well by the editor-in-chief of one of the main party newspapers in Kurdistan:

We, as journalists and as media, we do not have and we should not have a opinion in this matter, and we never have had a opinion in this matter because we try to be objective and cover what is going on. But I think, this is my personal opinion, I do not think it is a good thing for people to be deported or to be forced to return to Kurdistan. You have to understand why these people fled the country in the first place. In some cases deported people have killed themselves, in other cases we see that people return again and again to Europe. For a Kurdish person who is a Muslim, to adapt to the European culture – it is very, very hard. It is not like for someone from the United States to go and live in Europe, who shares the same culture. To be returned to the place were they escaped from its something impossible for them to cope with. I mean they chose this country, the European country, as their last card, searching a place they could rescue themselves. When these countries deport them to

their original country it is terrible for them. For example the Irish people and the Italian people, when they first travelled to the United States. What would happen if they were deported back to their homeland? It would be very difficult for them to readapt. I think that people should not be forced to go back to Kurdistan, they should be able to stay in Europe and build their life there. They went to Europe as a final rescue.

The interviews with the media professionals and the representatives of IFIR and KRG reveal an awareness of the culture clash between a Western lifestyle and Western values and the traditional Kurdish culture. Many convey that it is not only a challenge to adapt to the European culture for someone of Kurdish origin, but that it is equally hard, or even harder, to *re-adapt* to the culture he or she has left behind and maybe even abandoned. As mentioned, these deeper and broader aspects of emigration and subsequent return of emigrants is barely discussed in the Kurdish news sampled in this study.

Even if a majority of the journalists we spoke to shared the views on deportations purveyed in the news, some had more nuanced views on deportations than those appearing in the news coverage. One journalist points out that those deported from Europe actually often had 'bad' records, and that some were criminals. Another argued that people should and could not expect to be granted permits to stay in European countries:

The reports on deportations have a negative focus – they are anti-European in the sense that they condemn the deportations. They tell stories about how people are mistreated on the plane, they are very critical. It is not a good picture for Europe. But you know, I think people should know that if they go illegally they must expect the worst conditions, that they have no rights whatsoever.

On the other hand, others do not really believe in the official version of the Kurdish Government, claiming that deportations are happening against their will. Rather, they point to how the Kurdish Government, by providing a positive image of the region to European Governments, is actually paving the way for deportations:

Because the Government wants to show the European Governments that we have a stable region and secure region. In that way they indirectly tell the European countries that they don't have to accept our people. But in reality, what is going on behind the curtains is that there is unemployment, there is injustice, there are problems with housing and so on. (...) It is the Government's fault, showing a positive picture of Kurdistan to the European countries. And what is their answer? They send people back. So even if the Kurdish Government do not officially say that they accept deportations, they are encouraging them in another way.

An editor in chief of a party-aligned newspaper argues along similar lines. His message is that the Kurdish Regional Government actually finds itself in a delicate situation, promoting their region as a stable and prosperous place and, after all, a part of the central Government of Iraq, even if they are against the deportations:

The thing is you won't see anyone from the Government here telling a European government that my country is not safe, don't send back immigrants. I mean its something impossible for them to say, it will be regarded as a proof that they are not able to run their country. (...)

Interviewer: But I have the impression that the Kurdish Government is against deportation?

Of course the KRG does not agree with the deportation of people back to Iraq, but at the same time KRG is part of the overall political system in Iraq.

### **The stigma of mandatory and forced returns**

Deportation is a big issue in Kurdish news, but the content analysis of this coverage reveals that it is largely restricted to a focus on protests against the ongoing deportations. There is very little coverage of the life of those who are returned by force, or the situation for those who came back mandatory through repatriations organized by the IOM. All the media professionals we talked to pointed to one important reason for this relative absence: to return empty-handed from Europe is strongly related to shame and failure. To go public with stories of failure is not an option; some do it anonymously, but others will even refuse to do tell their story under cover, fearing that they or their family will still be recognized. An editor of an independent weekly explains:

The media have not done a great job in the coverage, they have not told about the negative sides of emigration.

Interviewer: Why is that?

It is difficult to make people tell these stories; we need a case to do it. For instance: a man goes to Europe, leaves wife and children, woman receives a divorce letter after a long time. I interviewed a woman who had experienced this, I promised she could be anonymous but nevertheless she would not let me publish the story, she said her husband could recognize her even if she was anonymous, there are barriers to this.

Another example, I interviewed two boys, they had had a really miserable time in Sweden, a terrible life. They first told me their story but then they changed their mind, they said that it could hurt their family, not only damage their own life but that of their family.

A freelancer describes a tendency among emigrants to tell only about the positive, leaving aside the negative experiences in general:

When someone comes back from Europe, he will tell only the positive things, he will maybe not tell that he has a low paid job, that he is washing, all he will tell about is the free life in Europe. They say life in Europe is heaven, they never tell the negative things. It is a shame for people to come and tell how it really is in Europe. But people need to know, they should learn about the negative things.

An editor in the newspaper associated with the opposition nuances the picture by claiming that people do tell, but that information is kept within the family:

That is absolutely true. They do not talk about it in the media. But they talk about it within their families.

Interviewer: Alright, okay. So it is kept within the family?

Yes, within the family

He comments as well on what he regards as a biased coverage of deportations, pointing out that the matter is maybe not politically contested but nevertheless delicate:

We still don't have a professional media here in Kurdistan. And the thing is, when they cover these stories, they all blame for example the British Government. And also the KRG. Because they say that the KRG had reported to the British Government that life in Kurdistan is better and that it's a good life. So they never look at the other side of it. And also, you know the media (...) They are also afraid of the families of the people who have been deported, because they don't want to upset them, they want public support. I think this applies for all the news media here, including the opposition newspapers.

Another journalist from a party-affiliated daily relates people's reluctance to going public with their stories to the fact that some do not wish to spoil their chances to once again go illegally to Europe:

They never want to publicize their names. Because they are afraid that when they go again, they will get caught on the border. And instead of going further, they will come back. They will be deported from the Iraqi/Turkish border. The thing is, they will always stay anonymous. They never give you a picture or their name. They want to stay anonymous. They give you information, but as an anonymous source.

It is important to notice that the journalists we met are not only professionals, they are also private persons, inhabitants in a region with large-scale emigration to the West. Most of them have close relatives or friends who have emigrated – many in the irregular way. Their ties and responsibilities towards these people will likely colour their stories. One journalist explaining the background for a news story he wrote, where he criticizes not only Europe but also the Kurdish Regional Government for the lack of assistance to deportees, gives this account:

I have an example from one of my relatives. That relative I have, he was in Britain for four years. And he got deported back; he thought he would receive aid from the KRG and that he would be able to return to his previous job. But when he came back, none of these things happened. And he got really desperate. So what he did, he went back to Britain again in the illegal way and he spent about 10,000 USD.

Interviewer: So, do you know more about the destinies of the people who are coming back involuntarily? Do you ever write stories about these people?

I haven't done any accurate and sort of fully-packed information research about this. But from what I know from the mouth of people, just from the relatives I know when they come back. When they come back – when they were forced to come back. (...) They still think that their life there [in Europe], even though it was not a good life, was better than their life here. So that's my point. They are in between, they cannot choose. They don't like either life, but they still prefer the bad life in Europe. (...) I have a really close example for me, which is my aunt's house. They were having a

good life here ten years ago, but they sold everything and they went to Europe. They stayed in Germany for four to five years. When they came back here, they started from zero.

An editor from an independent newspaper refers to the situation for her own brother when explaining while there might be a type of self-censorship involved when Kurdish journalists covered irregular migration and the return of migrants to Kurdistan:

Another reason for lack of focus, we do not want to make the situation worse for those who have left the country. For instance my brother, he spent 15,000 USD to be able to leave; he left in the middle of his college education. He sacrificed everything, there is nothing here for him to return to, and he must find a job there. If we focus too much on it, it might make KRG more eager to make agreement on deportations.

We noticed from the analysis of the media coverage that we did not find much focus on the differences between a European and a Kurdish culture or on diverging lifestyles and codes of conduct. As will be shown in the subsequent chapter, people point to these differences as vital push factors in their urge to go to Europe. In our interviews, we find that these are topics journalists actually consider important to cover as well. When asked what would be the most important topics for the Kurdish media to cover in the future, an editor explains:

There has been a sort of transformation of life here, you see that people feel sort of empty or people have sadness in their hearts. For example, when I was around 16, with my family and with my friends, we were all happy with the lives we had. But now, even though the standard of life has grown, still people don't feel happy. They leave Kurdistan and move to Europe, because they think that they will find happiness there, which I think is wrong. Because the sadness, the real sadness starts from Europe. (...) But people think that there is no censorship or there is no one to watch them in Europe, that's one of the reasons. But here they can do the same things as they do in Europe. (...) But they are afraid that someone would catch them or that they are being watched by someone.

### **The media campaign of STATT**

Most of the journalists interviewed for this research project maintained that Kurdish media had not focused properly on the risks, perils and hardship awaiting irregular migrants on their journeys to Europe, or on what their situation would be like if they succeeded in getting there. It was a surprise that we actually found articles in our sample which provided stories with information that clearly conveyed a message suitable for deterring people from embarking on illegal journeys to Europe. Further research on how these articles had been produced revealed that many of them had appeared in the news in the wake of a media campaign launched by a company called STATT. STATT provided footwork, translated articles from foreign newspapers and arranged interviews with people willing to share their stories with journalists. These included smugglers, people who had embarked on unsuccessful journeys to Europe as well as those who regretted that they had gone to Europe. In June 2011, STATT, together with the Independent Media Centre in Kurdistan (IMCK), an NGO working to improve the quality of the media and the functioning of Kurdish democracy, arranged a workshop with the aim of encouraging journalists to write about these issues and providing them with information on

the subject matter. At least three of the journalists we spoke to had participated on this workshop and all of them had published stories afterwards. The stated goal of this campaign was, through the media, to prevent people from going to Europe and Australia. It was also an explicit aim to inform people of the rules and premises of European and Australian immigration systems and how application for asylum is processed. In our sample there were no examples of TV reports focusing on illegal journeys or the conditions for rejected asylum seekers in the West. There were, however, TV reports produced with the help of STATT in the period just before and during our sample period. They are all posted on YouTube<sup>15</sup> by STATT and they show, for instance, live images of tiny and fragile vessels in open, rough sea, crammed with people, heading for the Australian coast, and people rescued from the water.

The clients of STATT are different types of organizations and Western governments. However, it is actually not clear who exactly they are, since STATT is following a policy of confidentiality, implying that they will not go public with the name of the clients in any of the projects they are working on. The company is based in Hong Kong. Its status as a commercial company is somewhat ambiguous, with home pages on the web presenting the organization more as a humanitarian type of NGO than as a commercial company. STATT is presenting itself as such: 'STATT designs and implements responses to challenges that cross borders and link communities'.<sup>16</sup>

As for the media campaign in Kurdistan, several informants claimed that it was the Australian Government who paid for the campaign. It was not possible to have this confirmed, but quite a few of the stories and reports that came about in the wake of the campaign provided 'deterrence' information about the conditions for those travelling to or applying for asylum in Australia. Our analysis of Kurdish news reveal that the campaign launched by STATT was a success: the company actually succeeded in reaching out to journalists with information and footwork, and, through these endeavors, came out in the media. In our view, the ethical standard of a campaign like this needs some reflection. By keeping the names of their clients secret, and, thus, also the motivation of their clients for paying for this type of campaign, STATT can get access to and confidence from journalists they might not have had if they were open about whose interests they represent. The fact that the journalists who attended the workshop, and who subsequently wrote stories based on the material provided from STATT, did not investigate the status of the company or who it represents signals that the professional level of Iraqi Kurdish journalism is still wanting.

### **Conclusion and main findings**

News journalism in Iraqi Kurdistan is vulnerable and the struggle to build independent news coverage, free from repression and undue liaison with powerful stakeholders, is continuous. Journalists in this study pointed to a lack of resources, and what the journalists themselves regarded as a low degree of professionalism in Kurdish journalism. Most of the media professionals were not content with the way migration had been covered in the Kurdish news: they pointed to a lack of focus on the negative aspects related to emigration to Europe and many of them believed that people in general have unrealistic perceptions of life in Europe and the opportunities there for undocumented immigrants. Many of them pointed to the influence of the media as paramount for a person's decision to leave.

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<sup>15</sup> [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_6Z1h9XbQ\\_g](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_6Z1h9XbQ_g)

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.statt.net/>

However, we actually found articles in our sample, even if there were not many, which provided stories with information that clearly conveyed a message suitable for deterring people from embarking on illegal journeys to Europe. Further research on how these articles had been produced revealed that many of them had appeared in the news in the wake of a media campaign launched by a company called STATT. STATT provided groundwork, translated articles from foreign newspapers and arranged interviews with people who were willing to share their stories with journalists. These included smugglers, people who had embarked on unsuccessful journeys to Europe as well as those who regretted that they had gone to Europe. The status of STATT is ambiguous; they are sometimes referred to as an NGO in the Kurdish news, reflecting their lack of openness regarding who their clients are and the fact that this is a commercial company. It was not possible to have this confirmed, but many of our source believed the Australian Government funded the projects of STATT in Iraqi Kurdistan.

The interviews reveal that the destinies of undocumented emigrants to Europe are sensitive issues, even if not directly challenging the Kurdish Regional Government or related to party-political cleavages. To come back empty-handed, to have 'failed' in Europe, was strongly related to shame and social stigma. To go public with stories of failure is not an option, some do it anonymously, but others will even refuse to tell their story under cover, fearing that they or their family will still be recognized. It is hence very difficult to make people tell their story in public.

The interviews with the media professionals and the representatives of IFIR and KRG reveal an awareness of the culture clash between the Western lifestyle and values and traditional Kurdish culture. Many convey that it is not only a challenge to adapt to the European culture for someone of Kurdish origin but that it is equally hard or even harder to *re*-adapt to the culture he or she has left behind and maybe even abandoned. As mentioned, these deeper and broader aspects of emigration and subsequent return of emigrants is barely discussed in the Kurdish news sampled for this study.

Deportation is described as a big issue, and the interviews with the representatives from IFIR and KRG confirm the findings from the content analysis of news. Deportations are almost unanimously regarded as a break with basic human rights and as unfair treatment of people who have already suffered much to get to Europe. A common claim is that 'they have nothing to return to' and do not deserve this type of treatment from Western governments. The media professionals, in general, share this perspective, even if some nuance the picture by pointing to the responsibilities of KRG for the situation.



## **7. Push and pull - the stories of life in Europe and Iraqi Kurdistan**

A media revolution brought about an unprecedented flow of information in the wake of the new millennium. The number of Kurdish mass media exploded, the access to international satellite channels from abroad and web-based media all over the world became commonplace and, perhaps most significantly, digital technology made possible transnational personal communication, enabling frequent, daily contact between people settled far away from each other. Most people in Iraqi Kurdistan could not easily move physically across borders, but they seemed, all of a sudden, to be literally immersed in information about life in Europe and the West. In this chapter we describe the most important push and pull factors influencing people's decisions to emigrate to the West in the last decade. A main purpose is to show how personal stories and information from the mass media merged into certain dominant pictures of Europe, and how these images for many became a contrast to the life in Iraqi Kurdistan.

In chapter 5 we noticed that there was a relative lack of certain stories in the Kurdish media both regarding why people emigrate from the Kurdish region and with regard to the destinies of people who return mandatory or by force. Here we provide both types of stories – we discuss why people have emigrated or wish to do so, and we describe the conditions for asylum seekers in Europe and their life when back in Kurdistan. In particular, we look into what it means to have attained a European citizenship for those returning from Europe. We relate the personal stories to the media coverage on migration, and discuss how these personal stories seep into the public discourse.

The focus is again on irregular migration and the policies pertaining to irregular migrants in Europe; that is, we do not describe other types of migration (education, work or family migration). For this part of the project, 36 informants, 12 in Norway and 24 in Iraqi Kurdistan, with different types of migration experiences, citizenship and legal status were interviewed (see Chapter 4 on method). The largest group consists of 19 informants whose applications for asylum have been turned down.

The informants with rejected asylum applications did leave Iraqi Kurdistan in the last decennium after the fall of the Baath regime, most of them with only low levels of education, many dropped out of school. Our interviews show that they left for mixed reasons. Even if some pointed to a feeling of insecurity as one reason to go, most of them chose to emigrate in spite of the status of the Iraqi Kurdish region as politically stable, relatively secure and almost untouched by the violence and unrest that has affected the rest of Iraq. *Why* they went will be explored in this chapter. What they knew and know of the premises for gaining asylum in a European country will be discussed in the next chapter.

### **Media use**

In the years after 2003-2004, conditions were gradually stabilizing and improving in Kurdistan, but people were still leaving in unparalleled numbers. Through mass media, through social media – and also through the stories told and the lifestyle exhibited by those

emigrants returning from Europe – captivating images and stories of life and conditions in Europe were flourishing.

Our interviews confirm the common notion that the technological media revolution has profoundly changed the patterns and scope of media use and mediated personal contact. Our informants, both those residing in Norway, permanently or temporarily, and those living in Iraq, including both former emigrants and those with no migration experience, generally have access to the Internet and use it frequently to stay in contact with relatives and friends abroad.

Among the 24 informants in Kurdistan, 17 had access to the Internet, most of them had personal computers, others visited internet cafes. Facebook was the platform of choice for many informants. The vast majority used a combination of Facebook, SKYPE and MMS/SMS, combined with talks on their cell phones to stay in contact with their friends and relatives abroad. SKYPE and Facebook were the media platforms mentioned by most informants. The frequency of this contact varied, some having contact with their network abroad several times each day, others communicated more randomly. The very few who did not use the web in Norway or Kurdistan, also lived in isolation from other types of social contact. This applied to a few of those who were deported from Europe and to those who lived in Norway without a residence permit. As for use of the mass media, we find, in line with the results of a media survey recently conducted in Iraq (IREX 2012), that TV was the medium most frequently used. People mostly watched Kurdish channels, like Kurdsat, KNN and NRT, but quite a few also mentioned Al Jazeera and some the BBC. People who had returned from Europe said they tried to follow the channels they used to watch there, but that it was difficult to get access to, for example, NRK. Many used the web to read news and newspapers, the majority confining themselves to Kurdish outlets like *Kurdistani New*, *Awene*, *Levin* and *Hwalati*. As for the informants living in Norway, their use of the mass media naturally reflects their language skills. Those living without residence permits, in general only watched Kurdish TV channels and not Norwegian or international channels. Two of them also read Kurdish newspapers. For those permanently residing in Norway, the picture is mixed, but most watch a mix of Kurdish channels and NRK and TV2. A generation division seems to appear: those having arrived in Norway as grown ups watch more Kurdish programmes than the informants arriving here as a child or teenager.

### **Pull factors – the stories of life in Europe**

The access to mass media and personal media today is a new phenomenon. Until a decade ago it was very difficult for most people in Iraqi Kurdistan to communicate with their family members or friends outside the country. Due to international sanctions, the country's communication infrastructure and technology were dilapidated. The post system was basically dysfunctional and long-distance calls were a luxury that few people could afford. To talk by phone to a relative outside Iraq meant many people had to sacrifice a significant chunk of their income. But now, thanks to the influx of the ICTs after the 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq, communication with the outside world has become immeasurably easier compared to a decade ago. The way new media technologies fundamentally changed the communication with the rest of the world is described like this by a young man now residing in Norway, he arrived there in 2004:

I knew nothing of life in Europe back then, about what was waiting there. Now it is all different. We have Internet and Facebook, it was not like that before. We had one central telephone where we could make calls in the village, it cost 2 dinars for one

minute, it was very much, and we could not call much. We could send letters by fax that was the cheapest way to communicate. One of the men in the village came back on holiday from Canada where he lived. I recognized that he was different, that he had changed a lot – I was fascinated by his style. Otherwise you know – you watch films, listens to music, find the Western lifestyle attractive. It influences your dreams – we all have dreams right?

In line with former studies (King & Wood, 2001) we find that many people refer to a rosy and ‘beautiful’ picture of Europe as central in their motivation to leave. Our material shows that this is an image where personal stories and the image from mass media and popular culture tend to merge. Whereas some will point to the stories told by people they know as most important, others point to the mass media, in particular TV, as the most vital and influential source of information. But, in general, people point to how personal contacts *and* the mass media played an important role. A young man recently deported back from the Netherlands says:

Their descriptions were beyond imagination. I always wanted to go and see the place with my own eyes.

Interviewer: Who were those people who talked to you about there?

They were my relatives and friends. Also, the videos and pictures they showed me had affected me.

The influx of Western popular culture – fiction in the form of films and TV serials and pop music – is seen as paramount. Many refer as well to very popular long-running Kurdish TV productions focusing on the life of Kurdish people in Europe as decisive for their impression of life in Europe. A Kurdistan TV show, *Be Kontrol* (Without Control) had an entertainment format where an energetic young female presenter would travel across Europe to meet Kurds. She would visit families, often from seemingly-successful backgrounds. The show is currently off the air. Kurdsat has been running a show for a number of years, named *Kurd Le Ewrupa* (Kurds in Europe), that almost exclusively shows interviews with successful Kurds such as professionals, singers, artists and writers living in the West, mostly in Europe. Unlike Kurdistan TV’s *Be Kontrol*, the Kurdsat show has a serious format that profiles one or more people on each show. *Be Kontrol* is referred to thus in our interviews:

The media visits some cities and countries and tells about the life there. And they show beautiful images of Europe. There was a show – I don’t remember the exact name of the show, but Dashni Mwrad was running the show. She was visiting a lot of European cities. This had not only affected me, but most of the youth, this was back in 2006. She was describing how beautiful Europe could be, especially for youth.

Others refer to pop culture – music and fiction movies – as decisive, like this informant who used to live in Norway but has now voluntarily returned to Kurdistan:

The Kurdish media played Mikail's song that says, 'Come come to Sweden.' It shows the beauty of Sweden. I don't know why they didn't shoot the song when he goes to work at the car wash, and how miserable people's life can be.

When people are asked about what they regard as the most influential medium, television stands out as the medium reaching people across educational, social and economic backgrounds. A young man explains, when describing his motivation to leave Kurdistan in 2000:

Like I said it wasn't any political reason at all. But I have to say, the media plays a big role in this. Most TV channels here, via satellite, viewed Europe as a wonderful place.

Some refer to the urge to emigrate as a trend that took the form of a fashion – as acts people wanted to imitate:

Most of my friends had been to Europe so I became curious too. You could probably say it was something of an imitation.

Another, who after all chose not to go, explains:

Many people were leaving the country for economic reasons and individual freedom. The things we saw on TV and from the advertisements dragged us to the idea of immigrating. So, media had affected us in one way, and those people, who were coming back from Europe, had affected us in another way because they were talking about their lives, and it made us wish to have their life. I felt really sad for staying here at that time, but now it's something really normal to be here, and I don't feel sad.

### **Push factors: The felt inflexibility of life**

Since 2003, the conditions in Iraqi Kurdistan have improved with regard to both security and economy. The region is developing into a relatively affluent society, where the economy is rapidly growing and an increasing part of the population has increased their standard of living. Still, many informants point to three factors as decisive for the urge to emigrate, factors of particular importance to the youth. The first concerns the perceived lack of possibilities for those without contacts and influential networks in Kurdish society. The other concerns political repression and power abuse. The last factor, very central in the accounts of most informants, is related to social and psychological aspects and the lack of individual freedom.

### ***Nepotism***

A great frustration is expressed from young people, who feel that their abilities and competence is not valued and that relatively lesser-skilled people are given positions due to their acquaintances and not their competence. The lack of opportunities is linked to the urge to emigrate, formulated like this by a man who had to return from Europe when his asylum application was turned down:

There are many things that make you feel unhappy. I think life in Kurdistan is just for rich families or aristocracy. There are no opportunities for poor people. As a young

man I may have many dreams, but not one of them come true. Those who are going to leave Kurdistan toward foreign countries feel that their dreams will become true. They believe they can get permanent residency of destination country.

Another male informant, now aiming to emigrate to Europe, regards the improvements of Kurdish society as something favoring only a privileged class of people:

I want to leave Kurdistan because I don't see that much improvement. I mean there is nothing for the youth. Our days are rotating, it goes and goes on, it's pretty much the same thing, and it's nothing new about it.

Interviewer: Some people will say that thing has changed a lot, that it has improved in many ways, do you say that this is a wrong picture?

Probably those persons just look at their own privileged class, they never look at the lower classes. For us things have not changed yet. There are no jobs, students graduate from university, but to find a job they need contacts. For example, I was the best student at my university, but they put the daughter of an influential person in my position. It's not fair.

Another young man describes his situation before leaving for Europe with smugglers like this:

I looked inside myself I saw a lot of potential and, in Kurdistan, I couldn't find a way to show my potential and energy. The thing is there was a lot of corruption in the country like they way they hire people was not based on merit, but it was based on knowing people from a high position. I also thought about the overall Iraqi budget per year; it 70 billion dollars per year, and I asked myself, 'Why don't I have a penny in my pocket?'

The contrast between what people experience in their own life and the impression they get of the opportunities in the West through the media seems to promote dissatisfaction, accentuating what people regard as unfairness:

In Kurdistan there is a problem. We see the beginning of a fairly well functioning system. But there is corruption, economic criminality and hiring of relatives to jobs. For some this is the perfect system, but the average people rather want to leave the country.

(...)

Technology has made the world into a small place. Every home in Kurdistan has a satellite dish, Internet and they follow the development in the rest of the world. Young people who watch get frustrated over the unfairness they see, over the difference between inside and outside. It leads some to still want to leave.

### ***Political repression and power abuse***

The second main factor motivating people to look out of Iraqi Kurdistan for a different life is related to political oppression and what is regarded as power abuse and the lack of equality before the law. A man living in Norway with Norwegian citizenship gives this account:

In Kurdistan, all laws, political or religious, how they apply to you depend on how much power, money and how many contacts you have. The laws do not apply for all, in particular not for those who have made them.

Other informants point to the lack of full freedom of expression, in particular related to the critique of Islam as a great problem:

Another main reason that led me to leave Iraq was the practice of free speech in the European countries. I don't see the real practice of individual freedom and the freedom of thoughts here in Kurdistan. In Europe, they respect any idea and thought that someone has, no matter what, but here it is not like that. For example, let's say that I don't like Islam or I have something critically to say about Islam; I don't have the freedom to say this here in Kurdistan, but there, they were respecting any type of religion.(...)They don't allow you to practice your thoughts and ideas because either your ideas don't match their ideas, or your ideas don't serve their parties.

Others again refer to the strict security measures in Kurdistan, and that it is impossible to argue with or oppose the views of the police.

No one has asked me yet, but if a friend or a family member asks whether they should go to Europe, I will answer that there are great differences between Europe and our country. I would start by telling about the problems in Kurdistan, I would tell them that I have never been stopped by the Norwegian police in any control asking for my ID. Just think of it, in Kurdistan there are checkpoints everywhere.

### ***Lack of individual freedom***

Finally, many of the informants describe a situation in which young people have left or wish to leave Iraqi Kurdistan in search of more individual freedom – and happiness. Some who are back describe a situation that is safe enough but not psychologically fulfilling:

I don't know about now, but before it was media that motivated people to leave this country. Also, people left because of unemployment and civil war. Now things are better, but what is important is happiness. People are not happy now, and I am one of them.

Interviewer: Why aren't you happy?

I don't know. I am confused. I think about Europe. I can't overcome my feelings. It is always in my mind.

Many refer in particular to the restriction on relationships between men and women in Kurdistan. In a strictly-segregated society, both young men and women feel a stifling lack of

independence related to gender relations. The situation is epitomized by a young man reflecting on the option of emigration:

People still go, and the reasons why they go are that they want more freedom. I think the main reason is the possibility to have a relationship with a girl. I mean here you cannot talk to a girl, but there it is exactly the opposite. So this might be the main reason why most of the people or youth want to travel.

He continues by describing a very strong social control in the Kurdish society:

We have this thing called *hashiraeti* which controls most of the life of people. Under the pretext of religion, they try to restrict everything, it is not flexible. I will give an example; once, a friend of my father was invited to our house. He said that I would never allow my girl to marry someone she chooses. How could I allow someone to marry my girl that I raised for twenty years? So I have to choose the right person for her. The thing is that people who are older than you, probably your dad, brother, uncle cousin, like your great, great cousin, like your step-cousin. Like someone who is older than you and he is just related by you through blood, they interfere with your freedom and your life. They mention honour always (...) I mean, believe me, even if it is really hard to get a citizenship in Europe, still a lot of people travel there. So if in case it was easy to get a citizenship like half of the country would immigrate.

We see a traditional society where strong social claims on the individual are only slowly in transition. Today, people are widely exposed to other lifestyles, values and ideas through transnational and global communication, but the access to this type of life and its values is restricted. The result is described by some with words of sorrow, regret and melancholia. The strict limitation on travel to Europe invites this remark from a woman with relatives in Norway:

For European people, when they travel, they will have connection with their homeland easily, but for Iraqis it is not like that at all. For us travelling is so difficult. The easiness of travelling reduces the psychological impacts of immigrants. So, because travelling is really hard for us and because we don't get visa, this impact people when they get there. All what they have there is a phone to talk to their family or a webcam of a computer. Because of all of these reasons, they feel so homesick and they don't feel satisfied at all.

Others describe 'a sorrow in the heart' as predominant among many Kurds, acknowledging that society is changing, but maybe not at the pace or in the direction they wish. We return to one of our professional sources, an editor of a semi-independent paper:

Because of a sort of transformation of life here, you see that people feel sort of empty or people have sadness in their hearts. For example, when I was around 16, with my family and with my friends, we were all happy with the lives we had. But now, even though the standard of life has grown, still people don't feel happy. They leave Kurdistan and move to Europe, because they think that they will find happiness there. (...) They think that there is no censorship or no one to watch them in Europe.

### **What European citizenship can do**

People went to Europe with dreams and aspirations in the last decade. Our research shows that their experiences after arrival in Europe to a high degree correlate with the period during which they left Iraqi Kurdistan and whether or not they were accepted as trustworthy asylum seekers in Europe. Those who left in the 1980s and 1990s give accounts of how they in general felt welcomed and as someone special in Europe. Like this man, age 24, who has a Norwegian citizenship but is now residing permanently in Kurdistan after several years in the UK. His family arrived for political reasons in Norway in 1985, and he was born there:

Yes, we had Norwegian citizenship. The neighbourhood we lived in was called Askøy, in Bergen city. We had a really beautiful house there. When I was born, they put my picture in the Norwegian national newspaper the next day because I was the first Kurdish child there. In the headline they wrote either the first Kurdish or Iraqi child was born in Norway. I think they wrote Kurdish. My dad still has a copy of the newspaper in London. People were visiting us; our neighbors were bringing flowers for us just because of my birth.

In general, there is a sharp distinction between the ‘haves’ and ‘have-nots’ – in other words, the experiences of those who managed to receive protection in a European country and those whose applications for residence were turned down, often after several years. Those with Norwegian or European citizenship, even if they now have chosen to return to Iraqi Kurdistan and resettle there, have positive stories to tell about their life in Norway or other European countries, exhibiting gratitude for the chances they got in Europe. They do talk about homesickness and that they miss their family network but, overall, their accounts stand in stark contrast to the reports from all those who are denied the right to stay in Europe.

The significance of a Western citizenship stands out in the accounts of the informants in our sample. To have a European citizenship implies freedom of choice and entitlement to resources and rights that distinguish its owners. This informant is representative of those who went, had their applications turned down and, subsequently, were forced to go back :

My friends told me to go to Europe with them because they enjoyed it there and they told me they’d do this and that for me. But it was nothing like that. It changed my opinion about Europe. Europe wasn’t all that to me. They would only respect you there if you had a citizenship. Without civil rights, you were nothing. I really regret going there.

Another informant says:

Life of those who got residency was good. They had a normal life and accessed everything like school, job and other ordinary needs. You can drive car, have a house and think about your destiny.

We see that the divide between people who have a European citizenship and those who have not is not only a vital distinction for those living in Europe, it is also a trophy that defines the

life of those who have returned to Iraq: the latter come back with competences and resources they put to use in a country where the opportunities might now seem better than in a Europe marked by economic crisis. They can take the chance, through their citizenship they have options that are out of reach of those with an Iraqi citizenship only: with a European citizenship they can choose to return to Europe for shorter or longer periods of time if the conditions turn out too difficult in Kurdistan or if one is in need of services only offered by a European state. Explained like this by an informant:

Those families who come back, they all have European citizenships. So when they come back, they say, we will see. If we have a good life here, we will stay here.

The ease, degrees of freedom and security a European passport provides is expressed in the following quote by the young man who spent his first years in Norway and later went to school and studied for his PhD in the UK. Now back in Kurdistan, he explains why he never bothered to apply for a British citizenship:

No, I didn't try because I had Norwegian citizenship, and the thing that could be done with the British citizenship can be done with the Norwegian one, too.

Informants like him have, as mentioned, a very different impression of life in Europe than the ones arriving later in great numbers. They do not always seem to care that much about today's conditions for immigrants to Europe, either. When asked about what he thinks of the European immigration policies of today, the young man replies:

I do not have much information about that. When we emigrated to Norway getting citizenship was an easy thing. I think my dad got it in less than a week, but this was during the 1980s. My dad always tells me that they never felt like they were a second-rate people in Norway. He means that they were always equal to the Norwegian people in terms of everything.

### **Brutal Europe – stories of denial**

The contrast is stark between the stories of people with a European passport and the accounts given by those who went to Europe, did not receive protection and who were forced to return. Many of them express great disappointment about the Europe they were introduced to. Their stories centre on humiliation, psychological problems, idle waiting, fear and despair.

Quite a few tell how they travelled from country to country in Europe under dire circumstances. Desperately looking for a country that would accept them, they repeatedly found themselves in front of immigration authorities with their full case information and fingerprints, resulting in various types of imprisonment, detention and transportation back to the European country where they had first arrived. A man deported from Germany tells how he initially tried to leave Kurdistan many times before he finally made it to Europe, and then spent many years in different camps and prisons, with periods of black work in between:

I left in 2005 and got to Germany in 2006. The situation in Kurdistan was not stable, and a lot of people were coming back and talking about how joyful Europe was. So, I decided to travel.

In 2003, I tried to go two times, but I didn't succeed. In 2006, I found another deal; I went to Syria with my passport. Then I went to Lebanon. From Lebanon we flew to Czechoslovakia. Then, we drove to Austria and from there to Germany. All of these travels were illegal.

I lived in Germany for four years and three months. I was in Britain. I was in Holland for two months. I was in France for three months. I searched all of these countries because I was looking for a positive answer from them concerning my residency right, and not a single one of them gave me an answer.

Stories of humiliation and bad treatment in Europe are common. This is the account of a woman who stayed in the Netherlands before she was deported back to Iraq:

I lived for about 11 years in Holland, but we had a terrible life there. (...) In the camp there, we couldn't leave for more than 30 km. I had to sign everyday. They were telling me, 'Why don't you leave; this is not your country. You have nothing in this country except your suitcase.' They were driving me crazy. Many nights, I had to take pills to sleep. They were fighting me mentally.

Others focus on the intolerability of being denied the opportunity of taking up an education and, not least, not having the opportunity to work while waiting for their case to be processed, like this couple who had received a negative response from the Norwegian authorities on their asylum application:

Husband: I don't understand why they do this to us, is it not better for Norway if we work? We can pay taxes and be much better off psychologically and socially.

Wife: When they say that asylum seekers create problems, it is caused by the Government. When a young person is denied the right to stay, with no permission to work, he has no choice but to become a criminal. I cannot because of my family, but a young man does not care.

A young man who returned to Iraqi Kurdistan with the assistance of the IOM after several years in Norway explains:

I just lived in these camps where I didn't use bus, train, or anything. They put me with some people who had criminal background. Believe me I was sent to stay in a room that was full of sick and crazy people because these people knew that they would be sent back to their country, so they were fighting and using prohibited things.

The disappointment with the Europe where they had hoped they would find universal human rights is deep among many. This is the view of a young man who left Iraq in 2006 and was recently forcibly returned to Iraq:

But I just want to say that there are no human rights in Europe, because if there was, women and children wouldn't be in prison. If there are human rights in Switzerland, they wouldn't beat people and put children and men in the same room as prisoners.

A couple still living in Norway without a legal permission to stay, with their asylum application denied, has this comment on the status of human rights in Norway:

Our life here in Norway is just as difficult as it was in Kurdistan. We had heard about rights for women and children, we do not see much of that. We received our refusal to stay on March 8, on women's day.

Some declare that 'there is no human rights' in Europe – having experienced how Europe treats people arriving as illegal immigrants/asylum seekers. However, stories of brutality and humiliation are mixed with examples of good treatment. Some point to the fact that in many ways they were actually treated with more respect by government authorities than they were used to in Iraqi Kurdistan: as two men, the first deported from Finland in 2009, the other from France in 2011, comment:

Life in Europe is nice. There is equality there, unlike here. They respect people there. If I go back, I would agree with that life no matter what, even if I ate only one meal in three days, because they will look at me and treat me like a human being and because there is equality there.

Again, the distinction between those accepted as legal members of their new state, with a legal status, and those who are not, is underscored. This woman, who stayed in the Netherlands before she had to return to Iraq, states:

They respected us a lot as human beings, but in term of giving residency right, they were really tough and didn't have any conscience.

Even if the picture is nuanced, the most vital conclusion is that those who went illegally to Europe in the years from 2000 until today find that they were humiliated and treated unfairly. Those we spoke to in Norway, still residing in asylum centers after their rejection, feel the same.

### **The impossibility of returning**

It is a paradox that, even if most of those who had to return by the IOM or were deported by force to Iraq describe unbearable situations in Europe, in general did not regard returning of their own will as an option.

The perspective that life in Europe as an irregular immigrant, even if it is ultimately a life bereft of the most basic ingredients of a normal life, is better than to return is widely felt. This was the case for the informants with rejected asylum applications living in Norway. Asked whether he knew what to expect before leaving for Europe, this couple answers:

Husband: We heard about it, but we could not imagine how bad it actually would be. I have lost everything I had for this, if we should return I would not even have a tent to live in, we spent 50,000 USD to get here.

Wife: It is not possible to go back, no way.

A young, single man is clear about his decision not to accept the request from Norwegian authorities to return to Iraq assisted by the IOM:

No, I do not want to go back. I am used to staying here now, I prefer Norway to Kurdistan, even if I do not have a residence or work permit. I am content with the small amount of money I receive, I would never consider returning. If I get a permission to work I can find a job and pay taxes like everybody else.

Informants with rejected asylum applications tell stories of suffering mounting to human tragedy. A man from Kirkuk, deported back to Iraq, tells his story:

I have a terrible life here in Kurdistan, because I am used to life in Europe, but now I have to live here. I was being treated unfairly, because even though I had all of the legal documents to stay in the Netherlands, I was deported to Iraq. I was in jail for three months and a week. I tried to suicide and behead myself, but the cutter got broken halfway through my neck. You can still see the sign of it. Then, they put me in jail. They asked me to sign and agree to go back. They told me if I sign the paper, they would deport me to Erbil, but I didn't, so they deported me to Baghdad. I stayed one night in Baghdad. Then I came back to Sulaymaniyah. I haven't seen Kirkuk yet. It has been 11 months since my deportation.

Another informant, who left Kurdistan for Europe in 2003 and was deported back in 2006, tells a similar story:

I received my second rejection letter. A few days after I had received it, I was thrown in jail. I stayed in prison for about 45 days, but still refused to sign a contract agreeing that I would be sent back here to Suleymaniyah. During my days in prison, I even made an attempt of suicide. After that, it had gotten to a point where security would follow me even into the bathrooms. So they forced me to leave their country, claiming that they didn't need me to sign any papers. They sent me to London. In London, I was put in the worst jail. In 24 hours, you only had 15 minutes to go outside.

I remained there almost 45 hours and after that, we were sent to the airport. At the airport, the plane that was going to fly us was far off in a corner so no one could see it. And it wasn't even British – it was Italian. Since it was an Italian company that was going to fly us, we could supposedly have nothing to say against the Brits. So we boarded the plane and we flew back here. However, Suleymaniyah didn't agree that we could land here; neither did Baghdad; neither did Hawler. After flying from 9 until 5 o'clock, Massoud Barzani finally signed and confirmed that we could land.

There was no one in Hawler to welcome us back home. One of the Brits from the airplane made fun of me by saying: 'This is how your people welcome you back home?' I had nothing to say to him. So we got off the plane, received 100 USD each, and took a taxi back to Sulaymaniyah

### **Deportation and “voluntary” returns**

One particular aspect is worth elaborating in the stories of deportation presented here. Many informants tell that they were asked to sign an agreement declaring that they would return to

Iraq, a so-called ‘voluntary’ return through the IOM, which they refused. It is apparent that this type of agreement is not regarded in any way as voluntary by the former asylum seekers. Others, who actually in the end agreed to go back with the IOM, still regard it as a deportation, saying that they were ‘deported by the IOM’. This is the story of one man who went back from Norway through the IOM but definitely regards it as a de facto deportation:

My lawyer told me if you do not get back to Kurdistan, they [police] will deport you forcibly. I felt despair and became very nervous because they rejected my case.

Those who actually did go back mandatory through the IOM or who were expelled and deported do not, however, tell uniform stories about what it was actually like to come back. As was discussed in the last chapter, mandatory returns are related to shame and social failure in Iraqi Kurdistan and, therefore, marked by concealment; few will go public with their fate. Some of the stories of the returnees substantiate this impression. This man acknowledges both that he and most others had unrealistic expectations about Europe and that life can be difficult there – but even so, he is sorry to be back and will still advise anyone to go there:

I do advise everyone to emigrate to Europe because there is no hope here. People can work illegally there, they will earn less than the native Europeans; we call it ‘black jobs’, but it is much better than to live here.

Some informants report not only that they feel miserable and without possibilities when back in Kurdistan, they also convey that they are isolated from their families because of shame:

The reason why I left was because there were a lot of explosions, and I didn’t feel secure at all, so I left Kirkuk. To be honest, I haven’t gone back to Kirkuk yet. I don’t know where my house is in Kirkuk.

Interviewer: Why don’t you go back to your family and home in Kirkuk?

I feel shame, because my family sold its house for me to go to Europe, so how can I go back to them without anything. They will even like me to go back to them, but I feel shame to go to them empty-handed.

Some of these informants, even if they went through dire conditions in Europe, would like to go back to Europe even now. They see life in Kurdistan as without hope and opportunities, and they report difficulties with merging into the Kurdish culture after becoming used to a European way of living. Others, however, report that they are actually glad to be back, some regretting deeply that they went to Europe in the first place, others saying that, after all, and now content with their life, they learnt a lot from the experience and do not regret anything. Some have taken up their education, some have started a new family and found a new job. Some report that they were actually warmly welcomed by their family.

### **Dreams and nightmares seeping into the public discourse**

What do the personal stories on travels to, stays in and returns from Europe add to the picture of the characteristics of the discourses on emigration in Kurdistan? They both confirm and nuance the findings from the analysis of Kurdish news and the opinions of editors and

journalists. The interviews confirm that the rosy dreams of Europe were strong among those who chose to go to Europe in the decade following the turn of the millennium. People clearly had unrealistic pictures of the possibilities of achieving residence permits in Europe. We see that many of those leaving for mixed reasons after 2003 were deeply disappointed. As one young man, who was deported back in 2010, said: “Europe is nice only in pictures”. We do, however, find evidence showing that people who left may have had bits and pieces of information about the destinies of people struggling and failing in Europe, both with regard to the conditions in camps and detention centers and the destinies of those deported. What our interviews show, however, is that this type of information was not part of any systematic knowledge of European migration policies and their rationale. Some recount how they were warned but did not really take it in:

Honestly, I didn't enjoy life here even though I had a job and my own car. I wanted to know how life was in Europe. Of course, my parents kept insisting that I should stay here because they didn't want me to leave. They told me they'd do everything for me as long as I stay here, because I have an older brother who tried the same as me but he was deported back 11 times. That's why my parents wanted me to stay. After his 11th try, my brother decided to reside here. He explained to me how horrible it was to travel from here to Europe. Whatever it was, I didn't listen to him. I paid 800 USD for my passport, which was a great deal of money at the time. I flew out to Turkey, where you were to be sent back home if you didn't have a lot of money. I stayed in Turkey that night, but travelled to Bulgarian waterside [in a van] the following day.

Others describe how they themselves now try to convince potential emigrants, but that people do not want to listen to them:

My brother wanted to go to Europe, and I told him all of my stories, but he didn't believe me. I told him how they behaved with me and put me together with criminals, and how they treated me like animal even though I was an educated person with a law degree, but he didn't listen to me and went there. He told me that was my chance, and that I had a bad luck. He said that he will try his chance. Nobody believes you here.

When asked whether they believe that the media cover the conditions for asylum seekers in Europe and deportations from Europe sufficiently, the answers are varied. Some will acknowledge that there have been some stories on this matter in the news, and that the picture of Europe is more nuanced than before:

For example, Kurdsat is a satellite TV channel. It has a show on the life of those who have invested their time in studying and becoming people with good positions there like doctors and engineers. They interview Kurdish educated people in Europe, so they show us a picture that these people had a good opportunity in Europe. There is also another way of showing Europe, which is completely opposite to last one. It's interviewing those people who live there and still don't have citizenship, and it shows how they struggle with life there. So, it shows both sides (...) we have to know that we have different type of TV channels. Some of them show Europe as a Hell while the others show it as heaven.

Others again will say that these topics are not much covered. Of those who had to return from Europe against their will, many ask for a more substantial coverage of the conditions they faced in Europe. As a man aged 22, deported from the Netherlands, explains:

Kurdish media shows Europe as if life is nice and easy there. They do not show difficulties and real side of the events. Kurdish media have not showed reality as it is. For instance, they do an interview with an emigrant who gained residency and live a high quality life. But this is not the real life of emigrants. When I arrived in Greece, I saw many people addicted to drugs, their lives were ruined.

Another informant who returned with the IOM from Germany put it like this:

You know whenever people see a beautiful picture, they have to look at the background and the surrounding area of the picture. Media should cover everything about Europe. They should visit two camps and see the situation of people there. There are people who cry day and night for their mothers and fathers, for not having money, cigarette, and residency right. There are some others who even have residency right, but they still can't come back to Kurdistan, because they haven't done well or don't have anything here. Media shows only the beautiful places of Europe like parks. I have friends who say that they have to see Europe one day. I always tell them about the truth and try to show them the negative parts of Europe, too.

Whereas the picture of Europe appears to have become more and more nuanced and supplemented with stories of black and grey, some do still cling to the rosy picture of Europe. Young men who still wish to try their luck regard what they see as a largely negative coverage of conditions in Europe as unreliable and as attempts from the government to discourage people from going. This is the view of a young man who wishes to try his luck and go to Europe with smugglers next summer:

My only dream is to live abroad. And the things I have in mind they are not unrealistic pictures, they are realistic pictures. One thing that makes European society really good, or foreign society really good, is that there is no social classification. I mean there is no difference between the lower class and the upper class. My brothers and friends, they talk about their life there and they will not lie to me, they tell me the truth and they, their life compared to life here is a lot better and they will always tell me the truth, and sometimes they encourage me to go there and that's why I will travel or I will emigrate this summer.

### **Conclusion and main findings**

Today, people in Iraqi Kurdistan are widely exposed to other lifestyles, values and ideas through transnational and global communication. The actual access to this type of life and values is nevertheless restricted. First, the traditional Kurdish norms of conduct curb the choices available to young people in Kurdistan. Second, the national frontiers of the region and the policies of the national state system severely limit their exit possibilities.

In Chapter 5 we described how journalists and editors self-critically regretted the lack of focus on the negative aspects of immigration to Europe in the Kurdish media. Their strong assumption was that, in general, people have very unrealistic perceptions of life and

opportunities in Europe. To some extent we find that they are right: people who went to Europe in the last decade did not have realistic expectations; personal stories merged with the messages from the media, portraying life in Europe as rosy, attractive and full of opportunities.

These types of stories served as strong pull factors and served to push dissatisfaction with the conditions of life for most people in Iraqi Kurdistan. Three push factors, poorly described in Kurdish mass media and in Western media, stand out as vital: the first concerns the perceived lack of possibilities for those without contacts and influential networks in Kurdish society. The second factor concerns political repression and power abuse. The third factor, very central in the accounts of most informants, is related to the lack of individual freedom in general and to the restrictions on gender relations in particular.

Our data provide ample evidence that, for those who went to Europe as asylum seekers in the last decade, disappointment, despair and misery dominate their experiences. Even if the picture is nuanced, the most vital conclusion is that people who went illegally to Europe in the years after 2000 until today find that they were humiliated and treated unfairly. Informants we spoke to in Norway, still residing in asylum centres after their rejection, feel the same.

A central finding is that people do not make any clear distinction between deportations and so called voluntary returns through government assisted programmes. This might explain why so little information exists on the destinies of people who return with the assistance of the IOM and why it seems to get so little attention in the Kurdish news discourse. These types of returns stands out as something very different from the homecoming of people with a European citizenship who actually voluntarily decided to go back and live in Kurdistan.

We see that the divide between people who have a European citizenship and the ones who do not is not only a vital distinction for those living in Europe. It is also a distinction that defines the life of people who have returned to Iraq; through their European citizenship people have options out of reach of those with only an Iraqi citizenship.

In one sense, our interview data confirm the notions conveyed by journalists and editors that coming back empty-handed from Europe is related to shame and social stigma. Some of our informants report that they have not been able to take up their life in a good way when back, many reporting problems with re-adapting to Kurdish society, others that they live in isolation from their former network and families. The picture, however, is not totally bleak. Quite a few of our informants who were denied asylum in Europe report that they are content with their present life in Iraqi Kurdistan and that they were welcomed by their family.

Even if we find that many people left for Europe with unrealistic expectation, we also find that people today have rather more mixed perceptions of life in Europe. A viable hypothesis is that the image of life in Europe has gradually become more and more nuanced, with shades of black and grey now clearly present in the former pink and rosy palette. In the next chapter we go into more detail about how people actually regard Western immigration policies and their rationale.

## 8. Experiences of an arbitrary asylum system in Europe

A paradox that has guided this research is that, despite the high rejection rate for asylum seekers from Iraqi Kurdistan coming to Europe, people have continued to come. On the one hand, asylum policies and practice regarding applicants from KRG have been more or less unchanged over the last 10 years, both in Norway and in other European countries. The number of people granted the right to stay is very low. On the other hand, in this period, asylum seekers from this part of Iraq have continued to come to Europe in large numbers, although decreasing in recent years. This is a paradox that has puzzled politicians, migration authorities and researchers.

Based on this paradox, an important question that we will explore, although not answer fully, is the following: Why do people continue to seek asylum in Europe, despite the high rejection rates and the deportations? Although this is a question that needs different types of data to be fully answered, this chapter will examine it through the perspective of people who have migrated themselves, who intend to go, or who has someone close who has left Iraqi Kurdistan. The perspectives of the people directly concerned will add valuable insight to the understanding of the paradox described – looking at the paradox through a different lens than usually used by European governments.

In order to come closer to an understanding of the paradox above, we will examine a set of related questions: How much do people actually know about and understand of the asylum system? How do people explain that some are rejected and others accepted as refugees? What kind of judgements do people pass over the European migration system? Are European migration policies perceived as just? How do migrants themselves talk about the question of credibility – of truth and lies – in asylum claims?

In the report “Why Norway?” Brekke and Aarseth (2009), studied reasons why asylum seekers from three chosen countries, Eritrea, Iraq and Russia, had ended up in Norway. Knowledge among the asylum seekers of Norway and Norwegian migration policies were among the topics they examined. Interestingly, they found that Iraqis were slightly more aware of details in Norwegian asylum policies than the other two groups in their study. Based on this and other findings in their study, one of their conclusions is that correct and well-communicated information about asylum policies, especially in transit countries in Europe, is a tool to influence asylum arrivals. These findings and conclusions provided an interesting background for the current study, especially when we started looking at what kind of knowledge and understanding of Norwegian and other European migration policies the interviewees possessed.

### **Lack of knowledge and understanding of the asylum system**

As discussed in former chapters, there has been an information and communication revolution in Iraqi Kurdistan over the last 10 years. All sorts of information from Europe or elsewhere in the world is readily available on the Internet or through satellite TV. In addition, large parts of the population have friends and relatives abroad who also serve them with information and knowledge. With this access to information, one should expect that information about migration policies, the asylum system, conditions for asylum seekers in Europe, the detention centres, high rejection rates, etc., would also be well known, at least among those with migration experiences or intentions.

However, the findings in this study with regard to this is, in many ways, the opposite. Knowledge or actual understanding of the European asylum system is very low among the people interviewed for this study. This is a finding supported by the analysis of Kurdish News on migration: we found very little precise or specific information of the premises of European asylum policies (discussed in Chapter 5).

One explanation for why so few of the persons interviewed for this study have any knowledge about the actual criteria for gaining asylum or protection in European countries is that few of them left Iraqi Kurdistan for any of the reasons that would give them protection under the Refugee Convention. However, one would think that at least those who have been to Europe and gone through the asylum process would have a better understanding of the system. Nevertheless, if there has been 'a learning' by going through the application process, being rejected and returned back, there is little proof of this 'learning' among the persons with migration experience in this study. While many touch upon bits and pieces of the asylum process when asked directly, few have any clear ideas about protection criteria related to the Refugee Convention or the Norwegian Immigration Act. The young man (22) in the following quote clearly articulates this lack of knowledge and understanding of Norway's immigration policy and the implications of an asylum claim. He had applied for asylum in Norway, but was rejected and deported:

I got the information from my friends, smugglers and my relatives who lived in Europe. (...) I was told that gaining permission for those who were under 18 was very easy. I didn't have any idea about Norway's policy on giving people residency. (...) I thought that once I got there, I would easily get residency. I thought my life would be much better. (...) In fact, the situation in Europe was very difficult. I do not understand the migration policy of Norway. They always change the rules.

While lack of knowledge and understanding of the asylum system is a main finding from most interviews in this study, people do have many observations and interpretations of how the migration system works. While some of these interpretations may not be totally correct, they say a lot about how the system is perceived, and why people act as they do.

### **An unjust and arbitrary migration system**

It is a clear finding from most of the interviews that people experience the asylum system in Europe as partly arbitrary. What is referred to as an arbitrary asylum system in this report is a wide range of perceptions found in people's accounts related to who is rejected and who is getting some sort of residency in a European country. What they have in common is that they contribute to an overall picture of an unpredictable system. Who is accepted and who is rejected is, in people's accounts, attributed to other circumstances than fulfilling protection criteria in the Refugee Convention. This is partly linked to the lack of knowledge and understanding of the asylum policies and practices, as discussed in the previous section. But it is also linked to what people perceive as different treatment of people with the same background and asylum claim; changing rules and different treatment of people with the same profile at different times; people with no real need for protection have been able to trick the migration authorities while people with what is seen as better reasons to flee Iraq are turned down. All of this seems to contribute to an attitude that, because the system is arbitrary and unjust, it is rational to try, and it is justified to try to trick the system.

We will return to how people talk about their experiences with trying to deceive the system in the next section. First, we will examine some of the statements related to the picture of an arbitrary system. The following quote from a man (24) who has been deported from Norway to Iraq expresses the feeling of randomness in who is granted the right to stay found in many of the accounts, interestingly, without relating this to whether people had reasons to apply for asylum or not:

When we sat off to Europe, we were 15 Kurds. We have lost contact with two of them. I was deported back [to Iraq], while the rest of them were granted residency.

This person does not go into people's reasons for migrating; he is just referring to the fact that he was rejected while others who left at the same time were accepted. As we also see in other interviews, he is implying that they were lucky while he was not. The same perception of randomness, clearly linked to lack of understanding of why people are rejected, is expressed by the woman (38) in the following quote. She has no migration experience herself, but has relatives in Norway and refers to what she has heard from them:

From what I hear from people, it is different from one place to another. (...) The situation might even be different for two people in the same place. There are examples of people who have immigrated together to Norway, one of them got a warm welcome and got [positive] response from the authorities quickly, while it was the total opposite for the other. I have no idea why it is like that.

Again, it is not discussed why people are accepted or not, just that the outcome has been different. This clearly reflects the lack of knowledge and understanding of the asylum system as discussed in the previous section. But it also reflects the impression of randomness found in many of the interviews, that some are allowed to stay while others are not.

In addition to the perception that people are treated differently, there is also a clear impression found among the interviewees that regulations and practices change over time. This is clearly expressed in the following quote from a man (22) who was deported from Norway:

I don't understand the Norwegian migration policy. They always change the rules.

Although Norwegian immigration authorities claim that the policy towards applicants from the KRG has been more or less unchanged over the last 10 years, this is not the impression that is reflected in the interviews with Kurds in Iraq and Norway. For the purpose of this study, the important finding is that this is people's impression, whether or not it reflects actual changes in policies.

People not only point to how policies allegedly change over time in one country but also to how policies change between countries. The following quote from a man in Kurdistan who has relatives abroad but not migrated himself is typical in how it describes this fluctuation between countries, and how this fluctuation triggers people to go to different destinations:

There was a time when they said that Holland's migration policies were good, so a lot of people immigrated to Holland from Kurdistan. There was a time when they said exact the opposite thing about Holland and said good things about Sweden, so again a lot of people immigrated there. Then, people focused on going to Norway because they said that Norwegian economy was really strong, so people stated to focus on immigrating there. Later, they said that Norway didn't give the right to stay to people, and people were going crazy there without residency.

#### **'We had to lie. All of us did.'**

It is well known that the stories some asylum seekers tell to migration authorities are not reliable. Lack of credibility of the cases is a commonly-used reason for rejecting asylum seekers. The caseworkers will base their assessment of credibility on previous knowledge of the situation in the area, previous cases, the internal logic of the story, inconsistency, documents, etc. It is assumed that asylum seekers are told by smugglers, or friends or other migrants, what to say and what stories will work. However, it is not easy to get asylum seekers to talk about this aspect. They will mostly keep to their stories whether or not they are true, also when they are interviewed by researchers. Given this, the openness in regards to this aspect in almost all interviews in this material is remarkable. Many of the interviewees talk openly about different aspects of how they tried to deceive authorities in different European countries when they applied for asylum. This ranges from the asylum claim itself, the place of origin, the travel route and stays in other countries on the way, age, name and identity including ID documents. The following paragraphs give some examples of these aspects.

While being seriously persecuted or living in a situation with a high level of violence may be reasons for being granted asylum or protection, few of the people interviewed in this study had such a background. However, many of them had presented such stories when they were interviewed by migration authorities in Europe. The man (39) in the following quote is very

open about how he and others changed their stories or background in order to get the right to stay. He himself was rejected and deported back to Iraq:

Well, first of all, I didn't leave Kurdistan for any political reasons or because of the situation in Kurdistan. So in order to leave this place, we had to lie. All of us did, and some succeeded but some failed. I didn't lie much, that's why I didn't get accepted. Some used Saddam or Kirkuk as excuses for leaving the country and they succeeded in getting their residence permit.

In addition to admitting that he didn't leave the KRG because of any political problems or the situation there, he also points at the logic of randomness, 'some succeeded but some failed'.

The previous account points at using Kirkuk, a city in Iraq, as an excuse to apply for asylum. Giving false information about where they live or come from in Iraq is quite common, according to many of the interviews. This has to be understood in relation to the fact that exactly where an asylum seeker comes from in Iraq is often crucial for the outcome of the asylum case. Although immigration authorities claim to assess cases on an individual basis, place of origin has often proved crucial for the outcome of the case. Even when the asylum claim is turned down, protection on humanitarian grounds can be given if the immigration authorities assess the humanitarian situation in a given place as too severe to return people there. Norwegian and other European authorities have had different practices for asylum seekers coming especially from the KRG and from other parts of Iraq. Although this has been changing over time, one can roughly say that the KRG has generally over the last ten years been viewed as secure and stable, while an area like Kirkuk, which borders the KRG, has often been seen as less secure and stable, and Baghdad or Ambar have been seen as insecure. Given this as an example, it is not surprising that someone coming from Sulaimaniyah in the KRG claims that he comes from Kirkuk, which is only a one-and-a-half-hours drive away. The man in the following quote is from Sulaimaniyah, is in his late twenties, and has been deported from a European country back to Iraq:

I went to the police, and they interviewed me. They asked why I went there, where I was from, and what my problems were. I told them about my life and my home country. As my friend mentioned, all of us lied about our hometown just to have a better chance to stay. Our friends there gave us some advice because they knew better. So, I told them that I was from Kirkuk, and I made up a case for myself. After one year, I got my rejection. Later, I got the final rejection. They told me that my Kirkukian identity and my documents were fake. They were right about that because I had lied about it.

Also claiming to come from another country than Iraq occurs in the interviews. An Iraqi man (27) claimed he came from Iran when he applied in for asylum in a European country. His case was rejected and he was later deported back to Iraq:

My brother and sister were also there, but I couldn't see them because I had told the police that I was from Iran and that I had no relatives there. (...). They didn't believe my case ... They told me that I was Iraqi and that I was lying. (...) The translators

know, and they work with the police, so they can tell by your accent where you come from.

The travel route from Iraq to Norway is another bit of information that some say they have altered when being interviewed by the migration authorities. This is mainly done in order to have their cases assessed in Norway and not in other European countries they have travelled through which are part of the so-called Dublin agreement. The man (28) in the following quote points to how he held back information about his travel route when he was interviewed by the migration authorities. He was granted the right to stay in Norway:

I already knew people here [in Norway]. But when I came I said that I didn't know anyone. To be honest, it would have caused trouble for me if I had told them that I knew someone here. I can tell you that 80-90 percent of those who come here don't tell the truth about how they got here. They travel through many countries to get here. If I had told the truth about how I got here, Norwegian authorities would have asked me why I didn't apply in, let's say Greece. I haven't told them how I got here.

Some have not just travelled through other European countries but have also applied for asylum in other countries before they arrive in Norway. If this is discovered, and the other country is a signatory to the Dublin agreement, the applicant is generally sent back to that country to have his case decided there. Sometimes, people try to use other identities, other stories and other documents when they apply in a new country. Although this may work for some, it generally got much more difficult after a common European electronic system for comparing fingerprints from asylum seekers, Eurodac, was introduced in 2003. 'They had my fingerprints' is a recurrent topic in many of the interviews. In the following quote, a man (27) who has been deported back to Iraq from Germany, tells how, after having his case turned down in Germany, he went to France and from there to Britain:

[When I came to Britain] I decided not to go to the police because I knew they had my finger prints in Germany ... After a while my relatives convinced me to go to the police. So I went to the police in London. [The police] asked me to come back the next day. When I came the day after I got arrested. (...) They told me that I had fingerprints in Germany. I denied that. (...) Later, they showed me all the information they had about me, my address and my photo from Germany. I couldn't say a word when they showed me that. I was in jail for a month in Britain, then I was deported back to Germany.

Although admitting to giving wrong information to Norwegian or other European authorities is a recurrent topic in many of the interviews, some also point at the fact that people who tell the truth are not believed either. In the following quote, a man (28) who succeeded in getting accepted, and has since gained Norwegian citizenship, admits to not telling the truth but, at the same time, he points at how other people who have been honest about their identity still face problems:

I can tell you that most of those who come to Norway, they don't tell the true story, and that includes myself. At the same time, I know people who have not lied about their identity, but nevertheless don't get an ID card and are not granted citizenship even though they have lived here for 12-13 years.

This and similar observations contribute to the impression found among the interviewees that the system is not totally just, consequent and predictable. Why some manage and others do not is perceived more as a question of being lucky than of a just asylum system regulated by laws and international conventions. The following account is another example of how the impression of an unjust system seems to be strengthened when people see that those who lie are accepted while others, who, in their opinion, have more justified cases or come from areas with high levels of violence, are rejected. A man (29) deported from Norway states:

There were people from Baghdad and Kirkuk who didn't get residency. On the other hand there were people from Sulaimniyah and Rania, who claimed to be from Kirkuk, and therefore got residency. Believe me, I stayed there for three years, and I saw only one person from Kirkuk who got the right to stay in Norway.

This section has demonstrated that trying to deceive migration authorities seems to have been a common practice – most of the people interviewed for this study talk about this as something almost everyone, including themselves, have been doing. According to their experiences and observations of others, some people have been successful while others have not. This contributes to the impression they have that the asylum system is arbitrary and unjust, as pointed out earlier. It also contributes to explain why so many have tried to use the asylum system to migrate to Europe from Iraqi Kurdistan over the last 10 years, despite the fact that in recent years people are rarely granted asylum or protection. As long as people see that some are successful in tricking the system, it motivates others to try. The underlying discourse in many of the accounts is not about right or wrong but about being lucky or not, about taking the chance.

### **The moral discourse of an unjust migration system – rights-based versus meritocratic policy on acceptance**

Many of the interviewees discuss moral aspects of justice and injustice related to the asylum system. In the previous sections, some of these aspects have already been brought up. This has been related mainly to what people see as an arbitrary asylum practice where gaining the right to stay is more about luck than about a just system. It has been related in part to observations of honest asylum seekers who are refused or denied rights because the authorities doubt their asylum claims or identity, while others have obviously deceived the system. Another aspect of the moral discourse found in the interviews challenges asylum or humanitarian protection as the only valid reasons for granting people the right to stay. A recurrent topic in many of the interviews is the paradox many see in that people who work

and pay taxes are rejected and deported while criminal migrants are not deported from Norway or other European countries. These two issues are often contrasted in order to show what is perceived as injustice in the migration policies. The man (25) in the following quote expresses this view very clearly. He is living in Norway and is granted residency.

The picture is complex. Those who go [to Norway] just to have fun, people with money, they don't need to stay. But those who has been here for 10-12 years, people with jobs here, they have nothing to go back to. The authorities have to assess each case individually. There are many criminals who come here [to Norway]. The authorities need to address that. (...) They have to be sent out. But those who work and pay tax, it is easy to find them [for the police] and send them out. That's not right. Why don't they send out the criminals?

The man (28) in the next quote is in a similar situation; he has residency in Norway, but is concerned about others without:

I know [many Kurds in Norway] with high work ethics, who have managed to get integrated into society (...) Many of them have been without any permission for 10 years [referring to the so called MUF cases], but fortunately most of them got positive response in 2011. (...) Still some are waiting for a response. (...) I am totally with the idea to send back those who are into drugs, criminality and rape, even if they have Norwegian citizenship. (...) I don't care if they are sent back, I would even be happy if they did. But for those who have been here for many years, who have used a lot of money to get here [to Norway], it is not right to send them back at once. (...) It would be possible, as an example, to give them some space, like three years, to plan their return and save up some money. It is not acceptable that they are arrested on the street or in their homes; that is a violation of human rights and human dignity.

As in the previous quote, hard-working migrants without residency are contrasted with criminal migrants. In addition, he also addresses what he sees as a violation of human dignity in deporting people who have sold everything to come to Norway.

As described in the previous chapter, deportations are generally seen as very problematic, as violations of human dignity, and, generally, as a bad solution because it is believed to cause problems for both the families and the deported person. The man in the following quote has Norwegian residency, but is referring to his experiences when he visited Iraqi Kurdistan:

When I was in Kurdistan, I got the impression that it was terrible to come back empty-handed. I have experienced youth who have been sent back, and that has led them in a totally wrong direction (...) It is totally wrong the way things are done now [i.e. the deportations] (...) People should be allowed to plan their return and save some money. They should be allowed to stay for a while to work.

In contrast to the previous three people, the young man (21) in the following quote has been rejected and has to leave Norway. He is, however, in line with some previous statements when he is questioning the decision with reference to his clean criminal record:

I have gained my freedom here. I am happy to be in Norway, but still I have been rejected (...) I have been here for 3 years and 4 months (...) I am a good guy. You can go to the police and check my record. I have caused no problems. I don't understand why I have been rejected (...) I don't understand why others have been granted residency (...) I don't understand how they think.

Seen from a legal point of view, it is easy to dismiss most of the arguments brought up by the people quoted here. They bring elements into the discussion that have little or nothing to do with asylum or humanitarian protection. While this is partly linked to what has previously been pointed out in this chapter as a lack of knowledge and understanding of the asylum system, it also represents an actual challenge to some of the fundamental beliefs on which Norwegian migration policies are based.

The Norwegian asylum system is closely linked to the universalistic, rights-based welfare-state philosophy of the Nordic countries. In contrast to this rights-based approach, many of the interviewees in this study bring a more meritocratic approach into the discourse of justice in the migration system. They point at having a work ethic, an education, the ability to integrate into the Norwegian society, and being a law-abiding citizen as other important criteria that should be taken into account when considering whether or not to grant immigrants the right to stay.

Although a meritocratic approach to migration policies is often associated with the Canadian model, and is often seen as inconsistent with the Norwegian model, such discussions on considering factors other than those strictly related to asylum when granting people the right to stay are not totally foreign to the debate on migration in Norway. Such debates often occur when local communities protest against the expulsion of a rejected asylum seeker living there, someone who is well integrated, doing a good job, paying taxes, and contributing to the local community in different ways. These debates also challenge in similar ways the universalistic, rights-based asylum regime enforced by the Norwegian Government and contrasts it with a more meritocratic approach to who should be allowed to stay.

While a discussion of these more fundamental questions related to the migration system and the Norwegian welfare state falls outside the scope of this report, we still think it is important to bring this perspective into the discussion. Based on the findings in previous sections of this chapter, it would be tempting to conclude that the obvious lack of knowledge and understanding of the asylum system found among migrants requires better communication of the Norwegian migration policy. Although this is to some extent true, the discussion in this section challenges this conclusion. If the people you want to communicate a better understanding of Norwegian migration policies to disagree with some of the fundamental principals in that policy, better communication will not necessarily change their behaviour. In previous chapters we have seen that deportations of rejected asylum seekers are strongly

condemned in Iraqi Kurdistan, by the Regional Kurdish Government, media professionals, NGOs and in the general opinion. They are regarded as a violation of human rights in general, and also as unfair on meritocratic grounds.

### **Conclusion and main findings**

A main finding from this study is that the knowledge and understanding of Norwegian and other European countries' asylum policies is poor among the people interviewed. This finding stands to some extent in contrast to the finding by Brekke and Aarseth (2009) that the Iraqi asylum-seekers in their study had slightly more knowledge of details in Norwegian asylum policy than the other groups in their sample. One reason why they found more knowledge than we found in this study might be that their sample was drawn from asylum-seekers in reception centres, people who were in the asylum process and probably had been exposed to this information quite recently. Methodological factors, such as how questions were asked, may also have contributed to the different finding in the two studies. If questions in this study had been more specific on concrete aspects of the asylum policy, the interviewees might have answered more specifically. However, the difference between the studies should not be exaggerated. We did find that people possessed bits and pieces of information, and there were clearly individual differences. However, the information was, in general, mostly inaccurate and not up to date on policy changes. Thus, the overall picture from this study is quite clear: the information has either not got through to the potential or actual migrants or the information has not been considered as relevant for their choices.

While understanding of the asylum system seems to be poor, there is a very clear perception among most interviewees that the system for accepting and rejecting migrants in European countries is arbitrary and unjust. This perception is partly based on their observation of how people with similar backgrounds can have totally opposite outcomes of their asylum cases. Partly, it is based on what is perceived as unpredictable and constantly changing policies. Another factor that has contributed significantly to the perception of the system as arbitrary is that so many have been able to deceive and trick the system in different ways, as well as the opposite: genuine claims and identities have been rejected as not credible. The testimonies in this study of how people, with or without luck, have tried to deceive migration authorities around Europe are many. There seems to be an underlying argument in some of the interviews that an arbitrary and unjust system encourages and justifies people's attempts to beat the system.

In addition to the different aspects of a perceived arbitrary system, some of the interviews in this study have an underlying moral discourse suggesting that other aspects than those related to protection according to the Refugee Convention should also be taken into consideration when deciding on a migrant's right to stay. Some of the accounts in this study challenge the rights-based approach to asylum and migration policies in Norway by contrasting it with a more meritocratic approach, where qualifications, education, a strong work ethic and being a good citizen should also count.

Even though people perceive the European migration system as arbitrary, and seem to have a low understanding of the asylum concept itself, many are aware of the tightening of the

borders in Europe, the high rejection rates for Iraqi Kurds, detention centres and deportations. Thus, the question asked at the outset of this chapter remains: Why do people continue to seek asylum in Europe, despite the high rejection rates and the deportations?

One answer can be found in the push and pull factors discussed in the previous chapter. Both push and pull factors are perceived as stronger than all the deterrence that is produced by the current asylum regime in many European countries. However, based on the findings in this chapter, we believe that an equally important explanation lies in the impression of an arbitrary system. Although many have failed, also many have succeeded. As long as it is considered possible, although the probability of failure is high, some will continue to try. Especially for some of the young people we have met, it is about taking a chance where, in their understanding, the outcome seems to be determined more by luck, than by a just and predictable migration policy.



## 9. Conclusions and recommendations

This report is based on research into the Iraqi Kurdish discourse on migration. The reach and role of the media for people's knowledge of migration policies and for their decision to emigrate have been assessed. The normative arguments evoked both in media coverage and personal stories have been analyzed and compared to the dominating and well-known perspectives in Western, European and Norwegian immigration debates. Our research confirms the importance of the media for people's perceptions. The communication revolution in the last decade, especially the influx of Western popular culture through satellite TV, has been decisive in shaping people's images of life in the West, and has as such been a major pull factor for migration to Western countries.

The conclusion, however, is that the abundance of information does not mean that, in general, people who left for Europe in the last decade had realistic perceptions of the chances of gaining asylum. Specific or precise information about premises and changes in asylum and return policies seems not to reach people. There is a clear perception among those who have emigrated, or considered doing so, that the system for accepting and rejecting migrants in European countries is arbitrary: to gain asylum is a question of good or bad luck. This perception is partly based on their observation of how people with similar backgrounds can have totally opposite outcomes to their asylum cases. It is in part based on what is perceived as unpredictable policies.

The mass media in Iraqi Kurdistan today does, to some extent, focus on the conditions for irregular immigrants in Europe; in particular there is a substantial and critical coverage of deportations from Europe. This coverage however, gives only limited information on the underlying premises of European immigration policies or the views of Western governments. The coverage is predominantly very critical, conveying that deportations are unfair and violate basic human rights. Arguments of the unfairness, brutality and lack of respect for human rights inherent in Western return policies are echoed in interviews with journalists, representatives from the Kurdish Regional Government and NGOs as well as in interviews with people in general with different types of migration experiences in Iraqi Kurdistan.

We find that topics central in people's personal accounts is only sparsely covered in the Kurdish media, indicating that they touch upon sensitive issues surrounded by information barriers in Kurdish society. We do not find any substantial coverage of why people have left Iraqi Kurdistan or what type of challenges they meet when adapting to a different society and culture in a new country. Neither do we find news items discussing why some people still wish to go to a European country. Further, stories on how people adapt and how they are welcomed when they return from Europe are conspicuously absent from the news.

Interviews with media professionals confirm that these types of stories are surrounded by shame, and that to come back empty-handed from Europe with a rejected asylum application is to be stigmatized. People do not distinguish clearly between people who are deported and people who return through so-called voluntary return programmes organized by the IOM.

In Iraqi Kurdistan we see a traditional society where strong social claims on the individual are only slowly in transition. Today, people in Iraqi Kurdistan are widely exposed to other lifestyles, values and ideas through transnational and global communication, but the access to

this type of life and values is restricted in two ways. First, the internal norms of conduct curb the choices available to young people in Iraqi Kurdistan. Second, the external borders of the region and the policies of the national state system with strict visa requirements severely limit the exit possibilities. Even a visit to family and friends in Europe is beyond the reach of most people. The result is described by some through words of sorrow, regret and melancholy; others, in particular the young, express great frustration and a feeling of being locked up.

A hypothesis derived from the analytical framework of this report is that in the midst of a communication revolution, some types of information spreads more easily than others, both in the traditional mass media and in personal communication. We argued hence that the claim that changes in Norwegian and Western asylum policies would spread quickly to potential groups of emigrants around the world due to new information technology, were open for investigation. We found that the many complex and partly conflicting premises of Western asylum policies are poorly understood among most people. This conclusion is based on one case study, exploring transnational communication and media coverage in one single region. With reference to theoretical arguments about the typical characteristics of information spread through the mass media and in personal narratives (see chapter 2), it can nevertheless be argued that this conclusion has more wide ranging value, applicable to how the spread of information in a digitally connected world is spread in general.

### **Main findings**

- The access to mass media and personal media has profoundly changed in Iraqi Kurdistan in the last decade. The communication revolution, especially the influx of Western popular culture through satellite TV, has been decisive in shaping people's images of life in the West and, as such, has been a major pull factor for migration to Western countries.
- Access to the Internet is widespread and people use it frequently to stay in contact with relatives and friends abroad and to stay updated on news.
- The contrast between what people experience in their own life and the impression they get of the opportunities in the West through the media pushes dissatisfaction with the conditions at home. Vital pull factors are nepotism, lack of individual freedom and political oppression.
- Media coverage of migration-related issues is limited in Iraqi Kurdistan. When covered, it is predominantly related to internal migration inside Iraq or migration from neighbouring countries.
- The media coverage of Western migration policies focuses primarily on return policies and their consequences.

- Coverage of deportations to Iraq from Western countries is predominantly very critical. It is mostly described as a humiliating practice, and as a violation of the right to the freedom of movement. The Kurdistan Regional Government also shares this view.
- Iraqi Kurds have very little understanding of the policies behind rejection decisions in the West despite a prevalent realization that rejection rates for their compatriots have risen since 2003. Generally, knowledge and understanding of Western migration policies seems very poor among Iraqi Kurds.
- There is a clear perception among interviewees that the system for accepting and rejecting migrants in European countries is arbitrary and unjust. Gaining the right to stay in a European country is perceived as a question of luck, not of justice or complex policy-making with domestic and international considerations.

## Recommendations

The following recommendations are based on the findings from this study:

1. Information about Norwegian migration policies must be more targeted, and adapted to specific audiences. Availability of information about laws and regulations, in itself, will rarely lead to this being conveyed through media or personal communication. Media campaigns targeting journalists directly can be useful. However, it needs to be clear for journalists that the Norwegian Government sponsors it.
2. In order to lift the stigma of returns assisted by government-sponsored programmes, groundwork providing stories about returnees who have been able to take up their life and resettle in a successful way could be distributed to the Kurdish news media and within the Kurdish public sphere.
3. Although better ways of communicating Norwegians asylum policies is important, communication alone cannot solve the general dissatisfaction with Norwegian immigration policies. As long as asylum is the only way available to most people applying for residency in Norway, persons without a real need for protection will continue to come. The normative arguments conveyed in this report invite a broader principal discussion about the regulation of immigration from countries outside EU/EEA. Both systems of work permits for non-specialists as well as residence permits partly based on virtue, merit and the ability to integrate into society are vital measures that should be considered in a long term perspective.
4. Dignity and social acceptance is crucial for returnees. Norwegian authorities should consider different measures in addition to cash incentives to motivate rejected asylum

seekers to return. A system should be considered where rejected asylum seekers who sign up for voluntary return are granted a time-limited work permit before returning, thus enabling them to return in dignity with money they have earned, and with valuable experience. To avoid abuse, the majority of their salaries can be kept in a restricted bank account and disbursed after arrival in Iraq.

5. Considering the federal structure of the Iraqi state, and the strong split between KRG and GOI, Norway should enter into direct discussions on both forced and voluntary return with the Kurdistan Regional Government rather than just relying on agreements with the Government of Iraq.

## Appendix I - Interview guides

### A - Interview guides for Iraqi Kurdistan

#### *i) Guide for informants without personal migration experiences*

##### **Introduction**

- Introduction of the research project
- Explain confidentiality/anonymity – names and identifiers to be changed
- No obligation to answer questions found uncomfortable
- Discussion will be recorded – is that OK?

##### **Background**

Can you tell me a little bit about your background?

Where do you come from?

Where do you live?

How old are you?

Are you married?

Do you have family – children?

What is your occupation?

What type of education do you have?

How will you describe your life in Kurdistan?

What citizenship do you have?

(What country do you regard as your homeland?)

##### **Migration**

Do you have friends and family who have emigrated from Kurdistan?

Who? Where?

Do you have regular contact with people who have emigrated?

How?

To stay in contact with these relatives/friends – how do you communicate?

- Skype
- Mobile phone calls?
- SMS?
- E-mail?
- Through web based social media like Facebook?

- Letters?
- Your contacts visiting Kurdistan?

What do the people you know tell about their life in Europe/Norway?

What do you know of life in Europe in general?

Have you ever considered emigrating yourself? Why/why not?

If you have, what countries would you prefer to go to? Why?

Would you advice your relatives/family/friends to emigrate? Why/why not?

What do you know about European migration policies?

What do you know about the life of immigrants in Europe?

Where do you get this information from?

- Personal conversation contact with friends/relatives?
- News in the mass media?

### **Media use**

Do you read newspapers?

If so, which papers do you normally read?

How often? (Daily, weekly, every month)

What types of info do you search in the newspapers?

Do you read ever read European/ Norwegian/international newspapers? (On the web/internet)?

Do you watch television? How often? (Daily, weekly, every month)

Which channels do you chose?

What types of programs do you prefer watching?

Do you regularly watch news on television?

Debates/talk shows?

Do you listen to the radio? How often?

Which radio channels do you prefer?

What types programs or info do you search?

How often do you listen to news bulletins on the radio?

Do you have a computer with internet access?

Do you use internet/the web regularly?

What types of internet sites do you visit/use? (YouTube, Facebook, etc?)

Do you have active profiles on e.g. Facebook?

Do you have a blog/personal websites?

Do you read news on the web?

On what sites do you read news?

**Opinions on Kurdish media**

- How would you describe the presentation of Western societies in Kurdish mass media?
- How would you describe Kurdish news on conditions for asylum seekers and other immigrants to Europe?
- How do you personally perceive the regulation of migration in Europe (conditions for asylum seekers, family reunion deportation of failed asylum seekers and illegal emigrants)
- How would you describe the picture of Europe in Kurdish mass media?
- In your view; is the picture in Kurdish media correct? Why/why not?
- Do you think Kurds in general have a realistic picture of life in Europe?

*ii) Guide for Returnees from Europe*

**Introduction**

- Introduction of the research project
- Explain confidentiality/anonymity – names and identifiers to be changed
- No obligation to answer questions found uncomfortable
- The interview will be recorded – is that OK?

**Background**

Can you tell me a little bit about your background?

Where do you come from? (Part of Kurdistan, town)

Where do you live now?

How old are you?

Are you married?

Do you have family – children?

What is your occupation?

What type of education do you have?

How would you describe your life in Kurdistan now?

What citizenship do you have?

What country do you regard as your homeland?

**Migration**

Can you tell us a little bit about why you emigrated in the first place?

Where did you plan to go? Why?

When did you leave?

What were your expectations concerning what life would be like in Europe before you left?

What did you know about the possibilities for gaining permission to stay in Europe/Norway before you left Iraq?

What were your sources of information about Europe before you left?

What happened when you came to Europe?

Did you learn the language of the country where you arrived?

What type of income did you have in Europe/Norway?

Did you find work?

How did you stay in contact with relatives and friends in Kurdistan?

- Skype?
- Mobile phone calls?
- SMS?
- E-mail?
- Through web based social media like Facebook?
- Letters?
- Visits to Kurdistan?
- Other?

What type of media did you use when you were in Europe/Norway?

- European/Norwegian mass media? (what types: news papers/television/radio?)
- 
- Kurdish news media? Which?
- 
- Other?
- 
- Internet – what sites?
- 
- For how long time did you stay in Europe?
- Why did you go back to Kurdistan?
- Do you stay here permanently?
- How has it been to come back to Kurdistan?
- Do you have an income? Somewhere to live?

- Would you advise your relatives/family/friends to emigrate?
- Why/why not?

Do you stay in contact with your network in the European country (Norway) where you used to stay? How?

- Mobile phone calls?
- SMS?
- E-mail?
- Through web based social media like Facebook?
- Letters?
- Visits to Europe?

### **Media use**

Do you read newspapers ?

If so, Which papers do you normally read?

How often? (Daily, weekly, every month)

What types of info do you search in the newspapers?

Do you read ever read European/ Norwegian/international newspapers? (On the web/internet) ?

Do you watch television?

How often? (Daily, weekly, every month)

Which channels do you chose?

What types of programs do you prefer watching?

Do you regularly watch news on television?

Debates/talk shows?

Do you listen to the radio? How often?

Which radio channels do you prefer?

What types programs or info do you search?

How often do you listen to news bulletins on the radio?

Do you have a computer with internet access?

Do you use internet/the web regularly?

What types of Internet sites do you visit/use? (YouTube, Facebook, etc?)

Do you have active profiles on e.g. Facebook?

Do you have a blog/personal website?

Do you read news on the web?

On what sites do you read news?

Do you follow news from the country where you used to stay ? How?

- Personal contacts?
- The mass media?
- Which type of mass media/news

### **Opinions on Kurdish media**

- What kind of picture of life in Europe is reflected in Kurdish mass media do you think?
- Is it a realistic picture?
- (How would you describe Kurdish news on conditions for asylum seekers and other immigrants to Europe?)
- How do you personally perceive the regulation of migration in Europe (conditions for asylum seekers, family reunion deportation of failed asylum seekers and illegal emigrants)
- Do you think Kurds in general have a realistic picture of life in Europe?

## **B - Interview guide for Norway**

### **Introduksjon**

- Presentasjon av forskningsprosjektet:

Dette forskningsprosjektet en del av et større forskningsprosjekt ved Institutt for medier og kommunikasjon, Universitetet i Oslo.

(<http://www.hf.uio.no/imk/forskning/prosjekter/mediation-of-migration/index.html>)

*Vi ønsker å finne ut mer om hvorfor ulike innvandringsgrupper har bosatt seg i Norge og om hvordan de holder kontakten med venner og familie i det landet de opprinnelig kommer fra. Videre ønsker vi å kartlegge hvilke medier de bruker og hvor de får informasjon både om forhold i Norge og i landet de kommer fra i dag. Spesielt ønsker vi å vite mer om hva folk mener om mediernes dekning av innvandring og innvandringsspørsmål – både norske medier og utenlandske medier. Prosjektet er finansiert av Norges forskningsråd og Justisdepartementet. Vi opererer likevel helt uavhengig av norske myndigheter, kun forskerne i dette prosjektet har tilgang til datamaterialet. Informasjon vi får vil ikke gis videre uten at den er fullstendig anonymisert, og vil ikke kunne brukes av norske myndigheter (UDI) i forbindelse med saksbehandling.*

- Forklar at dette er en undersøkelse der alle informanter er fullstendige anonyme. Ingen andre enn forskerne i prosjektet har tilgang til dataene.
- Ingen forpliktelse til å svare på vanskelige spørsmål.
- Innhente skriftlig informantsamtykke.
- Intervjuet vil bli tatt opp på diktafon – er det i orden?

### **Bakgrunn**

Kan du fortelle meg/oss litt om bakgrunnen din?

Hvor kommer du fra/hvor er du født?

Hvor bor du nå?

Hvor gammel er du?

Er du gift?

Har du familie – barn?

Hva slags utdanning har du?

Jobber du?

Hva slags jobb har du?

Hvor har du gått på skole?

Hvis du har studert etter skolegang – hvor har du studert?

Hvilket statsborgerskap /pass har du?

Hvilken tilknytning har du til Norge? Har du oppholdstillatelse? Venter du på svar på søknad om opphold?

For dem som venter på svar fra norske myndigheter: Hva gjør du mens du venter?

Har du lov til å jobbe?

Hvor bor du?

Hvilket land vil du beskrive som ditt hjemland?

### **Om livet i irakisk Kurdistan**

Hvordan vil du beskrive livet i Kurdistan?

Hvordan var det før du/dine foreldre reiste – hvordan er det nå?

Hvilke typer medier brukte du før du dro:

Kurdiske aviser?

Hvilke?

Hva leste du i avisene?

Hvor ofte leste du aviser?

Kurdiske fjernsynskanaler?

Hvilke?

Hvilke programmer så du på?

Så du tv - nyheter?

Hvor ofte?

Etter din mening: Informerte kurdiske medier om forholdene i Europa for innvandrere?

Hvilke forestillinger hadde du om hvordan livet i Europa var før du/dere dro?

Hvor hadde du denne kunnskapen fra?

Familie/Venner:

Som allerede bodde i Norge/Europa

Som hadde kunnskap om Europa men som bodde i Kurdistan

Medier: Aviser, fjernsyn, filmer, radio?

Kan du fortelle litt om hvorfor du/din familie bestemte dere for å forlate Kurdistan i første omgang?

Hvor planla du/dere å dra? Hvorfor?

Hva visste du om mulighetene for å få opphold i Europa da du dro? Om mulighetene i Norge?

Hvordan kom du/dere til Norge?

På hvilket grunnlag søkte du om opphold i Norge:

**Via:**

Familiegjenforening

Arbeidsinnvandret

Asyl eller flyktning

Utdanning

Annet

### **Om tiden i Norge/Europa**

Hva skjedde da du kom til Europa?

Lærte du norsk? Hvordan gjorde du det?

Hvordan var/er oppholdet på asylmottak?

Hvordan er livet ditt nå?

Jobber du? Hvorfor/hvorfor ikke?

Føler du at du er en del av det norske samfunnet?

Hvordan ser du på livet i Norge nå i forhold til hvordan du trodde det var før du dro?

Hvordan holder du kontakten med venner og slektninger i Kurdistan?

Mobiltelefon? Hvor ofte?

Skype? Hvor ofte?

SMS? Hvor ofte?

E-mail? Hvor ofte

Gjennom nye sosiale medier på nettet, som Facebook? Hvor ofte?

Brev? Hvor ofte?

Besøk til Kurdistan? Hvor ofte? Hvor lenge?

Hva synes du er viktig å fortelle om livet i Norge til venner og familie i Kurdistan?

Vurderer du å flytte tilbake til Kurdistan? Hvorfor/hvorfor ikke?

Vil du anbefale folk du kjenner å emigrere til Europa/ Norge? Hvorfor/hvorfor ikke?

Tror du folk i Kurdistan har et realistisk bilde av livet i Europa?

Synes du kurdiske medier i dag gir et nyansert og riktig bilde av Europa? Av forholdene for asylsøkere?

På hvilken måte får du med deg nyheter om Kurdistan nå?

Via personlig kontakt med familie/venner i Kurdistan?

Via massemedier? Hvilke?

### **Mediebruk i dag**

Leser du aviser?

Hvilke aviser leser du?

Hvor ofte?

Hvilken type info søker du i avisene du leser?

Leser du norske/europeiske/ internasjonale?

Ser du på TV?

Hvor ofte?

Hvilke kanaler foretrekker du ?

Hvilke typer programmer foretrekker du?

Hvor ofte ser du nyheter? På hvilke kanaler?

Ser du på debatter/talkshows?

Synes du norske tv-nyheter er lette å forstå?

Hører du på radio?

Hvor ofte?

Hvilken radiokanal foretrekker du?

Hvilke type radioprogrammer foretrekker du?

Hvor ofte lytter du på nyheter på radio?

Synes du norske radionyheter er lette å forstå?

Har du tilgang til Internett? Hvordan?

Bruker du internett ofte?

Hvor ofte er du på nettet?

Hvilke type nettsider fortrekker du? (Facebook, Youtube, etc?)

Er du aktiv selv på noen av disse plattformene – f.eks. Facebook?

Har du en blog/personlig nettside?

Leser du nyheter på nettet?

Hvor leser du nyheter på nettet?

Hvilke typer nyheter holder du deg oppdatert på nett?

### **Om norske nyheter**

- I hvilken grad synes du norske nyheter angår deg?
- I hvilken grad synes du at norske medier gir et dekkende bilde av innvandringsproblemer?
- I hvilken grad opplever du at dekningsgraden av innvandringsproblemer i norske medier er relevant for deg og din situasjon?
- I hvilken grad opplever du at innvandrere fremstilles for negativt i norske medier?
- I hvilken grad opplever du at innvandrere fremstilles for positivt i norske medier?
- I hvilken grad opplever du at personer med samme opphavsland som deg eller dine foreldre fremstilles for positivt i norske medier?
- I hvilken grad opplever du at personer med samme opphavsland som deg eller dine foreldre fremstilles for negativt i norske medier?

## Appendix II - List of informants

### Informants in Iraqi Kurdistan

*A). Informants with i) close relatives in Europe, that are ii) voluntary returnees or iii) mandatory or forced returnees*

ID	Gender	Age	Migration experience	Year leaving Iraqi Kurdistan	Year returning Iraqi Kurdistan	Citizenship
2	Woman	38	No personal emigration exp. Close relatives in Norway	-	-	Iraqi
7	Man	41	No personal emigration exp. Close relatives in Norway	-	-	Iraqi
8	Woman	31	No personal emigration exp. Close relatives in Europe	-	-	Iraqi
10	Woman	30s	No personal emigration exp. Close relatives in Norway	-	-	Iraqi
23	Man	23	No personal emigration exp. Close relatives in Europe	-	-	Iraqi
24	Man	23	No personal emigration exp. Close relatives in Europe	-	-	Iraqi
1	Man	24	Voluntary returnee from Norway	1985	2011	Norwegian
6	Man	Early 60s	Voluntary returnee from Norway	1985	2011	Norwegian
9	Man	35	Voluntary returnee from Norway	1995	-	Norwegian
16	Woman	20	Voluntary returnee from Switzerland	-	2006	Iraqi
22	Man	37	Voluntary returnee from Norway	1986	2011	Norwegian
3	Man	28	Returned by IOM from Norway	2002	2010	Iraqi
4	Man	29	Returned by IOM from Norway	2007	2009	Iraqi
5	Man	20s	Deported from Norway	2007/8	2009/10	Iraqi

11	Man	27	Returned by IOM from Germany	2005	2011	Iraqi
12	Man	31	Deported from the Netherlands	2006	2011	Iraqi
13	Man	37	Deported from Finland	2001	2009	Iraqi
14	Man	28	Returned by IOM from France	2007	2011	Iraqi
15	Woman	47	Deported from the Netherlands	Around 2000	Around 2010	Iraqi
17	Man	31	Deported from the Netherlands	2006	2010	Iraqi
18	Man	40	Deported from the Netherlands	2000	2012	Iraqi
19	Man	22	Deported from the Netherlands	2005	2012	Iraqi
20	Man	24	Deported from the UK	2006	2009	Iraqi
21	Man	34	Deported from the UK	2000	2008	Iraqi

***B). Professional informants in Iraqi Kurdistan***

Nr.	Affiliation
1	Head of Migration Office, Iraqi Kurdistan
2	Head of the International Federation of Iraqi Refugees
3	Consultant, STATT Consulting
4	Project manager, Independent Media Centre in Kurdistan (IMCK)
5	Journalist in weekly newspaper associated with the opposition (Gorran movement)
6	Editor and journalist in independent weekly newspaper
7	Journalist in daily newspaper associated with Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP)
8	Editor and journalist in weekly newspaper associated with the opposition (Gorran movement)
9	Journalist and producer in television company linked to the main opposition group (Gorran)

10	Journalist, freelancer
11	Editor in chief of the daily newspaper linked to the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK).

***C). Informants in Norway - Immigrants of Kurdish origin***

ID	Gender	Age	Arrival in Norway	Status
1	Man	25	2004	Protection, Permanent residence
2	Man	28	2001	Protection, Permanent residence
3	Man	30	2010	Protection (UK), Permanent residence
4	Man	30's	2008	Rejected application for asylum
5	Woman	30's	2008	Rejected application for asylum
6	Woman	31	2009	Rejected application for asylum
7	Man	22	2009	Rejected application for asylum
8	Man	30's	2010	Rejected application for asylum
9	Woman	30's	2010	Rejected application for asylum
10	Woman	28	1999	Protection Permanent residence
11	Man	54	2002	Protection Permanent residence
12	Woman	25	2006	Permanent residence (family reunion)



## Appendix III - Survey Questionnaire

Q1 Er du...

Mann ..... 1

Kvinne ..... 2

Q2 Hva er din alder?

Q3 Hva er ditt postnummer?

Q4 Hvor ofte er du i kontakt med slekt eller venner

i ditt eller dine foreldres hjemland?

Q5 Hvordan skjer denne kontakten?

Q6 Hvor ofte reiser du til ditt eller dine foreldres

hjemland?

Q7 Hvor lett eller vanskelig synes du det er å forstå følgende?

Svar på en skala fra 1 til 6, hvor 1 betyr "meget vanskelig" og 6 betyr "meget enkelt"

Norske nyhetssendinger på TV ..... 1

Norske aviser ..... 2

Q8 Hvor viktig er det for deg å følge med på følgende?

Svar på en skala fra 1 til 6, hvor 1 betyr "ikke viktig i det hele tatt" og 6 betyr "meget viktig"

Nyheter om stedet du bor ..... 1

Nyheter om det norske samfunnet ..... 2

Nyheter om det internasjonale samfunn . . 3

Nyheter fra ditt eller dine foreldres

hjemland ..... 4

Q9 Så noen spørsmål om den norske nyhetsdekningen av innvandring og integrering. På en skala fra 1-6, der 1 betyr "i svært liten grad" og 6 betyr "i svært stor grad," i hvilken grad...

I HVILKEN GRAD...

...synes du at omfanget av dekningen av

innvandring og integrering er tilstrekkelig?

...er nyhetsdekningen for positiv når det

gjelder innvandrere?

...synes du at all den viktigste

informasjonen knyttet til innvandring og

integrering er dekket?

...gir den samlede nyhetsdekningen rom  
for forskjellige synspunkter på innvandring  
og integrering?

...er nyhetsdekningen for negativ når det  
gjelder innvandrere?

...er nyhetsdekningen av innvandring og  
integrering riktig?

Q23 Så du på TV i går?

Hvilke av følgende TV-kanaler så du på i går?

KRYSS AV FOR KANALENE DU SÅ PÅ I GÅR

TV-kanaler fra eget/foreldres hjemland

NRK1

NRK2

NRK3

NRK Super

TV2

TV Norge

TV3

TV2 nyhetskanalen

CNN Aljazeera BBC World

Andre norske tv-kanaler

Andre internasjonale tv-kanaler

Ingen av disse

Q27 Hvor mange av de siste syv dager har du lyttet  
på radio?

Q28 Hørte du på radio i går?

Q29 GÅ TIL SPM Q30 HVIS DU IKKE HØRTE PÅ  
RADIO I GÅR

Hvilke av disse radiokanalene hørte du på i  
går?

KRYSS AV FOR RADIOKANALENE DU

HØRTE PÅ I GÅR

NRK P1

NRKP2

NRKP3

P4 NRK MP3

NRK Alltid Nyheter

Radio Norge

BBC Radio

Lokalradio

Andre ..... 10,

Ingen av disse ..... 11.

Q30 Hvor mange av de siste syv dager har du lest  
aviser?

Q31 Leste du avis i går?

Hvilke av disse avisene leste du i går?

VG

Dagbladet Aftenposten Regionalaviser (f.eks. Adressa, Bergens Tidende,  
Stavanger Aftenblad)

Norske lokalaviser

Andre norske aviser

Aviser fra eget/foreldres hjemland

Internasjonale aviser

Ingen av disse

Q33 Hvor mange av de siste syv dager har du  
brukt Internett?

Q34 Brukte du Internett i går?

Vi tenker her på all internettbruk, uansett  
om det er på PC/Mac, mobil, nettbrett eller  
andre steder.

Q35 Hvilke av disse nettstedene besøkte du i går?

NRK.no

Yr.no

VG.no

Dagbladet.no

Aftenposten.no

TV2.no

Desi.no

Utrop.no

Islam.no

Lokal/regionalavis på nett

Facebook

msn

Youtube Ingen av disse

Q42 Planlegger du i løpet av de nærmeste årene å flytte fra Norge?

Q43 Er du født i Norge?

Q44 Hvor mange år har du bodd i Norge?

Q45 Er du norsk statsborger?

Q46 Hva er ditt morsmål?

Q47 Hvilke(t) språk snakker du når du er...

Q48 Hva er din høyeste utdanning?

Q48B Vil du si at du i hovedsak..?

... jobber heltid

... jobber deltid

... er student, elev eller lærling

... for tiden er arbeidsledig

... er alderspensjonist

... er trygdet

... er gift/samboer uten eget betalt arbeid

... annet/vil ikke svare

Q49 Hvor gjennomførte du din høyeste utdanning?

## Appendix IV - Codebook Migration in Kurdish News

The purpose with the content analysis of Kurdish news is to map how migration is covered in newspapers and on television in the Kurdistan region, Iraq. Migration as a phenomenon is understood in a broad sense. We include both news directly related to emigration and immigration as well as stories on issues more loosely connected to the phenomenon, like reports on lifestyles and life opportunities for emigrants in the West as well as the coverage of incidents where Kurdish emigrants are involved in their new countries of residence.

### **Key words to look for in the news to select:**

Include all news with these words (or synonyms) in them: Migration, emigration, immigration, immigration policy, refugees, asylum seekers, work migration, migrants, emigrants, immigrants, trafficking, internally displaced persons (IDPs), deportation, forced returns, Norway.

Include coverage of immigration related topics in Kurdistan, like work migration.

Include also reports on the life and destinies of Kurdish emigrants living in the West.

The research project Transnational Communication looks in particular into the communication between Kurds in Norway and their relatives and contacts in the Kurdistan Region. Hence we include all types of news that in some way or the other includes Norway – irrespectively of what aspects of Norway these news stories focus on.

### **For each news item the following information is to be coded**

**Article Unit** Provide each news item with a number (1, 2,3...etc)

**Date** (year/month/day)

**Outlet** Name of newspaper

**Reporter** Name of journalist (s)/reporter (s)

### **Size Newspaper report:**

- 1 Double page
- 2 One page
- 3 2/3
- 4 1/2
- 5 1/3
- 6 notice

### **Format:**

- 1) News report
- 2) Interview
- 2) Column/op-ed (opinions)
- 3) Feature article (longer in depth story, often with a more creative/richer language than the regular news report)
- 4) Other

**Title (headline) :**

Write in an English translation of the title as precise as possible.

**Picture**

Yes/no, if yes describe who is pictured, what does the picture illustrate and where it is located.

**Picture text**

Yes/No, if yes, translate text to English and write in

**Sources:**

Fill in:

**Indirect or direct source.** Direct sources are those that are quoted in the report article. Indirect sources are those that are referred to without direct quotes.

**Name**

**Gender**

**Nationality/ethnicity** (Only if clear in the article/report)

**Affiliation of source:**

Politician/Government:

    Within Iraq: Regional or Central

Religious leader

Representative from NGO

- Expert/researcher

Media expert (e.g. journalist/editor)

Culture/entertainment

Business, finance

Sport

"Man in the street" People in general

**Position of the source,**

e.g. police officer, correspondent, prime minister.

**NB:** All this information is not necessarily provided in the text, if not leave open.

**Key words**

Type in relevant key words

**Résumé/synopsis:**

Main theme of the article/report. Look at titles and captions. What is the story all about? Who are involved? What is at stake? What countries and regions of the world are mentioned? Write a short résumé in English.

**Positive/Negative/neutral**

Is the dominant message of the article/TV-report negative or positive? Are the sources critical towards a phenomenon, is the title problem focused, or is it the opposite way around, e.g. is the outcome of emigration describes in positive terms?

**Categories for TV-reports**

**TV-channel**

Name of TV-report

**Length of TV-report:**

Number of minutes

**Name of TV-anchor**

**Name of reporter**

**Format**

News report

Other

**Headline**

Often a TV-report is introduced by the news anchor, providing a type of headline, the main focus of the report. Write in how he/she presents the story.

**Images**

Make a short description of the images of the report: Who are featured in the report, are there mostly sources talking (so called talking heads) or are there images of incidents/happenings, people experiencing different situations etc.

**Location**

The place where some or all of the report is filmed – e.g. a report from Norway, filmed in the Norwegian parliament, with reporter “on the spot”.



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