

Return Migration and Vulnerability: Case Studies from Somaliland and Iraqi Kurdistan

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We are most grateful to the many individuals in Somaliland, Finland, Kenya, and Iraqi Kurdistan, for their generosity in giving us their time and answering our many questions. We hope that this study is useful to the understanding of the complex dynamics of return migration, and can be utilised in further developing policies of return.

Liisa Laakso,
Project leader
Professor and Dean at the Faculty of Social Sciences,
University of Helsinki

Executive summary

The research report at hand aims at informing the development of Finnish return policy, particularly policies concerning vulnerable groups of returnees, such as women, children and ethnic or religious minorities, by engaging in comparative qualitative research in Iraqi Kurdistan and Somaliland, two areas that are of great interest for Finnish return policy. This project has sought to analyse the returnees' socioeconomic and political situations before and after return, as well as the challenges of reintegration after living in exile. In addition to participant observation, open and semi-structured interviews were conducted with returnees and civic organizations.

The personal histories both in Somaliland and Iraqi Kurdistan demonstrate that return after years of exile cannot be understood simply as a homecoming, but rather, the returnee faces various challenges of reintegration arising from the fundamental socioeconomic and political changes happening in the home societies, which are still recovering from extended conflict. In this novel situation, many experience feelings of 'double absence'. Their lives in western countries may have been burdened by structural discrimination and at times, xenophobia. It was not uncommon for our interviewees to list the inability to reunite their families in the diaspora as a central reason for considering return. However, upon return, the returnee comes to witness that the fundamental elements organising social life, such as traditional forms of economy, and the cohesiveness of kin, tribal and other localised identities have changed in a profound manner. In both contexts, this societal change has facilitated entirely new kinds of social hierarchies as well as social, religious/sectarian and political identifications, which the returnee may find difficult to identify with.

Reasons for return

Return can be described as a *process of acculturation*, similar to what migrants go through when first moving abroad. What happens before the

'return event' is highly relevant for the success of return, as the returnee's *readiness and preparedness*, his or her vital *material and immaterial resources*, together with *social networks* which forge reintegration, are built up before returning, not after.

The returnee's decision to return may have been processed for several years. It is often provoked by major life changes, or *critical conjunctures* such as retirement, the death of a parent, receiving an inheritance, marriage, or changes in the educational or professional situations of children. For some, the need to look after elderly parents or an ethical commitment to benefit the local society by engaging in developmental and social welfare programmes may be the prime reason for return.

Return is strongly based in emotional reasons, such as a personal longing for the former home country due to *cultural or religious reasons*. The hastiness of life in the West, the practical problems in coordinating work, family and friendship, a sense of cultural alienation and the lack of access to the western context as a socially accepted and equal member emerge strongly in the research material. Male returnees in particular emphasized easy-going sociability and sense of being integrated not only in the social network of kin and neighbourhood, but also in close male networks of leisure, as socially gratifying experiences, which they had largely lacked in the diaspora. For women, return may be more challenging in this regard, as they need renegotiate their public and private roles and meet diverse expectations.

Concern about cultural, especially normative upbringing of children also ranks high as a reason for promoting return. Many interlocutors had led their lives in multicultural urban contexts in the West and they had witnessed a multitude of social challenges with regard to raising increasingly 'ethnicized' and 'racialized' children in such settings. While return may often be particularly difficult for children who have spent a large part of their socialization process in a western context, the parents tend to see the social atmosphere in the return context as morally more upright and containing mechanisms of immediate social control that prevent children from being influenced by moral vices and dangers. For example alcohol and drugs were perceived to be too widely present in the western context.

In both contexts, the return of many individuals is directly associated with their inability to gain a permanent legal status of residence in their country of asylum. Such returnees reported simply choosing the less negative of two unattractive options; the psychologically extremely exhaustive life in legal and economic limbo, without a possibility to reunite one's family in diaspora, or returning 'empty-handed'. For rejected asylum claimants, return without a legal permit for re-entering the EU territory may seem to be a personal failure, and the returnee may become subject to strong social stigma. In the context of Iraqi Kurdistan, a large majority of such returnees openly reported planning another attempt to reach the EU territory. Several interlocutors in Iraqi Kurdistan had in fact made even four or five attempts to reach Europe.

Return migrants in post-conflict settings often face severe challenges in reintegration. The country of origin may have undergone significant and unanticipated changes, such as ethnic and religious polarization, alongside population transfers with a corresponding reorganisation of the political and social arena in the society. In both Somaliland and Iraqi Kurdistan, the 'secular space' has become more limited and increased religious neo-conservatism has generated changes in for example gender roles and norms of propriety. Especially the returnees who spent several years abroad with no close contacts to their country of origin may feel alienated and even unwanted upon return.

Voluntariness in return

Our field study indicates that returnees perceive return as truly voluntary only when the returnee has gained permanent residence in the country of the asylum, and can thus truly choose between staying and leaving. The interlocutors of this study often stressed that no person who has not gained residence in the West should be forced to choose between forced return and participation in voluntary return programs.

These findings concur with earlier reports on voluntary return migration. Applying the term 'Voluntary Return' to those returning with accumulated personal resources, and returning by their own free

will as well as those returning as a result of external pressures after receiving a negative decision on their asylum claim, leads to the entire term ‘Voluntary Return’ becoming empty of meaning. Furthermore, the ambiguity of the meaning of ‘Voluntary Return’ in discourse has damaging effects on policies and practices concerning return migration, as the misrepresentation of the phenomenon can lead to misguided policy directions.

Return and reintegration

The reintegration process may prove to be particularly difficult, and at times impossible, for certain social groups, such as sexual minorities or ethnic minorities returning to ethnically homogenized settings. Children with a refugee background, who have been socialized in the West, may also find it challenging to adapt, as many women who during the years of exile have constructed public roles for themselves which may strongly challenge the norms of propriety in their country of origin.

Particularly in the case of Somaliland, the returnees are commonly perceived as relatively wealthy and may thus be exposed to continuous expectations of providing assistance to the more needy family members. On the other hand, in many regions of Iraq, returnees may become targets of criminal groups because of their assumed economic status.

Somaliland is highly dependent on migration as a whole: remittances, but also the contributions of returnees in business and administration are significant. At the same time, there is a fierce competition for resources and jobs. This causes tensions and prejudices on both sides. This especially concerns vulnerable groups – women, children and minorities.

In the case of Iraq in particular, large-scale returns may further destabilize ethnic and sectarian stances, particularly in the disputed areas, where the balance between different social groupings is a delicate political question.

Not only do the receiving societies change, but also the migrants themselves change in many ways during the years of exile. Changes in behaviour, habits, perceptions, and patterns of consumption may also

pose severe challenges for reintegration. It is often the case that refugee households are deeply divided with regard to their perceptions on return. Children, who have spent their critical years of socialization outside their country of origin, often lack sufficient language and social skills to orient in the new setting. For many, life before exile in the West may have been spent in the neighbouring countries for extended periods of time, or as irregular migrant in search of international protection. All these experiences may prove to be both socially and psychologically burdening factors that can hinder the process of reintegration.

Successful return and reintegration appears to be a result of a premeditated process of weighing options, accumulating resources, and careful preparation for return. Often the process of increasing one's capabilities, enforcing old and creating new social networks, building realistic expectations and gathering sufficient material and immaterial resources, may require up to several years to accumulate. Both material and immaterial support in this process can promote sustainable and successful return.

Vulnerabilities

While each setting of return has its own distinctive context, the Iraqis and Somalis presented in this study share a fundamental characteristic; their lives, transnational mobile histories, and livelihood strategies speak of a constant flow of economic, social, and human capital that occurs in a multidirectional manner between the country of origin and the western diasporic context. Hierarchies of different kinds of political statuses (refugee, asylum seeker, asylum holder, migrant, citizen, naturalized subject etc.), are obvious and challenging issues in this global cross-boundary setting, but also in individual life courses, where they tend to vary and change over time.

Especially women, children and minorities experience return in different ways. Also ethnicities, religious identities and political leanings may be critical in return to post-conflict context. All women who were part of the research agreed that there are gender-specific challenges

and opportunities in return. Female returnees face challenges such as difficulties in reintegration. Gender specific perceptions and normative expectations of propriety of women in the local community may have changed radically during their years in exile. Contested recognitions and identifications are at stake, revealing shifting grounds in terms of status, age and gender.

Recommendations

Based on this comparative empirical data, the study then proposes concrete recommendations to be taken into consideration when formulating the future directions of Finnish return policy.

1. When talking about voluntary return in official Finnish and EU return policy discourses, it is vital to clearly differentiate actual voluntary return, which is grounded in genuine free will and intention, and ‘voluntary return’, which is based on external pressures of different levels.
2. It should be recognised, that return is not necessarily sustainable and lasting, if the context of return does not enable sustainable livelihoods and a ‘good life’ – subjectively speaking. The potential returnee needs to be able to gather first-hand information on his or her personal possibilities for return and reintegration. The system of return migration thus needs to be flexible and permissive of circular migration.
3. The system of return migration must take into account the special needs of vulnerable groups, such as women, children and minorities, and return should always be intentional and genuinely voluntary. Those belonging to vulnerable groups have less opportunity to influence the resources at their command, the social and economic assets, which enable successful return.

4. Family work should be developed in both the destinations and origins of return migration. Violence against women and children, as well as practices of external pressure, need to be intervened with.
5. Remittances and return migration shape the economic structure of Somaliland. In addition, many return migrants are active in development work, civic organisations and administration. They complement the traditional forms of development work. The development effects of return migration should be more widely assessed and utilised.
6. Programmes of return migration need to be closely linked with the process of asylum, so that the asylum claimant has the opportunity to accumulate work-life related skills and capabilities. Successful return is commonly based on the skills the returnee has gained in the country of exile, be they skills acquired through work experience, or competences acquired in education.

The research team

Petri Hautaniemi conducted research in Somaliland and was managing the project in its first year. Hautaniemi, PhD, is a former university researcher at Development Studies, in the Department of Political and Economic Studies in the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Helsinki. He completed his dissertation in social anthropology on Somali child migration and young men in 2004, and has published a number of articles on related themes. He has also scrutinized the concepts of Somali transnational families and kinship among state authorities in Finland, and the role of second-generation youth in global Somali kinship networks. Lately he has been engaged in studies on Somali return migration, and is co-editor with professor Liisa Laakso of a forthcoming book called *'Diasporas, Conflict and Peace in the Horn of Africa'* to be published by Zed Books. He currently works as a senior adviser at the Department of Development Policy, in the Finnish Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Marko Juntunen conducted research in Iraq. Juntunen is a social anthropologist working at the School of Social Sciences and Humanities at the University of Tampere. He holds a PhD in Arabic and Islamic studies from University of Helsinki (2002). He has over ten years of experience conducting ethnographic fieldwork and coordinating research on migration, transnationalism, gender studies and Muslim diaspora in the West and has published extensively on these issues. His previous research project focused on gendered vulnerability, asylum and possibilities of return among Iraqi and Afghan asylum seekers in Finland. Since 1998, he has carried out several field work periods in Northern Morocco and Spain, concentrating on the patterns of transnational mobility among the Moroccan urban underclass.

Liisa Laakso led the research project at the University of Helsinki. Professor Laakso is the Dean at the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Helsinki. Previously she held the UNESCO Chair in Development and International Cooperation at the University of Jyväskylä. Her areas of expertise include conflicts, democratisation, and development cooperation. She has directed several research projects, including DIASPEACE (funded under the 7th EU Framework Programme) and 'Security, governance and identities in flux: The role of diaspora in development in the Horn of Africa' (funded by the Academy of Finland). Her articles have been published in the *Journal of Modern African Studies*, *Journal of International Development*, *Journal of Commonwealth & Comparative Politics*, *the Round Table*, *International Journal of Development Issues*, *African Studies Quarterly*, *Nordic Journal of African Studies* and *Current Research on Peace and Violence*, among others.

Mariko Sato worked in the project as a research assistant and a co-writer of the report. Sato is a Master's student in Development Studies, in the Department of Political and Economic Studies in the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Helsinki. In 2012, Sato spent over six months in Somaliland, where she gathered research material for her Master's thesis on the topic of gendered experiences in return migration to Somaliland.

Abbreviations

AVR	Assisted Voluntary Return
BAMF	Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (Germany)
DAVRiF	Developing Assisted Voluntary Return in Finland
FGM	female genital mutilation
EC	European Council
ECRE	European Council on Refugees and Exiles
EU	European Union
IDP	internally displaced person
IFIR	International Federation of Iraqi Refugees
IOM	International Organization for Migration
KDP	Kurdish Democratic Party
KRG	Kurdistan Regional Government
NELM	Neoclassical economics and the new economics of labour migration
PUK	Patriotic Union of Kurdistan
RF	European Return Fund
SARC	Sexual Assault Referral Centre (Somaliland)
SGBV	sexual and gender-based violence
SLNC	Somaliland's National Human Rights Commission
SOLID	EU's General Program of Solidarity and Management of Migration Flows
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
VARRP-FIN	Voluntary Assisted Return and Reintegration in Finland

1. Introduction: return to Somaliland and Iraqi Kurdistan

This research report is the final product of an EU-funded project “Return to Somaliland and Iraqi Kurdistan”. The eighteen month project was launched in January 2012, and was carried out at the Department of Political and Economic Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Helsinki, Finland. The project’s main source of funding was the European Return Fund (RF), which is part of the EU’s General Program of Solidarity and Management of Migration Flows (SOLID), nationally coordinated by the Finnish Ministry of the Interior.

Voluntary return migration is currently a key policy question in Finland as well as in all European Union countries. The readiness of state actors to promote voluntary return is based on four central factors. When compared with forced returns of migrants with no legal basis for their stay, voluntary return is not considered to be only *cost-effective* but also as greatly *reducing the need for time-consuming settling of bilateral political agreements* between the states involved. Furthermore, from a *human rights perspective*, voluntary return is often viewed as less questionable than forced return. It has also been argued that voluntary return is more effective in *promoting sustainable resettlement* in the country of origin.

In Finland, the development of return policies has concentrated on improving the management of return and developing administrative practices. Less attention has been given to the contexts of return and the experiences of return migrants themselves.

The research report at hand aims at supporting the development Finnish return policy, particularly policies concerning vulnerable groups of returnees, such as women, children and minorities, by engaging in comparative qualitative research in Iraqi Kurdistan and Somaliland, two areas that are of great interest for Finnish return policy. This project has sought to analyse the returnees’ socioeconomic and political situations before and after return, as well as the challenges of reintegration after living in exile. Based on this comparative empirical data, the study then

proposes concrete recommendations to be taken into consideration when formulating the future directions of Finnish return policy.

Given the widely shared interest of EU member states to promote return migration, it is striking that we still largely lack basic data on the social profiles of individuals belonging to the main groups participating in these programmes, namely rejected asylum seekers. This situation undoubtedly results from the fact that projects monitoring return can at best evaluate the socioeconomic conditions of the returnees for the limited duration of a project cycle, and are thus unable to provide long-term insights on this issue. The researchers participating in this study share the conviction that long-term empirical information focusing on the returnees should be considered as fundamental for the development of any return programme in the EU. More so, as currently western states use several kinds of legal sanctions in order to increase the attractiveness of voluntary return, regardless of the fact that recent studies question the effectiveness of this method. Not only do sanctions generate resentment and suffering as well as increase the vulnerability of rejected asylum seekers, but they also contribute to an increasing distrust towards western asylum policies in general. Trust between the returnees and the institutions responsible for administrating and implementing return is extremely important. Unfortunately, many prospective participants of the programmes witness that the threat of deportation is often mobilised as a means to pressure people to participate in programmes of voluntary return.

It should be added that the future prospects of rejected asylum seekers take a variety of courses, of which forced and voluntary return are only two possible outcomes. Many remain in Europe as irregular migrants and they may decide to continue their journeys in search of safety.

Challenges of reintegration

Return migrants in post-conflict settings often face severe challenges in reintegration. The country of origin may have undergone significant and unanticipated changes, such as ethnic and religious polarization alongside population transfers with a corresponding reorganisation of the political

and social arena in the society. In both Somaliland and Iraqi Kurdistan, increased religious neo-conservatism and the shrinking secular public space are in many ways a by-product of the recent decades of instability and external political influences. This has generated changes in for example gender roles and norms of propriety. Especially the returnees who spent several years abroad with no close contacts to their country of origin may feel alienated and even unwanted upon return.

The reintegration process may prove to be particularly difficult and at times impossible for certain social groups, such sexual minorities or ethnic minorities returning to ethnically homogenized settings. Children with a refugee background who have socialized in the West may also find it challenging to adapt, as may women who during the years of exile have constructed public roles for themselves which may strongly challenge the norms of propriety in their country of origin.

Particularly in the case of Somaliland, the returnees are commonly perceived as relatively wealthy and thus they may be exposed to continuous expectations to assist the more needy family members. On the other hand, in many regions of Iraq returnees may become targets of criminal groups because of their assumed economic status.

In the case of Iraq in particular, large-scale returns may further destabilize ethnic and sectarian stances, particularly in the disputed areas where the balance between different social groupings is a delicate political question.

Not only do the receiving societies change, but also the migrants themselves change in many ways during the years of exile. Changes in behaviour, habits, perceptions and manners of consumption may also pose severe challenges for reintegration. It is often the case that the refugee households are deeply divided with regard to their perception on return. Children who have spent critical years of socialization outside their country of origin, often lack sufficient language and social skills to orient in the new setting. For many, life before exile in the West may have been spent in the neighbouring countries for extended periods of time, or as irregular migrant in search of international protection. All these experiences may prove to be both socially and psychologically burdening factors that can hinder the process of reintegration.

The two contexts

Each return setting has its distinctive contextual characteristics, and each return has its own socioeconomic dynamics. Finland only started running voluntary return programmes to Somaliland quite recently and due to its unstable security situation deportations from Europe are not currently implemented. Participants in voluntary return programmes have so far been scarce. However, thousands of Somalis return from Europe to Somaliland for different periods of time, and they influence the society on the social, economic and political arenas. Iraqi Kurdistan has over the past decade been a target area for both forced and assisted return from EU states. The participants in the voluntary return programmes are high in numbers compared to Somaliland. Regardless of these contextual differences, we believe that many of the conclusions drawn from our data can help immigration authorities to identify the best practices and methods for increasing the sustainability of return, which can then guide the future directions of Finnish return policy as a whole.

Any debate on return policy should serve the long-term interests of both the countries of origin and the countries of exile. Voluntary return programmes should not become vehicles to repatriate unwanted and rejected asylum seekers to areas where they become destitute and begin to search for survival through embarking on another costly journey towards the West. Ideally, effective and well-coordinated return policies with associating forms of material and immaterial assistance could incorporate the returnees into a transnational flow of ideas, investments, social skills, and material goods that construct new and mutually benefiting socioeconomic impacts for each end of the migration continuum.

By conducting research with returnees in their home society, we wish to supplement the two earlier RF funded academic research projects dealing with Finnish return policy in a logical manner: the first research report by Tiina Kanninen (2010), *Gender, Vulnerability and the Obligation to Return: An Overview of Return Assistance to 'Rejected' Asylum Seekers in the Nordic Countries*, opened new perspectives on the administrative and official aspects of return by reviewing the policies in Finland, Sweden, Norway, and Denmark for the return of 'rejected' asylum seekers and

aimed at providing guidelines for the development and coordination of Finnish return politics. The second study, by Mariko Juntunen (2011), *Prospects for Sustainable Return: Iraqi and Afghan Asylum Seekers in Finland*, was conducted among asylum claimants in Finland. The research focused on the experiences of Afghans and Iraqis on gendered vulnerability, persecution, violence, and traumas in their countries of origin and on route to the West. It also provided an evaluation of the challenges of reintegration encountered by rejected asylum seekers upon return. We highly recommend the reader to reach these complementary perspectives on a single question.

Rationale and approach

In Finland, as in elsewhere in the EU member states, plenty of time and effort have been invested in the development of the ‘top-down’ aspects of return policies. The focus in each national setting has been on the formulation of effective administrative networks for the coordination and implementation of voluntary return programs. While we recognize that it is highly necessary to evaluate and develop the organizational models of return, it is equally pivotal to take into account the ‘bottom-up’ perspective, with emphasis on the experiences of the returnees themselves, whose life-courses and subjective social and economic conditions before as well as after the return then provide the prism through which to weigh the successes and failures of voluntary return programs as a whole. This research aims to address this largely overlooked question by examining return to Somaliland and Iraqi Kurdistan by means of empirical ethnographic study.

Our aim has been not to treat return migration in simplistic terms. Our approach has rather been to acknowledge the highly complex nature of return over time and space. Our intention has been to address individual life strategies, experiences and histories as a fundamental source of information, allowing us to build a more comprehensive understanding of more general migration patterns, such as return and resettlement. This study and report is concerned with two very different

regional areas, Iraqi Kurdistan and Somaliland in the Horn of Africa. The anthropological reflective methods we have used have revealed shared as well as context-specific characteristics of return in both places. In both contexts of the research, we engaged in direct participant observation with several categories of returnees (internally displaced people, forcibly returned people, participants of assisted voluntary return programs, and people leading a transnational life between the West and their country of origin).

In addition to participant observation, we carried out numerous open and semi-structured interviews with returnees, and civic organizations focusing on return.

Interview questions included for example the following:

1. Describe your migration history. Why / when / where / with whom / how long?
2. What kind of activities did you engage in while in the diaspora?
3. What were the reasons for your return? Why did you choose to return now?
4. What were the opportunities you encountered upon return?
5. What are the challenges you face as a returnee?
6. What are the gender issues relating to return and the following themes:
Marriage, violence, politics, forced return of children
7. What are the central issues concerning children and family in return?
8. What resources do you have here that could be used as opportunities?
9. What are the concerns of the community regarding return migration?
10. What are your life-prospects in the future?
11. In your personal opinion, how does the diaspora affect the overall development of Iraq/Somaliland, especially in the following fields?
Business, politics, livelihoods, social life

Our research group had several years of experience in ethnographic research on migration issues concerning Somaliland and Iraq, and we were well acquainted with the many contextual differences. We had previously visited the areas in question and had maintained professional contacts in these contexts. These experiences and networks provided us with a rich starting point for taking on this research, albeit having a new set of research questions. We were consequently aware of restrictions of time and resources in place, and we had an educated intention to gather as rigid information as possible under these given constraints. For example moving between research locations was a practical security question, the number of forced and voluntary returnees varied from context to context, and it was not always easy to categorize people at all. We wanted to rely on informal networks and the so-called 'snowball methodology' in finding new informants, in order to avoid overly 'official' and pre-mastered encounters with informants. Reading official migration reports facilitated by local governmental authorities very often gives a superficial understanding of social circumstances, since their primary purpose is to provide information for governance and decision-making. For us, it was vital to gain insights from people's lived experiences and life-course perspectives, about the aspirations and prospects in these challenging environments, where policies and political realities are a part of the demanding structures that informants need to tackle with on a daily basis. It was of course imperative to contextualize these informal encounters, and we went through a heavy load of secondary literature and reports concerning each respective regional context. At the end of the report, a selection of literature, which we found to be useful, is provided for interested readers.

In western administrative discourses, return migration is often seen in an overly simplified manner, as a one-time and one-directional movement of persons between two places. This approach is largely silent about the complexity of the practical life courses of moving subjects and the fact that return has often been carefully planned beforehand or has at least been anticipated for over long period of time. In order to fully account for the complex positions of returnees with increasingly transnational social networks, researching returnees in Somaliland and Iraqi Kurdistan

requires one to pay careful attention to the individual life histories of returnees and the overall social conditions of return.

While each setting of return has its distinctive context, the Iraqis and Somalis presented in this study share a fundamental characteristic; their lives, transnational mobile histories, and livelihood strategies speak of a constant flow of economic, social, and human capital that occurs in a multidirectional manner between the country of origin and the western diasporic context. Hierarchies of different kinds of political statuses (refugee, asylum seeker, asylum holder, migrant, citizen, naturalized subject etc.), are obvious and challenging issues in this global cross-boundary setting, but also in individual life courses, where they tend to vary and change over time.

This report addresses various kinds of vulnerabilities. Especially women, children and minorities experience return in different ways. Also ethnicities, religious identities and political leanings may be critical in return to post-conflict context. All women who were part of the research agreed that there are gender-specific challenges and opportunities in return. Female returnees face various challenges, such as difficulties in reintegration. Gender specific perceptions and normative expectations of female propriety in the local community may have changed radically during their years in exile. Contested recognitions and identifications are at stake, revealing shifting grounds in terms of status, age and gender.

There is a strong tendency in the EU member states to interpret the return migration of refugees in straightforward manner, as a simple indication of improved security and political stability in the country of origin. As this study demonstrates, the realities of return are far more complex. Firstly, return is easily turned into an object of political manoeuvring, as the receiving governments often translate return as an indication of the success of their political strategy to stabilize the post-conflict society. Second, it is important to bear in mind that violence and instability generate several different forms of population movement – from internal and regional displacement to international asylum migration. Also marriage as means to migrate to the West is frequent in this context. The returns of internally or regionally displaced persons may often occur as a result of financial difficulties or a suddenly collapsing

security situation in the receiving communities, as is the case of the Iraqis who sought refuge in the currently war-torn Syria or Somalis in the Libyan revolution during the Arab Spring in 2011. These returns are likely to reverberate across the international community and can thus contribute to an increasing political willingness in western asylum seeker receiving countries to promote large scale returns.

Research conducted in Somaliland

Somaliland was visited twice during the research project in March and September 2012. During these two field work periods, we were able to speak with 60 informants in Hargeysa, Burao and Borama, the three major cities in the country. In addition, transit periods in Nairobi were used to seek additional informants for the sake of comparison with those who still were on their way to Somalia. We met with the individuals and groups who participated in this study several times in order to gain a deeper understanding of their life situations. Spontaneous gatherings in cafes were sometimes time-consuming, but highly informative for gaining insights on the multi-layered realities of the returnees. Finally, 15 women and 15 men were interviewed in length. With the help of local research assistants, we were able to be sensitive to returnees' backgrounds and thus include diverse perspectives on the theme. For example, some seven NGOs were included in the interviews. Also representatives from administration, business, health and education sectors and development work were strongly represented among the informants.

Special attention was put on gender issues. We discussed children's experiences concerning the gender realities in the country, and what gender equality looks like from the perspective of a returnee. We also dealt with the legal status of women returnees, and the level of their access to services. Female informants were encouraged to bring fourth relevant issues in reintegration.

Research conducted in Iraqi Kurdistan

The field work in Iraqi Kurdistan took place in the two major cities in the region, namely Erbil and Sulaymaniah, and was conducted in October 2012 and March 2013. In Erbil, several interviews were conducted in its twin city Ankawa and during our stay in Sulaymaniah, we made a one-day visit to the town of Halabja. We collected data from 56 people (44 men 12 women) in these locations and in addition a legal specialist on Finnish asylum policy and two Kurdish female asylum seekers, were interviewed in Finland. Furthermore, we visited six cultural, religious and civic organizations in the Christian community, three branch offices of political parties, a human rights organization, a private school for returnees, a heritage museum of the Kurdish genocide and a former interrogation centre of the Baath party. In all of these sites, we conducted semi-structured interviews with the employees.

We also interviewed individual members of the Yezidi and Christian communities, university students, voluntarily and forcedly returned migrants from Sweden, UK, the Netherlands, Turkey, Germany and Greece, former political prisoners of the Saddam Hussein era, survivals of the Kurdish genocide in Halabja, as well as former Peshmerga and Ansar guerillas. We encountered severe difficulties in gaining access to women returnee's voices, and were largely dependent on the representatives of the civic organizations to understand the challenges of reintegration for women in the region. To supplement this considerable gap in our data, we carried out two interviews among two Kurdish women in asylum reception centres in Finland. We furthermore closely reviewed the research interviews conducted by Marko Juntunen with three Kurdish women for an earlier study regarding the prospects of sustainable return among rejected Iraqi asylum seekers.¹

In the interview settings, we focused on the social, economic, and gendered challenges of the reintegration of returnees. In order to contextualize the experiences of the returnees, it was necessary to gain insights on the historical transformations of asylum migration in Iraqi

Kurdistan and the subjects' individual experiences as migrants. Other interview topics included the human rights and security situation in Iraqi Kurdistan, with a specific focus on minorities and gendered violence.

Structure of the report

In the following section, we will briefly present a selective review on return migration literature and introduce the concepts relevant for this report. The purpose of this presentation is to provide a conceptual context for the starting points of this report, mainly the discourses on the complexities of return migration as a phenomenon and the contested nature of voluntary return migration.

In the country sections named 'Return to Somaliland' and 'Return to Iraqi Kurdistan', we will present the research findings concerning each respective context, with both sections following the same structure. Firstly, in the introductory parts, a brief look into the region's history and migration history will provide a contextual basis for the findings. Secondly, an analytical mapping of the returnees is presented. Finally, a deeper look into the vulnerabilities concerning return migration is provided.

Following the country sections, the conclusions and recommendations section includes a comparison of the two country cases, and drawing upon these analyses, provides insight into the phenomenon of voluntary return migration and the vulnerabilities involved. Finally, recommendations are presented.

2. Return migration: from 'voluntary return' to voluntary return

Review of return literature

This section provides an outline of the literature which we found useful for the purposes of this research and report. It is by no means an exhaustive presentation of research literature on return migration, but rather a selection of literature which portrays our angle and starting points for looking at the phenomenon of return migration.

Five central paradigms of return migration

We found Jean-Pierre Cassarino's (2004) categorization to be a useful presentation of the central discourses on return migration over the past decades. Jean-Pierre Cassarino has divided existing return migration research in five paradigms based on distinct conceptualizations on return migration. *Neoclassical economics and the new economics of labour migration (NELM)*, have viewed return migration from the view point of economic strategy. Neoclassical economics view return migration as a 'failed migration experience', in which an individual's choice to emigrate did not yield hoped financial benefits of higher earnings abroad. NELM on the other hand, regards return migration as a result of a successful strategy, arguing that returnees are those who have managed to reach an earning goal, remit from abroad, and based on savings and an attachment for their home country, decide to return. (Ibid., 255–256.)

Thirdly, *the structural approach* views return migration as a contextual personal and social issue, which is moulded by structural and situational elements. By taking into account the importance of contextual matters, the structural approach emphasizes that in addition to the returnees' financial capital and skills, local power relations and cultural issues also affect the returnees' ability to make use of their emigration experience upon return.

The structural approach has contributed to understanding how not only the migration experience in host countries affects repatriation, but how societal changes in the home country also play a role. (Ibid., 257–261.)

Transnationalism as a viewpoint to return migration emphasizes the hybrid identities of migrants and their transnational activity and mobility. It also takes into account the continued social and financial linkages that migrants have with their home countries from abroad. The transnational approach also notes that return does not mark the end of the ‘migration experience’ as transnational links remain active even after return. The concepts of transnational identities and hybridity are utilized to explain how migrants negotiate their place in society and how they may identify with multiple localities or a global diaspora network. (Ibid., 261–265.)

Lastly, *the social network theory* describes returnees as actors preparing for return by mobilizing resources stemming from the commonality of interests instead of shared attributes, such as ethnicity and kinship. In social network theory, similarly to transnationalism, migrants engage in cross-border social and economic networks, but unlike transnationalism views them as being based on complementary exchange relations. (Ibid., 265–268.)

Four arguments explaining return

Overall, return migration literature can roughly be categorized as having four different types of arguments explaining return:

- i) *changes in the economic situation* of the home country and the returnee’s *inability to integrate* into the host society (see Nekby 2006, Reyes 1997, Borjas & Bratsberg 1996, Duleep 1994, Lam 1994),
- ii) the returnee’s *personal preference* for home country (see Galor & Stark 1991, Hill 1987, Constant & Massey 2003),
- iii) the returnee’s ability to *achieve a savings goal* serving an investment project in the home country (see Yang 2006, Mesnard 2004, Dustmann & Kirchkamp 2002), and

- iv) the returnee's *experience abroad leading to better employment opportunities* in home country (see Wahba 2007, Barrett & O'Connell 2001, Co et al. 2000, Dustmann 1995). (Dumont & Spielvogel 2008, 178–183.)

Concepts used in this report

Return migration – return preparedness and sustainable return

Research shows that returnees form a heterogeneous group with highly varying experiences of migration, regarding length of stay abroad, legal status, motivations and patterns of resource mobilization (Cassarino 2008, 100). In addition to these varying experiences of migration and differing backgrounds, all returnees have their own state of *return preparedness*. Return preparedness refers to a process through which the returnee not only prepares for return, but hases “*the ability, though not always the opportunity, to gather the tangible and intangible resources needed to secure one's own return home*”. According to Cassarino, returnee preparedness is comprised of two key components: ‘*a readiness to return*’ and ‘*free will*’. Readiness entails the extent to which the returnee is able to secure resources needed for return. These resources are for example financial capital, networks, and skills. Free will reflects the autonomous decision-making process of the individual choosing to return on his or her initiative – that the decision to return is not dictated by external circumstances. (Ibid., 101.)

Here we can see a common ground with Amartya Sen's conception of development as freedom. Freedom entails the enhancement ‘*human capabilities*’ and ‘*human capital*’. These refer to the freedom of individuals to identify their needs, to have real choices on which to base decisions and to take action to improve their lives. (Sen 1999.)

Due to differing circumstances, potential returnees have varying degrees of return preparedness. Factors inhibiting strong preparedness include too short length of stay abroad and inability to freely choose to return. When the stay abroad is too short, the returnee might not be able

to mobilize sufficient resources for return. Upon return these returnees tend to be dependent on the resources available at home. If the returnee is not free to independently choose to return, the degree of preparedness and readiness is non-existent. (Cassarino 2008, 102–103.)

Return preparedness, free will and readiness to return, can aid us to understand why some processes of return migration is sustainable while others turn out to be unsustainable. *Sustainable Return* can be summarized through three factors

- i) the returnee does not need or want to re-migrate *immediately* after return,
- ii) the returnee has sufficient sources of income and means of support, or access to training and rehabilitation that assures sustainable livelihood in the near future, and
- iii) the returnee has access to public services such as health care and does not experience safety threats. (Black et al. 2004, 25).

Liisa Malkki (1992, 37) has argued, that return migration has largely been seen a restoration of a natural or ‘national order’. This notion presumes migrants as out of place or ‘uprooted’, in need of being reinstated in their right place (ibid., 25). However, emphasizing return as a permanent solution which cuts off further transnational links does not correlate with more recent studies revealing a multitude of transnational activities by returnees (Black & Gent 2004, 9). During past years the emphasis has begun to shift from return to transnational mobility and circular exchange (Faist 2010, 13), to better include continuing transnational linkages in return migration.

Stepputat (2004, 5) talks about ‘*mobile livelihoods*’ as enabling sustainable return. Mobile livelihood refers to making use of existing links upon return and creating new connections through continued migration movement. According to Stepputat, mobile livelihoods and free mobility can be a stronger incentive for return than financial return packages (ibid., 5). Here it should be noted, that mobilization of these links and networks for return is not as applicable for failed asylum seekers as it is for those returning on their own (Black et al. 2004, 9).

Transnational diasporas

Diaspora is a concept that has evolved remarkably over recent decades. Until the 1930s, 'diasporas' referred to a network of communities, that had been dispersed from their homelands, often involuntarily. As Tölölyan (2012) notes, at the height of the nation-state era, diasporas often lived in precarious conditions as second-class citizens, glorified by no one. During this time, the term diaspora was used for the tree 'classic' diaspora groups, Jews, Greeks and Armenians. (Ibid., 5.)

In the 1990's the concepts '*transnationalism*' and '*globalization*' became closely imbricated with diaspora (see Cohen 1997, Van Hear 1998). Diasporas were seen 'to re-inscribe' space in a new way by creating transnational spaces and communities. They contrasted the nation-state paradigm in which people share a common culture within territorial boundaries. (Basch et al. 1994.) Van Hear (1998) emphasizes that while diasporas have an enduring presence abroad, this exile need not be permanent and can include movement between the homeland and the host country. He also states that diaspora communities can have diverse forms of exchange – cultural, social, economic, political, within the transnational community (ibid.) The postmodern notion of diaspora, emphasizes de-territorialized identities, multiple belonging and hybridity over ethnicity, 'homeland' or particular places of settlement (Anthias 1998).

Voluntary return as a contested concept and practice

There is no convention for return terminology in EU countries (EMN 2007, 3). Often, return migration is categorized dichotomously as 'Voluntary Return' and 'Forced Return'. In recent years this dichotomy has been increasingly criticized as it is debatable as to how well it actually reflects the experiences of returnees and the nature of return flows. (Cassarino 2008, 99.) In a report on return migration, the European Migration Network (EMN) noted that,

“... there is no clear boundary between Voluntary and Forced Return, since there are different understandings of these terms by the Member States and it sometimes depends on the legal status of a returnee (legal or illegally resident). Whether return can truly be considered as voluntary ... is another consideration” (EMN 2007, 6).

In the EU discourse, the term Voluntary Return is somewhat misleadingly applied to those returning asylum seekers whose application has been rejected and who comply with the return order. In these cases, return is obligatory rather than voluntary, as the returnees have no other choice than to leave the country. (Kanninen 2010, 16.) The European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE) defines voluntary return as being only applicable to an individual, who has a *legal right to stay* in the country and, *based on free will, makes an informed choice* to repatriate. ECRE emphasizes that this decision must be genuinely autonomous and not influenced by external pressure of any kind. (ECRE 2003, 4.) It can certainly be said that for members of diasporas, having an unclear citizenship and residence status, creates a sense of uncertainty. This experience of unclear prospects and uncertainties renders the prospects of return migration unsettling. (Gundel 2002, 274.)

In cases of return of asylum seekers whose application has been rejected, ECRE suggests using the term ‘*Mandatory Return*’ instead of Voluntary Return. Voluntary and Mandatory Return are thus differentiated from ‘*Forced Return*’, which refers to the return of individuals who have not consented to leave, but are required to do so by law and may subject to forceful removal or other sanctions. (ECRE 2003, 4.)

In Finland however, the term ‘Voluntary Return’ is equally applied to asylum seekers whose application has been rejected and others returning voluntarily. According to IOM (2012, 7), before the beginning of its projects of voluntary return (DAVRiF in 2010–2012 and VARRP-FIN from 2013 onwards), most persons applying for Assisted Voluntary Return (AVR) in Finland were asylum seekers who cancelled their asylum process to return to their homeland. Since the commencement of the AVR projects, the demographic of applicants has changed, with

more than half of the asylum seeker applicants having already received a negative decision on their asylum claim.²

Practices of 'Voluntary Return' in Finland

Until 2010, assisted returns in Finland were arranged on an ad hoc basis. In 2009, IOM received funding from the European Return Fund to develop Assisted Voluntary Return in Finland with the project 'Developing Assisted Voluntary Return in Finland' (DAVRiF), which was implemented from 2010 to 2012. In addition to the IOM project, the Immigration Police implemented a return project from 2009 to 2011 with the support of the European Return Fund.

In the period between 2010 and 2012, IOM Helsinki organized the return of more than 850 persons through DAVRiF. Most of the returnees in the programme were asylum seekers. In addition to asylum seekers returnees can be victims of trafficking, persons with a valid residence status for protection reasons, certain groups of persons with an invalid residence status, and persons who do not have any permits for stay in Finland. There were more than 40 destination countries in the programme. Iraq was the most common destination of return with 158 returnees, while there were only two returns to Somalia / Somaliland through the IOM programme.

In early 2012, IOM published two reports examining the conditions of return conditions in Iraq and Afghanistan, which are two major destinations for AVR in Finland. In the time period between 2010 and 2012, Iraq was the most common destination of AVR. There was no similar report on Somalia/Somaliland. However, in 2010 the Finnish Immigration Service published its latest report based on a fact-finding mission to Somaliland.³

In 2013 the project "Voluntary Assisted Return and Reintegration Programme in Finland" (VARRP-FIN) was launched to continue the tasks of DAVRiF. The project functions as a continuation of the previous project "Developing Assisted Voluntary Return in Finland (DAVRiF)". Through VARRP-FIN, there were 121 assisted returns in the time period

between January and April 2013. Of these, there were 32 returns to Iraq which continued to be the most common destination for returnees. In the first four months of 2013, there were no assisted returns to Somalia / Somaliland. The amount of returns through programmes of voluntary return has increased considerably during the past decade. Between 2005 and 2009, there were 35 to 74 annual returns, when in 2012 there were 320 returns through the IOM programme. The number of returns is expected to continue growing with estimates for 400 returns in 2013.

The VARRP-FIN project is funded by the European Return Fund and the Finnish Immigration Service. VARRP-FIN is planned to continue until 2015. The Finnish Ministry of Interior has set a project to institutionalize a system of AVR. It is expected that legislation on national Assisted Voluntary Return will be passed in Finland before the end of VARRP-FIN, enabling a permanent AVR system in line with the EU Directive on Return, which emphasizes voluntary return as the primary mode of return.

Vulnerable groups in return migration

The European Return Fund defines the following groups as vulnerable in return migration – minors, unaccompanied minors, disabled people, elderly people, pregnant women, single parents with minor children and persons who have been subjected to torture, rape or other serious forms of psychological, physical or sexual violence.

However, the concept of vulnerability is by no means universal. Vulnerability encompasses factors from systemic economic marginalization to individual physical abuse. Vulnerability also varies depending on the economic, social, cultural and security conditions in a given context.

In the case of return migration to Iraqi Kurdistan and Somaliland, groups including persons belonging to ethnic or clan minorities also need to be taken into account. Also persons suffering from chronic illness, including mental illness, should be accounted for as being vulnerable within the return migration process. Substance abusers are another group of individuals who may be vulnerable in return. It is not necessary, nor

useful to draw up a comprehensive list of vulnerable return migration, as vulnerability can to some extent be a time and context specific experience. For example in the case of Somaliland, clan relations are not based on a universal and timeless system, but are rather socially constructed and negotiated – power relations and subsequent vulnerabilities related to clan relations are subject to change over time. In Iraq, due to the security situation collapsing following the regime change, many urban areas have witnessed large-scale population transfers. In the many ways reordered urban spaces, which have been reordered in many ways, security as well as vulnerability, are highly relative to the individual's subjective position within the social fabric.

3. Return to Somaliland

Somaliland fact sheet

General:

- Somaliland declared independence from Somalia in 1991, but remains internationally unrecognized.
- The government of Somaliland is comprised of an executive president, a cabinet and a parliament. The parliament is composed of the House of Elders and the House of Representatives.
- The judiciary is established as an independent branch of the government. The legal system consists of civil and common law of different origins such as *xeer* and sharia. Xeer is an un-codified set of rules used by traditional elders to mediate relations between clans.
- In 2001, Somaliland adopted a new constitution through a public referendum, and has held several national elections.
- There is no universal system of social protection in Somaliland to provide security in old age, illness or disability. Instead, civic organizations have emerged to provide welfare services.

Population

- The population is growing fast, at a 3.1 % annual rate, and is estimated at 3.5 million.
- The population dominantly Somali, with a growing Oromo population from Ethiopia. Islam is the predominant religion, with most Somalilanders being Sunni.

Economy and work

- The Somaliland economy has gone through a process of privatization over the past two decades. The economy has been built on livestock and agriculture, transit trade, remittances and a growing service sector.
- The unemployment rate is soaring, with estimates varying between 47 to 80 %.

Urbanisation

- Somaliland has experienced a rapid process of urbanization since the end of the war. Despite this, the population is still mostly concentrated in rural areas, with 35 % of the population living in urban settings.
- The legal framework for land management in Somaliland is incomprehensive and disputes over land ownership are common. Conflicts and violent confrontations relating to land ownership are common in Hargeysa.

Infrastructure and basic services

Somaliland is highly dependent on remittances and diaspora contributions in many basic services, such as education, electricity, health care, garbage collection, and telephone services.

- Overall, the infrastructure is in poor condition. There is limited access to water and electricity. Local energy sources remain largely under-utilized, though oil exploration is underway in Somaliland. Due to Somaliland's unrecognized status, oil exploration in Somaliland holds a high risk. According to oil industry estimates, the total size of the oil exploration areas is equivalent to that of the entire Kurdistan region in Iraq

Introduction

“The country is now moving towards the formation of new social hierarchies; in my view I think the returnees have tremendous role in that. Majority of the people of the city for example are rural people, who settled in the city after the civil war or were born after that, most of the people who lived here either died or went abroad, thus the outlook and the life style of the people changed. They will stare at you as someone who is acting in surprising way. The more people return from abroad the more we will notice changes.” Woman, 58

Somaliland declared independence in 1991 as an attempt to maintain the relative peace and stability in the area. The politics of the country have also been greatly influenced by the changes in the economy of the region where, from a viewpoint of history, nomadic life and cattle trading have played an important role. Over the years, the weight of this role has varied and diminished in recent years as the economy has expanded to include the building industry, the trade in imported goods and the increase in international money transfers. For over twenty years, the region has remained outside the armed conflict in Somalia and there are signs not only of a new kind of social and political organisation but also of increasing inequality. It is estimated that the populations of Hargeysa, Burao and Borama, the three largest cities in Somaliland, have grown threefold as migration from the surrounding areas and from further afield has speeded the urbanization. Return to the countryside is less and less frequent but migration from the countryside to the cities has increased. The return migration of international Somali refugees plays a central role in the changes taking place in society.

Brisk return migration

”Inside UK Somali children feels that they are refugees, living in poor neighbourhood, only troubled examples are the ones that always shown in the public the Somali Identity is something that every child

is ashamed of, so, carrying all these fact in my mind I arrived in Hargeysa and found out totally different situation, not that much residents were living in the city, few vehicles, but beautiful houses and buildings, people going to their work places, we used to walk even at the midnights because it was very peaceful, I was very delightful experience the idea that I had changed into different one. Moreover, I was looking for a voluntary work to spare my time, but I couldn't find it, and I didn't have many contacts to help me. I returned back to UK, I started my degree in the university" Woman, 27

Many Somalis who fled the country at the turn of the 1990s have come back either permanently or temporarily. Even more numerous former citizens who left as refugees are regularly visiting their home country for a holiday or in order to invest in property or business enterprises. They also send money to the country in the form of remittances. According to a 2013 FSNAU study, Somalilanders are highly dependent on remittances from diaspora members abroad, with 66 per cent of Somalilanders reported having received between \$1000 and \$6000 in remittances annually.⁴

"Women fundraise for conflicts or drought or famine, and the remittance send back to Somaliland is mostly from women, but the men are the one who are leading the process itself." Woman, 45

In the summer seasons, thousands of people from the diaspora are thought to visit their home regions all around the country. Most of them carry a US or European passport, which makes international travel easy. This is particularly evident in Hargeysa, the capital with the recovery of business life, the more active social life and the rise of prices and rents.

Traditionally, Somaliland has had plenty of traffic passing through the country, and due to the conflict in southern Somalia there are large numbers of internal refugees and their camps inside the country. Urban centres have seen migration from the countryside of nomadic people suffering from drought and misery, from the north and the south as well as from the neighbouring Somali-populated border regions. The unofficial migration routes in the area lead in particular to northern

Africa and the Middle East via Yemen. Every year, hundreds of young people take big risks trying to reach Europe via these routes. Many of them end up coming back after having failed in the attempt. Plenty of young people in Hargeysa live with the dream of escape or with the bitter memory of return.

Other inhabitants of Somaliland include foreign guest workers, restaurant workers from Yemen, Oromo people from Ethiopia and representatives of the ethnic minorities from the south, such as the Bantus and other minority clans. The growth of the building industry, the increase of business ventures, agricultural enterprises and the so-called “unwanted” jobs have added to work-related immigration, while many people are trying to leave the country for humanitarian reasons. Return migration, too, adds to the national economy’s need for workers. More and more often, properties owned by people living in the diaspora are looked after by poor Ethiopian Oromos, or the estate of an owner living abroad is managed by a Bantu farmer from the south. Despite increased supervision and monitoring, exact and reliable statistics of the immigrants are not available. On one hand, the minorities are regarded as hard-working and reliable inhabitants, and on the other hand they encounter prejudices. At times, they face a threat of violence or of actual violence against foreigners.

Return migration is shaping Somaliland in many ways and the country is very dependent on the resources of the returnees. With the chronic lack of know-how, typical of a modern state, many returning migrants are active in politics, in central roles in public administration, on the boards of major enterprises, as founders of civic organisations, in international development co-operation, as owners of private schools, or service providers in the growing private sector service industries. The slow diversification of the economy is partly due to the returnees. As a result of return migration, there are services available which the local inhabitants can only afford with the help of money sent by emigrants or with other outside aid. Hence, return migration is the cornerstone of the national economy. A young returnee woman in her late twenties explained about the influence the diaspora returnees have on the local society:

“The diaspora individuals who came here in early 2000 to gain political position, nobody searched for their conditions in the country they came from, I’m saying that because a man that owns a khat shop, can’t come here simply and claim that he can hold a political position such as MP or minister. Now, the situations changed many young generations are coming home with education and experience that can help them find a career here or even help the politicians.

Others who are like me and work in the civil society sector are gaining experience and giving back knowledge. Speaking of myself, if I was working in other country I will only look after my personal interest, but now am working for myself and helping others. Others come for business and investing in the country, others come just for tourism and spent money.”

Short historical review since the 1960s

In the age of colonialism, Somalis had been divided in five regions: the French Somaliland, the Italian Somaliland, the British Somaliland (which roughly followed the borders of today’s Somaliland), the Northern Frontier District of the British Kenyan Colony and the Ogaden region of Ethiopia. The British Somaliland gained self-governance from the colonial rule of the United Kingdom in June 1960 and quickly joined the Italian Somalia to the Somali Republic the same year. The first government was made of representatives from all the major clan families, from north to south. The government however struggled in post-independence years to consolidate the different traditions of rule set up in the British and Italian colonial governments. The northern region began to portray discontent towards the union early on. In 1961, officers from the north attempted a coup. Despite this, integration of the regions slowly proceeded. Clan divisions and traditional loyalties also presented challenges for the governing of the new state.

The independence of the Somali Republic also incited nationalistic aspirations in Somali regions neighbouring the new republic. In northern

Kenya, which was under British colonial rule, these aspirations lead to a four-year conflict in the mid-1960s. Many Somalis in the Ethiopian region of Ogaden and the French colony of today's Djibouti shared these pan-Somali sentiments. The West took the side of Kenya and Ethiopia, which lead to the Somali Republic seeking support from the Soviet Union.

In 1967, a new government began its rule under a prime minister Mohamed Haji Ibrahim Egal, from the former British protectorate. Egal attempted to take the so-far unfruitful pan-Somali policies down a notch while also building up an autocratic rule. The president Sharmarke was assassinated in 1969. A military coup bringing General Muhammad Siyad Barre to rule soon followed.

Siyad Barre's outspoken goal was to build a strong nation, purified from clan rivalry. In 1970, *Scientific Socialism*, which blended Marxism with Islam, was adopted as the state ideology and a cult of personality was built around Siyad Barre, now coined as the 'Father' of the nation. Large-scale campaigns were launched to increase literacy, and to develop rural and nomadic areas.

Somalia joined the Arab League in 1974, and began increasingly to direct anti-imperialist rhetoric towards Ethiopia over Ogaden and towards France over Djibouti. In 1977, Djibouti became independent under a Somali president. Tensions over Ogaden continued to grow as Ogaden nationalists appealed Somalia for support and the Soviet Union shifted its support to Mengistu's Ethiopia. In 1977, Somali nationalist forces, with the tacit support of the Somali government, managed to take hold of areas in the Ogaden, only to be re-conquered by Ethiopia the next year. The Ogaden war caused a large scale influx of people from the Area, seeking refuge in Somalia. The defeat in the Ogaden war caused internal tensions within Somalia, and in April 1978 there was a failed coup against Siyad Barre.

In response to growing insecurities and tensions, Siyad Barre began to mobilise clan support and traditional loyalties to consolidate his power-base. Two opposition groups were formed, the Somali Salvation Democratic Front (SSDF), and the Somali National Movement (SNM). SSDF was formed mainly by officers from one of the Darod

clans, which had been prominent in the old civilian governments and was based in Ethiopia. SMN was largely supported by the Isaaq clans in Somaliland.

In the 1980s, the Somali government began to impose an increasingly repressive military rule on northern Somalia due to SNM activity and the support it drew from the area. In 1988–91, a civil war broke out between the Somali government and Somaliland's clansmen after SNM had attacked military targets in northern Somalia. Siyad Barre's regime mobilised, whenever possible, other clans to fight against the dominantly Isaaq SNM. But by 1991, SNM managed to overcome Siyad Barre's forces and opposition towards Siyad Barre's rule began to spread and eventually lead to a general uprising which caused Siyad Barre to flee Mogadishu in January 1991.

Somaliland's struggle for recognition and prosperity

After the hostilities in Somaliland ended, the traditional clan elders managed to bring relative peace between Isaaq and the other clans. A national congress was held in May 1991. By this time, it had become apparent that the public was in favour of separation from the South. On 18 May 1991, the SNM leadership claim independence from the south as the Somaliland Republic. Somaliland's proclamation of independence was not received well in Mogadishu, but the new interim government was engulfed with its own problems. Both interim governments, in Somaliland and Mogadishu, competed over emergency aid from the West.

While Somaliland enjoyed relative peace and stability, south central Somalia became divided into clan-based polities, each controlled by a clan elder or warlord. Over the years, several UN missions and peace conferences failed to restore peace in the south. Despite the relative peace Somaliland has enjoyed in comparison to south Somalia, the state-building process in Somaliland has not been easy. National reconciliation conferences played a big role in gaining a sense of national coherence and the basis for national institutions. The diaspora has been closely involved

with the state-building project in Somaliland. However, at times, there has been open conflict over clan rivalries. Corruption and administrative ineffectiveness have stifled societal development. Economic was long hindered by Saudi Arabia banning livestock imports from Somaliland. Incrementally however, Somaliland has been able to resolve major conflicts and build working administrative institutions.

Somaliland today

Although Somaliland has not ceased to seek international recognition for its independence, it is undeniable that Somaliland continues to have a close connection with south central Somalia. This connection is especially visible in economic contacts and trade. These economic contacts carry a heavy importance to both parties, Somalia and Somaliland. Trade flows between these two areas by road, air and sea. Tight kinship relations are mobilized for organizing trade beyond borders. As a result, a large amount of the livestock exported from Berbera actually originates from south central Somalia.

In April 2013, Somaliland and Somalia continued official talks which had begun in June 2012. The parties signed a communiqué as a result of the talks hosted by the government of Turkey. In this communiqué, the two governments committed to facilitate international aid to Somaliland. An agreement was made to continue dialogue and to refrain from any inflammatory acts between the two parties. No specific statement on the future status of Somaliland was included in the communiqué.

The last elections held in Somaliland, the local elections in November 2012, were regarded relatively peaceful although the international election observation mission noted some substantial concerns over cases of multiple voting and disputes about the results, which lead to post-election protests and violence. Despite relative peace and stability economic and social development in Somaliland remains geographically unequal and below the African average according to several key indicators. Somaliland has not yet been able to make the transition from recovery to sustainable development. Economic and social progress is inhibited by high rates of unemployment,

weak production, high prevalence of poverty, lack of access to finance, and depleted natural resources. In 2004, the estimate per capita income was 250 USD. Over 70 per cent of the population in Somaliland is poor.

The Somaliland economy has gone through a process of privatization over the past two decades. Before the civil war, the public sector produced most of the industrial output and basic services. Due to the weakness of the government, the service sector has grown rapidly in a state of deregulation. The economy has mainly been built on four pillars: livestock and agriculture, transit trade, remittances and a growing service sector. There has been notable investment in telecommunications, money transfer services, transport, education, health, hotels, utilities and trade (Bradbury 2008, 140). Overall, the economy is still dominated by labour intensive sectors, such as livestock and agriculture. Livestock and agriculture are however highly sensitive to drought, diseases and other problems arising from environmental depletion and destruction, making these industries vulnerable over time. Livestock exports account for about 80 per cent of all export earnings. Export taxation of livestock trading substantially contributes to Somaliland's public finance through export taxation. One of the oldest ports in the region, Berbera port is located south of the Gulf of Aden, one of the world's central trade routes. The main destinations for trans-shipment and trans-border trade are the Arabian Peninsula and for Somalia as whole, Dubai and Kenya.

Somaliland is ineligible for most aid programs and the government's ability to mobilize tax revenues has been unstable, forcing the government to rely heavily on private loans. Somaliland is also highly dependent on remittances. Remittances add up to 40 per cent of the annual income of urban households. Remittances provide important foreign exchange revenues, which allow Somalis to import products oil, sugar, and flour. Remittances also help finance many basic services such as education and health care.

The unemployment rate in Somaliland is very high at 47 per cent for the whole country. Unemployment in urban areas is even higher at 62 per cent. Employment opportunities are scarce and jobs are mostly occupied by people coming from abroad. IDPs and Ethiopian migrants are employed in menial jobs, while skilled workers often come from

south central Somalia or further abroad. Overall, the informal sector is strong in Somaliland. In Hargeysa, almost 80 per cent of all jobs are in the informal sector. Traditional social mechanisms provide some support for the unemployed population, but these measures are insufficient and are increasingly being undermined by urbanization and other societal changes.

Somaliland has experienced a rapid process of urbanization since the end of the war. This urban drift has been especially visible in the capital Hargeysa. Most returnees choose to settle in Hargeysa, and the area attracts a concentration of services, employment opportunities and access to aid and remittances. The results of this rapid urbanization have been twofold. On the one hand, rural areas provide fewer and fewer opportunities. For example, income levels have high urban-rural disparities. On the other hand, the urban drift puts a strain on the infrastructure and environment as cities struggle to accommodate a quickly growing population. In Hargeysa, the prices of land have been jacked up, and have created tensions over ownership.

In recent years, the prospect of possible oil reserves in Somaliland has raised expectations and hopes of future oil revenues. In October 2012, UK-based Petrosoma announced that it would begin surveys in Habra Garhajis, Somaliland, in a joint venture with Australia-based Jacka Resources. Genel Energy, a Turkey-based operator and UK-based Asante Oil also have plans for oil exploration in the Nugaal block. Due to the fact that Somaliland remains internationally unrecognized, oil exploration in Somaliland holds a high risk. Any exploration license obtained from the government of Somaliland may potentially be subjected to legal challenges by Somalia's government in Mogadishu. For example, in the case of the Nugaal oil exploration area, a part of this area overlaps with another license issued to Canada-based Horn Petroleum by the semi-autonomous region of Puntland. According to Genel Energy and Jacka Resources, onshore Somaliland remains a relatively unexplored region. According to oil industry estimates, the total size of the oil exploration areas is equivalent to that of the entire Kurdistan region in Iraq.

A history of modern Somali migration

It has often been noted that migration and movement is at the heart of the nomadic Somali culture. Nomadic Somalis have been grazing their livestock well beyond the borders of the modern state of Somalia for centuries, especially along the trading route connecting Ethiopia with the Arabian Peninsula.

In addition to nomadic cross-border movement, Somalis and especially northern Somalis, have a long tradition labour migration. During the colonial rule, many Somalilanders from the British colony were employed in the British Merchant Navy. Some of these former nomad pastoralists turn seamen returned to Somaliland after their employment ended, but many stayed in the UK.

After Somalia gained independence, the East African transport sector employed many Somali men. Many Somalilanders moved abroad more permanently after becoming disillusioned with immaterialized promises of positions and resources in the new independent Somalia. Since the 1960's, hundreds of thousands of Somalis have moved to Arabia and the Gulf States in search of better employment opportunities. The Somali diaspora in the Gulf States remitted heavily to their families and kin back home. In northern Somalia the influx of remittances even caused an inflation of local prices. Besides labour migration and overseas employment, many Somalis from wealthier families went abroad to study in countries like the Soviet Union, Italy or the UK. After completing their studies, many stayed on work and settled down abroad.

The civil war caused a major migration wave from 1988 onwards. The first large-scale flight of people occurred after Hargeysa was bombed as a result of the conflict between the Siyad Barre regime and the opposing SNM. At least half a million people fled to seek refuge in Ethiopia and Djibouti. Several thousands of those who fled eventually found refuge in North America or Europe.

As Siyad Barre's government fell apart in the south, the country was engulfed in civil war, prompting many to leave the country. A prolonged drought caused widespread famine, which further increased exile. By 1992, nearly one million Somalis had left the country to Kenya, Ethiopia

and to a lesser extent Djibouti and Yemen. To varying degrees, Somalis have continued to leave south central Somalia ever since the 1990s, with several thousand also seeking refuge in Somaliland. Those Somalis living and working in the Gulf States for the past few decades are nowadays facing difficulties as they often have a limited legal status in these countries and as employment opportunities have declined, they often have no other choice than to leave the country and either return to their homeland or find a third country to settle in.

Mapping the returnees

“Yes of course, return and livelihood here is a personal question. It is not philanthropic as “it is for my people”, I think it is also that, but I think for most people it is secondary, because we are ready for that for personal reasons. I have been out of Somalia when I was 14, and that is a lot. I left in 1965 when Somalia was Somalia, and Somaliland and Somalia were together, and the country was working. And while I was away Siyad Barre came and, civil war and all this, I was always outside.

I started my NGO here. When I came I saw it was meaningful. I know language of these people, I know the culture, I know the religion. I found out that I can live here. I am very good friend with my colleague and his brothers, they live here. They did so much that I felt welcome in here. And I have seen the country that I have never had possibility, if not because of them. And I tell you, it is a wonderful country. If you go out of this city, it is so beautiful. I can tell you it became here more than working as a professional. It became also a project meeting people and having life here.

But I tell all my friends that I live in the house that I rent, and it is a very good house. And everybody tells me why don't you buy this house? It is a very good house, very big and a lot of guestrooms and so on. And I say, no, I will never buy a house here, because I don't want

to be here for so long. I want to buy a house in Mogadishu. This city is my way to Mogadishu. And I must say it has been a very good decision to come here. I think it would have been very difficult to come directly from Europe to Mogadishu. I have a lot of emotions in Mogadishu, in the South. I don't have it here. Here I am Somali but still I am a stranger. So it is easier for me to be here. I do not have relatives to take care of, or I have to behave in a certain way because my sister is here. I do not have all these problems. I have relatives in the South mostly, they came to visit me here. One of my sisters just left yesterday. And my brother has been here, so it became easier to see them.

My son was born in Europe. He is of a Somali father. And I am a Somali mother. So he is very Somali in looking but he is also very European of his mentality. He never lived in Mogadishu. Maybe two three months. He visited me here and worked here. I was turning 60, and I decided I don't want all these feast and all these, I will get away and I will be in Somaliland working for 3 weeks. And my son asked me what do you want for present for your birthday? And I said, 'I would like to have your company in here'. And he said, 'ok, I will work with mentally retarded children'. So he was here for 3 weeks working as a volunteer in mental health. He understands Somali but he speaks very little. And that is his conflict, because he wants to learn, but he wants to decide when and how he will learn. And when he is with Somalis he feels this pressure. 'Oh, how come you don't speak Somali?' He says: 'I am fed up with that question. Let me decide when I will learn my Somali.' But he can learn it, of course he can.

He feels more national there than I do. For example I never say 'we' in my country there. He says. He says we. So he is more integrated than I am. For me it is an intellectual decision. For him it is more emotional. He belongs there. He also becomes more vulnerable, because I have this distance. He does not have. So when he meets racism, it is more hurting. And he is a man, black man, good looking. And when he goes out, meet girls, and local men there become angry. So it is always this problem of racism in night life there. He becomes hurt in

a more emotional level. I got hurt on an intellectual level and I can give feedback intellectually.” Woman in her 70’s

Mapping the returnees in Somaliland for this report has not been an exercise thriving for complete and exhaustive analysis of a geographical migration pattern. It has rather been an attempt to understand through a relatively small number of interviews (30), encounters and discussions (60), as well as readings of secondary information, why people return to Somaliland, and how they experience it. Return in this frame of approach has turned out to be highly complex. We need to avoid seeing it as a single homogenous event. Rather we need to conceptualize it as a transnational practice where return is actually a number of acts of transnational mobility and circular exchange, involving highly personal aspirations and assets. Instead of highlighting return as solely voluntary versus forced, or permanent versus short-lasting resettlement, we need to be cautious of its highly dynamic and multi-local nature. Return migrants, whether forced or voluntary, tend to act upon multiple opportunities and obstacles enabling or restricting their mobile livelihoods. In our interviews on return, we have come to know unique life paths, where transnational space and related social networks have saturated the interviewees’ multi-local lives.

Having said this, we should not deny the commonalities found within the unique life courses of Somalis returning to Somaliland. As in the quote above, by a Somali woman in her 70’s, return can be a chance to deal with one’s past, to realize one’s potential, and face the future in a planned manner. This happens without completely cutting the ties of one’s transnational past, and her life prospects rather suggest further mobility and maintenance of relations to global and local opportunities. This is a common feature among many of our interviewees, as is also constant contestation of one’s own identifications and seek of others’ recognition. It seems that hybrid identities are on the move negotiating their entitlements and obligations vis-à-vis more sedentary traditions.

Needless to say, the set of opportunities and capabilities varies along the interview material and personal accounts. However, certain common patterns are identifiable in the documentations. This chapter is an attempt

to present the forms and configurations that seem to be involved in the experiences of the informants.

Firstly, it appears that returnees clearly tend to highlight their personal preparedness for moving back to the region of origin. There is a certain personal accumulation of resources, whether financial or skills-related, that enables one to make a move. In Somaliland, these resources very often include a foreign passport and an ensured political status in the host country. Moreover, the most significant asset in return is the networks that a returnee has been able to become part of. These involve intimate and familial social ties, as well as more sporadic and distant companionships formed during one's migration history.

Secondly, opportunities in the country of origin must be there, before one realizes personal preparedness and resourcefulness. Peace and stability in the country is the most significant precondition and even a kind of pull factor. The opportunities also include prospects for employment, investment, entrepreneurship or simply philanthropic activities. Also, more intimate opportunities, such as marriage, appear to be an appealing reason for returning.

Thirdly, personal and familial human developments tend to be a crucial factor in return practice. These include what we call critical conjunctures in a life course. Marriage, death and caring for one's parents are critical, emotional, and practical reasons for return among many informants. Longing for Somalia as a culturally and religiously intimate home is also a common motive for relocation. The cycle of biological and social reproduction tends to explain especially women's migration paths and personal choices within them. However, also men give meaning to children become grown-ups, or parents getting old, when they explain the moment of realizing their plans for return. Very often men re-migrate first, and look for opportunities from the family point of view. Some of the children, often sons, may accompany them for this journey.

The fourth frame of reasons explaining return and related experiences include the challenges and obstacles of the migrants. Failures in the host country make one to ponder relocation. On the other hand, discrimination or fear of it is also reflected upon in some of the interviews. It can be so

forceful that the whole family will consider moving at a same time. This happened for some Norwegian Somali families who decided to move back immediately after the Utöya massacre in 2011. The number of Norwegian children increased notably in one of the private schools in Hargeysa. Personal frustration in the enabling life conditions in the host country can be especially hard for men, who relatively tend to lose more of their status in the labour market in destination countries. Women, on the contrary, may gain more space for individual action at home, due to better family welfare provided by many European countries. But even women have fears leading to return migration or sending children to relatives in Somaliland. Many Somali mothers are afraid of losing their children, as authorities in host countries threaten to take their children into custody in the name of child protection. Somalis encounters constant cultural prejudices in Europe.

Preparedness and assets

A lot of expectations have been laid on diaspora members from those remaining in Somaliland, and the communities in exile are indeed involved in many activities that support the overall development of their country of origin. These stretch from remittances sent to family members to engagement in the political process of peace building and increasingly in business activities in the Horn of Africa. Although migrants in general are very much engaged in the everyday life of their families in Somaliland and in the events of their country of origin, they are so to different degrees. Whereas some of them travel back and forth, and some have even returned permanently, many are still hesitating despite keen aspirations for homecoming. In the interviews it becomes clear how certain kind of accumulation of resources and sentiments in the end make person to decide to return. This is often very personal as returnee wishes to make a difference on a personal and communal level. In this preparedness is pivotal notion and it is highly connected to assets one inhabits. A 60-year old returnee woman described the work she was doing in Somaliland:

“They wanted to do something visible, but what I do is not visible, I go to homes, they want to make some monuments of their help, and they wanted to build this [hospital] bigger, and I said no no, don’t do that. It is very expensive and it is not put, like they do in Berbera and Hargeysa, they are there for years. That is old fashioned psychiatry, in my view. So if you want to build something, build it small. They built ten beds for the men and five for the women, and we opened it last year. Now we have worked with active out-patients for two years now.”

Preparedness is often linked to repeated travels to Somaliland. It is exactly during the visits the growing “feeling” makes one to consider assets and opportunities, and finally feeling prepared. Another 62 years old female returnee described her return process in the following words:

“Surprisingly, my trip to Hargeysa in 1995 made me realize that the country and the people are in need of its diaspora to come back and participate in the uplifting the country that had undergone through civil war. Therefore, I decided to return back in 1997. I said I realized that my knowledge, my skills, and experience are needed most in my country. I used to work with the Somali community in Sweden, in translating for the new families that were moving to Sweden and requesting the government to host them. But until many years, I didn’t work with the qualifications I obtained from the universities. Doing research on women’s issue was my interest not interpreting for other people. I believed that my knowledge will be ravaged in Sweden were many professional like me are many but very rare in my home. That is why I came. Few challenges concerning the procedures I gone through when I was obtaining the papers of the land and different channels you go through. There is no proper office you can go to, all what I was doing was going after persons I know. Where in Sweden, when you are dealing with legal issues you know where to go.”

As expectations are high locally, returnees are sometimes almost ‘patronizing’ in their statements. A middle-aged male returnee from Helsinki acknowledges his own role as a saviour:

“I am prepared to help my country. They must be afraid of so many diaspora people coming to help them. 5–6 of ministers are from diaspora, and they all bring different kind of expertise, they have learned culture and many other thing. We need to ensure them (locals) that we are not going to abandon them, we want develop them”

Opportunities

It has been stated that the returnee’s personal preference for their home country (see Galor & Stark 1991, Hill 1987, Constant & Massey 2003) is an obvious reason for returning. This however, must be understood in the light of enabling factors. A young mother with three kids moved to Somaliland because her husband had been born there, and had a good business with his relatives there. Although the mother was originally from Mogadishu, she had a strong preference for staying in Somaliland, rather than in Texas. The reasons for this were many, but being more well off in Hargeysa, than in the U.S., made it possible for her to provide her three sons with a private education, with a friendly community, a Muslim upbringing, and with a house keeper. She told us that life in Somaliland is generally hard, but easy with the assets she possessed. In Texas, household technology like washing machines, made life easy, but at the same time, the hostile environment made life too hard. Everyday racism and especially the events after 9/11, made life hard in schools and public places. The opportunity to have a more secure upbringing for her children in Hargeysa was pulling the family back to its origins. Even everyday gun violence in the U.S., somewhat paradoxically, made a security-wise fragile home region more appealing than the West. A male returnee in his late twenties stated his assumption, that returning is much harder for women than it is for men, even if the returnee woman had a personal preference to return.

“It is more harder, more harder. Because in our society, a man can do a lot in the outside, but woman, she always, she will be in home. Also, because men are more educated than women, and man now struggling to get job. What about woman now? The man has not work.”

In case of poor education and lacking personal skills and assets, women tended not to be able to make use of opportunities. However, strong familial networks may appear as a good source of welfare. In most cases, the female informants appeared to be strong and active decision-makers when opportunities did arise. A 45-year old woman told us that,

“the reason behind why I came back this time, was the year I spent in Somaliland made me realize that I can live in this country and start establishing business after seeing all this development and peaceful environment, what was also impressive is that my kids liked life here, and welcomed the idea of returning back, and I sensed that if am not taking the first initiatives in coming back my kids will never even bother to see their families and relatives, before now they used to generalize their lineage family everyone was uncle and aunt, they could not differentiate and tell their close ones apart from their ancestor, so part of my children are with me now and others on the way. What attracted me here are the peace that people reached, friends and relatives welcoming my kids, I’ve seen the development that I always been hearing, the country is different now from past, education and business level are increasing in the past we used to see youth only eager to learn but nowadays even the eldest also are learning.”

During the interviews it was revealed that especially men were struggling to persuade their wives living back in the host countries, to come and join their return activities. In some cases, these men married a second wife, and brought only some of their children to Somaliland. In general terms, men tended to be more mobile because they did not carry the same responsibilities for the home and children, as women did. A returning medical doctor from the U.K. told us about his returning brother. He had to work hard to get his wife and children to join him in Burao. When he finally succeeded, the children were very sick in the beginning, due to contaminated drinking water. However, as time passed by, the kids became healthy, their bad asthma symptoms were cured, and they lost their overweight. The mother was happy, and the story ended in the family staying put in Burao, but father having to move back to London

for work and a steady income. Opportunities and preferences may change over time and space. This is true especially in fragile social conditions where subsistence, security and everyday realities vary constantly. This makes return migration a never-ending activity, contesting the very idea of permanency.

Business opportunities are attracting many returnees. They may invest large shares of their savings in the hope of big profits in the future. They invest in land, hoping to find minerals, such as ore or diamonds, or even oil. A middle-aged bus driver from Helsinki had saved up money for several years, and he invested in large areas of land. He had drilled a water pump in order to sell water and establish a farm. He had advised his relatives to do the same. A lady returnee, his relative, had invested in an open well that had then dried up. She was miserable about losing all of her tiny savings. Even the bus driver himself was struggling. In the first months, he had lost three agricultural devices due to robbery, and now had to guard his farm around the clock, sleeping modestly on a thin mattress in a store room. Still, many of the returnees were optimistic and expressed enjoyment in ‘the African way of doing business.’ A young, 27-year old returnee woman told us the following about her personal motivations:

“Others who are like me and work in the civil society sector are gaining experience and giving back knowledge. Speaking of myself, if I was working in other country I will only look after my personal interest, but now am working for myself and helping others. Others come for business and investing in the country, others come just for tourism and spent money.”

The development sector is also a central field of labour opportunity for many returnees, both men and women. Returnees either establish their own NGOs, or they are recruited internationally. Many returnees underline their philanthropic motives along with income opportunities. A young woman in her twenties told us about the process of finding employment:

“The current organization, I work with advertised a position of researcher and a trainer at the same time, I applied that position when I was in Syria, I didn’t get any response back. Finished my course and returned back to the UK, continued searching for careers, I applied another advert from another international organization in Europe a voluntary work. I thought if I start with the voluntary, it could lead me to a permanent one, so while accepting their offer for the position following a telephone interview, the earlier organization in the UK also contacted me and conducted interview with me, and then they offered me the position, now what!”

Sometime returnees have already wide international experience and they already possess professional qualities to any demanding position worldwide. However, they want to combine return to home country and their aid related profession. A nearly 60-year old woman explained about her work history before coming to Somaliland:

“In 1993, I got the British travel document. After finalizing my study in 1995, I got a job from the current organization that I am representing. The position was in Ethiopia and Eritrea. I worked as gender officer there. Our project came to an end after the clashes between Ethiopia and Eritrea begun in 1999, so we went back to UK and continued working in the head office until the beginning of 2000 when I was promoted as the Deputy Director. In July 2000 we achieved a Somaliland project that is composed of two parts, research part and a programme part. I decided that I will take the project to Somaliland and return back there. The project ended in 2001, and after we applied for an extension period. We succeeded and since then I lived and worked in Somaliland.”

As so many returnees have been travelling repetitively to Somaliland before they actually felt prepared and assured of opportunities, they have made long term plans for staying. Over the period of time their return has become permanent. This is how one woman, 60, recounted her process of resettlement:

“During my stay in Somaliland, I used to visit the IDP camps inside the country, and examine the conditions of young children. One day in Odwayne, this was one of the biggest camps in the Northern part, I saw in the check point a small kid who was carrying a gun that was in the size of his body. I was very shocked so I asked the driver why the young boy is carrying the gun at this age; he replied that he might took it from the guards at the check point while sleeping. I didn’t stop at that answer and went to the elders of the camp and told them to not let young children hold guns and play with it. They agreed but also added that “we are in war zone, and in a war zone everything is possible”. From that day, I decided that if am going to help in a way or contribute to the country I will start from rehabilitating and educating those young children. Education is the only way they can go away from running after the warrior men. I went back to Dubai and visited a group of Somalilanders who were also like me wanted to contribute to the country by any means and waiting to listen to my observations. After many discussions we agreed on establishment of schools and bring back uniforms to the children back in Odwayne, therefore we registered 1200 students and gave those uniforms to them. I never left Somaliland since, except for short periods.”

Critical conjunctures

“Most vital events – such as marriage, motherhood, and migration – are negotiable and contested fraught with uncertainty, innovation, and ambivalence”, writes the American anthropologist Jennifer Johnson-Hanks (2002) on life cycles in human cultures. Seeing these three vital events in combination simultaneously, rather than in isolation, is imperative when looking at the research material on return migration to Somaliland. Rather than categorising these events as vital, we would like to approach them as critical, since they are decisive and momentous events in a migrant’s life path. This does not mean that we need to approach them as dramatic occurrences, but rather as occasions leading to actions of one or the other kind. An old lady returnee started her long story by stating the following:

“My husband died in the US and I came back in 1995 to look after our lands and shelters and also to see the situation of the people here.” It was a kind of explanatory statement concerning what one in general is also responsible to do. A middle aged bus driver from Helsinki made his savings until his dear father died and he buried him in the Muslim grave yard in Finland. Soon after that whole family moved to London and subsequently he arrived investing in Somaliland. “My father was my best friend, and when I lost him I felt I need to return to my father’s home country.”

Loss is not the only reason for return; even fear or anticipation of it is decisive. Many accounts tell about how parents act upon the cultural hybridity of their children, or how returnees want to take care of their aging parents. Cultural hybridity is a notably prevalent theme in the migrants’ life histories. Migration experiences have forced all returnees in different ways to ponder upon their feelings of belonging and cultural sentiments. At the same time though, it has not always been easy for them to feel accepted in their host countries. Becoming alienated from one’s own cultural and religious background also causes people to consider return as a means of cultural reproduction.

“We came after seeing our kids maturing in a western culture that is different from ours. We decided that returning back to Somaliland will be the better choice for them. We can practice freely our religion obligations without ant fear of being discriminated.” Woman, 49

“I came back to Somaliland for my children; I wanted them to learn the Somali culture. While living in UK I noticed that my children lacking the basic elements of their traditions and culture, all what they know about Somaliland is the news they see on TV all the time, thus I thought of changing that perception and make them be proud of their home country. The reason I came back was my children, but after I arrived I noticed that there are investment opportunities that are available which I can make use of. That is when I started my shop.

Other thing is that the peaceful environment which we were looking for before we left the country is now attracting everyone Diaspora man or woman.” Woman, 45

“Combination of two things brought me here, I always liked to work in the development, and my father was quite sick here so I wanted to be near him, that was the two major reasons. My husband and I are not together, he works at the UK and am working here, and my daughter doesn’t see her father” Woman, 30

Marriage is a typical event influencing not only the migrant’s life path, but also the decision to move back to Somaliland. In many cases, returning for marriage is a male phenomenon, but also women return to find a spouse. As a young woman in her twenties explained:

“I am Somalilander but I am born in Kenya. My uncle encouraged me to come and see my people and my country. He told me ‘if you want to stay you stay, come and see your relatives’. I stayed one year, I wanted to be married.”

A 26-year old man, who had returned to Somaliland with a programme of assisted voluntary return told us how he had married a local woman upon return:

“No, first I (Interviewer: ‘Divorce?’) Yeah, I go there and divorce. There is one girl, she is stay, she is same class, we love each other, then when I come back, I was staying, when I was staying Helsinki, I was talking with the telephone, and before I was love her, and she was love me more. Then when I come here, the first day I come here, second day I was marry... always going IOM office and asking my money and they give me 3000 dollar, and for I was 2800 euro was become, when you change in dollar 3400. IOM is very good really, for system... I was done in the money 1500 dollar I was married with a, with a (Interviewer: ‘With a girl?’) yeah, and 1000 I was trying first to open a small shop (Interviewer: ‘To sell what?’) to sell, to get life.” Man, 26

As one forcefully returned man in his late twenties told us, life circumstances may have changed during one's absence and can make everyday life unbearable even if you should feel at home as a returnee:

“Personally I don’t khat, I don’t chew khat. Also I don’t walk around in the city too much, sometimes in the morning, but I don’t like to walk around senseless. I prefer to stay in my home. Uh, yes of course, of course I have friends, but when you become around thirties of 29, everyone does his life, and they don’t help you, because everyone is struggling his family, and he can’t help you. Everyone say to you, sorry I can’t help you.”

Failures and fears

Some of the most sensitive topics in the interviews were failures and fears, which seem to explain many of the return decisions. For men, the European labour market has not been inviting and they had often been employed in low-paid work, which was not necessarily in their own professional field. Many Somali men have entrepreneurial aspirations, but it was not uncommon to hear complaints about how difficult it is to manage private businesses in the Nordic countries, or to become wealthy. For them, Africa in general, and Somaliland in particular, appeared to be less regulated in this regard and one could start out small and grow bigger in the future. A 45-year old Somali man from Finland told us the following:

“So far, my home is in Finland. My family is there, they’ll come here when they can. I don’t have an apartment. You can learn there, but you can’t get money. I have a couple of hundreds of euros with me. It isn’t easy to get an income here either. In the beginning you have to work for free, in 10, 15 years you can get something. It’s hard in Finland, but they are ahead of us, we learn new things. I’m a socionom, I’ve worked for 22 years. First peace, and then you need to try to organise your own resources, use what you have. Now we need peace, we need talk, not guns. I don’t want guards, what else could people do?”

Men felt marginalized in their host countries in comparison to the public access they had in Somaliland. For women, the family situation was more dictating and problems with their children occupied them more often. The Finnish researcher Marja Tiilikainen (2011) has come to the conclusion that Somali migrants do not always succeed in meeting the high expectations of their families and communities. Her article focuses on this 'failed diaspora', i.e. the experiences of those Somali migrants who have been deported or returned to Somaliland, either by authorities or their families, due to criminal behaviour, mental illness, drug abuse, or life styles that Somali families find unacceptable. It is hoped by the families that they will recover in Somaliland by being 'returned to culture' or by receiving religious and traditional treatments. The theme of forcefully return children to their culture is prevalent in Somaliland discussions with returnees and locals alike. A 62-year old returnee woman told us about forcedly returned children and Somali families:

“Forced children back is new trend, I see it when I go back or travel for training purposes. Many families after getting troubled by their siblings deviant acts decided to send them back home where they are exposing to their culture and tradition. I guess that happens because parents in the beginning didn't give time to their children to talk about their culture and norms. Fathers are sitting with friends in khat sessions just like here. Only small numbers of men are raising their children properly. All the burdens fall on the mother shoulders. So I can say that brining children back home to make then behave will not solve any problem, nevertheless it means that parents couldn't face their responsibilities towards their kids.”

Compared to the case of Iraqi Kurdistan, only very few asylum seekers from Finland have returned to Somaliland with voluntary return programmes. The interviews in Somaliland included only two cases of authority assisted returnees. In both cases, the sense of failure was a key theme. As one of them, a young man in his late twenties told us in an interview:

“Because I miss my family, and they give me a negative decision, that’s why I come here. If they give me a positive, I will never go, because I want to make progression... education. Because first of all the reason I went to Finland is not money, I want to learn something. I know Finland is very very high quality education.”

The other young man, who had also come with a programme of assisted return, explained the immense stress the failure of emigration and finally the assisted ‘voluntary’ return had caused him:

Interviewer: “Were they disappointed that you couldn’t stay?”

“Yes, of course. Also, the most problem now, I am criticizing, too much people criticizing, and I can’t satisfy all of them people. When I meet someone, he ask me a lot of questions. Now I sit in the room, I don’t want to go outside, because too many too many questions.”

Interviewer: “Too many questions. But I understood that you got 3000 dollars, euros from IOM to settle here? Is that enough?”

“Nothing, now I have no more.”

Interviewer: “Yes, and how long have you been here?”

“Nearly two months.”

Interviewer: “So, where did you give the money? I mean, to your family or?”

“No, because first of all I try to make a share, a small business, but now I used a lot, I make a lot of withdrawals, because my family all need something, because I want to put something in my home, like bed, something like that. I used a lot of it, now nothing. Now I have no any job.”

The failure of not getting a residence permit or citizenship is not only seen as a failure in the diaspora community. It is a failure which can be very difficult to explain to one’s family in Somaliland after being away for a longer period of time. As one of the young returnee men told us:

“Yeah, because I don’t have passport, my mind want to see my mother, my brothers, like this. Then my mind too busy. Then I decided last

time to go back my country, in order to see my family, together have life. My family, they don't like to come back in Africa, because they know the life in Africa Is very hard, and they say 'why you didn't stay there?', and I say 'I can't stay there, because I don't have any documents, I can't go job, I can't go anywhere, I was only, I only stay place many people staying together'. I said 'it's not good'. To sleep many people together, you don't know these people, many people coming for you, some of people they sick, some of people they not clean people. I said 'it's not good life', like this, but if I said, I tell them, 'if I was get documents, like passport, I get good life, job, like this, everything'. But when you didn't, I said 'when I didn't have any documents, you can't get good life', because you know the life of the kind, it's very good the life of the kind. But people when they get passport, Finland, they give good life. They get home, they get school, they get job, they get education, development like this, he can go everywhere, he visit his family, he bring his wife, kids, like this, everything.

My family is very big, and my family they was thinking that I have passport, and I came alone (P: and you have a lot of money?) yeah, and they was thinking that I do job in there, I said 'nothing, I don't have'. They didn't accept, 'why? You was staying Finland, you was doing job'. I said 'I didn't do job, I was staying only camp'. Then, they realized, they realized me after maybe two weeks, when they see I am coming, always going IOM office and asking my money and they give me 3000 dollar, and for I was 2800 euro was become, when you change in dollar 3400. IOM is very good really, for system."

Permanent, periodic or circular – notions on mobile livelihoods

It is evident that return is not a single event, nor necessarily a permanent decision. On the contrary, it appears that those who have felt forced to return, even if a certain degree of voluntariness is involved, as well as those who have been successful both in their host country and back in the country of return, see re-emigration as a realistic option for them

in the future. One of the young men returning with a programme of assisted return stated the following:

“Yeah, I hope, before when I come, my dream was like this, get passport, do job, then make money, then some business make here. But my dream is not come true. Not yet come true. It was not written by the God. But one time, maybe it will become. I try to, I try to go in Addis Ababa, next month like this. To ask you know, visa Cuba or Mexico like this. To ask Cuba, or go America. Cause America, they didn't you know, they didn't defy Africa, they know Africa is hard life, and also America you can get job, you can get easy job, documents it's easy to get. So I try, but one plan is that, and one plan, because now I am family, I need to get a job, I need home, my own home. Now I live with my mom, and my wife is living her brother, her sister, because we, because I don't have my own home.”

One explanation for mobile livelihoods can be that the migrant experience has increased the individual's knowledge about his or her capabilities and the overall possibilities and options found elsewhere in the world. Recent discussion on human development and mobility builds on socioeconomic theory on human capabilities and well-being (see for example Sen 1999). In this developmental discourse, capabilities on the individual level are understood as opportunities to achieve a state of well-being through mobility. Moreover, it scrutinizes whether this resourceful frame of capabilities may or may not have an instrumental role in more general community or macro-level development (see de Haas 2010). A 25-year old returnee woman told us the following in an interview:

“Most of people want to go there one day, they are thinking to be diaspora, they do not know they are jobless there, I have seen so many to come here to look for job because they do not have job there, they want to have work in un or NGO, more and more coming, any tension? Might be, but here they want to have someone who knows how to run the office, investing.”

Addressing the vulnerabilities – gender and age in a changing landscape

A fragile Somaliland

Somaliland is constantly struggling with the lack of clean water, the stability problems of the generator-produced electricity, the irregular availability of food and daily consumer goods, and the problems of health and education. In all these fields the country is very vulnerable. All basic food supplies, medicines and other commodities, with the exception of water, are imported. There is very little domestic production and, in spite of a number of attempts, such ventures as self-sufficient fishing, farming or poultry farming have not been successful. For example, eggs are imported from Brazil via Dubai. Revenue from taxes is minimal and corruption is eating into the potential state income. Competition for resources is fierce which is reflected in issues of security. Violence and threats against vulnerable groups, such as women, children and minorities are everyday occurrences, with beatings and other ill-treatment seen even in public places.⁵ With urbanisation, the traditional conciliation of violent crimes, in particular rape and violence against women, has significantly changed in nature.

“For instance, when rape occurs, the traditional elders were using culture in solving that by making the girl marry the man who raped her. Rape rate is higher in the cities due to the urbanization and since the culture is still more powerful in the rural areas, another factor is the justice system and courts. When a man rape a women in other countries the police arrest him and accuse him guilty for what he did, here you would see that the family of the victim is she knows the man looking after the man and his family and asks to marry their daughter, but nobody seek the justice for that.” Woman, 60

“One of the issues that makes me sick, the Somali culture treat women who got raped as if she committed by herself, they don't see her as victim but rather as someone who is dirty and force her to marry the

guy who raped her. If this occurs to young returnee girls, am sure it is someone she knows that raped her.” Woman, 24

“I’ve heard a lot of rape cases, maybe it’s due to difficulties in getting marry here, marriage here is very expensive, it was much easier to get marry before, I haven’t been here long enough to look at the causes, and to the youth culture, I know about the domestic violence it’s obvious in Somali community in UK, but here is normal to see a husband beating his wife, I guess poverty and khat consumption is behind that, women are more empowered than men in UK, women are will call the police if they felt that they are threaten by their husband.” Woman, 62

The change of economic structure affecting land ownership

Somaliland has often been described as a nomadic economy. The sale of cattle, camels, goats and sheep to the Arabian Peninsula has been extensive and has reinforced the status of the port of Berbera and of the clans ruling the area. However, the cattle trade has suffered because of Saudi Arabian import bans and the unstable conditions of the region. Drought and famine have also affected the keeping of and trading in cattle. Many investors have gone over to the building industry, property and various import enterprises. Issues of land ownership and the related ever increasing conflicts about possession have added tension between people with different sources of income, such as nomadic life and the property trade.

In traditional Somali society, land was not privately owned, and private control of water resources was limited. Communal ownership of land and public right of access is giving way to private ownership of land and areas of groundwater. More local conflicts have arisen from the production of charcoal, and the nomads settling down in permanent homes and pastures, as well as the new water resources. Private interests also extend to possible mineral deposits, and many people, if they can afford it, acquire plots of land even in areas with no potential for farming or nomadic life. Land deals are riddled with corruption.

B. is a bus driver from the capital area. He has bought 400 hectares of farmland. He says that he will use part of it to grow lemons, papayas, lettuces, and beans. He also owns 40 camels and a share (44 hectares) in a co-operative. The farmland near the city originally consisted of 12 hectares, and he drilled a well 160 metres deep in the area at a cost of \$80,000. In his absence, however, homes were built on the land and he now has only 2 hectares left for cultivation. He has fenced in the area to stop any further appropriation of land. Last year, the produce from this small garden was \$50,000 but the profit was only \$10,000 because of continuing investments. He also sells water to tank trucks at \$7 per tank or approximately 80 cents per barrel (with a retail price of \$1.5). Outside the city area land used to be free, and for the bigger areas he has paid €2000 to the authorities.

More and more, the conflicts occur within the communities as private individuals quarrel about their rights of ownership. The quarrels can then escalate into violent conflicts between clans, with possible political interests.

Although the number of camels and goats in the country exceeds the number of people many times over, the formerly proud nomadic society of Somaliland has gone through major changes. This can be seen in particular in the breakdown of social cohesion and the increase in inequality. The change in Somaliland can be seen as the diversifying of social relations, with the differences between genders, classes and population groups diversifying into multifaceted and unequal social relationships. The chance of a private individual's ruling his or her everyday life is totally dependent on globally-dispersed, extended family households and the individual's status within them. The role of the individual within the household, again, has been redefined. Next, I shall inspect the social hierarchies shaped by these changing roles, because cultural change and diversification take place fast, especially as regards gender and age. Somaliland has always been more heterogeneous than its reputation would suggest, but the modern way of life, consumer habits and urbanisation have hastened the change and the diversification of the structure of society.

”Many ideas have changed now. Previously men were looking for girls who have quite amount of education to marry, but now they are looking for women who have jobs and are educated. Another thing is that the society is not anymore accepting any one who can afford to work but don’t work. Man or woman.”

Gender

”I know what gender is. And from what I’ve seen so far, I saw men are top and women are lower.” Boy, 10

”People here perceive gender equality as an idea imported from western and those NGOs are working according to that agenda. However, personally when we talk about equality I always say, apart from seeking equality where are my rights as a woman? I argue with men telling them that our Islam gave me complete rights even when it comes to breastfeeding the Islam obligate husbands to pay the value of the breastfeeding for two years. However, men ignore all that and repress the rights of women and attribute to her all sins as they say ‘Eve was behind the deportation of Adam out of heaven.’” Woman, 60

Women have always played an important role in Somaliland even though, traditionally, they have not had access to executive positions or to the Council of Elders in order to represent their clans. The Council of Elders acts as a mediating body in conflicts between clans and represents the official public life of the region. Women have also always held a lower status as official religious leaders.

In the traditional nomadic society, women have had very limited say in business matters, although their contribution as workers in the nomadic economy has been of crucial importance. Youth unemployment is rampant in Somaliland, but women are especially disadvantaged in the labour market due to cultural attitudes and practices, low enrolment in education and limited access to resources. According to the global Gender Inequality Index (GII), Somalia is the fourth most unequal country in

terms of gender. In a recent UNDP survey-based study, more than half of young women and half of young men consider gender discrimination to be a major obstacle in life in Somalia. Violence against girls and women is endemic in Somalia. It is estimated that up to 98 per cent of women in Somalia are subjected to Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). Sexual and gender-based violence, such as rape, sexual assault, forced prostitution and domestic violence, is common and often goes unpunished. The lack of open discussion about gendered issues such as rape and domestic violence hinders women's equal access to justice. Furthermore, the traditional laws are often highly discriminatory against women.

The presence of women in politics, on both a local and a national level, is on the increase, although men are still in the clear majority. The status of a few strong and visible women as opinion leaders has enhanced women's projects in society, and many women, particularly those returning from the diaspora, hold important positions in civic organisations.

"I would say, hard work first, then you meet every criteria. Most of politicians are men and they say: what? This is only a woman. But if you work hard and say: I want to be president. Then your hard work will take you there" Woman, 24

"Only one challenge which concerns women that are in a top position in local or international NGOs. Somali men in this country are against that, they don't want to see women who are very successful in heading an organization. Also apart from rejecting those women, men try to undermine women's contribution to the development of the country. I am known to be vocal and very confident in the meetings, so, men always try to put me down. In this country women have to struggle ten times for their wellbeing than any other ordinary women in the neighbouring countries. It is not easy to survive as a professional woman. If a woman makes a mistake in her profession, you would see everyone is talking about it, while every place men are committing corruption and no one is bothered to talk." Woman, 58

Weak men and strong women?

Studies on return migration in Somaliland have revealed that more of returnees are men than women and that male return migration is encouraged by the general atmosphere and mentality in the country, which favours male participation in public life. In his article, Hansen (2008) describes this as a symbolical return to a virgin land where virile men are welcomed. In traditional anthropology, relations between men and women are presented as a union of contrasts between man and woman, hard and soft, strong and weak. However, the strong and long-standing participation by women in the stability of the region and the fortifying of family life and civic society in Somaliland cannot be ignored. Women are also more educated than they used to be and operate in prominent positions, such as instructors and in health care. They have their own legal organisation, the Women Lawyer's Association, which acts, among other things, to promote the rights of female victims. As a young returnee woman in her late twenties told us,

"A woman must always approve herself to gain the recognition from her male constituent, but men don't need that, their masculinity approves them."

At times, returnee men are even perceived as 'losers', though there are also many successful men as figureheads in public administration and business. Many men have not been able to benefit from their exile to the same extent as women. In the western world, their power and public role have been more limited, their political and social influence weaker, and they have often felt that they have lost their status as the authority in the family while women and mothers have gained more and more relative power. Hence, many men have become disillusioned by the time they return to their home country and, even after a new marriage to a local woman, they frequently remain dependent on the remittances of their relatives, adult children, and at times even their first wife.

“What also I realized is that they don’t have their parents as role model to follow, all what they are seeing is their mother at home doing household activities, cooking, cleaning, and then taking the welfare every week, and seeing their father either chewing khat or sleeping, and even the father is working he will be working in low profile job such as taxi driver, or security guard.” Woman, 27

“Most of people want to go abroad one day, they are thinking to be diaspora. They do not know they are jobless there. I have seen so many to come here to look for job because they do not have job there. They want to have work in UN or NGO. More and more are coming.” Woman, 24

“There is an evolving idea of the returnees are not coming with positive contributions but also coming with lots of negativity. Such as politically, I would see senior officials that are returnees who are most men, elder, those are diaspora but they were not raised in west countries as me. Those I believe are taking advantage of the situation here, because they were hopeless in abroad so they decide at once that they should go to Somaliland and become an MP or minister, live in a nice house and have a new car.” Woman 2, 24

“When I talk to people and ask them why a young woman will marry an old man they will say that, because life in western countries is secure in terms of everything. They regarded as guarantee insurance, even if the spouse doesn’t have job they will say, at least he has a passport. The latter when they stay and his wife get pregnant they leave and never come back.” Woman 2, 24

The problems the returnee women face can arise from their limited opportunities to play a meaningful role in the society. They may also feel more vulnerable in the new context. On the other hand, many returnee women who have been able to maintain their social networks and have a good basic education have better chances of employment than local women. In addition, they frequently have financial resources and contacts

which they can use for the improvement of their own position and, more often than local women, they are able to employ domestic help.

Women from the diaspora are perceived desirable wives by the locals due to them often having a foreign nationality and this is considered a major resource in the extended family and the fragile political context. Traditionally, local men very seldom marry women older than themselves. This unwritten rule does not always apply to a wife from the diaspora.

“Being a single returnee makes you become interested by men, they will say “you are from overseas”, this is create a situation where you will be uncertain about the person if he interested in you or in the citizenship I hold. But, I can add here that, old returnees are known or maybe their father was famous to the community and has social status so they reintegrate in the community, but for us as young generation we face a lot or problems, we have to prove ourselves. For returnee women like me is even more difficult, our relatives say when they see me “she is Ayan”, unlike my brother, they would say “oh, he is the son of Ahmed Ali, good for you” although being here for one year made them realize that am a women that can work as tough as men. Young men who come here are liking it just because they feel that they are born to known families, have money, girls would easily admire him, so marrying from here is simple.” Woman 2, 24

“It was a trend started by men returning home and marries young women, many couples survived but few faced problems related to cultural shock or husband reveal of second marriage. Another form of marriage is a man marry back home and when the wife arrives she mingles with the new culture and leave him for other man. Then before couple years a new trend started with female returnee marrying from here and then make them obtain the citizenship, this type of marriage made many young men who were successful here to continue their successes but also there were some who left their wives for other women, so the single mother struggles with her kids alone. I believe the main reason why Somaliland people will marry someone from

diaspora is just simply to acquire a passport, and live in opulence place like UK. Since many people are now returning, and there has been an increase in the interaction between returnees and local, also the technology, everyone now a days can easily obtain information about the other partner to know his/her background. Many people return and stay for quite long period with the spouse and then may decide to depart together. During my work in the University I used to conduct debates with students, there was one time that we heard news about a submerged ship that was carrying 25 youth from Borama [in the western region of Somaliland], and all of them deceased, I asked them will you still want to migration after hearing this, majority said yes, why not, and I said why? They answered because girls here want to marry guys from diaspora; most of us had their girlfriends married to diaspora men, so we will travel and comeback with cash to marry whom we like, then I told them that not everyone who comes home is rich, I knew men who borrow money before returning and marry with that money, and others were dropout and chew khat, so when we hear that he got married we feel sorry for that girl.” Woman, 27

Internal relations between local and returnee women have also changed. The returnees often have better resources and a better educational background and they are able to obtain employment more easily than their local counterparts. Unemployment is endemic, especially among the local young people, and financial dependence on relatives is high. This reflects on the chances of starting a family and, in urban environments, the lack of means has led to ever later marriages. Returnees, both men and women, are popular as spouses due to their resources and access to travel abroad. The issue of personal wealth and standing has become a structural problem as well, when the choice of spouse is ruled by the person's ability to support a family. The capability to be a familial breadwinner is guaranteed with employment in state administration, in one of the major mobile services companies or in a money transfer office – jobs that are often run by owners living in the diaspora.

“The diaspora are the backbone of the development of the country, more over politically they participate in the conflict as well as the reconciliation. When it comes to their participation in the democracy of the country, the diaspora play major role in supporting parties, candidates, and officials financially and morally; I can say they are continuous source of support to Somaliland. For example, me and my husband were contributing 1500\$ to the SNM in the first years, we were supporting them financially.

In my opinion I strongly believe that without the diaspora contribution to the country in every way, the country wouldn't reach what it has today. Starting at the family level, the money they send through remittances services assist families in offering their basic needs.”
Woman, 60

Altogether, social relations between men and women are in a transient state. Weak economic growth in Somaliland reflects heavily on extended family households and their internal relations. In an increasing number of households, women are the heads of the family, and although polygyny is ideally thought to be based on the equal treatment of wives, in many cases the man is unable to support his families even though the doctrinal right to multiple wives is dependent on his ability to support them. These situations are being widely dealt with at courts of law, and this too mirrors recent changes in the demographic dependency ratio. Women's access to markets and investments in productive sectors is particularly restricted.

“Recently in the last twenty years, women are working in what so called “men's job” or “breadwinners”. Culturally some of the jobs were regarded as men's role, but what happened is that women become the head of the households, doing what men suppose to do. Same thing in the education sector, more girls are now in universities and also in schools.

Women if they are seeking to be equal to men they should open the door very wide because the more they push the more it gets hard to open". Woman, 60

"I don't agree on women should participate or hold a government position; the politics is a dirty place for women to be. I have my own reasons for that which are first Allah the almighty assigned for us as women different obligations than the men, and we have to look after our children and husbands. Second, I don't think women can handle the burden of public office duties. I think women should be educated to raise her kids very well, and have a career that she would work and come back to her home after work hours.

There are issues related to marriage, local woman tend to look for a Diaspora man like also the men who do the same. I believe that it should be steps before marrying someone such as getting to know him/her as much as you can to avoid problems in the life. I know stories such as woman who have known men from the net, and after they arrived to the country it happened that the man is handicapped or mentally ill, same thing happened to men also." Woman, 45

"Marriage between returnees and people here I think there always interest, a lot of men who are not educated, don't have career or any other requirement to get successful, beautiful wife, so they think if they come here, it's easier for them to get that choice, in the other hand, a lot of women are single mothers, and hard for them to find second partner there, but here it is easy for them to find that , so the situation is she is looking for husband, husband looking for wife, and both sides are getting something." Woman 2, 45

Prejudices against returning immigrants

Competition for jobs and resources in Somaliland is fierce and local people do their best to protect themselves within the community.

Loud critical discussion about the morals, religious virtue and social competence of the returnees tends to lead to underestimating their skills at large. Many people say: *“They know how to read and write but they don’t know our culture”*. The clan system operates on the local level as well, and many returning immigrants feel that they do not have the same employment opportunities as the locals. Workers are reported to have complained about nepotism and that getting a job does not depend, initially, on education, skills or experience. This is particularly evident in local organisations. And yet, their board members are often returnees or diaspora members.

“One last one is that mind-set of the society that I came here to steal their jobs. A lot of young people may look negatively on returnees that came to take our employment chances. They say “you came to take the few opportunities that we have, you think that you are better than us, know more than we do”. I think that it is due to the fact that opportunities here are scarce. For me it was completely an experience happened by accident, I didn’t have the intention to come here and steals someone’s job.” Woman 2, 24

“In Finland, the people claimed that I was taking their jobs. In Somalia, the people blame me for taking their jobs” Man, 40+

“Some of the challenges were coming from the people here when they notice that you are return they isolate you and pause talking to you in the first time, some time they use the word “dhaqan-celis” which means return home and reintegrate with the Somali culture, secondly as a return women working in a place with merely men who think that women shouldn’t reach that level of education and stay home is another challenge in my profession, they didn’t accept me first because I am a women , not only that but young women that lived in western country and have western way of life and know nothing about her Islamic traditions. So they were behaving with me with all these ideas in mind.” Woman, 27

Young people are left on the outside

In discussions on the issues of young people, the gravest issue is thought to be the social exclusion of youth. The increase in crime and disorder is considered particularly dangerous. In the biggest towns, a new phenomenon is rape and robbery by young people and the emergence of youth gangs. Although the actual impact of these gangs on public order may have been exaggerated, many people have been reminded of pre-war Mogadishu, where violent and illegal gangs terrorized their neighbourhoods. Doubts have also been aired concerning the gangs contacts with under-cover older leaders and other public figures.

The situation of the young people in Somaliland is not defined solely through general inactivity and idleness. The National Development Plan of Somaliland points to the existence of social diversification and groups of socially excluded young people. It is estimated that 11% of all children are orphans living in appalling conditions. They do not work or go to school. They are often homeless, malnourished and they have no access to basic services. In Hargeysa alone, in addition to the orphans, about 3000 children are thought to be living in the streets. Apart from the groups mentioned, child refugees from the countryside turn up to live in public spaces, with in effect, no social or legal protection.

Return migration and the young

“Youth mainly face obstacles in reintegration with the new society; they used to be free in their host countries and didn’t feel much restriction from their parents. However when they come here they face a lot of control from the society and relatives, such as don’t do that, don’t wear this, and so on. So they take time in reintegrating process, most of those teenagers are second generations who were born in Arab country and then moved to Europe or America. For elder returnees they face challenges with the high expectations from the local people, they assume that the returnees came with a huge wealth.” Woman, 49

The Somali society is based on a hierarchy of age and, traditionally, older men and religious leaders represent the communities in the country. Demographically, however, the number of young people is enormous. It is estimated that people under the age of 30 make up almost 70% of the population in Somaliland. In proportion to the total population, youth would number as much as 3.5 million.

Youth unemployment in Somaliland is estimated at 84 per cent, which is one of the highest rates in the world and higher than in south central Somalia and Puntland. Unemployment remains high even among youth with secondary or tertiary education. This has an enormous social impact, and a large proportion of Somali families and their young depend on remittances from abroad. Overall, the youth in Somaliland experience a high level of exclusion from traditional political decision-making, contributing to their general inactivity. According to a 2012 UNDP survey, nearly 50 per cent of youth respondents in Somaliland strongly believe that youth experience more exclusion than other groups.

“1994 onwards more people have gone to school, but there is no work. NGOs could give work every one according to their level. I think even for mothers. Everyone can do something. Many young ladies and men are not well educated, especially displaced people, there is nothing to do, and there is no further education. Many have left school at class 4 or 6, can write their name only. Some have gone through Sudan and everywhere in the desert to look for a job...” Woman 2, 24

Although some sources indicate that the education of girls is on the increase, only a third of girls attend school, while the attendance rate for boys is 50 %. The quality of education is under constant suspicion and scrutiny. The majority of the most educated young people have received higher education and completed the so-called basic administrative studies. Vocational education is non-functional and does not meet the needs of the labour market. Among the young, there is a culture of idleness accompanied with dreams of a better future in Europe.

A recent trend is to move to Mogadishu to find employment, as the business life there is thought to offer more opportunities. A part

of the young people interviewed for this research stated that they look for employment in various companies Mogadishu and particularly in international aid organisations operating there. In their opinion, they are more trustworthy employees than their peers in the south who have grown up in the middle of the chaotic civil war. Somaliland youths also migrate abroad illegally. Sa'id Omar, the youth department director at Somaliland's Ministry of Youth and Sports has estimated that the number illegal youth emigrants is growing, being 300 to 350 during the last three months of 2012. A large part of the young people, particularly men, considers emigration at some stage of their lives.

Dreams and idleness are closely linked with poverty and the common use of the drug khat. A large part of the young people uses their meagre means to buy this, by local standards, relatively expensive drug and chew it regularly. Traditionally, the use of khat has been a social experience connected to particular rituals such as religious gatherings or weddings. However, within the past two decades since the civil war, the consumption of khat has increased dramatically. The social norms regulating the use of khat have depleted, with the large majority of the male population nowadays consuming khat on a daily basis.

“They are chewing, chewing, chewing. They have nothing else to do. You can go there to see when they load the khat truck and you can get it, does not cost much, or your friend gives you.” Woman 2, 24

There seems to be a high correlation between unemployment and excessive drug use. Also, mothers in Somaliland end up being the sole supporters of their families and young mothers have to shoulder added responsibility when young men spend most of their time out chewing khat. The general increase of violence at home and in urban areas is seen as a result of this idleness and the side-effects it bears. In addition to the connections of khat use with unemployment and violence, khat is also commonly associated with mental illness. A study carried out by VIVO in 2002 in Hargeysa, revealed that 80 per cent of patients suffering from psychosis were excessively using khat before they became ill. It should be noted overall, that Somaliland is estimated to have one of the highest

rates of mental illness in the world. Those suffering from mental illness are often socially isolated and vulnerable to human rights violations at home and treatment facilities alike.

The habit of chewing khat is not common among young women but even still, they have fewer chances than young men of finding employment. Due to the general mentality and women's lower educational level, they have no access to the fields of production and enterprise. This is seen as a reason for the way the next generation ends up in the same situation.

"I remember one occasion occurred in my first year as project coordinator, the project was providing scholarships for young girls and boys similarly, we required 50% boys and 50% girls, it was easy for them to list the 50% boys but they said they couldn't find 50% girls, so I said NO, we will follow the project objectives and look further for the 50% girls and if we couldn't find we may look for 30%, they were unhappy with that and argued that there are no girls for the scholarship so they will presented all to boys, during our discussion they were saying: 'What do you know about this country, it is our country Somaliland, and you came recently?' I said, 'no you are the one who don't know nothing, because if you knew your country you would find the 50% of the girls', finally we agreed and they provided us with 10 girls only. People assuming what are based on the place you came from is a huge challenge for the returnees." Woman, 27

"I don't believe in equality between men and women at all, because in front of Allah we are the same but not equal. When I used to live in UK I was always trying to tell them that women do more work than men so what is the equality they are looking for." Woman, 49

In Somaliland, there is no shortage of enlightened debate about the problems of the youth, and many organisations are involved in youth issues. It is remarkable, though how these issues have an evidently low priority in everyday politics. A basic means against idleness, it has been suggested, would be the promotion of sports and leisure activities. This

idea linked to recreational pursuits, has been met with wide-ranged support, also in interviews with returnees. Their own children are often unhappy due to the lack of recreational activities and, among children the biggest reason for home-sickness for Europe is precisely the lack of activities.

The stigma of the young returnees

From the social aspect, the situation of young returnees is not always easy. The interviews reveal a view that young people who have succeeded in their new home country have better chances of coping with return than those who have returned unwillingly or who have failed in some way. In Somaliland, the concept 'dhaqan-celis' is widely known. It is used to describe young people who have been sent back by their families, temporarily or permanently, voluntarily or involuntarily, in order to learn about Islam or Somali culture.⁶ The situation of children and young people sent back by their families has been discussed in public in Finland as well, but it is also being commented upon in Somaliland.

“The terms ‘dhaqan-celis’ and ‘fish-and-chips’, are used among the local people to describe the youth returnees. It is annoying term actually to be used to describe young kids who were interested in returning and learning something from their culture.” Woman, 49

“Parents are the ones responsible of the children’s way of living. They work hard to raise them, which are why they have the right to decide where they should live either here or there.” Woman, 58

“I would like to add that some forced children even became worse here according to the availability of khat and freedom since they are out of the sight of their parents. I recommend before sending them they should look for a family or relatives that can help them overcome the misbehaviours, or try to stay with them for a while.” Woman, 27

“Parents send those children that they think are naughty, and make them live with relatives. I don’t think they get better here, their situation is even worse; there are some who get mature. A few families arrange marriage for those teenage thinking that would help them overcome their misbehaviour. Those who get better were initially responsible but needed some guidance. My experience to Somaliland opened my eye to realize where I came from, I always thought that am a Canadian. I didn’t felt the Somali identity at all; yes I noticed I was different but still had the feeling of being Canadian. I believe all Somali children are disconnected for their cultural roots. Coming here made me realize that am not a white Canadian girl who her life is ten times easier than mine. I have to struggle more in life than Canadian girls. I share many things with Somali girls, but the simple different fact is just me being raised in Canada and has different citizenship.” Woman 2, 24

“We liked the first visit but we didn’t like the second time, because we stayed longer. When we heard that we are going to return to Somaliland we were shocked. The word “home” according to us is London, not here. We grew up there.... In the beginning things were difficult but after a while we adopted to the new circumstances... I finished high school in the UK, and now am studying in Quran School. I will be going back this year to start my university studies. The life style here is very different from the one we used to. It is totally new way of living. I used to have friends since I was young and they are all in London...” Girl, 12 and boy, 10

Somali families send ‘problem’ young people back to their relatives in Somaliland, especially when, for one reason or another, the youth has not succeeded in the new home country, as is often interpreted in the cases of substance abusers, criminals, or persons with mental health problems. They are commonly viewed by locals as an additional strain on the already inadequate health care resources in Somaliland. The local people see the returning youths as being failures and morally suspect. The way they behave and the clothes they wear are criticised and their suspected

influence on the local youth is a cause of anxiety, in line of the thinking - 'don't put rotten apples into the apple basket'. The returnee youth may have financial resources and an educational background that the local youth lack, but even so their chances of integrating are limited. At times, people avoid them, and their company is considered to be 'dangerous'. Young people who keep company with returning migrants are called 'Dagan andoofi'. This term refers to a person who has lost their culture before even leaving the country. In this respect, it can be said that the youth culture is splitting into division between 'them' and 'us'.

"Language is very simple obstacle but I had difficult communicating with people, sometimes making me mute. My parents were speaking with me in Somali but I was responding in English.

Another obstacle is more social in the since that when you grow up independently. My family gave me the opportunity to enter the world; I was given the choice and liberty to study what I want. So coming here I was not living with my family but rather relatives, I was feeling that am being constrained and freedom is not as I use to have it with my family. For my relatives are different settings, they would tell me not to go there, not to do this or that.

In the work space, being a young woman, especially a returnee woman that thinks that she is qualified and talented; I face an obstacle with the men I work with. I have to work with elder men from the government, so when they see me they say "you are a young women that returned from Canada, and your Somali is broken also", so that makes frustrated, because I know what am doing, but they put me in a different discriminated category that is a young, Diaspora, and female. The latter is shared by almost every Somali female. So all that three points are against me.

I believe young generation is now willing to listen and interact with women, unlike elder generation." Woman 2, 24

“People here are more violent than in UK, they speak in aggressive way, we didn’t use to that” Girl, 12

“Politically, many local stated that “the government is headed by Diaspora”. Where ever I go I hear them saying “you are ruling the country”. They returnees besides have negative inputs to the country, such as those teenagers who were brought here to be rehabilitated are doing things that made their parents send them here as, selling cocaine, wine and act in a gang way. Returnees are ‘double side sword’.” Woman, 49

“That young girl will make comparison between her and other girls, so she might run out of the house or start seeing awful groups such as gangs. In this situation the parents send these children to Somaliland assuming they will get better if they are exposed to local cultures.” Woman, 60

“...children at host countries hear all the time about feminism and rights of women, however here they see that women advocating for women’s issue are told to be quite and learn about their religion and culture.” Woman, 60

“The local community when they see a young girl or boy that returned from the diaspora who is behaving in a different, automatically they assume that all kids are like that. They start calling him/ her with funny names, those children when they return they never come back. Children returnee no matter how they behave they will never insult or say bad things for elder people, whereby I see local children do that.” Woman, 45

“The life style here is very different from the one we used to. It is totally new way of living. I used to have friends since I was young and they are all in London. Perhaps if there was any person who could understand our situation things would be much easier for us. The way

of living here is like you always have work to do inside house such as cleaning, where in London we had time to go out and do activities. It is quite boring here.” Girl, 12

“We didn’t have any friends at the beginning g but I met recently teenagers who are just like us returned home.” Boy, 10

Islam and the youth

In Somaliland, religious activism is on the increase but there does not seem to be any agreement on the political impact of these activities. It is fairly easy to talk to people about the role of the extremist movements although their general comments do not give it much attention. The spread and the implications of the more moderate Islam, instead, are more difficult to assess. Some people see religion as an important cornerstone of the society and many young people appreciate the advice and the life guidelines they receive in the local mosques. For others though, even moderate Islam appears a political power with too much influence. So far, religious leaders have kept a distance to actual government politics and the political elite, even though religious leaders are known to have wide connections to certain politicians, courts of law, businesses and clan elders.

Many people see the moral impact of religion as positive enough to even be a force to solve major social problems in Somaliland. According to one analysis, nomadic young people moving from the country to towns benefit from the care of religious circles that can provide them with a kind of social safety net, educational opportunities and even employment. Young returnees who have not joined religious communities are reported having ended up in illegal migrant networks, taken up drugs or been diagnosed with mental health problems. Another point of view concerns young women joining religious circles and then being more likely to marry than those living a more secular life. Even returning migrants often mention religion and its significance in the interviews.

"We came after seeing our kids maturing in a western culture that is different from ours. We decided that returning back to Somaliland will be the better choice for them. We can practice freely our religion obligations without any fear of being discriminated." Woman, 58

"Back in UK, Somali children doesn't have a proper Somali culture which is defining their identity, so missing that they mix things in the wrong way, so parents when they see this they send them to Somaliland to get back to their culture. I think that families can teach their children the culture but they can't control it, there are schools, where he/she will mix between different views. I met a lot of girls here and knew them back in UK, they are good now, and I mean I liked this country and going to miss it when I go back to London. In the first month, I hated being here, and was asking myself why I am here? However, after I learnt the culture and religion norms I came to know that am Somali, where in UK I didn't know that I was a Somali looking into the way I was behaving.

I've changed so much, so I recommend parents in the UK to bring their children back home sometimes.

I never used to wear 'jalabib' in London, it was hard for me, but now after I understood that it is Islamic dress I decided to wear it even when I go back. In the street I can walk wearing it without someone insulting me. I will not be free as I am here. I will feel that people are getting intimidating by me" Girl, 12

"My experience here is quite good, I didn't know my relatives in London, my uncles my aunts, also I didn't use to pray that much. Then, I came here, I go to the mosque every day, and I study Quran. I think that the country is not developing that much, the government should let the people develop their country." Boy, 10

It is evident that not all respondents are religious, although there is not much public space for questioning the dominant political and religious

ethos in Somaliland. However, there are some who are worried about the decreasing space of secularity and the increasing need to adapt their relation to religion in practice.

“I am not religious at all, I am agnostic myself. Not many understand when I say agnostic, I try to explain. Atheist is something different, it is when you know. It can also become kind of dogma.” Woman, in her 60’s

The old people in society have a strong position

“Apart from that you see a lot of ministries at the moment are Diaspora origins, and they bring wealth of knowledge from developed country to implement here, also our culture have a lot of negative aspects which is tribe, it touches every field in our life, everything here is all about tribe, but we as returnees we are clean from that.” Woman, 45

The government of Somaliland has had only a limited capability to exercise authority in the country. Its influence has been felt the most in urban areas, but on a countrywide scale the government has had to depend on the Elders of the clans ruling the regions. In issues of public order and the enforcement of judicial power, the government has worked closely with representatives of the clans and the traditional conciliatory system called *‘xeer’*. The result has been an undefined division of work in which public order and jurisdiction have been the responsibilities of the Council of Elders. This has further strengthened and redefined the old pre-war and family-based structures of authority.

Since the disintegration of the government, clan-based representation has been of crucial importance to the stability of the region. However, the clan elders have not necessarily possessed the ability to administer national resources or to promote actual development. The people of Somaliland now face a dilemma because on one hand the high value of the traditional leadership system in various conflict situations requiring conciliation is recognised, but on the other hand its nepotistic and corrupt nature is seen

to prevent any genuine societal development, increase of employment opportunities, participation in public life and implementation of the civil rights of women, young people and minorities. The women and young people of the country are still waiting for their share of the peace.

Human rights as an open question

The relative stability in Somaliland, with somewhat functional governmental and administrative institutions, has allowed a positive development of the human rights situation in comparison to south central Somalia and the Horn of Africa region overall. However, this does not mean that the human rights conditions are satisfactory, as indeed, several issues can be seen to require attention.

For example, the National Union of Somali Journalists has reported that, authorities have made several accusations of defamation and similar charges against the press. In January 2012, 25 journalists were arrested for protesting over the closing of a local TV station, Horn Cable TV, which the President Ahmed Mohamed Siilaanyo had accused of broadcasting anti-government propaganda. In addition, several journalists have been killed in the past few years.

What is notable in the case of Somaliland is the alarming frequency of GBV. Reliable statistics on gendered violence are scarce, but estimates carry a worrisome message about the human rights vulnerabilities of women in Somaliland. Access to justice for women, especially rape cases, is extremely limited, and cases are often negotiated by elders. The chairperson of Somaliland's National Human Rights Commission (SLNC), Fathiya Hussein Jahur, has made a call for increasing the role of formal justice at the expense of traditional 'negotiation' justice, where the perpetrator might not face any punishment and the victim receive no compensation.

4. Return to Iraqi Kurdistan

Iraqi Kurdistan fact sheet

General:

- The Constitution of Iraq recognises the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), the Kurdistan National Assembly and the 'Peshmerga' Guard as a legitimate army.
- KRG exercises executive power according to the Kurdistan Region's laws as enacted by the Kurdistan National Assembly.
- The constitution grants the right to social security, especially in cases of motherhood, sickness, unemployment, injury, disability, old age, displacement, and loss of one's means of livelihood in circumstances beyond one's control.
- There is furthermore a complex pension system that covers for several categories including, war widows, survivors of the Anfal genocide and former political prisoners.
- Since 1992, the judiciary in the region has operated as an autonomous and independent establishment.
- The court system consists of the following courts: Court of Cassation (High Court), the Court of Appeal, the Criminal Court, the Court of First Instance, the Juvenile Court, the Personal Status Court (for Muslims), the Misdemeanors Court, the Labour Court, the Court of Investigations, the Personal Article Court (for Christians, Yazidis and other religions).
- In many areas, tribal councils settle disputes between families and groups.

Population:

- Between 5 and 6.5 million (2013 estimate).
- The population is heterogeneous in terms of both religion (Muslims, Christians, Yazidis, Shabak, Mandaeans) and ethnicity (Kurds, Arabs, Turkmen, Assyrians, Armenians).
- The majority is formed by Kurdish Muslims who adhere to the Sunni Shafi'i branch.

- The dominant language is Kurdish, though Arabic is also used widely. Minority languages include Turkmen, Neo-Aramaic, Mandaic, Shabaki, Armenian, and Persian.
- Approximately 36% of the population is under the age of 15.

Economy and work:

- Economic growth is extremely rapid in the region, with a growth rate of 12% (2013 estimate).
- The area ranks sixth in the world in oil wealth.
- International investment especially from Turkey, Iran, the EU and the U.S. and has increased over the past years
- Three out of four citizens receive a government salary.
- Unemployment rate is estimated between 30% and 80% depending on the sources. The service and manufacturing sectors are largely operated by foreign workers
- The Kurdish Constitution grants women with a 25% quota in all public positions, but in practice the law is only strictly implemented in the Parliament.

Urbanisation:

- Until 1970s the population was largely leading a rural life.
- The Ba'ath regime through its repeated aggressions against the population in Kurdistan caused a massive mobilisation of people who were forced off their lands.
- Despite the rural villages being later rebuilt, the region has witnessed a rapid expansion of urban infrastructure over the past decade. Population growth in the major cities is up to 4.3 %.

Infrastructure and basic services:

- While large areas of Iraq are still burdened by the frustratingly slow rebuilding of basic structures, Kurdistan makes a clear exception in this. Water and electricity reach even the remote villages and the road network is in good or excellent condition. The city centres of the largest cities have been rebuilt with new business, residential and recreational areas.

Introduction

The autonomous region of Iraqi Kurdistan has struggled for the most part of the 20th century to increase its independence from the Government of Iraq. The decades of the Baath party reign in Iraq (1968–2003) had a devastating effect on the Kurdistan region as a whole. Large scale violence has been in steady decline in Iraqi Kurdistan since the mid-1990s and the past decade has coincided with unprecedented economic growth, steadily increasing foreign investment, and the creation of modern infrastructure and services in the region. However, the society in Iraqi Kurdistan still suffers from numerous unresolved questions vis-à-vis the Iraqi government, in addition to deep collective wounds produced by the decades of wars, genocide, kidnappings, targeted assassinations, torture and oppression of basic civil liberties by the Baathist regime.

Moreover, social and political tensions also persist within the region; political and economic life in Iraqi Kurdistan is to a great degree divided between the dominant political forces – the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK). The past decades have witnessed numerous armed confrontations between these two parties. At present KDP's strongholds are in the northern part of the region, while PUK's core areas are in the south. The parties finally united in 2003 in order to ally with the international military coalition in ousting President Saddam Hussein and ran together in the first regional elections in 2005 which resulted in the establishment of the Kurdistan Regional Government. Masud Barzani from KDP was elected as the President of the autonomous region and Jalal Talabani from PUK became the President of Iraq.

Other political parties have repeatedly voiced their frustration over the fact that the current political climate does not allow any real political opposition. Two families, Barzani and Talabani, are largely present in the regional government, security institutions and economic conglomerates. The KRG region, with its ethnically and religiously heterogeneous population, furthermore faces severe challenges with regards to sectarian, ethnic, territorial and economic disputes with the Government of Iraq, not to mention the wider geopolitical disputes in the turbulent region.

Short historical review since the 1970s

In 1970, the leaders of the Kurdish community and the government of Iraq signed the Autonomy Accord which designated Erbil as the capital of Iraqi Kurdistan. However, the area stayed firmly under Baghdad's control as the Iraqi government practically installed the Kurdish authority, and the Baath party regime displayed no political will to introduce a multiparty system in the region. In terms of civil liberties, the situation in Kurdistan hardly differed from that of the rest of the country.

Kurds had long looked for the support of Iran in order to increase their bargaining and military power against the Iraqi Government. Iran's support increased in 1973 as the result of an agreement between the U.S. and the Shah, and Iran began to offer support for the Kurds rebelling against Baghdad. The mid-1970s marked the beginning of a 15-year period of extreme violence in the region; continuous military confrontations, population transfers, mass killings of civilians, kidnappings and finally a concentrated effort to carry out ethnic genocide in the Iraqi Kurdistan region became a part of the shared social memory of all segments of the population.

The Iraqi government initiated a new military campaign in 1974 and pushed the armed Kurdish rebels to the Iranian border. Through diplomatic means, it persuaded Iran to end its support for the Kurds. Without a strong ally providing material and military support, the Kurdish military force *Peshmerga* had to concede to Baghdad's increasing control in the area. In the period which began in 1975, there were large-scale population transfers from many regions, and concentrated efforts to Arabize many localities with a heterogeneous population profile, particularly in the oil rich Kirkuk region. Despite these massive repressive measures, the resistance remobilised its ranks, and open warfare between the *Peshmerga* and the Iraqi army began again in 1978. By 1979, the Iraqi army displayed increasing willingness to carry out direct aggression against civilians in the region. Some 600 Kurdish villages were destroyed and nearly 200 000 civilians were deported to other parts of the country.

The Iran – Iraq war (1980–1988) had an even more dramatic effect on the Kurdish society. With the onslaught of the war, the Iraqi government

initiated series of new anti-Kurdish policies, leading up to a full-scale military confrontation once again. The so-called Anfal Campaign, which began in 1982, was a conscious attempt to destroy the entire Kurdish and non-Arab populations in northern Iraq. By late April 1989, 182 000 civilians had been killed, 4 500 villages completely destroyed, properties burned and the remains of private houses and mosques, including their invaluable cultural heritage of manuscripts and historic artefacts had been routinely bulldozed by tanks, indicating the government's will to wipe out the cultural heritage and rural lifestyle of entire populations. In several localities, chemical weapons were routinely used to kill the women, children and elders still remaining in the villages.

The Gulf War and its legacy

The Gulf War (1990–1991), between the U.N.-authorized coalition force and the Iraqi army, followed Saddam Hussein's military occupation and the annexation of Kuwait. The war heavily impaired Iraq's military force and popular uprisings against the Baathist regime flared in Kurdistan, leading to Peshmerga's takeover of major cities. The Kurds were however overwhelmed by the aircrafts, artillery and tanks of the Iraqi army. By early April 1991, major cities in the region were in control of the Iraqi army.

According to UNCHR figures, approximately 750 000 Iraqi Kurds fled to Iran, while Turkey received slightly less than 300 000 refugees. More than 300 000 civilians had no other option than to camp in extremely difficult conditions on the Turkish border. Over the summer months, the Peshmerga confronted the Iraqi army again, concentrating in the cities of Erbil, Dohuk and Sulaymaniah. A cease-fire was finally signed in October 1991, and the Iraqi government left the Peshmerga in control of 16 000 km² of Iraqi territory, an area which defined as the present day autonomous region. In the aftermath of the uprising, no-fly security zones were established by the U.N. in southern Iraq and the northern Kurdistan region. Especially in the north, this resulted in the increasing sense of independence from the Baghdad government, finally leading to the establishment of the Kurdistan Regional Government in 1992.

Internal frictions increase

The disagreements over power-sharing between PUK and KDP escalated in 1994. The control over smuggling activities, vital for the region suffering from an international embargo imposed on Iraq in 1991, became the gravest cause of tension between the parties. The frictions erupted into clashes that lasted for nearly two years, from 1994 to 1996, with a steadily increasing involvement of Iran, but also Iraqi government. The clashes finally led to a direct Iraqi army military operation with KDP against PUK forces in Erbil.

The U.S. feared that the devastating scenario of 1991 would be repeated, and fired nearly fifty cruise missiles to oust the Iraqi army from the region. The present power-sharing agreement – with KDP controlling Erbil, and PUK its traditional stronghold Sulaymaniah – was reached immediately after the confrontation. When the international community loosened the conditions of the economic embargo with the introduction of the ‘Oil for food programme’, foreign revenue began to spur the rapid revitalization of the region. By the year 2003, PUK and KDP had come to understand the benefits of mutual cooperation and decided to form a joint leadership, which was to join the international military coalition to oust Saddam Hussein. After the regime change in Baghdad, the Kurds participated in the interim Iraqi Governing council and the power-sharing between PUK and KDP was further cemented.

Kurds in the post-Baathist Iraq

The period following the regime change of 2003 has been a painful process in most parts of Iraq, characterized by the poor security situation, the frustratingly slow rebuilding of basic structures and the fragmentation of social loyalties along ethnic, sectarian, ideological and tribal lines. Kurdistan however, has witnessed an unprecedented prosperity due to improved security.⁷ With an eight per cent economic growth (in 2011) and an average annual income of 6 000 \$ US, the GDP of the region is 50% higher than in the rest of Iraq.

The Kurdish society has transformed extremely rapidly from a largely agrarian-based, highly regulated, and state-owned economy to a free market economy. People repeatedly both hail and criticize the hastiness of the change. While hunger and food shortages are firmly rooted in popular memory, today the latest model vehicles overload six-lane business streets. The KRG has issued several business-friendly regulations over the past few years, including ten-year tax exemptions and land at a reduced price for investment projects.

The economic success is boosted to a great degree by the rich oil reserves, estimated at a total of 45 billion barrels. In recent years, the region has attracted numerous world leaders in the oil business, such as Exxon Mobile, Chevron, Gazprom and Total, to buy exploration blocks in the region. Erbil and Sulaymaniah host hundreds of large-scale construction projects, and dozens of glass-walled business buildings, five-star hotels and shopping malls with luxury brands have been opened over the past decade. At present, the KRG region hosts 17 foreign consulates and a new international standard airport was opened in Erbil in 2011, attracting increasing investments in tourism and services. Turkey and Iran, in particular, have been keen on investing in the region, with obvious political and economic interests in the natural riches of the region.

Despite the recent boom, the market suffers from severe hindrances. There is a great shortage of local expertise in several key sectors of the economy, which explains the increasing presence of foreign experts in the region. In addition, the lack of locally produced building materials and many basic goods such as processed food products is a widely recognized problem. The KRG region has been labelled in the international media as the 'next Dubai', because of its increasing prosperity. Yet being termed as the next Dubai is appropriate due to KRG's increasing reliance on imported labour as well. Many domains of the service sector employ thousands of workers from Malaysia, Pakistan, Bangladesh, India and the Philippines.

Skyrocketing land prices and the general cost of housing in major urban areas burden ordinary citizens' domestic economies. In Erbil, the property prices compare with those of many the major cities in Western Europe.

The major sources of friction with Baghdad

Oil is both a blessing and curse for the region. The KRG adopted its own oil law in August 2007, and began to export crude oil to foreign markets in 2009 via oil fields in Turkey. The Government of Iraq has made several efforts to stop foreign companies from making direct contact with the Kurdish authorities, regarding the oil market and exploration rights. The issue has largely remained unresolved; the KRG authorities show a great determination to push for a more independent oil policy, which in turn repeatedly aggravates the Iraqi Government.

The key question to be resolved between Baghdad and the KRG is the administrative status of the so-called disputed territories, areas formerly inhabited by Kurds – together with several religious and ethnic minority populations – and subsequently “Arabized” by the Baath party regime. These areas, many of which have extremely rich oil fields, are at present among the most dangerous areas of Iraq for civilian population. Shootings, random fire, explosions of car bombs, kidnappings for ransom, and targeted murders occur on a daily basis. The economically thriving safe havens in Iraqi Kurdistan – Erbil and Sulaymaniah – border areas which are witnessing deeply traumatizing acts of violence. It is thus understandable that many ordinary citizens of the KRG region view the future with a deep concern.

The Governorate of Kirkuk, with its multi-ethnic population and large oil reserves, is for Iraqi Kurds a central symbol of Baathist discrimination and violence. The determination of who has the historic right of ownership to the Kirkuk city, and the manner in which these rights should be decided, is a persisting source of dispute. It is highly likely, that the question of Kirkuk will remain unsolved for several years, and will thus be a cause of continued concern between Baghdad and KRG.

At present, ethnic Kurds represent less than 60 per cent of Kirkuk’s population, despite the KRG having promoted the influx of ethnic Kurds and outflow of Arabs in the region. The question of Kirkuk drove the Peshmerga very close to confrontation with the Iraqi army in the summer months of 2009 and again in February 2011. At the time of writing

this report, tension was mounting once again in the Kirkuk province. On April 23, 2013, in Hawija, which is situated north of the city, more than 200 people who were engaged in demonstrations against the Iraqi government were killed or wounded by Iraqi security forces. Growing criticism against Nouri al Maliki's government in Baghdad revolves around his monopolisation of power and unwillingness to resolve the question of disputed territories.

In the present stalemate situation, KDP and PUK are unlikely to push for the outright independence of KRG regardless of nearly unanimous popular support for independence in the KRG region. Should Iraqi Kurds take concrete steps towards full independence, the risk of armed conflict, not only with Iraqi army, but also with Turkey, Iran and Syria, each with large Kurdish minorities, would undoubtedly increase.

In the other disputed territories of Niniveh, Salah al-Din and Diyala, the security situation is burdened by complex webs of tensions as well. The large Sunni Arab majority residing in these areas accuses the Iraqi government, which is dominated by Shia political parties, of conscious marginalisation and persecution of the Sunni population under the guise of 'de-Baathification' and anti-terrorism legislation. The tensions have been steadily mounting since December 2012, when tens of thousands of Sunni Arabs began to demonstrate against the Maliki government. Concerns over renewed sectarian violence increased in April 24th 2013, when at least 128 people were killed and several hundred anti-government protesters were wounded by security forces in regions with Sunni majorities. Since then, there has been a sharp increase in violence followed by repeated warnings by major politicians of a sectarian conflict between Sunnis and Shia. The frequency of violent incidents is below its height of 2006–2007, but April 2013 was the deadliest single month in Iraq since June 2008. According to a UN statement, 712 people were killed in acts of terrorism and acts of violence.

While the general public in and outside of Iraq largely focuses on sectarian tensions between the Sunni and Shia populations, other religious groups such as Christians and Yezidis in the northern disputed territories are extremely fearful of their situation as well. To complicate

the troubled inter-group tensions further, religious boundaries are by no means isomorphic with the ethnic divisions in the area, containing not only Arabs and Kurds, but also Assyrians, Armenians and Turkmens.

Over the past decade, Erbil has received several tens of thousands Christians from Kirkuk, Mosul and Baghdad who have fled targeted killings, acts of terror and intimidation in their home regions. The same holds true with Iraq's Yezidi religious minority.

Moreover, the current civil war in Syria complicates the security situation in the entire Middle East. Many Iraqis have voiced their concern that the Sunni protest movement in Iraq has been inspired by the popular uprising in neighbouring Syria. The Syrian conflict has great potential to turn into a renewed revolt in Iraqi governorates, which hosted the main groupings of the Sunni insurgency during the fall of the Baathist regime. The Maliki government in Baghdad has repeatedly warned that should President Assad's regime in Syria fall in the hands of Sunni opposition, the entire region could be further destabilized.

The new Iraq

The political impasses clearly bear on the Iraqi society in several ways. The Iraqi social scientist Qasim Husayn Saleh (2008) claims that there are two binary oppositions which characterize the present Iraqi society. The first binary exists between the oppressed and the oppressor. According to Saleh, this has been particularly clearly adopted by the Kurdish and Iraqi Shia Muslim political entities, against the remnants of the Baathist regime, the majority of who are Sunni Muslims. 'The culture of victimhood and retaliation' first manifested itself in the policies that dissolved the Baath party structures and ousted its members from public institutions. The second binary emerged between 'the insider Iraqis' and 'outsider Iraqis'. Saleh sees that the insiders, who never sought refuge outside of Iraqi territory, accuse the expatriate 'outsiders' for not participating directly in the toppling of Saddam Hussein's regime, nor in the resistance against the foreign military occupiers of Iraq. Many of those Iraqis who spent a great part of Saddam's reign abroad, sought successfully (but illegitimately

according to the insiders) political influence in the power vacuum following the international military occupation of 2003.

The Iraqis cast their votes in the first democratic elections in 2005. Saleh demonstrates that the elections reflected the increasing fragmentation of the social fabric of the society. People chose their candidates based on their ethnic and sectarian identities and tribal affiliations, not according to the candidates' political programmes. The Shia voted for 'their' candidates, while the Kurds supported people seen to represent a Kurd ethnicity. The same pattern applied to the Arab Sunni population and the smaller minorities, such as Turkmen, and Chaldean and Assyrian Christians. By the time of the third parliamentary elections, held in 2010, Iraqis had according to Saleh created a political culture consisting of 'branching political loyalties'. While many Iraqis at present are deeply critical of the present day political culture, they remain loyal to the political representatives, not out of their liking, but because they represent the only entity capable of protecting them and enabling their survival.

Ordinary Iraqis often emphasize the fact that the ethos of tribalism dominates in Iraq whenever the state structures are weak. While such a view can be criticised for its disregard of the complexity of present-day politics, which occur in increasingly globalized fields of interests and power struggles, there is a grain of truth in it. Most Iraqis today confront severe obstacles in their everyday life, as the state has failed to provide security and to rebuild the basic infrastructure and services. Religious and sectarian discourses together with tribal and ethnic symbolism fuel the political battles from local councils to the Iraqi parliament. In this ethos, ordinary Iraqis in and outside the KRG region need to increasingly be alert to the ways in which they present their social identities and personal affiliations to members of public administration, security institutions and strangers encountered in public spaces.

A history of modern migration from Iraqi Kurdistan

Modern migration emerged in Iraqi Kurdistan as a direct consequence of decades of war and oppression. Those of our interviewees, who were

born in the late 1940s and early 1950s routinely termed themselves as representatives of the 'destroyed generation', pointing to shared experiences of violence as forces structuring their life courses. The biographies of these men and women consisted of experiences being guerrilla fighters in various armed resistance groups fighting against the Baathist army, while others suffered years of imprisonment, torture and repeated interrogations as opposition activists. The family members of victims of persecution experienced violence in a less direct manner, as for years they lived in fear, being unable to keep contact with husbands, wives, sisters, brothers, fathers and mothers.

Moreover, the interviewees born in the 1970s and 1980s shared memories of the horrors of the Anfal operation, and had sought refuge in Iran, Syria and Turkey in 1991, as the Iraqi army suppressed the Kurdish uprising in the aftermath of the Second Gulf War. They experienced the pressing economic shortages of the embargo years and mounting tensions between the KDP and PUK parties. They also witnessed thousands of their fellow citizens migrating to the West simply in order to save themselves from the uncertainties of life in the unstable political climate.

In order to fully comprehend the deeper social background of the migration to the West, we carried out a series of interviews with the generation born between 1940 and 1950, among members of both Kurdish and Christian communities. The first considerable series of migrations in the modern context occurred in the 1930s after the Kurdish leader Ahmed Barzani had initiated a rebellion against the Iraqi army. More than 30 000 people fled to the Iraqi-Syrian border, and many Iraqi Christians migrated to the U.S., Canada, Brazil and France. By the late 1960s, several thousands of people had fled from large Christian villages, such as Telkef, to Baghdad and to the U.S., particularly to the Detroit area.

In 1974, as the Iraqi government began an offensive against Peshmerga, which had received vital backing from Iran, another outflow of population including Christians occurred. The 1974 Algiers Agreement settled the hostilities between Iraq and Iran, leaving the Kurds without support. In 1975, the Iraqi army initiated massive forced population transfers of Kurds and Kurdistan's minority populations to the Iraqi provinces of

Diwania and 'Imara. In Kirkuk, the transfers were large-scaled, with a great part of the population being replaced by Iraqi Arabs. This period also witnessed considerable international migration to the neighbouring countries and further abroad.

The next substantial migration wave took place in the 1990s, after the UN had issued a financial and trade embargo on Iraq in August that year. Poverty, the fear of renewed aggression and political instability, together with the lack of basic food provisions increased people's readiness for international migration. One of our interviewees reported that his monthly wages as a civil servant in the late 1990s did not suffice to buy a kilo of meat. Welfare for the impoverished families was a mere three to four US dollars a month, a significant push factor for the thousands of families largely dependent on the material help from their relatives living in the West.

Many families, who were recipients of financial help from relatives abroad, took the decision to leave Iraqi Kurdistan, especially for Europe. The Kurdish communities in Germany and Sweden grew gradually in the 1990s. Other destination countries included Italy, Australia, Holland, Great Britain, Finland, Norway and Denmark. By the turn of the millennium, tens of thousands of Kurdish families had become transnational in the truest sense of the word. Among our interlocutors, there were several individuals with immediate family members living in three or more different continents.

The early 1990's in many ways turned a new page in the history of Iraqi Kurdistan, as the groundwork for the present-day stability was cemented by the recognition of the Autonomous Iraqi Kurdistan in 1992. Surprising as it may seem, even more people than previously were leaving in search of a better future abroad. In fact, migration towards the West continued on a large scale over the next decade and a half.

With the economic development, expanding labour market and improving living conditions, asylum migration begun to diminish from 2006 onwards in the most prosperous parts of the KRG, such as Erbil and Sulaymaniah. Nevertheless, another form of international migration emerged as a consequence of the sectarian war between 2006 and 2007. Hundreds of thousands of internally displaced people (IDP) sought

refuge in the KRG region, the largest group being Sunni Arabs from major cities in Iraq, that were taken over by Shia militias or had become too dangerous to live in due to terrorism, targeted murders, kidnappings, random fire and sexual violence. As noted earlier, tens of thousands of people from religious minority groups have sought refuge in Erbil and Ankawa. A representative of a Christian cultural association in Ankawa, whom we interviewed for this study, informed us that during the period between 2003 and 2007, more than 700 Christian civilians were killed outside of the KRG region, in targeted assassinations by armed militias. According to figures provided by the association, Ankawa's Christian community has grown from 12 000 (1988 estimate) to 37 000 (current estimate).

Our field data indicates that in Erbil and Sulaymaniah, many IDPs from all groups display a great readiness to move to the West. As one of our interviewees, Mati, 64, a Christian man from Baghdad related us in Ankawa:

"Those who come here from Baghdad must be ready to pay at least 600 US \$ monthly for housing, but it's not exceptional that the rents [for a large family] reach over 1000 US \$ monthly. They soon begin planning the departure for the U.S. or elsewhere."

Border talk: Shared perceptions on international mobility

In order to grasp the multiple ways in which the ordinary citizens are connected with international asylum migration, we collected data through organized interviews, but also by engaging in spontaneous discussions in cafes, restaurants and other public spaces in Sulaymaniah and Erbil. In these meetings, we encountered several individuals who were returnees, holiday returnees, or transnational migrants living between Iraqi Kurdistan and Europe. There were also those, who had experiences as failed asylum claimants and irregular migrants in the EU, predominantly Greece, and Turkey. With no exception, our interlocutors also had close relatives living in EU member states. Although our field data is by no means exhaustive,

it suggests that in Erbil and Sulaymaniah, the percentage of families with international migrants may be considerably higher than the estimate – 22 per cent for the entire Iraqi Kurdistan – proposed by previous studies.

When speaking about migration, our interlocutors conceptualized a number of Western European EU states as ‘the countries of asylum, referring to Sweden, Denmark, Norway, Finland, Germany, Holland and Great Britain. ‘The countries of asylum’ are understood as relatively receptive towards Iraqi asylum seekers and are contrasted with other EU member states, which are perceived as restrictive, or ‘impossible’ for Iraqi claimants, such as Greece, Italy, France and Spain.

Personal experiences as asylum migrants, or the experiences of others, occupy a prominent role in the social interaction in public spaces. Young men, in particular, are surrounded by a shared discourse on border regimes, failed or successful attempts to reach EU territory, and preferable strategies for constructing one’s narrative for asylum hearings. Such ‘border talk’ is highly similar to discourses found in many other border zones, and does not differ significantly from, for example, the discourses of young men on the Moroccan - Spanish frontier.⁸

Karzan, 37, whom we met in a spontaneous manner in a cafe in Sulaymaniah, told us that he had attempted to travel to Finland, where his sister had been living for several years. Karzan had left Sulaymaniah in 2007 with a local migrant smuggler in order to travel to Greece via Turkey. He had found work in a construction firm, and worked there for three years without a residence permit, but had to return to Iraqi Kurdistan due to financial problems. Karzan’s journey to Greece had been dramatic. In December 2007, he had boarded a vessel pertaining to Afghani smugglers in Izmir, Turkey. The overloaded boat tipped over, miles away from the Greek island Lesbos, and several dozens of the migrants had drowned. Karzan was rescued by the Greek coast guard after seven hours in the sea. He told us that he had paid 3 500 for the trip to Greece. Regardless of the dangers, he said, he understands very well why unemployed local youth in particular have high readiness to embark on a journey to the West.

In Erbil, we met three times with a young man, Tahseen, 19, from Iraq’s Yezidi minority, originally from the town of Zakho. At the time

of the first discussion, he was working in his uncle's hotel in Ankawa. Tahseen told us that his best friend had arrived in Turkey the day before, and he was attempting to cross the border to Greece with smugglers. At each meeting, Tahseen kept us updated on his friend's news, until his friend finally reached Greece and began to make arrangements to travel to Germany. Tahseen informed us that such a rapid distribution of knowledge via mobile phones concerning international mobility and asylum policies in different EU member states is common among young people.

Motives for migration

By far, the most frequently offered explanation for the continuation of migration towards the West is the uncertain political and administrative future of KRG. Kurdistan's troubled relations with the Government of Iraq, but also the unresolved Kurdish question in the neighbouring countries, creates largely shared fears, that the present day stability may be prove to be short-lived.

Secondly, our interviewees shared the perception that in KRG, and in Iraq in general, the administrative culture is extremely corrupted, and access to political and economic resources, business life and, the labour market is mediated through networks of patronage. The interviewees from younger generations, who pertain to families with a tradition of criticising the KDP and PUK-dominated public sphere, particularly complained about the economic options are often bleak for those without membership in one of the leading parties.

When talking about ideological loyalties, our Arabic-speaking informants preferred to use the term *intima'*, which could be translated as firm commitment or loyalty to a common cause. In Iraq, *intima'* includes a wide range of social commitments; it organizes patronage networks and structures male leisure and friendship networks. Bonds of loyalty among the different factions of political activists, who resisted Baathist rule, have firm historic roots with shared experiences of armed resistance. For many of these political activists, *intima'* is constantly reproduced through

shared memories; by commemorating mutual friends who lost their lives, by narrating stories about interrogations, imprisonment, armed battles and other hardships lived through over the decades. The nature of intimacy explains the reason as to why many institutional domains, from arenas of political decision-making to street corner cafes, are composed of inner circles of people sharing the same ideological preferences. One of our informants for example, a leftist journalist, explained that since he only sits in cafes frequented by leftists in Sulaymaniah, he never has to confront people with sectarian views outside the Internet.

The third general motive for migration resides in the fact that the society is witnessing an increasingly fierce economic competition among ordinary citizens. The ways in which materially satisfying life, economic success and failure are measured, is undergoing extremely rapid transformation. Due to these reasons, many of our interviewees preferred labelling the present day migration as 'envy migration' [*hijrat al ghira* in Arabic], rather than 'asylum migration' [*hijrat al luju* in Arabic].

Our interviewees almost unanimously shared the view that in Erbil and Sulaymaniah, the security situation is very good. They did however perceive, that the society is thoroughly securitised, and that many members of the security institutions still lack a basic awareness of human rights and knowledge on the proper treatment of detainees. While most of our interviewees perceived that very few asylum claimants from the KRG region have political reasons to seek protection in the West, they did recognize that police brutality, human rights violations, torture as a widely used method of interrogation and sexual violence, are all prevalent in the region.

Increasingly rapid flow of information between the Kurdish diaspora abroad and the KRG region through return migration, long-distance phone calls, the Internet and other new forms of media, have exposed the ordinary citizens to a new imagery of life elsewhere, and this has widened their spheres of imagining possible lives. This has coincided with the rapid opening of the Kurdish society to global economic and social influences. We heard a similar interpretation of the current situation from two members of Sulaymaniah's cultural elite. They emphasized that the youth today suffers from a clash of social values; on one hand the society

is increasingly individualistic and market-oriented, on the other hand it is still suffering from the collective trauma of the past three decades and is largely organized through traditional social codes, emphasizing collectiveness based on kin, patriarchy, and male relations of patronage. Azad, a 41-year old assistant professor at a local university explained his views with this metaphor:

“This is society is still like the Kurdish Dabka [group] dance, you are directed from left and right, but the consumption culture enforces individualism. Of course this fact leads to clashes.”

As noted earlier, in Kurdistan as elsewhere in post-conflict societies, social and political influence is to a large degree based on an individual’s role as a defender of the nation, in the armed resistance. On the other hand, as Azad claims, the internet-age consumption culture requires guidelines that the youth cannot copy from the earlier generations, whose heroes were the Peshmerga – who practically lived in caves. Rezgar, 46, self-proclaimed poet in Sulaymaniah, expressed his feelings to us in the following manner: *“we went directly from the caves to the Internet.”*

Rezgar preferred to call this value change a ‘jump’, and indicated that some have managed to jump better than others. Rezgar stated that the situation has left many citizens deeply embittered. While they suffered for the common national cause for years, they did not manage to re-orient their lives in a successful manner in the present economic boom. Rezgar saw that for many, the present is often even more painful than the past suffering. War survivors are witnessing how others illegitimately claim economic benefits meant for the former Peshmerga and victims of the Anfal. Others grossly overemphasize their personal role in the resistance in search of influence and economic opportunities.

Burhan, 61, whom we interviewed in Sulaymaniah, fought with the Peshmerga for 21 years. Originally from Halabja, Burhan was present in the town during the poison gas attack of 1988, and saved dozens of victims by offering them water and injecting them with antidotes. While in the mountains, he said that it was by no means exceptional for him to go for up to four years at a time without seeing his family. He explained

that the collective trauma of the past could not be treated by bringing even five million therapists to Iraqi Kurdistan: *"I constantly see dreams about mountains, battles, and explosions. I can get to sleep only by drinking alcohol or by taking pills,"* he revealed us. Burhan continued by clarifying the reasons for his obvious embitterment towards the political culture in KRG.

"As I retrospectively see what we accomplished with our struggle, I regret. The biggest problem is the mentality, which has not changed a bit. This is still a tribal system of authority, people are not selected to their positions according to their qualifications. The worst thing is to follow how people use this economic growth for their personal benefit. I still have bullet in my chest and cannot afford to get an operation."

Evaluating asylum claimants

During the fieldwork, we noticed that our interviewees reflected on asylum migration in a manner that stands in sharp contrast with the field data that was gathered among Iraqi asylum claimants in Finland (see more in Juntunen 2011). In Finland, the asylum claimants struggled with the fact that it was very difficult to convince the Finnish authorities that their stories of persecution were factually true. But in Kurdistan, people repeatedly reminded us that the Iraqi asylum claimants are 'forced' to make up their personal narratives of suffering, in order to convince the authorities of their need for international protection. The discourses on the justifications for asylum migration were highly contradictory. On the one hand, people widely recognize the fact that because of the collective Iraqi trauma, all Iraqis, Kurds among them, 'deserve' asylum abroad. On the other hand, people realize that in and outside of Iraq, some people claim rights (pensions, economic benefits, international protection) based on fictive stories of suffering.

While our interlocutors recognized the fact that the immigration authorities in the West have extremely detailed knowledge of the social and political conditions in Iraq, they maintained highly ambiguous views

regarding western asylum regimes. At times, the regimes were portrayed as extremely unjust, and were seen to violate the basic human rights of asylum claimants. At other times, the western authorities were seen as naive and unable to distinguish deserving claimants from bogus ones. On several occasions, we heard from people with secular religious views that the western regimes at times grant asylum to ‘radical Muslims’, while the victims of Muslim radicalism receive negative decisions. Many of our interviewees perceived that presently the profile of Iraqi asylum claimants has changed. While in the 1980s and 1990s the asylum migrants were people victimized by the Baathist regime, in the current context they are increasingly people who had become marginalized by the Nouri al Maliki government due to their Sunni sectarian identities.

Since there are those who resort to fictive accounts of persecution and create an atmosphere of doubt among the western authorities, it is perceived best to have a convincing story. People thus recognize that the successful presentation of an asylum claim requires creative skills and often also a consultation with those who have experience of asylum hearings. Tariq, 63, whom we interviewed in a Christian cultural association in Ankawa reported:

“Iraqis at the present resort to any possible means to migrate; this includes composing fictive stories [of persecution] direct lies to immigration officials. The wretched people do this in order to be able to settle down somewhere. Among the people of the Arab world no other nationality has suffered like the Iraqis.”

Mahmud, 51, a communist underground courier, who was sentenced to death by the Revolutionary Court in Baghdad (in 1984), but was later pardoned and transferred to the section Abu Ghraib prison reserved for political prisoners (the factuality of his biography of persecution was validated to us by two of his prison mates), laughingly narrated the following for us in a tea room in Sulaymaniah:

“In 2004 I fled with my family to Turkey. I presented my case for the UNHCR in Turkey. I lied half, but half was true. They did not find my story convincing.”

Ali, 51 years of age, a former political prisoner of the Saddam era, whom we met in Sulaymaniah, spent three years in Sweden as an asylum claimant. He had been forcibly returned to Baghdad [his family lives between Sulaymaniah and Baghdad] by the Swedish immigration officials in 2010. He provided us with the following explanation for his failure to convince the Swedish authorities of his need for international protection:

“I told the immigration officials that I have two wives. Besides my wife, I wanted to rescue my sister who lives in Baghdad and I claimed she is my second wife. I think that is why I received a negative decision. I had a strong case. I am a former political prisoner and was wounded in my leg during the Sectarian war in 2006.”

Mapping the returnees

Forced returns

In the period of 2006 to 2007, as many parts of Iraq witnessed the bloodiest months of sectarian violence, some European countries engaged in forced returns of rejected asylum seekers to Iraq including Iraqi Kurdistan. Germany, Britain, Sweden, and Denmark were particularly determined to deport hundreds of Iraqis whose asylum requests had been rejected by authorities. The migrant regimes in many parts of the EU followed the logic of the German government; with the fall of the Baathist dictatorship, Iraqis were no longer in need of international protection. The Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF), began its procedures in 2006, and aimed to deprive 4,400 Iraqis of their refugee status, including hundreds of Iraqis already well-integrated into the German society. Some 14 000 Iraqis faced deportation from the

country, but lacking air connections and a bilateral agreement with the Government of Iraq prevented Germany from engaging in large-scale deportations.

Britain deported 632 people against their will to the Iraqi Kurdistan's region between 2005 and 2008, and it was estimated that the number would exceed 900 by 2009. According to the International Federation of Iraqi Refugees, Britain has organised monthly charter flights, each carrying approximately fifty Iraqis, since the beginning of 2009.

In Sweden, 1 400 Iraqi refugees received letters from the country's Immigration Service where they were informed that measures would be taken to deport them forcibly, unless they consented to return voluntarily. As a response, the International Federation of Iraqi Refugees organised demonstrations in several European capitals, including Stockholm (April 19, 2007), and Helsinki (April 20, 2007).

Numerous EU countries displayed growing willingness to solve the Iraqi refugee crisis by engaging in forced returns of failed asylum seekers. In Denmark, Iraqis represented nearly fifty per cent of the total number of rejected asylum seekers under expulsion order in March 2009. By 2009, Britain, Denmark, Sweden, and Norway, had ratified bilateral agreements with the Iraqi government to repatriate Iraqi citizens.

According to an estimate by the Finnish Immigration Service in May 2010, the time was ripe for the rejection and removal of asylum seekers from autonomous Kurdish regions, southern Iraq, and the capital Baghdad. The reason, it was claimed, was that they no longer needed international protection due to an improved security situation. In May 2009, approximately 1 500 Iraqis were waiting for their asylum decision, and the new guidelines were to be applied to new decisions only. The Immigration Service estimated that the first returns were expected to be take place in the spring months of 2010.

The inter-governmental repatriation agreements received a lot of critique from humanitarian organisations, including UNHCR and Refugees International. However, for several EU member states, the agreements were interpreted as guarantees that the returns could be implemented without violating the human rights of the displaced Iraqis.

As for the Iraqi Government, it received the returnees with open arms, since they conveyed an important message to international audiences: the Government of Iraq was on the right path to stabilize the country.

In July 2012 the Iraqi Government suddenly announced that it would refuse to accept any nationals deported from Europe, and threatened to fine airlines carrying rejected asylum seekers. Already in 2010–2011, both the KRG's and the Iraqi Government's reluctance towards deportations had become more pronounced. The UK, for example, had been unable to implement deportations in 2010 to Erbil, and began to carry out deportations of failed Kurdish asylum seekers through Baghdad instead. However, the Iraqi government refused to accept these measures in 2011, due to legal disputes over their reception at Baghdad airport. According to the International Federation of Iraqi Refugees (IFIR), Norway and Denmark had been sending rejected asylum claimants to Iraq forcibly until the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg ruled in favour of blocking the deportations, stating that many areas of Iraq remained too dangerous for returns. As a consequence of the decision, Frontex, the EU agency responsible of coordinating deportation flights and border security with member states, stopped organising returns in autumn 2011. This situation is however bound to change in the near future. IFIR announced in late February 2013, that the UK government will attempt to restart deportations to northern Iraq.

Return migration

The participants of IOM-administered voluntary return programs are predominantly people who have not managed to gain citizenship, asylum or residence in their country of destination. A recent study on voluntary return from Norway to Iraq indicated that 73 per cent of the participants in the Norwegian programme fitted this category. A considerable number of the interviewees in the study informed having suffered from the fact that they were uncertain whether they could remain in Norway. The final

decision to return, the study indicated, happens as a result of incentives, advice and at times pressure by authorities in motivating the rejected claimant to return.

Voluntariness of return

Our field study indicated that people perceive return as truly voluntary only when the returnee has gained permanent residence in the country of the asylum, and can thus truly choose between several options; life in the West, a transnational lifestyle between Iraq and the West, or life in Iraqi Kurdistan. When talking about return, those informants fluent in Arabic used the terms '*awda*' (return) and '*i'ada qasriya*' (forced return) when talking about return migration. It should be noted that the term '*awda*' was used nearly solely in cases of persons possessing permanent residence in their countries of destination. The latter term was applied to deportees, but also to participants of voluntary return programs, in cases where the returnee had not gained a permanent residence in the West. In the latter cases, people usually added that the returnee had gained 'compensations' (free travel, cash compensations etc.). In all our interview situations, the interlocutors perceived that no person who had not gained residence in the West should be forced to choose between forced return and participation in voluntary return programs.

The study concerning voluntary return from Norway indicated that there were several respondents who returned with an erroneous impression, expecting that IOM would directly provide them with reintegration support in the form of cash or offer a direct access to jobs. Some returnees claimed that the return programme had been presented to them in Norway in a different and uncritically positive light. The practical implementation of the programme was thus disappointing for many in Iraq and they felt they had simply been encouraged to return.

In the Norwegian case, a large majority of the returnees preferred cash compensations rather than education or vocational training as a form of reintegration support. While undoubtedly additional education could

improve the returnees' options in the labour market, the preference for cash compensation can be understood from several angles. First, during their years as asylum migrants some may have become indebted to friends and members of family and kin. Second, many returnees we met display very little readiness to stay permanently in Iraqi Kurdistan and instead opt save up money for a new journey to West. Thirdly, the preference for cash can also indicate to the importance of patronage networks – rather than formally recognised education - with regard to access to the labour market.

Return as a failed investment

The asylum migrants from Iraqi Kurdistan have versatile personal histories of international mobility. While the vast majority resorted to costly services provided by migrant smugglers directly from their country of origin – after journeys expanding from few days to several years – there were also those who had repeatedly spent extended periods in neighbouring countries Turkey, Iran, and Syria, before embarking on a journey to the West.⁹ Some had spent years on the road in countries generally viewed as transit locations – such as Iran, Turkey, Greece, Bulgaria, Italy, and France – while in search of shelter in northern Europe.

While in transit, the future of asylum migrants is largely dependent on the person's ability to gather information and contacts facilitating further travel. It is increasingly common that asylum claimants from Iraqi Kurdistan end up leaving their applications for asylum – and often under several different identities – in several EU countries.

We should also point out, that very few asylum claimants inform western authorities that they are from the KRG territory. Knowing that the area is deemed safe by western immigration authorities, people state being from the most unsettled regions of the disputed territories, such as Mosul and Kirkuk. Akram, 44, reported the following to us in an interview in Erbil:

”When you go the asylum hearing, you know exactly what to say. In Germany we had many interviewers and they really knew our cases. They heard every day similar stories. But everyone had their reasons to leave the country, even if they did not reveal their true story, they had a reason to leave Iraq.”

In the case of Finland, one third of asylum claimants arriving in 2009 had also sought asylum in some other EU member state. When the options for protection seem bleak, many are left with no other alternative than to drift – by the decision of authorities or voluntarily – from country to country, living in the streets and unofficial migrant encampments with occasional stays in asylum and detention centres.

The field data of an earlier research on Iraqi asylum seekers in Finland indicated that a large number of Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers, nearly all of them young men, arrived in Finland through Sweden.¹⁰ While some had stayed in Sweden for several years without residence, the asylum cases of many were still being processed in Sweden when they had decided to proceed to Finland and leave a new asylum claim there. It should be noted here that in February 18th, 2008, Sweden signed a ‘Memorandum of Understanding’ regarding the repatriation of Iraqi refugees from Sweden to Iraq. Similar agreements were also ratified by Denmark and Norway, which may at least partly explain Finland’s growing attraction as a country of destination for Iraqis in 2009 and 2010. With regard to the process by which the asylum migrants from Iraqi Kurdistan end up choosing participation in Assisted Voluntary Return Programmes, our data can at best be only suggestive. However, our interviews do indicate that a large majority have a perception of having been placed in a position of choosing between return and sanctions, such as forced return and a prohibition of re–entry. People are largely aware of the fact that many rejected asylum claimants become destitute. The inability to survive economically, together with feelings of reaching a legal dead end, leads to many being easily encouraged to return.

Rezgar, 26, from Ranya, in the Governorate of Sulaymaniah, left his asylum application in Finland in 2005, and he had gained a one-year temporary residence permit. He left Finland upon the expiration of his

residence permit and lived for extended periods in both Norway and Germany, where he has family members. In both countries, he left asylum applications under different names. Rezgar showed us his documents indicating that he had arrived in Finland in September 2009, and on the day of his arrival, he left his asylum application in Finland for the second time, claiming that his life was threatened in Iraqi Kurdistan. The document confirmed what Rezgar told us; uncertain of his possibilities to gain asylum in Finland, he left the reception centre in Helsinki in October 2009. He was caught by the Finnish Police in conditions which he was not willing to reveal to us, and was placed in a detention centre in Helsinki, where we met him in February 2010. Aware of the fact that the Norwegian, German and Finnish authorities would not grant him a permanent protection, he said that he only wanted to get out of the detention centre, where he had spent 41 days. He informed us that,

”My lawyer tells me that ‘you will face a deportation’. I said, I don’t mind, I just do not want to become crazy here. I do not know what they are after, I have refused to cooperate with Refugee Help and IOM, I am tired of them. I just want to go back as soon as possible.”

Our data also indicates that return is seen many in many ways as a failed investment, especially in cases that involve large economic sacrifices, such as selling family homes, land resources etc. These economic arrangements may increase the future vulnerability of the individual migrant, but also that of the migrant’s family, which may be part of the economic arrangements. One Kurdish family (father mother and four children), originally from west of the city of Mosul, that we interviewed in Finland in 2010, resorted to selling all of the family’s possessions before embarking on their journey.

”Our home was only 15 kilometres from the border with Syria and there are radicals who cross the border from there. At our region there are plenty of tensions between Sunnis, Kurds and Yezidis. The Muslim radicals see that Yezidis are devil worshippers and they do not like the. Never in the history, we faced tensions between Kurds and Arabs in

that scale. After the fall off Saddam both the terrorists and the Baathists have caused a lot of friction in the area. After 2003 many international organisations came to the north of Iraq. One of them was the Greek organisation Kalimaka that deals with health sector, they have offices in both Erbil and Dohok. I had worked in agriculture and occasional in on small shop. As I know some English I met suddenly a Greek woman who was searching a car driver. She worked as a coordinator in the project. So I started to work with her as a driver. The car had Greek license plates so many people knew that I had started to work for a foreigner. The terrorists did not distinguish between occupying forces and humanitarian work. All who worked with foreigners were in danger. So because of the bad security situation the company had to leave in 2007. I started to get threats through phone and in the end I decide that we have to leave. I did not even think of leaving my family behind so we all left. The terrorists go to Tal Afar because there are plenty of frictions between people; Turkmen, Shia, Sunnis and people who come from Syria. Many of our friends left their homes but I have no idea where they went. Hundreds of people have left for Europe, often entire families. We sold all we had.”

Life after return

Akram, 44, whom we introduced above, left Kurdistan with migrant smugglers and travelled through Turkey, Greece, Italy and France, to Germany where his paternal aunt lived with her family. After leaving his asylum application in Munich for processing, he decided that his prospects for gaining asylum in Sweden would be much better, and he also had several paternal cousins who had lived for several years in Hässleholm. After two months in Arvika, Sweden, he moved to Köping and stayed there until gaining his refugee passport.

In 2000, he returned to Kurdistan through Syria, to get married. His entry was made possible by his good contacts with the Kurdish border control. With his wife, also an Iraqi Christian from Erbil, he purchased

a modest flat in Stockholm. Akram had worked in a pizzeria already in Köping, and with a Kurdish friend he opened a restaurant in Stockholm, while his wife found periodic work in a communal home for elderly people. Akram remained closely attached to Kurdistan and he visited the region in 2002, 2004, and 2006, monitoring closely the social, political and economic developments. Finally, after his father's death in 2006, Akram began to plan a return with his family. Life in Stockholm had proved to be strenuous. The couple had two children, and Akram was working long hours in his restaurant. His wife had grown tired of her sporadic working hours which left the family little possibilities to plan their daily rhythms, child care and visits with Kurdish friends in other Swedish cities. The family moved to Erbil, and settled in Ankawa in 2008.

Akram's sister owned a piece of land on which Akram intended to construct several greenhouses for the purpose of cultivating fruits. He was sure of the future success of the enterprise, as he was well aware of the fact that the market in Erbil was nearly entirely dependent on imported green groceries and fruit. He had reached an agreement with an Australian financier, and in 2009 he applied for a construction and business permit from the municipal authorities in Erbil. Despite his efforts, he did not receive an answer from the authorities but instead, he suddenly learned that the municipality had reserved nearly all of the land property in question for a public construction project.

Some months later he began to negotiate with the municipal authorities on the construction of a 150 square metre building, where he wanted to set up a pizzeria. While in Sweden, he had worked in several pizzerias owned by Kurdish migrants and also ran a pizzeria in Stockholm. However, the project failed due to a considerable bribe demanded by the municipal authority responsible for construction permits. *"Our problem is that we still lack many legal structures that protect business projects"*, Akram said.

At the moment of the interview, Akram worked in his relative's real-estate business, but he had high hopes of beginning his own enterprise soon. Akram himself spoke actively against migration. He saw that despite the uncertainties, the situation is stable in Erbil, and the economic

situation offers plenty of possibilities. Akram considered himself to be privileged; he possessed both Iraqi and Swedish passports, and he still had his flat in Sweden. *“Just in case”*, he says.

An overwhelming majority of the voluntary returnees to Iraqi Kurdistan are able to return to their home areas, as very few returnees lost their properties due to violence, confiscations or destruction, as happened in many other regions of Iraq. Our field data from Iraqi Kurdistan indicates that the success of return stands in close relation with the social capital, i.e. reputation, connections, of the individual returnee and his kinship networks.

The fragile security situation pushes people to occupy a small social universe ‘on the ground’ – without kin contacts people, do not move to other areas of the region, because it is both too arduous, and with regard to disputed territories, it is too dangerous. The fact that their lives after return occur within a limited sphere of regional boundaries, does not exclude the maintenance of a large network of transnational relations with family and friends. With regard to the ways in which these networks operate, our interviewees expressed highly differing experiences.

In nearly all the spontaneous meetings that we carried out in both Erbil and Sulaymaniah, people’s family and friendship networks consist of long term residents in Iraqi Kurdistan, voluntary returnees from the West with double passports, and people who had been forcibly returned from where they had sought asylum. In Sulaymaniah, we carried out an extensive group discussion with five returnee men; one of them was a returnee from Sweden (with a double passport), one a returnee from the Netherlands (who had decided to return permanently despite having permanent residence in the country), one a returnee from Germany (who had returned permanently because of problems with his student visa), and a forcibly returned man from Turkey. In the case of the men with double passports, they all had several immediate family members who predominantly resided (because of work or studies) in the EU territory, but visited Kurdistan several times annually. The men themselves spent most of the year in Kurdistan but also spent a considerable time in the West. In each case, the families had property in both countries.

Addressing the vulnerabilities – a volatile human rights situation and contested landscapes

Human rights

Several civic organizations in the KRG monitor the human rights situation with a specific focus on domestic violence, as well as the human rights record of the judiciary system, courts of law, prisons and security institutions. Democracy and Human Rights Development Centre (DHRD), whose personnel we interviewed in Sulaymaniah, engages in direct field surveys and has a network of more than twenty legal specialists and advocates working on a voluntary basis. Despite its continuous efforts to improve the human rights record, various forms of violations such as torture and maltreatment in police and detention centres as well as imprisonment without legal hearing are still widespread in the KRG area. A particularly problematic security institution according to DHRD is the Crime Prevention Centre in Sulaymaniah, where torture is a widely used method of interrogation. Human rights activists in the area generally witness that fighting against practices torture in the Iraqi security climate is particularly demanding due to its deeply rooted status in the political culture of the past four decades in the Iraqi society. According to a DHRD specialist,

”Torture is practiced even against those who contact authorities in order to confess their violation. The authorities torture and ask the victim: why did you do what you did?”

The access to security institutions and prisons was reported by DHRD to be considerably easier in Sulaymaniah than in Erbil, and we were told that the representatives were repeatedly prohibited from entering police jails and Asaish (Kurdistan Intelligence Service) detention centres for random inspections. A representative of the DHRD organisation provided us with the following list of obstacles to promoting the human rights record in the KRG region:

- The police are insufficiently aware of human rights issues. The organization trains monthly thirty police officers on the proper treatment of citizens monthly, but this is far from adequate.
- Sexual and gender-based violence, particularly against women, is widespread in domestic settings but there are also violations taking place in prisons and safe houses for women.

On several occasions, the public authorities have been proven to have attempted to cover up individual cases of human rights violations or deny such cases altogether despite solid evidence reported by both domestic and international human rights organizations.

Domestic violence and gendered violence

In Iraq, there are no accurate statistics on violence against women. Together with a general public silence regarding the issue, limited data hinders the attempts to address the problem. According to UNWOMEN, at least 400 cases of honour killings are reported annually in Iraq. However, the overwhelming majority of murders, honour-based suicides and other forms of violence largely go unreported. In Kurdistan, honour killings are perceived as being a major cause of death for women.

Domestic violence remains largely hidden in the KRG region, regardless of its widespread nature. The specialists, whom we heard for this study in both Sulaymaniah and Erbil, reported that the reasons for domestic abuse result from the legacy of wars, general political violence enforcing the traditional values of honour and shame as well as the lack of institutional structures providing protection. Moreover, the brisk process of urbanisation since the 1990s and women's increasing economic independence has rapidly introduced women to public spaces, opening new possibilities for contacts between men and women outside of the controlling gazes of family, kin and neighbourhood.

The honour killings of both men and women occur throughout the region and were addressed by the human rights activists we heard as

a 'widespread problem'. On many occasions, domestic violence drives both married and unmarried daughters to suicides.

The KRG authorities have taken concrete legal steps against this phenomenon by passing a law against domestic violence, establishing educative programs for the police and the judiciary. However, in practice many of these laws are poorly implemented and it is not uncommon that the representatives of security institutions are themselves perpetrators of gendered violence.

On occasions Kurdish families residing in the EU member states send their daughters back to Iraq against the woman's personal will and family members in Iraq then confiscate her passport. This problem is spread throughout families in diaspora with no regard to educational and economic backgrounds. The phenomenon is predominantly associated with families residing in societies which are on occasions perceived by Kurdish families as morally corrupt due to their liberal gender order, such as Finland, Norway and Sweden.

Legal specialists in organisations such as DHRD have initiated legal measures against several of these kinds of families. In some individual cases they have informed the embassies of the Nordic countries in question in order to initiate measures for the victim's return to EU territory.

A journalist whom we interviewed in Sulaymaniah informed us that often the authorities' unwillingness to protect the victims in such cases is due to their perception that such protective returns to the West violate the spirit of the Iraqi constitution. The constitution states that no legal measures can violate the spirit of Islamic Sharia law. Some authorities, according to the journalist, perceive that sending a young woman from an Islamic country to the liberal West against her family's will goes against the spirit of Sharia.

We were furthermore informed by DHRD of cases where rural women have been murdered by members of their extended family, and yet the judiciary system did not implement any legal measures against the perpetrators.

Weapons are widespread throughout Iraq and the same holds true for the KRG area. The large majority of women killed are killed with guns.

In addition cases where women are burned, suffocated or poisoned are not unheard of.

DHRD has studied several cases where the women have been claimed to have died due to burns or an explosion of domestic gas bottles, or by slipping in the bathroom. According to medical reports studied by DHRD, the majority of such cases occur between 2 am and 6 am in the morning, indicating that most likely the family members have attempted to cover up murders by presenting them as domestic accidents.

According to the same specialist, EU immigration authorities are widely aware of the prevalence of domestic violence in the KRG region, but at large they lack the political will to recognise the dangers that the returns of women against their will may cause for their personal safety.

The authorities in KRG provide several safe houses for women fleeing domestic violence or the threat of it. However, DHRD perceives that on many occasions the personnel in the safe houses lacks sufficient training and on occasions gendered and sexual violence has been perpetrated by the staff. According to a DHRD specialist on gendered violence, the official society sometimes deems that proper girls do not get into trouble and such a perception makes girls and women even more vulnerable to sexual harassment and intimidation. Lack of commitment in developing public sector work plagues many sectors of Iraqi society and safe houses are no exception. The same specialist told us that a recent report – which we were not able to review for this study – reveals that the public sector civil servants in Iraq spend on average 30 minutes a day for their professional duties.

On occasions, asylum claimants present their cases to Western authorities in terms of fear of persecution due to their sexual minority status. Usually, these cases do not receive positive decisions in the EU; for example in Norway during the years 2011 and 2012, 40 of 52 homosexual persons seeking asylum were rejected according to Norwegian government statistics.

Perhaps surprisingly, the specialist in DHRD perceived these cases nearly categorically as fraud claims for refuge. According to him, there are cases of abuse, intimidation and severe forms violence, even murders of people belonging to sexual minorities. However, according to him,

these cases in the KRG region are by no means in balance with the number of asylum claims presented in the EU states on this basis. While the engagement in homosexual activity is legally prohibited in the KRG region, according to the specialist, the authorities seldom implement legal action against suspects. On the other hand, with regard to other forms of gendered violence he perceived this as a minor problem.

Religious minorities

Psychological uncertainty among the religious minorities in KRG results not only from the tension between KRG and the Government of Iraq, but many also fear that the increasing social influence of the followers of conservative and radical interpretations of Islam will threaten the fragile social cohesion even in such safe havens as Ankawa.

According to the data we gathered from the members of Christian and Yezidi communities, there are at present three dominant reasons for the emigration of religious minorities. First, the people we heard expressed a deep concern with regard to the possibilities for social and cultural continuity of religious minorities in Iraq as a whole. The second reason is the discrimination against members of religious minorities regarding their access to government jobs. Thirdly, our interlocutors criticized KRG authorities of insufficient protection of the democratic rights of religious minorities in the Iraqi Kurdistan. As an active member of a Christian cultural organization in Erbil told us,

”All laws are for the benefit of the majority, minorities feel that they are not decision makers. This is not real democracy here. The financial resources are controlled by the majority and people feel that the laws are written by the majority for the majority.”

The representatives of three Christian organisations we visited in Ankawa recognised that the status of the Christian community is considerably better in Erbil than elsewhere in Iraq. In fact, many ordinary Christians who had fled the violence in Baghdad and Mosul informed us that they had

been able to transfer their pensions, and other benefits (and on occasions their professional positions as civil servants) to KRG with no major bureaucratic hindrances. On the other hand, several of our interlocutors expressed having experienced forms of less direct discrimination. The youth whom we met in a Christian cultural youth club expressed that access to professions in the public sector is considerably easier for Kurdish youth with KDP membership than for them.

Fears of the disruptive influence of the conservative interpretations of Islam to the social cohesion are well founded. Religiously based violence is frequently reported in Iraqi Kurdistan. Zakho, a community in the north eastern part of Iraqi Kurdistan serves as an example. As a consequence of a speech held in a Friday prayer in a local mosque by a conservative imam, a group of protesters took to the streets demanding the end of lewdness and moral depravity in the community. Thirty liqueur shops and three hotels owned by members of the Christian and Yezidi minorities were burned in December 2011. In September 2012, the Ministry of Religious Endowments in KRG issued a statement banning the local imams from addressing in their speeches the anti-Islamic movie 'The Innocence of Muslims', the movie that had prompted large demonstrations in the Muslim world. A journalist of Christian background whom we met in Ankawa informed us that: *"whenever events motivated by islamofobia become global news, it is us, Christians, who become objects of aggression here"*.

Numerous members of Ankawa's Christians community felt embittered towards the Western asylum policy. In several of our interviews our interlocutors pointed out that while the threatened members of Christian minorities receive negative asylum decisions in the EU, many radical Sunnis, currently persecuted by the Shia dominated Iraqi government receive positive asylum decisions.

Confiscated lands and co-opting

After the collapse of Saddam's regime, considerable international financial and development aid reached the Christian communities in Iraqi

Kurdistan. In many parts of the area reconstruction projects of destroyed Christian villages were initiated. In the general unrest, many Christian civilians were targeted; according to a chairman of a Chaldean cultural organization, more than 700 civilians were killed in targeted murders between 2003 and 2008. There was plenty of speculation around the question as to who was behind these incidents.

However, as pointed out by the representative of a Christian cultural association, the aid was not delivered by an elected committee. A single person loyal to the KDP leadership took charge of the aid. With their political and financial authority, a group of loyal Christians began to attract Christians from other regions (Baghdad, Mosul) to move to Ankawa. A chairman of a Christian cultural association informed us:

”So now people have become very jealous. People come from Mosul to our land [in Ankawa] and I have no right to [keep my] land. Even from the areas from in the north of KRG which are safe (people come). The plan was to empty all these areas [of Christians] and encourage them to come here, they can control people more easily.”

Christian communities in many parts of the KRG region have reported losing their lands. In the Dohuk governorate in September 2012, confiscations were carried out in two villages to pave the way for construction projects. Many representatives of Christian organizations were extremely concerned that a similar situation will continue in Erbil and its surroundings. As a member of a Chaldean Assyrian cultural organization told us:

“Same thing is happening here in Ankawa. They have taken thousands and thousands of hectares without compensations. They were all privately owned lands. All this Erbil airport... we told, if you do not compensate us, name this airport Ankawa International Airport. Not Erbil International Airport. This is our fatherland.”

Among many of the most vocal activists of the Christian community, there was a widely shared frustration towards the KRG regional

government because of its constant policy of co-operating with certain specific members of the Christian community who serve as vehicles to carry social, cultural and economic policies that severely threaten the cultural continuity of the Christian community in the region. Many felt that the KRG government still refuses to recognise the indigenous nature of Christians in the region.

The representatives of the Christian community in Kurdistan's political institutions do not enjoy the popular support of the community. Many of our interlocutors told us that these pro-government persons have received considerable financial and personal benefits as rewards for their loyalty, which in turn increases the tensions within the community. A representative of a cultural association clarified:

"We were very harmonious society before but now, when the government should be very fair with you they want to divide you to pieces and to control you, especially through the land question. All over this area there is lot of oil. There should be very serious work from the international community to protect the Christian people, both Syrian and Chaldean people who are the original nations of this Mesopotamia."

Safe haven?

To complicate the scene further, even the critics of KRG policies recognize the fact that the region offers security for tens of thousands of Iraqi Christians fleeing persecution in Baghdad, Basra, Mosul and elsewhere. This fact makes it more and more difficult for them to convince the international community that many Christians feel increasingly unwelcome in the area. Jusif 57, a prominent figure in a Christian cultural organization informed us:

“The western states say [to asylum claimants]: ‘you were threatened by whom? The Kurdish people? Kurdish government? But [Christian] people were killed in Mosul, and they escaped to the north. That means that Christians are safe in Kurdistan.’

But if you go to details, in fact they are killing you here but slowly. Either they say: ‘Give up your language, your culture and become a member of one of our parties. If you say what I am saying now you will be punished. There is no career promotion for you, there will be no funds for your association. If you apply funds from the local authorities they will just complicate your case.’

From two Christian organisations we heard that the social atmosphere in Ankawa has rapidly changed over the past five years. The local authorities have allowed practically hundreds of alcohol merchants, nightclubs and bars to open businesses in the area. They are predominantly run by members of minority communities, Yezidis along with Christians. The most vocal critics were bound to see a conspiracy theory behind this development – the authorities consciously wanting to destabilize the security situation in Ankawa in order to gain better bargaining positions with the leaders of the Christian associations. As a chair of a Christian cultural association stated:

”They try to push the dirty people to come to Ankawa. We try to demonstrate against all these illegal bars. Lot of the owners are Yezidis supported by the police and the security. We do not need these bars and hotels because we have our own social clubs. If you go to bars or nightclubs you never see people from Ankawa. They are from Erbil. Kurds from Erbil, they are usually high level officers with their guns, they become here drunk, there is lot of harassment against the people, especially girls. And against the neighbours.”

5. Conclusions and recommendations

The personal histories of returnees in both Somaliland and Iraqi Kurdistan demonstrate that return after years of exile cannot be understood simply as a homecoming. Rather, the returnees face various challenges of reintegration arising from the fundamental socioeconomic and political changes happening in the home societies, which are still recovering from extended conflict. In the novel situation, many experience feelings of 'double absence'. Their lives in western countries may have been burdened by structural discrimination and at times, xenophobia. It was not uncommon for our interviewees to list the inability to reunite their families in the diaspora as a central reason for considering return. However, upon return, the returnee comes to witness that the fundamental elements organising social life, such as traditional forms of economy, and the cohesiveness of kin, tribal and other localised identities have changed in a profound manner. In both contexts, this societal change has facilitated entirely new kinds of social hierarchies as well as social, religious/sectarian and political identifications, which the returnee may find difficult to identify with. Furthermore, the years of conflict, as the Iraqi case indicates, have transformed the population profile in the region due to considerable internal and regional displacement.

Our ethnographic data points clearly to the direction that in such settings, starting a new life requires flexibility and readiness to re-adapt oneself to the new realities; while for some the changing socioeconomic atmosphere opens new opportunities in civic associations, business life and in the political sphere, for others the course which the societal change has taken may be seen as the dominant factor slowing reintegration and even hindering sustainable return. In Iraqi Kurdistan, it is not uncommon to hear members of the diaspora stating that regardless of the fact that they would have more economic opportunities and a higher standard of living in Kurdistan than in the diaspora, they strongly oppose the idea of return due to a perceived crisis of values in the region. Free

market capitalism forges an increasingly individualistic lifestyle, and yet in the critical domains of life, everyone from families to political parties, maintain the conservative norms of propriety, honour and social 'face'. Many thus feel that they simply would not enjoy personal freedom in such settings. Many of the interviewed Somali women returnees, found it difficult to adjust to the changed conditions of women in Somaliland – indeed, returnees often undergo a form of culture shock upon return. The same holds true for the young Kurdish men who left their homeland during the extreme poverty of the mid-1990s and returned a decade later amidst an economic boom which made their years in exile seem like a 'failed investment'. Given the rapid pace of social change, it cannot be assumed that all potential returnees are willing or capable of starting life anew.

Return can in fact be described as a process of acculturation, similar to what migrants go through when first moving abroad. Here we see that what happens before the 'return event' is highly relevant for the success of return, as the returnee's readiness, his or her vital material and immaterial resources, together with social networks which forge reintegration, are built up before returning, not after.

Return as a form of circular migration

To ease this process, it is of utmost importance that the returnees have a chance to carefully and realistically weigh their options in the context of return. This is promoted by having the opportunity to maintain social networks and having the possibility to visit the context of prospective return. For the most successful returnees, in both of our cases, the period of paving the way for permanent return took several years and in some cases involved up to four or five temporary stays in the country of origin before making the actual decision to return. Successful return and reintegration appears to be a result of a premeditated process of weighing options, accumulating resources, and careful preparation for return. Often the process of increasing one's capabilities, enforcing old

and creating new social networks, building realistic expectations and gathering sufficient material and immaterial resources, may require up to several years to accumulate.

Both material and immaterial support in this process can promote sustainable and successful return. Finding ways to increase state actors' political willingness to aid and assist such forms of return may be a difficult, if not impossible task considering the current economic crisis in the EU. It may appear that the present day asylum policies, the systems of surveillance and control of migrant mobility are extremely costly methods of governing migration. Furthermore, these methods do not address the causes of asylum migration, but rather treat the symptoms.

Labelling return as a single event, where the returnee simply picks up the life once left behind in the home country is highly misleading. Successful return actually often has the characteristics of circular migration. In both Somaliland Iraqi Kurdistan circular migrants who weigh their opportunities for return are clearly visible during the spring and summertime, when people from the diaspora come to visit their friends and relatives, and to search for possibilities for investment. In both contexts, such circular migrants both vitalize the local economies and generate rapid price increases, especially in the sectors of housing and construction.

In the cases where the returnee is an asylum claimant who has received a negative decision and participates in an Assisted Voluntary Return Programme, the returnee is seldom in a position where he or she has managed to accumulate the necessary resources, networks and capabilities, nor has he or she had the opportunity to engage in circular travel to pave the way for a successful return. When talking about voluntary return in official return policy discourses, it is vital to clearly differentiate actual voluntary return, which is grounded in genuine free will, and 'voluntary return', which is based on external pressures of different levels.

While Assisted Voluntary Return is promoted by state actors due its assumed cost-effectiveness, the experiences of 'failed return' may encourage the returnees to seek new opportunities to emigrate, which in turn burdens European asylum systems but also the entire domestic economies investing in the individual who embarks on a journey to the West.

Motivations for return

Return can be described as a *process of acculturation*, similar to what migrants go through when first moving abroad. What happens before the 'return event' is highly relevant for the success of return, as the returnee's *readiness and preparedness*, his or her vital *material and immaterial resources*, together with *social networks* which forge reintegration, are built up before returning, not after.

The returnee's decision to return may have been processed for several years. It is often provoked by major life changes, or *critical conjunctures* such as retirement, the death of a parent, receiving an inheritance, marriage, or changes in the educational or professional situations of children. For some, the need to look after elderly parents or an ethical commitment to benefit the local society by engaging in developmental and social welfare programmes may be the prime reason for return.

Return is strongly based in emotional reasons, such as a personal longing for the former home country due to *cultural or religious reasons*. The hastiness of life in the West, the practical problems in coordinating work, family and friendship, a sense of cultural alienation and the lack of access to the western context as a socially accepted and equal member emerge strongly in the research material. Male returnees in particular emphasized easy-going sociability and sense of being integrated not only in the social network of kin and neighbourhood, but also in close male networks of leisure, as socially gratifying experiences, which they had largely lacked in the diaspora. For women, return may be more challenging in this regard, as they need renegotiate their public and private roles and meet diverse expectations.

Concern about cultural, especially normative upbringing of children also ranks high as a reason for promoting return. Many interlocutors had led their lives in multicultural urban contexts in the West and they had witnessed a multitude of social challenges with regard to raising increasingly 'ethnicized' and 'racialized' children in such settings. While return may often be particularly difficult for children who have spent a large part of their socialization process in a western context, the parents tend to see the social atmosphere in the return context as morally more

upright and containing mechanisms of immediate social control that prevent children from being influenced by moral vices and dangers. For example alcohol and drugs in the western context were repeatedly debated issues and raised plenty of concern among the returnees.

In both contexts, the return of many individuals is directly associated with their inability gain a permanent legal status of residence in their country of asylum. Such returnees reported simply choosing the less negative of two unattractive options; the psychologically extremely exhaustive life in legal and economic limbo, without a possibility to reunite one's family in diaspora, or returning 'empty-handed'. For rejected asylum claimants, return without a legal permit for re-entering the EU territory may seem to be a personal failure, and the returnee may become subject to strong social stigma. In the context of Iraqi Kurdistan, a large majority of such returnees openly reported planning another attempt to reach the EU territory. Several interlocutors in Iraqi Kurdistan had in fact made even four or five attempts to reach Europe.

Return migrants in post-conflict settings often face severe challenges in reintegration. The country of origin may have undergone significant and unanticipated changes, such as ethnic and religious polarization, alongside population transfers with a corresponding reorganisation of the political and social arena in the society. In both Somaliland and Iraqi Kurdistan, the 'secular space' has become more limited and increased religious conservatism has generated changes in for example gender roles and norms of propriety. Especially the returnees who spent several years abroad with no close contacts to their country of origin may feel alienated and even unwanted upon return.

Return and reintegration

The reintegration process may prove to be particularly difficult, and at times impossible, for certain social groups, such sexual minorities or ethnic minorities returning to ethnically homogenized settings. Children with a refugee background, who have been socialized in the West, may also find it challenging to adapt, as many women who during the years

of exile have constructed public roles for themselves which may strongly challenge the norms of propriety in their country of origin.

Particularly in the case of Somaliland, the returnees are commonly perceived as relatively wealthy and may thus be exposed to continuous expectations of providing assistance to the more needy family members. On the other hand, in many regions of Iraq, returnees may become targets of criminal groups because of their assumed economic status.

Somaliland is highly dependent on migration as a whole: remittances, but also the contributions of returnees in business and administration are significant. At the same time, there is a fierce competition for resources and jobs. This causes tensions and prejudices on both sides. This especially concerns vulnerable groups – women, children and minorities.

In the case of Iraq in particular, large-scale returns may further destabilize ethnic and sectarian stances, particularly in the disputed areas, where the balance between different social groupings is a delicate political question.

Not only do the receiving societies change, but also the migrants themselves change in many ways during the years of exile. Changes in behaviour, habits, perceptions, and patterns of consumption may also pose severe challenges for reintegration. It is often the case that refugee households are deeply divided with regard to their perceptions on return. Children, who have spent their critical years of socialization outside their country of origin, often lack sufficient language and social skills to orient in the new setting. For many, life before exile in the West may have been spent in the neighbouring countries for extended periods of time, or as irregular migrant in search of international protection. All these experiences may prove to be both socially and psychologically burdening factors that can hinder the process of reintegration.

Successful return and reintegration appears to be a result of a premeditated process of weighing options, accumulating resources, and careful preparation for return. Often the process of increasing one's capabilities, enforcing old and creating new social networks, building realistic expectations and gathering sufficient material and immaterial resources, may require up to several years to accumulate. Both material and immaterial support in this process can promote sustainable and successful return.

Vulnerabilities

While each setting of return has its own distinctive context, the Iraqis and Somalis presented in this study share a fundamental characteristic; their lives, transnational mobile histories, and livelihood strategies speak of a constant flow of economic, social, and human capital that occurs in a multidirectional manner between the country of origin and the western diasporic context. Hierarchies of different kinds of political statuses (refugee, asylum seeker, asylum holder, migrant, citizen, naturalized subject etc.), are obvious and challenging issues in this global cross-boundary setting, but also in individual life courses, where they tend to vary and change over time.

Especially women, children and minorities experience return in different ways. Also ethnicities, religious identities and political leanings may be critical in return to post-conflict context. All women who were part of the research agreed that there are gender-specific challenges and opportunities in return. Female returnees face various challenges, such as difficulties in reintegration. Gender specific perceptions and normative expectations of female propriety in the local community may have changed radically during their years in exile. Contested recognitions and identifications are at stake, revealing shifting grounds in terms of status, age and gender.

Recommendations

Based on this comparative empirical data, the study then proposes concrete recommendations to be taken into consideration when formulating the future directions of Finnish return policy.

1. When talking about voluntary return in official Finnish and EU return policy discourses, it is vital to clearly differentiate actual voluntary return, which is grounded in genuine free will, and 'voluntary return', which is based on external pressures of different levels.

2. It should be recognised, that return is not necessarily sustainable and lasting, if the context of return does not enable sustainable livelihoods and a 'good life' – subjectively speaking. The potential returnee needs to be able to gather first-hand information on his or her personal possibilities for return and reintegration. The system of return migration thus needs to be flexible and permissive of circular migration.
3. The system of return migration must take into account the special needs of vulnerable groups, such as women, children and minorities, and return should always be genuinely voluntary. Those belonging to vulnerable groups have less opportunity to influence the resources at their command, the social and economic assets, which enable successful return.
4. Family work should be developed in both the destinations and origins of return migration. Violence against women and children, as well as practices of external pressure need to be intervened with.
5. Remittances and return migration shape the economic structure of Somaliland. In addition, many return migrants are active in development work, civic organisations and administration. They complement the traditional forms of development work. The development effects of return migration should be more widely assessed and utilised.
6. Programmes of return migration need to be closely linked with the process of asylum, so that the asylum claimant has the opportunity to accumulate work-life related skills and capabilities. Successful return is commonly based on the skills the returnee has gained in the country of exile, be they skills acquired through work experience, or competences acquired in education.

Selected bibliography

This is a selection of publications which we found to be useful for this report. It should be noted that the bibliography is not intended to be a comprehensive bibliography. The publications are listed in three thematic categories: 1. Return migration, 2. Iraq, 3. Somalia / Somaliland, 4. Other literature used in this report.

1. Return migration

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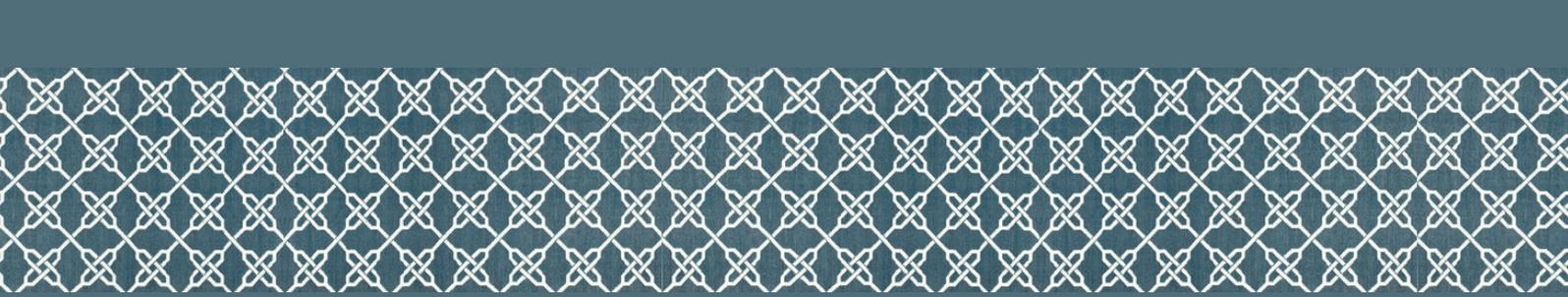
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Notes

- ¹ Juntunen, Marko (2011). Prospects for Sustainable Return: Iraqi and Afghan Asylum Seekers in Finland, Tampere Peace Research Institute, Occasional Paper, No 100.
- ² IOM Helsinki has made an evaluation report concerning the 2010–2012 AVR project in Finland. IOM (2012). Vapaaehtoisen paluun kehittäminen 2010–2012: arviointiraportti. IOM: Helsinki. Available online in Finnish only at:
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- ³ The Country Information Services, which is a part of the Finnish Immigration Service, provides several country reports, which are available online at:
[http://www.migri.fi/about_us/country_information_service/reports].
The Somaliland report is available in Finnish only at:
[http://www.migri.fi/tietoa_virastosta/maatietopalvelu/raportit].
- ⁴ Roughly one third of the respondents in the FSNAU study stated that they would be unable to cater their basic needs, such as food, medicines and school fees, if they did not receive remittances regularly. Food Security and Nutrition Analysis Unit – Somalia (2013). Family Ties: Remittances and Livelihoods Support in Puntland and Somaliland. FSNAU, Jun 5, 2013.
- ⁵ The Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC) was established as a pilot project in Hargeysa in October 2008. SARC operates as a ‘one-stop’ location where victims of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) can receive medical care and counselling. Victims also have the opportunity to report the assault to the police for investigation and have access to free legal advice and representation. In 2010, SARC received 107 cases, involving 89 female and 23 male survivors of sexual violence. In 2010, 89 cases registered in the SARC involved minors, and the majority of the cases submitted were dealt with under the formal justice system, which was not the case in 2009.
- ⁶ See more on this issue in Tiilikainen (2011).
- ⁷ The legacy of the 2003 military occupation is analysed in detail in Juntunen (2011).
- ⁸ See more on this topic in Juntunen (2002).
- ⁹ Juntunen (2011) includes detailed information on the experiences of Iraqi asylum migrants on their way to the West.
- ¹⁰ See more in Juntunen (2011).



Return Migration and Vulnerability

Return migration is a current issue in migration policy and discourse. It is a complex social phenomenon, involving not only the returnees, but also the sending and receiving countries. Somaliland and Iraqi Kurdistan are post-conflict regions, which are currently both receiving return migrants, but are at the same time facing serious security and development challenges. When looking at return migration in these two regions, it is important to take into account the experiences of returnees themselves, and especially returnees belonging to vulnerable groups. Women, children, and minorities can be especially exposed to risks in the process of return migration, as they may not have as much control over the resources and social networks enabling successful return.

The decision to return voluntarily is generally the result of a long process of consideration and preparation. Successful return often has many of the characteristics of circular migration. In cases where the returnee is an asylum claimant who has received a negative decision and participates in an Assisted Voluntary Return Programme, the returnee seldom possesses the necessary resources, networks and capabilities to ensure a successful return. Experiences of 'failed return' might encourage the returnee to seek new opportunities to emigrate.

It is necessary to take into account the multifaceted nature of return migration, and the possible vulnerabilities involved, when further developing policies of return in EU countries. The thorough inclusion of social and human rights aspects in return policies promotes safe, successful and genuinely voluntary return.

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