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Youth Migration Gains and Losses: A Critical Analysis of Economic Perspectives in the Case of the Raparin Administration in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq[1]

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Abstract

Migration[5] has long been at the forefront of global political discussion. In the Middle East, where the migration phenomenon is more prominent, younger migrants are driven away by factors such as poor basic services, lower quality of life, and limited job opportunities; at the same time, they are attracted by Europe's better economic opportunities and quality of life, the possibility of sending remittances to families back home, and being able to build a better future. Although many attempt to migrate legally, this is often impossible and so migrants resort to irregular means. Migration has thus become a serious challenge for many families in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI). In light of this issue, the study's focus was on irregular migration in the Raparin Administration, an independent administration in the KRI. We examined the drivers of irregular youth migration and investigated the push and pull factors underlying the alarming rise in illegal migration through dangerous routes to Europe. The study adopted a mixed-methods approach. In addition to desk research and key informant interviews with families in the Raparin Administration, we conducted surveys in selected districts there, where most families have at least one member who has sought refuge in Europe over the last decade.

The findings show that many from the Raparin Administration migrated for better life opportunities and to secure a more promising future for themselves and their families. Many young university graduates aimed to find good jobs so that they could send remittances to their families in the country of origin, thus substantially improving their families' circumstances. We also found that, since 2003, economic drivers in Iraq have become more influential compared to other migratory waves. Moreover, while wealthier young persons were more likely to migrate using regular channels, those from disadvantaged backgrounds, as is typical in the Raparin Administration, were more likely

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[5] Although the concepts of migration and forced migration, including voluntary migration, are used interchangeably, by migration we also mean forced migration.

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to consider irregular and dangerous routes. Financing youth migration was also a core concern for families, who supported both the decision to migrate and its requisite costs.

Key Words:

irregular migration, Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), Raparin Administration, unemployment, push and pull factors

1 Introduction

As a Middle Eastern country, Iraq is not only seen as a destination for refugees and migrants, but also as a sending country. Migration has in fact become a regional phenomenon linked to skilled and low skilled workers. In the case of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), particularly the Raparin Administration, media and popular discourses present a desperate image of locals fleeing unemployment and poverty at home. The study of irregular migration is examined because of the social and economic importance it has for the area, and because the national and international media focus on the phenomenon. In the growing body of literature on the subject, there is an emphasis on the main factors causing migration in the developing world, with the most significant ones being economic, social, political and environmental. Within this context, the developing world is the key region for irregular migration and labour migration. Considering the economic conditions of migrants, income and employment have historically been considered the two main drivers of migration, but inequality has also been a relevant, if less studied factor. From this perspective, recent migration has been seen as a positive for poverty alleviation because of the remittances that migrants send home. UNHCR figures indicate that Iraq is still one of the major countries of origin for new asylum applications in Europe. In 2022 alone, 36,000 Iraqis applied for asylum, and figures from previous years have consistently positioned Iraq among the top 20 source countries of refugees (UNHCR, 2023). This has resulted in new generations being born into a situation of forced displacement, illustrating the never-ending displacement cycle of refugees from Iraq.

However, we argue that migration in the KRI since 2014 has followed different patterns to other migration phases because of the economic disparities suffered in Iraq due to the impact of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). The drop in the price of oil has also had a huge effect on the KRI's economy and financial well-being over the last decade, since the region depends almost entirely on fossil fuel revenues. The economic conditions and lack of available job opportunities are clear push factors for migration among the younger population as they have no hope for their future (World Bank, 2015; Ahmad, 2018). Even worse, those who migrate are university graduates who have struggled to find employment in the public and even private sector, as the market in the KRI is small and opportunities limited. In the Raparin Administration, private sector opportunities are also restricted, and small businesses tend to be family-based with very few opportunities for employment. The area is also well-known for its informal economy, mainly in the agricultural sector.

A serious fear associated with post-2014 migratory waves is that this phase of migration may not be driven by temporary employment needs but by families' permanent need to seek a better life. This has clear long-term implications for the KRI demographically, socially, economically, and politically, alongside the risk of brain drain (Statista, 2023). A simple explanation of why the youth in the Raparin Administration migrate could be due to the experience of conflict and war, years of economic turmoil, and the lack of

employment. However, in this research, we dig deeper to investigate both push and pull factors for migration; moreover, whether migrants are pushed, pulled, or pushed and pulled, they must always make the decision to migrate and have sufficient resources to do so (Flahaux & de Haas, 2016). Nevertheless, it should be borne in mind that the combined push and pull factors of migration determine the decision to either migrate or stay. Some factors are independent of the individual — political, economic, social, environmental, and demographic — while others are not, albeit they may not be entirely under the individual's control. The latter factors can be both obstacles and facilitators of migration, such as technology, social networks, links to the diaspora, and legal or political frameworks. Personal characteristics and attitudes also have a role, including age, gender, ethnicity, education, wealth, marital status, religion, and language. This research therefore makes several contributions to the literature which are both timely and relevant, given the continuing displacements in the KRI and the terrible loss of life of thousands of Kurdish migrants in the Mediterranean (Statista, 2023).

The article is divided into six sections. Following this introduction, the second section presents the literature on irregular migration, in particular the KRI's potential migration. The third focuses on the methodology for data compilation and analysis. The fourth presents the findings on the migration phenomenon in the Raparin Administration with respect to the push and pull factors of migration theory. The fifth contains a discussion of the findings, and the final section ends with conclusions, recommendations, and future perspectives.

2 Literature Review

The existing literature on migration explains why, when and how people migrate. The most prominent theory of migration is Ernst Ravenstein's 'Law of Migration', which describes country-level lifetime migration patterns. In 1985, he identified that migrants move towards great centres of commerce and industry, which absorb the migrants (Rees & Lomax, 2020). From the same perspective, Lee (1966) had already introduced push and pull factors in the context of the mass movement of people from one place to another. Based on Lee's concept, negative (push) factors drive people from their country of origin to migrate and positive (pull) factors attract and motivate them to go to other locations. However, the push-pull approach mainly centres on related motives and the expectation of maximising want-satisfactions. That is to say, the migration decision is associated with a complex set of external and impersonal forces.

Other scholars have also highlighted how the conditions in a country can push people to migrate, such as social, political and economic factors. Of these, unemployment, low wages and population growth push migrants to different destinations, while pull factors attract people to leave (Joseph, 1988; Van Hear et al., 2018). For migrants, push factors are far more influential in taking the decision to leave and believing that the unknown is a better option, as is the case in conflict-affected countries with security concerns (Aker et al., 2021). Skilled migrants are considered the key drivers of economic development and growth, but the opposite is true for migrants defined as being a burden on the welfare system, economy, and public services, including housing, transportation, education, and healthcare. However, migrants' eyes remain on the remittances sent home to support the economic development in the home country (Green, 2017; OECD, 2017).

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Iraq, similar to many other Middle Eastern countries over the past decades, has been caught up in waves of migration and, as such, Iraqis are familiar with migration as it has been part of the political history of the country. However, the nature of migration in Iraq is complex and situation-based, such as in the case of Kurds who mainly migrated for political reasons from the 1970s until 2000s. This type of migration is the opposite of the current migration flow of 2014 and 2022. Contrary to other waves of Iraqi migration studied elsewhere (Yassen, 2016; 2023), the recent migratory wave is driven by economics. With globalisation and modern means of communication, people in developing countries know about economic disparities and available economic opportunities in receiving countries (de Haas, 2005), and it is push and pull factors such as these which determine who migrates and where they are destined. Recent records indicate that developing countries, especially those affected by conflict and poor economies, exhibit many push factors for migration.

In the literature, sending countries are generally defined as victims of migration, but there are also long-term advantages for economic migrants. However, despite the positive effects of migration, it also has a negative influence on the development of sending countries (Issac, 1947). Other scholars have considered the impact of brain drain caused by skilled labour moving from developing countries to be a singular advantage for the immigrants, ignoring the fact that such migrants are an important segment of the population which can contribute to the economic development of the host country (Salmi & Salmi, 2017; Portes, 2019) to the detriment of the sending countries.

Ozden and Schiff (2007) suggest that the movement of people has several important economic benefits for migrants, their families, and the home and host countries. Ratha (2014) emphasised income gaps and economic disparities between developed and developing countries, as well as unemployment; indeed, the income gap has become a major driver for economic migrants to consider moving to an advanced economy. However, Collier (2013) attempted to alter the fear around sending countries for being 'emptied out', and yet people migrate despite knowing the consequences may be painful and unexpected.

In the case of Kurdish migration, the migrants are generally male. In most developing countries, a family's preference for migration is given to sons, as their safety, future and welfare is more assured than for potentially more vulnerable females. The same privilege is given to a married woman, who can migrate if her husband agrees to accompany her (Seefar, 2021).

Pull factors have been the magnet of migration, especially the recent labour migration. A familiar feature with Kurdish migration is the idea of migration being a permanent move to Europe. For Mandal (1981), individuals decide to move from their places of origin to other places for social and economic gains. Importantly, migrants intend to succeed and work hard in the destination country, contributing to economic growth. The significance of the choice of the location has been well studied based on economic returns per migrant. Moreover, it is suggested that migrants should be integrated economically and socially to maximise the potential gains for both sending and receiving countries (Taran & Ivakhnyuk, 2009; Portes, 2019; Clemens, 2022).

Information and previous knowledge of Europe regarding economic prosperity, job opportunities, welfare and social benefits, besides other benefits, are the top pull factors

(Ozaltin et al., 2020). Recent studies have shown that Europe is the destination most favoured by Kurdish migrants for the reasons outlined above (King, 2005; Askandar, 2017; Khalil, 2021). Moreover, many migrants have knowledge of ageing communities, and the potential for opportunities that can be given to young migrants in European countries. Most migrants do not stay in transit countries but prefer to move to the UK or Germany (Taran & Ivakhnyuk, 2009). Bade (2003) noted two key factors, a high standard of living and high wages, as the main pull factors for migration. Why does Europe attract Kurdish migrants? Sirkeci (2005) pointed to factors such as respect for human rights, social justice, and fair treatment for those of different races and religions as being the most appealing besides economic benefits. In this sense, Kurds migrate to achieve security (Kaczorowski, 2018).

This paper contributes to the migration literature as it is the first study of the push and pull factors causing migration from the Raparin Administration. Many studies have been conducted on migration and conflict in Iraq, with a limited focus on the economic and situational environment factors behind migration waves in the post-ISIS period. Apart from the main economic factors, this study investigates the influence of the family on youth migration, where social and economic aspects intertwine. Aligned with this, the decision to migrate allegedly has been undertaken with family support and via a process of selection within the family, i.e., the family decides which member will migrate irregularly. The International Organisation on Migration (IOM, 2023) describes irregular migration as the "[m]ovement of persons that takes place outside the laws, regulations, or international agreements governing the entry into or exit from the State of origin, transit or destination". The costs of irregular migration are high, and, to secure funds, migrants sell their homes and properties, sometimes leaving decent employment to pay smugglers to assist their irregular migration.

Recent migration from the KRI can be said to align with Collier's stance (2013) regarding the societies of the bottom billion, where people are aware of a richer life elsewhere and many young people are desperate to leave. Collier also notes that, although the movement of people from poor countries to rich ones is a simple economic process, the effects are complex. Migration for economic purposes as a pull factor is not new and has been in the minds of many, not only in the KRI but more broadly. Due to the history of war and conflict in the region, people feel they are in the middle of an unending period of considerable uncertainty, and for this reason many families and young individuals prefer to migrate, especially to Europe. In this context, the World Bank (2018) emphasised how, when migrants move to improve their prosperity, their incomes increase three to six times when they move from lower to higher income countries. Indeed, the most vital labour market determinants of migration flows are the wage differences between the destination and source locations.

3 Methodology

Purposeful sampling was used with a non-probability sampling technique because the survey group/target population is a migrant one known to be hard to reach (Bacher et al., 2019). Twenty wealthy and middle-income families were chosen for face-to-face interviews by the researchers. Due to the sensitivity of the subject, some families in the sample were acquaintances. For privacy and data scarcity reasons, obtaining truthful responses from the interviewees was essential for accurate information to be collected

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on the phenomenon of migration in the Raparin Administration. Another concern for the migrant families was identity confidentiality, and most repeatedly asked for assurance that their names and addresses would not be disclosed to avoid any family problems in the future. In any case, the ethical principles of informed consent, confidentiality, and the avoidance of harm (or doing good) were followed.

To facilitate the adopted qualitative interview method, a set of questions was prepared; the collected data were then analysed thematically. Interviews were conducted with participants' consent, and primary data collection took place between March and May, 2023. Data were collected in locations such as Sangasar, Chuwarqurna, and Hajiawa; these areas were selected because they had been highly affected by irregular migration in past years. In the Raparin Administration, a limited number of jobs are created annually; that is to say, population growth and education are not aligned in these locations. Further information and analysis were gathered from key academic informants at the University of Raparin, and from several participating experts attending the 68th International Association for the Study of the World Refugee Problem Conference on the Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration: Transnational Skill Partnerships, hosted in Germany at the Technical University of Applied Sciences Würzburg-Schweinfurt (2023).

4 Findings

According to the collected data, each family had at least one migrant abroad and many families mentioned more than two, with some even having 15 family members or relatives abroad. These were mainly recorded as irregular skilled migrants. Another important finding is associated with the decision to migrate. Most participants considered migration to be a viable decision based on collective family consent. Further, this decision and its financing were supported by the family, indicating that the families were typically both the backbone of irregular migration and the stimulator of youth migration in the Raparin Administration.

The families and their migrants were found to be seeking better economic opportunities through migration, regardless of the risks associated with irregular migration. Based on the opinions and data, people migrated due to poor economic conditions and the hope of better economic opportunities in the destination countries, revealing that, in this study, push and pull factors were driven by economic factors in the sending and receiving countries.

During the data collection, we realised that the families were aware of many details about the process of migration and the risk factors were known in advance. Many interviewed families mentioned that the diaspora community was the source of information and guidance for their family members when they migrated to the intended destination. It seems that even older family members had background information on the legal, social, cultural, and financial structures of western countries. In addition, among the destination countries, the UK and Germany were the two main preferred destinations for most migrants from the Raparin Administration. The level of awareness of the potential migrants and their families was high because of the large community of Kurds in these destinations. Social media were the second source of information relied upon by migrants. Thus, their awareness level enabled many families of potential migrants to be less concerned and fearful about the safety of their children or family abroad.

Notably, families in the Raparin Administration saw migration as an investment in human capital because they knew that when the migrant reached the destination country, their families would receive remittances. Often, there was less concern about brain drain in the home country, and they were aware that European countries are ageing and need skilled and young labour for their economic development. Another finding is that many migrants were young, aged between 13 and their 20s.

Young persons from wealthier families were also more likely to migrate using regular channels with a visa or via an investment passport, whereas those from disadvantaged backgrounds, which is mostly the case in the Raparin Administration, were more likely to consider the irregular dangerous routes through the Mediterranean or overland through Bulgaria. There was a sense of uncertainty about migration in the community since it is a very complex topic that has created huge debate among families; they blamed the government for a lack of services and employment opportunities as reasons for migration.

Disinformation and ambiguity have made it difficult to define migration from the Raparin Administration as 'work migration' since, among the studied families, there were cases of those who were well-off economically but nonetheless influenced by other push factors. This includes political oppression, such as a lack of equality before the law and lack of individual freedom.

The findings show that there are serious concerns about the irregular migration of youth for both sending and receiving countries, including loss of life on dangerous routes and the risk of brain drain in the country of origin. However, if the migration of youth is managed effectively, it can create massive economic opportunities for both sets of countries. Economic incentives have motivated many young and educated individuals to migrate, and many have chosen to move to Europe as a close destination for most Middle Eastern countries. Most migrants are highly educated workers, for whom an investment which develops their skills would cost less; its effect on the labour market is therefore more positive compared to less educated migrants.

5 Discussion

The main objective of the present study was to research the push and pull factors of migration in the Raparin Administration. Various such factors were considered by the families of migrants, including income disparity, lack of employment opportunities, social stability, conflict, and wars, as well as pull factors associated with the economic well-being of a migrant.

For many remaining family members, economic circumstances served as the motivating push factor, while economic opportunities, lifestyle, and social securities were the main priorities seen in the host country. The local Raparin community, in particular potential migrants, see refugees, internally displaced persons (IDPs) and migrant workers in the KRI as a threat to their employment opportunities. This aligns with data reported by Yassen (2019), who found there were tensions between local workers from the host community and members of the refugee and IDP communities, with the former blaming the latter for the lack of employment in the region. One labourer claimed that,

> "Syrian refugees work for lower wages and longer hours and this has impacted the market" (Yassen, 2019: 459).

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The Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) has responded to this tension in an exclusionary manner, it can be argued (Yassen, 2022), by introducing a quota which means employers need to employ a minimum 75 percent of local workers and a maximum 25 percent of foreign workers. Failing to do so incurs huge penalties, according to Decision 94 of the Kurdistan Regional Council of Ministers of 2021. Contrary to this view, we argue that migrants are not considered a threat to employment; rather, they contribute to economic development and the region is in need of skilled labourers (OECD, 2014).

This view is confirmed by the data collected from 20 families, whose migrant family members intended to maximise their income and invest in property in their country of origin. In turn, this suggests that because migration in the developing world is linked to economic well-being, migrants and their families think migration is a channel for long-term material improvement; however, at first glance, the migrants seem to have had no idea of their effect on the host economy. In fact, they encouraged their family to migrate, too, for a better life and livelihood. In the Raparin Administration, migration had a domino effect. For example, a father who had returned from the UK motivated his two unmarried sons and two married daughters to migrate there. In this family, only the mother, an elder daughter, and the father (the returned migrant) remained at home. The fears associated with migration are thus diverse and complex for both sending and receiving countries.

Many scholars have studied the effect of migration on economic growth, with differing results. In some studies, international migration has a direct influence on inclusive growth in the host countries as well as the country of origin. The potential migrants from the Raparin Administration were mostly aged under 30, and some were as young as 13, which is extraordinary. This finding is in line with another study which emphasised the importance of migrants being young because, over their longer lifespan, this helps them generate more income and contribute to the economic growth in both countries alike (Koczan et al., 2021).

We found that the gains from migration were family-based; that is, the decision to migrate and fund the migration was both supported by, and quite common among, the studied families. For most of the families, it seems that no decision had been made regarding their family member returning home, with some mentioning that their migrants had been away for more than 15 years. A few families mentioned that their migrants were graduates of home country universities and would like to return if employment opportunities became available alongside political and social stability. This suggests that there is little hope of return until the migration situation improves.

Although it is not easy to generalise from a sample of 20 families, most of the interviewees reported a short-term negative financial impact, since all mentioned borrowing money to pay for the irregular migration, with most being paid to smugglers. Regardless of the gains of migration, there were losses for every family left behind. In the current migration waves, many were not prepared to migrate but felt forced to do so, which is against the theory of migration which says that it is a voluntary process. One mother said,

> "My sons have graduated and for a few years they could not find proper jobs and there was a lack of employment. I urged them to plan their migration."

She also mentioned that, from an economic perspective, their friends in the UK had advised them that moving to the UK was more meaningful than staying.

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Our interpretation of the collected data is that the key drivers of migration were the economic and financial contributions of the migrants to their families. Thus, it is vital for the host countries and countries of origin to understand the impacts of migration on their communities in the long-term. There was also a widespread belief in the community that governments must create jobs and life-long opportunities. A recently graduated student noted that,

> "The lack of employment opportunities is a main factor imperilling livelihoods in the region, curtailing my ability to afford to get married or buy a suitable house. This is not only my story, it's the story of thousands of young people in Raparin, because we do not live in an industrial metropolitan location. We are in a remote, mountainous area where opportunities are limited and constraints are varied."

Most of the families referred to employment as the main determinant for their decision, and households in this study were shaped based on their income and gender. Among the 20 families, nine households were single women heading families. Among the economic and social consequences of migration, the psychological impact was mentioned by many households, mainly the female. This means that migration has a heavy cost. One girl aged 30 felt helpless. She said,

> "For men, it's a bit easier because they can migrate alone, but for us it is extremely difficult to migrate alone unless we have a male companion, because the route is not just dangerous as there is also a risk of abuse and sexual harassment by smugglers. I know women who have been sexually harassed even when their husband was present."

In dealing with migration, the risk and adventure were both associated with the process of moving from the home to the destination country. The interviewees' initial views were similar to those found by Klöble (2021), who noted that families mostly consider migration to be risky. Having calculated the risks, most of the families in our study used a family-selection process to decide which of them would migrate. They linked the decision to known risks and the uncertainty of migrating irregularly, with all the families defining migration as "a risky process full of uncertainties and challenges". Regardless of these, many families were ready to contribute to financing the irregular migration of their family members. They remained focused on future benefits, despite their current economic circumstances, with some families indicating that being in debt for many years because of migration was costly for them. In addition, the long-term economic expectations were not the same for all families, as some had good economic benefits from remittances made by their migrants and had the potential to invest in properties.

Yassen (2016) suggested that resettlement in third countries and other complementary pathways could reduce irregular migration and save thousands of lives every year. Overwhelming evidence shows that tens of thousands of people risk their lives trying to enter the EU irregularly and many die in the attempt (North Press Agency, 2023). In 2021, when Belarus facilitated visas for Iraqis, over 3,000 Iraqi Kurds saw Belarus as a way to reach Europe. However, many hundreds saw their dreams shattered when they became trapped on the border with Poland during winter, resulting in many deaths (Menmy, 2021). Research has shown that the push factors as noted above are visible and, whenever pull factors emerge, Iraqis have a huge desire to reach the so-called 'promised land' (Seefar, 2021). The interviews with the potential migrants revealed two options for reaching Europe, the US and Canada: 1) legal pathways such as the visa process, and the UNHCR's resettlement submission programmes — available for only a small proportion of asylum

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seekers; or, 2) irregular migration, which often comes at a high cost and risk, aided by human smugglers and often without appropriate documentation (Djajić, 2014). Iraqis have tended to choose the latter for lack of alternatives. Dana, aged 19, frustratingly admitted that,

> "There is no life in the Kurdistan region. I have decided to migrate irregularly through the death route with the support of a smuggler who cannot be trusted, but I do not have any other choice because my visa application has twice been rejected, so the legal route is not available. What am I supposed to do?"

His is a common view among the KRI's youth who have lost hope.

Investment in increasing legal pathways could save lives and contribute to sustainable solutions. Troeller (2002: 92) admits that "increased resettlement opportunities may reduce the motivation to move 'irregularly' in search of asylum". This view is echoed by the UNHCR (1997: 671), which argued that,

> "[r]esettlement can have a positive, mitigating influence on irregular movements when it is implemented on the basis of clear and consistent criteria, and when it is used as a policy tool to reinforce protection in countries of first asylum".

6 Conclusions and Recommendations

Economic factors were the most important for migration, followed by security and political instability in the region. However, the key pull factors that stimulated migration were economic well-being, securing a better future for families, aspiring to a better life, and seeking available opportunities in the social, economic, and political context. These factors have been considered by every Kurdish individual since 2014. In line with this, economic insecurity and political instability in Iraq have negatively influenced the KRI, and therefore both economic push and pull factors were the most important determinants of Kurdish migration in 2014 and 2021. This may indicate that future migration waves will be similar to the two phases addressed in this study. Our conclusion aligns with that of the World Bank (2018), which indicated how limited job opportunities and unemployment were the most influential push factors for migration, especially skilled labour. Another crucial migration issue is the economic returns for both the host and country of origin. The KRI has benefited from migrants' remittances since the 1990s, and thus migration has a long-term economic advantage which could change the future of the region's economy. However, the lack of employment opportunities and skilled/educated labour, combined with poor economic conditions for families, will always push people to migrate.

Based on these findings, it has been noted that factors such as equal treatment, human rights protections, and access to public services shape how migrants think about a receiving country, with most Kurdish migrants choosing Europe as the preferred destination. In addition, the huge Kurdish diaspora in European countries such as the UK and Germany helps potential migrants access their preferred destination. Despite what Kurdish migrants might think about the host country, however, the literature notes the challenges which remain with migration, such as learning the language, rules and regulations, finding decent jobs, and being exposed to xenophobia and racism. Nonetheless, migrants always consider the positive aspects of migration and their destination, and foreign governments' provisions for migrants, especially illegal migrants, are always appreciated.

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The political and economic situation in the KRI has been adversely affected by long periods of war and economic challenges. As this study proposes, the 2014-2021 migration waves were driven by economic factors and thus it is important for the KRG, as the main actor, like other governments, to study the experiences of migrants and potential migrants.

Accordingly, we make the following recommendations for the KRG and its policy makers to consider when dealing with migration:

To the Kurdistan Regional Government:

1. Design policies that can resolve economic challenges, including limited job opportunities, unemployment, quality of life, and other economic and health insecurities;
2. Implement measures aimed at creating employment opportunities. Such initiatives would subsequently improve the average wealth and per capita income of individuals living in Kurdistan and start empowering skilled labour in the regional economy;
3. Improve social security, public services, and health insurance. By implementing such initiatives, locals will not be lured to the attractive social incentives offered in other countries; policy makers thus need to create policies which support the government in structuring a framework for providing a better life with appropriate living standards for those in the KRI;
4. Collaborate with the private sector. Because the KRI market is small and jobs are limited – the region is an oil-driven economy — the private sector needs to develop other industries, including services, industry, tourism, and other industries; this could create more jobs and reduce pressure on the government;
5. Focus both on resolving tensions with Iraq's central government and on regional economic diversification, to save people from the 'oil curse', since the oil sector cannot provide jobs for everyone in the region; this is based on the experiences of the last 30 years and the recent economic crises;
6. Fight all forms of discrimination and promote equality. All citizens in the KRI, regardless of race, tribe, political, or religious inclination should be given a fair chance in life. There should be equal distribution of resources to avert possible inter-tribal conflict. The needs of minority communities should also be properly taken care of in a manner similar to the majority tribes;
7. Remove the exclusionary clause on the soon-to-be adopted Employment Law, which stipulates that 75 percent of employees should be local. Such a quota discriminates against refugees, IDPs and migrant workers in the KRI. The employment of individuals must be based on experience and skills rather than nationality or origin.

Next, to Iraq's donors, we make the following suggestions:

1. Iraq is a country of 45 million persons with two thirds of the population being under the age of 24. Therefore, investment is required to support community resilience. This can be achieved through programming that provides skills

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building for the youth so that they can have more equitable access to formal economies, and livelihoods support;

2. Iraq and the KRI are rebuilding from 20 years of conflict, and so support for economic revitalisation is required as part of broader recovery and stabilisation efforts.

Lastly, to the international community, we suggest that:

1. Global partnerships are fundamental, especially with the destination countries to which Kurdish migrants move. The KRG needs international support to fight extreme poverty, as this is one of the UN's sustainable developments goals. Such a measure could minimise immigration waves to other countries if the government can provide subsidies and financial support to families in poverty;
2. Access to resettlement in third countries and other complementary pathways should be expanded;
3. Coordination and support for the KRG is required to strengthen inclusion and integration pathways for the host community and refugees, IDPs and migrant workers, to de-incentivise dangerous and irregular migration through the Mediterranean and other dangerous routes.

In the future, we plan to explore in more depth economic preferences and the aftermath of migration regarding those who remain in host countries. With a larger and more representative sample, we may make recommendations on the development of reliable and coherent policy frameworks for the KRI.

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