

## Transnational Exchange IV Workshop (May 2019)

### Voluntary return to the Middle East with a focus on Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria

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## 1. AVRR counselling in Europe: Update

This session offered a short overview of the current situation of AVRR in the different European countries, focusing on current tendencies and changes as well as figures of return as far as they are available. For a more detailed description of the different AVRR systems, please refer to the AVRR posters available on the webpage of the Transnational Exchange project.<sup>1</sup>

### Austria

Voluntary return numbers:

Year	Counselling provider 1: Caritas Austria	Counselling provider 2: Verein Menschenrechte Österreich (VMÖ) *including voluntary return numbers from detention center
2015	1267	n/a
2016	1865	n/a
2017	1160	2603
2018	1089	3016

### Reintegrationsprogramme Kriterien- und Leistungsvergleich

 **Bundesministerium  
Inneres**

Referat III/5/a

Stand: 01.10.2018	ER(R)IN Österreich	OFII – Frankreich/ Österreich	RESTART II	IRMA plus
Organisation	BM.I	BM.I	IOM	Caritas Österreich
Laufzeit	01.06.2016 – 30.06.2020	01.09.2018 – 31.08.2019	01.01.2017 – 31.12.2019	01.01.2017 – 31.12.2019
Zielländer der Rückkehr	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Bangladesch</li><li>• Indien</li><li>• Irak Zentral/ Süden</li><li>• Irak KRG (Kurdengebiet)</li><li>• Marokko</li><li>• Pakistan</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Benin</li><li>• Elfenbeinküste</li><li>• Kamerun</li><li>• Kongo RDC</li><li>• Mali</li><li>• Senegal</li><li>• Tunesien</li></ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Burkina Faso</li><li>• Gabun</li><li>• Guinea</li><li>• Kap Verde</li><li>• Kongo Brazzaville</li><li>• Togo</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Afghanistan</li><li>• Iran</li></ul>	1) <u>Nur Vulnerable:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Kirgistan, Mongolei, Armenien, Indien, Ghana, Tadschikistan, Pakistan, Russische Föderation</li></ul> 2) <u>Auch Nicht-Vulnerable:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Gambia</li></ul>
Kriterien (zusätzlich zu den Kriterien für freiwillige Rückkehr des BFA)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <u>Generell:</u> 3 Monate durchgehender Mindestaufenthalt in Österreich<sup>*)</sup></li><li>• <u>Irak:</u> 6 Monate durchgehender Mindestaufenthalt in Österreich<sup>*)</sup></li><li>• Nur eine Person pro Kernfamilie kann die Unterstützung erhalten<sup>**)</sup></li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <u>Generell:</u> 3 Monate durchgehender Mindestaufenthalt in Österreich<sup>*)</sup></li><li>• Nur eine Person pro Kernfamilie kann die Unterstützung erhalten<sup>**)</sup></li><li>• Unbegleitete Minderjährige können nicht teilnehmen.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <u>Generell:</u> 3 Monate durchgehender Mindestaufenthalt in Österreich<sup>*)</sup></li><li>• Nur eine Person pro Kernfamilie kann die Unterstützung erhalten<sup>**)</sup></li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <u>Generell:</u> 3 Monate durchgehender Mindestaufenthalt in Österreich<sup>*)</sup></li><li>• <u>Russland:</u> 12 Monate durchgehender Mindestaufenthalt in Österreich<sup>*)</sup></li><li>• Nur eine Person pro Kernfamilie kann die Unterstützung erhalten<sup>**)</sup></li></ul>
Reintegrationshilfe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• € 200.- Bargeld</li><li>• € 2.800.- Sachleistung</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Generell € 3.000.- Sachleistung</li><li>• Tunesien: € 4.000.- Sachleistung</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• € 500.- Bargeld</li><li>• € 2.800.- Sachleistung</li><li>• zusätzliche Unterstützung (nach Bedarf) <sup>***)</sup></li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• € 3.000.- Sachleistung</li></ul>
E-Mail	<a href="mailto:BM-III-5-Reintegration@bmi.gv.at">BM-III-5-Reintegration@bmi.gv.at</a>	<a href="mailto:BM-III-5-Reintegration@bmi.gv.at">BM-III-5-Reintegration@bmi.gv.at</a>	<a href="mailto:avrr.vienna@iom.int">avrr.vienna@iom.int</a>	<a href="mailto:reintegration@caritas-austria.at">reintegration@caritas-austria.at</a>

<sup>\*)</sup> Ausnahmen im Einzelfall möglich – z.B. bei im Rahmen von Dublin nach Österreich rücküberstellten Personen

<sup>\*\*)</sup> Kernfamilie: Eheleute/Lebensgemeinschaften inkl. deren minderjährige Kinder

<sup>\*\*\*)</sup> Zusätzliche (nicht wie bei anderen Programmen bereits in der Sachleistung enthaltene) Leistungen: Erhebung der familiären Situation bei unbegleiteten Minderjährigen, Empfangsunterstützung, temporäre Unterkunft nach der Ankunft, Weiterreise am Zielort, medizinische Unterstützung, Business Broschüren, Weitervermittlung zu kostenlosen Business Trainings

Changes in 2019:

The main countries of return are Iraq, Afghanistan and Syria so far (although IOM doesn't offer support for returnees to Syria, the number of returnees is high – many large families are returning). The government provided for a limited amount of time an additional assistance of 1000€/person or 3000€/family for the top 6 countries of return: Iraq, Syria, Russia, Nigeria, Afghanistan and Iran

Outlook: The AVRR counselling is currently offered by NGOs only. The responsibility of AVRR counselling will be in the hand of the state agencies only from 2021 onwards.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.caritas-augsburg.de/hilfeberatung/migrationsundfluechtlingsberatung/transnationaler-austausch/project-activities/conference-ii/conference-ii>

## Switzerland

Voluntary return numbers:

Year	Voluntary return with financial support	Voluntary return without finan. support	Total number of voluntary returns
2017	1059	224	1283
2018	774	232	1006

Main countries of return in 2018<sup>2</sup>:

1. Algeria	73
2. Iraq	54
3. Gambia	36
4. Sri Lanka	35
5. Turkey	32

Changes:

In March 2019 the new accelerated asylum procedure came into effect. The entire procedure takes place in the federal asylum centers within a maximum of 140 days. During the 140 days interested asylum seekers can decide to return voluntarily and receive less support, the longer the procedure has been ongoing (degressive model). The least return support amounts to 200€. The reintegration support in the country of return amounts to CHF 3'000.- (approx. 2600€). Only 40% of the asylum seekers with more complicated asylum reasons will get distributed to the cantons for accommodation. This returnee group may receive 1000 CHF start-up (a child 500 CHF) support and in most cases 3000 CHF reintegration support like in the years before.

A new AVRR counselling provider in Switzerland started its work in 2018: ORS.

## Denmark

Voluntary return numbers:

According to Danish statistics there were 1.150 rejected asylum seekers in Denmark until April 2019<sup>3</sup>.

Three main countries of return <sup>4</sup>	2018	2019	Total
Iraq	82	15	97
Iran	37	0	37
Afghanistan	32	6	38
<b>Total</b>	<b>151</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>172</b>

<sup>2</sup> Statistik Rückkehrhilfe SEM (Staatssekretariat für Migration)

<sup>3</sup> Source: <https://politi.dk/-/media/mediefiler/dokumenter/landsdaekkende/statistikker/udsendelser/2019-marts-udsendelsesstatistik.pdf?la=da&hash=5699E2EC8F92E79C676E4377F9F7786491406E4F>

<sup>4</sup> The Danish Refugee Council

Applications for reintegration support - countries <sup>5</sup>	2017	2018	2019 (until March 31)	Total
Afghanistan	12	32	6	50
Iraq	11	82	15	108
Somalia	2	6	2	10
Bangladesh	5	2	1	8
Iran	0	37	0	37
Georgia	0	18	0	18
Others	1	7	32	40
<b>Total</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>184</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>271</b>

#### News:

The Danish Refugee Council (DRC) is the only provider of AVRR counselling in Denmark and currently employs 15 counsellors across the country. The government tightened the laws related to asylum procedures in general and came up with stricter regulations for rejected asylum seekers. At the same time the Danish government supports return and reintegration programs and provides the necessary financial support for returnees. The Danish authorities accommodate rejected asylum seekers at special centres, under special conditions. Returnees with a residence permit in Denmark continue to enjoy great financial assistance from the government for returning purposes. The government is open to suggestions from the DRC regarding the improvement of the return assistance. DRC works on extending its list of return countries in which it can provide reintegration assistance through a local partner organization. The reintegration partners (28 different countries) are acquired within the ERSO network, which the DRC is also part of. Around another 20 reintegration partners are accessible through the ERRIN network.

### Belgium

Return numbers:

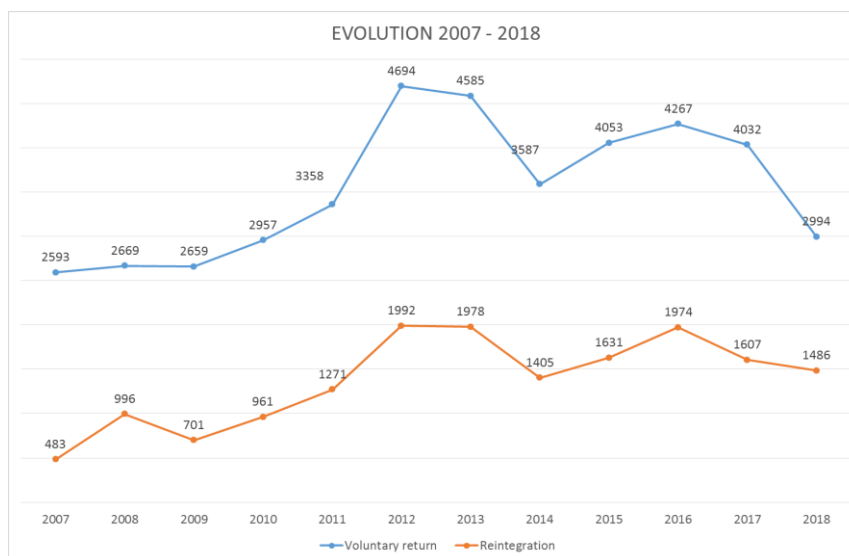


Figure 1: Voluntary return numbers from Belgium from 2007 – 2018<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> See above

This chart illustrates the total number of voluntary returns (blue line) from Belgium in the period between 2007 and 2018. Not every returnee is entitled to reintegration support (depending on the country of return and the legal status in Belgium). The orange line proportionately shows the number of recipients of the reintegration assistance.

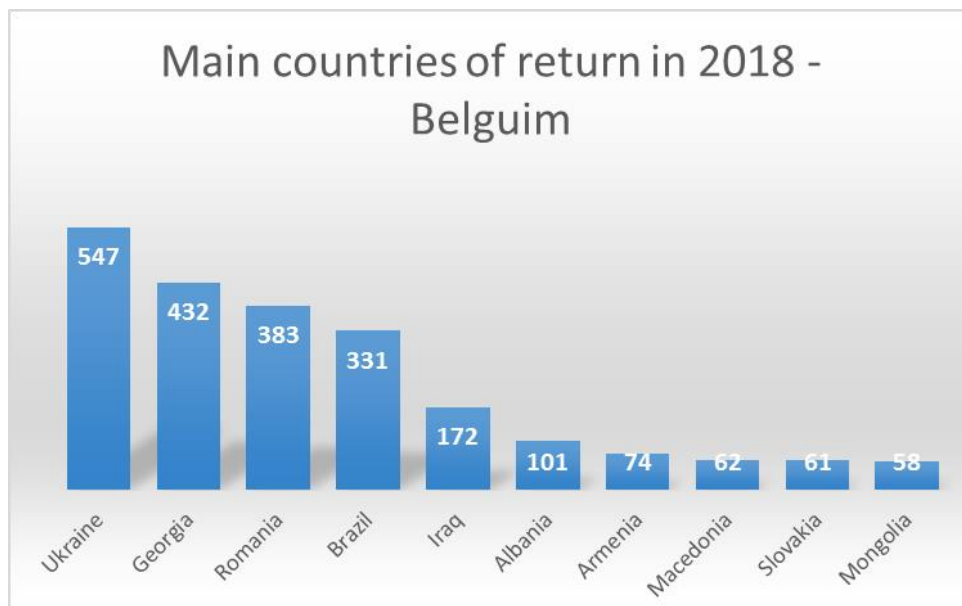


Figure 2: Main countries of return from Belgium in 2018<sup>7</sup>

News: The main actors are unchanged: Fedasil, IOM and Caritas. New legal changes regarding return might take place with a new government after 26.05.2019. The financial assistance has remained the same in 2018 but the government hopes to increase the budget for return in the future – especially for vulnerable returnees. Fedasil continues to develop outreach projects to improve collaborations with the cities in which Fedasil has a voluntary return desk: In Liège the CONEX project has been already launched since 01/01/2019 and for Charleroi it is underway. Fedasil tries to improve its counselling approach depending on each target group (chronically and severely ill returnees, families with children ....).

## Sweden

Voluntary return numbers:

Year	Voluntary return	Forced return
2018	8233	2351

Voluntary return countries (not including other EU/EES country)

Country	Number of returnees
Iraq	686
Albania	345
Ukraine	339

<sup>6</sup> FEDASIL

<sup>7</sup> See above

The Swedish Migration Agency is sole responsible for offering return counselling in Sweden. The counselling starts after the initial decision of refusal and will continue throughout the appeal process if the migrant's application is further rejected. The Swedish Migration Agency's return counselling is based on a "motivational method" and always aims at resulting in a voluntary return. The tasks are relatively clearly divided: the returnees are in charge of planning the trip, getting a passport and anything else necessary for the return; the Swedish Migration Agency gives the financial support, books the plane ticket and connects returnees with contacts in the country of return.

#### News:

The Swedish government and migration authorities work on improving its return procedure and on increasing its return numbers, in particular the assisted voluntary return numbers after refusal or withdrawal of asylum. The Swedish Red Cross resumed return counselling in 2019 since they were granted funds by the AMIF until June 2020. The organization can offer counselling and financial support in individual return cases and focuses on accommodating voluntary return for rejected asylum seekers under humane and dignified conditions. This also includes connecting returnees to reintegration organizations mainly using the Red Cross network. The municipality of Strömsund, together with the Swedish Migration board and the provincial government of Jämtland, operates the child's best on return. For three years the municipality will work together with a number of other municipalities in Sweden to improve the conditions both for the individual unaccompanied minor and for adults and activities that meet the child. The child's best return project will contribute to increased competence and cooperation in the field and thus develop a more sustainable return process. (<https://www.stromsund.se/2582.html> )

### The Netherlands

Voluntary return numbers<sup>8</sup>:

Year	Number of voluntary returns	Proportionally special support
2017	1532	
2018	2149	Reintegration assistance through IOM: 1001 Victims of trafficking: 15 Medical cases: 272 Unaccompanied minors: 14

Main countries of return<sup>9</sup>:

	Country	Numbers of return
1.	Albania	368
2.	Republic of Moldova	229
3.	Azerbaijan	136
4.	Iraq	134

News: Return and reintegration assistance will not be given to nationals from the following countries: Mongolia, Georgia and all countries circling the European Union.

<sup>8</sup> <https://iom-nederland.nl/en/statistics/voluntary-return-in-2018-a-year-in-numbers>

<sup>9</sup> See above

## Germany

Voluntary return numbers<sup>10</sup>:

Year	Number of voluntary returnees (REAG/GARP)
2017	29.522
2018	15.962

Main Countries of return<sup>11</sup>:

	Country	Numbers of return
1.	Iraq	1834
2.	Albania	1562
3.	Russian Federation	1371
4.	Macedonia	1246

News:

In 2019 the REAG/GARP program was extended largely. Returnees can receive tickets for public transport to travel to the airport. Whilst adult returnees received in 2018 either 500€ or 700€ depending on the nationality, every returnee from a vast list of return countries is entitled to 1200€. Additionally the returnee receives 1000€ after six months in cash or after return a budget of 1000€ for rent, restoration and furniture. The target group for assisted voluntary return was extended to people who came to Germany with a family reunification visa if the person in Germany had applied for asylum.

## 2. Afghanistan – an update on the safety situation

### Security

When discussing return and reintegration counselling for Afghan returnees, it is recommended to start with an update on the security situation in Afghanistan. Ms. Stahlmann, who researches for the Max Planck Institute for social anthropology and the International Max Planck Research School on Retaliation, Mediation and Punishment, gave the following overview.

Afghanistan still struggles with indiscriminate violence. Violent attacks mainly executed by the Taliban are prominent all over the country. They are usually characterized by its unpredictability, its openness, its deliberateness and its asymmetry. The Taliban selects target places of great relevance to the society and economy such as market places, hospitals, schools, state offices, mines, opium fields, main traffic routes, etc.. This warfare strategy nationwide keeps the Afghan population in constant apprehension, insecurity and fear.

Afghan males are almost forced to choose a side. Adversary war parties and local militias are the alternative to cooperating with the Taliban. In general, Afghanistan struggles from an extremely high degree of militarization which results in quickly escalating conflicts on a local and regional level.

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.bamf.de/DE/Infothek/Statistiken/FreiwilligeRueckkehr/freiwillige-rueckkehr-node.html>

<sup>11</sup> See above

Civilians, mainly women and children, are usually not spared during the ongoing conflicts. Daily life is also exacerbated by road blocks and check-points on main routes taken over either by the Taliban or militias. Afghan returnees who may not have grown up in Afghanistan but in Iran face an immediate threat by not knowing how to recognize the different war parties and how to behave accordingly. Trivial things such as the mobile phone service provider or music and pictures on the mobile phone can lead the returnee into a precarious situation at the check point. It needs to be considered as well that the Taliban keeps minute records of its members and renegades. This implies that persons who fled from the Taliban 20 years ago will need to face its consequences once the Taliban gets hold of him after return. Not cooperating with the Taliban meant then and still means now that the denier, his relatives and his supporters will be persecuted.

The Taliban feeds its power partially from a well-functioning surveillance system. It works with its paid informants, professional secret service and through social control. If Afghans new to town want to rent or do business with anybody, the opponent will ask for the name, names of family members, place of birth and/or a person who vouches for the trustworthiness of the counterpart. Then the relatives will receive a phone call and need to verify the identity and the trustworthiness of them. The whole village will quickly know about the returnee. This information easily transpires to Taliban members.

Returnees will face another security risk when reintegrating in Afghanistan. The mere fact that an Afghan national chose to flee from Afghanistan and to migrate to a Western country counts as desertion or as apostasy among the Taliban which again results in persecution. Usually returnees have spent a couple of years in Europe, having learned the language and gotten accustomed to different cultural practices or Western behavior. The Western behavior, pronunciation or clothing style only confirms the apostasy. The Afghans also assume that the stay in Europe has allowed the returnee to accumulate wealth. The returnees might need to face burglars.

Certain news traveled from Europe to Afghanistan and cause difficulties for returnees. Reports about only criminals or terrorists being deported back to Afghanistan are circling within the Afghan society. Rumor has it that the German government didn't want them anymore - so they are not really welcomed in Afghanistan. This information, however, only pertains to a certain percentage of people returning from Europe. Reasons such as no legal permission to stay and family are not discussed. This means that the returnee will face a lot of suspicion. Some Afghans might not even want to be in contact with returnees because of it.

When looking at some numbers, Afghanistan is still one of the most dangerous countries in the world. In 2018 44,600 people were killed through warfare<sup>12</sup>. Since 2016 there are ca. 1,65 Mio IDPs registered in the country due to conflict<sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>12</sup> <https://www.acleddata.com/data/>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/operations/afghanistan/internally-displaced-people-idps>



## Living in Afghanistan

Life in Afghanistan even without the warfare is shaped by hardships. 310.000 people have been affected by flooding since 2017<sup>14</sup>. Ca. 4,3 Mio people suffer from the consequences of drought (400.000 IDPs)<sup>15</sup>. These natural catastrophes hinder the sector of agriculture immensely. From 2007 to 2015, between 200,000 and 300,000 Afghans were deported annually from Iran and Pakistan. The expected number of deportation from these two countries is 1.5 Mio for 2019. More people will need to find housing, to buy food and clothing and to start an income-generating activity. These returnees obviously compete with returnees from Europe. In 2017 41% of households had to refer to crisis- or emergency strategies to access food (selling of goods/land/house, migration, begging, child labour, criminality)<sup>16</sup>. Due to the high unemployment rate many turn to militias or the Taliban and earn money as fighters.

Since Afghans cannot rely on a social health care system which covers health expenses, retirement funds and unemployment, the social network has to absorb any costs in this regard. But even simpler tasks such as renting or opening a bank account require a guarantor from the family or the village. The social network needs to do more than just being a financial back-up though. In cases of sickness the family needs to care for the patient even when being an in-patient in the hospital (food, transportation, etc.). In order to carry out a normal life (not a fighter), the returnee needs a guarantor. The returnee can increase his chances for a better reintegration by sending remittances to the family in Afghanistan regularly while still in Afghanistan or the returnee receives money on a regular basis from abroad which he then makes available to his social network. Only then the clients get introduced to live-saving new networks.

Ms. Stahlmann conducted a monitoring about the whereabouts of deported Afghans from Germany in 2017 and 2018. Her findings included information about the living situation after the forced return. Out of 53 returnees 41 persons went into hiding after the return. Hiding includes staying in hotels or changing shelters or private places on a regular basis. 7 persons were homeless temporarily; 2 homeless long-term. Only 2 out of 53 returnees managed to stay temporarily in the home village with the family. 1 person stay with a friend, 1 stayed in a dormitory and 1 got his own apartment. These findings allow a careful assumption that also voluntary returnees might have difficulties to find housing. However, the feedback from the reintegration partner in Afghanistan differs a bit from this assumption.

## Reintegration

Richard Davenport who works for the reintegration organization International Returns and Reintegration Assistance (IRARA)<sup>17</sup> spoke about the general structure of IRARA and of its services provided in Afghanistan. IRARA has its headquarters in Brussels and does not provide reintegration services directly in different countries of return. IRARA partners with service providers in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Egypt, Pakistan and Sri Lanka who do the groundwork. The Afghan Center for Excellence (ACE)<sup>18</sup>, partner of IRARA, offers arrival assistance, onward travel arrangements, temporary accommodation for two weeks approximately, medical assistance and family tracing

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/operations/afghanistan/natural-disasters-0>

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/operations/afghanistan/infographic/afghanistan-integrated-drought-response-dashboard-aug-2018-feb>

<sup>16</sup> Afghanistan Food Security Cluster: Seasonal Food Security Assessment (SFSA) Afghanistan 2017

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.irara.org/>

<sup>18</sup> <http://ace.af/>

immediately after arrival. Once the returnees have settled a bit, further appointments allow the organization to figure out the best reintegration assistance, financed through ERRIN, together with the clients. The reintegration services encompass enrollment in educational trainings or apprenticeships, referrals for extensive medical treatments, mentoring business start-ups and wage subsidies. ACE works with Afghans returning mainly from the following European countries: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Switzerland and Sweden. ACE works in close cooperation with the Afghan Ministry of Refugees and Repatriations, the Afghan Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs, Martyrs and Disabled, Deloitte as well as Ipso (International psychosocial organization)<sup>19</sup>.

Whilst the return conditions seem more than challenging according to Ms. Stahlmann, Richard Davenport reported during his presentation that the majority of voluntary returnees who were granted an ERRIN reintegration budget managed to use the full amount after return (mainly for business start-ups). This information implies that the returnees lived in Afghanistan for up to six to nine months, survived and were relatively free and save to open a store or to buy into an existing business. The two presentations gave different suggestions about life after return to Afghanistan. The reports didn't necessarily contradict but possibly represent different people groups. It is recommended that AVRR counsellors read more about the topic.

Offering reintegration assistance is challenging at times for ACE. Since the reintegration budget needs to be transferred from Europe, delays of payment happen sometimes which is hard to understand and accept for returnees. The case numbers strongly increased in the beginning of 2018 (mainly from France) which caused long waiting times and discontent amongst returnees. Returnees got also confused about which types of services are offered by which organization: IOM, ACE, Ipso, etc.. Even the climate influences the reintegration work. In winter time traveling to the office of ACE for reintegration counselling is sometimes not possible because the snow blocks roads.

When discussing how the AVRR counsellors can prepare the returnees best, the conclusion was to help returnees to get ID-papers which will facilitate administrative necessities in Afghanistan.

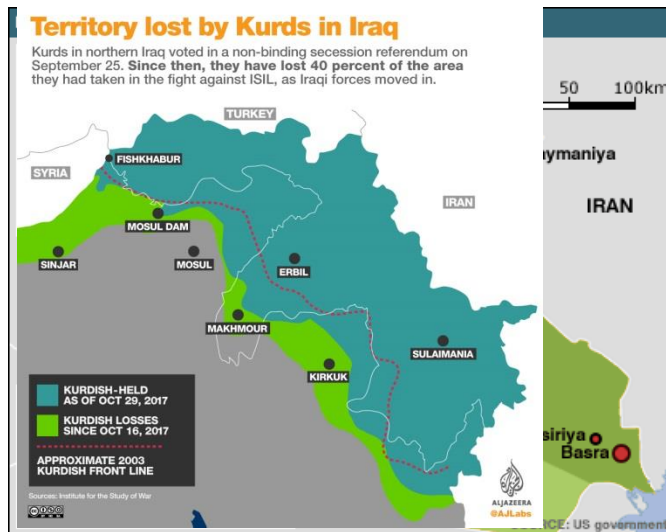
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<sup>19</sup> <https://ipsocontext.org/about-us/>

### 3. Iraq – current political and security situation

Before talking about reintegration options in Iraq, it is helpful to understand the current political and security situation at first. Soran Jawher, National Coordinator of the Migration for Development Programme by the GIZ, gave a detailed overview.

#### Political situation



Dr. Barham Salih was elected president of the Republic of Iraq on 2. October 2018 for a four year term. The president leads the Central Iraqi government together with the Prime Minister Adil Abdul Mahdi al Muntafiki. The challenge of governing Iraq is to find compromises between the interests of 25 + political parties (over 60 different parties when the smaller ones are counted as well). The parties represent not only different political stand-points but also ethnic and religious interests. For the election 2018 27 coalitions and 205 political entities (88 Electoral lists) ran for a public

office. The following parties won seats in the Iraqi parliaments (329 seats): Forward (54), Fatah Alliance (48), Victory (42), State of Law (25), KDP (25), National Coalition (21), Wisdom (19), PUK (18), Reform (14), Minorities (9), Others (55). There are 22 ministries which are led by 15 ministers. The diversification of interests explains the lengthy and challenging processes to make new laws<sup>20</sup>.

Aside from the central government the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) governs autonomously the four governorates of Duhok, Erbil, Silemani, and Halabja with an independent parliament and military forces (Peshmerga). The 111 seats in the Kurdistan parliament are taken by 6 major parties (KDP, PUK, Gorran, Yekgirtu, NGM, others) and some smaller ones. Masoud Barzani was president from 2003 – 2017. The successor Nechirvan Barzani is still to be officially announced. The border between the Autonomous Kurdistan region and the rest of Iraq (Central Iraq) are still changing. The area around the border is named disputed territories. After the Kurdish referendum in October 2017 for example the Kurdish territory diminished which rendered city such as Mosul and Kirkuk under central governmental control. Ever since the referendum, the new governmental leaders have not been inaugurated.

Autonomy seeking ethnic groups are only one explanation for the instable security situation in Iraq. More explanations shall be named after a short overview over the places with the most incidences. According to a heat map from January to April 2019 Mosul, Kirkuk, Baghdad (600), Karbala, Najaf, Basrah, Ramadi are the place with the most occurring attacks, armed clashes, robbery, kidnapping, arrests, etc.. In comparison to the number of 600 incidences in Baghdad alone, the KRG seems relatively safe with 110 incidences (predominantly airstrikes close to the Turkish border) in the four governorates. Here are some of the following reasons for the unstable security situation in Iraq:

<sup>20</sup> [http://www.aljazeera.com/mritems/Images/2017/10/31/1e6e53ed8185441a862afbbf1dbe21ff\\_6.jpg](http://www.aljazeera.com/mritems/Images/2017/10/31/1e6e53ed8185441a862afbbf1dbe21ff_6.jpg)

- Insurgency asymmetric attacks
- Arbitrary arrest, abduction, kidnapping
- Explosive remnants of war (ERW), landmines
- Sectarian, ethnic, cultural and religious divide
- Large number of armed groups, affiliation, loyalty
- Access, Documentation
- Power vacuum, particularly in Nineveh

### Pre-departure counselling in Europe

The attending counsellors thought of topics to discuss with the client in the counselling for different types of Iraqi clients. The ideas of the working groups are listed below:

Young Iraqi females with long stay in Europe returning with the family	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Considering the opinion of the girl (separate conversation with girl about hopes and dreams). Discuss lifestyle before. Inform the about the real opportunities/chances besides returning with the family.</li> <li>• Observe the family dynamics</li> <li>• Implications for the family (Discuss the differences between Iraq and the West when it comes to behavior, etc.); raise awareness amongst the parents as well</li> <li>• Preparation for school reintegration (preparatory courses in Iraq, International school? Continuation of studies? diplomas accepted? conditions for application in local university)</li> <li>• Organize separate language classes</li> <li>• Proper goodbye (souvenirs from friends; Goodbye party etc.; How to keep in touch with friends)</li> </ul>
Young Iraqi men with a professional future in Europe but requests of the family in Iraq to return	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Questions to ask: finish apprenticeship / training before return? How strong is the pressure by family to return?</li> <li>• Go for a visit and then financial support</li> <li>• Go to legal advisor, how is the legal perspective in Europe</li> <li>• Check role and responsibility to take care of family members in Iraq; maybe someone else can step in (why is he responsible, if there are other siblings in Iraq)</li> <li>• Maybe being in contact with partner organization working in Iraq to give a realistic view of his possibilities in Iraq</li> </ul>
Elderly person wants to return to spouse in Iraq	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Start open dialogue with clients about the reason why he would like to return</li> <li>• What is the background of his leave from Iraq to Europe?</li> <li>• Did he talk with his son and his wife / family members staying with him in Europe about the idea of return?</li> <li>• After gathering all this information, trying to map out the situation of the client with the opportunity for staying or leaving and give the client information of different opportunities (stay or leave) and take the time to discuss this with the client</li> </ul>

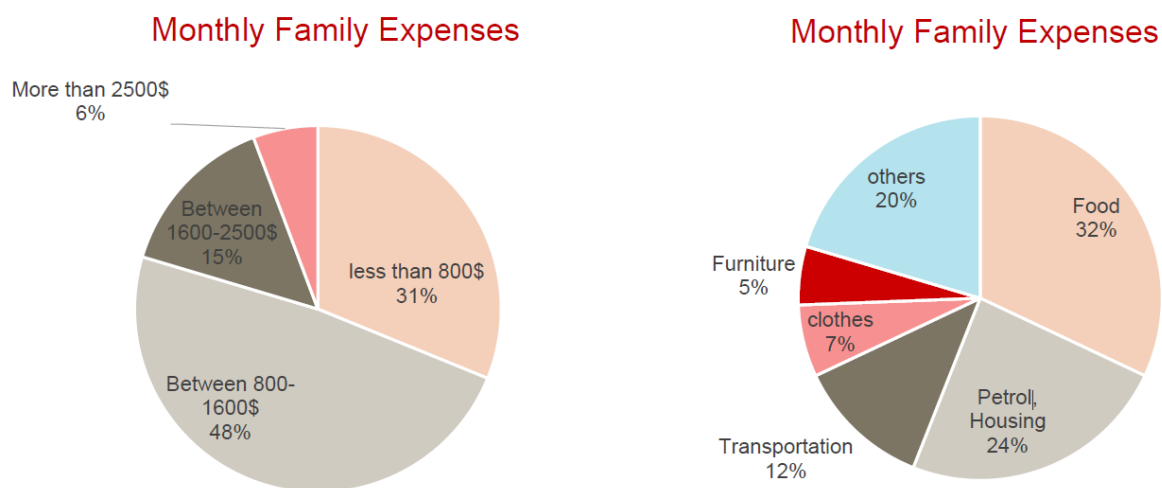
### KRG administration and central Iraq administration

Not only Kurds will return or move to the KRG but also returnees who are originally from the disputed areas along the border Central Iraq Government and KRG as well as IDPs such as Christians from Baghdad and refugees from other countries such as Syria. In order to settle in the KRG region, returnees or migrants need to provide a guarantor, a person who has residence in the KRG already

and able to vouch for the applicant (not financially, rather for the integrity of the applicant), to obtain a residency permit for the duration of 1 year (standard) and to register with the Asayish (independent security forces). The Asayish rank higher than the local police in terms of authority and power. The Asayish runs a diligent background check on every registering person. This process can take up to 5 weeks. Once the returnees know where they would like to live, they need to register with the Mukhtar, the local representative of the neighborhood, as well. More information about the registration process can be found on the homepage [services.gov.krd](http://services.gov.krd).

Returning to Central Iraq is less complicated. The returnee merely needs to register at the residency office. Sometimes the police does a brief background check. The following graphic shows the ratio of living expenditures.

## The Iraqi Central Surveying Agency (December 2018)



### Health

The Iraqi health care system is a dual system. There is free public and expensive private health care. In Iraq the saying “You get what you pay for” very much represents the truth. The public health care scheme is underfunded, outdated and too little regulated. Private treatment is more beneficial but due to the high costs (monopoly, little regulation) the majority of the society cannot benefit from it. Sick people usually seek treatment in a primary health center (total in Iraq: 2331) which is either headed by mid-level workers or by medical doctors first. If the sickness turns out to be more severe, the patient is referred to one of the 229 hospitals (general and specialized). Whilst the treatment is covered by the public health care scheme, the follow-up care (rehabilitation) services are not included. Medication in public health care centers can be bought at a low price; sometimes the medication is not available anymore.

### Work

Even though the Iraqi GDP amounted to 197 Billion USD in 2017, Iraq struggles with a high unemployment rate. 65% of the GDP is won through oil production and oil export. The oil sector, however, employs less than 5% of the working population. The private sector should provide most jobs but it is limited, weak and monopolized. The best paid and most secure jobs are in the public sector (13% in 2017), working for the government also includes retirement benefits. Usually only

highly educated people receive a job in the public sector. If they get one, they will not change their position anymore – even though there might be little work to do.

Dr. Karin Köcher, senior advisor for ETTC Iraq, talked about the labor market and work opportunities for returnees in greater detail. The public sector is in the process of getting down-sized which results in even more entrants to the labor market every year. The weak formal private sector cannot absorb the excess of the public sector. Most graduates hope for employment in the public sector. After graduation unemployment remains a challenge for the majority of graduates who are looking for white collar and high security jobs. Aside from getting university education Iraqi young people have limited options to get vocational training. The reputation and the quality of this type of education are very low. This situation explains why young people opt for “paid employment” in militia groups. According to Dr. Köcher the following capacity building measures need to be undertaken to improve the employment situation: The economy needs to be diversified and focus less on the oil related activities alone. The economy needs a renewed work ethic including eradicating corruption, nepotism and the WASTA system. In several cases highly paid positions are taken by foreign workers. A solution could be to always give priority to local applicants. Not only the companies but also the ministry of labor and social affairs needs capacity building. More official job opportunities could get created if the public and informal sector were reduced. Starting a business in Iraq is tedious since the rules and regulations are confusing and hard to abide by (business conditions rank 165 out of 190 according to World Bank).

For those returnees who attempt to find employment despite the difficult labor market situation the following steps can be taken: ask for employment within the family networks, amongst former school mates or friends, seize political and ethnic relations, register with the MoLSa, check out career fairs or homepages such as [www.Jobline.net](http://www.Jobline.net) ; [www.Gulfjobsites.com](http://www.Gulfjobsites.com); [www.Unjobs.com](http://www.Unjobs.com) ; [www.Hawa.jobs](http://www.Hawa.jobs); [www.ncciraqjobs.com](http://www.ncciraqjobs.com). If returnees opt for starting their own business, they will most likely do it in the informal sector. Many small businesses get established by young people with little education. The businesses include services in the domestic industries, street vendors, family farms in form of an informal business. The new entrepreneurs usually struggle with a lack of funding, modern technologies, infrastructure (such as electricity or internet), business competition culture, bank accounts or an official registration. Business start-ups in the informal sector are not perceived as desirable by the families. It is hard for entrepreneurs to restrain from playing along with the corruption system. Around 98% of the returnees vote for a small business start-up as reintegration assistance. However, in most cases the budget does not cover the rent, equipment, goods, other devices, first salary. For returnees who do not have specific skills and experiences, the scale of business options is very limited. In this case the go-to business ideas are: taxi; mini market; barber shop; sales of shoes, textiles, mobile phones, etc. To create a sustainable business in Iraq in the informal sector, Dr. Köcher recommends 4-5 months of investment before the business shows revenue.

Soran Jawher explained the challenges of starting a business or finding work in Iraq. The private sector in which people should find employment or start businesses easily is weak and the competition little. The people working in the private sector struggle with limited financial resources to start their businesses or to keep them going. External funding is also not really an option, since very few banks give loans. In addition to that unclear, complex regulations hinder small entrepreneurs from running their businesses smoothly. In the case of people owning and running a business they have little options of getting advice to grow their business. Business consultants are



rare. Regarding the employment situation the limited vacancies in the private sector create a high demand on jobs. Only the very best or people with contacts are getting hired. The majority of Iraqi workers struggle with (long-term) unemployment. The competition for jobs in safer areas is not only amongst locals but also amongst a high number of internally displaced persons (IDP) and refugees.

The attending counsellors discussed during the workshop if and how professional trainings could benefit the reintegration process.

<b>Professional training in the host country</b>	
Advantages	Disadvantages
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Creation of plans / ideas for a future</li> <li>-Stimulation to start working, stay active</li> <li>-hopes and ideas start</li> <li>-find out if I have the skill or not</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-gap between knowledge in the host country and home country</li> <li>-wrong expectation</li> <li>-Hopes to stay here</li> <li>-certificates from EU are maybe not accepted</li> <li>-language problem</li> <li>-attitude problem: role of employer and worker</li> <li>- little availability in most European countries (except of Germany and the Netherlands)</li> </ul>

<b>Professional training in the country of return</b>	
Advantages	Disadvantages
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-motivation</li> <li>-perspective</li> <li>-in line with domestic school system</li> <li>-will maybe generate an income or job</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-no income but (high) living expenses</li> </ul>

### Reintegration service providers

The field of reintegration services is highly diversified in Iraq. The reintegration support organizations differ depending on the governorate. The reintegration services are not centralized and the majority of the organizations work little in consultation with the other organizations of the same field. Hence, a doubling of the same services is inevitable. The great variety of offers may confuse returnees. The GMAC made an overview of all organizations offering support to returnees:

1. IOM (Job placement, Business startup / development, vocational training, Cash Assistant)
2. ETTT (Job placement, Business startup / development, vocational training, In kind/Cash support - ERRIN)
3. German Center for Jobs, Migration and Reintegration (GMAC)

The GMAC offers its reintegration services in Erbil, Sulaymaniyah, Duhok, Halabja, Kirkuk, Baghdad and Basra. Its services include advice and guidance on social, cultural and economic reintegration, employment support, business start-up and development, vocational training, psychosocial and legal support. The center is run by the German GIZ but the services are open to returnees as well as the local population. The GMAC assessed its clients and profiled them from 2013 – 2019: Out of 1321 clients 41% were 25-35 years old. When asked about the reasons of return to Iraq, 38,8% returnees named the rejection of their asylum cases. When asked about their professional perspective, 46% stated that they would like to find a job or start a

business start-up. 90% of the 1321 returnees needed cash assistance and housing. The survey also showed that the lack of housing and lack of income hindered a smooth reintegration process (72%).

4. Jiyan Foundation for Human Rights (Provides MHPSS, Legal advice and support and health support to returnees)

Only in the Northern part of Iraq the Jiyan foundation is active. Its mission to (re)building lives and to empower returnees is implemented in its offers such as social work, family counseling and crisis intervention, psychological counseling and treatment (Diagnostics and Assessment, Psychological Treatment, Empowerment and Awareness-Raising) and medical care for disadvantaged families

5. Hawar Help (Vocational training for women)
6. Quandil (Registration, Legal Aid and Protection (Dohuk)
7. UN Women (Vocational training, Job placement)
8. British council Iraq (Vocational trainings)
9. Danish Red Cross (Business startup / development, CfW, Vocational Training, apprenticeship in Mosul; Psychosocial support services for young Iraqi with special focus on returnees in Baghdad)
10. Amar Foundation (Vocational Training, Employment promotion, career advice, job fair in Baghdad)
11. And more depending on the location

### Reintegration Challenges

Reintegration in Iraq remains a challenge. Similarly to the local population the returnees struggle to make a livelihood, to get access to food, shelter, transportation, electricity, water, education and healthcare. The instable security situation keeps returnees under constant apprehension. As named beforehand complex regulations make it hard to get civil documentation. Single women returning face further challenges. In case of young females returning they might struggle to continue their educational career since female education is frowned upon. If they have degrees, it is still hard to find job opportunities especially in rural areas. As women might have gotten accustomed to Western cultural norms and freedom, they will face challenges with taking on the traditional role of an Iraqi woman. Sexual and gender-based violence is sometimes inescapable.



## 4. Syria – Travel documents and travel routes

### Disclaimer

The last day of the workshop about voluntary return to the Middle East focused on voluntary return to Syria. The organizers of the workshop made clear that the information shared about Syria was an attempt to give a first basis for discussion for the attending return and reintegration counsellors. By no means the information given is comprehensive and can be solely relied on during counselling. The situation in the country still changes frequently which might already render the information outdated. The two speakers presented two very different perspectives about life in Syria now but also had different people groups in mind. Voluntary return to Syria is still highly debatable. The IOM does not support voluntary return to Syria so far. Many governments and NGOs still don't support voluntary return to Syria either. Nevertheless, the demand for return counselling of Syrians with a residence permit increases and several AVRR counselling centers have started working with Syrians.

### Travel documents

Mr. Al Tayyan, who leads the McSa e travel solutions UG travel agency located in Berlin, presented information on travel documents and travel routes. This travel agency is also an agent for Cham Wings, the Syrian airline, as well as for Wings of Lebanon, the Lebanese airline. Cham Wings offers domestic flights as well as international flights from the Damascus airport to Teheran, Moscow, Yerevan, Muscat, Kuwait, Khartoum, Baghdad, Erbil, Qamishli currently.

In order to be able to travel to Syria, clients need to have the right travel document. Currently two options are possible: Syrian passport or Syrian Laissez-Passer. Recognized Palestinian refugees can hold a special Syrian passport for refugees. A new passport can be obtained from the Syrian consulate in the respective European countries. The applicant needs to send several documents in advance and personally attend an appointment at the consulate. He or she needs to show a Syrian ID or an old passport. The passport with a normal processing time of 4 to 6 weeks costs 265€. In case of an emergency the Syrian citizen can apply for a 2-day Express Passport which costs 705€. The passport allows Syrians to travel from different cities in Europe and even fly detours via Qatar. In comparison to the passport the Laissez-Passer with a validity of 3 months costs only 25€ (plus 25€ registration fee) and takes about 3 weeks processing time (in Belgium, however, the Laissez-Passer takes 2 -3 days to be issued but is only valid for 14 days). Syrian Laissez-Passers are currently accepted by few airlines which limits the cities to start the return journey. In Germany for example only Lufthansa Airlines accepts Syrian Laissez-Passers until now.

### Travel routes

Traveling to Syria from Europe can be organized in two different ways. If Syrians entered the European Union with a real Syrian passport and an official visa to one of the Schengen States, these Syrians have the option to travel from Europe to Lebanon by plane and take a taxi or bus to the Syrian border (1,5 hours). Experience has shown, however, that many Syrians were denied entry to Lebanon or were even denied by the airline at the airport of departure. Sometimes a Lebanese visa was requested and in the worst case the returning clients could be denied entry to Syria. If external (state) funding enables the return, the government usually wants to see prove that the client returned to the home country – hence a plane ticket to Syria. In this case and for all other Syrians traveling with a passport without an EU visa Mr. Al Tayyan recommends currently traveling from Europe via Teheran, Iran, to Damascus, Syria. The only exception is for Syrians traveling from the Netherlands – they will need to travel via Moscow, Russia, to Damascus, Syria. Traveling via Teheran

is possible because Syrians don't need an Iranian tourist visa for transit if they have a connecting flight with Cham Wings Airlines. Cham Wings has an office in the Imam Khomeini Airport in Teheran and its staff picks up the luggage and checks it in for the flight to Syria. Syrians traveling from different European countries (aside the Netherlands) via Moscow is not yet possible due to luggage and transit problems.

#### **Unaccompanied Minors<sup>21</sup>**

- Unaccompanied minors under 12 years are not accepted.
- 13-18 years of age: need the approval from the legal guardian with an official guardian document.

Needed:

- Contact of the family in Syria, Name, Telephone number with official document (Family book, Birth Certificate,...)
- Confirmation from the Immigration department
- Name / Contact / from the person who will accompany the UM to the Departure Airport.
- Cham Wings will take care of the unaccompanied minor upon arrival to Damascus and according to IATA regulations.

#### **Elderly Passengers / WCHR - Passengers<sup>22</sup>**

- Assistance for elderly passengers and passengers with limited capabilities can be provided upon request.
- Cham Wings has to be notified in advance if special assistance is needed
- Any special medical, physical requirement should be provided with medical certificate.
- Pregnant women should have a medical certificate. Depends on medical report, not allowed in 7th or 9th month of pregnancy

#### **Luggage<sup>23</sup>**

Free Baggage Allowance depends on the baggage allowance policy of the first carrier, but should not exceed 30 KG, e.g. if Lufthansa allowance from Germany is 1 Piece a 23 KG, the max. free allowance for whole route is 1 Piece a 23 KG.

If the first carrier offers another policy (Like Austrian, they have now 2 Pcs a 23 KG) the max allowance should not exceed 30 KG and in such case the allowance will be 2 Pcs 1 a 23 KG + 1 a 7 KG or 2 Pcs a 15 KG. Excess Baggage Rates varies as per fare conditions (Piece concept or KG Concept).

Copy of the Baggage Label:

→ For all passengers the luggage will be checked till Teheran. No check in to Damascus is possible for the time being.

→ After getting the boarding Pass and the Baggage Label, Cham Wings need a copy of the label to forward it to their station in Tehran to take care of the luggage to Damascus.

<sup>21</sup> PowerPoint Yassin Al Tayyan, Agent for Cham Wings, 09. May 2019

<sup>22</sup> See above

<sup>23</sup> See above

Mr. Al Tayyan's conclusion at the end of the workshop day was that voluntary return of Syrians who used to be non-political and law-abiding and lived a traditional life should not lead to problems concerning returning and reintegrating in Syria. Each case needs to be treated individually.

### Security

Mr. Simon Jacob, an Assyrian journalist based in Germany but traveling to the Middle East a lot, gave an overview of the security and socio-economic situation in Syria. The geopolitical situation in Syria dates back to Sykes-Picot Agreement of 16. May 1916. The agreement divided Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, and Palestine into French- and British-administered areas. The borders in Mesopotamia drawn by the French and British divided ethnic groups (Kurdish, Assyrian, Yezidi, Turkish, Alawi, etc.). These ethnic groups are structured in tribes, clans, and families. The separation of the clans still fuels the conflict today. During the civil war in Syria entire tribes made alliances with the war parties. Returning male Syrians will be asked about their tribal background (such as Egaidat, Baggara, Kul'ayeen, Abeed) and might consequently have difficulties depending on the tribes' political and belligerent activities. The country has, broadly defined, four different military zones now: Syrian government (Assad), Interim Government (Syrian opposition), Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (Kurdish and other ethnic minorities) and Turkish occupation. Regarding security Mr. Jacob pointed out a few provinces according to the number of recorded violent risk indicator events in March 2019: Tartous, Hasaka and Damascus were very safe; the situation in Idlib, on the contrary, aggravated intensely; Deir Al Zour and Hama still suffer from great violence and instability. When talking to clients about voluntary return to certain regions, the clients need to double check with their relatives on site who will be the better judges about the security situation than the AVRR counsellor in Europe. The security situation is ever-changing in Syria and it is not foreseeable in which direction the conflicts will evolve.

### Economic situation

Different types of jobs are found in the four different military zones. The job market is still very limited. Depending on the military zone and the tribe membership doors to jobs get opened or closed. Mr. Jacob gave information about the labor market from before the war first. In 2009 20% of the GDP was generated by the agricultural sector (cotton, fruits, vegetables and other crops). 17% of the working population worked in agriculture then. 2-3% of the labor force worked in the field of mining and 5% of the working population was hired for the oil and natural gas production. The industry and manufacturing sector generated 27,3% of the GDP in 2010, providing work for 16% of the labor forces (mainly in Aleppo, Homs and Damascus). Most people were employed in the services sector (67%) in 2008. The distribution of the GDP in agriculture (20,0%), industries (19,6%) and service (60,4%) in 2017 seem relatively similar to the situation before the war. After 2014 50% of the remaining working population struggled with unemployment. The loss of work was also owed to the massive sanctions after the outbreak of the civil war. And the currency showed an inflation rate of 30% per year. The following list shows current average salaries:

Job	Salary in Dollar per Month
Regular job	100 \$
Public employee	200 \$
Militia: trooper	150 \$
Militia: sniper	1.500 \$

The income of 100\$ per month is not enough. In many cases family members living abroad try to send money to their relatives in Syria.

Living expenses for food and housing are listed in the following:

II. ECONOMY				
Living expenses				
Food	City/Area	Latest Update	May 2019	
	Aleppo	Damascus	Range	
Basic Menue	7,00 USD	6,00 USD	2,25 USD	7,00 USD
Fast Food meal	2,45 USD	3,57 USD	3,00 USD	5,83 USD
500 g/Chicken	1,46 USD	1,98 USD	6,80 USD	10,00 USD
1 Liter milk	0,45 USD	0,75 USD	0,40 USD	1,00 USD
12 eggs	1,13 USD	1,09 USD	0,90 USD	1,80 USD
1 kg tomatos	0,34 USD	0,50 USD	0,27 USD	0,58 USD
500 gr. Local chees	0,91 USD	1,51 USD	2,00 USD	5,00 USD
1 kg apples	0,47 USD	0,71 USD	0,40 USD	1,00 USD
1 kg potatos	0,26 USD	0,39 USD	0,19 USD	0,60 USD
Water 1.5 Liter	0,39 USD	0,40 USD	0,30 USD	0,50 USD
Housing				
85 m/2, furnished - 1st	388,00 USD	394,00 USD	150,00 USD	500,00 USD
85 m/2, furnished - 2nd	67,00 USD	224,00 USD	40,00 USD	150,00 USD
Utility - Gas, electricity, ... 1 month	22,00 USD	20,00 USD	10,00 USD	40,00 USD
45 m/2, furnished - 1st	58,00 USD	245,00 USD	50,00 USD	300,00 USD
45 m/2, furnished - 2nd	32,00 USD	149,00 USD	30,00 USD	150,00 USD
Utility - Gas, electricity, ... 1 month	12,00 USD	23,00 USD	10,00 USD	30,00 USD
Internet 8 Mbps/1 month	14,00 USD	13,00 USD		
40 " flat screen TV	323,00 USD	320,00 USD		

The price for bread, for which the flour was subsidized by the government until the outbreak of the war, could vary from area to area. The bread in Damascus was in the beginning of the conflict 16 times higher while it remained cheap in other areas.

Mr. Jacob concluded his presentation with saying that young men who used to be politically active or were journalists prior to their flight to Europe should never return. Return would either mean a death sentence, prison or fighting for militias.



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Augsburg

Bayerisches Rotes Kreuz  
Kreisverband Augsburg-Land



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