

# Turkmen in Iraq and International Migration of Turkmen

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## **Turkmen in Iraq and International Migration of Turkmen**

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## I. Introduction: Iraqi Turkmen Population and Turkmen's International Migration

Iraq, today in an extreme political and social turmoil, has been a country of ethnic tensions for decades as its population has been described along the lines of political alignments according to which Iraq is comprised of a Shia majority, a governing Sunni population, the second largest group, the Kurds, and Turkmen along with some other small ethnic groups such as Jewish and Yezidis. In such a demographic structure, ethnic and religious boundaries have been blurred in discussions about contemporary Iraq. However, in fact, despite these groups as mentioned above are key political actors in Iraq, Shia and Sunni divisions include Kurds, Arabs, and Turkmen alike and similarly among Turkmen or Kurds different religious identities can be detected. Despite being geography of conflicts for decades, there is hardly any study about Iraqi demographics in relation to its ethnic components.

Iraqi Turkmen as the smallest of larger ethnic groups in Iraq requires a special attention within the Middle Eastern hub of international relations which often brings regional actors and global powers against each other due to their concerns about their own ethnic minorities. The Kurds being an ethnic group spread over the territories of Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria have been attracting a great deal of attention in this regard and seem to be a key actor in Iraq's political reconstruction today.

Turkmen population in Iraq requires attention because of its relatively small size compared to other actors in relation to the formation of a democratic regime and minority rights issues that may entail. Also equally important is Turkey's concerns about Turkmen as a Turkish population mainly residents in oil rich Kirkuk and surrounding towns over which Turkey have been carrying unvoiced ambitions since the early 1920s. Although most international sources indicate a population of around half a million for Turkmen, Turkmen claim their population about 1.5 to 3 million which is also justified by independent agencies: "the Iraqi regime's policy of nationality correction by which Turkomans have been encouraged to assume Arabic names and register as Arabs in the national census. Many Arabised Turkomans are likely to reclaim their true ethnicity the moment the opportunity arises" (ICG, 2003: 7 and Ghai et al. 2003: 5). Turkey's concern is also about the checks and balances with the Kurds through a Turkmen political existence in Northern Iraq as it is worried about an independent Kurdish state's influence over (i.e. spill over effect) the Kurdish populations of Turkey's own, mainly living in southeast provinces.

*“Iraqi Turkmen as the smallest of larger ethnic groups in Iraq requires a special attention”*

This study outlines the characteristics of Iraqi Turkmen population and patterns of their international migration. By doing so, it is aimed to provide a snapshot of a significant ethnic group's demography for policy makers, and planning actors involved in Iraq's reconstruction following the two-decades long warfare. Since without reliable information on different segments of Iraqi population, it would be harder to establish suitable strategies in such geography with so many international and regional actors involved through ethnic politics. Therefore, this study was planned to identify Iraqi Turkmen's basic demographic and socio-economic features in relation to their international migration because the literature on international migration suggests that political conflict, wars, and ethnic tensions are likely to trigger or facilitate out-migration. If this is so, then, stability in Iraq without having a proper census identifying the ethnic stakeholders in national politics will be extremely difficult for a long while. Outgoing populations become important as it is also a possibility that any particular group might have been involved in such an out-migration more than others as this particular group might be the one that most suffered from the conflict and have been surpassed by others. The hypothesis here is that this group in Iraqi case could be Iraqi Turkmen. Thus this study aimed at analysing the data collected through a randomly selected representative sample of Iraqi Turkmen to test this hypothesis by examining international migration patterns of Iraqi Turkmen and at the same time outlining some demographic features to help understanding the needs of population politics in Iraq.

*“... suffering from the Arabisation policies of Saddam regime as they were forced to resign from their ethnic identities...”*

Turkmen have been suffering from the Arabisation policies of Saddam regime as they were forced to resign from their ethnic identities in favour of Arab identity (ICG, 2003 and Ghai et al. 2003). The reconstruction process following the fall of Saddam regime in Iraq stands as an opportunity for all Iraqis to live in a democratic and just Iraq. For Turkmen to benefit from this opportunity, their existence, their population should be clarified and thus they can participate in

Iraq's economic, political and cultural life as equal partners as other ethnicities without giving up their own Turkmen identity.

In this regard Global Strategy Institute (Ankara, Turkey) believe in that this study will contribute to the goal of informing international community about the existence of Turkmen in Iraq and the problems they are facing. Global Strategy Institute also concerned about Turkmen in Iraq since they are an extension of Turks in Anatolia and their problems can only be solved within a united Iraq.

According to Turkmen resources Turkmen population in Iraq is around three million despite it has not been widely recognised. According to the last census in Iraq when Turkmen were allowed to register themselves as Turkmen in 1957, their population was 567,000 out of 6.3 million total population in the country. However, other ethnic groups, especially the Kurds, deny such a large Turkmen population and claim their population is less than 5 percent of

the total population. As with all minorities in Iraq, the size of the community is burdened with controversy. Iraqi Turkmen Front (ITF) suggests a figure of about 3 million Turkmen in Iraq (13 per cent of the Iraqi population). The other group named Turkmen Cultural Association (TCA) presents a much smaller number: one million Turkmen, of whom some 25,000 are live in the territory controlled by the Kurdistan Regional Government (mostly in the town of Arbil). (ICG interview with Jawdat Najar, TCA leader, Arbil, 27 August 2002). The head of the Islamic Union of Iraqi Turkmen based in Damascus, Abbas Bayati, stated there are between 1.5 and 2 million Turkmen in Iraq, evenly divided between Sunnis and Shiites, and that about 300,000 of these live in the KRG-controlled area. (ICG, 2003: 7) However these figures are far from accuracy as nobody can verify it.

Unless a proper and fair population census is done in Iraq, these figures will continue to vary at different sources run by different political concerns. For the Kurds, the obvious reason for denial is that geographically, Turkmen population is living in northern Iraq where mostly the Kurds inhabit because admitting Turkmen existence entails sharing the land with Turkmen. Within this context, Turkey is concerned about the problems of Turkmen, fellow Turks in Iraq, to ensure they have equal rights and maintain their own culture, language, and traditions with dignity.

Therefore as a pioneering effort this study is very important to understand Iraqi Turkmen international migration for the first time employing scientific methods. Identifying the patterns of international migration and characteristics of Iraqi Turkmen people in general and those migrating will sure contribute to the knowledge in the field of migration studies as well as enabling policy makers and planners to base their actions on objective information and scientific knowledge rather than speculation. Therefore it is expected that the results of this study are going to be exploited by international agencies, governments, policy makers, practitioners, and finally academics and students. Timeliness of the study is another asset which adds more value to this effort as Iraq is through a critical process of reconstruction which will definitely be influential in reshaping the affairs in the Middle East. This study is going to reveal the reasons of Turkmen migration from Iraq, their future tendencies toward migration and so will inform the Iraqi government and international community to provide evidence in support of solutions to the problems in Iraq.

## II. The Research Process

This research had become inevitable and well needed especially after the chaos and turbulence appeared in Iraq following the attack of the USA and coalition forces in 2003. Negotiations including Iraqi Kurdish leaders triggered worries among Iraqi Turkmen as most Turkmen live in so-called mainly Kurdish populated areas in the North of Iraq.

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Following a preparation period, 40 interviewers were trained to apply a four-module questionnaire to about 1400 randomly selected Iraqi Turkmen households in selected cities and towns in Iraq where a sizeable Turkmen population is expected to exist according to the past census results, literature and also on the basis of interviews made with key informants from the Iraqi Turkmen community in Turkey.

Altunkopru, Baghdad, Besir, Dakuk, Erbil, Hanekin, Kirkuk, Musul, Suleymaniye, Taze, Telafer, Tuz, and Zeynelabidin were selected. However, it had not been possible under the current conditions in Iraq to complete all interviews as initially planned. As a result, some areas had to be excluded due to high insecurity and practical reasons reducing the final sample size to include 1040 households with 5986 individuals (2992 females and 2994 males) in 12 cities and towns.

*“In July 2004, over 1,000 households were visited to collect information about 6,000 individuals in Iraqi cities including Baghdad, Kirkuk, Musul, and Erbil.”*

In every town and city three districts were selected randomly and within each selected district one street was randomly selected. Contacting and conducting interviews with 15 Turkmen households from each selected streets were planned. Method to select Turkmen households was visiting houses beginning with the first house in the street until finding a Turkmen household and continuing the same procedure till completing 15 interviews. When the street accommodates too few households then the interviewers need to proceed to the next street until the interviews in a selected area is completed.

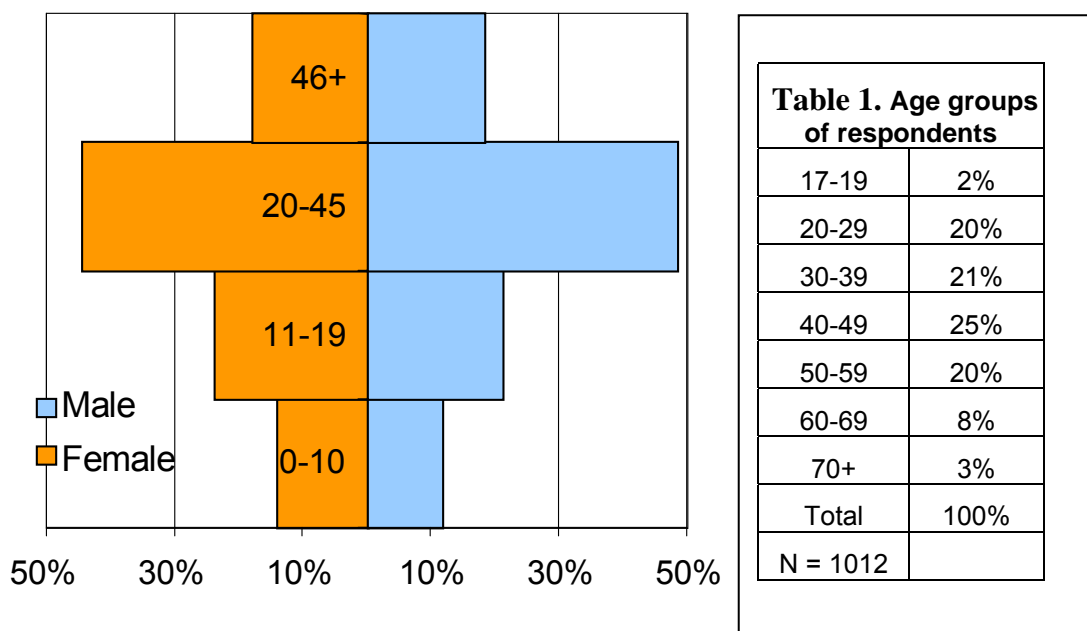
The questionnaire aimed to collect information on the households' background characteristics including the size, living conditions, employment and education status of members, relative wealth and living standard compared to others living in the same area, migration experiences of household members, if there is any, migrant's decision making processes and factors influencing migration decision, along with the information about migration experiences of communities of which the household members are a part. Module A covered the background characteristics of key respondent from household, while Module B and D were about household features including size of household, living conditions, quality of the living environment, cultural features such as religion and language, and values of household members. Module C was about characteristics and experiences of migrants themselves. Obviously due to the nature of international migration, it was not possible to find migrant actor to answer questions except in very few cases in which migrants were luckily visiting their families back home. In other cases, proxy respondents were used to collect information about the experiences of migrants.

### III. General Characteristics of Turkmen

*“36 percent of households were reported to have at least one member who ever migrated abroad.”*

In 1040 households, the total number of members was found 5986 which included 2992 females and 2994 males as displayed in the figure below. Almost three quarters of respondents were household heads including 15 percent women. Unless the actual migrant is available, these key respondents were used as proxy to answer questions about migration experiences in module C of the survey questionnaire. 36 percent of households were reported to

have at least one member who ever migrated abroad. These households are classified as “migrant households” in this study.



**Figure 1. Age structure of household members**

As the table above shows respondents were almost equally distributed among ten years age groups largest group being persons between 40 and 49. 23 percent of respondents were women whilst 20 percent was never married as opposed to 76 percent married and 4 percent divorcees, separates and widows.

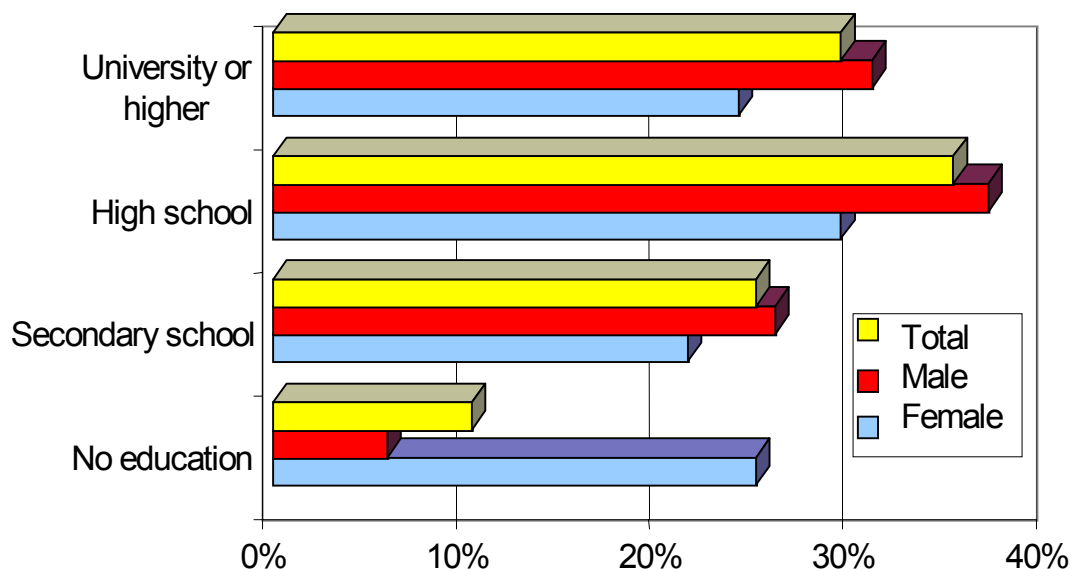
*“29 percent of Iraqi Turkmen are either university graduates or at least enrolled with a degree program once”*

Respondents were found highly educated as 29 percent of them either university graduates or at least enrolled with a degree program once. However gender difference is striking especially among those who have no education at all: as opposed to only less than 6 percent of



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men, a quarter of women have no education. There are also differences between men and women in other educational level categories ranging from 4 percent to 9 percent. Only about 10 percent of the total population did not have formal education and this proves that Iraqi Turkmen are a highly educated group. This is even clearer when Iraq's very low overall ranking in Human Development Index is considered.



**Figure 2. Educational attainment amongst Iraqi Turkmen**

64 percent of households have nobody ever migrated. Total number of migrants fled Iraq at some point in time including current migrants reported in these 1040 households contacted were 590 in 371 households (36 percent of the total) that corresponds to 10 percent of the whole survey population for whom a special questionnaire module was used to gather information about their migration experiences.

## IV. Living Environment of Iraqi Turkmen Population

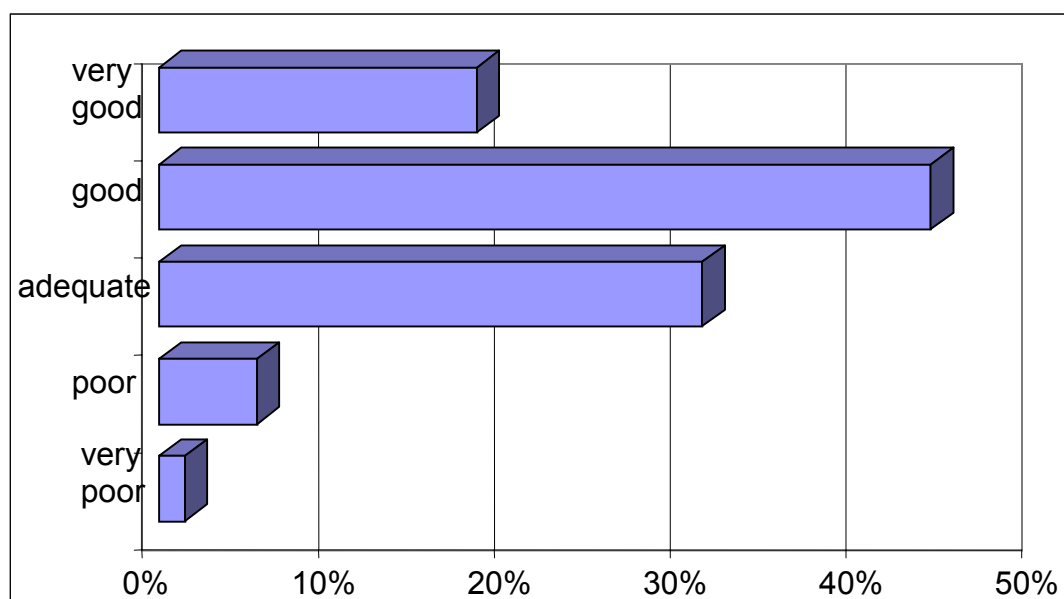
For the quality of life, a set of questions were used examining the type and ownership of the house, number of sleeping rooms, material used in the roof, sanitation facilities, water sources, and possession of household goods and appliances. Also few questions were used to collect data on relative welfare and wealth of the household in their own locality, including a question about the household's income level. This section also gathered information about the remittances to understand household's benefit from and connection to migration.

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Although the type of housing can be a misleading measure for welfare, it still depicts socio-economic differences and ownership of the house or flat surely defines the wealth of household to a great extent. About 90 percent of all live in houses whereas 9 percent live in flats. Nearly 60 percent of them own the house or flat they live in while every one in three lives in rented accommodation. 85 percent of these accommodations have water piped into houses for their sole use but about 6 percent have shared water sources.

Quality and availability of sanitation facilities are important indicators of ones living environment. More than half of Iraqi Turkmen households (53%) have flush toilets in their homes and 45% use closed pit toilets. Only a small fraction of them (2 %) have open pit toilets. Sharing toilet is not a common practice among Iraqi Turkmen.

Alongside the respondents' own views about the quality of their living environments, interviewers also rated the overall state of the houses where sampled households were resident. Our researchers in the fieldwork reported that only 7 percent of houses where Iraqi Turkmen live lack quality as they were not adequate. 44 percent reported good quality and 18 percent very good quality houses.



**Figure 3. Overall quality of Turkmen houses**

Number of sleeping rooms or bed rooms per person is also an indicator of the quality of life as it reflects the crowding –or density in occupation- in the house which entails the opportunity of one having his or her own private room. Among Iraqi Turkmen, individuals in less than 40 percent of households have this opportunity while more than half of them has to share rooms with others in the house. However average number of sleeping rooms per person for the whole Turkmen population under investigation is 1.2. When this is considered with the fact that average number of members in Iraqi Turkmen households is about 5, it proves that we have a reasonably well-off population group which obviously is not likely to suffer from overcrowding.

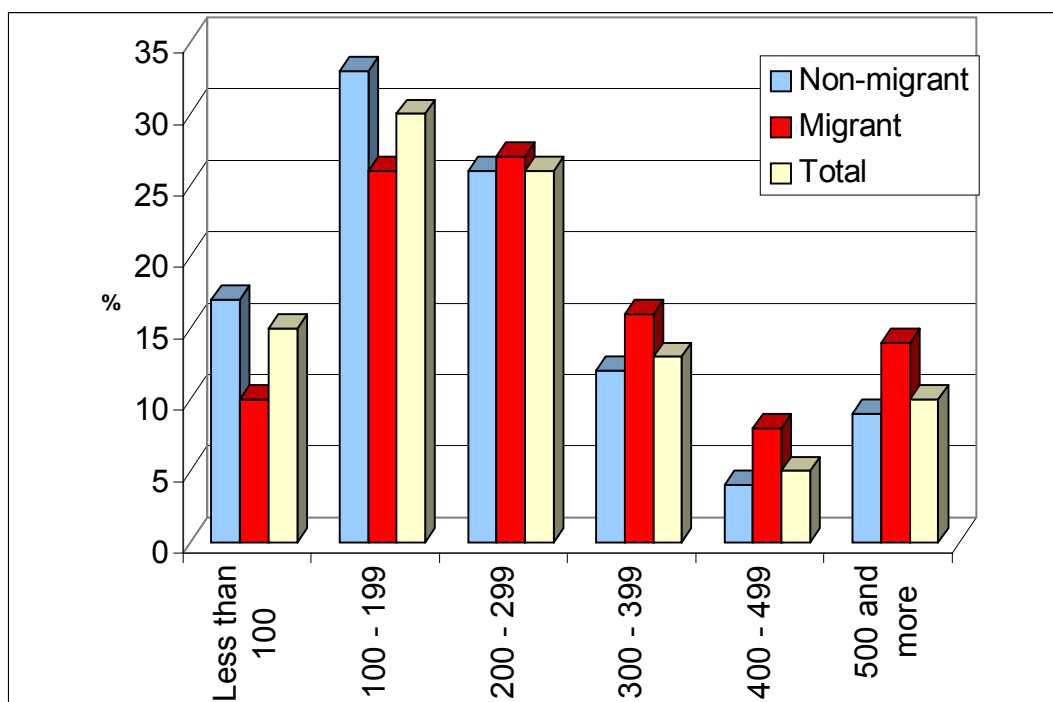
Being mostly urban dwellers, only a quarter of Turkmen own arable land and one third of this was confiscated by Saddam's regime. In assessing the welfare of Turkmen households, ownership of household goods was questioned. A record of household goods in possession was taken including radio, television, gas or electric oven, phone, fridge, washing machine, dishwasher, computer, bicycle, motorcycle, car, tractor. These are considered as basics and indicators of household's welfare. However for cross check, average income of the household, own description of financial situation of the household and household's comparative status were recorded. It is clear that almost every household have a TV, a radio, an oven and a fridge. However, one fourth do not have a washing machine whilst one third do not have a phone. Dishwasher is, on the otherhand, only a luxury item possessed by only five 5 percent of households. Half of households have a car and one third have a bcycle while only ten percent have a tractor and five percent have a motorcycle. Similarly computer is also enjoyed by only 15 percent of Turkmen households. It should be noted here that there are significant differences between households with members migrated abroad and those without (Table 2).

*“Iraqi Turkmen is a well-off population with all sufficient living standards and seems less likely to move abroad unless they are forced”*

**Table 2: Household goods in possession %**

	Households		
	Non-migrant	Migrant	Total
Radio	94	98	96
TV	99	99	99
Oven	94	98	95
Phone	60	78	67
Fridge	93	98	95
Washer	72	74	73
Dishwasher	4	7	5
Computer	13	18	15
Motorcycle	4	7	5
Bcycle	25	35	28
Tractor	9	10	10
Car	46	57	50
Number of households	665	371	1036

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**Figure 4. Average monthly household income**

Financial status of households is measured by average monthly income of the household along with comparative financial status and perceived financial situation of the household. As figure 4 displays, majority of Iraqi Turkmen homes are living on an average monthly income of between 100 to 300 US Dollars that is over national averages. However migrant households are enjoying better incomes compared to non-migrants. Iraq's GDP per capita has been steadily decreasing from 1999 to 2003 although we do not have figures for 2004. It was 2700 \$USD in 1999 to drop 1600 \$USD in 2003 at purchasing power parity (The World Fact Book, 2003).

The same contrast is evident when perceived and compared financial statuses of households are compared amongst non-migrant and migrant Turkmen. Figure 5 indicates that more than two thirds of Turkmen living on sufficient finances and as good as others living in quite the same financial conditions.

It is obvious from the data, majority of Turkmen live in relatively good economic conditions despite they do have lack of access to some opportunities as vast majority of them have no computers at home and a third of them have no telephone which reduces their communication ability and access to information. However, the reader should always bear in mind the fact that this study draws a picture from a country shattered by a recent war. At the same time, in all respects families with members who migrated abroad are better off than the others.

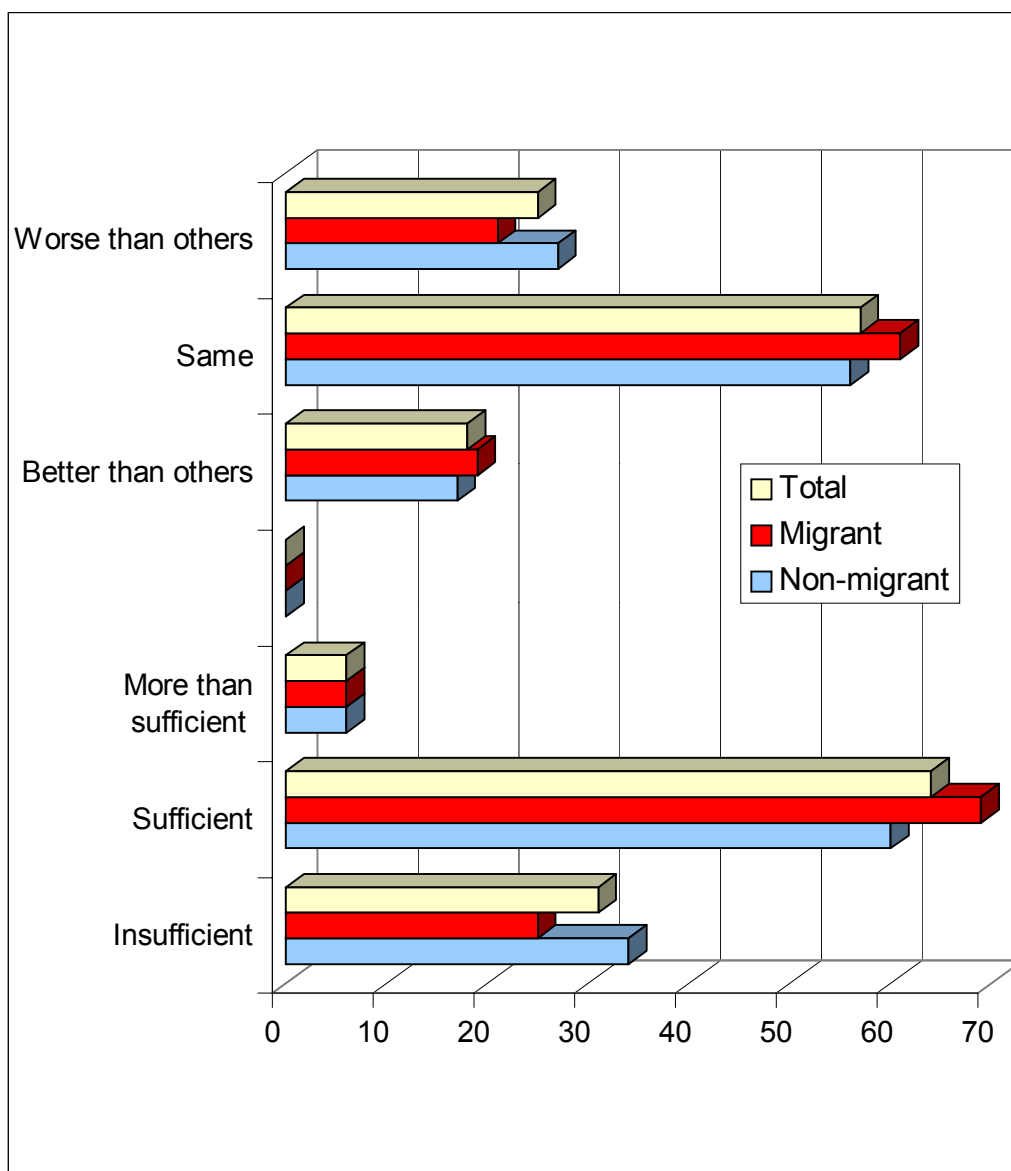


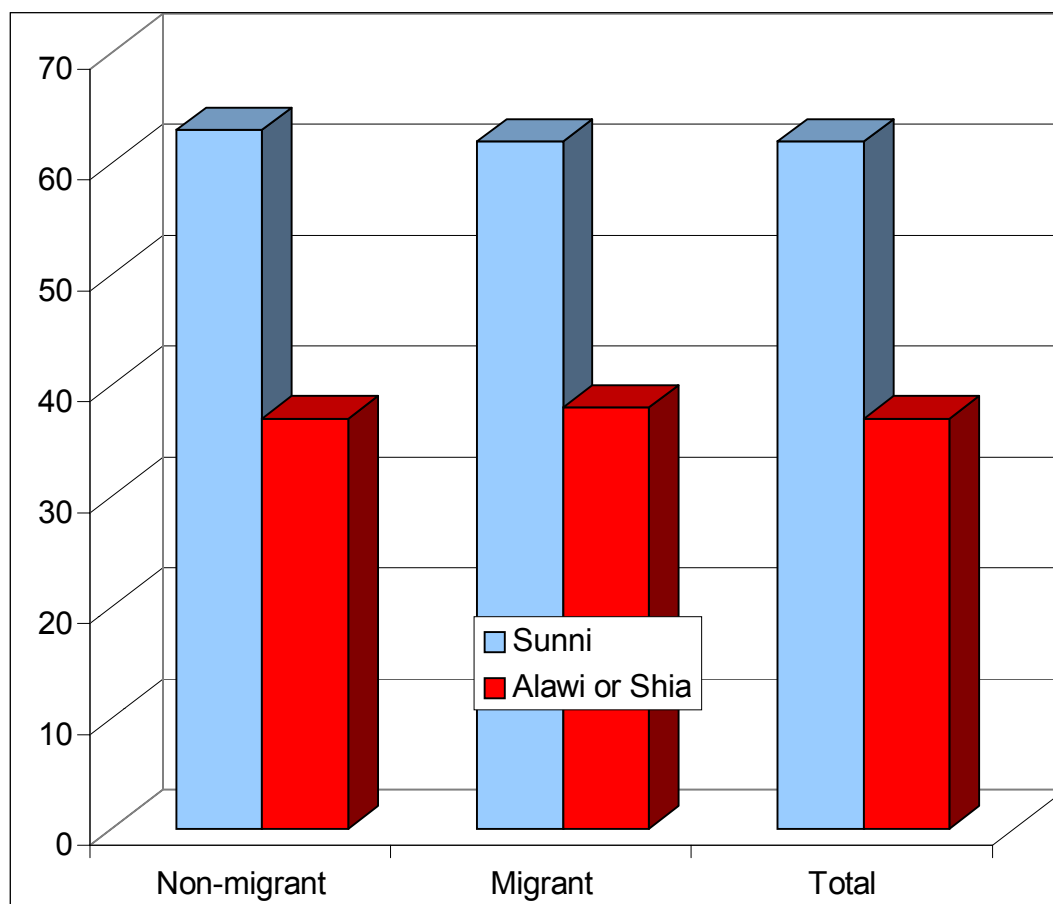
Figure 5. Financial status of the household

## V. Households' Cultural Characteristics and Attitudes and Opinions About International Migration

In this section, ethnic and religious identities of Iraqi Turkmen households are outlined as well as their opinions and attitudes about migrating abroad. Religious affiliation of the household members was asked along with a question about their language preferences and where they feel they belong to. Unlike the general breakdown of religious groups in Iraq, Sunni Muslims are majority among Turkmen as only about one third of them are Alawi or Shia (Figure 6). There are no differences between Sunni and Alawi groups in

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regard to their migration status. This can be indicative of a general feature of Iraqi population that religious identities exist amongst every ethnic group alike. Western, particularly American, experts have often misinterpreted this by seeing Iraq as a country divided between the Kurds, Sunnis and Shiites by mixing religious categories with ethnic ones.

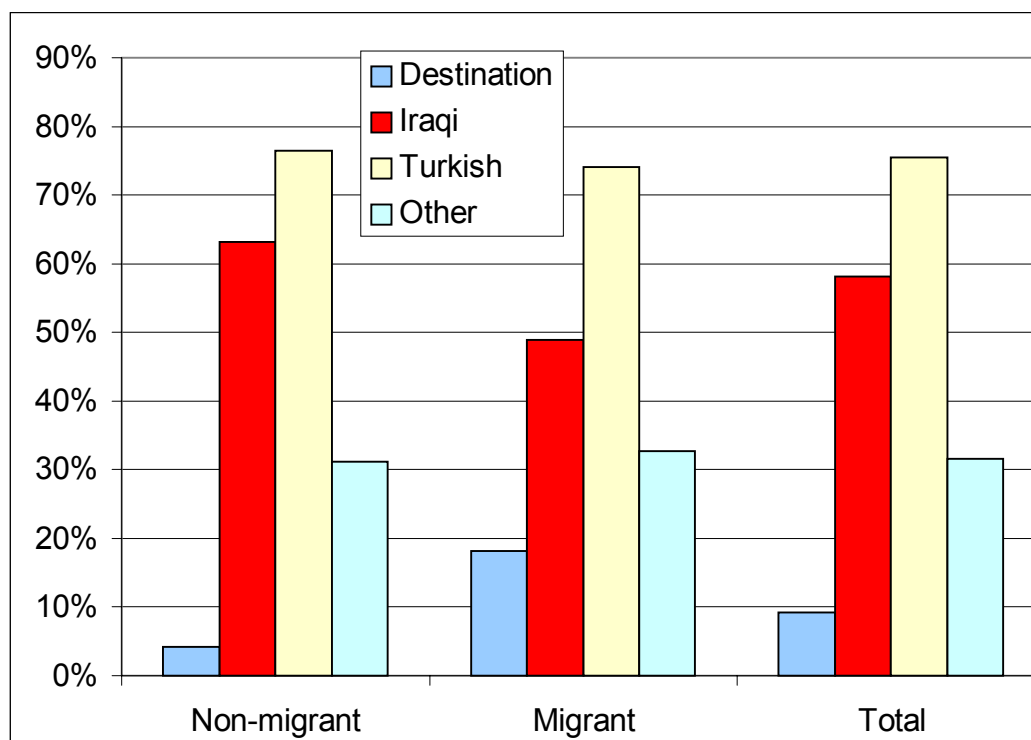


**Figure 6. Religious distribution among Turkmen**

99 percent of Turkmen's first language is Turkmen, a dialect of Turkish, and only less than one percent reported that their first languages were Arabic and/or Kurdish. Second language is Arabic for 90 percent of non-migrant households and 95 percent of migrant households. This difference between migrants and non-migrants can be explained with education effect. Migrants were more likely to be educated so it is reasonable most of them speak Arabic, the official language of Iraq taught through formal compulsory education. The third language among Turkmen is Kurdish for 53 percent of non-migrants and 30 percent for migrants.

*“Turkmen speak Turkish, Arabic, and Kurdish languages.”*

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**Figure 7. Preferences of Turkmen in following media**

Turkish media is very popular among Turkmen and it is no surprise as they share the same language: Turkish. Iraqi media sources are second most favourites among Turkmen followed by other countries' media and destination countries media. The only significant difference is the lower attention to Iraqi media among migrant households. However it is because the most Turkmen follow different media together for example almost 30 percent follow Turkish and Iraqi media together. Noticeable feature here is Iraqi Turkmen's vast interest in Turkish media that may indicate their strong cultural ties with Turkey.

Respondents were also asked where, which country they feel they belong to. The answer was a massive "Iraq" as more than 85 percent of Turkmen voiced this whilst the rest said that they belong to Turkey again expressing their ties to Turkey.

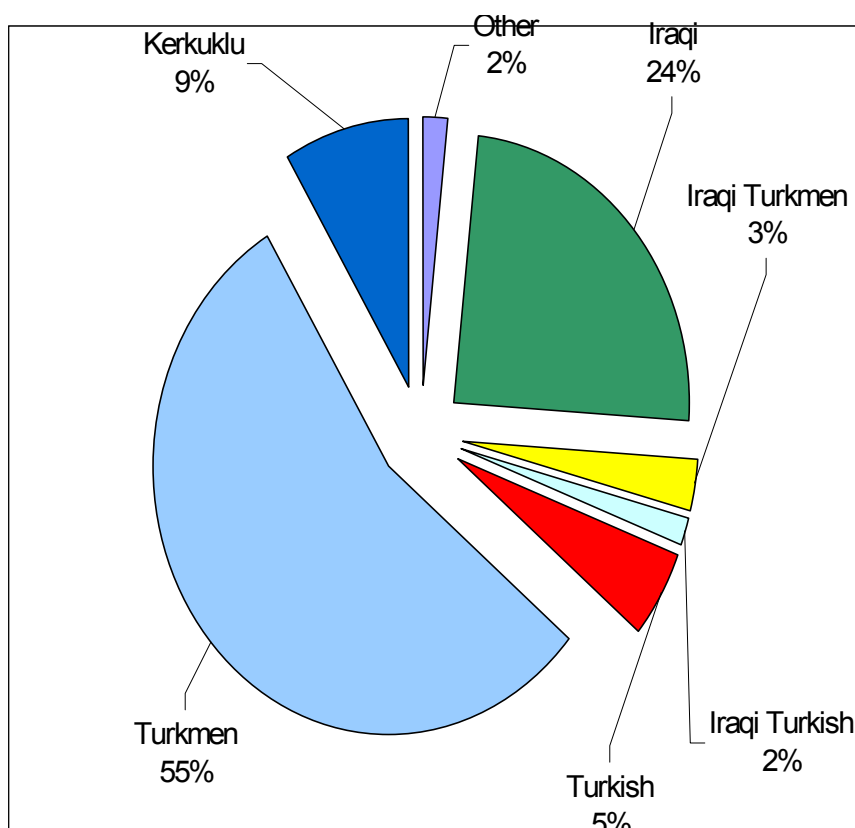


Figure 8. Different identities reported by Turkmen

Another question to examine how Turkmen define themselves was included in the questionnaire despite it was a question used only with migrant households and about half of respondents either left it blank or misunderstood. Among those who answered the question 55 percent of Turkmen were reported defining themselves as “Turkmen” whilst another ten percent preferred “Iraqi Turkmen”, “Iraqi Turkish” or “Turkish” and 8 percent of them, all from Kirkuk, called themselves “Kirkukian”. Only 24 percent of Turkmen defined themselves as “Iraqi” (Figure 8).

*“Turkmen identity is indispensable and Iraq is the homeland.”*

## VI. Opinions and Attitudes Toward Migration and Migration Experiences

Amongst 1040 Turkmen households, 36 percent was identified as migrant households. Mostly based on the answers of proxy respondents, we managed to collect information about the experiences and characteristics of individuals who had ever migrated abroad. Before the individual experiences, proxy respondents’ opinions, perceptions about migration and about migration experiences of others living around is going to be examined. This is to

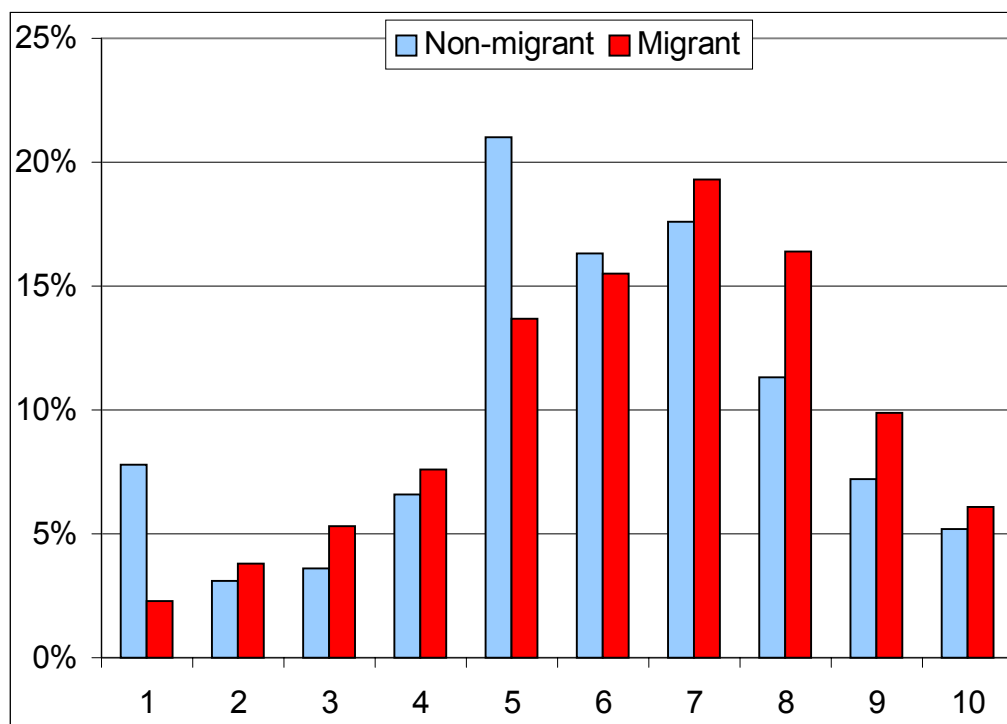


describe the overall context in which migration has occurred in the past and possibly to occur in the future.

*“Most Iraqi Turkmen are happy with their living conditions and would not like to move abroad”*

International migration often occurs when individuals are not satisfied with their own living conditions therefore it is worth to start with this: are Turkmen in Iraq satisfied with their current living standards? Turkmen were asked to rate their level of satisfaction 1 to 10 where 10 means delighted as opposed to 1 reflecting total dissatisfaction. Despite

majority of Turkmen have been happy with their current living conditions (60%), it is indicated that Turkmen with members migrated abroad are more satisfied compared to others (Figure 9). Thus we can argue that not those who are not satisfied but those who have been satisfied are more likely to migrate. But what are their opinions shaping their migration tendencies?



**Figure 9. Satisfaction with the current living conditions**

Turkmen in Iraq disagree with the idea of finding a job is easier abroad as almost half of them claim finding a job is easier in Iraq along another group (about 40%) thinking finding a job is same everywhere. There are significant differences between non-migrant and migrant segments which can be explained with the impact of the first hand information as migrants might have already experienced job search abroad and Iraq and were in a better position to decide whether it was easier in Iraq or abroad. Less than one third of non-migrant Turkmen is convinced that migration will improve their material

conditions while over 40% of them believe it would improve their cultural and political freedoms. Again possibly on the basis of their migration experiences, migrant Turkmen are more likely to believe that living abroad will improve both material conditions, and political and cultural freedoms along with better job opportunities. However it must be noted here that majority of Turkmen is not interested in migrating abroad as most of them do not believe that migration will bring material and non-material prosperity (Figure 10).

*“Most Iraqi Turkmen do not believe that migration will bring material and non-material prosperity.”*

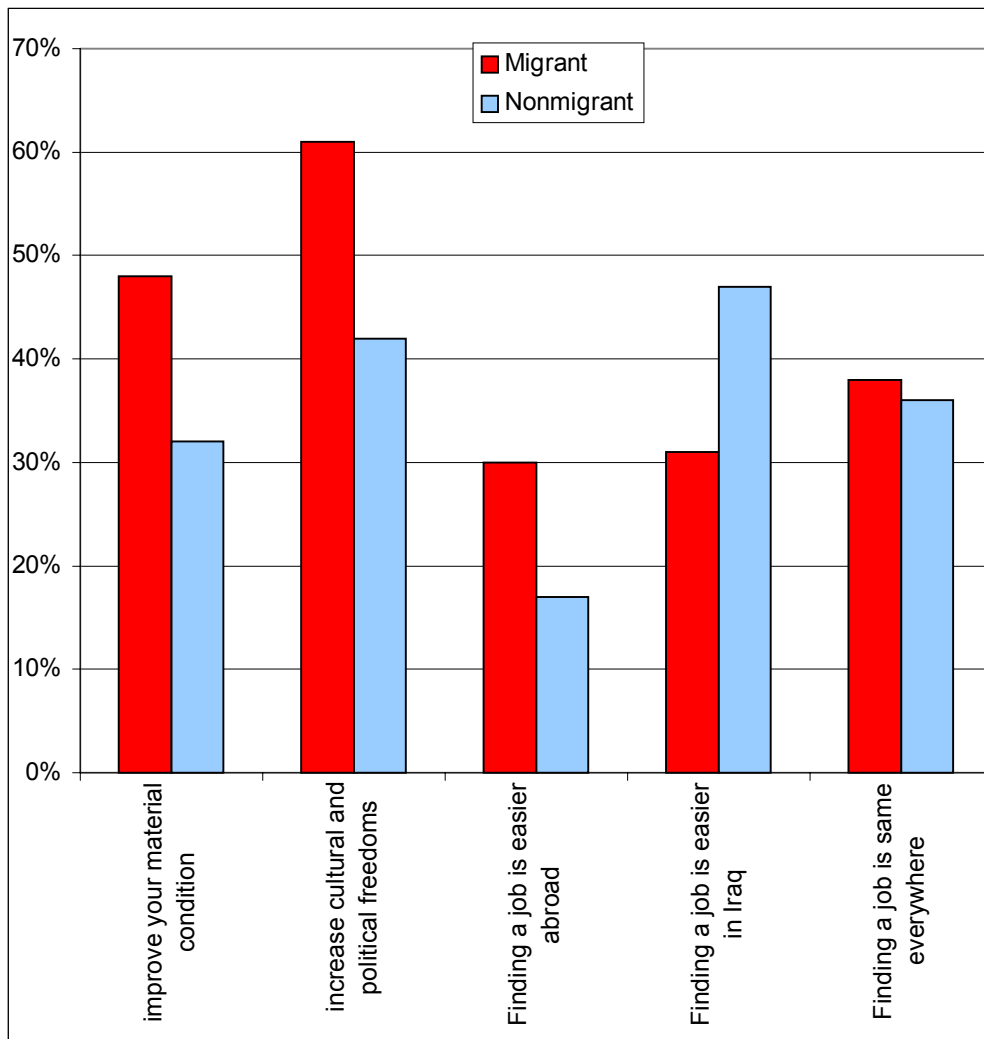
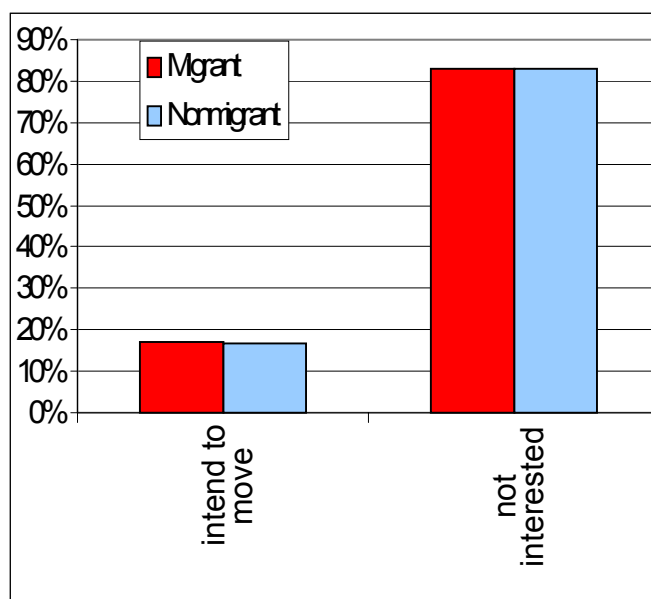


Figure 10. Turkmen opinions on what migration entails

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**Figure 11. Intentions of Turkmen to migrate abroad**

Being not quite convinced about the benefits of migration abroad, only a small fraction of Turkmen, 17% of both non-migrants and migrants were reported that they have intention to move to another country within one year (Figure 11).

For those with intention to move abroad within one year, the reasons were not surprising when migration studies are considered in general. Economic motivation that may include employment or better income or wealth (34%) and conflict, terror (31%) that means also war in the case of Iraq, are most widely mentioned reasons for migration.

*“Only a small fraction of Turkmen were reported that they do intend to move to another country within one year”*

**Table 3. Migration reasons for those with intention to migrate within a year**

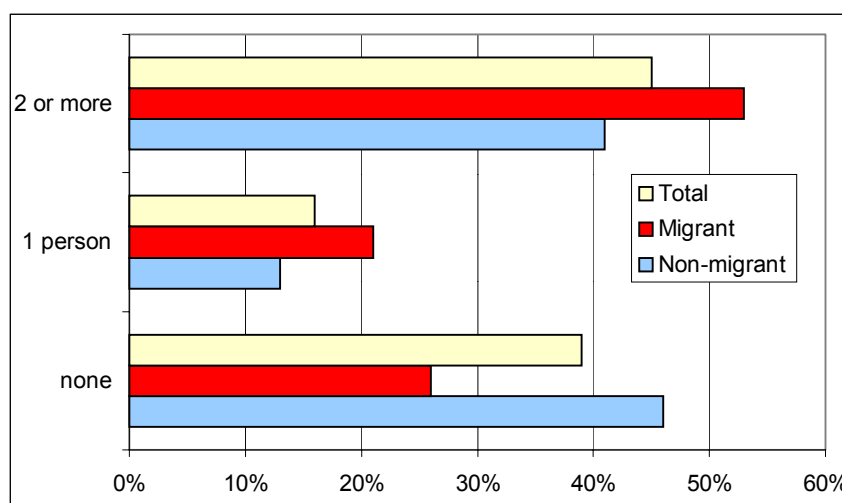
	Non-migrant	Migrant	Total
Economic	36%	32%	34%
family reason	11%	13%	11%
terror / conflict	32%	31%	31%
education	11%	14%	12%
economic and family	2%	1%	2%
economic and terror/conflict	6%	4%	5%
family and terror/conflict	3%	1%	3%
economic family and terror/conflict	-	3%	1%
economic family and education	-	1%	0.5%
Number of respondents	124	72	196

Table 3 shows when mixed motivations also considered economic reasons may rise up to 42% while conflict and terror to 40%. Education constitute a

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reason for only 12% of Turkmen whilst family reasons such as marriage or joining partners or parents or children is a reason for only 11% of them. On the other hand, 58% of non-migrant Turkmen and 42% of migrant Turkmen would suggest others not to move abroad indicating a lower tendency to migrate. This is even more significant when the environment of endless war in Iraq since the early 1980s is taken into account.

Migration abroad was an attractive move for some Turkmen but we also wondered whether it is acceptable for them to move via illegal ways. Would they prefer illegal migration if they are forced to? Only one respondent said “yes” to this question whilst about 42% said “may be” compared to 58% saying “no”. When it comes to the reality, however, the picture is different. Respondents were also asked whether they know anybody who migrated abroad illegally and only 39 percent reported that they do not know any such cases. Among the respondents from migrant households knowing somebody who moved abroad in a clandestine way was more likely compared to others (Figure 12).



**Figure 12. Knowing somebody who migrated illegally**

One in every five Turkmen household received remittances from abroad in the form of goods or money: 45% of migrant households versus 8% of non-migrant households. Among those 218 Turkmen households (corresponds to more than 20% of all) receiving remittances, 94% of remittances were fully or partly used for daily expenses while half of the households used it towards purchase of durable goods such as fridges, tvs, washers etc. Buying estates was concern of only 11% of remittance receiving households. 7% and 19% of remittances were used towards paying into savings accounts and debts respectively. 29% was spent on family health expenses compared to only 4% on family celebrations such as weddings. Religious solidarity in the form of donating to religious institutions or paying alms to the poor in the community received attention of about 8% and 6% of families who had remittances sent back to Iraq by Turkmen abroad. Clearly, even remittances did not lead more Turkmen to move abroad.

Moving from the opinions of the respondent who provided the information about the household to the actual migrant will enable us to see the patterns of Turkmen international migration from Iraq. First of all, who were they will be detailed and followed by why and how they migrated abroad. Finally their opinions and future intentions are measured.

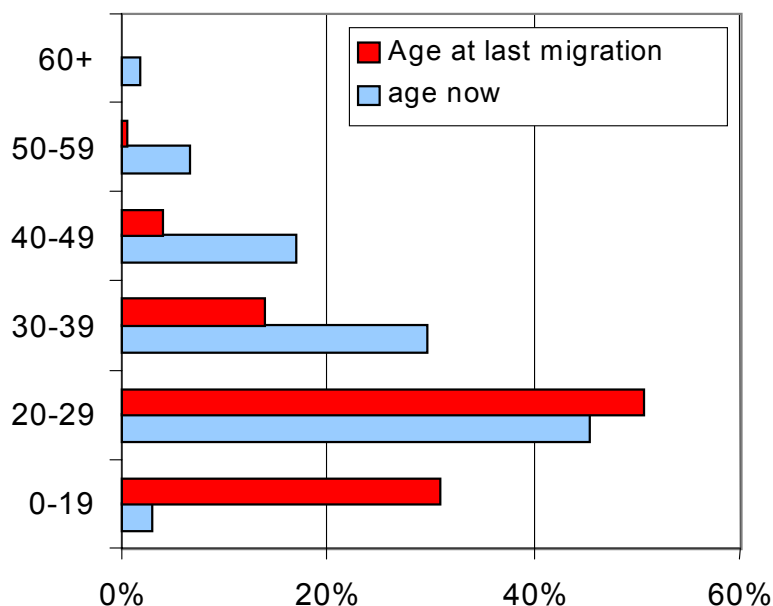
## VII. Migration Patterns and Migrant Characteristics

The focus of the analysis now is on the experiences of 454 migrants from 371 Turkmen households<sup>1</sup> visited in Iraq during the summer of 2004. Most preferred migration destinations for Turkmen in Iraq are Turkey (38%)

*“Turkmen often migrated to Turkey (38%) and Germany (21%).”*

followed by Germany (21%), Denmark (8%), Sweden (6%). Turkey’s leading role is because Turkmen are ethnic relatives of the Turks and it may also be explained by geographical proximity to some extent. Over 50% chose European countries to achieve migration goals while only 7 percent fled to

Middle Eastern countries (except Turkey) while 5% moved to immigration countries of Canada, USA and Australia.



**Figure 13. Age groups of migrants**

<sup>1</sup> Actual number of migrants is 590 but we only interviewed two of them for practical purposes: first to reduce the costs of study and secondly, it would be duplicating information in some cases. Therefore we adopted a strategy assuming two cases from the same household are representative of their overall migration experience.

Among Turkmen migrants interviewed, 25% are returnees currently live in Iraq while the rest is living in destination countries.

Figure 13 describes Turkmen migrants' age structure that clearly seems in line with the migration studies literature as most migrants are in their most productive ages and they went abroad when they were young. Only a quarter of Turkmen were 30 and over at the time of last migration abroad. These figures also need to be related to the period of migration which will help us to elaborate migration trends of Turkmen in Iraq.

## VIII. Turkmen in Iraq Migrated due to an Environment of Insecurity

Turkmen in Iraq moved abroad massively in the period around the first Gulf War and this migration trend seems continued as long as there are wars or attacks in Iraq. Obviously Turkey's alignment with the coalition forces during the Gulf War in 1991 can be a major effect that jeopardized the security of Turkmen in Iraq as they were recognised as affiliates of Turkey for centuries. In response to such risk Turkmen might have found the solution in fleeing Iraq. More than 80% of Turkmen migrations had taken place after 1990 and about 45% left Iraq after 1997 (Figure 14). The first massive out-migration can be related to the Gulf War and the latter is very likely to be in relation to the Operation Desert Fox and continuous attacks in Iraq in the following period (see Sirkeci 2004).

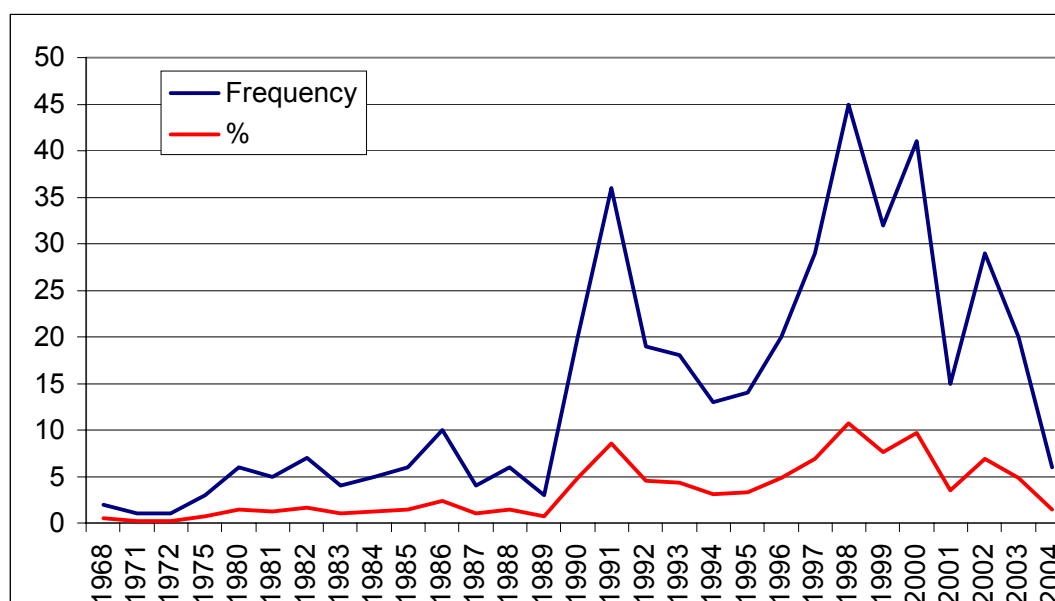
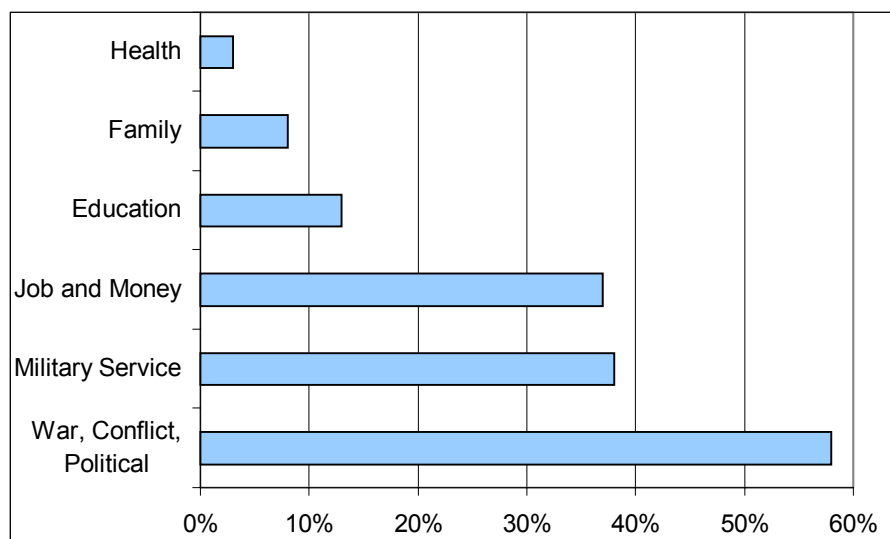


Figure 14. Year of last migration

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From figure 14, we can also predict that small increase around the mid-1980s could be due to Saddam regime's attacks in northern Iraq such as in Halabja. Motivations for migration as expressed by Iraqi Turkmen respondents will be helpful in understanding the relationship between such an environment of insecurity in Iraq and Turkmen's international migration as it was seen in some other cases (see Sirkeci 2003; Icduygu, Romano and Sirkeci 1999).



**Figure 15. Reasons for migration**

As figure 15 clearly describes economic motivations constitute a reason for a significant portion of Iraqi Turkmen. However the most cited causes for migration are two-fold: first, for those Turkmen might have felt extremely insecure, as they needed to flee Iraq to another country; second they did not want to serve at Saddam Hussein's army, which is particularly valid for males.

*Approximately 60% of Turkmen migrants left Iraq due to insecurity that means war, ethnic conflict, and fear of persecution.*

Nearly 60% of Turkmen migrants reported that their main motivation for migration was insecurity in a variety of forms including war, conflict, political oppression, and fear of persecution. In two third of the cases, migration decision was made by migrants themselves while in about 25%, it was the decision of household head.

Only about one fourth of Iraqi Turkmen had international migration experience before their last migration and one third of them had an earlier internal migration experience within Iraq. These indicate an experience of migration existed for some of Turkmen which may have facilitated their last migration abroad.

## IX. Migrant Characteristics

As mentioned above most migrants were young and among those 52% were never married as opposed to 48% who have been married and have kids. Married Turkmen migrants with kids often have two or more children (71%). Before migration abroad, only 17% of Turkmen had children. This is closely related to the fact that they were too young when they moved abroad and so did not have children.

Mother language is Turkmen (99%) although less than one percent was reported that the language spoken at home when they were child was Arabic or Kurdish. Along with Turkmen, a dialect of Turkish, 95% of them can also speak Arabic, the official language of Iraq. English, Turkish, German, Kurdish, and Persian are also reported as third languages spoken by Turkmen migrants. Since it is very similar to their mother language, Turkish is also common among Turkmen although only a fraction of them mentioned Turkish as an additional language (10%). They also speak English (35%), an international language. Kurdish and Persian are other local languages that understandable why spoken by Turkmen. German is because most migrants went to Germany.

Migration did not bring an improvement in terms of education for 72% of them while about one in ten reached an upper level in educational attainment level. However this is meaningful because only a small fraction of Turkmen moved abroad for education and so educational gain happened accidentally if it happened so.

Similarly for a large majority of Turkmen, migration has not been a passage to employment: only 29% of them moved from unemployment into jobs with migration while for 64% of them very little changed in terms of employment. Besides for 6%, migration brought unemployment. However, as displayed in figure 16, before migration, 17% of Turkmen were unemployed which reduced to only 4% after migration while proportion of those in employment rose to 59% almost doubling those working before migration. In this sharp change, students graduated and took up jobs should be considered as a major factor along with the outstanding decline in unemployment. Considering the warfare environment of Iraq, it is not a surprise so many Turkmen stepped into employment when they fled the country although they expressed that the reason for migration was not primarily to find job or earn money but conflict, war, terror and fear of persecution.

*“Migration did bring neither any educational improvement or employment for most Turkmen who moved abroad.”*



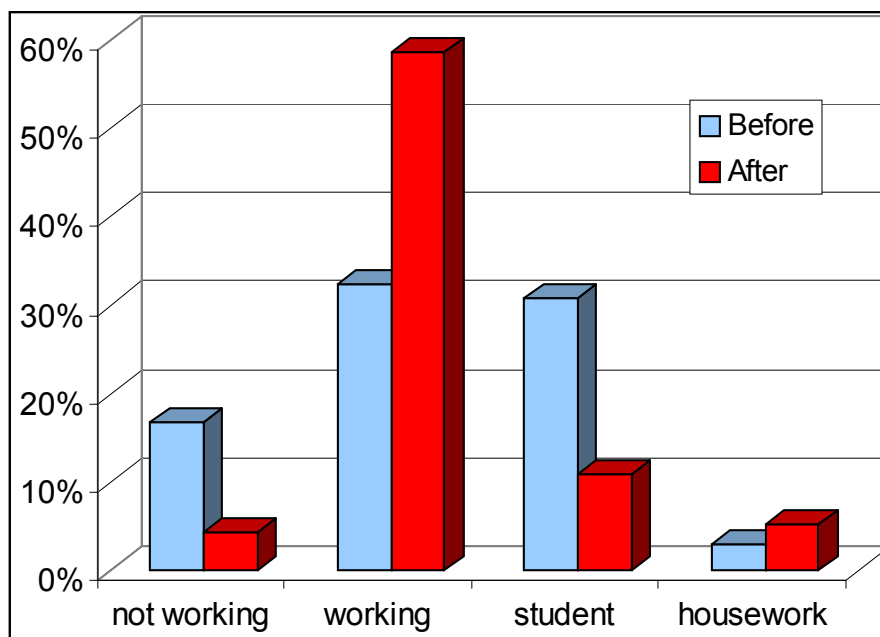


Figure 16. Changes in employment: before and after migration

## X. Turkmen on the Move

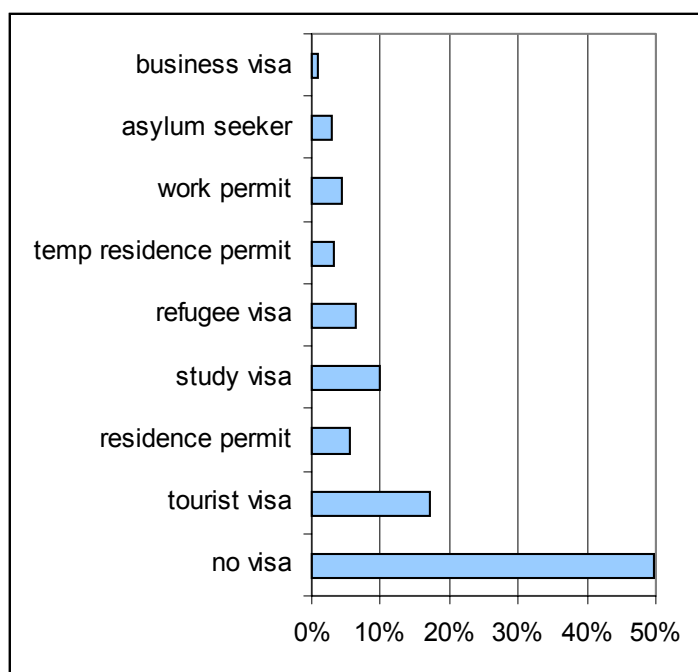
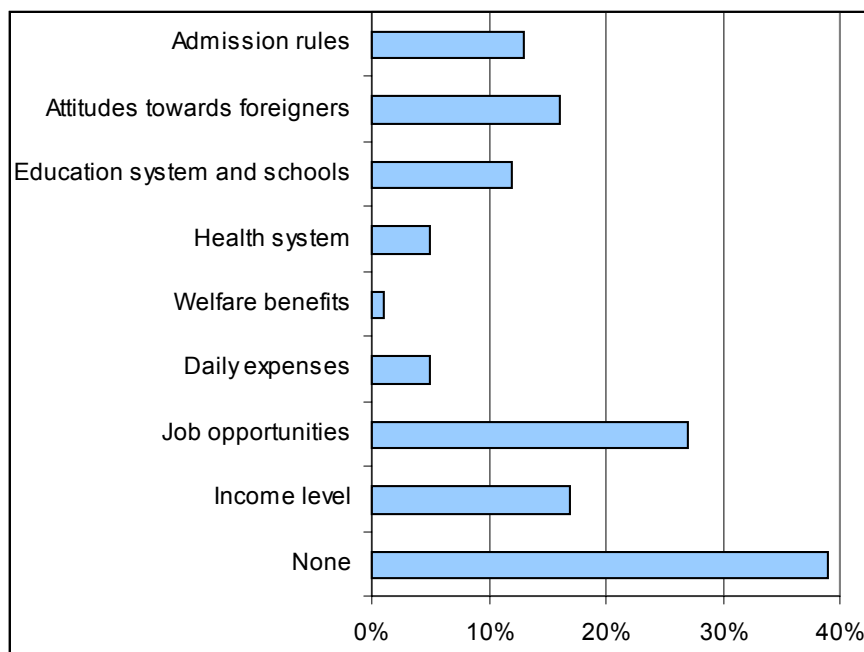


Figure 17. Type of visa on entry

Type of migration for Iraqi Turkmen was not so different than their contemporary migrant fellows all around the world: they often forced to prefer illegal migration (50%), probably the highest proportion of illegal migration recorded in migration studies literature. Half of Turkmen migrants arrived in

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their countries of destination without any entry clearance while another 17% arrived on tourist visas which as they overstayed could also be considered within irregular migration. Only a third of Turkmen migrants entered into their destination on visas allowing them to stay as residents (33%)



**Figure 18. Information about destination country before migration**

39% of Iraqi Turkmen had no information about the country where they migrated prior to their move. Job opportunities in the country of destination (27%) were the most know issue for Iraqi Turkmen prior to migration that was followed by income level (17%) and attitudes toward foreigners in the country of immigration (16%). Education system and schools were also known to only a small fraction of them (12%) while health and welfare system was almost unknown to all of them (Figure 18). Information source for 59% was friends and was family members for 16%. Finally it is reported that for all of those who had some information before migration, information had played a role in their migration.

59% of Turkmen went abroad alone while over 25% moved with some other family members including spouses, children, and parents. 5% of them migrated together with other relatives while 10% were going with friends. Moving abroad with other family members or as families can be considered as a sign that indicates some Turkmen fled the country or had to flee due to conflict, war, terror and / or fear of persecution, or for cultural reasons, i.e. to avoid Arabization. 28% of Turkmen migrants were followed by other family members after their initial migration whilst friends of about 20% had followed them.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> These figures are not exclusive but in some cases overlapping which means some Turkmen had family members, friends and other relatives already living in the country of destination therefore they may add up to exceed 100%.

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However, 40% of Turkmen migrants had nobody in the destination country before they moved. 6% of them had partners and 8% had brothers and sisters already living in the country of destination before they set to move. 28% of Turkmen migrants had their relatives in the country to where they moved while 21% had friends.

Those family members, relatives and friends were not always helping hand in achieving migration and afterwards: only 53% of Turkmen reported that they received help from somebody in the country of destination. 10% who received help was assisted by their close family such as partners, brothers and sisters, and parents while 8% received help from relatives and 14% from their friends.

The nature of the help for those who were lucky to have some assistance was various. A very small proportion received help and it was material help, mostly in the form of paying for their travel (13%), housing (17%), information about migration (5%) and help for obtaining visa and/or passport (3%). 15% of Turkmen were assisted in finding a job in the country of destination by their relatives and/or friends. They were either given job in those persons' own businesses or found a job in another place by their help.

## XI. Conclusions

Obviously, in any survey on international migration there are inevitable problems of collecting information about migrants. First, it is often not possible to find migrants themselves because by definition they are in the country of destination and we use proxy respondents in such cases. Second, there could be families or households moved abroad altogether and we are not able even to record such cases in most surveys. Besides in ethnic studies, particularly in conflict areas, there an additional pressure occurs: difficulty in collecting some sensitive information such as mother language or information reflecting political, cultural or religious preference. These were all the problems we faced in this study too. Therefore results presented here should be read with these kept in mind although I am confident to the best of my knowledge these findings are representative of Turkmen in Iraq to a great extent as we managed to collect information at least about 1/4 percent of total Turkmen population through a questionnaire survey applied to over a thousand randomly selected households.

- Turkmen is a well-educated population that is going to be very helpful in Iraq's reconstruction. Reflecting a valuable human resource a quarter of women and one third of men attended university whereas only one in ten had no education.
- More than one in every three Turkmen households have at least one of their members migrated abroad (35%) and this shows a quite high level of out migration. It is even striking almost a tenth of the total Turkmen population via migration abroad. As only less than 20% returned, this may prove that Turkmen have been leaving their homeland due to insecurity they have been facing for a long while.
- Turkmen migration seems a forced stream of migration also because of their socio-economic circumstances. They are pretty well off living in sufficient and satisfactory conditions and unless there is a forceful environment of insecurity, they would not be expected to flee as they have been doing so. This forced migration feature can also be seen in their destination selection as almost half of them moved to neighbouring countries including Turkey, Iran, and Syria.
- Another signifier of forced migration is the contrast between Turkmen attitude towards illegal migration and actual practice of Turkmen migrants. Almost half of Turkmen migrations fall into the category of illegal migration (49.5%). Only one respondent said he or she would migrate illegally along with about 40% saying "may be if they were forced to do so" (i.e. when there is no other options left). So most of those moved abroad via clandestine ways might have been forced to do so as they did not have any other choice.
- Turkmen are largely interested in Turkey; they follow Turkish media, some even feel they belong to Turkey instead of Iraq. Turkmen's interest and expectations from Turkey should be seriously considered. This is also important for Turkmen immigrants in Turkmen. When it is

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assumed total Turkmen in Iraq is about 3 million, that means, in the light of this survey, about ten percent of them live abroad and about 40% of this should be in Turkey. So that makes about 120 000 Turkmen immigrants in Turkey and around 300 000 all around the world. This is significantly high proportion for a relatively well-off population.

- With regard to their year of emigration, most Turkmen migrants (80%) reported to moved abroad after 1990. So this should be a serious concern for reconstruction of Iraq as this may constitute a forced migration resulting in a diaspora community with a population ranging between 125 000 (as the low estimations indicate a Turkmen population around 5% in Iraq) to 300 000. These people might have been forced to flee during the wars of the last 15 years and they may be still interested in participating in Iraq's reconstruction. International community should take this responsibility to ensure their rights to return and fairly participate in making their own country's future.
- A final point about Iraqi Turkmen is important for all interested parties: religious divisions in Iraqi population. Religious structure of Turkmen is very unlikely to be a unique feature in Iraq. Possibly similar to other ethnic groups in the country (i.e. Arabs, Kurds, etc.), Iraqi Turkmen population consists of two segments of religious groups: two thirds Sunni Islam and one third Alawi or Shia Islam. This proves that recently proposed (and widely quoted) political polarisation on the basis of religious divisions between Sunni and Shia does not reflect the reality. That means if there is any such political division, Iraqi Turkmen, as other ethnic groups, is going to compete with each other.

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