

# IRAQI DIASPORA ORGANISATIONS IN DENMARK

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This report is based on a non-exhaustive situational analysis of Iraqis and Iraqi diaspora organisations in Denmark. The report does not represent a comprehensive overview of all organisations or all aspects or characteristics of Iraqis living in Denmark, however, the aim has been to collect and present a quick overview of the subject. The report was commissioned by Danish Refugee Council's Diaspora Programme for the purpose of creating a basis on which an assessment of whether the Diaspora Programme should be expanded to include projects in Iraq can be made.

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Based on a non-exhaustive situational analysis, this mapping gives an introduction to the characteristics of Iraqis living in Denmark as well as an overview of the activities and capacity of the Iraqi diaspora organisations present in Denmark.

With more than 30,000 people with Iraqi background living in Denmark, the Iraqi diaspora is one of the largest non-Western groups in Denmark. Most Iraqis came to Denmark during the 1990s and were granted political asylum due to persecution by the Sunni Muslim regime.

For the mapping, 17 interviews were performed with representatives of the Iraqi diaspora organisations and one with an employee at a mosque.

Almost all the interviewed organisations had contacts in Iraq. Most were in contact with individual family members or friends, but many were also in contact with Iraqi or international organisations working in Iraq, and some had already collaborated on projects with Iraqi organisations.

The activities of the organisations interviewed varied from organising social and cultural events and information work in Denmark to engagement in humanitarian projects in Iraq. Whereas one out of three organisations were already engaged in humanitarian work in Iraq, all but two organisations stated that they would like to engage in relief, rehabilitation or development projects in Iraq in the future.

The Iraqi diaspora organisations seemed to have quite sporadic contact to each other. A reason for that might be segregation according to ethnic, political and religious affiliation, although conflicting information were found with regard to this.

The political and religious organisations seemed to constitute influential entities among the Iraqis, but they had limited experience with humanitarian project work in Iraq.



## 1. INTRODUCTION

The aim of this report is to give an introduction to the characteristics of Iraqis living in Denmark as well as an overview of the activities, capacity and aspirations among the Iraqi diaspora organisations present in Denmark. The purpose of making the report was to create a basis, on the background of which the Diaspora Programme can assess whether the Iraqi diaspora organisations in Denmark would be suitable to engage in relief, rehabilitation and development projects in Iraq.

The definition of diaspora used in the report is the definition used by the Diaspora Programme: "The term diaspora refers to migrants, refugees and their descendants, who live outside their country of birth or ancestry, yet still remain emotional and material ties to that country." (1)

The definition of diaspora organisations used in the report is corresponding to how Danish Institute for International Studies defines diaspora associations: "The report uses the term 'diaspora association' to refer to organisations where the majority of members identify as having a shared origin outside their country of residence and where this origin is important for the goals of the association. Diaspora organisations thus encompass a wide range of organisations, such as hometown associations, political or legal oriented organisations, cultural associations, women's associations and migrant youth associations." (2)



## 2. BACKGROUND

### 2.1 HISTORIC BACKGROUND OF IRAQI MIGRATION AND IRAQIS GLOBALLY

Iraq has a turbulent history, which has led many Iraqis to flee their country for safety reasons through the years. More than 5.8 million Iraqis have been displaced altogether since January 2014, and more than 2 million of them continue to be displaced. Of those who have fled Iraq since 2014, 260,000 are currently living as refugees outside of Iraq (3,4). The global Iraqi diaspora is estimated to include more than three million people, and whereas the majority are residing in the neighbouring Middle Eastern countries, a study of diaspora in the European Union and the USA found that around 500,000 Iraqis live in the European Union and the USA. According to the same study, the Iraqi diaspora is among the larger diaspora in the Western world (5,6).

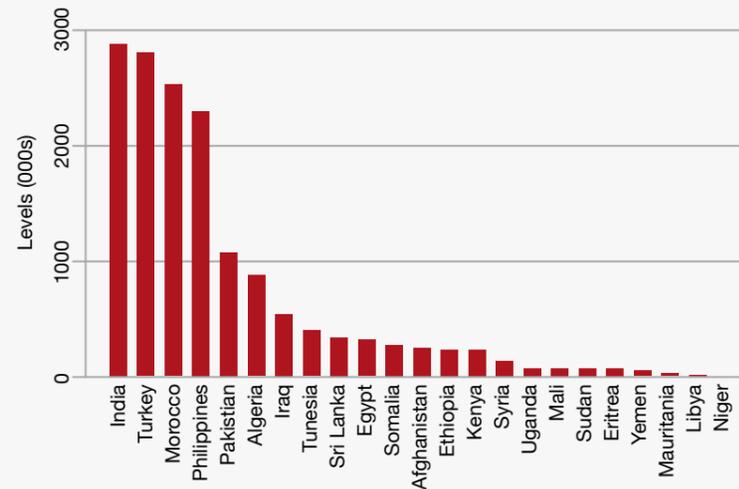


Figure 1.

Selected diaspora groups living in the EU and the USA ((5), p. 27)

The Iraqi diaspora has not arisen as a consequence of one large escape from Iraq; it has been formed over the last 70 years. In the 1960s and 70s, many Iraqis came to Europe to study, and they subsequently applied for and obtained political asylum in Europe. In the 1980s, the Iran-Iraq War and the concurrent levels of high unemployment led 1,5 million Iraqis to flee the country, and successively, the Gulf War and the following UN sanctions on Iraq in early 1990s, led another half a million Iraqis to leave the country. The Western coalition's invasion of Iraq in 2003, including the years leading up to, is the period with the most substantial migration of Iraqis to Denmark. After 2008 a relatively peaceful period followed, however, this ended by the ISIS invasion of the Northern and Western parts of the country in 2014 (7,8).

Though much unrest remains in Iraq, the Iraqi government in 2017 declared that it had regained full control over the country. In accordance with that, IOM reported that the current population displacement in Iraq is mainly a matter of returning the displaced, and the government encourages its nationals abroad to return home and support the development of the country (9,10,11).

The timing of the emigration out of Iraq often reflects ethnic affiliation as well as religious and political belief of the migrants, as the reason to flee has often been linked to being in opposition to those in power. Those who fled in the 1990s are thus often Shia Muslims and Kurds who fled the Sunni-led Saddam Hussein regime, who suppressed the Kurdish minority, whereas those who fled around the invasion in 2003 were mostly Sunni Muslims (12).

Today's Iraq is characterised by relatively large economic inequality and a small middle class (13). Arabs and Kurds are the largest ethnic groups (75-80% and 15-20% respectively), whereas the minorities of Turkmen, Yezidi, Shabak, Kaka'i, Bedouin, Romani, Assyrian, Circassian, Sabaeen-Mandaeen and Persian together constitute 5% of the population. With regard to religious groups, the majority are Shia (64-69%) or Sunni (29-34%) Muslims, and a minority are Christians (1%) (14). The ethnic and religious groups are independently oriented in many respects, and tensions exist between most of them, in particular between the Kurds and the Arabs (15).

## 2.2 STUDIES OF THE GLOBAL IRAQI DIASPORA

An American and a German study of the Iraqi diaspora describe the diaspora as generally being heterogeneous with regard to class, religion, ethnicity and political ideology. As a possible consequence of that, the diaspora has difficulties forming strong exile organisations, and they are described as a relatively weakly organised diaspora (16,17).

The largest European-based Iraqi diaspora is settled in the United Kingdom (18). A study of London-based Iraqi diaspora found interesting changes in the diaspora's desires of engagement in Iraq. Before the fall of Saddam Hussein in 2003, the common desire for the future among the diaspora was to return to Iraq after Saddam's fall. The diaspora was united in their stance against the regime of Saddam Hussein, though not all agreed on how the regime shift was best reached (19).

After 2003, many did in fact return to Iraq to help with the reconstruction of the country and the political system, but they were met with hostility and they were to a large extent unwanted by those who had not left. This led many to leave Iraq again and return disappointedly to the UK. The study found that after returning to the UK, the diaspora changed their attitude towards how to best assist in reconstructing of Iraq, and they now engage in grass-root and political activities to support Iraq from abroad instead (20).

A German report supports the observation that Iraqi diaspora is generally very engaged in the political development of Iraq from afar, and that they have been since the fall of Saddam in 2003. Those who are Iraqi citizens are allowed to vote in the elections in Iraq although residing outside of the country, and often political candidates who run for the elections in Iraq are recruited among diaspora. In fact, half of the government in Iraq is said to belong to diaspora from Europe or the USA. The largest political groups are the communists, the liberals and the conservatives (21).

With regard to Iraqi diaspora organisations in Europe, a recent briefing paper on Syrian and Iraqi diaspora in Europe found, that the majority of the organisations support activities focused on integration of newcomers, whereas some also do engage in humanitarian work in the country of origin. The paper does, however, not represent a comprehensive overview of the work done by diaspora organisations, and it calls for further research on the topic (22).

## 2.3 IRAQI DIASPORA ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES

An American and a German study of the Iraqi diaspora describe the diaspora as geneStrategies to engage with the global Iraqi diaspora exist. As an example, the International Centre for Migration Policy Development was in 2016 asked by the Iraqi government to develop a diaspora engagement policy in order to inform the policy development process towards Iraqi diaspora engagement. The centre came up with numerous recommendations including to weaken the senses of difference and tensions and strengthening the trust and credibility between the different groups (23).

## 2.4 IRAQIS IN DENMARK

By August 2018, 32,874 people with an Iraqi background were living in Denmark. Of those, 21,802 have immigrated to Denmark, whereas 11,072 are descendants of immigrants. The population consists of a little more men than women (54%).

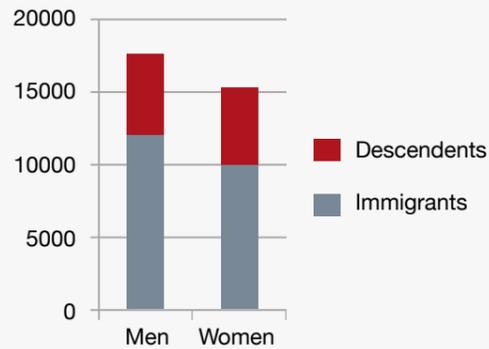


Figure 2. Gender distribution of Iraqis living in Denmark (24)

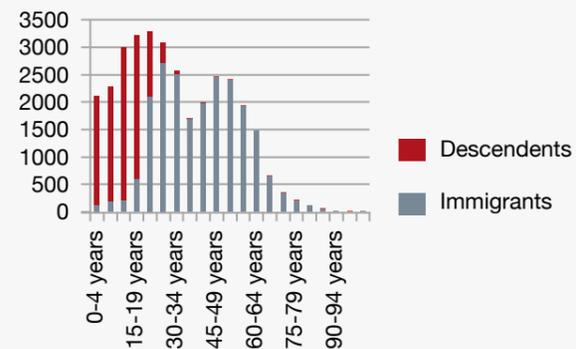


Figure 3. Age distribution of Iraqis living in Denmark (25)

The Iraqi population living in Denmark is relatively young; half (52%) are below 30 years of age. The majority are living in the capital region (see figure 4). Compared to the location of residence of immigrants of all nationalities in Denmark, more Iraqis are living near Copenhagen and fewer are living in Northern Jutland (26).



Figure 2. Place of residence for Iraqis in Denmark (27)

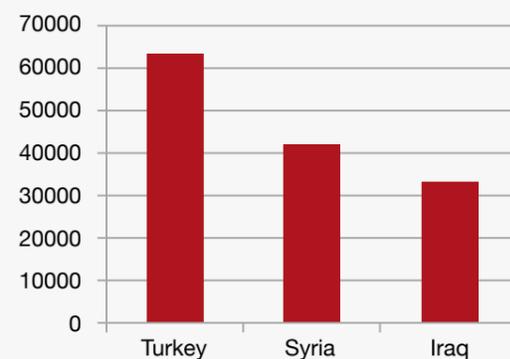


Figure 3. The three largest non-Western immigrant groups in Denmark (28)

The Iraqis constitute the third largest group of non-Western immigrants living in Denmark. The number of Iraqis living in Denmark has been more or less constant the past decade, with only the number of descendants increasing with around 500 people pr. year (29).

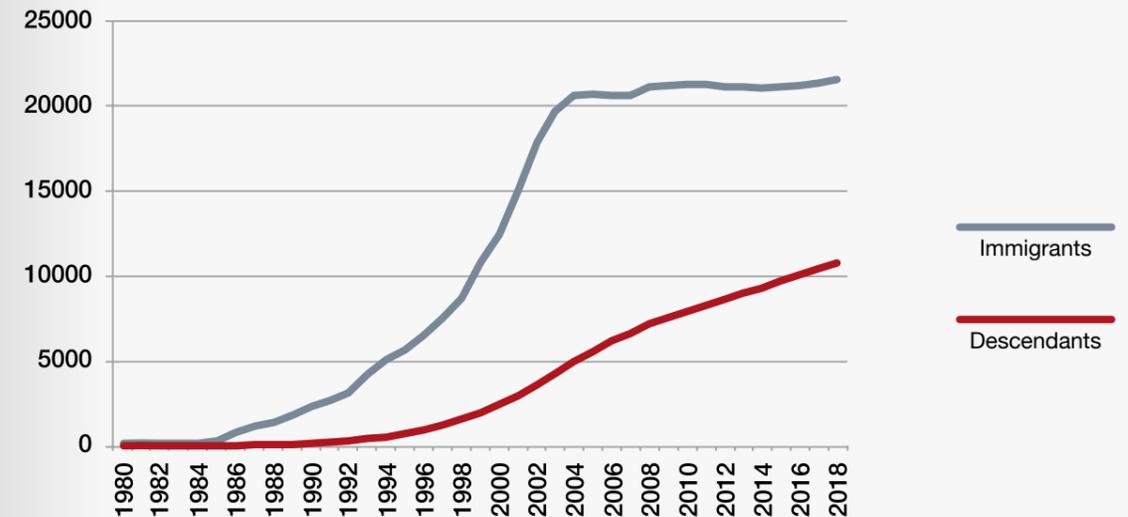


Figure 6. Number of Iraqis in Denmark 1980-2018 (30)

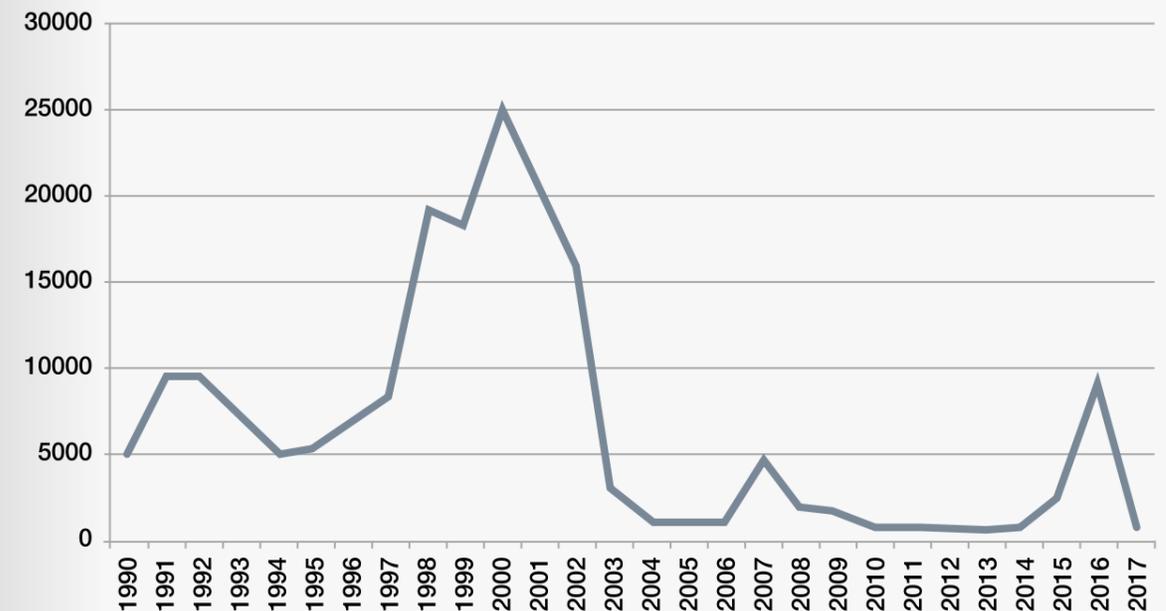


Figure 7. Number of asylum seeking cases from Iraqis in Denmark 1990-2018 (31)

Most Iraqis who are living in Denmark entered the country in the 1990s. The almost 20,000 Iraqis, who entered Denmark in the 1990s, were granted political asylum due to persecution by Saddam Hussein's regime and internal clashes in the Kurdish part of Iraq. They are primarily Shia Muslims and Kurds (32). Since 2000 almost no Iraqis have been granted asylum in Denmark due to implementation of strict immigration policies (33).

## 3. METHODS

This mapping is based on a non-exhaustive situational analysis. The analysis is based on desk research of primary and secondary sources on Iraqi migration and diaspora, consultation with Iraqi community stakeholders, and outreach to the Iraqi diaspora and randomly selected Iraqi diaspora organisations in Denmark.

First, employees at Danish Refugee Council with insights on the Iraqi community in Denmark were engaged in initiating contact to Iraqi diaspora organisations, and the search for organisations was announced at various social media platforms and at a local Iraqi social club. Municipality portals listing local organisations, the national organisation registry and various search engines were searched for Iraqi diaspora organisations. All organisations, that were identified, were contacted either via email or phone, and interviews were set up when possible. A snowball method was followed, thus all interviewees were asked about additional contacts.

Fifty-two organisations were identified, but only 17 responded to the out-reach. Seventeen interviews were performed with representatives of the Iraqi diaspora organisations and one with an employee at a mosque; some interviews were face to face, and some were over the phone. Kurdish organisations were also reached out to, as it was found that some Kurds identify as Iraqis. The informants from the Kurdish organisations were always asked about their national affiliation in order to select only those with an Iraqi affiliation.

The representatives of the organisations were among other topics interviewed about the aim and history of the organisation, the activities, the network and the potential aspirations for engaging in humanitarian or development projects in Iraq. Most interviews lasted about an hour and few interviews were conducted with interpreters (Arabic and Turkish), but most in Danish. See Appendix 1 for the full interview guide.

A list of Iraqi key stakeholders living in Denmark were shared with us by the Iraqi Embassy, and it was expanded with other relevant people by Iraqi community stakeholders. During the analysis, important media channels occurred and they were listed as well.

In order to obtain a nuanced overview of the diaspora organisations, I aimed at including organisations with a cultural, a political as well as a religious focus in the mapping. I also aimed at including organisations representing all ethnic groups, as it came to my understanding that some ethnic groups, and thus the organisations led by them, are protective of their own peers and not very involved with other groups. Only including some ethnic groups could potentially have predisposed some in the mapping.

### 3.1 OBSERVATIONS ON THE METHODOLOGICAL PROCESS

The diaspora organisations included in this mapping have been fairly randomly selected. Those who answered to my out-reach email might not have been the most relevant, important or influential organisations, however, I did try to compensate for this, by inquiring all informants about which organisations were central and subsequently contacting those. If more time had been available, I would have probably succeeded in getting in contact with more organisations, and thus a more comprehensive mapping would have been the result.

I only managed to get in contact with one mosque, further research should focus on mapping more religious communities to find out if others are more actively engaged in humanitarian work in Iraq.

Very little of the information on activities of the Iraqi diaspora organisations has been confirmed by other sources. Some showed me online documentation of the existence of the organisations they said they work with, but I have seen no proof from third parties that actual collaborations exist. Also, whether the majority of the organisations are really completely non-political and do include members of all political and ethnic backgrounds has not been confirmed. Bearing findings from studies of global Iraqi diaspora and statements from the Iraqi community stakeholders in mind, I regard it as questionable, even though that is what they have told me they are and do. In addition, the more general descriptions of the characteristics of the diaspora and the diaspora organisations such as the ones given by the Iraqi community stakeholders have most commonly not been confirmed.

The fact that almost all organisations expressed great interest in engaging in projects in Iraq was somewhat expected, as stating an interest is non-binding. I do, however, think that the shown interest is a good indication for an actual potential for engagement, thus it should not be underestimated.

De Gule Sider (dgs.dk) covers a large database of organisations, which are not shown on Google or municipality portals. This is good to know in future mappings.

It would have been beneficial to include a more geographically diverse selection of diaspora organisations, but time did not allow for that.

## 4. IRAQI DIASPORA ORGANISATIONS IN DENMARK

In this section, the findings of the non-exhaustive situational analysis are presented. In total, seventeen Iraqi organisations and one employee of a mosque in Denmark were interviewed (see Table 1). Among the 17 organisations, four Kurdish organisations were included, as they reported that they had members who identified as having Kurdish/Iraqi origin. As the organisations, which were interviewed, were randomly selected, their aim, type of activities and future aspirations cannot be regarded as being representative of Iraqi organisations in Denmark in general. Further, it should be noted that the list of organisations presented here is not exhaustive; many other Iraqi organisations exist in Denmark.

NAME	SIZE	CURRENT ACTIVITIES	INTERESTED IN ENGAGEMENT IN PROJECTS IN IRAQ (Y/N)	POTENTIAL FUTURE ACTIVITIES
Det Irakiske Fællesråd i Danmark	21 in the board of directors, 105 in the council	Information work in Denmark, humanitarian aid in Iraq	Y	Projects for children with diabetes and cancer and education of people in the care sector (equivalent to the Danish SOSU-uddannelse), orphanages, elderly homes, empowerment courses for women, sport facilities for young people.
Dansk Irakisk Forening i Gilleleje	50-70 members. Only few active	Information work in Denmark	Y	Projects to reconstruct buildings and infrastructure in Mosul.
Dansk Irakisk Hjælpeorganisation	4-5 members in board, 20 supporters	Humanitarian work in Iraq	Y	Projects to create job for women (e.g. micro loans, jobs in farming, cooking, sewing), improve infrastructure and conditions in slum dwelling in rural Iraq, boarding school for poor or orphaned children.
Dansk Kurdisk Kulturforening/Ishøj Kurdisk Forening/DKKFI	390 members	Information work and cultural events in Denmark	Y	Information seminars in Iraq on Danish organisation of healthcare and educational system.
Kurdisk Forening i Næstved	150 members	Social activities in Denmark	Y	In Iraq: Support to women who have been abducted by ISIS and subsequently freed, to support orphans, school children, Syrian refugees living in Kurdistan and help reconstruct villages that has been damaged in the war (reconstruct buildings and infrastructure).
Irakisk Kvindeforening	20 members	Information work in Denmark and humanitarian aid in Iraq	Y	Psychosocial projects for women in Iraq to help them gain confidence in themselves, campaign against violence, birth control and human rights information campaigns, projects to include women into the labour market.
Irakisk Turkemsk Kulturcenter and Irakisk Turkemsk Kvindeforening	Gender segregated; 110 members of Irakisk Turkemsk Kvindeforening and 190 members of Irakisk Turkemsk Kulturcenter.	Social activities in Denmark	Y	Projects to support the poor, children, widows and ill or disabled people.
Kurdisk Kulturforening i Randers	2010-2016: 212 members. Now none, but the organisation will soon be active again.	Social activities in Denmark and humanitarian aid in Iraq	Y	Giving courses in Iraq on educational subjects especially on child rearing without violence. Building a kindergarten that is to use Danish pedagogical methods.
Mellem Floderne	120 members	Social activities in Denmark and humanitarian aid in Iraq	Y	Reconstruction of infrastructure and schools to enable internally displaced Christians return to Mosul
Den Irakiske Demokratiske Forening	50 active members, additionally 100 supportersw	Social activities in Denmark and humanitarian aid in Iraq	Y	Reconstruction of infrastructure, hospitals and schools. Facilitation of return for IDPs and support to children living in the streets.
Almahaba - Irakisk Forening	200 members	Social activities in Denmark	N	Same as current.
Alliance for Irakisk Demokrati	150 members	Social activities in Denmark	N	Same as current.
Den Irakiske Kvindeliga	14 members	Social activities and advocacy in Denmark and economic support to an Iraqi organization	Y	Courses on empowerment for young women in Iraq and courses to train teachers in Iraq about progressive thinking.
Dansk Kurdisk Kulturforening	Approx. 50 members	Social activities in Denmark	Y	To support street children and orphans in Iraq.
De Irakiske Demokrater	96 members, but approx. 1000 supporters	Social activities and economic support to Iraqi organizations	Y	To fight for democracy in Iraq, to support street children, orphans and homeless in Iraq.
Babylons Kor	20 members	Cultural activities in Denmark	Y	Go on a tour in Iraq with their Iraqi sister choir to spread their message on gender equality and freedom of expression.
Kurdisk Kulturforening i Albertslund	140 members	Social activities in Denmark	Y	To build orphanages, support farmers and initiate education of widows to enable them to support themselves in Iraq.

The number of members of the organisations, which were interviewed, varies from five to 390, and the majority of the organisations are located in the greater Copenhagen area, se Figure 8.

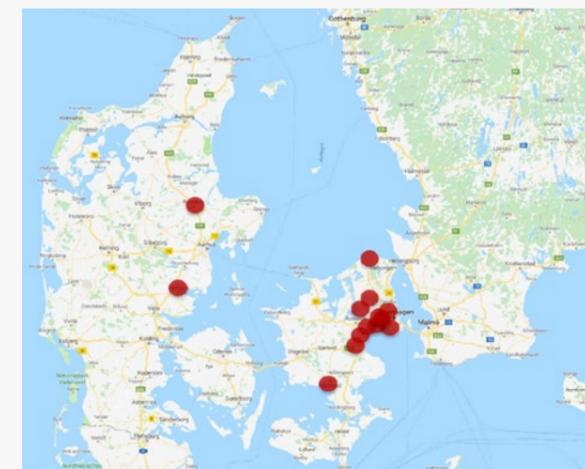


Figure 8. Location of the organisations interviewed

#### 4.1 ACTIVITIES AND NETWORKS

The aim of the organisations varied from creating a space for Iraqis to socialise and discuss integration matters in Denmark to fighting for democracy, gender equality and freedom of expression through music in Iraq. Many organisations engaged in several types of activities concurrently, thus, arranging social activities in Denmark was occasionally accompanied by doing humanitarian projects in Iraq. The most common activity of the organisations was to arrange social and cultural events such as holiday celebrations and seminars by Iraqi cultural figures in Denmark. One out of eight of the organisations engaged in information work such as informing members about opportunities, procedures and rules in the Danish society, and whereas one out of three organisations were already engaged in humanitarian work in Iraq, all but two organisations stated that they would like to engage in relief, rehabilitation or development projects in Iraq in the future.

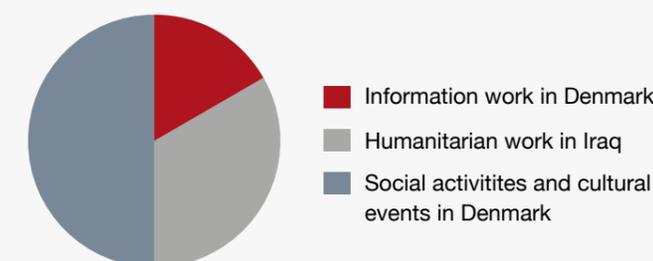


Figure 8. Location of the organisations interviewed

An important finding is that almost all the interviewed organisations had contacts in Iraq. Most were in contact with individual family members or friends, but many were also in contact with Iraqi or international organisations working in Iraq, and some had already collaborated on projects with Iraqi organisations. The main focus of the already existing or future planned projects in Iraq were development projects such as to support children and women including boarding schools for orphans and empowerment initiatives as well as job training for women. Reconstruction of buildings and infrastructure was also a common focus, and so was advocacy for gender equality, democracy and human rights in general. The locations of the current or proposed future projects were spread all over Iraq; see figure 10 for details.



Figure 10. Location of current or future proposed projects in Iraq

#### 4.2 POLITICAL ORGANISATIONS

In accordance with the literature on the subject, informants described how a considerable number of Iraqis living outside of Iraq are politically engaged in Iraq. I did not succeed to get in contact with any Iraqi party political organisations in Denmark, but many informants told me about the presence of the organisations in Denmark and in other countries outside of Iraq. I did interview two organisations who fought for democracy in Iraq, which evidently is a political agenda, however, they both did not identify themselves as being party political, and they stated, that they had members of all political parties.

The party political organisations seem to play an important role for the Iraqi diaspora in Denmark; according to some informants they are in fact the most influential and best organised organisations among Iraqis in Denmark. The Iraqi political organisations in Denmark represent the political parties currently present in Iraq, thus communist, liberal and conservative political organisations are present (34). It seems as if the main activity of the political parties is to gather support and obtain political influence, thus implementing humanitarian projects in Iraq is not part of their work.

#### 4.3 RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES

Many informants referred to the Imam Al-Sadiq Mosque and the Imam Ali Mosque in Copenhagen, when asked about where religious Iraqis in Denmark go to the mosque. None of the informants said that they came there themselves; they only knew someone who did. I was not able to get in contact with the Imam Al-Sadiq Mosque, but I managed to interview a person who worked at the Imam Ali Mosque. According to him the Imam Ali Mosque is the mosque with the largest Iraqi community in Denmark; several thousand Iraqis are connected to the place. In contrast to what the informants had said, the man also stated, that almost all Iraqis in Denmark are connected to a mosque; according to him almost all Iraqis can be reached via communication coming from a mosque.

The Imam Ali Mosque collects money from the visitors of the mosque and transfers them to an Iraqi humanitarian organisation called Al-Ayn Social Care Foundation. Thus, the community of the mosque is not directly involved in projects in Iraq themselves, but they support them financially. In contrast to the diaspora organisations, the mosque was thus primarily engaged in humanitarian work and not development projects.

#### 4.4 A FRAGMENTED DIASPORA

Similarly to the portrayal of the Iraqi diaspora in the literature, the Iraqis living in Denmark are described by Iraqi community stakeholders to be relatively strongly divided into groups according to ethnic, political and religious affiliation. Accordingly, no overall umbrella organisation for Iraqi diaspora exist in Denmark and the contact between the organisations seem to be limited, although a few organisations did report to collaborate and engage in each other's activities (35).

In striking contrast to this is the fact that almost all informants described their organisation to be open to people of all ethnic, religious and political background, and many of the informants said that they did have members coming from all backgrounds. The diaspora organisations, that seemed to engage most with other organisations, were Irakiske Demokrater and Den Irakiske Demokratiske Forening.

Many informants mentioned and warned me of the high degree of corruption that exists in governmental as well as political organisations in Iraq.

#### 4.5 MONEY TRANSFER

Several informants described how the transfer of money to Iraq is difficult. The international sanctions during Saddam Hussein's regime made it impossible to send money into Iraq via bank transfers, and the country is still suffering from this. Money transfer providers such as Western Union is said to steal a large share of the money; according to an informant, the only way to avoid this is by knowing the person who handles the transfer. As a consequence of these obstacles, many informants explained how they brought money in cash with them when travelling to Iraq (36).

## 5. OBSERVATIONS

- Many Iraqi diaspora organisations in Denmark are already actively engaged in projects in Iraq, and almost all interviewed for this study were interested in doing relief or development projects in Iraq
- Many Iraqi organisations in Denmark have contacts to individuals as well as organisations in Iraq
- The contact between the Iraqi diaspora organisations in Denmark seem to be quite sporadic
- Conflicting information exist regarding whether Iraqis and the Iraqi diaspora organisations in Denmark are ethnically, religiously and politically segregated, but it mostly seems, as if the Iraqis are quite group oriented
- Iraqi political organisations and Iraqi religious communities seem to be strong and influential both in Denmark and internationally, but they have limited if at all any experience with project work in Iraq

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## 7. APPENDIXES

- Interview guide
- Mapping outcome

### APPENDIX 1: INTERVIEW GUIDE

- Name of organisation
- Name and position of contact
- Contact details
- Address of organisation
- Website of organisation
- Number of members
- Description of members (age, gender, residence, immigrants or descendants, ethnic, religious and political affiliation)
- Is the organisation officially registered?
- Date of establishment
- Member of an umbrella organisation?
- Collaboration with other organisations?
- Aim of organisation
- Activities of organisation
- Location of activities
- Contact to organisations or individuals in Iraq? If yes; who?
- Aspirations of doing humanitarian or development projects in Iraq? If yes; which and where?
- Most important source of funding
- Main expertise of organisation
- Main needs of organisation

### APPENDIX 2: MAPPING OUTCOME

The mapping outcome is not publicly available as it contains sensitive information. Please contact DRC's Diaspora Programme via [diaspora@drc.ngo](mailto:diaspora@drc.ngo) for additional information.

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