



MIGRATION PHENOMENON IN THE KRG: WHY ARE THE KURDS GOING WEST?

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INTRODUCTION

The recent migrant crisis that emerged on the Belarus-Poland border embodies a risk that it could turn into an international crisis. While European countries are involved in the process, there are also rumors that Russia's foreign policy moves triggered the migrant crisis. In addition, it is

quite remarkable that the Iraqi Kurds have come to the fore as the main actors in the crisis in question. As a matter of fact, the death of 27 immigrants from Iraq, Syria, Somalia, and Iran while trying to reach England from the coastal city of Dunkirk in France via an inflatable boat on November 24, 2021 has been on the international agenda¹. Sixteen of those who lost their lives when their boat

¹ Jamie Grierson, "Channel drownings: what happened and who is to blame?," The Guardian, 25 November 2021.

Local media outlets and unofficial institutions working on migration in the KRG indicate that an average of 32 thousand people have immigrated from the KRG since the beginning of 2020

capsized in the English Channel are Iraqi Kurds, and their identity was also confirmed by the Iraqi Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG)².

The disaster in question occurred at the peak of the migration crisis that has been dragging on for months on the Belarus-European Union (EU) borders. Since August 2021, thousands of people from Iraq, Syria, and other Middle Eastern countries have been trying to immigrate to EU countries via Belarus. Migrants who tried to cross the EU borders faced greater risks as the weather conditions worsened due to the season, and at least 11 people, including a 14-year-old child, lost their lives on the Belarus-Poland border³. KRG Spokesperson Jotiar Adil has been stranded at the EU borders since the beginning of the migrant influx. He claimed that 7-8 thousand of the remaining 16 to 17 thousand people were Iraqi Kurds.⁴

Kurdish and other immigrants have been caught in the middle of an escalating geopolitical conflict as eastern EU states such as Poland, Lithuania, and Latvia have deployed police and security forces on Belarusian borders. EU leaders, who argue that the Belarusian government uses immigrants as a political tool to punish the EU, described the migrant crisis at the border as a part of the "hybrid war" waged by the Russian-Belarusian bloc against the EU, and started to approach Iraqi immigrants with an increasingly securitized approach⁵.

Local media outlets and unofficial institutions working on migration in the KRG indicate that an average of 32 thousand people have immigrated from the KRG since the beginning of 2020⁶. While these figures encompass those who abandoned the region via irregular migration⁷, the governments in Arbil and Baghdad do not

² "KRG to Receive Bodies of Migrants Drowned in English Channel on Friday," Bas News, 20 December 2021.

³ Lorne Cook, "Unprecedented: EU to sanction travel agents sending migrants to Belarus-Poland border," The Sunday Morning Herald, 16 November 2021.

⁴ "Nearly 8,000 Kurdistan Region people stuck on Belarus-Poland borders: KRG spok," Rudaw, 11 November 2021.

⁵ Dave Keating, "The EU Scrambles to Respond to 'Hybrid Warfare' on the Poland-Belarus Border," World Politic Review, 11 November 2021.

⁶ "37,000 Iraqis migrated in 2021, ten died: refugee foundation," Rudaw, 26 Ekim 2021; "Iraq's Kurdistan Region must address its youth migration problem," Rudaw, 3 November 2021.

⁷ The International Organization for Migration (OIM) defines irregular migration as migration movements that take place outside the laws, regulations and international agreements regulating entry and exit from countries of origin, transit and destination. The term irregular migration is generally used to describe people who use migration routes outside the framework of the law.



Irregular migrants waiting in cold weather at the Polish-Belarusian border.

provide any official data. In addition, it is observed that the number of Iraqi Kurds who migrated from the KRG or attempted to immigrate has increased since there have been media reports about dozens of Kurdish immigrants who died in the English Channel and on the Belarus-EU borders in recent months. In fact, many analyzes and discussions on the phenomenon of immigration from the KRG draw parallels to the massive migration movement that took place due to the bloody Kurdish civil war in the 1990s⁸.

Increasing immigration from the KRG, which has a higher level of welfare compared to the rest of Iraq, can be seen as a signal for a change in some dynamics. In

this study, which will examine the reasons for the motivation of the Kurds to migrate especially to the EU and the UK, it will also be argued that the sense of hopelessness about the future caused by the increasing discontent with the economic and political developments in the region encourages the Kurds to seek more welfare, security, and educational opportunities.

KRG AS A MIGRATION ORIGIN AND DESTINATION

Even though the Iraqi Kurds' have started leaving the KRG, which has been on the agenda lately, the Arbil administration hosts a significant number of immigrants and asy-

⁸ Abdulla Hawez, "Why are Iraqi Kurds migrating?" Kurdistan Source, 8 December 2021.

These data show that the migration phenomenon has a double effect on the KRG: the first is about the refugees that it hosts, and the second is about the emigration of its own citizens.

lum seekers. Especially after the terrorist organization ISIS took control of almost one third of Iraq's territory and the Iraqi security sector faced collapse, the KRG has been an ideal "shelter area" for many Iraqi government-controlled areas and Syrians fleeing ISIS terror.

According to the report published by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) on internally displaced persons in September 2021, 620,000 of the 1 million 189 thousand internally displaced persons in Iraq's 18 provinces are in the regions under the control of the KRG. 249 thousand people in Duhok, 231 thousand people in Arbil, and 140 thousand people in Sulaymaniyah left their homes due to security concerns and the devastation caused by the war against ISIS and sought refuge in the KRG⁹. Among these figures, there are also Iraqi Yezidis who were systematically persecuted by ISIS.

In addition, more than 252 thousand immigrants, who had to leave their country due to the Syrian civil war since 2011, continue to live in Iraq, especially in the lands under the control of the KRG. Approxi-

mately 97.4 percent of the Syrian immigrants reside in Arbil, Sulaymaniyah and Duhok¹⁰. These data show that the migration phenomenon has a double effect on the KRG: the first is about the refugees that it hosts, and the second is about the emigration of its own citizens. Especially in the post-2014 period, with the rise of ISIS, it seems that the KRG is an attractive destination for many displaced people in the region who face acute security and shelter problems.

With a population of more than 5 million, the KRG hosts almost 700,000 refugees, but as seen in the example of Belarus, its people emigrate to other countries in great numbers. Since the provinces of Duhok, Arbil, and Sulaymaniyah of the KRG are above Iraq's average in terms of human development¹¹, the KRG administration was able to establish the perception that it maintains a more stable and welfare-producing administration than the rest of Iraq. Despite this, the reason why Iraqi Kurds, who can be considered young and middle class, leave their homes and cross the EU and UK borders to seek a different life, points

⁹ "Refugee Situations," UNHCR Operational Data Portal, 30 November 2021, <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria/location/5>

¹⁰ "Refugee Situations," <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria/location/5>

¹¹ "Iraqi Youth Challenges and Opportunities," UNDP Iraq Human Development Report, 2014.



Migrants on the Polish-Belarusian border continue to wait in the closed zone.

to a phenomenon of the deterioration of the economic and political conditions in the region.

On the other hand, the identities and characteristics of the Kurds who decided to leave the KRG come to the forefront of the current agenda. It is known that a few weeks before the tragic accident in the English Channel, there were hundreds of Kurdish immigrants waiting for the right time to cross into England in a forested area in Dunkirk. An immigrant from Kirkuk spoke to the media in these words: "We had a miserable life in Kurdistan, if someone's life was good, why would they risk so much?"¹²

It is stated that the immigration costs of immigrants trying to go to European countries range between three and five thousand dollars¹³, including passports, plane tickets, accommodation costs, and fees paid to human smugglers. According to the IOM data, eighty-seven percent of the KRG households have a total monthly income that amounts to 850 dollars¹⁴. The same report shows that the average income of a person in the KRG who wants to immigrate is too low to cover the costs of emigrating to Europe, given that there are an average of five members in a household. From this point of view, it is possible to say that Iraqi Kurds, who are mostly in the middle and lower middle-income

¹² Kurdistan Watch, Twitter, 7 November 2021, <https://twitter.com/KurdistanWatch/status/1457411125058932738>

¹³ Mohammed Rasool, "The Migrants Who Paid \$3,600 To End Up Trapped on the Freezing Edge of Europe," Vice, 16 November 2021.

¹⁴ "Statistics Office, IOM, UNFPA Launch Demographic Survey of Iraq's Kurdistan Region," IOM, 14 September 2018.

levels, can take the risk of migration. While it is expected that those in the upper income level will migrate through legal means, it should not be ignored that Iraqis with low incomes obtain the necessary financing for migration by borrowing.

ECONOMIC FACTORS OF MIGRATION

Economic uncertainty and anxiety about the future, as well as some chronic economic structural problems in Iraq, are among the factors that determine the migration decisions of many Iraqi Kurds. The fragility of the economy based on oil trade, employment based on the public sector, the inability of the private sector to have a place in the economy of the KRG, and the increasing young unemployment rates are among the leading economic problems.

As of 2014, with the overlapping of financial, security, and humanitarian problems, the KRG was faced with a full-scale economic crisis. The most serious financial problem emerged in 2014 when the then Prime Minister, Nouri al-Maliki, cut the budget share¹⁵ paid to the KRG following the disagreements between the Arbil and Baghdad administrations that focused on the KRG's independent oil exports. The KRG had to decrease public spending and was forced to delay or cancel the payment of wages of its employees and Peshmerga forces. Since approximately 1 million to 4 million people

receive salaries from the administration in the region with a population of 5.5 million, according to unofficial figures, the dimensions of social unrest will be understood¹⁶. In fact, a protest movement targeting the administration under the domination of the KDP and the PUK has recently emerged¹⁷. The most recent violent protests took place at universities in Sulaymaniyah in November, with demands for students to increase the financial allowances allocated by the government to complete their education.¹⁸

The KRG administration was distressed due to the ISIS occupation of almost one third of Iraq's territory as of 2014 and the failure of the Iraqi security forces to halt the advance of the organization. For this reason, the KRG government prioritized the issue of security, especially the fight against ISIS. The humanitarian crisis caused by ISIS terrorism has disproportionately affected the Arbil administration. As mentioned above, hundreds of thousands of IDPs fleeing the violence of ISIS took shelter in the KRG territories, and the humanitarian aid budget allocated to the refugees has deteriorated the economic hardships that the Arbil administration suffered from.

The 2014 crisis also revealed the fragility of the KRG's oil-based economy. According to World Bank data, 92 percent of the government revenue of Iraq, one of the countries with the largest oil reserves in the world (fifth in the world¹⁹), is provided by the oil

¹⁵ "Iraqi Kurdistan's battle with Baghdad over oil revenues," BBC News, 10 April 2015.

¹⁶ "İKBY ekonomik krizden çıkmanın yollarını arıyor," Anadolu Ajansı, 11 February 2016.

¹⁷ Mehmet Alaca & Bekir Aydoğan, "Süleymaniye'deki hükümet karşıtı protestolar nasıl okunmalı?" Anadolu Ajansı, 15 December 2020.

¹⁸ "Sulaimani student protest turns violent," Rudaw, 22 November 2021.

¹⁹ "These 15 countries, as home to largest reserves, control the world's oil," USA Today, 22 May 2019.

sector²⁰. For the KRG, the oil sector provides 85 percent of the government's revenues²¹. It is one of the least diversified economies in the Middle East. However, the governments of Baghdad and Arbil failed to make investments in diversifying their economies and initiate reforms with the income they obtained during the high periods of the oil markets²². The income flow provided by the oil economy boosted public sector employment, and the private sector did not have the opportunity to develop. Even though the Arbil government moved away from the oil-based economy and announced a plan to revive the private sector in 2019²³, its implementation was hindered due to the global Covid-19 epidemic and other restrictions²⁴.

During the periods when oil revenues were high and the economy had high performance, the distribution of income remained unjust and no

steps were taken to overcome problems such as poverty and income inequality. As the Covid-19 pandemic wreaked havoc on the global oil market, the rate of Iraqis living below the poverty line increased to 31.7 percent in 2020²⁵. Because of the decrease in oil revenues in the first half of last year, the KRG was able to pay salaries to public employees for only two months.

At this point, it is necessary to examine the effects of the KRG's inflated public sector on economic fragility in the context of the oil crisis on the public sector. The IOM reports state that public sector salaries are the main source of income for households in the KRG. While two-thirds of the KRG households are supported by government salaries, 47 percent of the total household members are active government employees and 18 percent are pensioners²⁶. The public sector employs about half of the

During the periods when oil revenues were high and the economy had high performance, the distribution of income remained unjust and no steps were taken to overcome problems such as poverty and income inequality.

²⁰ "Iraq Economic Monitor: Navigating the Perfect Storm (Redux)," Dünya Bankası, 4 May 2020.

²¹ "The Kurdistan Region of Iraq: Reforming the Economy for Shared Prosperity and Protecting the Vulnerable," Dünya Bankası, 30 April 2016.

²² Sajad Jiyad & Mûjge Küçükkeleş & Tobias Schillings, "Economic Drivers of Youth Political Discontent in Iraq: The Voice of Young People in Kurdistan, Baghdad, Basra and Thi-Qar," Global Partners Governance, 2020.

²³ "KRG sets out development plan for 2020," Rudaw, 3 May 2020.

²⁴ "Kurdistan Region of Iraq: Reforming the Economy for Shared Prosperity and Protecting the Vulnerable," The World Bank, 30 May 2016.

²⁵ "Poverty rate in Iraq drops to about 25 percent," Xinhua, 16 March 2021.

²⁶ "The Demographic Survey of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq," KRSO; IOM; UNFPA Rapor, 2018.



A meeting on current developments in Iraq.

working population in the KRG. An enlarged public sector and an economy based on oil revenues are more vulnerable to shocks in the global oil market. As a matter of fact, the KRG economy showed signs of recovery after the 2014 budget crisis, but started to decline again in 2019 with the oil market collapse, resulting in the failure to pay public sector salaries. The payment problem in the public sector was also felt throughout the KRG due to its scale. As of November 2021, when this report was authored, civil servants had still not received their payments, thereby demonstrating a chronic problem for the Arbil administration in funding the public sector²⁷. Iraqi Kurds lost significant income due to the delay and/or cutting of public salary payments.

Another economic factor that encourages immigration from the KRG is that young

Iraqi Kurds, regardless of their education level, are not employed and are exposed to a feeling of despair for the future. It is stated that even during relatively better economic conditions before the Covid-19 epidemic, 20 percent of Iraqi Kurdish youth (18-34 years old) had no hope of finding a job²⁸. By 2020, the unemployment rate was 13 percent for the general population and almost thrice this figure for young people between the ages of 18-35²⁹. In fact, according to statistics released by the International Labor Organization (ILO), the employment rate of young women in all sectors in the KRG was recorded at only 5 percent³⁰. It is also stated that the youth unemployment increased, especially during the period when Covid-19 restrictions were in effect³¹.

In addition to economic indicators, the economic perception of Iraqi Kurds also

²⁷ "كلاوه عەبدولقادر: واپروات مۆجە دەبیته ۵۰ رۆژ جارێک" NRT, 4 December 2021.

²⁸ "Statistics Office, IOM, UNFPA Launch Demographic Survey of Iraq's Kurdistan Region," IOM, 14 September 2018.

²⁹ Sajad Jiyad & Mújge Küçükkeleş & Tobias Schillings, 2020.

³⁰ "ILO Country profiles," 2020, <https://ilostat.ilo.org/data/country-profiles/>

³¹ Sajad Jiyad & Mújge Küçükkeleş & Tobias Schillings, 2020.

plays an important role in the decision to migrate. For example, the interviews conducted by the UK-based Global Partners Governance show that the economic future of the KRG emerges as an issue that all participants are pessimistic about³². In a 2021 survey, 52 percent of Sunnis, 68 percent of Shiites, and 65 percent of Kurds expressed the opinion that “the situation in Iraq will not improve”. In this context, the delay or non-payment of salaries of public sector employees in the KRG, and youth unemployment throughout the region stand out as factors that feed economic pessimism.

However, it is seen that the participants agreed that the bipolar political system dominated by the KDP and the PUK made the KRG economy even more vulnerable to shocks. In this respect, the political structure and economic problems in the KRG are factors that feed off each other and push migration. The failure of the KRG’s economic management, which was once expected to be the Dubai of Iraq, corruption, nepotism, and a worsening record on employment push the Kurdish people to overcome the most difficult

migration paths and even risk death.

POLITICAL FACTORS TRIGGERING MIGRATION

KRG politics is actually governed by a two-party system. While the KDP, under the Barzani family, is dominant in the Arbil and Duhok regions, the PUK, under the Talabani family, is based in the Sulaymaniyah region. These parties have their own Peshmerga forces and intelligence services. In addition to that, public sector posts and tender agreements are shared according to party affiliation. Those who are outside of this system of affiliation either face unemployment or have to work in low-income jobs. The fact that the dominant parties are closed to change in the established order and the lack of political accountability deepens the feeling of hopelessness and injustice among the young Iraqi Kurds who are out of this political equation.

The displeasure of Kurds about the current political order is further highlighted since the Goran Movement, founded in 2009 by Nawshirwan Mustafa, who left the PUK, and the New Generation Movement,

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³² Sajad Jiyad & Mûjge Kûçûkkeleş & Tobias Schillings, 2020.

In addition to the economic and political factors, the Belarusian administration's efforts to utilize the immigrants against the EU provide a relative motivation for the migration of the Kurds.

founded in 2017 under the leadership of Kurdish businessman Shahsuvar Abdulwahid, received serious social support as anti-system parties. It also highlights the extent of the Kurds' discomfort with the current two-party political order. Accordingly, the boycott phenomenon, which became a chronic problem in Iraqi politics with the October 10 elections, can also be observed in KRG politics. As a matter of fact, in Duhok, where the KDP was strong in the October 10 general elections, the turnout in the elections remained at 54 percent, despite reaching the highest rate across the country. In Sulaymaniyah, where opposition groups such as the New Generation Movement are strong, it was recorded as one of the provinces with the lowest participation, at 37 percent. Finally, even in Arbil, known as the KDP's stronghold, the turnout remained at 46 percent³³. This picture shows that the decreasing loyalty of most of the other ethnic and sectarian groups in Iraq to the existing political parties and the political system has also been observed among the Kurds.

On the other hand, networks of corruption, nepotism, and patronage receive a very serious reaction in Kurdish society, especially among the educated. The transformation of the peaceful demonstrations against corruption and the government that broke out across the KRG in December 2020 into acts of violence³⁴ in which political parties and official buildings were set on fire can be considered as another reflection of the discontent with the established political order. For those who think that political change will not come through protests or elections, and that includes especially young Iraqi Kurds, the most ideal choice is to emigrate. The feeling of alienation from the political system that is shared by the majority of the people is one of the important factors that feeds the decision to migrate.

Another symptom of the rooted patronage system that encourages immigration from the KRG is corruption. According to a 2019 survey, 47 percent of respondents across Iraq describe corruption as the biggest problem in the country³⁵.

³³ Alper Cezmi Özdemir, "Irak Genel Seçimleri ve İKBY Siyasetindeki Değişimler," *Ortadoğu Analiz*, November 2021 Vol: 12 Issue: 107.

³⁴ Sofia Barbarani, "Iraqi leader calls for end to violence in Sulaymaniyah protests," *Aljazeera*, 8 December 2020.

³⁵ Munqith Dagher & Karl Kaltenthaler, "Polling Insights on Iraq's Shia Revolt," 8 November 2019.



Belarusian President Lukashenko visited the refugee camp on the Belarusian-Polish border.

Although steps have been taken to combat corruption in recent years, it is observed that they are insufficient to solve problems related to corruption. For example, the Arbil administration agreed with the US-based Deloitte and UK-based Ernst and Young firms to expose and monitor corruption in the oil and gas sector, one of the largest sectors in the KRG³⁶. Nevertheless, these companies' efforts failed to reveal the corruption in the region.

THE ROLE OF THE BELARUSIAN GOVERNMENT

In addition to the economic and political factors, the Belarusian administration's efforts to utilize the immigrants against the

EU provide a relative motivation for the migration of the Kurds. With the deepening of the migration crisis on the Belarusian and European borders, EU leaders accused Belarusian President Aleksandr Lukashenko of gathering immigrants to the EU border with the promise of easy passage³⁷. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, who met with Polish Foreign Minister Zbigniew Rau, accused Belarus and Russia of triggering the migrant crisis. Blinken claimed that the Lukashenko government is using the refugees for its own interests, Blinken said, "While the Lukashenko regime's actions threaten security in the region and fuel separation, they aim to divert attention from Russia's actions on the Ukrainian border."³⁸

³⁶ "KRG signs oil and gas audit agreement with Ernst & Young," Rudaw, 30 November 2016.

³⁷ "Belarus migrants: EU accuses Lukashenko of gangster-style abuse," BBC News, 9 November 2021.

³⁸ "Blinken'dan Belarus ve Rusya'ya 'göçmen krizi' suçlaması," Rudaw, 15 November 2021.

EU and US leaders accuse Belarus and Russia of "creating" an immigration crisis stemming from the conflicting relationships of the Belarusian administration with the EU. The Lukashenko government forced an international passenger plane to land in Minsk in order to arrest dissident journalist Roman Protasevich in May, while the EU introduced economic sanctions targeting Belarus³⁹. He declared that he would not stop the "migrant flow". Thus, with the deterioration of EU relations, the Belarusian government retaliated by encouraging immigrants to enter the EU through its own territory.

The announcement by the Belarusian government that it would issue visas for Iraqi citizens at the gate in August and the relaxation of travel restrictions caused Iraqi Kurds and other Middle Easterners who want to immigrate to Europe to use the Belarus route. The fact that Belarus shares its borders with the EU border countries of Poland, Lithuania, and Latvia and the possibility of safe arrival in Belarus has revealed this country as the safest option for immigrants. As a matter of fact, while arriving in Greece or other EU member states with a coast to the Mediterranean Sea via the Aegean Sea was another alternative for immigrants, it is the most unsafe and risky route. In this respect, the decision by the Lukashenko administration to provide a safe migration route via visa convenience has triggered migration from the KRG.

WHAT CAN THE KRG DO?

Lukashenko's immigration card against the EU did not work, and the case of Belarus

seriously damaged the image of the KRG, which was presented as a model in terms of economy, democracy, and human rights standards in the Middle East until 2014.

The KRG and EU countries, especially Germany⁴⁰, took action in November 2021 to initiate voluntary return flights, as the migrant crisis has dragged on and started to become deadly. The return flights started on November 17⁴¹ and have brought a total of 3,350 Iraqi citizens back to their countries so far⁴². Considering that the number of Kurds waiting at the Belarus-EU borders was previously announced as being between 7 and 8 thousand, about half of the immigrants returned to their countries of origin. However, it is unclear how many of the thousands of Iraqi Kurds waiting in Belarus managed to cross the EU borders and how many are still waiting.

Considering the migrant drama in Belarus, serious steps must be taken to meet the demands of Iraqi Kurds. The effects of the economic crisis that has not been overcome since 2014 and the dominance of family parties in regional politics have created such discontent that a substantial number of Iraqi Kurds have taken deadly risks and emigrated. In order for the Arbil administration to overcome this discontent, serious and concrete steps should be taken to diversify the economy. With the normalization of the Kovid-19 pandemic, oil prices have reached a level that will give the KRG economy a breather. This relative comfort created an opportunity for the KRG leaders to initiate eco-

³⁹ "EU imposes broad economic sanctions on Belarus over Ryanair incident," Reuters, 24 June 2021.

⁴⁰ "Germany, KRG to coordinate to end Belarus migrant crisis: official," Rudaw, 14 November 2021.

⁴¹ "Repatriation flights will begin on Thursday for Iraqi Kurds stuck at Poland-Belarus border," Mena Affairs, 16 November 2021.

⁴² "Iraq announces repatriation of over 3500 migrants from Poland-Belarus border," Mena Affairs, 13 November 2021.

conomic reforms. The Arbil administration may prioritize reducing the burden of the public sector, abandoning the austerity policies implemented after the 2014 crisis, supporting sectors such as health and education, and reducing the economy's dependence on oil. It is a positive indicator that the KRG government promised to reinstate student scholarships that were cut in 2014. However, since the above-mentioned structural reforms were not prioritized in years when economic indicators were in favor of the KRG, it is unlikely that the administration's attitude will radically change in the future.

Fighting the political aspect of the discontent that drives Iraqi Kurds to migrate requires making the KRG political system

more inclusive. It is necessary to ensure the participation of Iraqi Kurds, who are not affiliated with the dominant political parties, in the political process. In this respect, democratic reform is essential. Problems related to nepotism and corruption, which are among the chronic problems in the KRG, can only be tackled with democratic reform and the establishment of independent check and balance institutions. As a matter of fact, some of the main sources of alienation from the political system are the differences in job opportunities and even the legal system according to party affiliations. If the Arbil administration takes steps to overcome these deep-rooted problems, it can prevent future migration waves.

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Mr. Özdemir earned his master's degree in International Relations at the University of Chicago, where he went as a Fulbright scholar in 2020. While in Chicago, he took part in academic projects on the propaganda strategies of militant organizations such as ISIS and al-Qaeda at the research center called the Chicago Project on Security and Threats (CPOST). He is currently working as a Research Assistant in the Department of Iraqi Studies at ORSAM.

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