

THE SUNGLOW TRUST

Iraqi Migrants in the UK

Voluntary returns - reducing processing backlogs

A route home for failed asylum claimants

Upstream solutions reducing migrant flows to Europe

Employment opportunities meeting the challenges of climate change

**REALISTIC WORKABLE
SOLUTIONS**



THE SUNGLOW TRUST

Iraq - Emigration reduction strategies - Giving the migrant demographic new employment opportunities whilst working to mitigate the effects of climate change and adapt to these changes - an alternative to leaving home.





IRAQ - CLIMATE CHANGE - A POST-CONFLICT DRIVER OF MIGRATION

Iraq has been one of the countries hardest hit by climate change with the annual mean temperature increasing by 1 to 2 degrees Celsius between 1970 and 2004. The United Nations has found Iraq to be the fifth most vulnerable country to climate breakdown, affected by soaring temperatures, insufficient and diminishing rainfall, intensified droughts, water scarcity and flooding as well as increasingly frequent sand and dust storms. Temperatures in the country are increasing up to seven times faster than the global average, while annual rainfall is predicted to decrease by anything from 9% to 25% by 2050.

There have long been pressures particularly on the youth to migrate in the direction of Europe. The country faces endless crises including high unemployment, political instability and corruption. The advancing climate emergency only serves to compound the difficulties of daily life.

A series of dramatic events in the first six months of 2022 brought home the reality, and dangers, of climate change to the Iraqi public. Nine dust storms swept through the country in a period of only eight weeks, leading to the closure of government offices and airports, stifling economic activity and hospitalising thousands of people. The challenges of climate change in Iraq are real and present. Its adverse effect on daily life further incentivises migration, inevitably towards Europe.

As negative environmental changes intensify, the number of migrants leaving for Europe can only be expected to increase exponentially.





THE SUNGLOW TRUST



MIGRATION TO EUROPE - FROM IRAQ



In 2023, the European Union received 1.14 million asylum applications - up by 18% compared to 2022, which in turn was up around 50% compared to 2021 - a level reminiscent of the 2015/16 refugee crisis following the civil war in Syria, when 1.3 million then 1.19 million sought refuge in the EU.

In 2021 according to the EUAA (EU Agency for Asylum), Iraq was the third country of origin in terms of the number of applications for international protection lodged in the EU, with numbers approaching **30,490**. This is a 53% increase compared to 2020, although on a par with the 2019 figure of **31,325**.

In March 2022, for the first time, total monthly asylum applications in the EU exceeded **80,000**. During this year the largest number of applications came from Syria and Afghanistan, however figures show that **28,340** applications were lodged by Iraqi nationals. This compares to **26,131** asylum applications lodged by Iraqis in 2023.

Despite numbers fluctuating over the years, when it comes to number of applications ranked by nationality, Iraqis persistently remain in the top ten usually placed somewhere between third and sixth.



SEEKING ASYLUM IN THE UK - IRAQI NATIONALS

The annual number of asylum applications to the UK peaked in 2002 at 84,132. After that the number fell sharply to reach a twenty-year low point of 17,916 in 2010. It rose steadily throughout the 2010s, then rapidly from 2021 onwards to reach a high of 81,130 in 2022.

In 2023, the UK ranked fifth in the number of asylum claims received when compared to EU countries. But when adjusted for population size, it falls to twentieth place. There was a total of 67,337 applications made for asylum in the UK that year, which related to 84,425 individuals (including dependants). This was 17% lower than the number of applications in 2022 (81,130 applications relating to 99,939 people).

From the 81,130 asylum applications in 2022, Iraqi nationals accounted for **6,295** of these although by 2023 this had slipped back to **3,985**. However, compared to **2,971** in 2019 and **2,299** in 2020 this indicates a possible new upward trend.

According to the Iraqi Welfare Association 'at the end of 2022 more than **12,000** Iraqis were stuck in temporary accommodation for more than six months waiting for a decision of their asylum claims'.

In common with much of the EU, and according to the Home Office's Irregular Migration Statistics, the third largest incoming numbers by nationality from 2018 to March 2023 were Iraqis, after Iranians and Albanians. Iraqis represent 14.7% of total

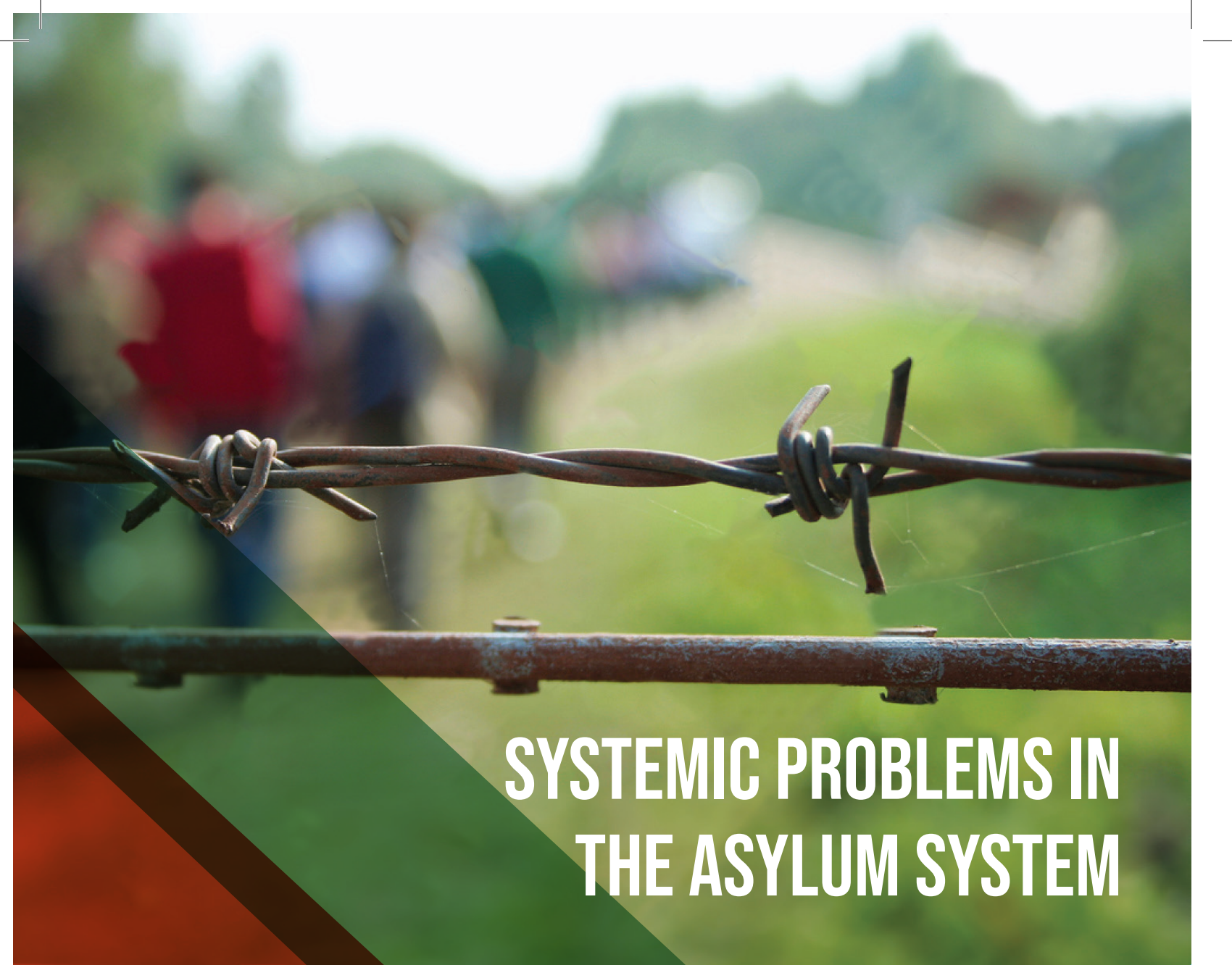
numbers for that period. Although the numbers vary over the years and each quarter is different, Iraqis consistently feature in the top ten incoming nationalities.

According to Home Office statistics in the year ending March 2024, Iraqis arriving by small boats ranked **sixth** by number of incoming nationalities.

Iraqi claims - Figures reveal 73% of all initial decisions made in the year to March 2023 had been positive, with refugee status granted (or some other form of protection). However, it should be noted that for Iraqis only 41% were granted any status. Furthermore, the overall rate of refusals for this group runs at 45% which is unusually high compared to other nationalities. It could therefore be suggested their claims lack the necessary substance. (These numbers don't take account of decisions being overturned on appeal which in the year to March 2023 were successful in 43% of cases).

EU members, particularly Germany, appear to have recognised an improved situation in Iraq by refusing larger numbers of applicants and increasing returns.¹¹ October 2023 - The EU is pushing for a 'non-binding instrument' with Iraq in order 'to increase Iraq's cooperation on readmission' – that is, acceptance of deportations. The plan is being pushed ahead by the Council of the EU by way of a non-binding agreement, despite acknowledgement that the Iraqi government announced in March this year that 'it denounced the previous policy of general non-acceptance of non-voluntary returns and... committed to start cooperating on all returns'.

This should encourage the United Kingdom to test the effectiveness of its own agreements with the Iraqi authorities and start repatriating failed asylum seekers both by forcible and voluntary means.



SYSTEMIC PROBLEMS IN THE ASYLUM SYSTEM

Casework backlog - At the end of March 2023 there were 172,758 people waiting for an outcome on their initial claim for asylum, a 57% increase on the number of applications awaiting this decision a year earlier at 109,735 people.

Since then, there has been a concerted effort by the Home Office to reduce this number and by March 2024 this had fallen to 118,329.

However, the backlog of cases has shifted to either end of the asylum process - a direct result of the Illegal Migration Act 2023 - which has led to tens of thousands of cases sitting in the inadmissibility process and not even being considered. Added to this, there are also tens of thousands of cases that were refused towards the end of 2023 which have moved into the tribunal system as appeals.

In an effort to reduce the 'initial decision backlog', nearly 20,000 asylum claims were refused between 1 October and 31 December 2023 and a further 13,253 in the first three months of 2024. There were more refusals in those six months than in total between January 2020 and October 2023 (31,749). As a result, between October 2023 and March 2024, 22,928 appeals were received by the first-tier tribunal - a 379% increase on the same period a year earlier. By contrast, in the year to March 2024 the first-tier tribunal disposed of 9,943 appeals. As a result, the backlog in asylum appeals almost quadrupled from 7,510 at the end of March 2023 to 27,133 a year later.

The result of all this chaos is that a person arriving in the UK and claiming asylum must wait such an extended time from the initial decision through to a final resolution, they are effectively granted a visa to remain in the UK for many years - albeit stateless and without work permission.

The Illegal Migration Act 2023 - This denies an asylum claim to anyone who has entered the country 'illegally' - having passed through a 'safe country' - be it by 'small boats' or any method other than the very limited numbers offered by a couple of settlement schemes. However, it allows this group entry to the same support and accommodation provision which asylum seekers receive, piling ever more pressure on an already limited bed-space capacity and overflowing into hotels. This is creating a secondary artificial backlog with further dire consequences for the entire asylum processing system when this logjam is released into it.

If the act was fully enacted, it would lead to the asylum system being effectively shut down. By the end of 2024, this would result in more than 115,000 people who are in the UK being left permanently stranded with their claims deemed inadmissible.

Returns - In total, there have been just over 74,662 asylum refusals in the last five years but just over 15,000 enforced and voluntary returns.

A stark example is 2021, when there were just 346 enforced asylum returns for the whole year. In the year ending March 2024, Iraqis ranked fifth in the top ten nationalities removed but with numbers only in the low hundreds. The numbers of Iraqis in the UK without any official status are unknown while many more continue to arrive daily. All the while backlogs persist at such a high level and processing is so slow that claiming asylum in the UK effectively gives the applicant a ticket to stay in the country for years – a visa without the associated privileges!

Returns - In total, there have been just over 74,662 asylum refusals in the last five years but just over 15,000 enforced and voluntary returns.

A stark example is 2021, when there were just 346 enforced asylum returns for the whole year. In the year ending March 2024, Iraqis ranked fifth in the top ten nationalities removed but with numbers only in the low hundreds. The numbers of Iraqis in the UK without any official status are unknown while many more continue to arrive daily. All the while backlogs persist at such a high level and processing is so slow that claiming asylum in the UK effectively gives the applicant a ticket to stay in the country for years – a visa without the associated privileges!





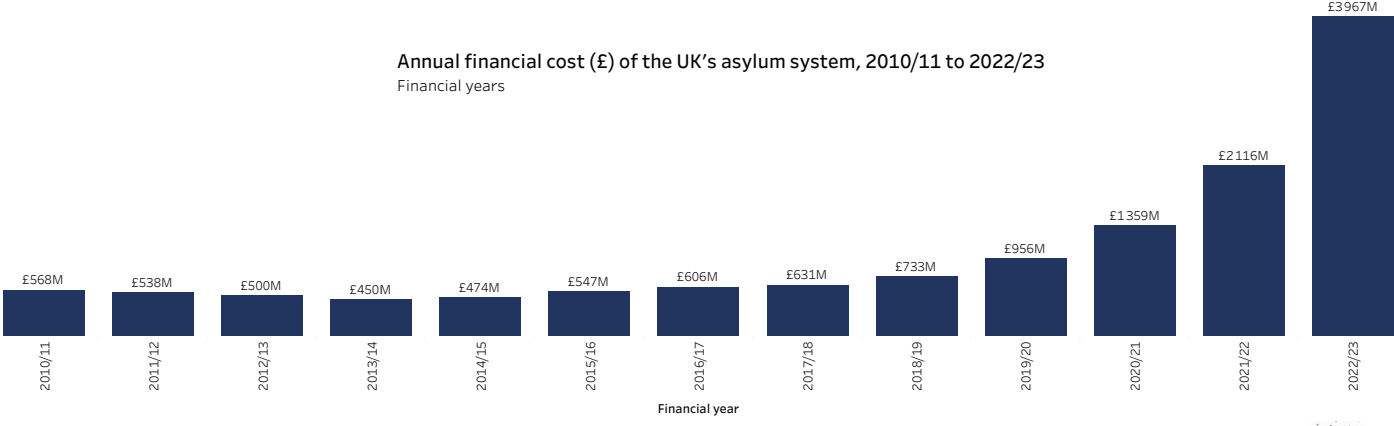
COSTS TO THE UK GOVERNMENT

Amid a backlog of asylum cases, costs to the UK government ballooned from £500m in 2019 to £4.3bn by 2023. The Home Office is responsible for asylum and protection in the UK, including ensuring compliance with the UK’s legal commitments. It is responsible for processing claims and supporting people seeking asylum who are destitute, by providing financial support and accommodation until it makes a final decision on their claim. Claimants are normally dispersed around the UK into residential property sourced from the private rental sector and managed by regional private contractors. In 2019 the government signed seven regional contracts with private sector companies for asylum accommodation and transport. These contracts had a combined value of more than £4.5bn over 10 years. The accommodation was only intended to be temporary while cases are processed.

The mounting case backlog, now including those trapped by the effects of the 2023 Illegal Migration Act and increasing incoming numbers, has meant that not only has this stock become full to capacity but additional accommodation has had to be found. Space in around 400 hotels was purchased to cope with the demand, alongside an unknown number of hostels. In just one month (December 2023) the Home Office spent £274m on 64,000 hotel beds, with less than 46,000 of them in use.

According to Home Office figures, the cost of hotel use reached a peak of £8m a day during 2023.

Following the latest backlog clearance this dropped back dramatically. By the end of March 2024, 35,686 people who had applied for asylum in the UK were being accommodated in hotels. It’s worth noting over half (19,550) of those being housed in hotels were from countries with initial asylum decision grant rates of at least 80%, at a daily cost of around £2.9m. The entire cost of the asylum system to the Home Office in the financial year 2021/22 was £2.116bn. By the year 2022/23 this had reached £3.967bn.



Source: Migration Observatory analysis of Home Office Immigration and Protection Transparency Data, Table Asy_04, Year ending December 2023
 Notes: Costs include those associated with deciding a case (interviews, asylum casework, issuing a decision); managing any appeals; accommodation and asylum support payments; costs of detention; enforcement costs, including escorting and assisting voluntary returns; and the cost of the Home Office’s relevant department staff and buildings.





THE LABOUR GOVERNMENT'S PLANS

The Labour Government has pledged a new Border Security Command, with hundreds of new investigators and intelligence officers to pursue, disrupt and arrest those responsible for people smuggling. 'A new security agreement with the EU will be sought to ensure access to real-time intelligence and enable our policing teams to lead joint investigations with their European counterparts'. Labour further promises to restore order to the asylum system so that it operates 'swiftly, firmly, and fairly and the rules are properly enforced'. This will partly be achieved by hiring additional caseworkers to clear the backlog and end the costly asylum hotels. Labour is to set up a new returns and enforcement unit, with an additional 1,000 staff, to fast-track removals to safe countries for people who have no legal right to remain in the UK. They have committed to negotiating additional returns arrangements to speed up deportations and increase the number of safe countries that failed asylum seekers can swiftly be sent back to - 'we will also act upstream, working with international partners to address the humanitarian crises which lead people to flee their homes, and to strengthen support for refugees in their home region'.

Background

At least %90 of Iraqis that reach the UK will be from the north of Iraq and therefore predominately ethnic Kurds. It's usually the case that young single males make up the majority of this migrant population. In Kurdistan - Iraq these tend to hail more from rural communities where this cohort feel less connected to the modern world and see little future in traditional occupations such as farming. Alongside which, there are the

ever-present difficulties of finding employment against a constant background of political instability, corruption and nepotism. The communities they inhabit are likely to be more socially conservative and young men are tempted by the freedoms a new life could offer in Europe without the constraints imposed by family, society and culture.

The purpose and origin of the UN Refugee Convention of 1951 will barely be understood by those seeking to migrate, even less the complexities of an evolved western asylum application and processing system - and entirely lost on the families of these migrants.

Generally, their only understanding is that a story needs to be concocted involving some kind of threat from the authorities, paramilitaries, inter-communal conflicts or even disputes within the extended family. Religious issues and defying cultural norms are also common ingredients.

In the late '90s, and particularly from 1999 onwards, increasingly large numbers of Iraqi Kurds left their homeland in northern Iraq crossing over the Turkish border making their way via Greece and Italy, dispersing across Europe with large numbers finally crossing the channel to the UK by lorry.

While Saddam Hussain was still in power, Kurds could support a stronger asylum case of facing persecution. For a number of years, the favoured treatment of this group by the Home Office was to grant ELR - Exceptional Leave to Remain. Refusals would be problematic in that removals to Iraq would be near impossible. When refusals did occur (and appeals proved unsuccessful) they usually stayed in the UK anyway, disappearing into their own emerging networks and the informal economy.

ELR grants, usually of four years, had the effect of shelving cases, thereby delaying any final resolution to these people's claims while they simply got on with life as best they could. Many thousands of Kurds were left in this limbo, often waiting ten or more years to finally receive settlement status.

During Saddam's time their asylum cases would frequently place their home as the city of Kirkuk. Demographic change was being forced on the Kurdish population and persecution evident and more widely known about in this region than other parts of the north. Post 2003 and Saddam's removal, an entirely different narrative had to be

found. Suggesting their starting point as Kurdistan - Iran always proved a favourite. Immigration lawyers at this time often related a weariness reading 'cases' that had been unimaginatively copy-pasted from one client to another.

During the late 1990s and early 2000s, the Home Office allowed the build-up of a backlog of around 400,000 asylum cases stuck at different points in the system or refused but still present in the country. From the latter part of the 1990s to 2011, four separate exercises to clear these cases led to 256,000 persons being granted settlement status. This is a quarter of a million failed asylum seekers given an amnesty and allowed to stay in the UK.

It was these years that allowed Kurdish immigrants to establish a foothold in cities across the UK and coalesce into communities that ever since have provided a ready-made welcoming home from home for any would-be newcomers.

Provincial cities that once hosted a few dozen Iraqi Kurds in the '90s are now home to established communities many thousands in number.

These days back in the Kurdish cities of Erbil or Sulaymaniyah, any bored teenager can make a couple of phone calls or visit Facebook and instantly get in contact with an operator or agent who can organise them a trip to the UK where a place awaits them with all the familiar surroundings of home. When it comes to the final leg of the journey, helpfully most if not all the departure points along the French coast facing England are controlled by Kurdish smugglers, the territory split between Iraqi and Iranian operators. Once in the UK the likelihood of being forcibly removed if their case is dismissed is almost nil. It's not an exaggeration to suggest that every family in Kurdistan Iraq has one or more relatives in their extended family somewhere in the European diaspora. The route from Kurdistan to the United Kingdom has in particular become a well-worn path.

In the space of two decades the influx of Iraqi Kurds to the UK has changed not only the ethnic breakdown of every city but even the face of the high street. No urban setting is now complete without the Kurdish barber, car wash and sundry Mini Markets.



SEEKING ASYLUM IN THE UK – THE REALITY

Iraqis claiming asylum in the UK today can never be sure of the outcome or how many months they will have to wait for their screening interview, which in turn maybe months or even years ahead of any initial decision. The whole process can and does run into years and if the decision is negative many months can be added to the process while the case makes its way through the appeals procedure.

The appeals process may not be limited to a single hearing, it can easily run to two or three. If there is the usual backlog in the first-tier tribunal where these cases are heard, this will stretch matters out even further. Three hearings separated by say a three-month wait for each, means the best part of another year wasted before any resolution.

Even when the decision is positive, often the grant of ‘leave to remain’ may be for a limited period as little as three years. When this expires the process effectively starts again with another prolonged wait of a year or two and if further leave to remain is refused on a technical issue - for example late submission of documents delayed in the post - then the appeals process is set in motion yet again.

If they are unable to find a Legal Aid lawyer, then the only option is to self-fund which can run into thousands of pounds very quickly and leading many to opt out. Home Office statistics categorise these cases as ‘withdrawn’ which may or may not be the reality.

For those who never made it this far the situation can be much bleaker. It’s not uncommon to hear Iraqi migrants in their 30s and 40s who made it to the UK in their late teens or early 20s speak with profound regret at having lost a precious part of their early life in exchange for nothing more than a basic understanding of a foreign language.

The early dream of a fantastic new life with money, freedom, flash clothes, cars, and unlimited opportunities long ago faded, now replaced by an arduous, seemingly never-ending routine working seven days a week in a car wash for little cash, sleeping on a friend’s sofa in some squalid damp and mouldy unlicensed multi let subsisting on lukewarm takeaways.

Even if the individual was lucky enough to be granted Leave to Remain for a period of say five years on their initial application, the chances of owning a British passport before seven years has elapsed is slim. It is this precious document that represents the culmination of years of waiting and uncertainty, yet it's not uncommon for the entire process to drag on for a decade or longer.

Not unusually the migrants dream of a new life in the UK generally turns out to be substantially at odds with the real lived experience of their fellow countrymen. Earlier arrivals will inevitably have put a spin on their new life when calling home. They want to appear successful even when expectations fall far short of the reality. It can be humiliating to admit to all the difficulties, hardship and an uncertain future.

Once this nationality of migrants has arrived in Europe they are going to proceed to their chosen destination and claim asylum there. Returning these people to other European countries they may have passed through is a fruitless exercise, in much the same way apprehending boats on the French side of the channel and depositing migrants back on the beach only delays their journey. It does no more than provide a few 'we stopped a number of boats' meaningless statistics. Besides, with Brexit we have dispensed with the Dublin Convention which enabled returns, so new agreements now have to be drawn up.

This is why introducing upstream solutions is imperative.



KURDISH RUN SMUGGLING OPERATIONS

Networks of Kurdish smugglers were instrumental in driving the expansion of the small boat crossings launched from the coast of northern France crossing the Channel to the UK.

The number of small boat arrivals increased sharply from almost nowhere in 2018. Iranian Kurds, previously migrants themselves in Calais, in 2018/19 turned to smuggling when they saw the money to be made. It was they who pioneered the mass use of small boats in the early days of the industry.

Much of this has since been taken over and perfected by Iraqi Kurds into a very efficient and streamlined business operation, the coastline territory now shared between the two groups. Numbers using this route peaked in 2022, when over 45 000 people were detected arriving in the UK using small boats.



RECENT EXAMPLE - A NEW ROUTE OPENS

June 2024

Iraq signs deal with Tunisia allowing Iraqi citizens visa-free travel to the country for a maximum of 15 days for tourism purposes.

Within days the route is open and 'bookings' are taken.

August 2024

News reports start to arrive:

A group consisting of 16 people in total was detained in Tunisian waters in early August while trying to illegally enter Europe....fourteen people from Sulaymaniyah, who were detained by Tunisian authorities last month go on trial....ten more people from the Kurdistan Region were detained in Tunisia recently for similar attempts....

Another clear illustration why 'upstream solutions' are needed.

SUMMARY

Recent history shows once someone arrives in the UK and claims asylum the likelihood is they will be here to stay, regardless of the outcome of their case. The asylum processing system is overdue a complete overhaul. Initial decisions need to happen far more quickly and the quality of decision-making improved to reduce the percentage of cases that needlessly go to appeal, clogging the appeals process and the Tribunal Courts.

Legal Aid needs resourcing properly so claimants can have representation. It takes a lot longer for judges to deal with appeals where there is no lawyer involved and it increases the chance of poor decision-making.

The whole process needs streamlining, particularly for those people whose country of origin means they can't be returned. Waiting a year or two for an initial negative decision, then a further year or two for an appeal that is predictably successful is absurd, costly to the state and clearly benefits nobody. However, this represents the life of tens of thousands across the UK.

They become entangled in processes that moves at an imperceptible pace. This benefits neither the individual, their families, the UK taxpayer or indeed desperate people whose lives are in immediate danger fleeing war zones.

Leaving people to fester for years in poor quality accommodation on a seemingly endless merry-go-round of legal wrangling without work permission or purpose in life, can only degrade the individual. Any enthusiasm to start a new life and assimilate is simply going to evaporate. Years of enforced idleness isn't going to produce a good citizen ready to take their place in the workforce, it's far more likely to encourage benefit dependency.

For Iraqi Kurds who may be tempted to make the journey, it makes good sense to intervene early on and target these individuals before they leave Iraq. To dispel any notion of the wonderland that awaits and provide tough, factual information of how easy it is to lose precious years with little to show in return.

This locks in with the Labour Government's strategy to focus on upstream solutions.

Our organisation is perfectly placed and poised ready to begin work in delivering these objectives for this cohort.

PROPOSAL



The predicted effects of climate change on Iraq have arrived – they are very real and undeniably present, its adverse effect on daily life contributing towards ever more external migration.

At The SunGlow Trust we address the emergency of climate change along with the highly contentious issue of migration to Europe and the United Kingdom, with pragmatic solutions that can realistically go some way to tackling both subjects simultaneously.

Our emigration reduction strategy gives a future to those thinking of leaving Iraq by offering potential migrants local employment opportunities with our organisation or our partners, where they will work to mitigate the challenges of climate change within Iraq. Thereby benefitting the nation and their own communities.

This proposal aims to reduce the numbers of Iraqis seeking to travel to Europe - and onto the UK - by targeting those demographics that are, and have, proven most likely to embark on the journey, educate them on the risks and provide meaningful employment opportunities in meeting the challenges of climate change in their home country.

The dual approach proposed brings together the emergency of climate change – the need to adapt to the changes and mitigate its effects – and combine it with addressing the problematic issue of irregular migration heading towards Europe and the UK.

In addition, with funding in place, we will be in a position to develop tailored return packages providing paid work to encourage those disillusioned Iraqis that have been unsuccessful in the UK to return home. We will support those with undetermined asylum cases that have grown tired waiting or those that have been refused but not been removed and have little hope of gaining any kind of settlement status.





THE SUNGLOW TRUST

OUTREACH AND EDUCATION AT HOME IN KURDISTAN IRAQ

Begin early on - even in the school corridors. Indeed, this could offer a crucial venue for educational intervention to dispel the myths that migration to Europe guarantees a prosperous new life.

The majority of migrants originate outside of the urban areas. Through community hubs and schools, we need to educate the communities of rural towns and villages on the numerous challenges and dangers of migrating to Europe.

This can be achieved by organising social media campaigns to bring reality into the conversation, countering the smuggler's narrative and sales pitch. Explain the real hardship most encounter whilst travelling and even long after arrival.

In addition, we will employ returnees from Europe, including those that have failed in their quest for asylum, to share their experiences and educate potential migrants on the hazards, costs and poor outcomes they frequently face.

Stop those with thoughts of leaving by paying the smugglers large sums of money and endangering their own lives, to ultimately enter our broken asylum system.

Pushback against the smugglers' persuasive recruitment campaigns is essential. Instead, these young people need to be faced with the stark reality of a dangerous journey across Europe with a particular focus on the risk to life taking unsafe boats across the English Channel.

They need to listen to real life accounts from those who faced adversity in attempting or making the journey and from bereaved families of those who perished. There is no shortage of either.

Relate testimony from fellow Kurds the horrors they faced confronted by smugglers extorting extra monies at the last minute and forcing vulnerable women and children onto overfilled flimsy rubber dinghies. The passage made all the more frightening by having someone at the helm who has no experience at steering a boat but has been entrusted with the lives of 50 or 60 people in exchange for a discounted 'ticket'.

Just because the smuggler speaks your language that doesn't mean you should trust them.

They need to hear these accounts in their vivid and awful detail and understand what it is to become human cargo. How the smugglers gamble with human lives driven only by profit, hoping their unseaworthy craft will make it to the mid-point in the channel and into English waters before the engine gives out or the vessel succumbs to a wave tipping its contents into the sea.

List the death statistics along with their names and ages so they can identify with the individuals themselves.

These unembellished horrors will drive home the message that it's simply not worth it. This cycle of emigration has become a cultural norm that has to be broken, especially amongst young adults, so the message passes onto the next generation.

This will work as a deterrent, as opposed to vague rumours about third country processing in Africa.

ICMPD (International Centre for Migration Policy Development) Report January 2024 'The importance of providing correct and reliable information: Multiple studies as well as our research have demonstrated that migrants tend to gather information about migration from close networks, social media, and smugglers. The information provided, however, is often inaccurate, unreliable, or overly optimistic, thus leading to misconceptions and unrealistic expectations. This raises the need for the developers of information campaigns to provide accurate and trustworthy information, sharing positive as well as negative messages about migration.'

October 2024 – Current operations

In association with our partner organisation www.dadngo.org we are in the process of commissioning three outreach hubs in the main cities of Sulaymaniyah, Erbil and Dohuk with the aim of interviewing the migrant demographic and assessing in more detail what are the drivers of migration for this group. This will identify the precise range of reasons behind their intentions to leave Iraq and what measures or support could be introduced to incentivise them to remain and build a life in their home country. Once they have departed their homeland it's too late.





UNITED KINGDOM

Promoting voluntary returns within the Iraqi Kurdish community in the United Kingdom. Extracting those in the asylum system backlogs to return to useful and productive lives while reducing the pull effect of the diaspora back home.

The UK currently has an agreement in which Iraqi citizens can be deported back to Federal Iraq or Iraqi Kurdistan if their asylum claim was rejected by British authorities. According to UK Home Office data, a total of 17 Iraqis were sent to Erbil and Sulaymaniyah between 2020 and 2022 – these numbers are insignificant and clearly a lot more concerted effort is urgently needed.

The following outline proposals rely on this agreement functioning effectively and with the full cooperation of the KRG - Kurdistan Regional Government of Iraq.

Refused but not removed

In total, there have been just over 74,600 asylum refusals in the last five years and just over 15,000 enforced and voluntary returns.

In the period from 2011 to 2020, almost two-thirds (55,273) of people who were refused asylum were not recorded as having left the UK. That's %61 of the total number of people whose asylum claims were rejected, according to analysis of Home Office data by the Migration Observatory. The true figure could be significantly higher as it only counts so-called «main applicants» and does not include any partners or children.

'Withdrawn' status

This is not, as one might expect, an asylum seeker abandoning their claim and returning home but rather a Home Office categorisation applied to a whole range of non-compliance issues, such as failing to attend an interview or complete a questionnaire on time. This can occur simply as a result of the authorities not updating the claimant's

address details. Where before, the only circumstances in which a claim would be treated as explicitly withdrawn were where an applicant signed a specified form. Now the Home Office has expanded the scope under which this can apply to numerous tiny bureaucratic breaches of procedure. It has been effective in reducing its backlog numbers but has instead diverted them to be included in their withdrawn cases, which in 2023 rose to 24,027 up from 5,255 in 2022.

The Home Office may be saving itself some effort in the short term and reducing the apparent asylum backlog, but they are doing so at the expense of creating more work in the long term. These people cannot be removed without some assessment of whether it is safe to do. Treating claims as withdrawn does not magically make the person concerned disappear, it simply increases the number of people who have their genuine claims for asylum thrown out without any substantive decision being made. This does however give us another opportunity to intervene and offer an alternative viable solution back in their home country.

Latest arrivals

Amongst the 118,000 total of outstanding applicants currently waiting for an initial decision (August 2024) will be a significant number of Iraqis who may already be reflecting on their choice of the UK to submit an asylum claim. As a consequence of the 2023 Illegal Migration Act, large numbers will have not been able to submit an asylum claim for many months, delaying their progress through the system.

The realisation it could take months or years for an outcome will slowly become apparent. If they haven't worked this out for themselves, they will soon learn the reality from their own communities.

Unresolved status

There are an unknown number of Iraqis stuck in one or another processing backlogs, often for years. This will include those that have simply opted out of the processing/asylum system or others who have spent years on the endless merry-go-round that some cases produce. Some of these can run for a decade or more.

A large proportion of this group will be receptive to practical inducement to return home.



SUMMARY

Allowing this nationality a comfortable ride for the last two decades has seen the growth of a vast nationwide diaspora, its existence acting as a magnet for ever more arrivals. From 2018 to 31 March 2024, two thirds of total arrivals by small boats, (79,149) comprised five nationalities of which Iraqis represented 13%.

It's clear that those who claim asylum and are subsequently refused, are unlikely to be returned.

Of all asylum applications submitted between 2010 and 2020 that were refused, by 30 June 2022 only around %41 resulted in being returned by the UK.

Forced returns are often long winded and can be subject to numerous legal challenges leading to multiple appeals and spells in and out of detention. The National Audit Office found that the Home Office struggled to complete enforced returns, mostly following late legal challenges to removal. In %48 ,2019 of all planned enforced returns were not completed.

Many countries of origin are reluctant to cooperate on returns agreements with the UK and receive deportees, these include Iraq, Iran, Eritrea and Sudan although there has been some movement with Iraq recently.

Clearly the Home Office prefers voluntary returns because of these difficulties but also because they are much cheaper. An estimate from 2013 put the average cost of a voluntary return at around £1,000, compared to £15,000 for an enforced return.

Despite the difficulties with daily life, Iraqi Kurdistan is not Eritrea where a lifetime of military service is forced upon the youth, neither is it Sudan where internal conflict has brought death and destruction to vast areas of the country.

Every city in the UK has its own close knit Kurdish community, it's very easy to quickly spread the message of what we have on offer. We anticipate uptake will be brisk from the outset and of course for every individual agreeing to a repatriation package a precious vacancy will become available in the asylum accommodation portfolio. Which in turn will go a little way towards easing the pressures and costs to the government and reduce the backlogs and use of hotels.

Our proposals offer a realistic voluntary solution bringing employment in one of our schemes tackling climate change.

We have extensive connections throughout the UK Iraqi Kurdish diaspora. With return and employment packages assembled and in place and supported by sufficient funding we can commence work without delay.

ALTERNATIVES TO MIGRATION

WORKING TO CONFRONT THE CHALLENGES OF CLIMATE CHANGE



EMPLOYMENT

Lack of employment opportunities is one of the key reasons Iraqi Kurds put forward as their reason for leaving. Much of the work that is available (other than scarce government jobs) is cash-in-hand, unreliable, low-paid day work. This is always unpredictable and vulnerable to the endless cycle of economic woes the region constantly faces.

Our community spirited schemes will provide both purpose and an income, a structured life and the opportunity to acquire transferable skills. We look forward to new recruits joining our team developing a sense of belonging and who will go on to build strong working relationships within their group, grounded in their own communities. And in a small way doing their bit towards tackling the effects of climate change.

Capitalising upon and building on existing skills, we can discourage those communities planning to follow others on the well-trodden path to Europe into believing a future does exist at home. Migration in the direction of Europe has become a perennial cycle almost engrained in the cultural mindset - this needs to change.

Directly targeting this demographic in-country long before they start formulating plans to migrate is the most effective way to reduce numbers leaving the region.



TREE PLANTING SCHEMES

Restoring lost forestation and increasing the existing coverage would provide an effective way of capturing and harvesting greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, as well as stabilizing soil, and decreasing salinization and desertification.

Consideration needs to be given to the areas where this can work effectively, the correct soil type matching the best suited indigenous species. There has to be sufficient ground water to support growth through the early years, using drip irrigation systems will keep usage to a minimum. Alternatively, the source could be treated wastewater if it can easily be brought to the planting site.

These saplings will be needed in large quantities. While there is local production along with imports from Turkey and Iran this could all be produced locally providing multiple employment opportunities.

Large scale nursery propagation would employ large numbers of people or with a little tutoring this could be an excellent opportunity for multiple small-scale businesses run by the youth of rural Iraqi Kurdistan. Income guaranteed by contract and payment per unit produced would give them confidence to invest their time. Seeds and propagation equipment could be supplied free of charge.

Financial support in the first year could provide the incentive to get these start-ups off the ground. Being able to establish these facilities in their own communities can only help reduce the pressure to migrate.

Other more advanced methods than growing from seed can also be engaged. With tissue culture any part of a plant is viable - the stem, leaf or seeds which can be propagated in quantity over a short time frame free of infection and with a better guarantee of yield. This 'in vitro' propagation process vastly decreases the time it takes to bring plants to maturity, boosts production numbers and helps minimise disease.

By this method yields can be expected from year one as opposed to propagating saplings from the seed itself. Again, nurturing saplings through their early years and planting out can provide employment opportunities into the future while supporting the reduction of GHG emissions.

The potential scale of this could boost an entire agricultural sector, supporting research and study for the production of saplings.

This would take time to set up and train staff to the required level, along with the technical support and funding needed. But it can offer sustainable employment in a sector with increasing demand. In the meantime, saplings needed for reforestation are generally in plentiful supply.



WATER MANAGEMENT

Rehabilitation of water channels - clearing and repairing these structures would help support farming communities across wide areas while providing useful employment to countless numbers. Reworking irrigation paths to bring back water flows to depleted farmland gives the local population incentives to stay and work the land rather than move to an uncertain future in the cities or beyond. Improvements to protect from evaporation and leakage can be created by covering channels or installing pipework to send water below surface, protecting the route from losses.

Water harvesting through the construction of small and micro dams can create new job opportunities both for conserving water for agricultural use or to recharge groundwater reserves. These can equally be retained on the surface as a natural oasis with environmental benefits or as a reservoir for green projects such as supporting sapling production





NATURAL WASTEWATER TREATMENT

With a water crisis overwhelming much of Iraq, steps should be taken to conserve every available drop.

The treatment of wastewater in a constructed wetland is a natural way to transform it from a problem to be disposed of into a valuable resource. After a basic process it can then be reused in agriculture or to recharge groundwater reserves. This provides an alternative to the wasteful and contaminating effects of dumping or allowing it to enter rivers and waterways.

A constructed wetland is an artificial wetland to treat sewage, storm water or industrial run-off. These are engineered systems using the natural functions of vegetation, soil and organisms to provide secondary treatment to waste water (primary treatment being the removal of solid matter). Similar to natural wetlands, constructed wetlands also act as biofilter and can remove a range of pollutants such as organic matter, nutrients (nitrogen and phosphorus), suspended solids and heavy metals. All types of pathogens (i.e. bacteria, viruses, protozoans and helminths) can be removed to some extent by this process.

Creating artificial wetland natural waste treatment systems, for example green reed beds, is not technically challenging and can provide plenty of useful employment opportunities while helping to reduce pollution.

These natural treatment schemes such as planted reed beds and other natural flora can absorb the nutrients in the sewage and use the water to grow plants that will absorb and sequester carbon dioxide.

Polluted waterways have been discovered to contain additional quantities of carbon dioxide and methane both of which are known contributors to global warming. A clear trend is found between water quality and greenhouse gas emissions: the more polluted the sites are, the higher their emissions. Oxygen levels also decline in these circumstances, unbalancing the ecosystem and killing off wildlife.

A constructed wetland has proven to be an effective, sustainable, reliable, and economical treatment method for sewage or industrial waste.

These systems can be implemented quickly in villages where they are ideal, as well as in medium-sized cities with agricultural lands in their vicinity that can immediately benefit from the improved output.

Clearly these natural-treatment schemes are not as efficient as modern sewage-management mechanisms but can serve as an effective interim measure while longer-term sewage management schemes await to be drawn up and implemented. In rural areas with less infrastructure these can replace or supplement existing efforts.



MINI SOLAR INSTALLATIONS

With high annual levels of uninterrupted sunshine, Iraq has a strong potential renewable energy base through solar power. In recognition of this in early 2022 Iraq's Central Bank approved a ID1 trillion (\$680m) fund for renewable energy projects in the country.

Power generation from renewable energy sources would increase Iraq's energy security and reduce the power sector's greenhouse gas emissions. These account for almost half of Iraq's total emissions due to its high dependence on fossil-fuel-fired power plants and the heavy deployment of polluting diesel generators.

The flat rooftops of Iraqi houses are ideal for small solar panel installations, with or without grid integration, providing a source of free power for households.

Likewise, small-scale localised systems independent of the grid (or with option to integrate) are a workable option to help address localised demand issues while the national infrastructure improves. They can also be swiftly deployed across rural districts where farmers are struggling with the effects of climate change. Villages don't have the benefit of neighbourhood generators that are common in urban areas. Self-sufficiency in power can supply water pumps for both consumption and irrigation purposes. With this additional source of power, refrigerated cold rooms can be constructed to extend the shelf life of fresh produce benefiting market traders and farmers alike and reducing the huge amount of waste that's normally experienced, especially during the summer months.

Mini solar stations can be quickly installed providing electricity on demand with only a minimum of back-up battery storage capacity required to meet basic daily needs.

According to the KRG Ministry of Electricity and Planning, there are 241 villages in the Kurdistan Region without access to the national power grid. There is no reason why all of these can't take advantage of a solar mini grid. Not only can this improve daily lives in these communities it is also one less reason to migrate to urban centres where resources and employment opportunities are often limited. Or indeed to travel abroad. Our team is experienced at installing domestic systems and is prepared to scale up both size and distribution. We are ready to instruct and train unemployed locals, especially the youth - our target group - how to assemble and install these systems, eventually deploying across the region.

Given time and support these teams can be given autonomy to hire and train their own staff, build their own teams to expand the deployment of mini solar systems exponentially.



RESEARCH, DATA GATHERING AND ANALYSIS

Unemployed youth, ideally graduates - of which there is an unemployed surplus - can be engaged in assisting our research. Inevitably some will hail from the communities we intend to work with. Not only will this provide useful employment but should reveal further valuable insights.

Conducting thorough research is vital at this stage of the organisation's development. While key people behind The SunGlow Trust have a wide breadth of knowledge across the issues we are tackling and the experience to set up our proposed projects - this needs to be backed up with accurate data. Complete assessments and projections are essential to have in place when approaching donors. Statistics need to be harvested and analysed, with specific areas aligned to our work targeted with in-depth research.

Information can be extracted from immigration statistics and climate change data, including government reports, academic studies, surveys, existing databases and information held by international and local NGO's. Interviews should be conducted and focus groups established to discuss with community members, experts and stakeholders. The discussion needs to encompass migration in the context of climate change.

Recruits by necessity will be local to the region. They are then ideally placed to involve themselves in local communities and to interview potential migrants, and indeed those that have attempted the journey unsuccessfully, to understand motives and reasons.

Unemployment, corruption, political instability and poor public services are the usual reasons given for taking the perilous journey to Europe. Engaging directly with this demographic and their communities will allow them to voice their dissatisfaction with daily life, along with their own individual reasons for wanting to leave. This gives these people a voice while helping to broaden our understanding and assist in targeting our resources more precisely.

Furthermore, this exercise will give our research staff an excellent opportunity to test our initiatives on our target clients. Would involvement in our schemes answer enough of their aspirations to remain grounded in their communities and build a future in their home country? If further incentives are needed, we can tailor as required using this valuable feedback.



THE SUNGLOW TRUST

THE KEY PEOPLE:

Hemen Salih

Lawyer with 20 years' experience working with NGOs in Iraq and Canada (Dual Canadian citizen)

Dr. Zeravan Muhsin PhD,

Politics and International Studies. University of Surrey.
Experience – Consultant Save the Children. Regional Coordinator GOAL Iraq. Project Manager IRC, International Rescue Committee. Director DAD NGO Iraq
Expertise – Fundraising & project design. Partnership building with international donors. Project management & operations

Sakar Rahman

14-year association with nationwide Iraqi NGO. Specialises in construction / solar installations and logistics (dual British citizen)



THE SUNGLOW TRUST

**Suite 5, 9th Floor, Justice Tower
Erbil - Iraq**

Web

www.sunglow-trust.org

Email

info@sunglow-trust.org

nick@sunglow-trust.org

Phone:

UK +44 (0) 771 816 1025

Iraq +964 (0) 751 434 2394 / +964 (0) 750 007 2233

Registered in the UK Charity number 1182796

Registered in Iraq - No. 5545 Directorate of NGO's - KRG (Kurdistan Regional Government)

UK Trustees:

Dr. Zeravan Muhsin - Khoshnaw Agha - Nicholas des Brisay

Iraq:

Country Director – Hemn Salih Ismaeel

Operations - Sakar Rahman