

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF ARMENIA

IRAQI ARMENIANS AFTER THE TOPPLING OF SADDAM HUSSEIN:  
EMIGRATION OR REPATRIATION?

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## ABBREVIATIONS

*ARCS* - Armenian Red Cross Society

*INN* – Iraqi News Network

*MP* – Member of Parliament

*MRGI* – Minority Right Group International

*NGO* – Non-Governmental Organization

*OVIR* – Office of Visa and Registration

*RoA* – Republic of Armenia

*TAS* – Temporary Asylum Seeker

*SRS* – Special Residency Status

*UNHCR* – United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

*USAID* – United States Agency for International Development

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This is the first study on Iraqi Armenians who settled in Armenia after 2003. Despite increasing significance on their difficulties in Armenia, there was no research publication. Thus, I initiated this research with the aim of undertaking a detailed study that would provide policy options for Armenian Government as well as other stakeholders.

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## ABSTRACT

*Armenians settled in Iraq mainly after the Genocide of 1898-1922. The community had a self-governing Central National Authority, cultural and educational institutions. However, with the advent of Baath party and Saddam Hussein, the role of Armenian institutions diminished and shrunk followed by the nationalization of Armenian schools. The continuing violence and instability since 2003 followed by radical transformations in Iraq has forced several Iraqi Armenians to resettle in other less dangerous regions of the country, to look for shelter worldwide or to return to Armenia, their homeland. Iraqi Armenians perceive that the future of Armenians in Iraq is overwhelmed by glumness, and consider that the community will disappear.*

*The influx of Iraqi Armenians to Armenia started in 2003, but took larger dimension in 2006 and 2007. According to the Migration Agency of the Ministry of Territorial Administration of Armenia 804 Iraqi Armenians were registered as temporary asylum seekers. Others (357 people) did not apply for temporary asylum seeker status and have gained special residency status between 2003 and 2007.*

*The study is based on sources, observations and interviews with 30 Iraqi Armenian households settled in Armenia. It finds that fear of war, lack of security and the current political situation of Iraq are the overriding reasons for Iraqi Armenians to leave Iraq and settle permanently in Armenia. Conversely, some Iraqi Armenians leave Armenia to another country especially because of generous welfare benefits received in the West. The reason that Armenia is their homeland dominates the motives of Iraqi Armenians to come to Armenia. Many Iraqi Armenians have been found holding strong Armenian identity and wishing to acquire dual citizenship and stay in Armenia permanently. While all Iraqi Armenians feel physically secure in Armenia, their permanent settlement in homeland is believed to be connected with housing and employment possibilities, as well as the success of their personal experience of integration.*

*Iraqi Armenians reported problems at secondary schools, medical institutions and higher education establishments. Lack of jobs as well as normal working conditions and decent employment opportunities are the main source of disillusionment and frustration.*

*The majority of Iraqi Armenians claimed that Armenia has not any particular policy or comprehensive government program towards Iraqi Armenians, and does not take measures to satisfy their basic needs. As for the repatriation of Iraqi Armenians to Armenia they opined that Armenian Government should make of it a priority issue to be solved. Moreover, Armenian Government should encourage the full integration of Iraqi Armenians into Armenian society. The solutions offered were evaluated in the following order: pension to elderly and handicapped, tax cut for small and medium businesses, Armenian language courses, trainings and degree programs, free land provision near Yerevan, dwellings for needy people, fine businesses for discrimination, free housing in other cities and towns of Armenia, free land for housing and agriculture in rural areas and free livelihood opportunities in Artsakh.*

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## **Introduction**

Armenia's relationships with what is now Iraq originated in ancient times: Armenian merchants used to travel through Tigris and Euphrates up to Nineveh and Babylon and Tigran the Great conquered the northern city of Mosul while expanding Armenia's frontiers<sup>1</sup>.

When Arabs seized then Armenian capital of Dvin in 640, around 35.000 Armenians were forcefully displaced to the regions bordering Euphrates. However, Armenian community in Iraq found its formation and development during the Abbasid caliphate in VIII-XIII centuries. Its size further expanded on the account of Armenians from Djougha and Hamadan persecuted by Persians and Turks, who emigrated and settled in Baghdad, Basra, Mosul etc<sup>2</sup>. Driven from their homeland by the Ottoman Turks from 1898 to 1923, about 30.000 Armenians looked for refuge in Iraq, hence contributing to the increase of the number of Armenians there<sup>3</sup>. Later on some Armenians left Iraq for western countries and in 1947 some 900 Iraqi Armenians joined the caravans of repatriates and settled in Armenia. Armenians numbered 15.000 persons in Iraq in 1948<sup>4</sup>. Political developments that resulted in the change of state order in 1958 had an influence on Armenian community and gave way to new streams of emigration that continued up to the end of 1970s. During Iraq-Iran (1980-1988) and Gulf (1991, 2003) wars it was prohibited to leave Iraq, hence the removal of the ban each time was followed by new waves of emigration of Armenians caused not only by political insecurity but also by economic hardship.

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<sup>1</sup> Sargsyan, A., & Petrosyan, A. (2003). Իրաք [Iraq]. Հայ Սփյուռք Հանրագիտարան [Armenian Diaspora Encyclopedia]. (Armenian encyclopedia publication, Yerevan), 268-273.

<sup>2</sup> Alpojayyan, A. (2003). Իրաքի հայերը [The Armenians of Irak]. (The Matenadaran, Mashtots Institute of Ancient Manuscript, Yerevan).

<sup>3</sup> Sargsyan, A., & Petrosyan, A. (2003). Իրաք [Iraq], op.cit.

Kenderian, S. (2005). 1001 Nights in the Iraqi Army: The true story of a Chicago Student held as a POW by the Americans during desert storm. Shant Kenderian.

<sup>4</sup> Aghpashian, H. (2007). Իրաքահայ գաղութի անցյալը, ներկան և ապագան [The past, present and future of Iraqi Armenian community], op. cit.

After its independence Armenia established diplomatic relations with Iraq, and opened an Embassy in Baghdad in 2001, as well as an Iraqi Embassy was operating in Yerevan. A parliamentary commission was acting within National Assembly<sup>5</sup>. The activities of embassies and the commission were suspended in 2003.

Armenians are considered as the fifth largest ethno-religious group, after Arabs, Kurds, Caldeans and Turcomans<sup>6</sup>. Armenian community of Iraq functions according to its statute (or National Constitution) and is administered by Central National Authority (based in Baghdad), which is elected by Iraqi Armenian Diocese Council. City councils of Basra, Kirkuk, Mosul and Zakho are accountable to Central National Authority that elects the Primate, which is afterwards ratified by the Catholicos of all Armenians in Ejminatsin. In addition, it acts near Iraqi Authorities on behalf of Iraqi Armenians<sup>7</sup>.

There are five Armenian Churches in Baghdad (the oldest was built in 1638), two in Mosul – the first one was built in 1857, and the second was newly constructed, and was bombed and looted by local insurgents. There are equally churches in Basra, Kirkuk, Zakho and Avzruk, a purely Armenian (Kurdish-speaking) village<sup>8</sup>. Traditional Armenian political parties were forbidden in Iraq, and social activities were organized through Iraqi Branch of Armenian General Benevolent Union with its sports clubs, Armenian Mixed Youth Union, Armenian Sports General Union (Homenetmen), Armenian Association for the Relief of Poor, and Cultural Union of Armenian Women of Iraq. These unions coordinated Armenian cultural and social life through their branches in Basra, Mosul, Kirkuk, Zakho, Duhok and Erbil. In addition, Armenian national schools functioned within Iraq, and the number of pupils only in Baghdad was 1.600. However,

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<sup>5</sup> Pashayan, A. (2007, March 30). Իրաքահայ համայնքը նոր մարտահրավերների առաջ [Armenian community of Iraq facing challenges]. (Webpage: <http://noravank.am/am/?page=analitics&nid=580>).

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Sargsyan, A., & Petrosyan, A. (2003). Իրաք [Iraq], op. cit.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.



when “Ba’ath” party came to power, buildings that hosted Armenian schools were nationalized and only Armenian language and religion courses were taught in public schools that originally belonged to Armenians up to 2003<sup>9</sup>. Coming with the policy of Arabisation of Iraq this had an overwhelming negative impact on Armenian community. Around 33 – 40% of marriages registered in diocese were with other Christians. The marriages of Armenian females with another Christians are registered and anointed by the Church of the husband, and starting from that moment the wife is not considered as member of the Armenian diocese. Increasing number of intermarriages speak about the fact that it became an accepted phenomenon, Armenian language was pushed out of utilization conceding to Arabic and Kurdish in Northern regions<sup>10</sup>.

In the result of current political situation the new generation continues to experience the deprivation from national education and the opportunity to master mother tongue, thus facing the danger of losing national identity<sup>11</sup>.

Taking into account the threat of unpredictable violence that may be directed towards national and religious institutions, the Armenians avoid appearing in crowded places<sup>12</sup>. Yet, they may be killed at every moment from the bombs installed in buildings, cars, streets, suicide bombing etc. Since 2003 31 Iraqi Armenians were killed in Iraq and 28 persons were abducted

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

Currently the leader of Armenian Diocese of Iraq is working in order to get back the building of the secondary school, which was obtained by Iraqi government against a symbolic payment in 1970s and opposite to the will of the community. The building situated behind National home for Elderly was also nationalized [currently government agencies are located there], that Armenian Diocese tries to get back or be recompensed.

<sup>10</sup> Armenian Diocese of Iraq (2007). Archives.

<sup>11</sup> Abusefian, M. R. (n.d.). Իրաքահայութեան սալագայի հրատապ հարցը [The urgent issue of Iraqi Armenians]. Asbarez Armenian Daily Newspaper.

<sup>12</sup> Pashayan, A. (2007, March 30). Իրաքահայ համայնքը նոր մարտահրավերների առաջ [Armenian community of Iraq facing challenges], op. cit.

by insurgent groups, 25 of them were returned, the destiny of two others is unknown and the corpse of the last one was returned to the family<sup>13</sup>.

Armenian and foreign organizations as well as private persons worldwide took an active part in supporting Iraqi Armenians in Iraq by providing monetary assistance to poor families. A large part of aids received was directed to constructing a building of 18 rooms for the utilization of poor families, adding a second floor to the National Home for elderly and building an indoor playground. Moreover, the Armenian National School was reopened in 2004 gathering some 163 pupils<sup>14</sup>. The majority of Iraqi Armenians, however, does not hope that they will have free and secure life in Iraq and “do not see any future in Iraq,” as a result they leave the country<sup>15</sup>.

The continuing violence and instability of recent years in Iraq has forced several Iraqi Armenians to resettle in other less dangerous regions of Iraq, to look for shelter in different countries of the world or to return to Armenia, their homeland.

The Essay has focused on Iraqi Armenian established in their homeland since 2003 and holding Temporary Asylum Seeker status, Special Residency Status or Armenian citizenship. The findings of the study are believed to be adequately representative for the larger Iraqi Armenian community in Armenia.

Based on the data gathered the study attempts to assess the needs of Iraqi Armenians in Armenia and assist Armenian Government, Non-Government Organizations as well as private

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<sup>13</sup> Armenian Diocese of Iraq. (2007). Իրաքահայեր կը սպանուին [Iraqi Armenians killed]. Gantheq 27, 8. Baghdad, Iraq.

This figure does not include Jan Jalal Karapetian, university student, Marou Awanis and Geneva Jalal.

<sup>14</sup> Armenian Diocese of Iraq. (2006) Ազգային Կենտրոնական նախկին վարչութեան քառամեայ գործունէութեան տնօրէնկազմի բնագործունէութեան հարցը [From the bulletin of four years activities of the previous central National Authority: The issue of financial assistance], op. cit.

<sup>15</sup> Azad-Hye Middle East Armenian Portal. (2006, September 19). Life under threat in present-day Iraq. Dubai. (Webpage: <http://www.azad-hye.net/news/viewnews.asp?newsId=734sds67>).

persons and donors in directing their resources for the fulfillment of the gaps existing in the policy towards Iraqi Armenians in their homeland.

The following research questions should be answered in the paper:

1. What are the demographic shifts of Iraqi Armenians since 2003?
2. What is the profile of Iraqi Armenians in Armenia?
3. What are the reasons for leaving Iraq?
4. What are the reasons for choosing Armenia as a place of destination?
5. What is the current status of Iraqi Armenians in Armenia and what are their future plans?
6. What is the current situation of Iraqi Armenians in Armenia?
7. What are the perspectives for durable solutions for Iraqi Armenians?

### **Literature review**

Given the fact that the repatriation of Iraqi Armenians is directly connected with current political developments the literature review is mainly based on Armenian, but equally refers to foreign sources. Particularly Armenian sources cover the articles published in Armenia-Diaspora Encyclopedia, print media in Armenia (Azg, Hayastani Harapetutyun) and in Diaspora (Asbarez, Horizon, Alik) including Iraq (Gantheqh), electronic news agencies (KarabaghOpen, 168 hours – weekly online, Panarmenian.net) and Azad-Hye Middle East Armenian Portal, and Ara Ashjian’s blogspot. In addition, articles from “Noravank” Analytical Center, as an outcome of the seminar entitled “Current challenges of Armenian community of Iraq” in 2007, were utilized.

Although most articles were of analytical nature with an emphasis on politics, some drew conclusions from interviews with Iraqi Armenians authorities, and Iraqi Armenians established in their homeland.

As for foreign sources employed within the framework of the current study it is worth distinguishing two types of literature: firstly the reports of Minority Rights Group International and U.S. Department of State, and secondly articles published in news agencies, such as Reuters, Iraqi News Network (INN), etc.

According to Hakobian (2006) chaotic situation created due to increased sectarian violence and lack of government capacity and infrastructure fragility, made vulnerable all religious segments of Iraq's population. However, radical Islamic insurgent groups are particularly more dangerous for Christians, including Armenians, whom they consider as "allies" of coalition forces<sup>16</sup>. In the report entitled "Assimilation, Exodus, Eradication: Iraq's minority communities since 2003" Taneja (2007) argues that as a result, many assaults are based on religious difference especially when Christians were punished for rules and behavior that did not correspond to Muslim traditions. Hence, Christian women have been intimidated by leaflets and consequently were forced to strictly follow the rules of Islamic dress code<sup>17</sup>. Besides Christians were perceived wealthier than others which may also cause attacks and lootings. In addition to religious differences, the Armenians being part of Iraqi minorities are marginalized and experience deprivation of citizenship right<sup>18</sup>. Although a large number of Christians flee from Iraq, many of them can not move because of the lack of financial resources in order to organize their exit from Iraq<sup>19</sup>.

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<sup>16</sup> Hakobian, E. (2006, November 2). Իրաքի բռնազրապման դառն պտուղը՝ բաժին ընկած իրաքահայություն [The bitter fruit of Iraq's invasion that Armenians got]. Alik Armenian Daily. (Webpage: <http://alikonline.com/files/2006/nov/2/2E04.htm>).

"Some Christians were killed because of selling alcohol drinks or working with Americans."

<sup>17</sup> Taneja, P. (2007). Assimilation, Exodus, Eradication: Iraq's minority communities since 2003. Minority Rights Group International.

"In spring 2005, some 1500 students left Mosul University in order to avoid constant threats against them."

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Reuters News Agency. (2007, January 4). IRAQ: Minorities living tormented days under sectarian violence. (Webpage: <http://www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/IRIN/e27c1cd1c833a5cf1bac0330fb97ea04.htm>).

In 2004, Armenian clubs of Basra and Kirkuk, as well as Kirkuk priest's residence were looted by the mob. Armenian Catholic Church in Baghdad was targeted because of the car bombings organized in five directions, as part of a global terrorism action against Christian population in Baghdad.<sup>20</sup> The newly built church in Mosul, that was ready for anointment, was targeted by a terrorist act in 2004<sup>21</sup>. According to Ganthegh quarterly published by the Armenian Diocese of Iraq in 2007 Christian community in Mosul dwindles because of insecure situation there, and among them Armenians. Members of city council left Mosul, people stopped to attend the church and Armenian clubs. Armenian community of Basra experienced the same calamities: Youth Union club is closed, Armenian Association for the Relief of Poor does not function and city Council members are often absent from Basra<sup>22</sup>, in addition the community revolts against the fact that they did not have religious leader. As for Baghdad, it remains the most dangerous place for Armenians in Iraq: they do not have jobs, nor security guarantees and no perspective for future. Religious ceremonies in the Cathedral were suspended, because almost nobody attended there, and it was decided to offer Friday Mass in St. Karapet Church<sup>23</sup>. In an interview the Primate of the Iraqi Armenian Diocese explicates "The churches are emptying. In my own church, we used to have some 600-700 faithful worshipping every Sunday. Today, they are 100-150. The reasons are several: they might be afraid of going out, but they also might simply not

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<sup>20</sup> Pashayan, A. (2007, March 30). Իրաքահայ համայնքը նոր մարտահրավերների առաջ [Armenian community of Iraq facing challenges], op. cit.

<sup>21</sup> Ashjian, A.S. (2006, February 10). Iraqi government to reconstruct Armenian Church targeted by terrorists. (Webpage: <http://ara-ashjian.blogspot.com/2006/02/iraqi-government-to-reconstruct.html>).

"The Iraqi government decided to reconstruct the Armenian Orthodox church ... after the Primate of the Iraqi Armenian Diocese H.E. Archbishop Avak Asadourian had met with the Iraqi president Jalal Al-Talabani and Prime Minister Ibrahim Al-Ja'fari and appealed to them to reconstruct the Church.

On Jan. 16, 2006, Iraqi Prime Minister's office requested in a note addressed to the Financial and Reconstruction Ministers' offices the allocation of the amount of money required and commencement of the reconstruction of the Church." The injuries were estimated to around

<sup>22</sup> Armenian Diocese of Iraq. (2007). Իրաքահայոց ապագայ պատմության համար. 2003-ի պատերազմը և ժողովուրդի ու հաստատությունների ապահովությունը [For the future history of Iraqi Armenians: The war of 2003 and the security of people and institutions]. Ganthegh 25, 12-14, Baghdad, Iraq.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid..

have petrol in their cars - queues at gas stations are three to five kilometers long - or they might have moved out of Baghdad”<sup>24</sup>. Besides the Cathedral St. Gregor Illuminator and its adjacent Armenian School and other buildings that belong to the diocese are situated in the downtown and subject to explosions and bombings, the most serious of which took place in December 13, 2006<sup>25</sup>.

The presence of coalition forces in Iraq is another source of menace for local population, including Armenians. Thus, in October 9, 2006 Armenian News Agency reported that two Armenian women were killed while driving in Baghdad by Australian Unity Resources Group hired to protect experts working for the USAID<sup>26</sup>. There were also cases when Armenians were killed because of working with Americans<sup>27</sup>.

Pashayan (2006) claims that criminal groups are also widespread in Iraq.<sup>28</sup> They abduct Christians in order to ask for ransom regardless their ethnicity and faith and often murder them. In 2005, wore in police uniforms some people have stopped the car of an Armenian physician, took him as a hostage and claimed some 75.000 dollars. During the same year an Armenian businessmen and a goldsmith disappeared in unknown circumstances<sup>29</sup>.

Armenians receive threatening mobile messages and leaflets, where they are required to leave the country or convert to Islam<sup>30</sup> or pay a “protection tax,” the amount of which depends

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<sup>24</sup>Michel, J. (2007, June 28). They have stolen the nights of Baghdad from us. (Webpage: <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/news/news-management/all-news-english/display-single-english-news/article/1750/quotthey-have-stolen-th-1.html>).

<sup>25</sup>Aghpashian, H. (2007). Իրաքահայ գաղութի անցյալը, ներկան և ապագան [The past, present and future of Iraqi Armenian community], op. cit.

<sup>26</sup>Panarmenian Net Armenian News Agency. (2007, October 10). Australian guards kill two Armenian women in Baghdad. (Webpage: <http://www.panarmenian.net/news/eng/?nid=23646>).

<sup>27</sup>Hakobian, E.(2006, November 2). Իրաքի բռնագրավման դառն պտուղը՝ բաժին ընկած իրաքահայության [The bitter fruit of Iraq’s invasion that Armenians got], op. cit.

<sup>28</sup>Pashayan, A. (2007, March 30). Իրաքահայ համայնքը նոր մարտահրավերների առաջ [Armenian community of Iraq facing challenges], op. cit.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid.

<sup>30</sup>Adnkronos International. (2007, April 27). Iraq: Christians face mounting threats, MP pays.

on financial situation of the family<sup>31</sup>. In addition the penury of electricity, drink water, food and combustible<sup>32</sup> accompanied by bomb explosions make Iraqi people sick and agitated and suffer from lack of medical assistance and psychological distortions<sup>33</sup>. The exodus of professionals such as engineers, physicians, teachers etc. worsens the existing tensions and adds to widespread intolerance<sup>34</sup>.

“...Armenians have suffered killings, abductions, torture and threats. Underpinning this is the resulting poverty and displacement many face; in 2006, the Armenian Diocese estimated that the number of destitute Armenian Christians had grown by fifty per cent since 2003”<sup>35</sup>.

### **Methodology and Research Design**

The study was informed by the qualitative research paradigm with some quantitative components and drew on historical-comparative analysis, observations and in-depth interviews with Iraqi Armenians conducted between 28<sup>th</sup> of September and 14<sup>th</sup> of October 2007. In order to assemble a comprehensive picture about the way Iraqi Armenians were adjusting to the life in Armenia field visits have been done in the capital Yerevan, in the towns of Masis, Abovian and in the village of Darakert. Mission Armenia NGO and the representative of Iraqi Armenians

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<sup>31</sup> Hakobian, E.(2006, November 2). Իրաքի բռնազրավման դառն պտուղը՝ բաժին ընկած իրաքահայույթյան [The bitter fruit of Iraq’s invasion that Armenians got], op. cit.

<sup>32</sup> Abusefian, M. R. (n.d.). Իրաքահայութեան ապագայի հրատապ հարցը [The urgent issue of Iraqi Armenians]. Asbarez Armenian Daily Newspaper.

<sup>33</sup> Ashjian, A. (2006, October 4). My daily life in Iraq (2). (Webpage: <http://www.karabakh-open.com/src/index.php?lang=en&nid=1125&id=2>).

“He [Barkev Nazarian] entered a coma, and I, with a relative of my uncle's wife, a physician, failed to get the medical assistance of a specialized physician, because many of them have fled the country and the one I know refused to come to my uncle's house being afraid to be assassinated or kidnapped on the way!! Under different pretexts, state and private hospitals refused to receive him and my uncle passed away on Thursday, September 29 after remaining in coma for two days. ... The well-known personality in the community and the goldsmith has got one participant, his nephew, in his funeral!!”

<sup>34</sup> Tooley, M. (2007, July 25). Iraqi Christians Pray for the Surge. FrontPageMagazine.com.

(Webpage: <http://www.frontpagemag.com/Articles/Read.aspx?GUID={E59E466A-4906-42A1-A9BD-}>). "Every day terrorist attacks are targeting people who could be the cornerstone of a new Iraq: professionals, physicians, and engineers. And this is resulting in an across-the-board brain drain, which is a shame since it takes decades to train qualified people."

<sup>35</sup> Taneja, P. (2007). Assimilation, Exodus, Eradication: Iraq’s minority communities since 2003. op.cit.

Relief Fund have been contacted in order to obtain the initial lists of Iraqi Armenians, who later referred to their friends and acquaintances and the snowballing method was used for the recruitment of informants. Most interviews were conducted in Armenian, with the exception of two interviewees (translation was provided by family members from Armenian into Arabic and the vice versa) taken into consideration insufficient level of Armenian language of those respondents. For the purpose of this study the legal status of Iraqi Armenians in Armenia did not play a significant role; the most important was the date of settling in Armenia. Hence, among interviewees were Temporary Asylum Seekers, holders of Special Residency Status and those who had renounced the Iraqi citizenship and got the Armenian one.

All the interviews were transcribed verbatim and analyzed by key topical and conceptual categories.

The questionnaire for in-depth interviews was divided into certain thematical parts in regards with following issues:

1. Profile of the Iraqi Armenians interviewed
2. Reasons for leaving Iraq
3. Reasons for choosing Armenia as a place of destination
4. Current status of Iraqi Armenians in Armenia and their future plans
5. Current situation of Iraqi Armenians in Armenia
6. Perspectives for durable solutions for Iraqi Armenians

The responses of the interviews are processed and analyzed using qualitative and quantitative methods (Appendix A).

Demographic shifts of Iraqi Armenians were drew on historical-comparative analysis based on Armenia-Diaspora Encyclopedia, archives of the Armenian Embassy in Iraq and



Armenian Diocese in Iraq, reports of Migration Agency of the Ministry of Territorial Administration of RA, of U.S. Department of State, the decrees of the President of the Republic of Armenia for granting SRC and several articles in print and electronic media.

## **Findings**

### **Demographic shifts of Iraqi Armenians since 2003**

According to Aghpashian (2007), while the number of Armenians was estimated from 20.000 to 22.000 in 1996, it decreased to 14.660 and 15.660 in 2003 because of mass departure<sup>36</sup>. Since 2003 the invasion of coalition forces spurred new emigration trends, and Armenians started to emigrate to the West (mainly Germany, Netherlands, Sweden, United Kingdom, United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand), to neighboring Syria, Jordan and Lebanon<sup>37</sup>. Besides, Iraqi Armenians have experienced internal migration and settled in Northern Iraq, where 1009 Kurdish speaking Armenians were already living in 2003<sup>38</sup>. Approximately 97 families settled in Northern Iraq from which 57 families in Erbil, 15 in Dohuk<sup>39</sup>. Local government built houses for 25 families in Havrezq<sup>40</sup>, as well as a church near the school of Dohuk<sup>41</sup>. The encouragement of Armenians to settle in Northern Iraq is part of the policy

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<sup>36</sup> Embassy of Republic of Armenia in Iraq. (2003). Archives. Baghdad – 11 000-12 000, Basra – 700, Mosul – 1470, Zakho – 1060 and Kirkuk – 430.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Armenian Diocese of Iraq. (2006). Իրաքահայոց համառոտ պատմություն: Զախոյի հայ գաղթածախը [Summary of the history of Iraqi Armenians: Armenian Community of Zakho]. (2006). Ganthehgh 24, 11-14. Baghdad, Iraq.

<sup>39</sup> Hakobyan, A. (2007, July 23). Many Armenians leave Baghdad for northern Iraq or Armenia. (Webpage: <http://www.armeniangenocide.com/showthread.php?p=25205>).

“Erbil and the former Armenian village of Havrezk have received the bulk of the Armenian refugees, about 100 families in each location, he [Dr. Vchuni Minassian - vice-chair of the Armenian Diocesan Council of Iraq] says.”

<sup>40</sup> Havrezq derives from Armenian expression Hay Vrezh (Armenian revenge). The village was previously inhabited uniquely by Armenians (500 families), who were forcefully displaced in 1976, because the territory was claimed of being within the military zone.

<sup>41</sup> Armenian Diocese of Iraq. (2007). Թեմական լուրեր. Հովուական այցելություն երկրիս հիւսիսային շրջաններու մեր համայնքներուն [Diocesan News: Primate's visits to our communities in the Northern regions of the country]. Ganthehgh 26, 5-17. Baghdad, Iraq.

intending to create a Christian autonomous region within an enlarged Kurdistan, pursued in particular by Sarkis Aghajan, current finance minister of Kurdistan<sup>42</sup>.

Armenia too became one of the major destinations for Armenians of Iraq: thus 65 Iraqi Armenians who renounced the Iraqi citizenship were granted the Armenian one in 2002<sup>43</sup>. 58 Iraqi Armenians had obtained the Special Residency Status (SRS) from 1999 to 2002<sup>44</sup>. With US-led invasion into Iraq in 2003, the influx of Iraqi Armenians to Armenia continued to expand, where they were entitled the status of applicant then the Temporary Asylum Seeker (TAS)<sup>45</sup>.

“They first get a certificate of applicant for three months then become asylum seeker for a period of one year [can be renewed]. According to R. Petrosyan [depute chief of the department dealing with asylum seekers of Migration Agency] Iraqi Armenians tend to return to Armenia together with their families. The majority settle on permanent basis in Armenia.”<sup>46</sup>

According to the report of Migration Agency of the Ministry of Territorial Administration of RA 804 Iraqi Armenians were registered as TAS. TAS status ensures the right to legally live in the country; however, housing needs are not satisfied. The special shelter located in Nor Nork can accept a limited number of 8-10 families for three months only. TASs are eligible to a one-time allocation of 15.000 amd from the Government of Armenia, and can

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<sup>42</sup> Lattimer, M. (2006, October 6). In 20 years, there will be no more Christians in Iraq. The Guardian.

“...He[Sarkis Aghajan] is convinced that the only way to secure protection in the longer term is for an autonomous region, a safe haven, to be established covering Nineveh's Christians, as well as smaller minority communities there such as the Yezidis and the Shabak. "This special region would help us to maintain Christian history in that place. In that way, there would be no way for Kurds or Arabs to intervene. This would encourage the Christians living outside to come back, and it would be an example in the Middle East.”

<sup>43</sup> Sargsyan, A., & Petrosyan, A. (2003). Իրաք [Iraq], op. cit.

<sup>44</sup> Irtek, Decrees of the President of Republic of Armenia for granting Special Residency Status. Irtek, Orders of the President of Republic of Armenia for granting special residency status.

<sup>45</sup> Hayastani Hanrapetutyun. (2007, January 13). Իրաքահայերը տնիստիստիում են Հայաստան [Iraqi Armenians move to Armenia].

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

receive a monthly financial assistance up to 20.000 from Armenian Red Cross Society if their family status corresponds to required criteria. Young people are not eligible for this assistance<sup>47</sup>.

There is a tendency to apply for SRC among Iraqi Armenians and 357 of them<sup>48</sup> have obtained Special Residency Status between 2003 and 2007<sup>49</sup> (Appendix E). A significant part of Iraqi Armenians want to acquire dual citizenship<sup>50</sup>.

While according to some estimates the number of Armenians who have left Iraq does not exceed 3.000<sup>51</sup>, different sources provide controversial data about the number of Armenians living in Iraq. In an interview with the head of Central National Authority of Armenian Community of Iraq the number of Armenians living in Iraq was estimated 18.000<sup>52</sup>, and the report of U.S. Department of State mentions the figure of 19.000<sup>53</sup>. “Noravank” Analytical Center, however, refers to the figure between 5.000 - 10.000, as the number of Armenians currently living in Iraq who either do not have the possibility to leave for another country or do not want to change their place of habitation<sup>54</sup>. In an interview with the vice-chair of the Cultural Union of Iraqi Armenians in Armenia, Yervand Minassian explicates that “All Armenians

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<sup>47</sup> Migration Agency of the Ministry of Territorial Administration of the Republic of Armenia. (2007, October 26). Report on influx of Armenians from Iraq (2003-2007).

Danielyan, K. (2006, July 20). Միգրացիայի գործակալություն է դիմել արդեն 4 Լիբանանահայ. Իրաքից ժամանակավոր կացության կարգավիճակ է ստացել 391 մարդ [4 Armenians from Lebanon applied to Migration Agency: 391 people from Iraq got temporary asylum seeker status]. Azg Armenian Daily 135.

<sup>48</sup> Danielyan, K. (2007, January 31). The number of asylum seeker Iraqis does not decrease. Azg daily. “Their number [temporary asylum seekers] in reality could be much bigger, because many of them do not apply to the agency [Migration Agency] having no expectation from the government.”

<sup>49</sup> Irtek. Decrees of the President of Republic of Armenia for granting Special Residency Status.

Irtek. Orders of the President of Republic of Armenia for granting Special Residency Status.

<sup>50</sup> Panarmenian Net Armenian News Agency. (2007, March 24). Iraqi Armenians want to become Armenian citizens. (Webpage: <http://www.panarmenian.net/news/eng/?nid=21583>).

<sup>51</sup> Noravank Analytical Center. (2007). Իրաքահայ համայնքը՝ մարտահրավերներին [The community of Iraqi Armenians counter against challenges]. (Webpage: <http://noravank.am/am/?page=analytics&nid=612>).

<sup>52</sup> Garagashian, V. (n.d.). Հարցազրույց Իրաքի թեմի Ազգային կնդրոնական վարչության ատենապետ տիար Պարոյր Յակոբյանի հետ [Interview with the head of Central National Authority of Diocese of Iraq Sir Paruyr Hakobian]. Horizon Armenian Newspaper, Canada.

<sup>53</sup> U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor. (2007, September 14). Iraq: International Religious Freedom Report 2007.

<sup>54</sup> Pashayan, A. (2007, March 30). Իրաքահայ համայնքը նոր մարտահրավերների առաջ [Armenian community of Iraq facing challenges], op. cit.

massively leave Iraq. ... today there are only from five to six thousands of Armenians left in Iraq”<sup>55</sup> According to Sargsyan & Petrosyan (2003) the number of Iraqi Armenians was around 10.000 in 2003, thus if considered that since about 3.000 have left the country, this figure may better represent the real number of Armenians in Iraq.

With the objective to promote durable solutions for Iraqi Armenians Iraqi Armenian Relief Fund assists Iraqi Armenians resettle in Armenia and since 2005 have helped 17 most disadvantaged families (65 Armenians) by financing their transfer from Syria to Armenia and their living expenses in homeland during one year<sup>56</sup>. One of the trustees of the fund explains in an article<sup>57</sup> that negative and hasty deliberations were spread in Armenian community of Iraq, the result of which was that Iraqi Armenians were ready to emigrate elsewhere than to resettle in their homeland. INN (2006) reported that the number of Armenian emigrants was not as high as that of other Christians and quoted a community member saying that the Churches and social clubs in Iraq in general oppose the trend of emigration from Iraq<sup>58</sup>. In the beginning of the initiative the fund had almost no applicant because of ignorance, lack of trust and confidence. However, little by little the number of applicants increased and in 2007 394 persons had applied to the fund expressing their wish to resettle in Armenia<sup>59</sup>. As opposite, an Armenian e-

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<sup>55</sup> Avagyan, L. (2007). Արարատ, մերին սիրուն արարատն [Ararat, from our beautiful Ararat]. 168 hours, weekly online. (Webpage: <http://www.168.am/am/articles/9362>).

<sup>56</sup> Muradian, G. (2007, August 4). Իրաքից հայ ընտանիքների նրրորդ քարավանը հայրենադարձվեց մայր հայրենիք [The third caravan of Armenian families repatriated to motherland from Iraq]. Azg Daily Newspaper. (Webpage: <http://www.azg.am/?lang=AM&num=2007080402>).

<sup>57</sup> Janoian, K. (2007, August 4). Լոս Անջելեսի Իրաքահայերու միութեան ներգաղթի աշխատանքները [Repatriation activities of Iraqi Armenians Relief Fund of Los Angeles].

The registration is online. The fund pays for the airfare from Aleppo to Yerevan and 120 US dollars per month for each family member during one year, a period that should allow the family to adjust to the reality in Armenia [initially this was 100 US dollars].

<sup>58</sup> Iraqi News Network. (2006, January 30). Iraqi Armenians: The Iraqi News Network reports on the Armenians. (Webpage: <http://www.armeniangenocide.com/showthread.php?p=25205>).

<sup>59</sup> Poghosian, N. (n.d.). Իրաքահայերը Հայաստան կ'ապաստանին [Iraqi Armenians settle in Armenia]. Horizon Armenian Newspaper, Canada.

newspaper<sup>60</sup> published an article, which based on the experience of one Iraqi Armenian family depicted an image of Armenia as the most terrible country in the world provoking anti-repatriation sentiments among the Armenians of Iraq. On the other hand, it held a dangerous message trying to portray an image of Iraqi Armenians as arrogant and greedy people, who even getting a job at Vivacell<sup>61</sup> would prefer to leave for Europe. The article contained also several contradicting statements such as “It's true, Armenia is the best country in the world, but we can't live here” or “ ... told us via her husband's sister that despite the fact that she became sick from the fear of bombs, she would happily go back” and few words later “ ... wants to go to Europe instead of Iraq.” This comes to confirm that besides the explicit intention to propagate anti-patriotic sentiments the coverage of Iraqi Armenians’ problems in Armenia lacks professionalism.

### **Profile of Iraqi Armenians in Armenia**

Concerning the profile of Iraqi Armenians interviewed, the following demographic data have been documented: gender, age and civil status, place of origin, educational level and specialty, date of settlement in Armenia.

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<sup>60</sup> Aslanyan, H. (2007, June 18). Iraqi Armenians are disillusioned.

(Webpage: <http://www.hetq.am/eng/society/0706-iraq.html>).

“A person dies once. If we have to die of hunger in our homeland, it would be better to die in Iraq in an explosion... The Armenia that our parents talked about day and night did not lived up to our expectations. We feel ignored and uncared for here. We came here to our homeland, hoping that we would feel like somebody here, but believe me, we felt that way more in Iraq. If it weren't for that damned war, we would never have left Iraq.”

The family was accidentally selected among the households interviewed within this research. In fact like other Iraqi Armenians they face almost the same problems in Armenia; however it is worth mentioning that before coming to Armenia they had over expectations. In particular, they were told that 100 US dollars would largely suffice a family of four, and they could buy an apartment for 5.000 US dollars in 2005. In addition they admitted of not evaluating the possibilities in Armenia objectively at their arrival and regretted of not buying an apartment immediately, which was crucial for family budget. However, the family was not planning to leave Armenia very soon, think to go back when Iraq recovers but would love to live in Armenia if the housing and employment issues were solved.

<sup>61</sup> K-Telecom CJSC. (2006). Speech, Mr. Pierre Fattouch, Chairman of the Board. (Webpage:

<http://www.vivacell.am/index.php?menu=94&lng=2>).

“In Armenia, we have invested in excess of \$75 million so far and will continue doing so to fulfill our promise to the Armenian people. Our project is one of the biggest foreign investments in the Republic of Armenia today.”

Altogether thirty in-depth interviews were conducted with Iraqi Armenian households who came to Armenia in 2003 (2 families), 2004 (1 family), 2005 (9 families), 2006 (12 families) and 2007 (6 families). The majority of respondents (fourteen households) were from Baghdad, four from Basra, one from Mosul and one from a village near Baghdad. In Armenia they settled in Yerevan (13 families), Abovyan (1 family), Masis (1 family) and Darakert village (5 families).

Among the interviewees there were seventeen women and thirteen men. Twenty-six out of thirty interviewees were married, three respondents were not married and one was divorced.

Twenty eight respondents said that they settled in Armenia with their family members, and one interviewee reported that he was alone in Armenia, and another was with some one of his family members the rest of the family living in Iraq. Twelve heads-of-household reported that they had large families composed of six members and more, while eighteen households reported that the number of their family members varied from one to five persons. All but two hold graduate degrees from Iraq (6 percent), twelve people (40 percent) had bachelor degree and five others (17 percent) had graduated from colleges or technical schools. Among the interviewees six (20 percent) held diploma of secondary education and five (17 percent) had incomplete secondary education. The profession of respondents varied; there were civil engineers, physicians, translators, teachers, jewelers, petroleum specialists, electricians, accountants. Their ages lay between 27 and 73.

### **Reasons for leaving Iraq**

Though Iraqi Armenians cite a number of reasons as to why they left Iraq, fear of war is the overriding one. Iraqi people suffered from the eight-year-long war with Iran as well as from economic sanctions imposed on the country following Saddam Hussein's invasion to Kuwait.

Iraq was in permanent trouble during last thirty-five years, and it continues to be in chaos currently. Previously a prosperous Iraqi Armenian community experienced hardship, and consequently exodus followed by political developments and changes in state regime. During the times of war it was forbidden to quit Iraq, and more than hundred of Armenians were martyred. Two heads-of-households told that they were thinking of coming to Armenia since its independence, but as it was forbidden to travel abroad, they were forced to postpone their intention. The current political situation compelled them settle permanently in Armenia.

The extended insecurity of living with the threat combined with a sound apprehension of its consequences, made many Armenians to sell all their belongings and property in order to seek refuge in Armenia. The majority of interviewees, mainly families with several children, cited this reason. From thirty households interviewed twenty-five were living in their private houses in Iraq, and twelve of them had sold their properties before coming to Armenia. Others mentioned that it was impossible to sell the property, family members were waiting in Iraq for a final decision, or the property was looted. Five families out of thirty had not any property in Iraq, thus they sold the belongings in order to be able to come to Armenia.

Fourteen households reported that they bought an apartment or a private house in Armenia upon their arrival, and one family was offered from a relative a private house, under the condition to stay in Armenia. Twelve households said that they were living in rented flats, and one family had settled without paying a rent in the private house of a relative who was abroad. One of the households noted that they had the intention to buy a house in Armenia, and were waiting their son who had traveled to Iraq in order to sell their property in Baghdad. Another respondent who had established in Armenia very recently, just two months ago, expressed his intention to buy an apartment soon.

Respondents explained that as one of the religious minorities Armenians were subject to killings, abductions, torture, threats and assimilation. Regardless of individual behavior, they were considered by Islamists as followers of the West and as insulters of Muslim values. Insurgent groups and Islamic militias that exercise de facto power over neighborhoods in Iraqi cities are another cause of fear for Armenians in Iraq.

One of the respondents witnessed that her family was living in an Arab village surrounded uniquely by Shia Muslims, faraway from the Armenian Church and the school. Her children were deprived from learning Armenian language; moreover her daughter was forced to strictly follow Muslim dress code. The money the family got from selling their house in Iraq did only suffice to buy a village house, in Armenia this time. The inaccessibility of Armenian Church and school, as well as cultural and sports clubs represents a danger to the sustainability of Armenian identity according to this family. .

Another respondent described:

“I was working in Iraq and gaining good salary, but I was told repetitively that if I do not give money to them, I will be killed. Thus, I was indirectly threatened and was at the center of attention. Christians are good and devoted workers, and today in Iraq they are perceived as like they have stolen the jobs that belonged to Muslims.”

Yet, some specialties such as physicians, jewelers, merchants and those working with foreigners or international organizations are the most targeted and experience most abduction and threats. Armenian merchants were caught and plundered in the market, as well as were threatened to abduct their children if they did not give up their businesses.

According to one of the interviewees there was not direct threat from the perspective of religion, however, she was told that the adoption of Islam would be more beneficial for her family's future. She explained that in her institution she was the unique Armenian, whose name was neither Arabic nor Kurdish, thus sounded strange.



Ethnicity also contributes to the fear, because the feeling of isolation as Armenian leads to permanent fear at the workplace. Another respondent reiterated during the interview about his son, bodyguard and interpreter in a western company, who was tortured by criminals camouflaged in policemen uniform. She then added:

“Then after having killed all the foreigners, they asked my son about his last wish before the death. And that was to render his corpse to the family, in order not to be profaned. They called my other son and asked for ransom. We put our house in pawn in order to free my son under the condition to never appear in the company where he used to work. After that we moved to Armenia, but my other son can not leave Iraq unless he pays the pawn back.”

Another interviewee told that her husband was threatened because of working in an international humanitarian organization as technical worker. Their son was abducted from their front door, and they were asked a ransom of 60.000 dollars. It was only thanks to the support of relatives from Canada and Sweden that they could pay that amount in order to get released their twelve-years old boy. They could not act differently knowing that a family friend had got his son without one finger, because he could only afford to pay 50.000 dollars.

Respondents told in addition that several Armenians were slaughtered in their houses, where now Arabs live.

On a different basis, many Iraqi Armenians have been victims of the strong anti-Western sentiments in Iraq that progressively grew and culminated in menace, treats and persecution. One of the interviewees mentioned that Armenians who used to work with Americans, have been particularly threatened by insurgent groups through mobile messages. They were told that Iraq and all their belongings should be left to Arabs, in other words they were implementing a policy of extermination of Christians. Because of the animosity and hostility towards Saddam Hussein's policy, the cadres of the former regime are persecuted currently. Many high-ranking professionals were killed and their families slaughtered. One of the respondents cites:

“I had a leading position during Saddam’s rule, and then I used to work with Americans. I was threatened twice to let everything and leave Iraq, if I did not want to see my children killed. They targeted my house, and it was impossible to sell it: every person who would buy it would be killed. Thus, my wife and I left Iraq with our three children and my mother-in-law the same night when we got the third warning. My brother-in-law’s family experienced the same cruelties, in addition to tortures, but because of financial difficulties could hardly escape to Northern Iraq.”

Victims of landmines are unable to get adequate treatment in Iraq, because good professionals left the country and young physicians are not competent and enough experienced in order to succeed. A head-of-household said that in the result of a car explosion his wife was injured, and was twice operated in the hospital. However, both interventions proved to be unsuccessful and coming to Armenia they hoped that cure was available.

“At the moment of the explosion my sister was in the open market, and while running she had broken her leg, and was plundered,” noted one of the interviewees.

“My uncle died in the hospital in Kirkuk because there was not any medicine available,” added another respondent.

### **Reasons for choosing Armenia as a place of destination**

While the motives for Iraqi Armenians to come to Armenia vary, in many instances, there is a combination of reasons that contributed to the decision to come to Armenia. The factor that Armenia is their homeland dominates and is cited by fourteen respondents. In the responses Armenia was associated with epithets such as “the best place” and “where we are free.” They also mentioned the factor of Armenian language and Armenian ethnicity as solid grounds for choosing Armenia. This speaks about a strong Armenian identity that Iraqi Armenians hold and their commitment to preserve national distinctiveness. While six respondents related about their experience of serving to Armenian Community in Iraq by giving lectures on Armenian history, organizing a choir, sports activities, celebrations and commemoration events, all others said that they were tightly connected to Armenian Church in Iraq. The possibility for children to attend

Armenian school was posited by several parents, while one told that Armenia was a rather advanced-looking and promising country.

Often Iraqi Armenians came to Armenia for the purpose of joining their relatives, who would facilitate practical arrangements in place such as finding an apartment or a job before their arrival. Others mentioned that they first traveled to Armenia as tourist in order to understand profoundly the system there and decide for the future. With a long-term objective in mind they would go to Iraq and sell their real estate, in order to settle in Armenia. Male head-of-household would leave first, having his family linking up with him when all practical arrangements were in place. However, in some cases encountered, the wife and children had been the first to leave, later joined by the husband.

Taken into consideration the fact that Iraqis citizens in general face extreme difficulties in obtaining passports for traveling to western countries, Iraqi Armenians are also restricted in moving to other countries than Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Egypt and Armenia. Having met cruelties and casualties in Iraq ethnic Armenians psychologically do not want to continue their existence in yet an Arab state, regardless relatively better economic conditions in there compared to Armenia. Fearing of a potential danger in foreign countries, Iraqi Armenians prefer to come to Armenia as a place for final destination, thus making a point to their displacements. If not in Iraq, Iraqi Armenians opt for living in Armenia. The possibility of obtaining a 10 year SRC and availability of visa were mentioned by one of the interviewees as another motivating factor for settling in Armenia. While in two households respondents noted that they had not enough financial resources to leave for another country, only one household mentioned its intention to move to the West in order to join other family members.

## **Current status of Iraqi Armenians and plans for the future**

From thirty heads-of-households two reported of being citizens of the Republic of Armenia, twenty had the status of TAS, seven had obtained SRC and one had a six month visa.

Sixteen households, that is more than the majority of respondents, told firmly that they had the intention to live in Armenia in the future. Three households connect their future to a third country, because they have families who could support and facilitate their departure. However, one of those three heads-of-household confirmed his willingness to stay in Armenia, if he could find a good job in order to guarantee a secure life for his family members; otherwise he would leave for Europe or Australia.

“My children are very young, two daughters of five and four years old, and a boy of one year, and I am in my fifties. I have to ensure a secure life for them, because if something happens to me how they are going to live?” he concluded.

Six families hesitatingly noted that they would go back to Iraq if everything got better, or to stay in Armenia. One head-of-household said that his sons were obliged to live in Armenia, because of extremely difficult conditions for renting apartments and finding decent jobs, which impeded their plans to establish families and link their future to their homeland.

Four respondents were undecided, because everything depended on their economic status in Armenia, possibilities for finding a job opportunity or a better hosting country. Finally, one of the interviewees mentioned that everything depended on God.

To the question about how many years they were intending to live in Armenia eleven heads-of-household expressed their wish to stay in Armenia forever. While six interviewees mentioned that they would like to live in Armenia from one to ten years, nine heads-of-household cited that their stay in Armenia was related to their social and economic conditions.

Only two families wanted to stay in Armenia up to the moment when the situation in Iraq would ameliorate, and two other respondents were undecided.

As for applying for getting citizenship of the Republic of Armenia, it was reported by two heads-of-households that they had renounced to Iraqi citizenship and applied for Armenian one. It is important to mention that Iraqi Armenians apply for citizenship not individually but together with all family members, while seven heads-of-households reported of getting SRC for 10 years which granted equal rights with the citizens of the Republic of Armenia except for voting rights and education at higher institutions. For those who established in village, SRC was a vital document in order to be able to buy lands for agricultural activities. The remaining part of Iraqi Armenian heads-of-household said that they would prefer to wait for the new law on double citizenship entering into practice, in order to apply for the citizenship of the Republic of Armenia. Their major preoccupation is that by renouncing to Iraqi citizenship they would be deprived of their properties in Iraq that they would like to sell in order to buy properties in Armenia. One of the respondents stated that getting Armenian passport would not change anything; moreover the aid from which his family was benefiting as TAS would be cut off.

In general terms Iraqi Armenians do not think that they could live in Iraq after current political developments, and they expressed their willingness to travel to Iraq after many years for temporary visit only, to return there in order to sell properties and resettle in Armenia forever, to fix some personal issues or solve business problems. One of the respondents told fearfully that she would eat dry bread in Armenia and never go to Iraq. In opposite, another head-of-household explained that he would like to go back again in Iraq, where he was born, and contributed to its development along his life through work and efforts.

“In the market people ask me: How do you feel in our country and they are right in a sense, what did I do for Armenia? Nothing or almost nothing!” he added.

Yet, there was a certain number of Iraqi Armenians who immigrated to Armenia with the hope to settle there for long-run, but returned to Iraq after having lived a certain period in their homeland. While thirteen out of thirty households interviewed confirmed that they knew such kind of people, seventeen denied. The estimation of the number of Iraqi Armenians who returned to Iraq varied in responses. Eight families reported that they knew from four to twenty persons, four people knew from fifty to sixty Iraqi Armenians who left Armenia for Iraq, and one of the respondents mentioned that he knew hundred of such people. Among the reasons for leaving Armenia they mentioned limited opportunities for getting a job, which would allow paying rents and taking care of the family.

“Yerevan is like an expensive European city, it is possible to earn 150 dollars, but the issue is to feed a family of seven, pay rents and other expenses. On the other hand when people came in the beginning they were not well informed and ready to the lifestyle in Armenia,” explicated one of the interviewee.

Other families came to Armenia with their savings and once having spent everything, they returned to Iraq, because they had no other alternative. Some heads-of-household told that even in the dangerous situation in Iraq, people can get some job and earn for one week by working only one day. For youth and single people it is relatively easier to overcome obstacles in Armenia, but for multi-children families it is very hard, in particular when there is any adequate support to households’ needs. Some Iraqi Armenian families, who tried to settle in Armenia but being acquainted with several problems returned to Iraq, were targeted by local insurgents who abducted them with the idea in mind that those people should be rich because they could afford traveling.

Armenia serves as a transit country for Iraqi Armenians to fly to other countries. Nineteen out of thirty interviewed confirmed that they knew people who traveled from Armenia to a third country. The geography of destination varied in responses: Syria, Jordan, Holland,

Germany, Sweden, Great Britain, Canada, United States, Australia etc. Sixteen out of nineteen who gave affirmative answer knew from one to thirty persons who had left Armenia for a third country, two heads of households reported of being acquainted with some fifty people, and one person mentioned a number of hundred individuals. Twelve respondents reported that they did not know anybody who had left for a third country. Before leaving Iraq some Armenians enter Armenia with the clear intention for leaving for a third country: the interviewees gave three primary motives of leaving Armenia for a third country: first, in third countries, specially in the West they were provided with housing as refugees, secondly they were paid monthly allocation and pension for elderly and thirdly they benefited from free medical treatment. One of the interviewees said that in comparison with Armenia, in Syria where employment was equally a major problem, houses and daily expenditures were less expensive. Unfavorable business conditions were mentioned by one head-of-household as an impediment that obliged to leave for a third country, notably to Syria.

“There are people who came to Armenia after having sold their businesses, but here they could not add to the money they brought from Iraq. There exist too many difficulties and obstacles in Armenia. A relative of mine tried to set up two businesses, but he could not succeed and was obliged to return to Aleppo,” witnessed one of the respondents.

It was mentioned by several respondents that families leave Armenia because of the unpredictability of future, lack of opportunities for youth and the miserable pension that the Armenian Government pays to its citizens.

“Many Iraqi Armenian love Armenia, but if you fail to work one day in Armenia, you will starve from hunger. Nobody cares for the security of children and elderly here. Many of us live on the aid received from abroad. What pension a man of forty is going to receive after having worked some twenty years if he gets the chance to find a job?” points out a head-of-household.

“I know one lady who was alone with her sick son and left for Europe purposefully because in Armenia she could not afford to pay for her son’s treatment fees,” added another interviewee.

One of the reasons for leaving Armenia for a third country is related to the fact that generally Iraqi Armenians have family members and relatives who successfully established there several years ago and wanted to reunify with all family members. Others, who were given the status of refugee in the West after recent political development in Iraq, think of bringing their family members to western countries, which would allow them to get allocations too, instead of helping them from abroad.

To the question whether the influx of Iraqi Armenians would continue in upcoming five years twenty heads of households answered positively. One of the interviewees claimed that however the number of immigrants in upcoming years would not be as significant as it was in 2006 and 2007; Iraqi Armenians would continue to settle in Armenia. Another head-of-household referred to some analysts according to whose predictions the situation of Iraq would stay unstable during ten or twenty years, thus causing exodus of general population and particularly of Armenians. It was mentioned that one third of Iraqi Armenians who left Iraq settled in Armenia. Three interviewees asserted that Iraqi Armenians' immigration to Armenia was depending on the situation in Iraq, and four heads-of-households reported that Iraqi Armenians would not continue to come to Armenia. Particularly they brought the example of some three families who returned to Iraq because of financial difficulties and others who initially planned to settle in Armenia but stayed in Syria and Jordan, because on the information received from friends and relatives they were not sure to find a job in Armenia. Three respondents were undecided: they mentioned that a lot of people from Iraq visited Armenia as tourist, but they perceived life very expensive there.

“Nowadays it is impossible for us to accumulate financial resources in a short period of time, thus poor people would probably stay in Iraq,” stressed one of the interviewees.



Twenty-eight heads-of-household mentioned that they had relatives in Iraq, approximately 600 people in total, who would like to settle in Armenia; two others mentioned that all their relatives quitted Iraq and they had nobody there. It can be inferred from the results of these answers that almost all Armenians of Iraq wish to settle in Armenia, and their immigration is impeded by several obstacles. Interviewees mentioned that the major problem is connected to the lack of sufficient financial possibilities even for covering airfare ticket expenses, the fact that many people rent flats in Iraq and have no property in order to sell, or have some properties but can not neither sell nor leave because of the risk of being plundered. It was pointed out that selling properties was forbidden by insurgent groups, and Armenians were intimidated to sell their properties fearing of killings. According to several heads-of-household there was a general attitude among Muslim population not to buy Armenians' and Christians' properties in general, because they would become theirs sooner or later.

Iraqi-Syrian frontier is one of the most dangerous passages because of robberies and plundering taking place as well as potential visa rejection to Iraqis, among them Armenians. Obtaining a passport is another extremely difficult procedure in Iraq, and people succeed to get a passport against a bribe of 500 dollars, which is not affordable for everybody.

Having a job in Iraq that allows living in decent conditions, motivates some Armenians to stay there, in particular when it is about state employees or teachers, whose professions are out of demand in Armenia.

“My sister is working in a petroleum company and she is forbidden to leave her job, she can only have holydays,” explained one of the interviewees. Retailers, who gain modest revenues in Iraq in order to ensure the subsistence of their families, can not move to Armenia, because they are not sure to succeed.

Education is another issue of concern: young Iraqi Armenians, who graduate from secondary schools in Iraq and are willing to pursue undergraduate studies, face financial

difficulties in paying their tuition fees in Armenia, as foreign students. Thus, they prefer to study in Iraq despite danger, where the higher education is generally free of charge.

Some Armenians, who were not able to settle in Armenia, moved to relatively secure regions of Northern Iraq where they were provided with construction materials and job opportunities. One of the interviewees explained that the potential influx of Iraqi Armenians depended on the success of those who tried to settle in Armenia earlier. The conditions that Iraqi Armenians face in particular in finding decent jobs reserve them to recommend their relatives or friends to settle in Armenia permanently but to make short visits only.

“The cheapest apartment costs 200 dollars, but there are other expenses too: food, transport. When I say that I need 500 dollars to be able to live normally in Armenia, my friends in the United States get surprised. How a head-of-household would feed his family if he is 50-55 years old and can not earn enough? His family will not be able to survive. My brother is master, and he works very hard in Armenia, and gets only 220 dollars, but he would be very rich doing the same job in Iraq,” explains one of the interviewees whose family is wishing but unable to join him in Armenia.

### **Current situation of Iraqi Armenians in Armenia**

#### *Prior knowledge of Armenia: Expectations vs. Reality*

On the basis of the answers that Iraqi Armenians gave the prior knowledge about Armenia can be classified into four groups: Armenia as a dream, positive, negative and realistic insights depicting Armenia.

Most interviewees drew on the images of Armenia they were told by their parents, who sowed love towards Armenia since childhood. Respondents told that Armenia was like a dream, that they adored it without knowing and being acquainted with it and considered Armenia as a holy place. Armenian cultural institutions in Iraq played a pivotal role for instructing the new generations about Armenian history and values, as well as for inculcating the sentiment that

Armenia was their unique homeland. Chorals and troops from homeland that traveled to Iraq reinforced those images and incited the desire to know Armenia.

“We knew that we had a homeland and always dreamed to see it. We always experienced certain nostalgia towards Armenia, that we knew was our home,” speculated one of the respondents.

In addition, interviewees mentioned Armenian Radio as one of the main sources for obtaining information about the situation and life and for being permanently tied to the Armenian culture.

“I passed my childhood in Zakho, which is situated between Turkey and Iraq. We used to listen to the Armenian Radio, and I loved Lusik Koshyan’s songs. Besides, my father taught me Armenian language and told me to write letters to Armenia,” related one of the interviewees.

A certain positive image of Armenia was posited by several interviewees. In their responses Armenia was associated with Europe or United States, where human rights were respected and protected. Especially Iraqi Armenian families settled in Armenia with prior expectation to receive government aid in response to the needs of elderly, children and sick people. Regarding the economic conditions Iraqi Armenians thought of Armenia as a cheap country where “with hundred or two hundred dollars per month one could live like a king, or buy an apartment for 5000 dollars.” Two heads-of-household mentioned that they visited Armenia in Soviet times, and had a positive impression of the country, particularly concerning street cleaning and garbage collection.

The image of Armenia in the minds of some respondents was full of negative characteristics due to communism, social hardship, economic difficulties and discrimination. Many of them had built their opinion on the basis of information received from relatives or friends with whom they were in touch being in Iraq. The information of few respondents predated the last years of Soviet rule and beginning of 90’s. Respondents explained that it was

impossible to travel to Armenia during Saddam Hussein's regime, taken into account Iraq's unpredictable politics. In reality fewer of them had formerly visited Armenia and had their personal impression about the country.

"We have heard awful things about communists: like that there was not even chewing-gum in the markets and that it was very cold in Armenia," told one of the respondents.

Another person said that he was not recommended to go to Armenia, because he would profoundly regret for having made such a decision due to lack of employment opportunities and abuse at workplaces.

"Armenians of Armenia disappointed us. We met three merchant ladies at the airport of Aleppo, who told us that people in Armenia had nothing to eat and no places to work. You would better return to Iraq, they added," explained one of the interviewees.

"Ten or twenty years ago and even before leaving Iraq we were told that Armenia was in a precarious situation and crime and violence were widespread phenomena, that there were a lot of poor people, beggars and alcoholics. That is why we were afraid to come to Armenia earlier."

Few realists explained that they were conscious about the difficulties Armenia faced since its independence that was harder to keep than to achieve. They claimed having followed political and economic developments of Armenia from Iraq through TV and Internet newspapers.

"All those who escaped the genocide of 1915 and settled in oriental Armenia could find themselves and integrate here, and thus, we will not be an exception despite financial difficulties. I hope they will not last very long," reiterated one head-of-household.

"I was realistic, but anyhow Armenia is my homeland. I was aware of difficulties in here, however I hoped that my diploma would help me to overcome the hardship," explicated an Iraqi Armenian physician.

From thirty heads-of-household interviewed eleven reported that their expectations were met, eight told that they had built unrealistic hopes and were disenchanted, and the remaining eleven reported that their anticipations were partially fulfilled. Almost all Iraqi Armenians reported that they were safe and secure in Armenia from the perspective of physical protection.

“Firstly we saw Yerevan as a careless city, nobody thinks about developing tourism here. Secondly we were living in Baghdad, and now we settled in a village, it is hard for us. We prepare canned food for winter, because prices are expected to rise, we had not this in Iraq. Fortunately my neighbors are extremely helpful,” alleged an interviewee.

“I found Armenia very great, better than I was imagining. I was surprised to see this huge ongoing construction sites, markets are full of products. The climate is excellent here. However, I could not think that lying and cheating were so common here, an Armenian should never lie to another Armenian,” uttered a head-of-household.

One interviewee explained that Armenians were extremely respected in Iraq, and being Armenian meant being among the best. The solidarity of Armenian community was well known, and Armenians used to be with each other and help mutually. Therefore several interviewees expressed their surprise of seeing that an Armenian could harm his or her compatriot.

“I was hesitating whether there will be enough economic growth in Armenia that would allow us to solve our financial problems and stay forever in Armenia. Now I am more than sure that the day will not start for me without Ararat, here is my homeland, here I always speak Armenian and here I have security,” added another head-of-household.

“Life was less expensive for us in 2003, but now dollar has almost no value, but I am happy that here everybody is Armenian, and believes in Christ. Here I do not worry that my son will be kidnapped, life is calm. The only thing is that I miss my family in Iraq, and this is hard.”

“Armenia looks like Europe, there is freedom here, but the needs of vulnerable people are not met. My husband and I, we were expecting to easily find a job, but that did not happen: even locals leave for Russia. Everyday we have to think about food,” complained one of the respondents.

### *Social interactions with local Armenians*

In most of responses local Armenians were described as kind, helpful and hospitable. Sympathy, compassion and spontaneous help were noted as important characteristics due to the concept of refugeeness as an inalienable part of Armenian memory. It has to be noted though that the lack of communication was mentioned by several heads-of-household as a sign of prejudice and fear that locals would be asked something, if they welcomed Iraqi Armenians. Respondents mentioned that local Armenians have misperception about them, in the sense that they

considered Iraqi Armenians as wealthy people and tried to overcharge in different transactions.

The lack of public awareness was cited as an issue to be adjusted.

“Local Armenians are very kind: although their manner of speaking may seem unfriendly at first glance, but when you become friends they are gentle. My neighbor for example, when he speaks, he tells a lot of curses, but when needed, he will offer his heart for you, he will call here and there to help you. He was even finding clients for me. I do not feel like a stranger here.”

“Children in our neighborhood are cute; they always run towards me and offer their help, never seen wrong things. Winter in Baghdad is not like what we have in Yerevan, and we are afraid of walking on the snow, so the bakehouse woman brings our bread in winter time.”

“We are a large family, so that I always have to make big purchases, but every time when I try to argue about the price, the merchant tells me that we were coming from a rich country.”

“There is a need to distinguish between literate and illiterate people: illiterates do not know that Iraqi Armenian is also Armenian, they call us Arab or Persian, as for literates they always tried to help us though they face difficulties too.”

“All the fingers are not equal: there are good and bad people. Some call us Turk, Persian or Arab. Some tell us why you came to our country, others are hospitable and welcome us. They do not like to talk to us, but I saw that nor do they talk to each other.”

“They have rude behavior, and 90 percent of them do not like Diaspora Armenians. 10 percent are very educated people, but what we see in the streets is impossible. Boys have very bad manners to interact with each other and with girls.”

“Once a co-worker asked me why we did not come to Armenia during Karabagh war. I explained him that it was impossible because all Iraq was in blood at that time: it was forbidden to leave the country and if somebody escaped from the army, he was persecuted to gibbet. People here are not aware how many young Armenians died during Iraqi-Iranian and Iraqi-Kuwaiti wars: I am sure that they all would like to sacrifice their lives for Karabagh, like many Armenians from Lebanon. I was very young at that time and remember that Armenian Church of Iraq collected money for Karabagh. I think that the government should elucidate the public about those issues and raise public awareness about Iraqi Armenians. I am not in Armenia for fun: here I earn my bread by the sweat of my brow and face the same problems as local Armenians.”

Some interviewees posited however that on the basis of their personal contacts they experienced a certain behavioral distinction between people’s attitude in Yerevan and regions, the latter being warmer, more open and sociable.

Respondents explained that they had moderate, normal or good relationships with their neighbors, sometimes limited by greeting each other. In rare cases have they mentioned about celebrating Christmas or other holydays together. However, the majority of respondents who settled in Yerevan complained that they were not welcomed by their neighbors, which seemed strange to the traditions they used to follow in Iraq, where neighbors used to greet newcomers and offer their support. They mentioned that their neighbors were cold and did not greet at the entrance. Particularly one interviewee cited an Arab proverb saying that one should pass through seven neighbors before getting to one's own house, emphasizing good neighborhood relationships as an important pillar for social life.

“When we settled in Armenia, we were surprised that nobody talked to us. And once one of our neighbors explained that she did not know that we were Armenians and have “yan” at the end of our family name and did know Armenian language. She was thinking that in Arab countries Armenians became Muslim,” narrated one of the interviewees.

Nevertheless, families living outside of Yerevan did not share this opinion.

“When we first came here all our neighbors gathered around and cultivated the land instead of us, because we came from Baghdad and had no idea about land and animals. They gave us saplings and taught how to carry out further: in general when they sow something they always share with us,” asserted a head-of-household.

“Before buying a house first find out who are the neighbors, says the proverb, but I did not do so in Armenia,” another interviewee related. He told that when he was renovating his apartment all the people in neighborhood were coming to welcome and get acquainted with him. “How come that everybody knows you, ask my neighbors, we live here for decades and know so few people,” the head-of-household concludes.

From twelve households who rented apartments reported having had problems with their landlords, particularly they complained about the lack of confidence and repetitive visits which had a controlling character. One of the families posited that their landlord asked them to explain

the reasons for having permanently several guests during the day time. Another interviewee told that they were obliged to change the apartment after having discovered that their landlord had penetrated into the house when they were not around. Another respondent narrated: “I had advanced eighty dollars to the landlord in the beginning of the month, but quitted the apartment one week later. The landlord was requiring some extra 10.000 drams, by calling everyday and terrorizing me.”

### *Problems encountered in Armenia*

Generally Iraqi Armenians who apply for TAS status in Armenia get it within few days. Thus, they have not the problem of staying illegally in Armenia or of being deported from Armenia, which speaks about a certain government policy towards Iraqi Armenians. Nevertheless, asylum policy of Armenia is embryonic and has serious administrative, social and legal protection weaknesses. Regardless the fact that this policy promotes temporary stay in Armenia, it lacks clear mechanisms in private and public sectors for facilitating the integration of Iraqi Armenians into Armenian society. Particularly the latter reported problems at numerous secondary schools and higher education establishments, where children and students were called Turk, Arab, Persian or Muslim. In addition Armenian educational system lacks a distinct system that assists schooling adolescents for overcoming the difficulties encountered during the transfer from Iraqi educational system to Armenian one.

“Our children did not know Armenian when we came here, and we had to hire teachers for private classes, which is not affordable for all families. My daughter is good in all subjects apart from Armenian. She was called Turk, taunted for her bad Armenian and bitten several times at school, so that I was obliged to take her to another school,” narrated a mother.

This becomes more problematical due to the fact that several families can not afford paying private classes for their children. One of the families explained that their 15 years old son



was obliged to quit the school because he was not able to understand physics, chemistry and Russian, and the school administration could not organize extra classes in order to facilitate the teaching process.

The situation is even exacerbating while dealing with higher education system, taken into consideration TSA status of Iraqi Armenians, which deprives them from favorable conditions for enrolment in the establishments of higher education and for applying for scholarships. They are subject to tuition fees for foreign students, the expense of which is almost not possible to be met by the majority of Iraqi Armenian families.

Lack of jobs as well as normal working conditions and decent employment opportunities are the main source of disillusionment and frustration for the majority of Iraqi Armenians, supplemented by the fear of not being able to sustain their families in Armenia. Some heads-of-household reported that they were accepted in the informal economy for a trial period and were not paid during that period. Several Iraqi Armenians reported a number of cases of discrimination and hindrance that impeded them to find a job or continue their career path, and in particular to start a small business on their own.

“I wanted to rent a store in Malatia, but I was told that as I was not an Armenian citizen and I should apply to tax inspection, but no one of my local counterparts is registered there. Here I have the feeling that I have to first satisfy police, tax inspection, communal service and then only the needs of my own family,” related a head-of-household.

“There are wealthy Iraqi Armenians also who are willing but unable to invest here, because they know nobody in the government. Thus, they are thrown out from the market as opposite to those who are protected from the top. I saw once a woman trying to sell sunflower seeds in opera square, but she was chased by the one who had come first. This is what we, Iraqi Armenians face in Armenia. Therefore, without government’s support there is a risk of failure in Armenia.”

One of the heads-of-household explained that there must be a distinction between low-skilled job opportunities and personal business possibilities. He claimed that in whole there was

not big problem for finding an opportunity for unskilled work, but when people try to open a café, they challenge the whole community authorities and fail.

While most of Iraqi Armenians consider that they do not have equal employment opportunities, three respondents mentioned that Iraqi Armenian craftsmen could create an image of skilful and honest worker during a short period, thus attracting the attention and sympathy of local businessmen and ordinary customers. Yet, two heads-of-household, who used to work as accountant in Iraq, reported that they were unable to adjust to Armenian labor market, where tax legislation was different as well and a certain level of Russian knowledge was required for finding a job. The majority of Iraqi Armenians appear to find a job among personal contacts within network of their relatives, friends, and neighbors in rare instances. Modest support had been forthcoming from Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) for facilitating the access of Iraqi Armenians into the job market, and for endowing with vocational trainings. Particularly Iraqi Armenians mentioned ARCS, Mission Armenia NGO and Iraqi Armenian Relief Fund as the main organizations preoccupied with their problems. Interviewees mentioned also UNHCR as an international institution that advocated the rights of Iraqi Armenians at Governmental level.

The scope of the support provided varies starting from the provision of food and cloths as well as pecuniary assistance for one year period, to moderate legal and employment counseling and even mediation near the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Armenia for renovating Iraqi passports. Respondents cited also the encouragement of NGOs for teach Armenian language in order to enable Iraqi Armenians to smoothly adapt to the Armenian society. Nineteen from thirty families reported that they had received assistance from minimum one of those organizations. Three families reported that the conditions for providing assistance was not communicated in

advance and that their assistance was cut off amidst the year because of the evaluation results, which were not explained beforehand.

One head-of-household said that Armenian Government's willingness to accept Iraqi Armenians was already the most important support, and his family personally would not need any additional assistance which was not the case for the others. He explained that while in Syria Iraqis received a three month visa initially and were obliged to change their place of residence every three month, they did not face this problem in Armenia. Five households mentioned that they had not applied for any support program and six reported that their families were not eligible for any type of particular assistance, because of the young age or single status. They emphasized however that young Iraqi Armenians face the same difficulties as the families with children and believed that it was unfair to deprive them of the minimum assistance at their arrival to Armenia, taken into consideration the fact that they did not know sufficiently Armenian in order to immediately enter the job market. In the majority of cases they reported of having spent more than one year to find a job with an average salary.

Thirty-five percent of interviewed families reported having family members with medical problems, due both to accidents in Iraq as well as in Armenia or innate malady. Although medical needs of some of them were partially met thanks to the efforts of NGOs and the support of their fellow Iraqi Armenian physicians, respondents pointed out several examples of abuse in some medical institutions where they were treated as potential source of revenues or as a burden to be liberated from as soon as possible. One of the respondents mentioned that the ambulance had transferred him to the hospital in an emergency situation, where he was asked to pay for the treatment and medicine.

“When my son broke his arm, we went to Malatia hospital for diagnosis. To my request about the price, the physician answered that we were foreigners from a rich country, thus we had to

pay three times the price that is 63.000 drams. Then we went to the Third Pediatric hospital where everything was organized free of charge.”

“My brother was injured in an accident, but nobody came for help. He was asked for money in order to be cured in emergency situation, but besides that he had some money in the pocket that was stolen, by police we assume. When he wrote a letter of complain to the President of the Republic, he was immediately convoked by relevant authorities but without any result.”

### *Experience with Armenian Authorities*

Several are the cases when Iraqi Armenians reported administrative abuse and arbitrary attitude of authorities such as police, Office of Visa and Registration (OVIR), City Hall etc. Some respondents complained that they were interrogated several times and were not treated respectfully at the airport and in the frontier, because of the Iraqi passport which was generally associated with terrorism and Islam.

“Islamist insurgents killed my brother and abducted me twice in Basra. I escaped through Iran and crossed Armenian boarder from Meghri, where Russian soldiers stopped me and transferred to the authorities of National Security. However, even after the release I do not know why they refuse to return my passport and those of my uncle and his two sons. Now I am probably going to pay a fine because I failed to apply for asylum in Armenia on time.”

“Iraqi Armenians are granted free Armenian visa when they cross the boarder for the first time, but the Armenian Embassy in Syria made me and my family pay the full amount. In Armenia Ovir charged the double for the price of special residency status.”

The need for bribe was mentioned as one of the most reluctant issues encountered by Iraqi Armenians not only while dealing with social problems but also for continuing further investments in Armenia. Although all Iraqi Armenians noted that in Iraq they were used to bribery, they mentioned that in Armenia the limits of morality and immorality were overlapped in the sense that they felt themselves victims to racketing.

“The jewelry store hold by an Iraqi Armenian family was robbed, but the thief was not captured, though police possessed his car numbers. Neighbors had told them that the police was expecting to be bribed in order to find the culpable. This family wanted to live for Syria.”

“When I was deciding to buy my house I was not told that the building was not initially designed for habitation, thus I had to pay much more for commodities and for property tax. Only the officer from gas department was scrupulous and prepared the documentation in due from.”

“When I started to renovate my house people from the communal authority, police and City hall came and started to stop the workers and asked me for money. They told me to give hundred dollars to each of them or they would hinder the renovation. I asked them to sign a paper, but they refused to give me any receipt. It is a shameful way to ask for money.”

The above mentioned negative phenomena added by the realization of the negligence towards local constituencies, result in lack of trust towards public authorities in Armenia. Iraqi Armenians have a better level of trust towards NGOs than official authorities, whom they consider helpless and indifferent towards their problems. One of the respondents concluded that he was surprised that none of the authorities had ever thought to convoke Iraqi Armenians, to listen to them, to understand and discuss their problems in Iraq and in Armenia.

“Armenian Government should know, that Armenians were kidnapped, abducted and then killed in Iraq,” he concluded.

Four heads-of-household reported that they applied to the President of the Republic and to the police and did not get any solution concerning their preoccupying issues. Those living outside Yerevan reported having applied to the mayor in order to obtain some official documents. The Ministry of Health was successfully contacted twice for free medical treatment authorization, however people were illegally charged in hospitals. Yet people turn to neighbors and other Iraqi Armenians as the main sources of information, advice and counseling.

#### *Relations with other Iraqi Armenians*

In general Iraqi Armenians have personal contacts before coming to Armenia and they often stay with their friends or relatives during the initial period of adaptation, who serve as a source of guidance in the new society. All the interviewees reported having good and warm

relationships with other fellows of Iraqi Armenian community established in Armenia, which displayed almost no internal disaccord. In most of the cases they reported of being connected to each other with family, friendship and neighborhood ties, and continued to interact with each other in the same spirit in Armenia too. In addition the heads-of-household interviewed related that they met principally in church on Sundays or in opera square, visited and assisted each other, and referred for help if necessary. One of the interviewees mentioned that a large number of Iraqi Armenians participated in the mass offered by the primate of Armenian diocese in S. Sarkis church in 2006, which was an occasion of sharing their thoughts about the experience in homeland.

Nevertheless, some families witnessed that they had got acquainted with new Iraqi Armenians in Armenia, whom they did not know previously. Two heads-of-household explained that they did not make any difference between Iraqi Armenians and local Armenians in general, and that they had equally good relationships with all of them.

Three heads-of-household evaluated that the delivery of permanent residency status was a major achievement and an encouraging approach from the Armenian government.

“We are thankful that Armenia allows us to live here and that we are not obliged to leave the country and go back, as it is the case for Syria and Jordan,” narrated one of the interviewees.

### *Integration in Armenia*

Two thirds of Iraqi Armenians interviewed reported that they were fully integrated into Armenian society, mentioning that the traditions they had approximately corresponded to that of local Armenians, with certain distinctions. It was explained that they did not experience the restrictions and limitations that existed in Iraqi society, and that they could easily get into contact with all without any fear, everybody being Armenian. They particularly mentioned the

egalitarian approach they got in daily life, something that would not happen in western countries. In three cases interviewees explained that they needed more time “in order to speak like people in Yerevan,” and not to be perceived as a Diaspora Armenian, and seven respondents explained that they were not integrated into Armenian society because of different reasons. The difference between the languages was cited as one of the most important impediments together with limited opportunities for mutual contacts. Yet, while middle aged heads-of-household considered that they had integrated mainly due to professional relationships, young Iraqi Armenians who were studying at Universities reported of not having many friends among local Armenians.

Some respondents referred to lack of tolerance in Armenian society as a hindrance for their integration that is accompanied by the hesitation and unwillingness to get spontaneously into contact with Iraqi Armenians. The reason was that they were often considered as foreigners by local Armenians on one hand and on the other some Iraqi Armenians envisaged settling in Armenia on temporary basis, thus they did not want to fully integrate, did not care about learning the language and exploring local patterns. In several households it was said that Iraqi Armenians’ manner of wearing differs from that of local Armenians, which is something they would like to preserve.

“Generally my son wears a T-shirt and a jean when he goes to the university. He was told by his classmates that he had to change his style and wear dark colors as do the majority of local boys,” complained one of the respondents.

Several households complained about the level of TV programs in forming and transferring images of local people, which reserves Iraqi Armenians to easily enter into more deep relationships with locals.

“Everyday they speak about divorce and treachery on TV, it seems that Armenians can marry and divorce the next day, for us it is strange because this is a Muslim tradition. I hardly imagine my daughter marrying with a local Armenian guy,” claimed a head-of-household.

One of the interviewees argued that he felt a certain level of prejudice and misperception on that Armenians from Arab countries did not know the language and should hold Arab names, this was complemented by the permanent but artificial debate about who was the best Armenian: Armenians from Armenia or Armenians from outside.

“I have the impression that more than a quarter of Armenians from Armenia hold non-Armenian names and speak Russian as opposite to Iraqi Armenians who have mainly pure Armenian names and used to speak Armenian in their families. Now, who is the pure Armenian?”

### **Perspectives for durable solutions**

#### *Future of Iraqi Armenians in Iraq*

“All will escape; no Armenian will be able to stay in Iraq.”

Iraqi Armenians display a rather high level of interest in regards with political developments in Iraq; the majority of families settled in Armenia catches Iraqi TV channels and follows political news on daily basis. Their thoughts about Armenians' future in Iraq are overwhelmed by glumness. They firstly distinguish the fact that all people's life is under danger and they are obliged to sell their properties secretly in order to be able to leave Iraq with some money. And this is in the best of the cases, because they are generally told to quit their houses and leave or simply are deprived of their properties. Hence, the number of Armenians in Iraq will continue to decrease. Secondly there is the question of Armenian heritage - churches, clubs, and owned buildings - on one side Armenians can not abandon their heritage and on the other Iraqi politics will continue to remain unpredictable.

Armenian National School is another issue: although it is recently renovated, the number of pupils is decreasing by 15 to 20 each year because of the dangerous situation in the streets, and regardless the support provided for tuition fees.



“My daughters did not attend the school during two years, they had forgotten what they knew, and it is not possible to live like that, and even after graduating the school they can not go to Universities, because students also are targeted,” posited one of the interviewees.

Those only who leave near the school are able to attend, but the fate of the school is also unknown because Armenians are not sure that Iraqi government would not nationalize it, as it happened during the former regime. Armenians do not have political clout to defend themselves, they do not play any important role in the political arena of Iraq, are not represented in Iraqi Government, thus can not exert influence. Other Armenian cultural institutions are also under the danger of expiration, taken into account the fact that every day people face the threat of death; cultural activities are paralyzed. Moreover, on one hand the main leaders left the country and on the other the mentality or the Armenian spirit that was inculcated to youth is giving up to limited preoccupations on survival and daily routine owing to the political instability.

“Clubs are closed, it is impossible to go to church, and we can not keep our Armenity by speaking Armenian at home only,” explained a mother of three children.

Nevertheless, this opinion was not shared by some interviewees who reported that families alone were able to preserve Armenian language and identity. While some interviewees mentioned that the situation in Iraq would be dangerous for everybody, others pointed out that Armenians as holders of Christian faith would suffer much more. The reason for this rigid stance was that according to them the mob were going to loot Armenian churches and threaten the priests, as it happened in Basra, Kirkuk and Mosul, and the government would not be able to stop or prevent their actions. In result, Armenians would become deprived of religious leaders and this would be a stirring signal about the disappearance of the community. Several respondents did not exclude that one day Armenian churches would serve as mosques for Muslims.

There is a strong believe among Armenians that the harassment of Armenians will continue as long as the government will be frail and unable to direct to peace, stability and security for ethnic and religious communities.

“Armenians’ future in Iraq depends on the political situation, but the government will continue to be weak. Government can change the situation, but until it is not strong the situation will not ameliorate, the 6-7 parties that act have no solution and are each against the other. During ten or even thirty years it will stay like this. They bombed a new church before the inauguration in Mosul, and the money was stolen by terrorists. There are small relationships between the government and the church. Armenian school is in a very dangerous place, people are afraid to send their children because of killings and kidnapping. I think there will be no Armenian school in Iraq, the same will happen with the clubs.”

Similar sentiments are expressed about the fate of Armenians’ properties in Iraq. The jeopardy of losing the properties is another cause of trouble for Iraqi Armenians: several were the cases when Armenians’ properties were registered under the names of Arabs, and they were asked to leave their properties by exerting threat. The Diocese does not have solid guarantees that Armenians’ properties will be protected, not only those of individuals but also those which belong to the community. One of the interviewees emphasized it as an important point that makes Armenians more vulnerable due to the absence of diplomatic relations between Armenia and Iraq.

Nothing is left from a previously flourishing community. Now being Armenian in Iraq means being weak and unprotected, thus subject to violations, crimes and abduction. Only the Church can officially defend the interests of Armenians, which is quite hard because of the current lawlessness partially causing simultaneously the brain drain of Iraq and the exodus of bright professionals, both Muslim and Christian.

Elderly, sick and very poor Armenians are left there, because they can not move to their homeland and are not sure to be able to survive in Armenia, the latter failing to satisfy the basic needs of Iraqi Armenians. Therefore, they will either leave for the West, or die in Iraq, perhaps

“having anybody to burry them,” concluded one of the respondents. Those who work in state owned companies wait for their pension age in order to have certain financial resources and to move to Armenia. Finally, few Armenians, who love Iraq as birthplace and are committed to it so much that do not imagine themselves living in another country or environment, will not leave the country in any circumstances.

The most pessimist interviewees reported that they were not sure that any single Armenian would stay in Iraq, because all the young people would leave Iraq, elderly would die and their hospice would become a house for local Muslims, and Armenian Church would become a mosque one day. One of the interviewees expressed his fear that Armenians would find themselves in the same situation as Jews, although Iraqi Government does not pursue a particular policy towards Armenians as it was the case for Jews, or directly threaten or force them to convert to Islam.

The question of intermarriages is also a crucial one for the subsistence of the Armenian community and it has two dimensions: firstly Armenian girls currently face the danger of being forcefully married with Muslims and converted soon after, and giving up their national traditions, a phenomenon that was extremely rare previously and was spread only among economically very poor and illiterate families. Secondly increasing intermarriages between Armenian girls and other Christians will contribute to a rapid assimilation process and loss of national identity.

“Armenians are killed because they were known as wealthy people, and now they face a cruel dilemma to be Armenian and die or to become Muslim. There are regions in Iraq where people are told to convert to Islam in order to be given life.”

“In current circumstances of lawlessness, insecurity and absence a large number of poor Armenians willing but not able to settle in Armenia expect some external support in order to quit Iraq. Their destiny remains rather troublesome and unknown.”

Several interviewees explained that new Armenian communities were establishing in Northern Iraq, where Armenians enjoyed relative security and receive material assistance from Kurdish government. However, most of all, Iraqi Armenians settled in Armenia do not believe that the internal displacement would be a sustainable solution and that political situation would improve within ten or thirty years and associate their future with Armenia rather than with any part of Iraq.

“Many Armenians leave for Northern regions: today they are given money, houses and jobs, but they will be treated as foreigners sooner or later, while in Armenia we are among Armenians. And if there is war, I know at least for what my sons are going to fight for,” alleged a head-of-household.

*Expectations from Armenian government for the integration into Armenian society*

Twenty-three out of thirty respondents claimed that Armenia had no particular policy or comprehensive government program towards Iraqi Armenians, and did not collaborate sufficiently with the office of the United Nations in order to satisfy their basic needs such as food, medicine, education and housing and to find durable solutions. Moreover, providing TAS status to Iraqi Armenians, Armenian government did not promote their permanent establishment in the homeland, where they could contribute to Armenia’s development, and act as full citizens of Armenia instead of leaving for the West.

“Whatever we have here, we created ourselves, and government did not do anything for us.”

“In Syria our children pay the half of the education fees, while in here the pay is extremely high for us. We would live with dry bread and onion, but it is important that our children follow undergraduate studies to later serve their homeland.”

Two heads-of-households reported that many Armenian families in Iraq prefer to stay there, because the education was free or more accessible than in Armenia. However, they mentioned that Armenian students were vulnerable not only to killings but also to kidnapping,

while the community could avoid those afflictions, if Armenian Government provided possibilities for young Iraqi Armenians to study in Armenia.

Three interviewees reported that the one year assistance provided by NGOs was not enough, because the needs of Iraqi Armenians were not properly evaluated and benchmarked with the potential of the Armenian infrastructures in Armenia and abroad.

Among the respondents 47 percent reported that Armenian government did not pay due attention to the problems of Iraqi Armenians (mean=2.19, where 1=strongly agree and 4=strongly disagree; don't know/can't say excluded). 23 percent of respondents did not support this statement and 30 percent were undecided (Appendix B, Table 1).

When it came to the level of satisfaction for social policy it was found that 27 percent agreed with the statement that they were satisfied with social policy implemented by Armenian Government (mean=2.65, where 1=strongly agree and 4=strongly disagree; don't know/can't say excluded). 50 percent reported that they were not satisfied and 23 percent of respondents did not express any opinion (Appendix B, Table 2).

Concerning Iraqi Armenians' integration into Armenian labor market the answers gave the following picture: while 50 percent agreed with the statement that Iraqi Armenians had equal opportunity to find jobs in Armenia (mean=2.45, where 1=strongly agree and 4=strongly disagree; don't know/can't say excluded), 47 percent disagreed as opposite (Appendix B, Table 3).

As for discrimination only 37 percent of respondents posited that Iraqi Armenians were often discriminated in Armenian labor market (mean=2.58, where 1=strongly agree and 4=strongly disagree; don't know/can't say excluded). 43 percent expressed a negative opinion about this statement and 20 percent did not express any opinion at all (Appendix B, Table 4).

More importantly as for the repatriation of Iraqi Armenians to Armenia 70 percent of interviewees expressed a thought that Armenian Government should make of it a priority issue to be solved (mean=1.74, where 1=strongly agree and 4=strongly disagree; don't know/can't say excluded). While 7 percent disagreed with this statement and 23 percent were undecided (Appendix B, Table 5).

Finally it was found that 97 percent or 29 persons thought that Armenian Government should encourage the full integration of Iraqi Armenians into Armenian society (mean=1.76, where 1=strongly agree and 4=strongly disagree; don't know/can't say excluded) (Appendix B, Table 6).

Respondents were offered several solutions that would contribute to the amelioration of Iraqi Armenians' life in Armenia. Within the scale from "1" to "10," where "1" was not a solution and "10" was an excellent solution, they had to evaluate each of them. Based on the results it was found that the provision of pensions to elderly and disabled was the best solution (mean=9.86), which was followed by the provision of tax reduction for Iraqi Armenians for developing small and medium business (mean=9.15). The organization of Armenian language courses (mean=8.93) and provision of opportunities for professional trainings and degree programs occupied respectively third and fourth places (Appendix C, Table 7).

For the discrimination of Iraqi Armenians a solution of fining the businesses was offered to the respondents, and fourteen out of thirty respondents did not express any opinion (mean=6.56) (Appendix C, Table 7).

As for housing possibilities, Iraqi Armenians opted for the acquisition of free land near Yerevan for building private houses (mean=7.78), then came the provision of dwellings in Yerevan for needy families (mean=7.56). In addition respondents were given the opportunity to

express their opinion about housing possibilities in regions. The provision of free housing opportunity in other towns of Armenia was ranked higher (mean=5.69) than the provision of free land for housing and agriculture in the villages of Armenia (mean=3.61). However, it is worth to mention that this option had the highest score in the responses of Iraqi Armenian households settled in the village with regards to housing issue (mean=7.4). As for permanent livelihood opportunities in Artsakh the responses showed that there was a certain reservation for choosing this option (mean=3.14) (Appendix C, Table 7). This is partially due to the fact that Artsakh<sup>62</sup> is mainly associated with the war, and for Iraqi Armenians this was not among the best options taken into consideration the fact that having escaped the war in Iraq they were not willing to risk their lives anew. However, six heads-of-household expressed their wish to settle in Artsakh, if they were offered a decent employment-placement there.

## **Conclusion**

Before further discussing the findings it is necessary to mention several shortcomings of this study. The collaboration with Migration Agency of the Territorial Administration of the Republic of Armenia was limited by the provision of the report on Iraqi Armenians with TAS status, while the lists of all Iraqi Armenians with TAS and SRC was necessary from the methodological prospective (OVIR refused to provide such an information). Another limitation for the study was linked to the level of the knowledge of Armenian language spoken by several interviewees, thus family members were sometimes asked to provide translation from Armenian

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<sup>62</sup> Ashjian, A. (2007, April 3). Primate of Iraqi diocese on REGNUM's report.

“On March 30 the news agency REGNUM reported that ... Paruir Hakobyan had stated the Armenians of Iraq prefer to leave for Iraqi Kurdistan because it is better there than in Nagorno Karabakh. KarabakhOpen asked the pastor of the Iraqi Armenians Archbishop Avag Asatryan to comment on this information. Archbishop Avag Asatryan said: “Every Armenian dreams of living in Armenia and Artsakh, which is indivisible from it. We know about the patriotic feelings of Paruir Hakobyan, because we have been collaborating with him for a number of years now. Therefore, we do not think that Mr. Hakobyan would compare North Iraq with Nagorno-Karabakh Republic. We think he meant that for the people of Baghdad it is easier to get to Kurdistan than to Karabakh. The Armenians of Baghdad are not rich, and it is cheaper to stay in Iraq than to leave the country.”

into Arabic and vice versa. Finally, in order to illustrate a comprehensive picture of Iraqi Armenians a field visit in Iraq would greatly contribute to this study.

With those shortcomings in mind, the study suggests the following key findings:

- The invasion of coalition forces forced Armenians to emigrate to the West, neighboring Syria, Jordan and Lebanon, to move to Northern regions of Iraq and settle in Armenia. 804 Iraqi Armenians were registered as TAS and 357 have obtained Special Residency Status between 2003 and 2007. There are approximately 7.000 Armenians living in Iraq.
- Initially Armenians preferred to emigrate elsewhere than to resettle in their homeland, because of negative and hasty deliberations spread in Armenian community of Iraq. Armenian community of Iraq lacked public awareness about the situation in Armenia.
- Armenian media does not always promote repatriation sentiments among Iraqi Armenians and held dangerous messages by portraying an image of Iraqi Armenians as greedy and arrogant people. Besides the explicit intention to propagate anti-patriotic sentiments the coverage of Iraqi Armenians' problems in Armenia lacks professionalism.
- Iraqi Armenians settled in Armenia originated mainly from Baghdad, Basra and Mosul, and moved to Yerevan, Masis, Abovyan and Darakert village in Armenia. The majority of the respondents live with their families.
- While the majority of respondents claimed that Armenians left Iraq because of the fear of war and insecurity combined with its consequences such as killings, abduction, torture, threats and assimilation, there were cases of being victim of strong anti-Western sentiments.
- Most respondents reported that the reason they moved to Armenia was to repatriate to homeland. Moreover, Armenian language and ethnicity as well the possibility for children



to attend Armenian school were cited as important factors. Often Iraqi Armenians came to Armenia in order to join their relatives and family members.

- Iraqi Armenians in Armenia get TAS status or hold a SRC. Although two Iraqi Armenians reported of having obtained Armenian citizenship, the majority was willing to get dual citizenship in order to be able to sell their properties in Iraq.
- Iraqi Armenians wish to stay in Armenia permanently, however their settlement is directly related to employment possibilities and housing conditions. They would like to move to Iraq only on temporary basis and for specific occasions.
- Respondents reported knowing families who settled in Armenia, but were forced to leave for Iraq because their housing and employment needs were not met. Although almost all respondents reported having relatives in Iraq who would like to repatriate to Armenia, their repatriation was impeded by limited financial resources, fear and difficulties for selling properties, and danger in Iraqi-Syrian frontier.
- Almost one third of Iraqi Armenians reported that their expectations in Armenia were met; one third claimed that they had built unrealistic hopes and the remaining third asserted that their anticipations were partially fulfilled. All respondents felt safe and secure in Armenia from the viewpoint of physical protection.
- Though local Armenians were described as kind, helpful and compassionate, interviewees argued that they had a certain level of misperception and prejudice. The majority of respondents reported that they were not welcomed by their neighbors; landlords were criticized in some cases for lack of confidence.
- Complaints about secondary schools included lack of a distinct system for assisting pupils to overcome educational, psychological and social difficulties. Students at higher

establishments were subject to pay higher tuition fees (equal to foreign students) and were deprived of scholarship opportunities in Armenia.

- Among problems encountered respondents mentioned administrative abuse coming from police, OVIR and City Hall of Yerevan, fiscal administration and medical institutions. Iraqi Armenians asserted that they have applied to state officials but their demands were not always answered.
- The integration of Iraqi Armenians into Armenian society is hindered by language barrier and limited occasion for mutual contacts and lack of tolerance.
- Regardless high level of interest for political developments in Iraq, respondents' thoughts about Armenians' future in Iraq are overwhelmed by glumness. They do not believe that things would get better: hence, all Armenians will flee from Iraq.
- Most respondents claimed the need of a comprehensive program towards Iraqi Armenians established in Armenia. Furthermore, they stressed that Armenian Government should encourage repatriation and integration of Iraqi Armenians into Armenian society.
- When asked about solutions respondents in particular opted for pensions for elderly and disabled, tax reduction, education opportunities as well as housing programs.

### **Recommendations**

The general drive of the research propels durable solutions and above all repatriation to the homeland, and makes the following recommendations:

In short-run

To the Government of Armenia

1. Provide the Iraqi Armenians with the refugee status that would enable them to benefit from dwellings and pensions as well as education possibilities at higher institutions with the same conditions as local Armenians.

To Iraqi Armenians settled in Armenia

2. Raise the level of self-organization through the creation of effective advocacy body in the form of an NGO which would represent their interests locally and internationally.

In long-run

To the Government of Armenia, Armenian Diocese of Iraq and Armenian Diaspora worldwide

3. Recognize the importance of the insecurity and danger for the preservation of Armenian identity in Iraq and promote the repatriation of Iraqi Armenians through building absorption capacity in Armenia.

To the Government of Armenia

4. Meet the housing needs by providing free land near Yerevan for house construction, dwellings in Yerevan for the neediest families, free housing opportunities in other cities and villages of Armenia and in Artsakh.
5. Provide mechanisms facilitating the acquisition of double citizenship as soon as possible.
6. Grant Iraqi Armenian students with the same educational rights as to local Armenians.
7. Design and implement adequate employment policies.
8. Provide tax reduction for Iraqi Armenians in order to develop small and medium businesses.

To Civil Society Organizations

9. Organize Armenian language courses free of charge, as well as extra-curricular classes facilitating education and integration process.

10. Provide adequate counseling on legal, business, housing and healthcare issues.

#### Mass Media

11. Raise public awareness in Armenia about Iraqi Armenians within the context of Iraq's political developments, and create a positive understanding of repatriation through mass media.

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## Appendix A

Questionnaire for in-depth interviews with Iraqi Armenian households in Armenia

Identification sheet  
Respondents Name

Interview ID number\_

Interview #

Date of interview

Location of Interview

Time Interview begins

Time interview ends

1. Profile of Iraqi Armenians in Armenia

1.1 How many people are there in your household? Please specify who they are.

1.2 Where were you living in Iraq?

1.3 What is your highest education?

Incomplete secondary school

Secondary school

University, college, technical school

Completed university degree (5 or 4 years)

Advanced graduate university degree

1.4 What is your specialty?

1.5 What is your age?

1.6 (Circle gender) Female    Male

1.7 What is your marital status?

Not married

Married

Divorced

Widowed

2. Reasons for leaving Iraq

2.1 What are the reasons that forced you to leave Iraq?

3. Reasons for choosing Armenia as a place of destination

3.1 Why did you decided to come to Armenia?

3.2 By what financial means did you come to Armenia?

3.3 In Armenia do you live in your own house or apartment or do you rent an apartment?

3.4 Do you live with your family members in Armenia? If not, would you like them to join you in Armenia? What impedes their settlement in Armenia?

4. Current status in Armenia and plans for the future

4.1 What is your status in Armenia

4.2 How many years do you intend to live in Armenia?

4.3 Where do you intend to live in the future?

4.4 Would you like to obtain citizenship of the Republic of Armenia? If not explain the reasons.

4.5 When would you like to return to Iraq?

4.6 Do you know people who came to Armenia then returned to Iraq? How many people?

4.7 According to you what are the reasons that force them to return to Iraq?

4.8 Do you know people who came to Armenia from Iraq then left for a third country? How many? According to you why do they leave for a third country?

4.9 Do you think that the influx of Iraqi Armenians to Armenia will continue during the upcoming 5 years?

- 4.10 Among your relatives and friends in Iraq are there people who wish to immigrate to Armenia? Approximately how many people? What hinders their immigration?
5. What is the current situation of Iraqi Armenians in Armenia?
- 5.1 How secure do you feel in Armenia from the perspective of your physical protection? What about financial situation of your family?
- 5.2 How did you imagine Armenia before your settlement in Armenia?
- 5.3 Did your expectations come true in Armenia?
- 5.6 How would you describe the attitude of local Armenians towards you and your family?
- 5.7 What would you say about your integration in Armenia?
- 5.8 What are the reasons for non-integration of Iraqi Armenians in Armenia?
- 5.9 When people find themselves in an unfamiliar country they come across with several obstacles. Please describe the obstacles that you and/or your family members came across in Armenia.
- 5.10 What kind of support did you get in Armenia?
- 5.11 When you encounter problems in Armenia what actions do you undertake? To whom do you apply for help? Do you apply to state officials?
- 5.12 What kind of relationships do you have with your neighbors?
- 5.13 What kind of relationships do you have with other Iraqi Armenians who live in Armenia?
- 5.14 How many people work in your household? If nobody works, how do you get money for your living expenses?
- 5.15 What kind of problems have you encountered for finding a job of your profession?
- 5.16 What kind of relationships do you have with your colleagues?
6. Prospects of durable solutions

6.1 What is the future of Armenians in Iraq?

6.2 In general terms are you satisfied with the policy that Armenian Government implements towards Iraqi Armenians?

6.3 I am going to read some statements. Please, tell whether you strongly agree, agree, disagree or strongly disagree with the following statements.

Armenian Government should encourage the full integration of Iraqi Armenians in Armenia.

Armenian government does not pay due attention to the problems of Iraqi Armenians.

Iraqi Armenians have equal opportunity for finding a job in Armenia.

I am satisfied with the social programs implemented for Iraqi Armenians.

Iraqi Armenians are often discriminated in the Armenian job market.

Armenian Government should make the repatriation of Iraqi Armenians as a primary issue to be solved.

6.4 I will read a number of solutions that would ameliorate the livelihood of Iraqi Armenians in Armenia. I want to know their opinion about each of them. Within a scale from “1” to “10” where “1” is not at all a solution and “10” is an excellent solution please express your attitude towards each of them.

Free land near Yerevan for building houses

Fine businesses for discrimination

Free housing in other cities and towns of Armenia

Free land for housing and agriculture in rural areas

Free livelihood opportunities in Artsakh

Dwellings for needy persons

Pension to elderly and handicapped

Tax reduction for small and medium businesses

Trainings and degree programs

Armenian language courses free of charge

## Appendix B

Table 1	Agree	Disagree	DK/Can't say
Armenian government must encourage the full integration of Iraqi Armenians into Armenian society	97	3	0
(mean=1.76, where 1=strongly agree and 4=strongly disagree; don't know/can't say excluded)			

Table 2	Agree	Disagree	DK/Can't say
Armenian government does not pay due attention to the problems of Iraqi Armenians	47	23	30
(mean=2.19, where 1=strongly agree and 4=strongly disagree; don't know/can't say excluded)			

Table 3	Agree	Disagree	DK/Can't say
Iraqi Armenians have equal opportunity to find jobs in Armenia	50	47	3
(mean=2.45, where 1=strongly agree and 4=strongly disagree; don't know/can't say excluded)			

Table 4	Agree	Disagree	DK/Can't say
I am satisfied with the social policy implemented by Armenian Government	27	50	23
(mean=2.65, where 1=strongly agree and 4=strongly disagree; don't know/can't say excluded)			

Table 5	Agree	Disagree	DK/Can't say
Iraqi Armenians are often discriminated in the Armenian labor market	37	43	20
(mean=2.58, where 1=strongly agree and 4=strongly disagree; don't know/can't say excluded)			

Table 6	Agree	Disagree	DK/Can't say
Armenian Government should make the repatriation of Iraqi Armenians as a priority issue to be solved	70	7	23
(mean=1.76, where 1=strongly agree and 4=strongly disagree; don't know/can't say excluded)			

## Appendix C

Solutions that would ameliorate the livelihood of Iraqi Armenians in Armenia.

Solutions	Mean	Median	Mode
Pension to elderly and handicapped	9.86	10	10
Tax reduction for small and medium businesses	9.15	10	10
Armenian language courses free of charge	8.93	10	10
Trainings and degree programs	8.79	10	10
Free land near Yerevan	7.78	8	10
Dwellings for needy persons	7.56	8	10
Fine businesses for discrimination	6.56	8	10
Free housing in other cities and towns of Armenia	5.69	5	5
Free land for housing and agriculture in rural areas	3.61	1.5	1
Free livelihood opportunities in Artsakh	3.14	1	1

Scale from “1” to “10” where “1” is not at all a solution and “10” is an excellent solution.

## Appendix E

Iraqi Armenians who received Special Residency Status and TAS status (1999-Oct. 2007)

Year	Special Residency Status	TAS status
1999	3	
2000	12	
2001	18	
2002	25	
2003	18	63
2004	43	143
2005	102	140
2006	122	275
July 26 <sup>th</sup> 2007	72	
October 31 <sup>st</sup> 2007		183
Total	415	804

Source: Irtek, Decrees of the President for granting Special Residency Status.

Irtek, Orders of the President for granting Special Residency Status.

Migration Agency of the Ministry of Territorial Administration of RoA.