



ANU YIJÄLÄ & MARIA NYMAN

# LIVING IN LIMBO

Qualitative case study of skilled Iraqi  
asylum seekers in Finland

1

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Iraqi asylum seekers in Finland

**ANU YIJÄLÄ & MARIA NYMAN**

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# FOREWORD

An unprecedented number of asylum seekers arrived in Europe in 2015. The majority of them came from the chaotic situation in Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan, and from refugee camps in the Middle East. Finland also saw a record number of asylum seekers enter the country over the course of just a few months, although the total number was substantially lower than in many other European countries, particularly Sweden and Germany.

The changed circumstances called for quick action to organise the reception of asylum seekers around Europe, including Finland. There was also a tremendous need for information regarding the background of the asylum seekers, their motives and whether they meet the conditions for remaining in the receiving countries. To participate in gathering information on the topic, the City of Helsinki Urban Facts launched a research project aimed at studying the expectations of asylum seekers who entered Finland and their conditions for integration. This research report gathers the results of the project. As the majority of the asylum seekers who entered Finland in autumn 2015 had Iraqi backgrounds, the study was targeted at Iraqis.

The study focuses on a small privileged group of asylum seekers of Iraqi background who are educated, have work experience and speak English. This target group was chosen, because they can be presumed to find their place on the Finnish labour market faster than those asylum seekers who lack these criteria. At the time of the study, in 2015–2016, the participants were waiting for an asylum decision in Helsinki and Turku. The results particularly focus on the factors that are assumed to influence the asylum seekers' successful integration into the Finnish labour market, provided that they are granted permission to remain in the country: specifically, their backgrounds, experiences associated with arriving in Finland and their expectations regarding staying in Finland.

The results indicate that the participants of the study have encountered many kinds of challenges in Finland. Their difficult experiences in their home country and their arduous journeys have left their mark on the participants, and spending a long time waiting in uncertainty does little to promote their integration into a new country. While they wait for an asylum decision, the asylum seekers live in a transitory state: while they have physically arrived in a new country, their lives are shadowed by a variety of factors that makes the process of adaptation psychologically difficult. Being idle and not having the opportunity to earn a livelihood are highlighted in the study as major challenges mentioned by the interviewees themselves. The results highlight a variety of challenges related to the system for receiving asylum seekers, but also solutions that could potentially enhance the psychological well-being of asylum seekers and promote their integration into Finland.

The research report was produced at the initiative of Anu Yijälä and Maria Nyman, researchers at City of Helsinki Urban Facts, and finalised with the support from the *Polkuja työhön* (Occupational Restructuring Challenges Competencies) project funded by the Academy of Finland (project no 303536). On behalf of the researchers and

the City of Helsinki, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the funding partner and, in particular, thank the Iraqi interviewees who participated in the project. Implementing this study would not have been possible without their cooperation.

Helsinki, January 2017

Katja Vilkama  
Research Manager

Vuoden 2015 aikana Eurooppaan saapui ennennäkemättömän suuri määrä turvapaikanhakijoita. Suurin osa tulijoista oli lähtöisin Syyrian, Irakin ja Afganistanin sekasortoisesta tilanteesta ja Lähi-idän pakolaisleireiltä. Myös Suomeen saapui muutamassa kuukaudessa ennätyksellisen paljon turvapaikanhakijoita, vaikka tulijoiden kokonaismäärät jäivätkin selvästi useita muita Euroopan maita, erityisesti Ruotsia ja Saksaa, pienemmiksi.

Muuttunut tilanne vaati nopeita toimia turvapaikanhakijoiden vastaanoton järjestämiseksi niin Euroopan laajuisesti kuin Suomessakin. Myös tietotarve tulijoiden taustoista, motiiveista ja vastaanottaviin maihin jäämisen edellytyksistä oli valtaisa. Osallistua kesken tiedon kartuttamiseen Helsingin kaupungin tietokeskus polkaisi käyntiin tutkimushankkeen, jolla pyrittiin kartoittamaan Suomeen saapuneiden turvapaikanhakijoiden odotuksia ja kotoutumisen edellytyksiä. Käsillä oleva tutkimusraportti on syntynyt tämän hankkeen tuloksena. Koska suurin osa Suomeen syksyn 2015 aikana tulleista turvapaikanhakijoista oli taustaltaan irakilaisia, kohdennettiin tutkimus heihin.

Tutkimuksen kohderyhmä on pieni, etuoikeutettu ryhmä koulutettuja, ammatillista kokemusta omaavia, englannin kielen taitoisia irakilaistaustaisia turvapaikanhakijoita. Kohderyhmä valittiin, koska heidän voitaisiin olettaa löytävän paikkansa suomalaisilla työmarkkinoilla nopeammin kuin niiden turvapaikanhakijoiden, joilta nämä kriteerit puuttuvat. Tutkimuksen aikana 2015–2016, tutkimuksen osallistujat odottivat turvapaikkapäätöstään Helsingissä ja Turussa. Tuloksissa keskitytään erityisesti niihin tekijöihin, joiden oletetaan vaikuttavan turvapaikanhakijoiden onnistuneeseen työmarkkinaintegraatioon: erityisesti heidän taustoihinsa, kokemuksiinsa Suomeen saapumisesta sekä tulevaisuutta koskeviin odotuksiinsa, mikäli he saavat luvan jäädä maahan.

Tulokset osoittavat, että turvapaikanhakijat ovat kohdanneet Suomessa monenlaisia haasteita. Vaikeat kokemukset kotimaassa sekä rankka matka ovat jättäneet heihin jälkensä, eikä pitkä odotus vastaanottokeskuksissa edistä uuteen maahan kotoutumista. Turvapaikkapäätöstä odottaessaan turvapaikanhakijat elävät eräänlaisessa välitilassa: he ovat fyysisesti saapuneet uuteen maahan, mutta heidän elämänsä on täynnä epävarmuustekijöitä, jotka hankaloittavat sopeutumista psykologisella tasolla. Joustenolo, ilman mahdollisuuksia itsensä elättämiseen, nousee tuloksissa esille yhtenä isoimmista haastateltavien itsensä mainitsemista haasteista. Raportin tulokset nostavat esille useita erilaisia turvapaikanhakijoiden vastaanottojärjestelmään liittyviä haasteita sekä toisaalta myös keinoja, joiden avulla turvapaikanhakijoiden psykologista hyvinvointia ja Suomeen kotoutumista voitaisiin edistää.

Tutkimusraportti on toteutettu tietokeskuksen tutkijoiden Anu Yijälän ja Maria Nymanin aloitteesta ja viimeistely valmiiksi Suomen Akatemian rahoittaman *Polkuja työhön* -hankkeen (nro 303536) tuella. Tutkijoiden ja Helsingin kaupungin puolesta esitän lämpimät kiitokset rahoittajalle sekä erityisen suuret kiitokset tutkimukseen

osallistuneille irakilaistaustaisille haastateltaville. Ilman heidän yhteistyötään tämän tutkimuksen toteutus ei olisi ollut mahdollista.

Helsingissä, tammikuussa 2017

Katja Vilkama  
tutkimuspäällikkö

# FÖRORD

Antalet asylsökande i Europa blev rekordhøgt under 2015. De flesta kom från den kaotiska situationen i Syrien, Irak och Afghanistan och från flyktinglägren i Mellanöstern. Även till Finland kom det på några månader fler asylsökande än någonsin, även om det totala antalet blev klart lägre jämfört med flera andra europeiska länder, särskilt Sverige och Tyskland.

Den förändrade situationen krävde snabba åtgärder för att kunna ordna mottagningen av de asylsökande, både på europeisk nivå och i Finland. Även behovet av information om de asylsökandes bakgrund, motiv och villkor för att få stanna i de mottagande länderna var stort. För att bidra till att samla kunskap som saknades lanserade Helsingfors stads faktacentral ett forskningsprojekt, med vilket man strävade efter att kartlägga förväntningarna hos asylsökande som kommit till Finland och villkoren för deras integration. Den föreliggande forskningsrapporten är ett resultat av detta projekt. Eftersom de flesta asylsökande som kom till Finland under hösten 2015 hade irakisk bakgrund, inriktades studien på dem.

Studiens målgrupp är en liten privilegierad grupp med utbildade, yrkeserfarna, engelsktalande asylsökande med irakisk bakgrund. Denna målgrupp valdes på basis av att de kan förväntas att hitta sin plats på den finska arbetsmarknaden snabbare än andra grupper av asylsökande, som saknar dessa kriterier. Under tidpunkten för studien 2015–2016 väntade deltagarna på asylbesked i Helsingfors och i Åbo. Resultaten inriktas särskilt på de faktorer som förväntas påverka de asylsökandes framgångsrika arbetsmarknadsintegration: speciellt bakgrundssituationen och anledningen till att ha lämnat hemlandet, erfarenheter av ankomsten till Finland samt förväntningarna gällande Finland, förutsatt att de får stanna i landet.

Resultaten visar att de asylsökande har stött på en rad utmaningar i Finland. De svåra upplevelserna i hemlandet och den ansträngande resan därifrån har satt sina spår på deltagarna. Den långa väntan på förläggningarna för de asylsökande främjar inte integrationen i det nya landet. I väntan på asylbeslut lever de asylsökande i ett slags mellanstadium: de har fysiskt anlänt till det nya landet men deras liv är fullt av osäkerhetsfaktorer, som psykologiskt gör det svårt att anpassa sig. Sysslolösheten, att inte kunna försörja sig själva visar sig vara en av de största utmaningarna som deltagarna själva nämner i studien. Resultaten av rapporten lyfter fram flera olika utmaningar gällande mottagningssystemet för asylsökande samt å andra sidan även åtgärder med vilka man skulle kunna främja asylsökandes psykologiska hälsa och integration i Finland.

Initiativtagare till forskningsrapporten är faktacentralens forskare Anu Yijälä och Maria Nyman och den har färdigställts med stöd av projektet *Polkuja työhön* (Occupational Restructuring Challenges Competencies) som finansierats av Finlands Akademi (projekt nr 303536). På forskarnas och på Helsingfors stads vägnar vill jag framföra ett varmt tack till finansören samt ett särskilt stort tack till de irakiska deltagarna i studien. Utan deras samarbete hade det inte varit möjligt att genomföra denna studie.

Helsingfors, januari 2017, Katja Vilkkama, forskningschef

# ABSTRACT

In recent years, the phenomenon of forced migration has reached unprecedented levels within the history of the European Union. In the autumn of 2015, Finland received more asylum seekers than ever, with Iraqis being the biggest group entering the country. This study is a qualitative research of skilled English speaking Iraqi asylum seekers, thus covering only a fraction of Iraqis who came to Finland during 2015–2016. The data was gathered through interviews with 22 persons (of whom three were women) and by ethnographic observations, as many of the participants kept contact with the interviewing researcher after the actual interview. During the time of the interview, all participants were waiting for the decision about their asylum request, while being registered at reception centres in Helsinki and Turku. In reality, however, half of the participants were staying in private accommodations.

The focus of the study is on factors potentially relevant for a successful labour market integration among this particular group of asylum seekers, given that they are granted international protection. Hence, their professional skills, work motivation, as well as their expectations and aspirations regarding placement on the labour market in Finland are studied. However, as the material from the interviews was rich, and understanding the starting points of the asylum seekers is required, themes such as religion and gender equality, along with other cultural differences between Iraq and Finland are discussed. Moreover, at the end of the results section of the study, some messages are delivered from the participants to Finns and to Finnish decision makers, together with some suggestions on how to best promote the successful integration of newcomers.

According to the results of the study, the difficult experiences in Iraq and the arduous trip have left their mark on those who managed to escape from Iraq. While waiting for a decision about their asylum request, the asylum seekers find themselves in a tough, limbo-like stage. Being in a new country without knowing whether they can stay or not, pose severe challenges to their psychological wellbeing and integration process. Regardless of the strong motivation of the participants to find work, the initial expectations of the desired fast employment seem to be somewhat unrealistic – from both the participants' side as well as the receiving society's side. Firstly, finding professional, English speaking Iraqi asylum seekers was harder than initially thought. Secondly, based on the ethnographic observations and the information from the interviews regarding experienced levels of stress and trauma, those interviewed often didn't seem to be ready to meet the requirements of the Finnish labour market. Regardless of having reached this conclusion based on the results of 22 participants only, it raises some concerns regarding the economic adaptation of these participants – at least the short-term – even though this group could be expected to present the most promising group of Iraqi asylum seekers as potential employees.

Hence, in order to be ready to start working, preparative training regarding the Finnish working culture, education on everyday practicalities and cultural habits in general, as well as support in handling traumatic experiences from the past are clearly needed.

For this purpose and to ensure that the message gets through, it would be important that the education could be arranged in the native language of the newcomers, preferably presented by a compatriot. In order to support those who have gained residence in Finland to regain their ability to work, organising diverse and sufficient rehabilitation should be a central focus in the future. Failing to address this issue is bound to become more expensive in the long run, as beneficiaries of international protection run a tenfold risk of developing post-traumatic stress disorder and other severe mental health problems in comparison to natives (cf. Kirmeyer et al. 2011, for a review).

Asylum seekers are not allowed to work during the first three (having an ID) or six months (denizen asylum seekers) after arrival in Finland. Even after gaining the work permit, practical issues such as not having a Finnish bank account may prevent one from accepting an upcoming opportunity of employment. During this time, the options for having an income are scarce: take-up of the reception allowance, or working on the black market. In a few cases, voluntary work and work training has been an option, but there are not enough of these kinds of opportunities for everybody. Receiving reception allowance without doing anything in return was found to have negative effects on the self-esteem of the participants. Based on the results of this study, it was evident that providing, for example, some kind of low-barrier internships or even temporary work contracts was a preferred option.

Furthermore, after realising that the reception allowance is actually collected from tax payments (and not from the UN or Red Cross as the participants had first thought), they also thought this to be the most likely reason behind the negative attitudes among some Finns towards asylum seekers. Moreover, apart from being a question of honour to make one's own living, having just about anything to do in order to stop thinking about the past life in Iraq was preferred, which is why many participants called for opportunities for some voluntary work for a start. In the light of the results of this study, it is reasonable to question whether this kind of policy regarding work is in fact teaching the newcomers to become passive recipients of social benefits. In order to prevent this pattern, harmful for both the individual and the receiving society, other options for asylum seekers need to be actively considered.

In general, the participants were not expecting difficulties in their adaptation to their possible new home country. Learning the Finnish language was often seen as the only real challenge, while only a few participants seemed to expect that finding work would be challenging. Following religious rules at work was generally not considered important and, in fact, after decades of religious and political conflicts and war in Iraq, the restricted influence of religion in Finnish society was perceived as liberating and welcomed in every way. Surprisingly, many participants reported being atheist. It is not certain, though, whether this presents a new trend or if it is related to maximising possibilities to gain international protection. Whichever the case, most felt that their personal values were clearly much more in line with the Finnish cultural values than with those of Iraq. This kind of value congruence has been shown to promote the integration process (Sagiv & Schwartz 2000).

Based on this study, however, even if their aspirations towards adopting Finnish cultural values are evident, the matter is not totally unambiguous: although the participants claimed to be pro-equality, the rooted, socially constructed and often sub-

conscious beliefs of inequality between genders was identified as a challenge regarding future integration of the participants. To reach even the minimum level of equality according to Finnish standards will require a lot of work, not only regarding the attitudes of Muslim men but also among Muslim women, who in this study were found to have accepted their culturally imposed, subordinate and inferior role in relation to men. Within this particular group, there is hope of improvement regarding this matter: the participants claimed to be pro-equality and were, for example, welcoming the idea of a future female supervisor, yet expressed concerns about their less educated compatriots, who were said to likely reject the idea even in Finland. According to the participants, the less-educated Iraqis are more attached to the traditional breadwinner-model, where the man is the head of the family, the provider and the decision maker, while the woman often stays at home. This model, however, would be hard to apply in an expensive country like Finland, where it is usually necessary that both spouses work outside of the home in order to make ends meet.

Some participants also expressed their worry about the less educated asylum seekers lacking discernment and thus being more prone to radicalisation. Contacts with Finns were thought to be the most potent precautionary action in order to prevent radicalisation. To support this aim, home accommodation for asylum seekers on a larger scale was sought after: the positive effects of home accommodation on psychological adaptation in terms of enhanced satisfaction of life in comparison to those living in the reception centres and accumulation of social capital were evident among the participants of this study. The attitudes and the readiness of the society as a whole to receive and support the newcomers play a huge role in their integration in a new country and play a crucial role in the prevention of extremist behaviour, which was not found among the participants of this study.

The results of this study emphasise the central role of the family in the participants' lives: the appreciation for the extended family in the Iraqi culture seems to be bigger than the value, which is generally given to extended family members in Finland. In contrast to voluntary migrants, where the presence and support of the family is a major asset (e.g. Black & Stephens 1989; Van der Bank & Rothmann 2006), in the case of forced migrants, the absence of the family often causes worry, instead of being a resource. The recent restrictions regarding family reunification in Finland present a threat to the integration of those about to gain residence in Finland. It could also be that resources go to waste, especially if the integration process has been initiated before an individual finds out that (s)he is not allowed to be reunited with his/her family, and the person decides to go back for this reason.

The media plays a huge role when it comes to the formation of attitudes towards the representatives of other countries (Jerman 2009; Horsti 2015; Horsti & Nikunen 2013): in this study, negative publicity regarding asylum seekers was found to have an immediate effect on the participants, half of them reporting experiences of discrimination. Regardless of this, the results of this study reflect a high motivation of the participants to adapt to Finnish society and culture, strengthened by the observation that contacts with Finns were very much sought after.

Finally, the Iraqi asylum seekers cannot be regarded as one homogenous group. In the interviews, the participants expressed their great worry about the predisposition

of some Finns to make generalisations about them based on a few ill-behaving compatriots. Even if the ethnical and cultural background gives some frames for certain cultural stereotypes, the differences on a personal level are bigger than the national generalisations, which are often prejudiced. In fact, the participants were longing to be part of and further develop the Finnish society, which undoubtedly is in a time of transition. In all, their desires of living in peace, getting employed and raising a family do not differ from the most common future plans of Finns themselves.

# TIIVISTELMÄ

Euroopan Unionin historiaa tarkastellessa pakotetuksi maahanmuutoksi kutsuttu ilmiö on viime vuosien aikana saavuttanut ennennäkemättömät mittasuhteet. Myös Suomeen tuli syksyn 2015 aikana turvapaikanhakijoita ennennäkemätön määrä. Suurin yksittäinen kansalaisuusryhmä tulijoiden joukossa oli irakilaiset. Tämän laadullisen tutkimuksen keskiössä ovat koulutetut, ammatillista kokemusta omaavat ja englantia puhuvat irakilaiset turvapaikanhakijat. Näin ollen tutkimuksen aineisto edustaa vain pientä osaa niistä irakilaisista, jotka tulivat Suomeen vuosien 2015–2016 aikana. Aineisto kerättiin haastattelemalla 22 henkilöä (joista kolme oli naisia), sekä tekemällä heistä etnografisia havaintoja useiden tutkimukseen osallistujien pitäessä yhteyttä haastattelut tehneeseen tutkijaan myös haastattelun jälkeen. Tutkimuksen alkaessa kaikki osallistujat olivat kirjoilla vastaanottokeskuksissa Helsingissä ja Turussa ja odottivat päätöstä turvapaikkahakemukseensa. Tästä huolimatta haastatteluhetkellä vastaanottokeskuksissa asui vain puolet haastatelluista, loput heistä asui yksityismaajoituksessa.

Tutkimus keskittyy tekijöihin, joiden voidaan olettaa vaikuttavan nyt huomion kohteena olevan ryhmän onnistuneeseen työmarkkinaintegraatioon, mikäli he saavat luvan jäädä maahan. Näin ollen tutkimuksessa kartoitetaan kohderyhmän ammatillisia valmiuksia, työmotivaatiota sekä tulevaa työllistymistä koskevia toiveita ja odotuksia. Koska haastattelumateriaali oli sisällöllisesti hyvin rikas ja turvapaikanhakijoiden tilanteen kokonaisvaltainen ymmärtäminen vaatii tuekseen myös taustatietoja heidän tilanteestaan ennen Suomeen tuloa, käsitellään tässä tutkimusraportissa myös muita teemoja. Esimerkkejä näistä ovat uskonnon ja sukupuolten välisen tasa-arvon tärkeys nyt tutkittujen henkilöiden elämässä sekä miten he kokivat Suomen ja Irakin kulttuurien poikkeavan toisistaan. Tämän lisäksi tutkimuksen tulososan lopussa välitetään tämän ryhmän lähettämiä viestejä suomalaisille, Suomen päätöksentekijöille sekä vastaanottokeskusten henkilökunnille. Viesteissä osallistujat kertovat oman näkemyksensä siitä, kuinka heidän sopeutumistaan suomalaiseen yhteiskuntaan voitaisiin parhaiten edesauttaa.

Vaikeat kokemukset kotimaassa sekä rankka matka ovat jättäneet jälkensä heihin, jotka onnistuivat pakenemaan Irakista. Odottaessaan turvapaikkapäätöstään turvapaikanhakijat elävät eräänlaisessa välitilassa: he ovat fyysisesti saapuneet uuteen maahan, mutta heidän elämänsä on täynnä epävarmuustekijöitä, jotka eittämättä hankaloittavat uuteen maahan sopeutumista psykologisella tasolla. Vaikka osallistujat ilmaisivat olevansa äärimmäisen motivoituneita Suomeen sopeutumiseen ja työntekoon, asianlaite ei kuitenkaan ole niin yksiselitteinen: alkuperäiset odotukset nopeasta työllistymisestä olivat haastattelun aikoihin kuitenkin jo osoittautuneet melko epärealistiseksi niin itse osallistujien itsensä, kuin myös vastaanottavan yhteiskunnankin kannalta katsottuna. Ensiksikin ammattitaitoisten ja englantia puhuvien irakilaisten turvapaikanhakijoiden löytäminen osoittautui huomattavasti odotettua hankalammaksi. Toiseksi, tutkimuksen etnografisista havainnoista sekä osallistujien haastattelussa antamista vastauksista koskien heidän kokemaansa stressiä ja traumaattisia kokemuk-

sia kävi ilmi, että haastatellut henkilöt eivät useinkaan olleet valmiita suoriutumaan suomalaisten työmarkkinoiden vaatimuksista. Vaikka tähän johtopäätökseen tultiin ainoastaan 22 henkilön aineistosta koostuvien tulosten pohjalta, herättää tämä kuitenkin huolta, mitä tulee taloudellisen sopeutumisen onnistumiseen ainakin lyhyellä aikavälillä tarkasteltuna. Huolta herättää etenkin se, että nyt tutkitun ryhmän voidaan olettaa ennustavan irakilaisten turvapaikanhakijoiden keskuudessa juuri kaikkein luopaavinta joukkoa potentiaalisia työntekijöitä.

Saatujen tulosten pohjalta lieenee selvää, että voidakseen aloittaa työnteon, osallistujat tarvitsevat lisää tietoa suomalaisesta työkulttuurista sekä perehdytystä arkipäivän toimiin ja maan tapoihin yleensäkin. Viestin tehokkaan perillemenon kannalta olisi ensiarvoisen tärkeää, että koulutus järjestettäisiin tulijoiden omalla äidinkielellä ja kouluttaja olisi mahdollisesti tulijoiden oman kulttuurin edustaja. Suomeen asumaan jäävien turvapaikanhakijoiden työkyvyn palauttamisessa hyvin keskeisessä asemassa on myös monipuolisen ja riittävän kuntoutuksen järjestäminen. Mikäli tässä epäonnistutaan, saattavat pitkän aikavälin kustannukset kasvaa ennakoitua suuremmaksi: kansainvälistä suojelua saaneiden keskuudessa riski sairastua esimerkiksi trauman jälkeiseen stressioireyhtymään sekä muihin vakaviin mielenterveysongelmiin on raportoitu olevan jopa kymmenkertainen kantaväestöön nähden (Kirmeyer et al. 2011).

Turvapaikanhakijat eivät saa työskennellä Suomessa ennen kuin kolme (mikäli tulijalla on ollut mukanaan matkustusasiakirja) tai kuusi (ilman matkustusasiakirjaa tulleet) kuukautta on kulunut maahantulosta. Työluvan saaminenkaan ei vielä tarkoita sitä, että työn vastaanottaminen olisi käytännössä mahdollista: tämän saattaa estää esimerkiksi suomalaisen pankkitilin puuttuminen, minkä avaaminen ei onnistu ilman virallista henkilötodistusta. Turvapaikkapäätöstä odottaessa mahdollisuudet tulla toimeen ovat pääsääntöisesti harvassa: tulijan on joko nostettava vastaanottorahaa tai työskenneltävä laittomasti riskeistä huolimatta. Joissain tapauksissa vapaaehtoistyöt ja työssäoppiminen tai työharjoittelu ovat tulleet kyseeseen, mutta näitä mahdollisuuksia ei kuitenkaan ole tarjolla riittävästi. Tutkimus osoitti, että osallistujat pitivät matalan kynnyksen työharjoittelupaikkoja sekä erilaisia väliaikaisia työsuhteita selvästi parempina vaihtoehtoina kuin vastaanottorahan passiivista vastaanottamista, jonka osallistujat kuvailivat vaikuttavan kielteisesti myös heidän itsetuntoonsa.

Saatuaan tietää, että vastaanottoraha on peräisin verovaroista eikä esimerkiksi YK:lta tai Punaiselta ristiltä, kuten osallistujat ensin luulivat, katsoivat he vastaanottorahan olevan myös kaikkein todennäköisin syy joidenkin suomalaisten negatiiviselle asennoitumiselle turvapaikanhakijoita kohtaan. Sen lisäksi, että oman elannon ansaitseminen katsottiin olevan kunnia-asia, aivan mikä tahansa tekeminen, jonka kautta olisi voinut hetkeksi päästä eron Irakia koskevista muistoista, olisi osallistujien mukaan ollut erittäin tervetullutta. Tämän vastakohtaa – eli tilannetta, jossa turvapaikanhakijalla ei ole muuta vaihtoehtoa kuin joutenolo – kuvattiin pahimmaksi mahdolliseksi vaihtoehdoksi. Tämän takia monet osallistujat peräänkuuluttivat mahdollisuuksia tehdä vapaaehtoistöitä tai työskentelivät ilman palkkaa. Tämän tutkimuksen tulosten mukaan onkin perusteltua kysyä, saattaako tämänlainen menettelytapa itseasiassa opettaa tulijoita passiivisiksi sosiaalityönsä vastaanottajiksi. Jotta tällaiselta haitalliselta tapahtumakululta sekä tulokkaan itsensä, että myös vastaanottavan yhteiskunnan kannalta voitaisiin välttyä, olisi itsensä elättämään tottuneille

turvapaikanhakijoille ensiarvoisen tärkeää pyrkiä lisäämään itsenäisen toimeentulon mahdollistavia vaihtoehtoja.

Yleisesti ottaen osallistujat eivät odottaneet kohtaavansa merkittäviä sopeutumisvaikeuksia, mikäli saisivat luvan jäädä maahan. Suomen kielen oppimista pidettiin usein ainoana todellisenä haasteena, ja ainoastaan muutama osallistuja uskoi työllistymisensä olevan haasteellista. Uskonnollisten sääntöjen seuraamista suomalaisella työpaikalla ei yleisesti ottaen pidetty tärkeänä: elettyään vuosikymmenten ajan uskonnollisten ja poliittisten konfliktien keskellä, uskonnolle Suomessa annettu vähäinen painoarvo tuntui osallistujista vapauttavalta ja kaikin puolin tervetulleelta. Yllättävän moni tutkimuksen osallistujista ilmoitti olevansa ateisti. Toistaiseksi ei kuitenkaan ole mahdollista sanoa, onko kyseessä nouseva trendi Irakissa, vai selittyykö ateistien suuri osuus aineistossa pikemminkin osallistujien pyrkimyksillä kohottaa omia mahdollisuuksiaan turvapaikanhakuprosessissa. Kummasta sitten olikaan kyse, tämän tutkimuksen osallistujat kokivat oman henkilökohtaisen arvomaailmansa vastaavan paljon enemmän Suomen kuin Irakin kulttuurisia arvoja. Tämän kaltaisten arvojen vastaavuuden on todettu vaikuttavan positiivisesti yksilön hyvinvointiin ja edesauttavan tätä kautta myös uuteen maahan sopeutumista (Sagiv & Schwartz 2000).

Tämän tutkimuksen tulosten pohjalta nousi esiin myös haasteita länsimaiseen yhteiskuntaan sopeutumista silmällä pitäen. Kyseessä on syvälle irakilaiseen kulttuuriin juurtunut ja sosiaalisesti konstruoitu, usein jo alitajunnan tasolla ilmenevä oletama miesten paremmuudesta naisiin nähden. Edes minimitason saavuttaminen sukupuolten välisessä tasa-arvossa tuleekin olemaan työlästä niin muslimimiesten, kuin oman (eli miehiin nähden alemman) asemansa sisäistäneiden musliminaistenkin kohdalla. Ainakin nyt tutkitun ryhmän kohdalla on kuitenkin tämän asian suhteen toivoa: osallistujat sanoivat kannattavansa sukupuolten välistä tasa-arvoa ja suhtautuivat positiivisesti ajatukseen naispuolisen esimiehen alaisuudessa työskentelemisestä. Tästä huolimatta osallistujat ilmaisivat huolensa vähemmän koulutetuista maanmiehistään, joiden he uskoivat vastustavan kyseistä arvoa vielä Suomeen tulon jälkeenkin. Heidän mukaansa etenkin vähemmän koulutetut irakilaiset kannattavat perinteistä perhemallia, jossa mies on perheen pää, elättäjä ja päätöksentekijä samalla kun nainen pysyy kotona. Tällaisen mallin toimivuus on kuitenkin kyseenalaista Suomessa, jossa molempien puolisoiden työssäkäynti on tarpeen, jotta perheen toimeentulo olisi riittävä.

Muutama osallistuja ilmaisi huolensa myös siitä, että vähemmän koulutetut irakilaiset ovat suuremmassa vaarassa radikalisoitua heikentyneen arvostelukykynsä seurauksena. Suomalaisten kanssa solmittujen kontaktien katsottiin olevan paras keino estää radikalisoitumista. Tästä syystä nimenomaan turvapaikanhakijoiden kotimajoitusta pidettiin erittäin hyvänä keinona luoda kontakteja suomalaisiin, ja majoituspaikkoja toivottiinkin lisää. Kotimajoituksen positiiviset vaikutukset osallistujien sosiaalisen pääoman karttumiseen ja psykologiseen hyvinvointiin myös tulivat selvästi esiin verrattaessa esimerkiksi kotimajoituksessa olevien osallistujien elämäntyytyväisyyttä vastaanottokeskuksissa asuvien osallistujien elämäntyytyväisyyteen. Vastaanottavan yhteiskunnan asenneilmapiirillä ja valmiudella vastaanottaa ja tukea tulokkaita voidaankin katsoa olevan huomattava vaikutus turvapaikanhakijoiden sopeutumisprosessin kulkuun ja mahdollisesti jopa siihen, pystytäänkö ei-toivottua äärikäyttäytymis-

tä ehkäisemään. Tämän tutkimuksen osallistujien keskuudessa ei havaittu minkäänlaisia merkkejä tämänlaisista taipumuksista.

Tämän tutkimuksen tulokset korostavat perheen keskeistä roolia tutkimuksen osallistujien elämässä: ylipäättään perheen käsitys on irakilaisessa kulttuurissa laajempi kuin mitä se on Suomessa, ja etäisempiäkin sukulaisia pidetään tärkeämmässä arvossa kuin mitä yleensä suomalaisessa kulttuurissa on tapana. Päinvastoin kuin vapaaehtoisten maahanmuuttajien kohdalla, joilla puolison läsnäolo ja vertaistuki yleensä helpottavat sopeutumista uuteen maahan (esim. Black & Stephens 1989; Van der Bank & Rothmann 2006), ainakin useiden nyt tutkittujen turvapaikanhakijoiden kohdalla tilanne näyttää olevan päinvastainen: perheen poissaolo pikemminkin aiheutti lisää huolta. Viimeaikaiset kiristykset perheenyhdistämistä koskeviin säännöksiin muodostavatkin selkeän uhan Suomeen hyväksyttävien turvapaikanhakijoiden sopeutumiselle. Voikin olla, että heidän sopeutumisprosessinsa tukemiseen käytetyt resurssit menevät hukkaan, mikäli perhettään ikävöivän henkilön ainoa mahdollisuus nähdä lähimmäisiään on palata takaisin kotimaahansa.

Medialla on suuri vaikutus siihen, miten suomalaiset asennoituvat muiden maiden edustajia kohtaan (Jerman 2009; Horsti 2015; Horsti & Nikunen 2013): osallistujat kertoivat kokeneensa välittömästi nahoissaan turvapaikanhakijoihin kohdistuneen negatiivisen julkisuuden vaikutukset. Puolet osallistujista myös raportoi kokeneensa Suomessa syrjintää. Tästä huolimatta tutkimuksen osallistujat olivat erittäin motivoituneita sopeutumaan suomalaiseen yhteiskuntaan ja kulttuuriin, ja kontakteja kantaväestöön pidettiin äärimmäisen tärkeinä.

Lopuksi todettakoon, että irakilaisia turvapaikanhakijoita ei voida pitää homogeenisenä ryhmänä. Tämän tutkimuksen osallistujat ilmaisivat selvästi huolensa siitä, että suomalaiset tekisivät päätelmiä kaikista irakilaisista perustuen ainoastaan joidenkin yksittäisten, huonosti käyttäytyneiden maanmiehiensä tekoihin. Vaikka etninen ja kulttuurinen tausta usein toimiikin kimmokkeena erilaisille kulttuurisille stereotyypeille, on hyvä pitää mielessä, että yksilötason erot ovat kuitenkin suurempia kuin monet, usein ennakkoluuloihin perustuvat kansalliset yleistykset. Tämän tutkimuksen osallistujat kertoivat haluavansa olla osa tällä hetkellä kovan muutospaineen alla olevaa suomalaista yhteiskuntaa ja auttaa kehittämään sitä entistä paremmaksi. Kaiken kaikkiaan heidän toiveensa rauhassa elämisestä, työllistymisestä ja perheen perustamisesta eivät juurikaan poikkea suomalaisille tutuista tulevaisuudensuunnitelmista.

# SAMMANDRAG

Fenomenet med påtvingad migration har nått oöverträffade nivåer i Europa under de senaste åren. Under hösten 2015 tog Finland emot fler asylsökande än någonsin, med irakier som den största gruppen. Denna studie är en kvalitativ studie på arbetsföra, välutbildade engelsktalande irakiska asylsökande, vilket med andra ord täcker endast en bråkdel av irakier som kom till Finland under 2015–2016. Data samlades in genom att intervjua 22 personer (varav tre av dem var kvinnor) och på basis av etnografiska observationer, eftersom många av deltagarna höll kontakt med den intervjuande forskaren även efter själva intervjun. Vid tidpunkten för studien väntade alla deltagare på beslut om uppehållstillstånd samtidigt som de var registrerade vid förläggningar i Helsingfors och Åbo. Under tiden för intervjun bodde hälften av deltagarna vid förläggningarna medan hälften hade skaffat sig privat boende.

Fokus för studien är förutsättningarna för framgångsrik arbetsmarknadsintegration för denna specifika grupp av asylsökande, förutsatt att de får stanna i Finland. Följaktligen diskuteras deras yrkeskunskaper, arbetsmotivation, förväntningar och förhoppningar om placering på arbetsmarknaden i Finland. Materialet från intervjuerna var så rikt, att även tema som religion, jämställdhet och andra kulturella skiljaktigheter mellan Irak och Finland har tagits upp för att öka förståelsen om utgångspunkterna och situationen som de asylsökande befinner sig i. I slutet av studien förmedlas även deltagarnas meddelanden om hur man bäst främjar en lyckad integration till både finländare generellt och beslutsfattare specifikt.

De svåra upplevelserna från Irak och den ansträngande resan därifrån har lämnat sina spår på dem som lyckats fly från Irak. Medan de asylsökande väntar på sitt beslut om asyl befinner de sig i ett påfrestande mellanstadium som utmanar deras psyke och integrationsprocess: även om deltagarna redan befinner sig i det nya landet, vet de inte om de kan stanna i landet eller inte. Deltagarna uppvisade stark motivation för att anpassa sig i Finland och för att hitta arbete, men dessvärre verkar både deltagarnas egna och det mottagande samhällets förväntningar angående snabb sysselsättning vara något orealistiska: för det första visade det sig vara svårare än förväntat att hitta kompetenta, engelsktalande irakiska asylsökande. För det andra verkade deltagarna i många fall inte redo att bemöta kraven som den finska arbetsmarknaden ställer, på basis av de etnografiska observationerna och informationen från intervjuerna gällande de upplevda graderna av stress och trauma. Även om dessa slutsatser har fattats på basis av materialet från endast 22 intervjuer, är det oroväckande – åtminstone på kort sikt – angående deras ekonomiska anpassning, eftersom denna grupp av asylsökande kunde väntas vara den mest lovande gruppen av irakiska asylsökande som potentiella anställda.

Följaktligen, för att bli redo att sysselsätta sig behövs förberedande utbildning om arbetskulturen i Finland, praxis, allmänna seder och vanor samt stöd för att handskas med traumatiska upplevelser från det förflutna. För att detta ska kunna mottas så ef-

fektivt som möjligt, skulle det vara viktigt att ordna utbildningen och stödet på de nyanländas egna språk och helst framföras av en landsman/-inna.

För att de asylsökande som får stanna i Finland ska återfå sin arbetsförmåga har även ordnandet av mångsidig och tillräcklig rehabilitering en central roll. Om man misslyckas med detta kan kostnaderna i det långa loppet bli högre än förväntat: bland dem som beviljats internationellt skydd har det rapporterats att risken för att insjukna till exempel i posttraumatiskt stressyndrom och andra allvarliga psykiska problem är upp till tio gånger större jämfört med den inhemska befolkningen (Kirmeyer et al. 2011).

Asylsökande får inte arbeta i Finland innan tre (om den sökande har resedokument) eller sex (sökande utan resedokument) månader har förflutit från ankomsten till landet. Även om man har fått ett arbetstillstånd innebär det inte per automatik att det är praktiskt möjligt att ta emot arbete: ett hinder kan vara att man till exempel inte har ett finländskt bankkonto, vars öppnande kräver att man har ett officiellt identitetsbevis. Under väntan på asylbeslutet är möjligheterna att försörja sig i huvudsak begränsade: den sökande måste antingen lyfta mottagningspenning eller arbeta olagligt, trots riskerna. I vissa fall har det varit möjligt att utföra volontärarbete eller arbetspraktik, men det finns inte tillräckligt med dessa alternativ. Studien visade att deltagarna ansåg att praktikplatser med låg tröskel samt olika tillfälliga anställningsförhållanden var klart bättre alternativ än systemet med den passiva mottagningspenningen, vilket enligt deltagarna även påverkar deras självkänsla negativt.

När de dessutom får veta att mottagningspenningen kommer från skattepengar och inte från till exempel FN eller från Röda korset, vilket deltagarna i början trodde, ansåg de att mottagningspenningen var den mest sannolika orsaken till vissa finländares negativa attityd mot asylsökande. Dessutom ansågs försörjandet av sig själv och sin familj som en hederssak. Vilken form av sysselsättning som helst, som kunde få en att för en stund glömma minnena från Irak, skulle enligt deltagarna ha varit mycket välkommen. Att inte ha något att göra beskrevs som det värsta möjliga alternativet. Därför efterlyste många deltagare möjligheter att utföra frivilligarbete eller arbetade utan lön. Enligt resultaten från denna studie är det motiverat att ställa frågan om detta förfaringssätt i själva verket gör de asylsökande till passiva mottagare av socialbidrag. För att förhindra detta mönster, som är negativt för både individen och det mottagande samhället, vore det av största vikt att överväga fler försörjningsalternativ för de asylsökande.

I allmänhet förväntade sig deltagarna inte att de skulle möta betydande integrationsproblem om de skulle få stanna i landet. Att lära sig det finska språket ansågs ofta vara den enda verkliga utmaningen och endast några få deltagare trodde att det skulle vara en utmaning att få jobb. Att följa religiösa seder på den finska arbetsplatsen ansågs i allmänhet inte vara viktigt: efter decennier mitt bland religiösa och politiska konflikter ansåg deltagarna att religionens föga inflytande i Finland var befriande och välkommet i alla avseenden. Överraskande många av deltagarna uppgav att de var ateister. Å andra sidan är det dock svårt att säga om det är frågan om en ökande trend i Irak eller om den stora andelen ateister i studiematerialet snarare är relaterat till deltagarnas strävan att öka sina möjligheter i asylprocessen. Oavsett vilken anled-

ningen är, upplevde deltagarna i denna studie att deras personliga värderingar motsvarade i mycket större utsträckning de kulturella värderingarna i Finland än i Irak. Denna slags kongruens mellan värderingar har visat sig ha en positiv inverkan på individens välbefinnande och bidrar därigenom även till integrationen i det nya landet (Sagiv & Schwartz 2000).

Utifrån resultaten av denna studie uppkom även utmaningar med tanke på integrationen i det västerländska samhället. På basis av intervjuerna visade sig det socialt konstruerade, ofta undermedvetna antagandet om mannens överlägsenhet gentemot kvinnan vara djupt inrotat i den irakiska kulturen. Att uppnå åtminstone miniminivån av jämställdhet kommer att kräva mycket arbete – inte bara av de muslimska männen utan även av kvinnorna, som accepterat sin underlägsna ställning gentemot män. Det finns dock hopp om förbättring, åtminstone för deltagarna i denna studie, som uppgav sig vara för jämställdhet och förhöll sig positiva till tanken om en kvinnlig chef. Trots detta uttryckte deltagarna oro över sina mindre utbildade landsmän, som de trodde skulle vara emot jämställdhet även efter att ha bosatt sig i Finland. Enligt dem stöder de mindre utbildade irakierna den traditionella familjemodellen, där mannen är familjens överhuvud, försörjare och beslutsfattare, samtidigt som kvinnan stannar hemma. Det är dock tvivelaktigt att en sådan modell skulle fungera i Finland, där det ofta krävs att både mannen och kvinnan arbetar för att familjens inkomst ska vara tillräcklig.

Några deltagare uttryckte sin oro även över att de mindre utbildade irakierna löper större risk för radikalisering till följd av försvagat omdöme. Kontakter med finländare ansågs vara det bästa sättet att förebygga radikalisering. Därför ansågs just heminkvartering för asylsökande som ett mycket bra sätt att skapa kontakter med finländare, och man välkomnade fler boendeplatser i finska hem. Heminkvarteringsens positiva effekter på ett ökat socialt kapital och psykologiskt välbefinnande hos deltagarna framkom tydligt när man jämförde till exempel livskvaliteten hos deltagare som bodde i heminkvartering med deltagare som bodde på förläggningar för asylsökande. Det mottagande samhällets inställning och beredskap att ta emot och stödja de nyanlända kan anses ha en betydande inverkan på de asylsökandes anpassningsprocess och kan möjligen till och med förebygga icke önskvärda extremistiska beteenden. Bland deltagarna i studien observerades inga tecken på dylika tendenser.

Studieresultaten betonar familjens centrala roll i deltagarnas liv: familjebegreppet är i allmänhet bredare och uppskattningen för den utvidgade familjen är i allmänhet större i den irakiska kulturen jämfört med i Finland. I Irak värdesätts den mer än i den finska kulturen generellt. Till skillnad från frivilliga invandrare, vars integration i det nya landet ofta underlättas av närvaron och stödet av en partner (t.ex. Black & Stephens 1989; Van der Bank & Rothmann 2006), verkar situationen vara den motsatta för åtminstone flera av de asylsökande som studien omfattar: familjens frånvaro blev snarare ytterligare ett orosmoment. De nya åtstramningarna gällande reglerna kring familjeåterförening utgör ett tydligt hot mot integrationen av dem som fått uppehållstillstånd i Finland. Det kan även vara så att resurserna som används för integrationsprocessen går till spillo, speciellt om personens enda möjlighet att få träffa sina närmaste är att åka tillbaka till hemlandet.

Media spelar en mycket stor roll när det gäller formandet av attityder gentemot representanter av olika nationaliteter (Jerman 2009; Horsti 2015; Horsti & Nikunen

2013): deltagarna uppgav att de personligen hade lidit av den negativa publiciteten om asylsökande. Hälften av deltagarna rapporterade att de upplevt diskriminering i Finland. Trots detta var studiedeltagarna starkt motiverade att integreras i det finländska samhället och kulturen, och kontakter med den inhemska befolkningen ansågs vara ytterst viktiga.

Slutligen bör det påpekas att de irakiska asylsökande inte kan anses som en homogen grupp. Studiedeltagarna uttryckte tydligt sin oro över att vissa finländare drar slutsatser om alla irakier utifrån gärningar som utförts av endast några enstaka landsmän, som missskött sig. Även om den etniska och kulturella bakgrunden ofta ligger till grund för olika kulturella stereotyper, är det bra att komma ihåg att de individuella skillnaderna trots allt är större än många nationella generaliseringar, som ofta grundar sig på fördomar. Deltagarna i studien uttryckte sin önskan om att få vara en del av och hjälpa att ytterligare förbättra det finländska samhället, som i dagens läge onekligen är utsatt för ett starkt omvandlingstryck. Avslutningsvis kan konstateras, att deltagarnas önskan om ett fridfullt liv, om att få sysselsätta sig och att få bilda familj är lika som framtidsplanerna för många finländare.

# 1 INTRODUCTION

The European Union is currently struggling to deal with the worst humanitarian crisis since World War II. While many Westerners are moving abroad voluntarily (e.g. as expatriates sent abroad to work by their employer in the home country), the systematic demolition of entire nations has led to an unprecedented movement of forced migration, where displaced people flee from their homelands searching for refuge elsewhere. The majority of those forced to migrate remain displaced within their countries of origin or migrate to countries close to their origins, or end up in refugee camps often situated in nearby nations. Only a small fraction of these people end up seeking asylum under international law in Europe and only a part of these asylum seekers will receive refugee status and are given permission to permanently stay in the country where they wish to start a new life.

Finland received 32,476 new asylum seekers in 2015, which is a manifold number compared to previous years (Finnish Immigration Service 2016a). As a consequence, the unrest caused by immigration that seemed out of control made it possible for right-wing parties to gain force in politics. As a consequence, the policies regarding international protection have become significantly stricter since the Government action plan on asylum policy came into force (December 2015), especially regarding voluntary and forced returns as well as the regulations concerning family reunification (cf. EMN 2016). At the moment, in addition to gaining refugee status, one may be granted permission to stay on the basis of subsidiary protection. Before the amendment to the Alien's Act, it had been possible to apply for a residence permit based on humanitarian reasons, but this option ceased to exist in May 2016, when also new guidelines concerning Iraqi asylum requests was conducted by the Finnish Immigration Service (2016b). Consequently, the share of negative decisions increased drastically: at the moment about 10 per cent of Iraqi asylum seekers are being granted asylum in Finland. Since July 2016, unlike before, persons receiving subsidiary protection must meet certain income requirements to get their family members to Finland. Different kinds of restrictions have been introduced also in several other EU member states (Council of Europe 2016). For example in Denmark, the amount of certain social benefits received by the immigrants has decreased to as much as 50 per cent (Turun Sanomat 2015).

A theme that has been much discussed lately in the media is the economic integration of asylum seekers and, more specifically, how will they make their ends meet in Finland. Unfortunately, the labour market integration of immigrants in Finland is relatively challenging: Finnish employers are quite strict when it comes to language proficiency and validation of studies completed abroad has proven to be somewhat complicated and costly as well. In addition, the working culture in many other countries seems to differ to that of Finland, where it is usual that both parents and also e.g. a single mother works full-time. Immigrants also face discrimination in the labour market more often than natives (Larja et al. 2012; Liebkind, Larja & Brylka 2016). These circumstances explain, at least partly, the lower employment rate among 20–64 year old

immigrants (63.7 %) in comparison to natives (73.7 %) (UTH 2014). That said, in the light of previous research, especially *immigrants of refugee background* (i.e. granted asylum seekers and quota refugees), have been facing challenges making ends meet. Even if they have found their way to the Finnish labour market, they may remain in need of social assistance benefits regardless of their full-time work (Yijälä 2016).

As most (63 %; 20,485 persons) of the asylum seekers entering Finland during 2015–2016 were Iraqis (Finnish Immigration Service 2016c), the City of Helsinki Urban Facts initiated a qualitative study to gain understanding about the phenomenon. The research focused on educated and skilled Iraqi asylum seekers, with sufficient knowledge in English, as well as prior work experience. The thought behind these criteria was that this chosen group would have the best presupposition to enter the Finnish labour market and to integrate into the Finnish society<sup>1</sup>. This having said, Iraqis are among the immigrant groups that have the highest unemployment rate in Finland and thus, the question remains, how to best integrate the newcomers in the Finnish labour market and society?

As shown in previous studies on voluntary migrants, acculturation is a complex process of psychological and cultural change (Berry 1997) that begins already at the pre-migration stage, after the decision to move abroad and choosing the country of destination has been made (Jasinskaja-Lahti & Yijälä 2011; Yijälä 2012; Yijälä & Jasinskaja-Lahti 2010). Unlike quota refugees, who have already been granted refugee status when they arrive to the receiving country but cannot choose their destination country, asylum seekers have in fact chosen their country of destination by themselves but don't know if they can stay or not. After coming into contact with a new culture, at the latest – regardless of the high levels of uncertainty experienced while waiting for their asylum decision – it is likely that the asylum seekers go through some psychological and cultural changes. However, information regarding this process among asylum seekers waiting for their asylum decision is still scarce (Brekke 2004). To address this gap in the literature, this research focuses on the experiences asylum seekers go through and expectations they have regarding their migration process in Finland, while waiting for the asylum decision.

The aim of this study is to give a voice to the persons themselves, who are experiencing a humanitarian crisis first-hand. In this research, 22 Iraqi asylum seekers were interviewed during 2015–2016: 19 personal interviews and one focus group interview with three participants were conducted. All of the participants were registered in receptions centres of Helsinki and Turku while waiting for the decision about their asylum request. They have hopes of starting a new life, and at the same time, they struggle with the fear of having to keep looking for another place or return to Iraq. In order to shed light on the phenomenon of forced migration, affecting all of us somehow, directly or indirectly, the purpose of this study is to answer questions such as *Who are they? What are the stories behind their journey here? What kind of education and skills do they have? What kind of work can they do? What kind of work do they want to do? How can we expect them to position themselves in Finland, and what can we do to fa-*

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<sup>1</sup> Previous studies on Iraqis in Helsinki have addressed, for example, their sense of belonging in the City of Helsinki (La Vecchia 2011), construction of identity (Kivistö & La Vecchia-Mikkola 2015), and feelings towards their country of origin (Kivistö & La Vecchia-Mikkola 2013).

*cilitate their acculturation process? What can they do on their part to improve their chances of successful integration?*

The research has been divided into seven main chapters. After the introduction, the theoretical background of the study is explained in chapter two. The third chapter includes the design of the research, research approach, methods and presentation of the participants of the study. The analysis of the study including quotations from the interviews is presented in chapters four, five and six, with messages from the participants directed towards Finns at the end of the 6th chapter. In the seventh chapter, the main results of the study are summed up and the conclusions of the study are discussed along with the limitations, recommendations and practical implications of the study. Finally, the report ends with a concluding comment including a quote from one of the participants that was contacted a year after the interview.

## 2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

In this chapter, the main frameworks of this study, the acculturation and adaptation frameworks, are presented in more detail. Furthermore, the chapter discusses the factors potentially related to the acculturation process in the context of asylum seekers while waiting for permission stay.

### 2.1 Acculturation framework

*Acculturation* is generally understood as a process of psychological and cultural change that leads to different adaptation outcomes (Berry 1997). Psychological acculturation refers to changes of individual experiences as a result of being in contact with other cultures, and as a result of participating in the process of group-level acculturation that one's cultural or ethnic group is undergoing (Graves 1967). Psychological acculturation often involves affective, behavioural and cognitive changes (Ward 2001) and culminates in a psychological adaptation towards these acculturative changes (Sam 2006, p. 16–17).

Adaptation can be divided into differing components (Berry 1997; Ward & Kennedy 1993): **Psychological adaptation** refers to psychological and emotional wellbeing and satisfaction. **Socio-cultural adaptation** emphasises the processes involved in acquiring the specific social skills needed to *fit in* or accomplish effective interactions in the new cultural context (Ward 2001). **Socio-psychological adaptation** refers to indicators such as identity, attitudes and values as well as intergroup attitudes (Liebkind et al. 2012; see also Masgoret & Ward 2006). Yet another dimension of adaptation is **work adaptation** (Aycan 1997a; Black & Stephens 1989), which is typically measured through organisational commitment, work performance, job satisfaction and turnover intentions, and closely related to **economic adaptation** (e.g. Aycan 1997b). The relationships between these different components of adaptation are often intertwined: for example, *positive intergroup relations* have been shown to be related to better psychological adaptation (Jasinskaja-Lahti, Liebkind & Solheim 2009), and psychological adaptation further to better work adaptation among immigrants (Searle & Ward 1990; Aycan & Berry 1996).

According to a well-known model of acculturation strategies developed by Berry and his associates (e.g. Berry 1990, 1997; Berry et al. 1989, 2006), immigrants must confront two basic issues in a new country: the desire to maintain their original culture in the new country, and the desire to be in contact with members of the host society. Based on these dimensions, four distinct acculturation attitudes (also called acculturation orientations or strategies) can be formed: integration, assimilation, separation and marginalisation (e.g. Berry et al. 1989, 2006). **The integration attitude** refers to when an individual is oriented both towards preserving his/her own cultural heritage as well as towards being a part of the new culture. **Assimilation attitude** can be defined as an

immigrant's willingness to be in contact with the dominant culture while detaching from his or her original culture, whereas ***separation attitude*** refers to a strong need to preserve one's own ethnic culture while avoiding contact with host country nationals.

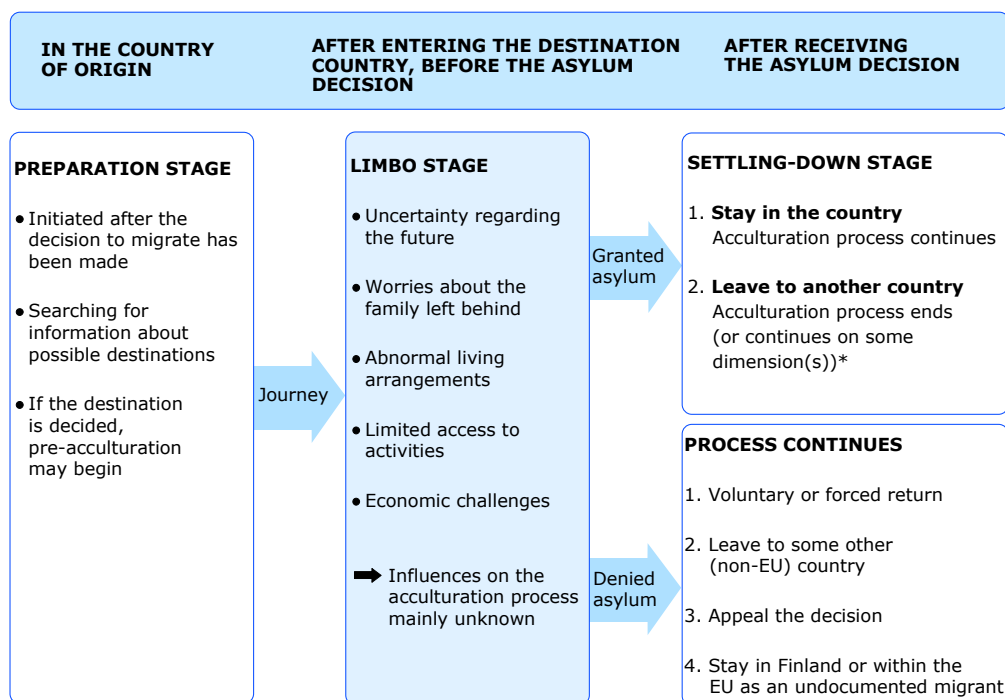
***Marginalisation***, in turn, is defined as a detachment from both cultures.

Numerous empirical studies in several countries have clearly shown that integration is the most commonly preferred acculturation attitude, whereas marginalisation is the least preferred option (e.g. Berry et al. 2006; Sam & Berry 2006). In addition, integration is often related to the best adaptation outcomes across different countries and cultures when assessed, for example, by using long-term health and wellbeing indicators among immigrants (e.g. Berry 1997; Berry et al. 2006; Schmitz 1992, p. 368; see also Berry & Sam 1997, for a summary). Notably, however, individuals may adopt different acculturation orientations in different areas of life. For example, a person may actively seek assimilation in the work environment while favouring separation or integration (e.g. by choosing to use one's native language (Navas et al. 2005) or maintaining one's religious practices at home (Khalid 1997)). It has been argued that, at least in the U.S., immigrants of Arab background face most challenges in adapting to Western culture (Al Wekhian 2015; Faragallah 1997), and that the more radical Islamic views one has, the more difficult the acculturation process becomes (Ibrahim & Cass 2011).

In his framework, Berry (1990, 1992, 1997) attempts to systematise the process of acculturation and illustrate the main factors that affect an individual's adaptation. In the present study, Berry's framework was used mainly as a basis for formulating concepts to facilitate the description of the phenomenon, as well as organising findings. One reason for choosing the acculturation framework for this study was that it has previously been successfully applied in the pre-migration context. In the studies in question, it became clear that – at least among the voluntary migrants – the acculturation process begins well before the actual immigration, that is, in the pre-migration stage (Jasinskaja-Lahti & Yijälä 2011; Yijälä 2012). Unlike the quota refugees, who cannot choose the country of their placement themselves, the asylum seekers have themselves – based on a more or less active search for information – decided their country of destination, some already before leaving Iraq and others having made the decision during the journey. Hence, it can be expected that – regardless of the fact that the asylum seekers are unaware of whether they will in fact stay in Finland or not – their process of acculturation has already begun, at least on some dimensions of adaptation. Nevertheless, due to a scarcity of contacts with natives, the life at the reception centres cannot be compared to common day-to-day life in Finland, thus leaving the asylum seekers in an in-between-stage of pre- and post-migration acculturation (Figure 1). Since there is a lack of information on what happens during this so-called *limbo-stage of the migration process*, this study focuses on the effects of this specific period on the short-term adaptation outcomes of the asylum seekers.

Previous research has shown that different factors affect the acculturation process of the individual, some of them already as early as from the pre-migration stage (Berry 1997; Yijälä 2012). The factors that are relevant for the context of this study are presented in the next chapter. Before addressing that issue, it is worth noting that although the acculturation framework has proven its usefulness among different kinds of immigrant groups in both pre- and post-migration contexts, it can also be, especially in the context of forced migration, criticised for not taking into consideration issues related to human rights and social justice.

Figure 1. Migration process among asylum seekers



\* For example, if a person keeps searching for information about Finland and its culture after leaving the country.

As seen in previous studies, acculturation attitudes also largely depend on the perceived willingness of the majority to adopt newcomers into the mainstream culture (e.g. Yijälä & Jasinskaja-Lahti 2010). Relatedly, Ngo (2008), for example, has criticised acculturation theories for not critically examining acculturation in relation to dominant-subordinate oppression. According to him, all the major acculturation theories have overlooked the power differentials in intergroup relations and the social construction of inequitable socioeconomic realities that immigrants often face in society. Instead of observing diversity within cultural groups, the viewpoints on culture have been rather monolithic and the analyses of acculturation have been ahistorical, neutral and apolitical. (Ngo 2008.) This notion relates to a more common critique proposed from the perspective of human rights by Tascón and Ife (2008), according to which human rights in general are mainly examined from a white Western and individualistic perspective, which is at odds with the more collective traditions of other cultures. Also the acculturation theories have been criticised for assuming a *one size fits all* -approach, where the models proposed fit as such for all kinds of immigrant groups, neglecting the different kinds of pre-immigration characteristics of the immigrants and the situation in the country of origin (Rudmin 2003). In this study, the criticism regarding the biased way of perceiving human rights and neglect of (in)justice aspects have been taken into account by presenting the voices of the participants as much as possible regarding these issues.

## 2.2 Factors related to the acculturation process

As previous research has consistently shown, the reasons behind the move abroad are often connected also to how the acculturation process itself is proceeding. The so-called *push and pull factors* – as referred to in previous literature on migration motivation (Berry 2005) – besides affecting the decision to move altogether, also affect the decision about which country the migrant chooses as a destination country. These push and pull factors are often active at the same time (Haour-Knipe 2013): one might, for example, be pushed away from one's birth country due to wars and/or poverty, and at the same time feel curiosity towards other countries that might present new opportunities and economic stability. In addition to the push and pull factors, however, there are also many other factors that may affect the acculturation process in a new country. This chapter summarises several different factors found in previous pre- and post-migration research that can be considered as possibly affecting the acculturation process that also the asylum seekers are going through while waiting for the decision for their request for international protection in Finland.

### 2.2.1 Demographic factors

Demographic factors that have been commonly studied in relation to different adaptation outcomes include gender, age, acculturation time, income and education. First, it is well acknowledged that women experience and report higher rates of stress symptoms and health problems particularly during migration (e.g. Chou 2009; Mirsky 2009). One explanation for these gender differences in health outcomes is gender role socialisation. For example, Mirsky (1997, 2009) has noted that females tend to express psychological distress more freely than males and, thus, often have elevated scores of discomfort in comparison to men, who are inclined to internalise their feelings. According to Ward et al. (2001, p. 93), however, the influence of gender on psychological adaptation depends on personal and situational factors.

The effects of age on adaptation are relatively ambiguous, even though adaptation at an older age is usually seen as more challenging (Ward et al. 2001, p. 94). Education, on the other hand, is consistently found to be associated with better adaptation. The positive effects of education have been linked to greater culture-specific knowledge and skills, higher status occupations and higher income (Ward et al. 2001, p. 94). Although the asylum seekers that have arrived in Finland are mostly men in their best working age, due to the challenges that the education system in Iraq has been subject to, the level of education of the newly arrived asylum seekers seems to be below the general level of education in Finland (Strandberg & Stordell 2016).

### 2.2.2 Health and levels of stress

In the new country, immigrants are often facing situations that influence their mental health. These situations can be communication difficulties due to language barriers, cultural differences in values or norms of behaviour, differences in family structure and intergenerational conflicts, as well as prejudices of the receiving society. These

situations are bound to further affect employment, social status and integration in a new country (Kirmayer et al. 2011). Moreover, during the application process for international protection, the possibilities for work – and therefore a financial betterment of one's situation – are close to non-existent. This could lead to financial dependency in the country of stay, together with other discomforts. As also noted in previous studies of immigrant acculturation, maintaining satisfaction of life especially during the initial stages of acculturation can be very difficult (e.g. Al Wekhian 2015). According to Rudmin (2009), minorities often belong to socially disadvantaged populations and are therefore more often subject to common mental disorders (e.g. Adler & Ostrove 1999; Fryers, Melzer & Jenkins 2003).

The relationship between migration and health is, however, a complex and reciprocal one: while some argue that immigration causes ill health (e.g. Anderzén & Arnetz, 1999; Zheng & Berry 1991), others argue that also the opposite may be true; initial pre-migration health problems may predict later post-migration adaptation difficulties (e.g. Rudmin 2009; Tartakovsky 2007, 2009). When it comes to asylum seekers, it is not difficult to see how these standpoints intertwine. It could be that the healthiest individuals have left their country in the hope of a better future, but that their health has plummeted during their journey towards their destination, as the journey itself has been very demanding. It could be the other way around as well, that an individual has undertaken the journey despite poor health and finally received treatment for his/her condition. Whichever the case, the prolonged uncertainty and forced idleness in the reception centres is likely to add to the distress and negatively affect the psychological wellbeing of asylum seekers.

According to Lazarus and Folkman (1984), the intensity of stress reactions to a challenging situation depends on temporal factors, such as imminence (i.e. how much time there is before an event occurs), duration (i.e. how long a stressful event persists), and temporal uncertainty (i.e. when an event is going to happen). According to them, however, the passage of time can either heighten threat or lead to the reduction of stress reactions (p. 115). Asylum seekers and refugees are likely to have experienced substantial trauma in the countries left behind, which may influence their ability to adapt in a new country (Akhtar 1999: see also Schwartz et al. 2010, p. 241). As the previous research has shown, refugees and asylum seekers tend to be up to ten times more prone to post-traumatic stress disorders, as well as depression and other health issues, due to their exposure to war, violence, forced migration and the uncertainty of their status in the destination country (for a review, see Kirmayer et al. 2011). Also long times spent in reception centres and especially the possible threat of being sent to detention centres, which have been found to cause feelings of powerlessness, may provoke depression and other mental health problems (e.g. Porter & Haslam 2005; Robjant, Hassan & Katona 2009). Notably, the post-traumatic stress disorder has been shown to cause impairments pertaining to attention, executive function, and memory (Koso & Hansen 2006). Good memory, however, is crucial for learning the language of the destination country (e.g. Westermeyer, Neider & Vang 1984), as well as for navigating in a new culture. Promoting the health of the asylum seekers is important, since the immigration experience as such is stressful even for healthy immigrants, and good health helps the asylum seekers to cope with the difficulties faced in a new country.

### 2.2.3 Cultural distance and fit

Perceived cultural distance refers to how culturally similar or different a person thinks his or her home country is to the new country of residence (Babiker, Cox & Miller 1980). Research on cultural distance has shown that the smaller the perceived cultural distance, the easier it is for immigrants to psychologically and socio-culturally adapt to a new country (e.g. Church 1982, for a review; Searle & Ward 1990; Suanet & van de Vijver 2009; see Gregersen & Stroh 1997 for results in the Finnish context). Furthermore, previous studies have shown that perceived cultural similarity is related to attraction, meaning increased liking and positive evaluations both on an interpersonal and an intergroup level (e.g. Osbeck, Moghaddam & Perreault 1997; Piontkowski et al. 2000).

However, other researchers have argued that it is not the cultural similarity between home and host countries, but rather the ability to fit into the host culture that resulted in successful adaptation among immigrants (e.g. Jun & Gentry 2005). This observation is in accordance with the *cultural fit* hypothesis, which asserts that it is not the personality per se which predicts adaptation, but rather the fit between the acculturating individual and the new culture (Ward & Chang 1997). When assessed through personality traits (e.g. Ward & Chang 1997) and cultural orientations (e.g. Jun & Gentry 2005), empirical examinations of the congruence between the individual's characteristics and the mean tendency of the host society have generally supported the cultural fit hypothesis.

The cultural fit hypothesis has also been tested through cultural values by studying whether higher perceived cultural value discrepancies between the immigrants and the natives relate to adaptation problems among immigrants. The results have been inconsistent. For example, not sharing the common frame of values of the host society has been linked to poor adaptation among immigrants in Germany and Israel (Stromberg & Boehnke 2001). In contrast, Ward and Searle (1991) found no effect of value discrepancies on psychological or socio-cultural adaptation among international students from 42 countries in New Zealand. It should be noted, however, that previous research has often assumed that immigrants hold values identical to those of their home cultures. Thus, value differences have been approached in terms of cultural fit as determined by group-level differences in country-level dimensions, such as individualism and collectivism (Suanet & van de Vijver 2009).

More attention, however, should be paid to cultural variation between groups within countries (Schwartz 2011); people may, for example, be motivated to emigrate in order to pursue their whole set of life goals, that is, their values, and therefore migrants may significantly differ from their co-nationals (Tartakovsky & Schwartz 2001). As previous empirical research has shown, immigrants often affiliate with a destination society that holds values similar to their own. Donà and Berry (1994) found that those immigrants who had more individualistic values preferred more individualistic cultures, whereas those immigrants who displayed more collectivistic values tended to feel drawn towards cultures with more collectivist values (for similar findings, see also Tartakovsky & Schwartz 2001). These findings clearly indicate that personal values and discrepancies between them and those ascribed to the country of immigration are likely to affect migrants' cultural affiliations. According to a study by Willems

(2012), safety, freedom, and possibilities for seeking out new opportunities were all very important factors in the lives of Arab Muslim immigrants in the U.S.

#### 2.2.4 Social support and family

Research has consistently demonstrated that social support from different kinds of sources effectively reduces distress during times of stress (e.g. Cohen & Wills 1985; Komproe et al. 1997), particularly during an international migration process (e.g. Anderzen & Arnetz 1999; Jasinskaja-Lahti et al. 2006; Ryan et al. 2006; Shen & Takeuchi 2001; Vega et al. 1991). Social support networks can be based either in the home country or in the new society; in the latter, they may consist of host country nationals or co-ethnics who have migrated to the same country. These networks provide immigrants with a sense of affiliation and serve as a valuable source of information regarding the host society, as seen through the lens of comparable others (Caligiuri & Lazarova 2002). Today's social support may also be received as well as shared through a variety of channels. For example, in her study of online forums for British migrants, Tabor (2010; Tabor & Milfont 2011) found that migrants participated actively in online discussions to provide and receive co-nationals' informational support both before and after the actual move.

Of all possible sources for social support, one that has been probably the most studied in the immigration context is the role of the spouse. The spouse and the family of the immigrant often play an extremely important role in the acculturation process, as shown by several studies in various contexts, including in Finland (Rask et al. 2016). In the context of expatriation, the support of one's family and spouse have been found to effectively reduce the stress of expatriates abroad. Family provides a reference group through which the new environment can be interpreted, assists the expatriate to mobilise his/her psychological resources to deal with emotional problems, and raises the expatriate's confidence, leading to better wellbeing (Tabor 2010) and cross-cultural adaptation overall (e.g. Black & Stephens 1989; Caligiuri et al. 1998; van der Bank & Rothmann 2006).

#### 2.2.5 Contact with host country nationals and experiences of discrimination

A key issue related to adaptation to a new country is contact with individuals from the host country. In his pioneering research on so-called *contact hypothesis*, Allport (1954) suggested that collaboration is one of the four premises under which intergroup contact leads to a positive attitude towards the outgroup members. Although the importance of contact quality is often emphasised, according to Pettigrew and Tropp (2006), mere exposure (contact quantity) to the outgroup can have a positive influence on an individual's attitude towards the representatives of other groups. However, possibilities for collaboration may not always be that easy to find. For example, Finnish organisations are still relatively homogenous when it comes to language preferences. Furthermore, creating friendships in Finland is difficult even for the international professionals (Yijälä et al. 2009), which may make the situations of meaningful collaboration rather scarce, especially without a common language. Establishing these con-

tacts, however, would be essential also due to their positive effects on the wellbeing of the immigrants (e.g. Feinstein & Ward 1990; Searle & Ward 1990). Successful contact with the members of the new society has also been found to facilitate the learning of culturally appropriate norms and behaviours (Black et al. 1991), thereby enhancing also socio-cultural adaptation.

According to the group engagement model (Tyler & Blader 2003), people's willingness to cooperate with any group occurs as a result of the identity information they receive from the group. This information originates from evaluations of the group's procedural fairness (i.e. fair vs. unfair treatment by an authority figure), which affect an individuals' motivation to engage with this group (i.e. to show psychological and behavioural connections to the group as expressed by supportive attitudes) (Tyler & Blader 2003). Consequently, the information that asylum seekers and other immigrants receive when in contact with the host country representatives may also affect their anticipations regarding future intergroup relations.

Previous studies conducted among Arab immigrants have shown that perceived discrimination in the new country can cause mental strain and psychological problems (e.g. Aprahamian 2011; Willems 2012). According to Swim, Cohen and Hyers (1998), individuals "can use their knowledge and awareness of when, where, by whom, and in what manner prejudice is most likely to occur in order to assess the likelihood that they will encounter prejudice in particular situations" (p. 39). Swim, Cohen and Hyers (1998) also stress that discriminatory incidents can be expected either because they occurred previously, or because information thereof was provided or sought from other people. Asylum seekers' contact with representatives of the new society may, however, often be limited to the staff of the reception centres, as well as the authorities of the receiving community, which means that these actors have a remarkable role in the formation of the expectations of the future life of those who are permitted to stay.

### 2.2.6 Expectations regarding life in a new country

Research on immigrant cross-cultural transition has stressed the role of expectations especially among sojourners overseas (e.g. Black et al. 1991; Black & Gregersen 1990; Martin et al. 1995) and in regards to re-entry adaptation (e.g. Black 1992; Black et al. 1992; Black & Gregersen 1991a&b; Stroh, Gregersen & Black 1998). These studies suggest that sojourners often make adjustments to their lives in anticipation of a migration by imagining or simulating the new social environment before entering it (Black et al. 1992). Such expectations of the success of future in-country adaptation are based on previous experiences and information acquired about the country of relocation prior to the move and have been associated with various post-migration adaptation outcomes (e.g. Black 1992; Caligiuri et al. 2001). Accurate expectations may also boost confidence, which in turn strengthens stress-coping skills in dealing with potentially stressful life changes (Ward et al. 2001, p. 76).

When based on in-depth preparation and proper knowledge of the country of immigration, the expectations of the migrant are often quite accurate. In the case of the asylum seekers, who in some cases might not even know exactly where they are going to end up when they leave their countries, in-depth preparation is, however, often a

luxury that many cannot afford. Still, if not beforehand, expectations are created during their – often very time consuming – journey to a new country. The nature of these expectations influences remarkably their choice of country, as seen above. In other words, depending on what kind of life they imagine for themselves in the future, and where they are likely to gain international protection, has much to do with where they choose to migrate. As shown above, previous research has shown that met or exceeded expectations predict immigrant adaptation while unmet expectations are shown to have negative effects on the acculturation process, causing e.g. psychological distress (Rogler et al. 1991).

An important factor affecting the expectations of life in a certain country is the contact with the host country representatives. For those asylum seekers that have not had the time or the chance to make the necessary preparations before leaving their countries, at the latest while waiting for the asylum decision in temporary accommodations, some kind of expectations are bound to form regarding their lives-to-be in their potential new home countries. The time spent waiting for permission to stay in an in-between-state of the migration process is a very distinct form of migration when compared to voluntary migration. Yet, this time could play a large role regarding the expectations of their possible future in Finland: the first stages of the acculturation process have shown to significantly influence, for instance, the development of acculturation attitudes (Ramelli et al. 2013; Yijälä & Jasinskaja-Lahti 2010), which are further linked to different adaptation outcomes in the new cultural context (e.g. Berry & Sam 1997).

## 2.3 Summary of the aims of the present research

In this study, acculturation is seen as a process that begins already prior to migration (i.e. pre-acculturation), and continues when one enters the new country. The aim of this study is to find out how the time spent while waiting for permission to stay in Finland affects the acculturation process of the asylum seekers. The study combines the acculturation framework (e.g. Berry 1997; Ward et al. 2001) and the framework of international (and repatriation) adjustment (e.g. Black 1992; Black & Gregersen 1991a&b; Black et al. 1991, 1992) to study the acculturation process of the asylum seekers still waiting for the permission to stay – or decision to leave the country. In addition, several other theories, such as socio-psychological theories of intergroup relations and models, have been applied to create a more comprehensive perception of the situation faced by the asylum seekers in Finland. Moreover, factors that in previous pre- and post-migration studies have been found to affect the different adaptation outcomes of the acculturation process are studied among the asylum seekers (cf. Figure 2).

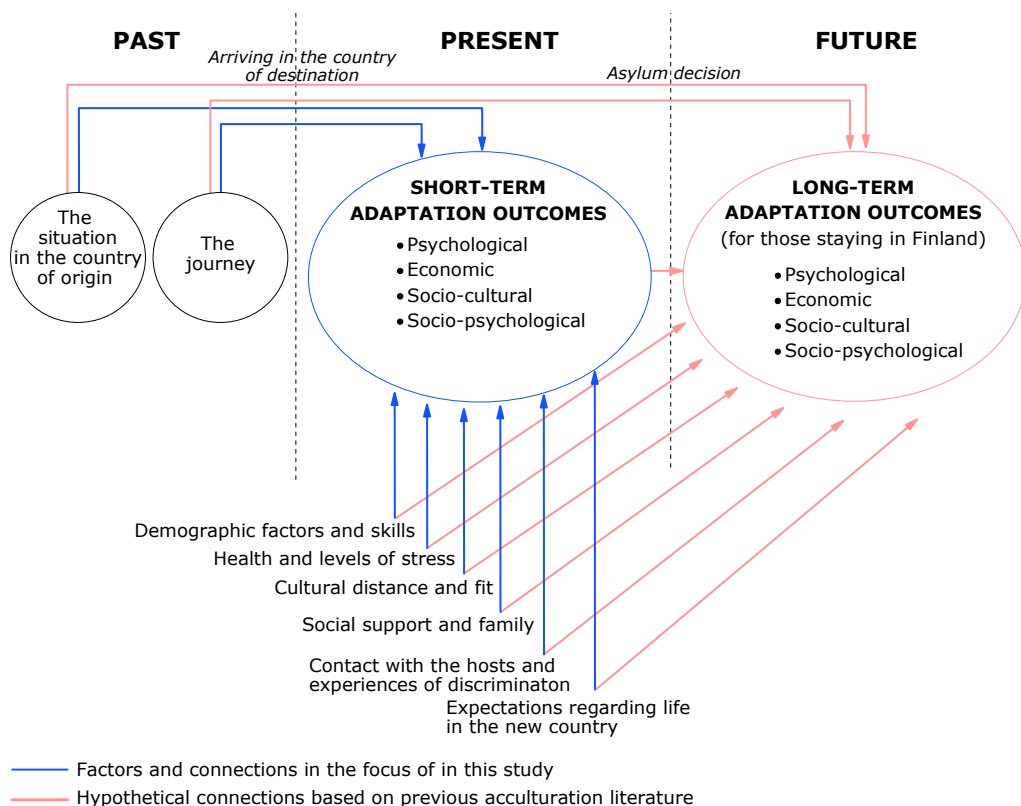
A central research question is what happens psychologically to asylum seekers upon arrival to their country of destination, where their lives are bound to continue for a substantially long time in a state of uncertainty in reception centres or other temporary accommodations. Even if many of the asylum seekers of this study have succeeded in finding themselves an apartment outside of the reception centres, it could be that the acculturation process cannot be developed in the desired way in circumstances where

the individual is forced to live in a state of uncertainty regarding his/her entire future. Hence, reflecting on previous research regarding the stages of pre- and post-migration, this research aims to understand how living in this *limbo-like, in-between-stage of the migration process* affects the participants of this study and subsequently the important initial stages (e.g. Ramelli et al. 2013) of their acculturation process.

This study also aims to shed light on the kinds of persons that this group of skilled asylum seekers are; privileged in terms of education and knowledge in English. The main themes studied include description of their life in Iraq; explaining the reasons for choosing Finland as their destination and efforts for reaching this destination; how they were doing in Finland at the time of the study; and what kind of future expectations they held regarding living and working in Finland. With a few exceptions (cf. Brekke 2004), the literature related to asylum seekers who are waiting for their asylum decision is scarce. However, in the previous studies about the topic, two opposite hypotheses have been presented: one predicts that there is a decrease in adaptation over time among the asylum seekers waiting for the asylum decision, while the other predicts an increase in adaptation (cf. Brekke 2004). In his qualitative study about how asylum seekers experience waiting for a decision in Sweden, Brekke (2004) found that the possibility of return negatively influenced the participant's motivation to adapt to the new culture. According to Brekke (2014), results supporting the opposite hypothesis have also been reported, however, for instance by Rooth (1999; Ref. Brekke 2004).

In this study, it is argued that in order to be able to predict the long-term adaptation outcomes among the granted asylum seekers, more light needs to be shed on the factors related to the short-term adaptation outcomes, such as the effects of the experiences from the past and from the limbo-stage. Therefore, in this research, the aim is to study the connections presented in Figure 2 (blue line). Based on the literature presented herein above, there is reason to believe that the same factors are also salient when predicting the long-term adaptation outcomes among the asylum seekers who have been granted asylum (red line); however, they were not in the focus of this study.

**Figure 2.** Factors related to short- and long-term acculturation among asylum seekers



Note: For the sake of clarity, the plausible connections between the circumstances of the past and the factors related to the adaptation outcomes in the present are not displayed in Figure 2.

## 3 DATA AND METHODOLOGY

In the following chapter, the research focus, design and methodological choices of the study are presented. Moreover, in the end of the chapter, the demographic and other background characteristics of the participants interviewed for the study are described in more detail.

### 3.1 Research approach

The method applied to collect the empirical material of this qualitative study was through semi-structured interviews, conducted both through personal ( $n = 19$ ) and focus group ( $n = 3$ ) interviews. This approach is justified due to the fact that this particular group in their unique migration stage had not yet been covered in Finland at the time of the study and the study included personal, tough and challenging themes and experiences. The aim of the interviews was to collect information about the perceptions and opinions of the asylum seekers during their process of seeking international protection in Finland.

This study builds on the social constructivist research approach, arguing that the reality is in constant evolution and change, where everybody's thoughts, words and actions form the reality that we live in (Patton 2001, pp. 96–103; Bryman 2011, p. 37). This approach enables the gaining of understanding of this phenomenon through the subjective experiences of the asylum seekers themselves. Based on these interviews, the purpose of this study was to find clues about how the phenomenon of forced migration could be handled in an easier and more fruitful way, for both the immigrants themselves and the Finnish society receiving them. The research approach chosen for this study belongs to the tradition of phenomenology, where it is stressed that subjectivity and the reflection of personal perceptions and experiences is seen as meaningful and that knowledge of the world is being transmitted only by perceiving and experiencing it. Therefore, this approach emphasises the importance of personal experience. (Patton 2001, pp. 104–106.)

Additionally, the study uses the ethnographic approach in utilising notes collected by the interviewing researcher in a field diary during the research process. Many of the participants kept contact with the interviewing researcher also after the actual interview, as some of them needed guidance in different areas of adaptation to Finland. Notes in the field diary were also collected from events relevant to the subject studied. The ethnographic observations have thus further enriched and given depth to the analyses by increasing the understanding of the phenomenon of the arrival of Iraqi asylum seekers in Finland and its effects, as it enabled the collection of data through yet another channel.

## 3.2 Research context and participants

The study focuses on Iraqi asylum seekers, which were the biggest group (20,485 persons) entering Finland to seek asylum in 2015 (Finnish Immigration Service 2016c). At this time, 7,073 Iraqi citizens were already living in Finland (Statistics Finland 2016). The ethnic backgrounds of the Iraqis living in Finland vary depending on the time of arrival: in 1990, the Shia, and now mostly the Sunni (cf. Juntunen 2016). The history of Iraq is marked by conflicts and wars and, consequently, many have been forced to escape. Iraqi citizens started to arrive to Finland in the early 1990s (Juntunen 2016), after the Iraq–Iran war (1980–1988) and the Gulf war (1990–1991). After that, there have been many more conflicts for the Iraqis to handle: the Iraqi Kurdish civil war (1995–1996), Operation Desert Fox (1998), the Iraq war (2003–2011) and, since 2014, the Iraqi civil war (Wikipedia 2016a). The Iraqi population (with the exception of the Kurdish population) of Finland has received little attention from researchers, with the exception of researcher Marko Juntunen. In his recent publication, the historical and political context of Iraq is being clarified and will thus not be the focus of this study (Juntunen 2016). It is important to remember that the participants of this study originate from the above-mentioned political context.

The scope of the study has further been limited to skilled Iraqis that speak English and that have previous work experience. This was done for several reasons. Firstly, from the pilot interviews the conclusion was made that it would be better to focus on one group in depth instead of focusing on many groups superficially. Secondly, as expectations regarding future employment were an area of interest, a group consisting of asylum seekers with vocational work experience would be more likely to have an idea of what they could do for a living in Finland. Thirdly, apart from the fact that knowledge of English is considered a minimum requirement when entering the labour market in Finland, this requirement made it possible to conduct the interviews in English and thus avoid the need for a translator, whose presence would have made the event of the interview more formal. It is, therefore, important to keep in mind that this case study does not represent the entire group of Iraqi asylum seekers and that the participants represent, in fact, a privileged group of asylum seekers that are expected to have a head start when it comes to adapting in Finland if they are given permission to stay.

Although all of the asylum seekers interviewed for this study were registered in reception centres in Helsinki or Turku, half of them were actually living outside the reception centres at the time of the interview: seven participants were living in apartments with Finnish families and four of the participants were living in rented flats with other Iraqis.

### 3.3 The interviews and the development of the interview form

The semi-structured interview consisted of both open questions as well as questions derived from established measurements, with the guided use of scales. The latter were used in order to facilitate the answering of the interview questions as well as possible future follow-up assessment. In the interviews, the participants were also asked questions about their background, education and work, religious views, equality between genders, migration experience, wellbeing, social contacts in Finland, and expectations regarding their future life in general, as well as employment prospects in particular in Finland (see Appendix 1 for the main themes of the interview form). The items and scales adapted from the following measurements were used<sup>2</sup>: Behavioural acculturation measurement (Szapocznik & Kurtines 1978); National Pride (World Values Survey); Attitudes towards Iraqis/Finns (Verkuyten's feeling thermometer, 2007); Relocation stress (Aldwin & Revenson 1987); Perceived cultural similarity between Iraq and Finland (Piontkowski et al. 2000; Rohmann et al. 2006). Also traumatic experiences, perceived quality of life, and satisfaction of life were measured using simple 1-item questions with four- and five-point Likert scale answer options. In this research, the focus lies on the aspirations that the asylum seekers had regarding their future employment in Finland, as none of the participants were yet in paid jobs at the time of the interviews.

The interviews consisted of asylum seekers from four reception centres in Helsinki, as was the case also in Turku. The interviews were between 1.5–2 hours long and took place in neutral environments such as libraries' meeting rooms, Demos Helsinki's office and in a private apartment in Turku.

In more detail, to test the interview form, three pilot interviews were conducted in the autumn of 2015 among three persons from Somalia, Afghanistan and Kosovo. A pilot interview with a long-term immigrant from Kosovo was chosen in order to make comparison with an immigrant of refugee background who has been living and working in Finland for several years. This helped in getting an idea of how perceptions about Finland are bound to change over time in comparison to those who have arrived recently. After the pilot interviews were carried out, the decision was made to focus only on Iraqi asylum seekers, because it became clear that the cultural context of the asylum seekers would significantly affect the outline of the questions as well as the adaptation of the scales used. In the process of creating the interview form, an Iraqi asylum seeker with experience of both living in Iraq as well as living abroad was consulted, to ensure that the questions were understandable.

After the three pilot interviews, a focus group interview was carried out in one of the reception centres in Turku. At this point, the decision had already been made to concentrate on one single group of asylum seekers, the Iraqis. The aim of the focus group interview was to test the modified interview form and to test whether it would be possible to ask sensitive questions related to the journey, religion and different values of the asylum seekers. During the focus group interview it became clear that the initial scales used were too complicated and thus the scales had to be simplified to better fit

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2 Note: In most of the cases, however, both the language used in the original source as well as the scales used had to be modified to be more understandable for the participants.

the context. Moreover, the structure of the interviews was modified and the questions were simplified. The questions of the interview form were also translated into Arabic. The answers from the focus group interview are part of this study, while the answers from the three pilot interviews have been left out of the study.

The step following the focus group interview was to find the participants for individual interviews from the reception centres in Helsinki and Turku. Recruiting participants was carried out by the interviewing researcher at events organised by or for asylum seekers, through direct contact outside of the reception centres and through contacts made in volunteer tasks. The process of finding enough suitable participants for the interview was a laborious process lasting several months, but was getting easier during the research process with the help of the so-called snowball sampling technique, where a participant who already had participated in an interview referred his or her friends to do the same.

The participants about to be interviewed were informed about the purpose of the data collection and assured that their anonymity would be guaranteed. As only three participants were women, only part of the information gathered from them could be used in this study to avoid the identification of these persons (i.e. age has been left out of the nicknames attached to the quotations).

All of the questions asked could be answered completely voluntarily. It was stressed that any question could be skipped without any further explanation. The participants were asked to only respond to questions in the case that they could be completely honest in their answer. This having been said, the information, experiences and opinions brought forth in this study are based on the subjective experience of each participant. The effects of the interviewing researcher being a white Finnish woman representing the native population of the country might have affected the trustworthiness of the study. However, as the interviewing researcher had been volunteering in many different reception centres, which the participants knew, they seemed to trust her and openly shared even their personal and distressing experiences. The data gathered in the interviews were additionally enriched with ethnographic observations. The trustworthiness of the study will be discussed further in the limitations section of the concluding chapter.

### 3.4 Research methods

The interviews were transcribed by the interviewing researcher and analysed using the Atlas.ti software, a program designed for managing qualitative data. After reading and interpreting the transcriptions, different codes were created (e.g. Differences between Iraq/Finland, Work motivation, Messages to Finns) for the parts of the text that were considered relevant. All the text segments of each code were then compared with each other, which led to the creation of more codes<sup>3</sup>. Analysing the codes led to the creation

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<sup>3</sup> E.g. Assimilation, Integration, Contradiction (when a participant said they had equality in the family but other quotations revealed that this was not the case, or when a participant said there is only one religion in Iraq while others stated that there are many, etc.).

of thematic headings, which will be presented in the results chapter (4–6). The codes that occurred most frequently are the themes that get most attention in this study. From 870 tagged quotations, predominantly the most representative quotations that reflected the general trends of the data were picked to be presented in this study. If presenting quotations that only presented the views of one or a couple of persons, this is mentioned separately. The quotes recited are in the format of standard language (no repetition) clean verbatim, which captures the text as it is spoken, but leaving out filler words and repetitions of the same word. After the recited quote, a nickname (chosen by the participant) will be displayed together with the age and the year of the interview. Shorter form (only the nickname) is used when referring to the participants elsewhere than in the quotes.

### 3.5 Demographic characteristics of the participants

Of the 22 participants, three were female. The average age of the participants was 31 years, ranging from 21 years to 58 years old. The majority were from Baghdad while some of the participants were from Anbar, Mosul and Fallujah. One of the participants did not want to tell where he was from. Half of the participants were single, six were married, three were engaged and two were in a relationship. Of them, 17 came alone, while five came to Finland together with another family member, of whom two became separated along the journey. Four of the participants (of  $N = 19$ ) had an intention of bringing two family members with them to Finland through family reunification. At the time of the interview, the participants had spent about three months in Finland on average.

Of the participants of this study, two had attended between 10 and 11 years of school, seven had attended 12 years or more of school, 12 and all of the women, interestingly, had reached the level of Bachelor's degree or equivalent and one participant had completed a Master's degree and had started doctoral studies in Computer Science<sup>4</sup>. In addition, several participants of this study had started their own studies on various levels, but had interrupted them before graduating, often due to war-related reasons. The ones that had completed a Bachelor's degree had graduated from areas such as Accounting; Agricultural Engineering; Media; Chemical Sciences; Computer Sciences; Construction & Building; Journalism; Marketing Media & PR and Mechanical Engineering. All of the participants had gone to public schools at least at some point, but their experience had varied greatly.

According to the participants, before 2003 there were private schools accessible only to the richest citizens in Iraq (*Mustafa; Adnan*). Generally speaking, the older participants were very satisfied with their education (*Adnan; Hamed; Yassen*), while the younger generation of participants were not. The reasons behind the dissatisfaction were problems related to corruption, thoughts about the classrooms being too

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4. Comparing this to a research conducted by Testipiste, which aimed to map out the education level and skills of asylum seekers ( $N = 1,004$ , of whom 66 per cent were Iraqis residing in 14 reception centres in the capital region), it is clear that the participants of this study are in comparison far more educated: only 16 per cent of those studied by Testipiste reported having completed a degree, mostly a bachelor's degree (Strandberg & Stordell 2016).

crowded, with up to 50 students in a classroom (*Husham*), and that the things they were taught were not up to date. However, three of the participants of the younger generation (*Moses; Yousif; Safaa*) were satisfied with the education that they got in public schools. Most of the participants either came from wealthier families and/or had established good connections for work in Iraq. Among those participants who had already gained work experience in their own field of studies, there were accountants, barbers, chefs, journalists, a computer repair technician, an agricultural engineer, a civil engineer, an electrical engineer, an engineer of construction and building, an IT engineer, a mechanical engineer, an officer, a researcher and a teacher. Those who had not yet gained work experience from their particular field of study had knowledge in architecture, biology, computer sciences, medicine, marketing and media.

All of the participants had Arabic as their mother tongue and spoke English in varying degrees: 10 spoke English fluently, seven could converse but not fluently and five only spoke simple phrases in English. At this point it is important to remember that it was somewhat challenging to find English-speaking participants for the study in the first place, so these numbers do not reflect by any means the language skills of the Iraqi asylum seekers in Finland as a whole. Apart from this, four participants spoke a third language: two of them Russian and two of them the Kurdish language, stating that they spoke it well enough to work in that language, although they were not Kurdish. In addition, two participants reported an excellent knowledge of Arabic, understanding almost all dialects of the 22 Arabic speaking countries.

The majority, 14 participants, came from a Sunni background, and six participants came from a Shia background (more information about the distinction and conflicts between these two groups, e.g. Juntunen 2016). Of them, three participants stated however, that they were not that religious, even though they did not mention being atheists. Moreover, as many as five participants stated that they were atheists, three of them of Shia background and two of them of Sunni background. Two participants did not want to reveal information about their religious backgrounds.

Of the participants of this study, nine had international experience from living in another country apart from Iraq at some point in their lives. Apart from the journey from Iraq to Finland, 14 had previously travelled abroad, while the remaining eight participants had never left Iraq before their journey to Finland. It is important to remember that an Iraqi passport has the third lowest status in the world, only above the passports of Afghanistan and Pakistan, a fact that greatly restricts extensive travelling (Wikipedia 2016b). In the following section, the profile of the participants is described in more detail, reflecting it to the state society of Iraq.

# RESULTS 4–6

The purpose of this study is to bring forth the voice of the Iraqi asylum seekers interviewed for the study, as a response to the mainly negative attention of the media. The presentation of the results consists of themes that emerged from the analysis of the data, which are organised under thematic headings. The results are divided into three parts. The first part focuses on generating an understanding of life in Iraq as perceived by the participants, as well as on their reasons for leaving Iraq and the factors that attracted them to Finland. The second part concentrates on the participants' experiences of the time spent in Finland, and the challenges they are facing in the limbo-like stage of their migration process, for example, what it is like to live in the reception centres and how the contact with Finns is perceived. The third part of the results consists of expectations regarding life in Finland and motivation to study and to work, as well as challenges that the participants might expect to confront when entering the labour market in Finland. Lastly, the end of the third part is dedicated to messages designated to Finns from the participants. When presenting the results of the scales used, unless mentioned otherwise, calculations are based on all 22 participants.



## 4 PART I: LIFE IN IRAQ

The purpose of the first part of the results is to shed light on the cultural and political context of Iraq, as well as the situation of the society prior to leaving the country, as perceived by the participants prior to leaving their country. The Iraqi country context is presented together with the so-called *push factors* that have affected their decision to leave the country. Also the journey and how they ended up in Finland, that is, the *pull factors* that attracted them to Finland, are being described. The topics discussed in this chapter include extremely stressful and traumatic experiences of the participants. These descriptions are used as a backdrop to enable understanding of the situation of why so many people are currently on the move, looking for safety and a place to live a peaceful life.

### 4.1 Deteriorating living conditions in the midst of war

The strong influence of Islam that permeates all aspects of life in Iraq, from politics to private life, rose as a central issue throughout this research, no matter what theme was under discussion. Religion has also played a significant role in the violent history of Iraq. In this chapter, the deterioration of the state of Iraq, the wars and the societal change that has led to an increase of inequality in the Iraqi society as they were reflected in the interviews and that made the situation in Iraq escalate to the point where the participants decided to leave their birth country are being presented.

#### 4.1.1 Wars, the breakdown of the state, and the escalation and politicisation of the religious division

It is hard to grasp how certain groups of people in many parts of the world, like in Iraq, are facing so much suffering, generation after generation. The participants of this study and generations before them have a long history of living in the midst of war (cf. Juntunen 2016), which, without a doubt, casts its shadow on those witnessing it first hand:

*I lived and witnessed war in Iraq since I was 10 or 12, 'til the moment I left Iraq. And, like, it started with the Iraqi-Iranian war and I was still 12 around that time. And, I think, it stopped 1988, and then 1990 another war, Iraqi-Kuwait war. And then came [Saddam] Hussein... and and and and.... until this moment. (Adnan 48, 2015)*

Some participants were explaining how tiring all the hideous images of war have been and how they are affected by them, both psychologically and also physically (note: long-term effects of witnessing war and destruction on psychological health are further discussed in Part II of the results, in section 5.2.1):

*So first moment in the war I see, I remember 'til now, I go outside from my house, I found a small kid with her mom, the both of them die and the dog eat from the meat, so I never forget this picture, is really hard. So war, you know if you go in some place war, this like, they make everything 'til the ground, there is nothing, and if you start [to] build again, and another war again. --- There is people they have like white hair when [even if] he is very young, and some people here [in Finland], they ask: "Oh guys, why you looking old?" --- you looking like 30 years, but you are young, and because [of] that [living in war] the experience [looking older than ones age]. (Isko 25, 2016)*

For some participants, living in war for extended periods has turned witnessing sudden and violent deaths into something ordinary:

*We were welcoming death since 2005 and 2006 [i.e. after the Shia vs. Sunni intercommunal violence, Wikipedia 2016a]. Everyone is expecting he will get die in Iraq. Car explosions, bombing, or someone will just shoot you or someone will kidnap you to ask for money. But then, when the threats came to rape and kill and sell, it's more difficult. Me and all my family we didn't mind to die altogether. To die, like, normal die, or by car expl... by accident. But it's hard to... it's got more hard and hard time by time. (Sara, 2015)*

*You know, the people in Iraq until now, when they go out just to make living for example, if he's the taxi driver, when he go out, he kiss his children, his wife and he say goodbye because he don't know if he will come back or not. Because explo[sions of] cars or kidnaps or... It's happening for everyone. Everyone. --- The people, they go out, they don't know if they gonna come back... (Noor 39, 2015)*

One participant was surprised to still be alive after having nearly died in three different wars:

*And how am I still alive? I don't know. The same place exactly [where I had almost died from a bomb exploding before], where I was working also, but that one was a real, real, real, real, bomb, that destroyed buildings, whole buildings, and I lost a friend at that time like... Seeing him as a burned piece of wood. This is something that I will, that I will never forget, you know? (Adnan 48, 2015)*

Many of the participants pointed out that the situation in Iraq became even worse with the invasion of Iraq in 2003 by a United States-led coalition, dethroning Saddam Hussein and, as a consequence, creating a political void that made the interests of different groups escalate even further<sup>5</sup>. During this time, more than ever before in the modern history of Iraq, the politicians started to use religion as a means to divide

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<sup>5</sup> During the regime of Saddam Hussein, the society was not yet as divided as it is today and neighbours did not necessarily even know the religious backgrounds of each other.

people further in order to gain support for their own purposes, that is, as a means for gaining political power (Juntunen 2016). The major long, ongoing conflict is the one between the Shia and Sunni Muslims<sup>6</sup>, which burst into civil war in 2006–2007. According to several participants, religion has been used for creating conflicts and increasing the gap between the Shia and the Sunni, creating ever more violence; everyone is obligated to choose sides:

*I [was] born in Baghdad, and I love my country, I love my Baghdad. Now --- [belonging] to the Sunni or Shia, we are divided, that what I mean. So I believe that my country will go to the something [that] is very danger[ous] and to not be fixed this thing because it's inside the people now, it's not something like politics. It's not politics matter, but the community, the society got contagious of this disease. (Hamed 57, 2016)*

As reported by the participants, after the 2003 invasion and the 2006–2007 civil war, the situation in Iraq was further aggravated by the insecurities caused by the entrance of ISIS in 2014 and the activities of the militias – armed groups that promote the interests of their own religious group and discriminate other groups. The militias, as told by some participants, look like any other person in the street, with the exception that they are wearing a badge from the government and have the right to kill (*Mustafa; Rooney*):

*Kind of mafia. And of course we are Sunni and we have this Shia militia threats all the time. Most of the time, not all the time. (Sara, 2015)*

The presence of these groups creates feelings of insecurity as reported by the participants and the situation has escalated to countless violations of human rights. Also the present, extensively corrupted, Shia government has further complicated/aggravated the situation, especially for the life of the Sunni in Iraq:

*This is the Sunni now: If you are not with the Daesh [ISIS], the other one will hammer you, the Shia. This is very difficult for us. Very difficult. The Shia they have the money, police, army, six or seven governors in the middle and in the south of Iraq, they have safety and everything. They consider all the Sunni with Daesh. No I'm not with Daesh. [I am] Between the base and the hammer. (Yassen 56, 2015)*

*I don't stay in my home. I change the places always. I can't do the life because I don't have home. --- My house is destroyed because militia and government go enter my house. (Adam 30, 2015)*

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6 Talking about religion with the participants was a controversial subject – some stressing the importance of one Islam – regardless of its Sunni or Shia interpretations. Others specifically wanted to point out the multitude of different religions within the country, and that even within Islam – and both within the Sunni and the Shia traditions – many different undercurrents exist. The differences between the Sunni and Shia interpretations were not the focus in this study, as this subject has been covered in other publications (e.g. Juntunen 2016). Furthermore, it is important to stress that the reason there are more quotes from participants from a Sunni background is that these were the majority in this study.

The problems seem to be affecting the whole society: many of the Sunni had the idea that parts of Iraq are safe for the Shia, although a participant of Sunni background from a small village confirmed that life was getting difficult also for the Shia. Attending school or going to work was often brought forth as a complicated issue, as being either Shia or Sunni nowadays determines where you can speak your mind and sometimes even where you can walk:

*Any Sunni in the street killed, in Shia places. You know, in area, in Shia area, this area all people Shia. If any Sunni enter this area, killed. Die. You know? And the Sunni place and Sunni area, any Shia enter, killed too. And make a very, very problems about this, if you want to go to anyone, you have walk around [avoid], anything you have, not want to go because they very, very difficult. If anyone knew you Sunni, killed. Hate, have many hate. Shia hate Sunni and Sunni hate Shia. (Adam 30, 2015)*

Visser (2010) argues that historically in Iraq there have been few attempts to impose a sectarian identity to specific, restricted regions in the country. Although a dimension of sectarianism has existed in Iraqi politics (where the pre-2003 Ba'athist regime's main concerns were security and obedience), Khoury (2010) also points out that sectarianism in its current form in Iraq is new as a consequence to the post-2003 political arrangements that have further aggravated the situation of Iraq.

Furthermore, different minorities tend to drop in a gap between these two groups. Even those who reported wanting to be far away from all religious matters, for example those reported as being atheists, were not left in peace. One of the reasons behind this might be that this minority is neither acknowledged nor accepted in Iraq: those that reported being atheists in this study told that they had been harassed by the militia:

*They broke in my house so I go to Baghdad after that, and in Baghdad they follow me and they shot my car, so I flee with my brother. (Husham 27, 2015)*

*I became an atheist, so three months ago there is a militia, or you can call mafia from the government ---, they knew I am atheist, so they are starting to following me. I've been noticed [had noticed that] when I got to work, they looking, I feel like someone behind me or someone watching me, so I've been so, so afraid. So I got to my friend[s] house, and stayed there for a month, and my family go to the other place, where my aunt live. So they came to my house, and broke the house, broke the door and broke the everything in the house, and they wrote me a letter. "We will kill, we will get your death, infidel [unfaithful]". (Mustafa 24, 2015)*

Furthermore, some of those who reported belonging to this group felt that they could not tell this secret even to their family. For example, in the case of *Moses*, if he were to tell his family about not wanting to practice Islam, they would assume that he is a bad person for "hating religion" and that his assumed motivations for doing so would be that he wants to go out, drink alcohol and have extramarital relations with women.

Apart from the disapproval from the rest of the family, *Moses'* big brother was told to be fanatical about Islam and working for an Iraqi militia group and would, according to *Moses*, be capable of killing him, were he to find out about *Moses* being an atheist.

When trying to understand the reasons why Iraq is being so frequently targeted, some of the participants mentioned the United States and the greed for oil. Reflecting on the current situation with ISIS in Iraq, and how it had escalated to the point it is at today, other fingers were pointing towards Iran and Saudi Arabia. Whoever is responsible for the current situation, unfortunately, peace in Iraq seems like a far-fetched idea in the near future, as also the division within the country has been going on for such a long time and left its mark on the people of Iraq (Juntunen 2016).

After years of waiting in vain for a betterment of circumstances, witnessing family members, friends and/or co-workers die and things deteriorate was a wake-up call for many of the participants to make the important decision to leave Iraq:

*I have four friends that were working with me --- I lost them [as they were killed] just because of our job exactly, because we were working together all in one programme against the government talking about the rights of people, about the civilisation, there was no life, there is no money, there is no salary --- And then I start to think about how to leave this country. (Ali 28, 2015)*

*I was threatened in my country, that's before leaving, my country. I lost my brother in law, my sister's husband, and.. The bullet that missed me got him. So this is also something that I cannot forget and... I do blame myself 'til this moment, that I was behind him losing his life... Because they were after me, not after him. And then I lost a brother. And lately I lost my son. So these are the memories about Iraq that I have. (Adnan 48, 2015)*

Many Sunni participants pointed out their Sunni background as the main reason for having had to leave the country, after many internal relocations. This happened also to *Yassen*, who had lived all his life in Baghdad until being attacked due to religious issues. He escaped with his family to Mosul, which also was attacked by ISIS in 2014, then they fled to Kurdistan, but finding work there was difficult. At that point they decided to leave Iraq altogether:

*I'm not ready to make the third life and to be destroyed. (Yassen 56, 2015)*

As in the case of *Yassen* presented above, it was actually a typical situation for several of the participants that before their journey to Europe they had been fleeing within Iraq or to neighbouring countries. After many attempts of finding places to live closer to their origins, the stress levels of day-to-day life became too overwhelming. For several participants, the final push factor for leaving Iraq had been receiving a personal threat, at times with no more than 24 hours' notice to leave the country:

*Why I left? Because somebody kill my family and the... I catch that people, but --- the uncle or cousin [of that person was] in government in high position, and nowadays our government is very bad there is not, they're only about money, it's like mafia. So they start send people to my place to killing me --- And they said --- it's better for you to go out, to save yourself, to see if [there is] some future for yourself. (Isko 25, 2016)*

*I: What were the main reasons that made you leave?*

*Threat of my life. Not safe cause there is some groups try to kill me, so I forced [to] escape since 2005. Escape from Iraq, I went to Syria, spend 7 years in Syria, yeah, and then I went back to Iraq in 2012, I thought the troops were done after 7 years, but I found it is still there, I spent in Iraq only one week or something like that, and then I [was] forced [to] escape again. (Noor 39, 2015)*

*We take the decision, there's no way [to be able to live in Iraq]. We have to leave. It's not a good life for a human being. --- You have to be respected. You have to be respected as a human. It doesn't matter if you're a doctor, an engineer or a cleaner. Doesn't matter. You have to be respected as a human being. There's no respect [in Iraq]. (Yassen 56, 2015)*

**According to all participants of this study, however, religion was not seen as a reason to keep people divided.** Moreover, it seems that the participants of this study actually thought that it would be a good idea to keep religious matters private, as it seems to create more friction between people. Instead, something as simple as a guideline of respecting others, regardless of other's beliefs, was seen to be of much more importance:

*My religion? It's very easy. If I respect the others, it's very easy for me. --- I will not bother anyone. This is the religion. If you like to go with God, you go. You have your room and you can do it. (Yassen 56, 2015)*

*There are so many things to share with the Christians. Even when we were in Iraq, we lived with a Christian people as a neighbour, we know all this procedure. It is not like we are living in a place where the religion is so far from us. And believing in God we are sharing this concept, there's one God, right? And not a one God, just a God in general. (Yousif 26, 2015)*

#### 4.1.2 The degradation of the rights of Iraqi women

As became clear in the beginning of this chapter, the negative effects that religion has had, and continues to have, on human rights in Iraq are remarkable, especially among women. Religion, for instance, determines whom an Iraqi woman can marry: what is allowed for an Iraqi man can get an Iraqi woman killed, for example marrying a Christian. All men in the study confirmed that marrying a Christian woman, however, is in no conflict with the Quran:

*Because in our legend, when the children come up, they follow the father['s] religion, so if the father [is a] Muslim, so the children would be Muslims, but if the father not Muslim, so their child would be not Muslim. It's forbidden to give from Muslim to other religion. For example, Finnish Muslim he can marriage Muslim. It's only about the religion. (Hamed 57, 2016)*

In the Iraqi context, the man is still seen as the breadwinner of the house. Apart from bringing purpose and passion to life, having work seemed to be a question of honour and even something that defines the entire being of a man:

*I'm shy to ask money from any person, so I should work, I get my own money. I want [that] I can buy what I like, so the most important thing in a life, especially for a man, [is that] he have a job. (Isko 25, 2016)*

For women, however, things are very different: not all women are even allowed to work outside the home, even if they have a professional degree, as the husband or the father can prevent a woman from working (see also Cook-Masaud & Wiggins 2011, p. 248).

*There are many [men] that don't allow the woman to work: "Stay at home. Take care of the kids. Wash clothes. Clean the house. Cook." (Adnan 48, 2015)*

*Many men won't allow their wives to work, many men won't allow their wives to say what she want. (Rooney 21, 2015)*

It seems that whether inside or outside of the home, generally speaking, the opinions of women in Iraq seem to have little importance, as described by one of the participants:

*Equality, there is no equality at all [in Iraq]. At all. Rights of women, they are cleaning and washing at home. (Ali 28, 2015)*

However, one participant (Moses) explained that many men in Iraq actually think that Iraqi women are treated well and are even privileged for not having to do paid work, but can just "sit at home cleaning and cooking". The traditional role of a man being the one in charge was clarified further by Yassen, who explained that the role of the man should be more of a guide for the woman:

*I: What is the most obvious things that are different for women [in comparison to men, in Iraq]?*

*The woman will be as a housewife and [it is the] man who's responsible for getting money [for the family]. --- For us, as an educated man, of course there is no differ-*

*ence for us. Yes, of course we have the rules that it [the man] should be a guide for you [for women]. [He] Should be a boss. (Yassen 56, 2015)*

However, in the previous quote, right after stating that there is no difference between men and women for an educated man like Yassen – he continues saying that the only exception is that the man should be a boss. In big decisions, then, the man is turned to for guidance and has the last word:

*All of the family get back to him to get [advice from] his experience and what we can do with this and that.*

*I: Like being like the guide for the woman?*

*Yeah. Exactly.*

*I: Do you feel that women need a guide or a man to be their guide?*

*No. I feel that a woman need a man to protect [her]. It's not protecting what I call, this is human being feeling [basic human instinct]. Always that the woman, she's a very beautiful human being. She's a crystal. She always want something to protect her from any external affecting. I feel the man will be the cover of her, protecting. This is what I feel. (Yassen 56, 2015)*

Seemingly responsible for all the work at home and raising the children (and nowadays sometimes working outside of the home, too), in court, an Iraqi woman's word equals half of that of a man (Hamed; Mariam; Hayat; Husham):

*When testifying in court, they need two women equal to one men [man]. Just on testifying on the court. (Hamed 57, 2016)*

The fact that the rules regarding men differ greatly in comparison to those of the women was justified even by the women themselves, who had traditionally been taught that they were more emotional, not in control over their thoughts and emotions and thus, less reliable than men:

*I think it's ok [that an Iraqi woman's word equals as half of that of a man], because the women it's very... emotion[al].*

*I: Ok, so you don't trust her judgement?*

*Sometime the woman when [having] periods, this day, she can't control her mind, yes. Sometime she feel sick and she can't to control the mind.*

*I: So is it for you like that, do you feel like you can't control?*

*Sometime, yes. (Hayat 2016)*

*Ahh, actually, I never think about this thing, so I don't know [if I think I can control my mind].*

*I: Do you think it's fair and justified that you need two women to testify against one man?*

*I don't know, because when we were like children they told us this thing, so I don't think, just save it in my mind.*

*I: Ok, you don't question it?*

*No. (Mariam 2016)*

*There is something our religion saying that a brain of a man is not like a brain in a woman. There is different. So, the idea is built from this matter, the idea is built from culture, the idea is built from how people are raised up. (Adnan 48, 2015)*

In other words, the shortcomings that the women are by tradition taught to embody, such as being too emotional and being unreliable due to lacking control over their own thoughts, are thought to be something that comes with the human nature, or more precisely, with the nature of women.

As described previously, the emergence of ISIS destabilised the society further, a fact that significantly affected the position of the Iraqi women. Along with the influence of ISIS, the women in Iraq were being even more restricted than before: it was told that the use of the hijab became obligatory. Even before ISIS, walking in the street as a woman meant being accompanied by a family member and keeping the eyes on the ground. Going somewhere in the first place meant having asked for permission prior to leaving the house:

*Yes, [I left] because I'm woman, I can't work and to study when the ISIS come --- "We kill you, if you continue --- to work." (Hayat 2016)*

*My wife [is] there [in Iraq], I have two daughters, also, they're living there, and for me my daughters they didn't even went to the school now for three years --- Just sitting at home. They don't go ever out. Only in emergency situation. For doctor or something like that. (Noor 39, 2015)*

In the case of Sara and other single Iraqi women, the presence of ISIS made life unbearable:

*ISIS, when they see single women, they take and they offer marriage, but when he get done of her he send her to his friend or... yes. So this is the main reason [that I left Iraq]. So, I didn't really...*

*I: So when you are married, then the husband can decide what to do with the wife?*

*I: Like send to friends?*

*Yeah. It's not a marriage. It's just they say we want to marry your daughter. But it's ISIS, and, I can't marry someone from ISIS. So... --- If you don't accept, maybe they kill you maybe they sell you. You don't know. You are belong to them now. This has happened, a lot in Mosul, in Sinjar, in Anbar. (Sara 2015)*

### 4.1.3 Today's Iraq

Described by some participants of this study, Iraq at the time of leaving was in a state of a life not worth living:

*There is no life in Iraq. Yeah. It's like [a] disaster. It's not about someone want[ing a] reason to leave. But it's really [a] disaster in Iraq. Yeah. There, you can [get] hurt even in your job, even in your home. In everything in life, there is pain. (Safaa 25, 2015)*

Other push factors mentioned by the participants were the lack of a political system, as led by a false government immersed in corruption, also referred to as the Air government because it actually does not really exist (Ali):

*The government, they didn't make any rules. Really, rules. About the life. About the traffic. About the shopping. About the anything. Even about the families. It's freedom, in anything. And that's bad. Anyone, he feel, he like king, and he have a kingdom inside, inside his house. And that's not good. (Safaa 25, 2015)*

*We have such a kind of system, "beautiful" [political] system. We have [a] prime minister, we have [a] president, we have parliaments, everything. Systematic way, we have it. But all of them were selected by none. They were selected by themselves. (Ali 28, 2015)*

*I don't think there's a political system. There's not even a system. --- There is no government. Their job is just to steal the money and kill the people there. (Hassan 22, 2015)*

Regardless of Iraqis having the right to vote and elections being organised, apparently the power remains within the same families:

*We have the right to vote, but when we are going to vote, for example, if I'm going to vote [and] Hassan will win [according to the votes]. [In the] Morning I will see another one won. So what's [the point]..? --- We have such a kind of cheating. (Ali 28, 2015)*

*We're talking about a country that you can put money in the policeman's pocket to get away from what you did. You cannot do it here. So with a country, with this idea, you can do whatever you want. And this is something that I don't like. (Adnan 48, 2015)*

Regarding government jobs, some participants mentioned the shorter working hours to officially be from 8 a.m. to 2 p.m., but in reality with only 0.5–2 hours of "real work" per day. One might wonder how this is possible, but apparently being a rich country regarding oil makes it possible to work less:

*Because, in Iraq, we do not want to develop our country, but we have oil, we sell oil for another country and like give this for people [in government jobs through salaries]. (Moses 33, 2016)*

*If you want to work [in Iraq], no one care about you if you work hard, if you do your work honestly, no-one care about these things. (Mariam 2016)*

The consequences of the escalated ethno-religious and political conflicts affect everyday life (see more about sectarianism, e.g. Ismael & Ismael 2010). For example, finding honest work, or applying for studies, has become challenging as all parts of society in Iraq suffer from severe corruption:

*The way of thinking that the last few years start to increase about Sunni, Shia and those are good and those are bad and this discrimination because of this, and someone asks you when you apply for a job, for example, are you Sunni, if because of that maybe you don't got a job or something, or you don't got a scholarship. --- This is it with many things. The discrimination because of being Sunni and also the stressful situation of living in [an] unsafe place. (Yousif 26, 2015)*

*Even if I have [had] a certificate, PhD, I will not get that job [in Iraq], still. Still I have to wait the government to, [but] if I have a friend in the government working there, he will [would] manage that work and job and give it to me. Still we have a lot of people that graduate from universities, they didn't have [get], you know, their jobs. (Ali 28, 2015)*

Lastly, regardless of religious background, or gender, the lack of freedom of expression in its various forms was identified as a push factor, and choosing a country where freedom is not merely a word was desired:

*I have more than one reason [to have left Iraq], because my work --- there are some corruption in my work --- when I tried to write about corruption, the situation, I found myself facing with --- some political party. Then they threat me, to kill me. --- If I write another thing, it's like I will be part of this corruption, like I help them, then I can['t] do that. Because I will go to prison. (Moses 33, 2016)*

***I want, actually, to live my life. I want to learn, so many things. I wish to learn. I have so many ideas. Even in my job, even in my-. In Iraq, it's impossible to do [so]. And I forget so many things in Iraq. I don't like to be like that. [I feel like an] Old people inside me. Yes. I want to make anything in life. Even I want to learn the music, I want dance. It's difficult in Iraq. You have rules, to walk on this rules, and you can't make anything else. You have, you have just the name, of freedom. You can't do anything. It's difficult [in Iraq]. (Safaa 25, 2015)***

The circumstances described above led the participants of the study into a situation where they (or their families) felt that leaving the country was the only reasonable option. Whichever the case, however, it seemed that the decision for leaving Iraq had principally not been an easy one to make:

*I wasn't thinking about what's being asylum seeker means. I didn't really think. Because in deep [inside] of me, I was thinking I will never ever leave my country.*  
(Sara 2015)

***"There's an English saying. They said, east or west, home is best. Nothing will be better than your home. I think so. I don't know but I feel that, but when you have two choice[s]: dying or not, you will have to choose not."*** (Yassen 56, 2015)

After all that the participants had gone through in their home country, as described above, it is not surprising that being an Iraqi caused mixed feelings among the participants. On one hand, coming from an ancient civilisation was regarded as something to be proud of, on the other hand, the problems of the recent decades and the current reputation of Iraq cast a shadow on the value given to their origins. When asked to rate on a five-point Likert scale how proud they felt about being Iraqi, remarkably however, as many as half (of  $N = 19$ ) felt excellent about being Iraqi:

***Well, this is difficult, because I feel very proud I'm Iraqi, but I feel some people look less [down] to me, when they hear I'm Iraqi. I feel really proud I am Iraqi. --- And if it's [was] safe, I would never leave my country. Ever.*** (Sara 2015)

*I'm from oldest country in the world. So, I'm very proud [to be Iraqi]. But those people destroyed [Iraq]. I feel so bad for that.* (Zaid 27, 2015)

*I love Iraq. I love my country. But I don't love the government, the people who control Iraq. Because they make us like... It's very difficult now for Iraqi to travel to anywhere because they don't give you the visa or anything. I don't know how can I answer this question. You mean, as Iraqi? Okay, I'm proud that I'm Iraqi.* (Noor 39, 2015)

When asking the participants to rate on a five-point Likert scale how proud they felt about being Iraqi, approximately one quarter of the participants said that they felt neutral about it, while another quarter (of  $N = 19$ ) felt bad or very bad about it:

*I'm just feeling bad because I want[ed] to [be] born in a country which first, should be a safe country. Second should be a place where I can find a job and even if I cannot find, the place where there's a people who you are living for and who you are living with is a people who you are comfortable with. I mean there's no perfect society, but at least ... There are so many things, I cannot count it, that what I'm looking for.*

***Finding a safe place first, and living in a country which give me the minimum rights. I'm not asking for the maximum. The minimum rights --- I didn't get any rights, even the minimum rights. I didn't get it in my country. At the same time, it is not a safe place to stay. So the two main things, getting the minimum rights of living, and also living in a safe place. This is what every human needs. I didn't find it. (Yousif 26, 2015)***

*[Feeling very bad] Because we don't have a good passport, we don't have a good education, we don't, actually we have nothing, you know? (Mustafa 24, 2015)*

As the circumstances in Iraq became too much to bare, the tough final decision to leave family and jobs behind was as a rule understood and supported – often even insisted on – by the family members of the participants:

*They were convincing me [to leave]. Because I don't care if someone kill me if I [could just] stay with my family. But you know parents always think more. (Sara 2015)*

*I: So your family decided [that you would leave Iraq], but you agreed?  
Yes. It's not my choose [choice]. (Mariam 2016)*

*All, my family, tell me, go. (Adam 30, 2015)*

## 4.2 The journey

As shown previously in this chapter, the violence and suppression in the name of religion were identified as the biggest motives for leaving Iraq. The participants explained that they were not agreeing with the imposed cultural code of Iraq and desperately wanted a change in their lives. The next part of the study will give an idea about how the participants came here, what routes were commonly used and what kind of hardships they were facing on their long journey to Finland.

### 4.2.1 The Death Way and the new opportunities for smugglers

Recalling the route from Iraq to Europe commonly used by asylum seekers in 2015 gave rise to many emotions in the course of the interviews, as some participants had witnessed lives that were lost on the way without ever reaching their target destination. In 2015, 3,777 migrants were reported to have died crossing the Mediterranean Sea; in 2016 (up to the end of November), 4,699 lives were lost (IOM 2016).

Some of the participants did not want to remember their way to Finland, others could not remember even if they tried, as the defence mechanisms (cf. Vaillant, Bond & Vaillant 1986) of the brain seemed to have kicked in to blur the unwanted memories.

Even if each journey was individual (e.g. some participants came partly by plane) the most common route used was the so-called *Death Way* – a term used by some asylum seekers of the study. The journey starts from Iraq to Turkey, continuing by the feared crossing of the sea to Greece, a stretch that can only be handled by certain individuals, as it is so exhausting both physically and psychologically:

*Most of the people they go through the sea. But this is like, this [is] also not easy. It's dangerous, and [includes] spending a lot of money, and danger is the most important [barrier]. Like not anyone can make this stage. (Yousif 26, 2015)*

Indeed, the participants confirmed that a lot of strength and mental preparation was needed in order to survive the journey (Black et al. 1992). The preparation strategy of *Isko* was to imagine the worst-case scenarios in order to be prepared for and overcome surprises along the way. He was the only one from his family who made it out of Iraq:

*I plan, I wait the right time to go, because it's not easy to going. --- [I came alone] Because they killed my mother, okay, and my father, he died before the wars, and my brother[s], they [were too] afraid if they [my brothers] come in same way [to Europe and thus did not try to escape], but in this time I just decide to go and I don't care if I gonna die or not, because I put some goal in my mind, if I reach or I die. So I just going, I never looking to the back, and there is many risk in the way, it's very hard, but I'm very lucky, I'm very happy to reach. Because those people, other people die, other people cannot reach, so it's really hard, so I'm very lucky to reach. (Isko 25, 2016)*

Due to salient advertising enabled by the easy online access, the marketing possibilities of the human traffickers have grown exponentially, and it has become colloquial for many people on the move to hire smugglers in order to reach their destinations. The need for help is not limited to the crossing from Turkey to Greece, but can continue throughout the journey. According to one participant of this study (*Ali*) a trip from Iraq to Finland arranged by a smuggler costs 7,000 USD, and some people were said to have paid even more than that.

Many of the participants had dealt with different kinds of smugglers. One of the interview questions was about describing the feelings that the word “smuggler” or “human trafficker” provoked. As expected, the response was not too warm and, generally, the image of these smugglers was bad, as they had not been honest about, for example, how many would be in the boats. In addition, handing over the faith of one's life into somebody else's hands was said to feel horrible.

Just as feared and expected before the departure, especially the crossing of the sea was the part of the journey that was connected to the worst memories:

*It will be just like 5–6 hours in the sea. No one can help you. The boat was not saved, we can say. At the same time we can say even that there were 40 persons in a boat just like for seven [persons], so it was a really...[horrible experience] (Ali 28, 2015)*

*Yeah, they are liar, they are mafia, they not care about you, they want only your money, and they rip you [off], because when I go there, they put knife in [on] my kidney and they said, take your bag off, if you gonna not take you bag off I will put it here and I will take it [the knife out] from the another side, so it was, my clothes, everything inside the bag...*

*I: They robbed you?*

*Yeah, so I [said] just take it, I take it off, and they said we going in this boat for only, only four metre [long]. So they said, we just gonna bring fifteen person, [but] when we got there, it was sixty-five person, so people after people. And we have woman with us and small kids, four months [old], and six months [old] and I Imagine if this [boat is] gonna broke, of course he will gonna broke, because he cannot, it's weak, it's very weak, it's gonna broke. These girls [are] gonna die. Maybe [a] young man can maybe swim, it was cold, it was wave, so they just... They just send us, and when we reach [to the shore], they are really surprised how we reach[ed], because they know, we are [probably] not [going to] reach, so these people, even the devil [is] better from them, they not have any mercy, they take our money and just... [send us to die] (Isko 25, 2016)*

After having handed over the money for the trip to the chosen smuggler, the participants had to obey their orders. Women and children were told to enter the boat first, as they could usually not swim, but actually, this was said to be the worst position to be in, as the boats were so crowded and those in the middle got crushed by the pressure of the passengers from all sides (Saif). Some had to leave all their belongings behind in order to have less weight in the boat, while others had to leave their life vests behind:

*He [the smuggler] forced us to throw out the bags. --- We throw all our clothes, and something like that, that we needed, and we are suffering from [not having with us] now, so we throw all our bags, clothes out to make, to leave the meaning of heaviness like we have it in the boat. Because it will not be heavy and it will go on. (Ali 28, 2015)*

*The smugglers have force us to leave it [the life vests] on the beach because the weight of the boat was too heavy. Yes. It was heavy. So not all the people on the boat was have a life vest. (Saif 29, 2015)*

*It was very bad. You know, I was thinking, I'm afraid about the girl [on the boat], not about me. I don't know, I can't even think. --- I think just in the moment: "What I'll do?"; all the time. "What I do?"... the small boat --- [gesturing sinking of the boat], "What I do?" I will swim? Or help this girl? Or what I do? I don't know. (Zaid 27, 2015)*

The boat where Zaid was ushered to luckily made it to shore without flipping, however not all participants of this study were as lucky:

*When we drown at the sea. I can't forget. --- Yes. It was horrible feeling. Even I can swim but, you forget how to swim or something, when you hear everyone just shouted. You get also just confused.*

*I: Ok. Did everybody make it?*  
*Yes. No one died. No one. (Sara 2015)*

Even if the boat would float, regardless of being heavily overloaded with people, the psychological distress of not knowing if one will reach shore or not, together with being scared to get caught by the coast guards and sent back to where one came from proved to be a tough experience:

*We are afraid from [of] the guards of, Greece or Turkey, I mean they will see us and they will come.*

*I: Coast guard. What would they do if they see you?*  
*They will get you back to Turkey. So we need to escape. So we're in such a kind of psychological issues and state. (Ali 28, 2015)*

Other participants, too, had a negative image of the smugglers due to the very expensive price for an inhumane journey. The participants of this study did indeed reach their destination, and some pointed out that they couldn't say that the smugglers had been all bad, as they had helped them to reach their destination, but they were sad about the fact that so much greed is often involved: a lot of money is made on these trips. Even so, many are ready to pay a high price in order to reach their destination, which also partly explains why sometimes only the trip of one family member can be paid for. There is, of course, the option to cross without the help of smugglers, but this is usually a lot harder and involves more risks of getting into trouble.

The challenges were not over even after crossing the sea, but continued and became even denser on land for some participants. After finally reaching Greece, different kinds of challenges, for example bureaucratic procedures, were waiting. From Greece onwards, the journey would commonly continue to Macedonia, then Serbia and Hungary, a country feared by some asylum seekers of this study, as it was said to be a place better to be avoided due to the harsh treatment by the officials, and the unwelcoming atmosphere in general. Thus, people on the move are recommended to avoid having their fingerprints taken in Hungary, as that would mean that they would have to seek asylum there:

*And Hungary, have I told you about Hungary? Because Hungary [was] the most hard step for us because...*

*I: Even worse than Greece and Turkey?*

*No, Greece most hard, but the second hard[est], Hungary, because in Hungary when they catch anybody, they start [to] beat him even above the hand or the wrist, to take the finger[prints] ---, and there were some people in the jail for 20-30 days like that, so the people are really afraid from [of] Hungary. (Isko 25, 2016)*

The most horrifying scene witnessed by one participant of the study was the disappearance of some fellow travellers who had been subject to organ trafficking in Belgrade, Serbia (*Isko 25, 2016*; the quotation is too severe to be published).

After Hungary, then, ordinarily the journey continued through Austria. There were of course some alternative routes, e.g. coming from Greece to France by plane, continuing to Stockholm by car and arriving in Helsinki by boat, but the most common route was the one described above. Walking long distances had been the destiny of many, as in some places the locals were prohibited from helping by the authorities:

***There are many places, in the forest, the rocks and the mountains, and for long distances that we walked. Very hard for us. --- The people that we, when we passed through these countries, they cannot help us, because they got instructions that they shouldn't help anyone of refugees.***

***I: Really? In what country?***

***Greece and Serbia. Yes.***

***I: The authorities told the people that they should not help?***

***Yeah. If they help they will be maybe imprisoned.***

***They can give us, like, food, maybe they can help, but transport, never. So we walked for about 40 km in this island in Greece it's called Matalini or Lesbos.***

***Lesbos. Yes. 40 km on our feet yes. No, they didn't give us [a ride]... even for money. (Safaa 25, 2015)***

*She [my wife] go from Turkey to Bulgaria, and then to Serbia, and then to Hungary, and then to Austria, and then to Germany, and then to Denmark, and then to Sweden, Malmö, from Malmö to Stockholm, and then Helsinki. It's a very long trip, Do you know how many hours she walked? She walked for more than 45 hours. 45 hours she walked. It's a very long trip. (Yassen 56, 2015)*

Oftentimes the nights were cold and spent mostly in very primitive conditions:

***I: Was there something else that you still remember?***

***The cold. It was very cold in the night. And we spent nights in the tent. Yes.***

***I: So you were carrying a tent as well? So you had a lot of luggage.***

***Yes. Yes. We got three tents. We bought from Greece. (Safaa 25, 2016)***

Typically, the journey would then continue through Germany (and presumably Denmark, although rarely mentioned) to reach Sweden. Instead of crossing from Stockholm to Turku or Helsinki, the land route was said to be of preference, thus going all the way to Lapland, crossing from Haparanda, Sweden to Tornio, Finland and then coming back south again towards Helsinki and Turku, in the case of many of the participants. As they were usually travelling in closed trucks for days on end, they often did not even know in which country they were, which was also reflected in some of the quotations below, where some countries were missing from the story:

*First station is Turkey, yeah. And go to --- Greece, after Macedonia, Serbia, [Hungary, Austria] Germany, [Denmark], after that Sweden, after that Finland. (Moses 33, 2016)*

No matter how hard the journey of each participant had been, having reached Finland alive was regarded as worth the ordeal:

*The journey it's like, some kind of saving [of] myself and [of] my family from something [that] is very bad to another situation [in Finland that] is very good. So it will be good for me. Even [if] it was so hard. (Hamed 57, 2016)*

The quotations presented above give an idea of both the reasons for leaving Iraq and also about what the participants of this study, and many asylum seekers have been through before arriving in their country of destination. In the following part of this chapter, the results describing the choice of migrating to Europe and particularly to Finland will be presented, as told by the participants of this study.

#### 4.2.2 Choosing Finland over other countries

In this section, the most important pull factors that made Finland stand out as a country of destination will be presented, as well as the channels of information used that led to the decision to choose Finland. Wanting to escape the war and destruction of Iraq presented earlier in this chapter is quite obvious, however the choice of going all the way to Finland and, if given the chance, starting life all over again from zero, might be less obvious.

Taking into account the experiences of living in the midst of war as presented above, it is understandable that the reason cited most often for choosing Finland as the country to seek asylum was the reputation of the excellent level of respect for human rights, such as safety:

*I want to feel it's safe. I want to send my children in [a] bus alone. Because it's difficult in Iraq. I want to, when I wake up, I found my children behind me [by my side] and, they are come from the school without anything happen. Yeah. I want to go and go to anywhere in night. To feel that's safe. (Safaa 25, 2015)*

Geographically speaking, Finland might not have been the first option to choose, but upon investigating the pros and cons of countries to seek asylum in, the conclusion of these participants was that it would well be worth the long journey, partly because Finland was seen as a pioneer in many fields, such as in education:

*I heard these kind of countries like Finland... People, there is human rights in Finland. It's not like other countries, in Europe, too. Italy, France, Greece, also Norway. Denmark. Finland's different.*

*I: Better than Norway and Denmark?*

*Yeah, human rights, they respect people more than those people. I heard about this, I don't know, this is first time [that I am] here.*

*I: From where did you hear about it?*

*From too many people. And I read about it. It's number one in education. Number one in too many things. And they are open-minded people, they don't mind if I'm this kind of, [that] kind of... Doesn't matter for them. It's very far [away] for me. It's the north, so I said, it's deserve to do this [it's worth doing this]. [Even] If I take long way to go to Finland, I will do it. (Zaid 27, 2015)*

Additionally, most of the participants interviewed for this study did not come here by chance, but were instead carefully counting the odds of being granted asylum in different European countries. In the light of this study, it seems that when the participants were contemplating their options, Finland had a reputation of accepting Iraqis more easily than other countries:

*I heard that Finland itself is accepting Iraqis. At the same time, I know there are huge waves of asylum seekers in Germany and Austria. I well know that Sweden stopped giving residence to the Iraqis. So the choice didn't come by accident, no. I heard that Iraqi cases are, or, let's say, Iraqis are accepted, and their cases, and that's why I chose Finland. (Adnan 48, 2015)*

As so many asylum seekers went to Germany<sup>7</sup>, some participants thought that it would be crowded there and thus get complicated to complete the request for international protection and to find a job. Instead, it was thought that it would be very easy to do the same in Finland. Before the time when asylum seekers started to enter Finland more than ever, a lot of rumours had been spreading about the wonders of Finland – promises of guaranteed residence, well paid jobs and a life in luxury – things that proved to be very far from the reality later on. The rumours were spread through word of mouth and on the internet. In fact, some of the participants had never even heard about Finland before pondering on which country to escape to. Encouraged by hearsay, they started to actively look for information:

*Actually I don't [didn't] know there is some country called Finland, --- I just read on Google, they are [that they] respect to human and womens, and said it's far away, no ISIS, no anyone, we can go. (Mariam 2016)*

There are various forums established, for example on Facebook, with the sole purpose of providing information about the pros and cons of potential migration countries. Even though it is well known that social media plays an important role nowadays in

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7 Altogether 1.1 million people were allocated to German reception facilities in 2015 (OECD 2016, p. 30).

the planning of the journey of many asylum seekers (Juntunen 2016), in this study, quotations regarding the use of social media were surprisingly scarce.

Only a couple of participants got information about the excellence of Finland through family members or acquaintances already living in Finland. One of them was *Yassen*, whose wife had some relatives living in Finland and told them that they had everything they needed and were happy in Finland, advising *Yassen's* wife to come as well:

*The first choices as a unit, it's Europe. And then we have two choices, Germany or Finland. As a matter of fact, my wife decided to be here. She's tell me, I like to go to Finland. I heard so much about it. Respecting, and and and. "Okay, it's up to you". (Yassen 56, 2015)*

A more surprising source of information was the smugglers, in the case of some who had not yet decided their destination when leaving Iraq:

*Actually the smuggler, he recommended Finland. Then I am a love of googles, so I wrote something on google and they say it in here that religion doesn't matter and the government doesn't matter if you, they don't care if you are Muslim or Christian or something. I like to deal with, government who don't care about your religion or something. So this was my, one of the things, who encouraged me. But [it was] the smuggler, who suggest Finland at first. (Sara 2015)*

After having overcome unimaginable obstacles, the participants' endurance is to be tested further with yet other challenges awaiting. For some, the efforts will prove to have been worthwhile, as they have come here to stay, while for others, the future remains uncertain.

## 5 PART II: HOW ARE THEY DOING NOW?

### LIFE WHILE WAITING FOR PERMISSION TO STAY

At the time of the study the participants were living in a limbo-like stage of the migration process, where the destiny of the rest of their lives is about to be unveiled. However, the fate is not in their own hands, and the only thing they can do at this point is to wait. In this part of the results, the adaptation process of the participants will be discussed from various angles. Obviously, at this stage, depending on the personal preferences of the participants, different aspects of life in a new cultural context affect the perceived quality and satisfaction of life. Thus, these two themes will appear throughout the chapter thematically.

#### 5.1 Perceived fit with the Finnish culture and lifestyle

Iraq and Finland can be argued to be two countries with a vast cultural distance (Hofstede 1991). The strong influence of Islam permeates all aspects of life in Iraq, from politics to the private life behind closed doors. Finns, on the other hand, are used to freedom of expression, keeping religious beliefs to themselves, as an extremely private matter.

At first thought, the cultural differences between Iraq and Finland could present a great challenge regarding the future acculturation of those asylum seekers that are here to stay. That said, being exposed to something new is not necessarily a bad thing – actually quite the contrary: in the case of the participants of this study, despite the unfamiliarity, the predictability of the Finnish system and order in society was something that was warmly welcomed:

*In Iraq, we have 30 million [inhabitants]. 30 million different, in the street many people, in markets, in any way... But here, system. I go to any places have system. In bus system. I like and I love system. Because in my head, in my idea, system is very, very important about anything. In family, now I with you, I respect you now because, this is [the] system about life. If you want to build a good life, you [will] want a system. (Adam 30, 2015)*

*Yeah, I hope I stay forever, then it's okay for me --- when I go to police station, I'm waiting, I know, after two minutes, the bus will be there. I'm so, so happy for that, it's good life for me, because we don't have like that in Iraq. I like the system, I go and the same time I'm get to police station. Yeah, I can go, you know? (Moses 33, 2016)*

Especially for the participants that had previous international experience through travelling or living abroad, the European lifestyle did not feel as unfamiliar as one might expect:

*I am getting used to live here. Well, because when I was young I read so much about Europe and I read many novels and I got many friends from Europe and USA, as friends on Internet. So I always communicated with them and I got many informations about the culture. So when I came to here I didn't find that it's very difficult for me to be inside this society. Because I feel that it's not strange for me. Even my son, he studied in --- [a European country] for five years, so he was in that society also in Europe. So for him and for me, we didn't find this kind of difficulty. (Hamed 57, 2016)*

*I: So even if you feel that this is totally different than the Iraqi culture, you still feel that it is easy to adjust?*

*Because I'm [the] kind of person, I'm travelling a lot, and my lifestyle is Europe style, because in my normal life, I go to the my walk with bicycle and come back and I go to the gym every day and when I have weekend I go to the beach, so my lifestyle is almost like your people so I know, I like it here, even the winter even the cold, I enjoy it, I like it. (Isko 25, 2016)*

Freedom of expression in its various forms, like the open-mindedness, being, thinking, saying and wearing anything one wants, were highly valued and appreciated attributes of Finland:

***I feeling like I belonging to where the[re is] democracy where the[re is] freedom, I belong there. (Moses 33, 2016)***

*I like the people here because nobody look at you, whatever you do. Whatever you wear, whatever you speak. So I think, I like that people [Finns]. (Zaid 27, 2015)*

Based on the following views presented by some of the participants, it seems that no matter how different the cultures of Iraq and Finland are, it might not be that hard to adjust if the new culture fits one's own interests or personality, as many said it did:

*No, I don't have any [think it takes a long] time [to adapt to Finland] because I feel they [Finns] are just like me. I came here to found myself inside this people. And I found it. Yes. (Safaa 25, 2015)*

*We are share this one same thing, the Iraqi and Finnish people they have poker face all the time. [Laughing] (Mustafa 24, 2015)*

***Some people tell me, I read [about] Finland, the woman she can to live in Finland and she can work and we have freedom, I think this is [the] perfect country for me. (Hayat 2016)***

As the previous studies have shown, also the results of this study showed that if the new culture is aligned with one's personal values, (i.e. values congruence ; e.g. Stromberg & Boehnke 2001; Van Vianen et al. 2004), adaptation can be easier. Among the participants of this study, their personal values were often clearly not in line with the cultural values of the Iraqi society:

*I: Would you say these values are the same in Iraq?*

*I say, the same for me.*

*I: The same for you?*

*Yes.*

*I: But not in Iraq maybe?*

*I don't believe so, no.*

*I: And can you describe how it would be different there?*

*The values are connected to people. --- What might work here, [is] not necessarily working there. Sometimes, it depends on the person himself, but for me, I wish that these things [Finnish values would] work in Iraq as well. (Adnan 48, 2015)*

Also the initial impression of the meetings with Finns was described in a positive manner by many participants:

*[I was told that] The people are welcoming and very kind and good people. And that's what we really found here and this is [a] good reason to be here. After suffering from injustice and disrespect in Iraq. Yes, they respect the people here. The humanity. (Hamed 57, 2016)*

On the other hand, the harsh climate in Finland raised worries in some participants and seeing drunk people in the streets was said to be uncomfortable. Many also thought that it was unfortunate that establishing friendships with Finns was so challenging (contacts with Finns will be further discussed in section 5.3.2). That said, all participants appreciated the safe living environment found in Finland, and were eager to learn more of the Finnish culture and language.

## **5.2 Living in a constant state of uncertainty**

After reaching the country of destination, but before knowing whether one can stay in that country or not, a special kind of phase – full of uncertainties – takes place in their acculturation process. Some asylum seekers get their decisions on their request for

international protection within weeks, while others have been waiting for it for more than a year. This was reported to be confusing and the participants called for some guidelines about the basis for decision-making, that is fast for some and slow for others. Many of the participants entering Finland in 2015 had been led to believe that getting asylum in Finland would be almost certain, while in 2016 it got more and more difficult to receive international protection.

The feeling of uncertainty about the future and the often long wait for the decision that will determine the destiny of their lives is the one common thing that is being shared by all of the asylum seekers and has a great effect on their daily lives. As the families left behind are counting on the family member that succeeded to escape, it makes the anxiety experienced during the waiting period a lot to handle. As the processing times for many participants have become much longer than initially expected, feelings of frustration had begun to emerge already at the time of the interviews.

### 5.2.1 Health, stress and trauma

The tough life in Iraq and the ordeals experienced during the journey from Iraq to Finland, as presented in Part I, have left their mark on the participants and this is being reflected in their current state of health and wellbeing. The severe effects of the past on the refugees' and the asylum seekers' psychological wellbeing are subject to manifest later on, when the acute causes of stress have ceased. Due to their exposure to war, violence, in some cases torture, forced migration, and the uncertainty regarding receiving international protection in Finland, these groups are, for example, at a ten times higher risk than the general population to be diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder, elevated rates of depression, chronic pain and other somatic complaints. (Kirmayer et al. 2011.)

The participants of this study rated their general health at the time of the interview on an average of 3.7 (on a Likert scale from 1 (very bad) to 5 (excellent)). A dip in the experienced state of health can thus be expected, as the journey and the migration process in its entirety was experienced as extremely stressful (mean 4.6 on Likert a scale from 1 (very easy) to 5 (extremely stressful) and traumatic (mean 4.0 on a Likert scale from 1 (very easy) to 5 (extremely traumatic):

***I: How traumatic has the process of leaving your country been until now?  
It was very bad. --- I think for months, I will think [about] this thing for months.  
And in years, I will also remember it. I [will] not forget this, not forget this at all.  
If I live to 100 years, I will all the time remember. (Zaid 27, 2015)***

*For me it was very, very, very difficult, because I left my family, my wife, my daughters, my parents, my everyone. I left them, I just escape by myself and I thought I'm gonna see my family, my wife, my daughters [within] six month, eight [months] or maximum one year. Now it's four [years]. So, it was very...yes... Extremely stressful, yes. (Noor 39, 2015)*

*Yes, yes. Traumatic. [Leaving Iraq was] Extremely traumatic. I left the country during 24 hours. Even I could not see many of my families. That's why. (Yousif 26, 2015)*

The long-term effects of war on psychological wellbeing are complex. Below, *Adnan* describes how he thinks that living in war has affected him as a person:

*I started to feel the effect of this mostly now, if I'm talking about psychological matters. For example, nightmares, difficulties with connecting with people, communicating with people, you know all these sounds of bombs and fighting and blood and bodies... (Adnan 48, 2015)*

In the public discussion, the need for help to deal with the stress and traumas experienced by asylum seekers is usually omitted, as the focus tends to be on the economic effects of migration and the point of concern seems to be on the desired fast employment of the newcomers. As the quotes above reveal, the effects of the wars are apparent. In some cases, the negative effects of war on mental health and wellbeing became more tangible after getting to know some of the participants better, but due to research ethics, this kind of delicate information will not be revealed. However, what can be said is that the participants and surely many other asylum seekers carry a very heavy weight on their shoulders.

### 5.2.2 Living at the reception centres

Apart from the tough and traumatic experiences lived in Iraq and on the journey to Finland, the endurance of the asylum seekers is additionally being tested after arrival to Finland. Although the participants were relieved by the fact that they had managed to escape Iraq, the current life situation was still not regarded as good.

The perceived quality of life<sup>8</sup> in Finland rated by the participants dropped somewhat in comparison to what it had been in Iraq: from 3.2 to 2.9. This is partly explained by the conditions at the reception centres, scarce in resources and lacking privacy:

*I'll say bad [quality of life now]. Just let me tell you why. Now I think it's bad, because we're living in some places [that] are crowded with people. We can't relax, we can't take our freedom and so I think just now it's bad, but I hope it will get better. (Rooney 21, 2015)*

The satisfaction of life<sup>9</sup>, on the other hand, was perceived to have improved in Finland, with an average of 3.5 at the time of the interview in comparison to an average of 2.4

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8 Quality of life was measured by asking the participants to rate their quality of life in Finland (with a predominantly economic connotation), on a scale from 1 (very bad) to 5 (excellent).

9 Satisfaction of life was measured by asking the participants to rate their satisfaction of life in general in Iraq versus in Finland, on a scale from 1 (very bad) to 5 (excellent).

for the life in Iraq. Hence, regardless of the situation at the reception centres, just being safe now was enough to have raised the perceived satisfaction of life from 2.4 to 3.5:

*We have saying in Iraq, we say, when somebody see the death, he will [be] satisfied with fever. (Hamed 57, 2016)*

However, the sudden inaction presented a strange and a new situation: the waiting was regarded as being extremely frustrating by all participants, as the inactivity was in fact adding to the stress, instead of having given the participants a chance to rest after the arduous journey. Meanwhile, waiting for the decision on their request for international protection, nearly all participants wished to have work or just about anything to do, to give pace to life, to help keep anxiety-causing thoughts away and to make time pass:

***Yes, very important for me [to have work]. Yes. --- To life [becoming] normal, yes. Wake up [in the] morning, and go to work, and go back and [be] tired and want to sleep... Because right now, it's feeling, I feeling bad. Because I don't have anything to do. Just sleep and wake up, eat. Nothing important in my life. I want change. And future. (Samir 24, 2015)***

*I am bored from sitting at home and just stay here. Even [if] it's cold outside I can work. It's ok. (Hamed 57, 2016)*

The participants thought that accepting work should be a matter of their own will, if only for the sake of their own wellbeing, as not having anything at all to do was considered the worst possible option. Seemingly, there is a lot of time to rest, however it became clear already in an early stage of making appointments for the interviews what the so-called "asylum seeker-rhythm" meant: sleeping late and waking up late. Even if one wishes to do otherwise, if others are awake, it is tough getting some sleep without the privacy of one's own room.

To make time pass, the participants spend a lot of time together at the reception centres:

*We talk about the way we came here, and what this country [Finland] will do for us. And... we try to forget. We try to laugh, make jokes, just to forget. I know from inside, we feel bad, all of us, but... we try to make new life: "It's the past, leave it". This is what I do. (Zaid 27, 2015)*

Besides boredom, another important reason for why it is so hard to live at the reception centres is that apart from the fact that different nationalities are mixed together, also Shia and Sunni Muslims share the same rooms, with varying outcomes:

*If you leave Iraqis together, and Somalians together, and you put Iraqians and Somalians in the same room, they will not understand each other. And when two people don't understand, or misunderstand, make big problem. (Zaid 27, 2015)*

In fact, according to some participants, it might have been easier to get along with someone without a shared language:

*Now I come here to Finland, have many problems, not with Finnish people, with my friend[s] --- people from Iraq. Not have problems but, if we stay many people in Iraq in same place, have many problem because the same language and many people here don't do anything, you know? Have 150 person here. I stay 1 month without [doing] anything, just eat and sleep. Because I don't have permission to do anything and work or, because I don't have [the sufficient] language [skills] and permission [to work]. (Adam 30, 2015)*

Apart from suddenly living in a country far away from Iraq and sharing one's room with strangers, also the food, although pointed out as being of good quality, tastes very different to the tastes that the participants are used to. In many reception centres, cooking is not allowed. However, many of the participants really missed cooking for themselves: this would give them something to do, something else to think about, would be an activity that can be shared with others and the food prepared could be just about the only thing that resembles what they are used to from before.

In addition to half of the participants who were living at the reception centres, the other half were living in private accommodation, of which seven were living with Finns, or close to them in apartments provided by Finns, and four were living at private accommodations with other Iraqis. Those living with Finns reported their average satisfaction of life at the moment of the interview better (4, "good") in comparison to those living at the reception centres, who rated their satisfaction with life as "okay" (3) on the same scale. In addition, those living outside of the reception centres with other Iraqis stated their satisfaction of life to be between these two values. Interestingly, from the ethnographic observations, it was confirmed that even after the time at the reception centres, it happened that Iraqis of both Shia and Sunni backgrounds would move to live in the same apartment. This kind of arrangement can partly be explained by necessity, as paying for rent with the reception allowance requires several persons to share the same apartment. Still, some participants reported that they had indeed become friends too, although naturally, in these kinds of friendships, it was told that talking about political and religious matters was better to be avoided.

Many of the reception centres in Finland are isolated from where natives live and work and social contact is often restricted to that of the reception centre. However, acquiring social contacts with natives would be essential with the acculturation process in mind. When asking about the preferred location, the bigger cities in Finland were seen as the most desirable places to live in, as their inhabitants are expectedly more used to dealing with foreigners and for the social and economic opportunities available there. Having lived in a big city in the past resulted in wanting to live in one of the

bigger cities in Finland as well. The general trend was that the participants wanted to stay in the cities where they had been until now. However, the reception centres are not always in big cities and people can be sent quite far away from them. Although it has been noted that the mass reception centres may hinder integration within communities (EUROCITIES 2016), the participants in this study clearly expressed their reluctance to be transferred to distant parts of Finland, such as Northern Finland. **Being sent "to live in the forest" was generally considered as some kind of penalty, having been used to life in the city with access to a rich social life:**

*When you send us to the north, and we are using [used] to be social, because your family is not here, so you always need to be with friends, and so when you send some to some state in a camp which is separated from – this is the most challenging thing – for the place which is separated from the people, and also like I cannot leave the room, I stay in the room all the time, and the communication with the Finnish people there is weaker than the communication with the Finnish people here [in Helsinki], because people they don't use to make communication with foreigners, and also the weather, and many things, that's why all the people now, they have problems with the transferring this to the north or another states. Everyone wants to stay in Helsinki because if you're used to live in the city, it is very difficult to you to live alone, especially if your family is not here. (Yousif26, 2015)*

Being isolated can be regarded by some as an even worse fate than living in war. One of the participants told about a friend of his who was transferred to the north of Finland with 24 hours' notice, with the consequence of him applying for a voluntary return back to Iraq:

*I told him, go there [to the north of Finland], see what [is] the situation there, and then you have [to] decide. If your life is real dangerous in Iraq so you don't need to go back because they moved you there [to the forest far away from a city]. He said yeah but I miss my daughters, my children, my wife. [I said] Yeah but if you go there, you're gonna die. (Noor 39, 2015)*

Besides preferring cities and not wanting to live in the more isolated parts of Finland, another common answer was that the place to live did not really matter, as long as there were opportunities for work and where also Finns themselves would live.

### 5.3 Social networks

In Finland, the question arises, how can the important social contacts be preserved with those still living in Iraq on one hand, and on the other hand, how the socio-cultural adaptation of the participants is proceeding in Finland in terms of making Finnish friends.

### 5.3.1 The role of social networks established in Iraq

In general, friendships and social contacts seem to be extremely highly valued in collectivist cultures, such as that of Iraq:

*I think that life without friends is nothing. You need to have friends. (Rooney 21, 2015)*

*Yes, and I have many friend[s in Iraq]. All night I see him [them]. All night I meet with him [them] and talk and enjoy. And that's past... For that I say many people [that are considered really important persons in my life]. I can't... [count them] Maybe 20? Yes. Because every place I have friend[s].. In work. In neighbour. In my student [circles]. Yes. Everywhere I have friends. (Samir 24, 2015)*

Moreover, the role of the extended family is of utmost importance: being part of a family can never be separated from the rest of one's being, family integrity being greatly valued (see also Al Wekhian 2015; Willems 2012, for similar results). According to the participants of this study, a person is always reflected in the context of the family to which one belongs. Consequently, each choice made has to be done thinking about the effect on the family as a unit. In the interviews it became clear that when something was happening to a member of the family, it was described to feel as if it was happening to the participants themselves:

*We think about our families, more than European or American people. --- When I heard something happen to my family, maybe I will... my heart will stop. It's really not [just saying], yes... And our health its changed [if I hear some bad news]. Yes, yes, yes. You can watch [see] from the face, he change. (Safaa 25, 2015)*

***The relationships... It's different between my country and here. I see that. Because, I think, when you born and continue my life, it's with my father and my mother, it's one family, it's one house. Yes. When I marry or something I can change my home and I go live with my wife, yes, but all time I am with my family. All [the] time. (Samir 24, 2015)***

In Iraq, it is common that children live with their parents even in their thirties. After getting married, it is common for the couple to live on the same property as the groom's parents, for instance in a space adjacent to his parents' house. Close family ties are seen as a richness and the positive effect that it has on the family's wellbeing is evident, in line with the results of Al Wekhian (2015). That Finnish children often move away from their parents at the age of eighteen was seen as strange and even unfortunate – a couple of participants were wondering how come Finns take such excellent care of their babies and children, and then, let them go at such a young age.

When an Iraqi person leaves, according to *Safaa*, he is not just thinking about himself, but the wellbeing of the entire family. The family in Iraq is often in constant in-

terplay with the person that migrated – usually the physically strongest is the one to undertake the journey and deal with the process. They live his journey, his wait, his uncertainty, his news and no news. Likewise, the one who's waiting for an asylum permit in a foreign country suffers the common news of loss and destruction of his family, which feels like an extended part of him. Especially the parents are considered as the most important source of social support:

*Without them [my family] --- I can't do anything. Always they are supporting me, especially my parents. (Yousif 26, 2015)*

Talking about their families was clearly emotionally moving. Even though the participants knew that it was impossible to bring their extended family to Finland, the longing of their family was tough to endure and the thought of seeing them again at some point in the future was the only thing that was said to bring comfort:

***Unfortunately the tough life that I've been living for a long time, have killed any hope, any dream that I have... the only thing that, I would like, let me be more comfortable... is to see my family here... and if death is paid for this, I don't mind to die the next day or even the same day, I don't mind. Just to see my family here, that's all. (Adnan 48, 2015)***

*I answer you about what I miss, just my family I, it's just my family. (Adam 30, 2015)*

*You can just write on google and you can see what are we facing [in Iraq]. I can't miss those days. I miss only my family. (Sara 2015)*

After reaching the country of destination, the internet was mentioned as a crucial tool for keeping contact with family and friends from the country of origin, a finding in line with previous studies (e.g. Hamel 2009). However, as it became clear from the interviews of this study, the physical presence of friends and family members cannot be replaced by any other form of contact: the phone and the internet, although useful for keeping contact, have their limits and might not be enough for keeping family ties as solid as sought after:

*I: Do you feel that you get support from them [the important persons in your life]?*

*No. I can't get support when... Only by phone.*

*I: Yeah. So you feel it's not working, kind of?*

*No, I should touch my mother and kiss her. (Sara 2015)*

### 5.3.2 Contacts with Finns

The participants of this study expressed great interest in making friendships with Finns, as the clear majority (96 %) found it important or extremely important to make Finnish friendships:

*Now I am in this country, in Finland country, I want to make relationships and I want friends and I want to join in this people. Now the big family is Finland, no Iraqi. My people, I want, because, you know. I don't complete my life without anyone. I want to talk, I want to go, I want to fun, I want to laugh, I want to, laughing, many things. (Adam 30, 2015)*

When asking why making Finnish friendships was found to be extremely important, the reasons were simply to connect with the people and to know the community and being able to introduce oneself as a part of the same community. Social contacts combined with work opportunities were seen as a key for happiness and successful integration. Living among Finns and, particularly, not living with others from the same cultural background or sharing the same language was a surprisingly common wish:

*I: Number of Iraqi contacts already living here?*

*None. I don't want. Really. You can write it. I don't want. --- I'm trying to be far as much as I can from people coming from my country. (Adnan 48, 2015)*

Many participants clearly wanted to make a difference between themselves and other, often less educated Iraqis, that they did not want to be parallelised with, while others simply thought that the compatriots reminded them too much of the unpleasant past in Iraq, which was desired to be forgotten. Thus, wanting to avoid contact with other Iraqis had more to do with the desire to get to know Finns instead:

*For me, doesn't matter [where I live], even in every single corner [wherever] in Finland, but sorry, except that I don't want to live with my people or Arabs. Sorry for that, but I need to be far away from the life that I spent. The rest of my life there. I suffered a lot, so this is the first reason that I came to Finland that I need to rebuild another life, far away. I need to know myself. (Ali 28, 2015)*

***I want [to] start [a] new life. Even in my language. I can't learn another language with the other Arab people. I'm now in my camp. Just kiitos I know. If I lived with the Finnish people, maybe I will learn more and more. Because all time we talk in Arabic language. And I can't learn from them the life, the Finnish life. --- I can't learn what they like, what they hate. What they are prefer. It's difficult. When I live with the Arab people. It's the same. It's small Iraq or small Syria. So what? It's the same. It's about this side. It's not that like I hate Arab people or they are make fighting.***

***I: It's just that it would be easier to integrate if you were with Finnish people? Yes. (Safaa 25, 2015)***

As mentioned earlier, seven participants had found their ways to live with Finnish families and they were happy about it, as it was seen as opening doors for new opportunities:

*Now I have some Finnish friends yes, for example, as I explain for you when we start talking, one Finnish guy, he give me his flat for two months without any rent or for any money, for free. Two months. I'm training [in] some organisation --- also, there I have friend. (Noor 39, 2015)*

Thus, Noor calculated having between four or five important Finnish contacts, while Sara had eight Finnish contacts that she considered being able to really count on. Sara was very happy about her Finnish family and thought that the relationship with Finns was very good. Besides having more important Finnish contacts, living with Finns also presented an excellent opportunity to learn the language better:

*I moved with this Finnish family, so, we have, like, every day we sit together for one hour and they teach us. (Sara 2015)*

In the eyes of the participants of this study, the experience about the quality of the contact with Finns in general was rated as good on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (very bad) to 5 (excellent). More precisely, the quality of the contact with Finns in the street was rated as an average 3.7 (of  $N = 19$ ), with staff at the reception centres 4.1 (of  $N = 18$ ), and the police 4.3 (of  $N = 18$ ). The volunteers at the reception centres got the highest rating 4.6 (of  $N = 19$ ) regarding the contact experiences with them, and their help and support was highly appreciated.

*I: Like how do you feel that you come along with Finnish people?  
I think excellent. Because Finnish people very honesty and respect anyone and if you tell anything... I think it is very excellent. (Adam 30, 2015)*

As the following quotations show, the general attitudes towards Finns of the participants who had established contact with them for example through living arrangements, like Sara, were positive, regardless of some sporadic negative experiences:

*I kind of love the people in here. Everyone I met was really nice. Of course we saw some bad things happening near our camp and people get angry, very easy near the camp. Because they know that this is camp. But most of [the] people I met they became my friends. And I think... yes, why not [stay permanently in Finland]? If I get really good job, why not? (Sara 2015)*

In this study, the importance of voluntary work became evident for creating social contacts, and those doing pro bono work stated having significantly more important contacts with natives: *Ali* calculated having 10 important Finnish contacts, *Isko* calculated having between 15–20 important Finnish contacts, *Omar* estimated them to be more than 20. Only some of the participants living with Finns came even a bit close to these numbers (i.e. 10 contacts in the case of *Hamed*, and 10–11 (or more) in the case of *Hayat*).

One of the participants, *Adam*, just could not handle being idle anymore after having spent one month doing nothing at the reception centre. Determined to find some help for his situation, looking for any work, even pro bono, he found a woman who took him to work at her restaurant. At the time of the interview, *Adam* had been working for a month in said restaurant, seven hours a day, five days a week, for free. Even if *Adam* did not receive any salary from the work that he was doing, he still regarded the work experience as valuable to him and reported feeling more satisfied with his life now than before he was working, not least because he counted having ten important Finnish contacts, thanks to the networks he developed in his workplace.

Work without pay is a complicated concept in the Finnish context, however in this situation it could be well justified. Apart from the free will of certain asylum seekers to do this, it is also a lot better to learn from mistakes while the stakes are not as high as when it comes to paid work. Furthermore, contacts established with Finns can prove to be extremely helpful in the future. Working before the official integration programme has begun is illegal, but doing this anyway and getting contacts or not working at all, and therefore, not getting these contacts, is a tough choice to make.

For the ones not living with Finns nor doing voluntary work, the average of important Finnish contacts (other than Finns who work with asylum seekers, e.g. authorities and reception centre staff) was between zero and one (mean 0.7), although sometimes this number included the interviewer or the lawyer of the participant:

*If you count a lawyer, you can say one. [Laughing] (Husham 27, 2015)*

*I: Number of Finnish contacts already living here?*

*None. I wish. (Adnan 48, 2015)*

*I don't have any relationship [with Finns]. (Moses 33, 2016)*

The importance for one's wellbeing of having Finnish contacts became clear even during the interviews: even if it was hard to recall and talk about the past in Iraq and the reasons for leaving, the participants communicated that they felt good just for being heard:

*Yes, but because of you, I say bad [satisfaction of life]. If you are not there, I say terrible [satisfaction of life]. Really, I'm saying the truth. Yeah, because you talk to me now. It's amazing. (Zaid 27, 2015)*

As the participants seemed to be of very social character, this perceived lack of contact with natives was considered unfortunate. Although highly appreciated by almost everybody, the interaction between Red Cross volunteers and reception centre staff while being a reception centre resident could not replace the sought after, less formal getting to know Finns as potential friends.

## 5.4 Perceived discrimination in Finland

According to several studies, discrimination is the biggest barrier to the acculturation process of immigrants despite of the country of origin (e.g. Eylem Gevrek, Gevrek & Gupta 2013; Montgomery & Foldspang 2008). The participants were asked if they had experienced discrimination (and if yes, how many times) in Finland. On average, the participants of this study had one experience of discrimination in Finland. The distribution between those interviewed was uneven, as some had several experiences, while half of the participants had no experiences of discrimination from Finnish people:

*I didn't see that there is racists.*

*I: You don't have any experiences of discrimination?*

*I hear that there is some kind of reaction from Finnish people about the asylum seekers, and some of them complained and they didn't accept this situation. But most of the Finnish people, they [are] welcoming refugees. (Hamed 57, 2016)*

*I saw, according [to] what I saw, I didn't see any person, any Finnish one, is a racist. Never. (Ali 28, 2015)*

A few sentences later, though, Ali did remember something that may be perceived as discrimination:

*I saw some people like in the bus they are looking at us, like. I don't know, such a kind of looks. But still a lot of good people here.*

*I: What kind of looks?*

*It's such a kind like from top to the toe, like that. You are refugee. You are stranger. I don't know. I felt that I'm such a kind of... I'm insulted: like I'm a killer, I'm coming to take their rights, I'm coming to take their money, I'm coming to make problems, to make a lot of things... They have the right to think in this way. (Ali 28, 2015)*

In his reasoning, it almost sounds like he is either in denial or trying to defend Finns:

*I don't have it [a racist experience]. I felt, I saw it but I don't want to analyse it that they are racist. Not at all. Maybe because they saw something new in their country. They don't have it before that. A lot of streams of refugees are coming, coming, coming. And, they are curious to give this kind of look. Maybe I was misunderstanding the look, but, not racist... (Ali 28, 2015)*

The other half of the participants had personally experienced discrimination, most of them in the streets and on public transport:

*When I tried to get the ratikka [tram], some woman came to me and shouted out about me.*

*I: In Finnish or English?*

*In English. You are asylum seeker, you're a rapist, and... Something like that. [Laughs] It's very awful experience. [Laughs] ---*

*Yeah. That's very bad feeling. (Husham 27, 2015)*

Obviously there should be zero tolerance for any kind of discrimination. However, the other half of the participants reported that they had been discriminated against in Finland. The experiences of being discriminated against that the participants had were, on the mildest spectrum (yet unacceptable), changing sides of the street (*Sara*). Then the next severe discrimination experiences were verbally violent attacks (*Husham; Noor; Isko*). The worst experiences, racist outbursts, were having bottles thrown at (*Saif; Hassan*) and attempts of hitting (*Noor*).

Of those who had experiences of being discriminated against, the clear majority had only one of these experiences, but even so, evaluated Finns in a positive manner. Surprisingly, even those three participants who had experienced discrimination four to five times (i.e. the maximum amount of discrimination experiences reported in this study) in Finland, also evaluated Finns in positive terms. Surprisingly, even the violent attacks were justified somewhat:

*Yesterday there was also [someone who had] drunk a lot, so we cannot just say racist or maybe because they are drunk and there was women, she would say very bad words in Finnish, because I know the bad words, and then she tried to hit me. Really! [Laughs]*

*I: I'm sorry. How many times has this happened to you?*

*For me?*

*I: From Finnish people towards you?*

*Bad words or the beating?*

*I: All of it.*

*Three four times, something like that.*

*I: What would be a general grade concerning the people in the street?*

*Three [i.e. "okay" on a scale from 1 (very bad) to 5 (excellent)]. (Noor 39, 2015)*

Several participants mentioned that they overlooked the sporadic experiences of discrimination, since the behaviour of the majority of Finns was perceived to be kind and helpful:

*I think it's very good people because I see everyone wants to help us. Just one exception about a Finnish person who were shouting at the asylum seekers "Why you come*

*to my country?" This happened behind the police station. But this does not change my thought. I know it's only one. (Samir 24, 2015)*

*But I cannot judge [them], because I have a lot of friend, Finnish, they are kind and friendly, I have my school, I have many friend, I meet people, as you are Finnish and very kind, and I have something in myself, I said, in all the world there is the good and there is the bad --- so if there is somebody bad, he is bad to himself, so I don't care, there is people the beautiful person, good person. (Isko 25, 2015)*

Looking for reasons behind the negative attitudes and the discrimination towards asylum seekers, also the behaviour of some Iraqi compatriots was emphasised. It was well known that some Iraqi asylum seekers currently residing in Finland were indeed troublemakers. The participants were afraid that those would ruin the reputation of all Iraqis with their bad behaviour and were very concerned about the negative media attention that some infamous Iraqis had managed to attract. This caused anxiety among some participants, as it was expected to have an effect on how the asylum seekers as a whole are being perceived:

*One person if they do wrong way, all the Finnish people, they look at all the refugees the same. (Omar 32, 2016)*

***I don't know, what is it [the attitudes of Finnish people towards asylum seekers], but I don't blame them whatever they're gonna react, you know, because of some of the refugees. Some of their behaviours, manners. I know there's so few, but these few people [are] gonna affect the rest. --- And we're gonna pay the price, all of us. (Hassan 22, 2015)***

A number of participants were eager to point out that they felt they were different from the majority of the (less educated) Iraqis, which proved to be a matter of concern:

*The most difficult thing will be to prove to the Finnish people: I am an Iraqi, I'm an Arabic, I am a Muslim. But I'm not like others. This is very difficult, and is one of the things that I like to do it, I need to prove to any person that I will know here that I am different than... others. Definitely there are others like me but, I know about myself. And this is something not easy to be done. As we talked, what Finnish people are seeing... the bad of refugees, bad of Iraqis, because since I'm not doing something wrong, Finnish people will not notice that. They will notice when someone is stealing, when someone is on the tram --- not paying, when someone is doing something bad, when someone is fighting. (Adnan 48, 2015)*

Furthermore, referring to some provoking headlines in the evening papers, the light in which asylum seekers were being presented was seen as unfortunate by the participants:

*There is some bad media, these people, and when they go to make [publish] it in tv or make it in the newspaper, they put [present] it in different, way [than the truth], they put different words [in somebody's mouth], he never said that thing, so it's really [a] shame. (Isko 25, 2016)*

Strikingly enough, the behavioural effects of the negative writings in the evening papers were felt immediately in the street, already the next day:

*I think Finnish people begun to... I'm sorry about saying that, but the Finnish people begun to [be] afraid from the Arab people. I saw that in the street when someone see the Arabic guy coming, he take a[nother] side...*

*I: Change the side of the street?*

*Yeah, yeah. Most of them begun to [be] afraid from that [what is written in the newspapers]. That[s] because of the bad people who came here. So I think those kind of people don't deserve to be here. (Rooney 21, 2015)*

*Some people just look [at] your skin colour and then they decide to cross [the street] and continue from the other side. And this has happened to me like twice or three times. (Sara 2015)*

*I think at the beginning everyone, most of people were supporter. But now I think the percentage came down. And maybe it's half by half or something.*

*I: By half? So now it's like half and half?*

*Maybe sixty and forty. Sixty supporter and forty not-supporter.*

*I: And when you came you felt it was totally different?*

*Yeah. I have felt it was, like, ninety to ten. (Sara 2015)*

The long-term effects of being discriminated against can lead to difficulties in psychological and socio-cultural adaptation (Montgomery & Foldspang 2008), and even alienation from society (Rumbaut 2008). A couple of participants pointed out that the uneducated Iraqis were running the risk of becoming radicalised, in the case that they were being left outside of the society in Finland. Ignorant people can be easy prey for radicalistic groups, as insufficient knowledge undoubtedly makes one more vulnerable to external influence. When this happens, it tends to end up in the headlines, creating a vicious circle regarding the reputation of the fellow countrymen and, as discussed above, the attitudes towards the entire group.

*[I come from a] Well-educated family. And this point is very important because many, many people and, in Iraq, not have any education. And if you want to do anything in this people that is very, very easy because don't have anything, don't have back-*

ground [knowledge]. --- If I don't have any education and I don't know anything, I don't read any book, I don't have any background about anything. If you want to make me anything [from me], that's very, very easy. But now, if you tell me anything, I know what you say because I have background about, you know now? But many people don't have any background about anything. You can make anything about [them], you can make killers or anything.

I: I understand.

Now, this point I told [to] many... This point [is] very important. (Adam 30, 2015)

It is clear that more efforts should be made in educating the newcomers regarding Finnish laws and manners, as giving tools for integration into society is of utmost importance in order to minimise radicalistic behaviour. It seems that many people resist change and are afraid of foreigners. However, if only for the sake of preventing radicalistic behaviour, including newcomers in society and keeping racism at bay benefits all. The participants of this study were noble enough to overlook the discrimination they had experienced by some Finns towards them, but it is foolhardy to expect that future immigrants do the same. Can we afford to just sit back and wait to see how long this patience and understanding will last?

## 5.5 Economic challenges faced in Finland

Apart from the challenges presented before, many of the participants are also facing unprecedented economic challenges in Finland, which will be described in more detail next.

### 5.5.1 Drop in the standard of living in Finland

There has been much writing in the media about e.g. the iPhones and smart clothes of the asylum seekers. It is a general misconception that asylum seekers are, or should be, poor. These kinds of preconceptions are surprising for many newcomers. The following quotation is an example of this, from an encounter when a Finnish man stopped Sara in the street to ask her for her reasons to come:

*"Then why you come [if not for the free money]"? I said: "We came, because we have war, [that's] why we came". And he was angry, and he was mentioning phone. I said: "We are not poor. Maybe I am poor now. But we are not poor". Iraq is very cheap; you can buy anything you want. We came, because we have war. If we don't have war, no one would like to leave his own bedroom, house, kitchen, living room, anything you have that has a value to you. Then he just went. (Sara 2015)*

As a matter of fact, it seems that this particular, privileged, group of Iraqis were mostly used to a higher standard of living in Iraq:

*And we are not very poor --- because everyone had more money and more cars, more... everything we had. (Sara 2015)*

One participant told that he had had such a good level of income in Iraq, that he was in fact accustomed to regularly helping others in Iraq financially, even strangers. Among others, also in his case it has been a challenge adjusting to receiving help instead of giving it:

*Yeah. I tell you, my level life, in Iraq, thanks for God it's [was] good, I not need anyone to help, but people who need me, people come and they need me [to] help them. (Omar 32, 2016)*

As the following quotes reveal, many participants had had a significant decline in their economic standard of living after leaving Iraq. In some cases, like with *Sara*, the quality of life had dropped from excellent to bad in a matter of weeks. Also other participants reported similar situations:

*Actually, in Iraq, we have a bad situation, but we have a big house, we have a lot of money, everyone have his own car... (Mariam 2016)*

In the interviews the participants were also asked whether they were expecting to make more or less money in Finland than in Iraq. Half of the participants (of  $N = 18$ ) who answered the question seemed to be quite sure that it would be difficult, if not impossible, to relatively reach the same level of income that they had been used to in Iraq:

*No. No, no.*

*I: Why? Why not?*

*Because now in, I heard, because I have 3 month [that I have to wait for my work permission], just, but in Iraq, if I work in two company, have big salary. 2 million in my country. ---*

*[I had] Two jobs...*

*I: Did you get 1 600 dollars in total?*

*Total, yeah.*

*I: Okay.*

*But in my country, this is a big salary. (Adam 30, 2015)*

*No. [I don't think I could make as much money in Finland as I did in Iraq].*

*I: Why not?*

*Because in Iraq there is a money, you can find money there, but you cannot find any safe[ty]. It's easy to get money there.*

*And here you think it's not easy?*

*No, it's not easy. The tax systems and like that, and the life is so expensive also. But I think I can get good life. (Noor 39, 2015)*

*I think [I would make less money in Finland] because Iraq don't have tax, in Iraq you can get money as much as you can. So if you can get a lot of money, you can get that. So there's no limit for having money in Iraq. (Rooney 21, 2015)*

The standard of living in Finland is without a doubt higher than that of Iraq. If allowed to stay in Finland and work here, 17 per cent estimated earning equally as much here as in Iraq. However, 33 per cent of the participants thought that it would be possible to make more money in Finland than in Iraq:

*Maybe more? You know why, because in this time, I have the good environment, that's why. If I really have the skills, maybe I will get a good job and having good money in this age. In that time when I was in Iraq I was more about studying, and working a small job. But now I have gained many things, so maybe it'll be more than [in] Iraq. (Yousif 26, 2015)*

*You need to choose a tough life [work hard] in order to make it. I can have a good life here. I will not be a king of Finland, but I can have a good life, an acceptable life. So that's why it's more [money in Finland] than in Iraq. (Adnan 48, 2015)*

For some it was a tough question to answer, as it seemed to be a question that had not been given a lot of thought beforehand:

*I don't very sure about that, because I used to make a very good income in Iraq, so I don't know. (Husham 27, 2015)*

*As a matter of fact, I didn't think about that. Most important is working, and then of course everyone wants some money covering his life and so on. But I'm not thinking that I will be a millionaire of course. (Yassen 56, 2015)*

### 5.5.2 “Instead of giving us reception allowance, let us work!”

In Finland, the people are taken care of during hard times, for example during sickness or unemployment. The concept of the welfare state, such as we know it in the Nordic countries, does not, however, exist in Iraq, and the Iraqis are definitely not used to receiving anything without working:

*We are not getting anything from the government. Never. Never. (Ali 28, 2015)*

The subject of reception allowance received by the asylum seekers has gained a lot of media attention and causes mixed feelings among Finns. The actual amount received per asylum seeker is 92.30 euros a month in reception centres where food is provided, and 314.91 euros a month in reception centres that are not providing meals, as well as for asylum seekers living outside of the reception centres (Finnish Immigration Service 2016d):

*A man asked me also: "Why you came here? I say: "What do you think"? – "I think you came because of money, or just Europe. or"... I said: "Believe me, this 92 € [a month] is nothing. And even we can't buy chocolate or chips for one month with those money". (Sara 2015)*

Whatever reasons may have brought an asylum seeker to Finland, upon arrival they are not allowed to work and are instead offered reception allowance. In theory, having a certificate of identity from Iraq makes it possible to work after being registered in Finland for three months. In the many cases of denizen asylum seekers, i.e. persons whose certificates of identity are missing, a waiting period of six months is required until the asylum seeker can legally even start to look for work. In practice, the waiting time can be much longer, as a passport is needed in order to open a bank account in Finland. However, for those who came to Finland without a passport, getting a certificate of identity can take a long time. In the meantime, accepting the reception allowance caused a lot of mixed feelings among the participants: they felt grateful, but at the same time they felt bad about receiving money without doing anything in return. In the light of these interviews, it seems that receiving reception allowance takes a heavy toll on the participants' self-esteem, is passivising, and is only serving a purpose for those who are unable to work:

*I don't want those people [to] give me money, I want a job. I don't want someone giving me... I want [to] get money, I want [to] work and get money. So I don't know until when they will allow me to get [a] job.--- (Zaid 27, 2015)*

Some participants reported that among those asylum seekers who have come to Finland, some were not in real danger and were in fact economic migrants, coming to Finland only for the better working possibilities and higher standard of living. Without a doubt, this phenomenon exists and is a reason for some to leave their countries. However, the participants of this study did not seem to fit the profile of economic migrants nor welfare migrants coming to Finland only to live on social benefits as, after being accustomed to living on a good income in Iraq, this does not seem to be a logical reason to have left Iraq. The situation of suddenly living on reception allowance instead of a salary and being a receiver of help can, understandably, be an awkward situation.

However, even if the reception allowance is not a lot to live on in Finland, many participants expressed their gratitude for it:

*Any is good. [I am] Satisfied. --- Everything here is good, as long as I'm not in Iraq. (Hassan 22, 2015)*

*Awesome, yeah. We can manage ourselves. (Ali 28, 2015)*

Gratefulness aside, it was reported that the reception allowance simply was not enough to live on and, thus, the quality of life at the moment was considered as poor. In addition, it was seemingly difficult for the participants to understand why the option of working for the money received was not being offered to them – this being also a question about honour:

*[Laughs (for the question of perceived quality of life in Finland)] Like, so poor.*

*I: Very bad?*

*Yes, because, ok, the government try to give us some supporting money, but I think it's not enough, because Finland is very expensive country, and I always ask them: "Please don't give me supporting money, find any kind of work for me. Any kind of work." Because I don't just like getting money from government without doing anything. I hate the situation. It looks like someone... I don't know it in English...*

*I: Begging?*

*Like begging money! I don't like. I hate it. But sometimes we are forced to do that. (Noor 39, 2015)*

What these participants clearly wanted was finding a stable place to start anew and work their way to be a part of the Finnish society:

***We don't come here to be, like, heavy things to this community. We want to be some kind of protective [productive] part of this society. I want to be productive, not heavy, just took salaries and spend moneys, and... That's what I'll be. (Hamed 57, 2016)***

As mentioned above, those Iraqis of this study that are not born rich are not used to an easy life and are not used to not working. However, since they are not allowed to work in Finland upon arrival, the reception allowance may be the only option for them to make ends meet. This is how the participants described the practical process of receiving the reception allowance:

*So easy, not any problems okay. So, so easy. (Omar 32, 2016)*

*You get a post that you will get your salary on this day, and you have to go to the bank on this day, and that's all.*

*I: And it's easy?*

*Yeah, no problem. (Adnan 48, 2015)*

Remarkably, the source of the support money had not been communicated to any of them. Random guesses varied from the Red Cross, the UN and the church:

*I think from Red Cross maybe? (Omar 32, 2016)*

*I: Do you know where does this money come from?*

*Finnish people? Not know. I'm guessing. I'd like to be part of this. I'd like to be the person paying, but at the same time, I'd like to be paying for the people who deserve. (Adnan 48, 2015)*

Through the new information received in the interviews, the participants understood how receiving the reception allowance most likely has affected the attitudes of Finns towards asylum seekers. When they found out that the allowance is, in fact, redistributed from taxation, these were some typical reactions:

*So, it has nothing to do with UN --- ?*

*I: No.*

*Now I know, how they [Finns] feel!*

*I: Well, now that you know where it comes from, how does it make you feel?*

*I realise some people can be angry a little bit. (Sara 2015)*

*Because [of] that [the reception allowance] many people hate [asylum seekers] [Laughing]. Yes because he [Finns] work and he pay to government and government pay money and ok, about my business [costs of living]. (Safaa 25, 2015)*

Taking into account the fact that the reception allowance is redistributed from tax funds, and this is thus likely to play a substantial role in the creation of negative attitudes among Finnish taxpayers towards asylum seekers, it is bewildering that this information is not being communicated to all asylum seekers upon arrival:

***I feel sorry for these people [the taxpayers], because they are not responsible. Why should they pay? I wish that the Finnish system changed. Let us go and do something, to gain this money. Take some groups, "Come on, we will do this, we will go and clean this building today." So, like, why should Finnish people pay? No, no, I want to do something, to get this money. (Adnan 48, 2015)***

*Oh, so that's why it would be really tough for the Finnish people if it is coming from there [tax money]. So I think the government should not put too much pressure on the Finnish people. (Yousif 26, 2015)*

*I feel guilt. I start to love Finnish people again and again, every day I love them more because of the shocks that I got it every day [like knowing where the reception allowance comes from]. So, we appreciate, total appreciate. We are speechless in such a kind of situation in front of us. Words are not descriptive. (Ali 28, 2015)*

Knowing where the money is coming from commonly made the participants feel an urge to start working immediately, to contribute to the society as taxpayers instead of being social benefit receivers:

*For that reason I think you have too much to pay to [the] government, so no... I think it's very difficult, so I want to get this permission to work... To help Finnish people, that's too much money they should to pay for us. (Mariam 2016)*

Also, Finns would benefit from knowing that receiving the reception allowance is oftentimes the only choice to survive economically, even if the asylum seekers would prefer to work:

*I: Why does it feel bad [to receive the reception allowance]?  
Because the people here, the Finnish people said, the money you take from our job, from us, actually I don't like it because we are hurt, it's like hurting someone else, who, he has nothing to do with this, but. I wish there is another option, but...  
(Mustafa 24, 2015)*

*I feel, I eat from Finnish people food. Yeah... I feel... bad, yes, actually... And, because of that, I want work, actually, to get my money, not from another person. Maybe he need that money, for his children. (Safaa 25, 2015)*

On a positive note, even if the reception allowance might be a necessary form of support during the waiting time, it was seen as a temporary solution:

*I don't want to depend on just social payment. It's not very good to me. It's good to make my life going, but it's not my goal to stay on social services. Yeah, I think it's bad idea. My feeling is this is a temporary situation for me, so... Yeah, like that. I have to take it, but not always. It's not feeling good to take this money. (Husham 27, 2015)*

*I think it's [an] emergency situation. When we get the work, I think we won't need that money. (Rooney 21, 2015)*

*I have to feel respect for every person live in Finland, even if you working or not working. Because I take this money from you, they working and give me this money. I know that. Then it is not good for me to stay there [on social support] I have to learn language and I have to work. (Moses 33, 2016)*

Furthermore, it was very common to want to return the favour for receiving housing, food and reception allowance in the form of paying taxes:

*Now I think this [is] my country and this [is] my place, [that] give me the food and water and save [safety]. I want to work and to help this place because [it] help me and give me anything [everything]. (Adam 30, 2015)*

*I don't like [to] just get supporting money. Asking or begging money, I don't like that. Because, the government, when they accept me [in] this country, they make [a] favour for me. So I wanna return the favour. --- It's very important for me to find any kind of job now until I learn the language very good and then I will try to find the best work for me. (Noor 39, 2015)*

*You know what I was thinking, when I get job, I will collect all this money that these people give me and I will give [it] back. I don't like... Some people laugh on me, some friends. You saw some people there. They said, "What's wrong with you? Take some money and go." I said, "Not all your fingers [are the] same, I'm not like you guys." (Zaid 27, 2015)*


## 5.6 Acculturation attitudes

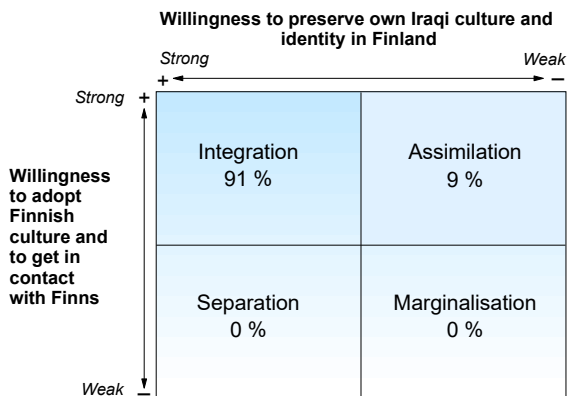
All factors described above have been linked to the advancement of the acculturation process. As presented in the theory chapter of this study, the attitudes of the immigrants differ regarding how much they want to maintain their own cultural habits in the new country and to what extent they consider it important to adopt the culture of the new country. These so-called acculturation attitudes will be discussed next.

The acculturation attitudes can be perceived through three different components: affective, behavioural, and cognitive components (the so-called ABC-model of acculturation, Ward et al. 2001). In this study, however, only the behavioural component of these attitudes was assessed by asking the participants to rate on a four-point scale their attitudes towards two dimensions of the acculturation process as defined by Berry (1997): the willingness to maintain the own heritage culture in the new country, and the willingness to adopt the Finnish culture and to get in contact with Finns. Within Berry's model, these two dimensions intersect to create four acculturation attitudes: integration, assimilation, separation and marginalisation (Berry 1997). In this study, the questions were directed to examine attitudes towards maintaining the participants' Iraqi way of living in Finland (e.g. how important the participants considered maintaining their Iraqi values and belief systems, language, and eating Iraqi food in Finland).

On the other hand, they were asked how motivated they were towards adopting the Finnish culture and its habits (e.g. studying Finnish history and traditions, learning the Finnish language and taking part in Finnish cultural events). Using the midpoint on the range of scores as cut points (e.g. Coatsworth et al. 2005), the participants were categorised into the forementioned categories as presented in Figure 3.

As discussed in the theory chapter, the integration acculturation attitude has often been related to the best adaptation outcomes across different countries and cultures when assessed, for instance, by using long-term health and wellbeing indicators among immigrants (e.g. Berry 1997; Berry et al. 2006; Schmitz 1992, p. 368; see also Berry & Sam 1997 for a summary). The participants of this study seem to be very motivated to merge their values, customs and behaviour to fit Finnish standards. In line with previous studies (e.g. Berry et al. 2006; Sam & Berry 2006), at the time of the interviews, the clear majority, 20 of 22 participants, belonged to the integration category (Figure 3). This means that almost all the participants want to both maintain their own cultural habits and also adopt the Finnish culture.

 **Figure 3.** Acculturation attitudes of the asylum seekers studied (N=22) (adapted from Berry 1997).



This is what the participants adhering to the integration attitude thought about the importance of learning about Finnish culture:

***I’m trying to get into Finnish people, I would love to know the Finnish people and getting more closer to know your culture and everything. I should, everyone who come to Finland should do this. (Mustafa 24, 2015)***

*I want [to] change my life. I want [to] live, actually. I want [to] live. I want to feel I’m now in another country. I must respect, I must learn from them. I must... even the language, learn the language. It’s about everything. So I prefer to be inside the Finnish community. (Safaa 25, 2015)*

By being open both to the culture of the country of origin as well as to the culture of the new country, immigrants can pick the best out of both cultures into their lives. This approach reduces the impact of a possible culture shock (Oberg 1960), which is more likely to occur if the own cultural background is not being cherished at all.

*When you are on a tram without a ticket. What makes you buy the ticket [in Finland] is the law, not the religion. I want to bring what the religion tells me, and match it with the law here in Finland, and go on with my way. (Adnan 48, 2015)*

*I have to bring some of the things from Iraq. --- But at the same time - if I was in a time hitting my son there, I want to stop here, because, I feel, hitting is not the solution. I can talk with my son. But at the same time, I have to pick some of the things that I used to do, there, like for example, staring at my son, to let him feel that I'm very angry at him. But, I won't continue hitting him. Cause this should stop. This is the right thing to be done. So this is the combination that I'm talking about: taking the good things from there, and, continue with your life. (Adnan 48, 2015)*

Two of the participants were placed in the assimilation category, projecting their preferences for letting go of their original culture and, instead, adopting the Finnish one:

*I: How important is it for you to keep your old values and belief systems here in Finland?*

*--- Not important at all, okay, because this is my life.--- not important, because I want to start my new life here, and contact and building my life here.*

*I: Okay, and what about the [Iraqi] food?*

*Not important.*

*I: Okay, And religious manners?*

*Not important.*

*I: And speaking your language?*

*Not important too. (Adam 30, 2015)*

Even though the assimilation acculturation attitude of the immigrants is often preferred and even expected by the host country nationals, for example, in their recent study Nakash et al. found that the preference for the assimilation attitude (abandoning one's own culture) had negative effects on asylum seekers' mental health (Nakash et al. 2015).

None of the participants was found to adhere to marginalisation nor separation attitudes, both of which previous research has reported being related to the worst adaptation outcomes (Berry & Sam 1997). In fact, towards those not willing to adapt to the Finnish society, the participants expressed little understanding:

*I still wonder: Some people, refugees, they are complaining here. Why complaining? You came to this country. You have to respect their rules. You have to. Why you came here then if you don't like such rules? (Hassan 22, 2015)*

*Go back [if you don't like the Finnish rules]. (Ali 28, 2015)*

Upon discussing what kind of behaviour the participants thought was expected from them by Finns, the following kinds of reflections emerged:

*The first thing [is] that you have to behave properly, kindly and politely, then you will get everything. It's everywhere in the world, by the way. (Ali 28, 2015)*

*I think they want us to do jobs, to pay taxes, to respect their habit, to not just sit down and take their taxes for our [us]. (Saif 29, 2015)*

## 6 PART III: A FUTURE IN FINLAND?

In this third and last the results chapter, the participants' expectations regarding life in general, as well as education and work in particular in Finland are presented. Then, the results related to the motivational factors of the newcomers, when it comes to studying and working in Finland, are discussed. Lastly, some possible challenges when entering the Finnish labour market are presented in section 6.2.2 and some messages from the participants are included at the end of this chapter.

### 6.1 Expectations of life in Finland

As discussed in the theory chapter of this study, the (un)met expectations have been linked to immigrant adaptation to a new country in numerous studies: the more accurate the expectations, the better the adaptation. Also surpassed expectations enhance adaptation, whereas unmet expectations may have negative adaptation outcomes (e.g. Black et al. 1991; Black & Gregersen 1990; Martin et al. 1995). In the following, the participants' expectations of life in Finland in general will be discussed. After that, the focus will shift towards the expectations concerning education and work.

#### 6.1.1 Expectations of life after receiving permission to stay

Firstly, what all of the participants were anxious to get was, naturally, an answer from the migration authorities regarding their request for international protection. In case that the answer would be positive, all but two participants stated that they would like to stay in Finland permanently, hoping to start a new chapter in their lives:

***[I want] Just respect and [a] safe life. Making [a] new life here. You know, I want [to] start my life, like we say in our language, "from zero". First thing, discuss it with those people, immigration and police. Then I start school to learn Finnish, then I hope if I find a good girl for me, and start normal life, like [any] other person. And in my way, and Finnish way, I will mix [merge these lifestyles], you know. --- And this is what I want to do. (Zaid 27, 2015)***

Among those stating that they would like to stay permanently, the perceived difficulties for adjusting to life in Finland was usually connected to learning the language and finding work.

Otherwise, the participants seemed to feel confident about adapting to the Finnish way of life:

*I don't think I will face any difficult[ies] if I have the permit to stay here. Because I have a dream, I can get it. (Rooney 21, 2015)*

*I think everything will be easy. I should work hard to learn [the] language or something. (Mariam 2016)*

*I: What do you think would be the most difficult thing for you to get adjusted to your life here?*

*I don't think there is something difficult, because I faced the most difficult challenge in my life before, that's why everything here will be easier than what I have faced before. (Yousif 26, 2015)*

Besides learning the Finnish language, only a few challenges regarding adaption were identified. For example, something that not only asylum seekers, but many other foreigners too, find to be quite shocking in Finland, are the drunk people that show up especially late at night in the weekends and during certain holidays. Also, concerning the expectation of adjusting to Finland, how well one feels being received by Finns is another factor identified also in this study to have an effect on the integration process.

The migration aspirations of two of the participants can be described in terms of a phenomenon called *circular migration*, where the entrance into Europe is made through peripheral countries such as Finland, with the plan to continue towards the intended country of destination regardless of being granted asylum in Finland. One of them, *Ali*, wanted to be a famous journalist or actor and the other one, *Hassan*, wanted to study medicine to be a doctor. While in fact planning to move to another country to later be reunited with his girlfriend, *Hassan* still has plans also regarding Finland, sounding almost as if he were here to stay:

*I'm thinking about this [continuing my studies] every single day when I'm waiting for the [decision for international protection], you know... I can't wait to just go back to university and study here, as a doctor and this is what I'm looking for. The best career I'm looking for. Again, I wanna add another thing. I like to be a game developer. This is one of the reasons why I came here. (Hassan 22, 2015)*

It seems that the Finnish way of thinking about the future in terms of making long-term goals is very different in comparison with that of the Iraqi culture, as reported also by Hofstede (1991). Asking the participants to imagine life five years ahead was a tough question to answer for most, since they could often not even imagine how their lives would look like in a couple of months or even the next day. Hence, for most of the participants, thinking about possible future outcomes seemed to be difficult and many participants did not have an idea of what to do in case they were not granted asylum in Finland, a finding in line with Brekke (2004):

*I have [had] a lot of dreams that crushed, so I don't want to dream. --- I hate dreams. Dreams is just fiction. I need something real. I need to go to school or enter the uni-*

*versity. --- My life have a very, lots of bad luck, so, I don't have goals. I just let it go. (Saif 29, 2015)*

The few participants of the study that had a Plan B were considering Turkey as another option. One had a friend who owned a hostel in Istanbul and the other one was thinking about going to Turkey in case not feeling well received by Finns:

*I can't live in some place and all people hate me. It's difficult to contact. Maybe I will go to Turkey because I can't return back. (Safaa 25, 2015)*

Of the participants, 37 per cent (of  $N = 19$ ) hoped that they could visit Iraq sometime in the future. According to the majority (53 per cent) of the participants, on the other hand, the only thing that was clear when thinking about the future was that they never wanted to go back to the lives they had left behind. For them, returning to Iraq was not an option:

*I: What if you don't get asylum?*

*I think about this too much. I don't know. But I'll told that police guy, I will not go back to Iraq. I don't think that. There's no choice, I can't go back to Iraq.*

*I: What if the situation would get better in Iraq?*

*The situation maybe will be better, but... my situation will not be better, because I'm not [a] believe[r] in Allah]. So.. I don't want to go back.*

*I: Not even to visit?*

*No. Nothing to visit there. (Zaid 27, 2015)*

*I hate Iraq, because of what they gave me, a lot of things. I don't want to go on, but I lost a lot of things. Even the hope, even the motivation to do, even the motivation to go to my work and to kiss my mother or my girlfriend, for example. I'm talking frankly. I hated the situation. I have all the bad memories. [Even] If they will kill me, I will not go back to my country. (Ali 28, 2015)*

*I: Do you have any other country in mind?*

*Any other country, but not Iraq. Never.*

*I: Not even to visit?*

*Never. (Adnan 48, 2015)*

For those wanting to forget the past but at the same time not wanting to make plans for the future, the situation leaves no option other than waiting for the decision about their request for international protection. According to *Zaid* and *Ali*, if they are not allowed to stay in Finland, they would rather die than return to Iraq.

## 6.1.2 Expectations regarding education and work in Finland

The spectacular reputation of the Finnish education system was one of the main pull factors for choosing Finland as the country to seek asylum. As expected, the older participants were less interested in studying than the younger participants and more interested in finding work in their field, although they did want to learn Finnish. All of the older participants had more than 12 years of education and one of them had a Bachelor's degree. Working as a way of living was seen as something indispensable and, consequently, being left without work was considered as a pitiful destiny, as stated in Part I of the results of this study. Regarding the motivation to study, for the younger participants, both the Finnish language and continuing to study in their respective fields was prominent throughout the interviews. This was the case regardless of whether the participants had not finished high school, had initiated studies in the university, or started in the PhD programme:

*I want to continue studying. I want continue my Finnish studying, I want to read books more and more. I want to learn as much as possible. (Saif 29, 2015)*

As became clear from the previous chapters, wanting to stay was obvious among the great majority of these participants; however, the prerequisite for living at a certain place – be it within Finland or somewhere else – was found to be strongly connected to work opportunities:

***Number one: [my staying in Finland] it depends on getting work here, because I'm not the kind of man who likes to sit at home doing nothing. So this is number one for me. Because I need to feel that I'm doing something. So, yes, but the thing that let me think to move to another country, will be searching for work. That's the only point. (Adnan 48, 2015)***

For the majority of the participants it seemed that finding work was sought after. For some, like *Zaid*, finding work seemed to be taken for granted. Upon coming to Finland *Zaid* had already spent most of his life outside Iraq and felt determined that he could start a new life in Finland working, as he had done before:

*I know I will get [a] job. I will try my best, I will get [a] job. Then I will save money. Then I will [do] whatever I want. What I need, sorry. And this is what I do [did] in [last country where I lived], and I will do the same here. (Zaid 27, 2015)*

On the contrary, on some participants it had dawned that finding work might actually prove to be the biggest challenge in adjusting to life in Finland, especially at an older age, like in the case of *Yassen*. He was afraid that he wouldn't get hired because of his age, which was a worrying thought:

*A person without working, it's very terrible to live without working. In any case, I have some thoughts, some ideas [regarding work], but of course working [is my goal]. (Yassen 56, 2015)*

Once again, the attitude was that if a certain type of job would be difficult to find, it wouldn't be a problem to shift the orientation towards another kind of profession by studying more or opening an own business:

***Actually the first [thing] I need to [do is] get any kind of job. [Laughs] Any kind. Just to stop taking supporting money from the government. And then I'm thinking to open my own business. Yeah. Like [a] restaurant because I have also some experience with the food things. And my wife also she's a very good cooker. I think when I bring her then we can save some money and then we can open our own restaurant. I'm thinking about that. Or supermarket. Like Arabic supermarket or Arabic cafeteria so we can serve some Arabic desserts with Arabic drinks. (Noor 39, 2015)***

*Now my education [is about] mathematic sciences, but if I don't have [a] chance about this type [to get employed in an equivalent profession], I can to change another... and I have many favourite works. Cooking or do anything or learn a new work. (Adam 30, 2015)*

Given that the participants would be able to choose whatever work they ever wanted, what they would prefer to do were the following: be an accountant, be a doctor or a game developer, work as a journalist, be a teacher and work on a big ship to sail all over the world. Other fields of interest were, among others, IT, mechanical work and mechanical engineering. Some participants were dreaming about becoming entrepreneurs in Finland: owning a barbershop, a beauty centre, a company for fixing computers and having an Arabic restaurant or a supermarket. In quite a few cases, the dream job of the participant was coherent with their current profession:

*Definitely [work] as an electrician. It's not only something that I'm good in, it's also something that I like and love. I've been working as an electrician and, as much as I find difficulties and big problems, I'm more happy. I'm not satisfied with easy problems. Things, that let me use my mind and brain to solve the problem, even if it tooks me two or three days, I'm more happy than solving a problem in 1/2 an hour. (Adnan 48, 2015)*

One of the participant's dream job was to continue to make research, although changing focus towards topics related to refugees:

*Helping the society, the Finnish society, and helping the refugees together to solve all of these challenge[s] that the Finnish society and government are facing with the refugee[s], doing my best to make everything going smoothly and people, [so that] the*

*refugee people live in a nice way with the Finnish people, and this is [a] very good target. (Yousif 26, 2015)*

For some, the options seemed almost endless:

*I can work in the field of designing clothes for women and men. Even we can talk about decoration for houses and rooms with colours, even with furniture. And, of course food. This is my favourite place. The kitchen. I love it so much. It's just like in my blood. Teaching. It's the best skill that I have. I love the way of teaching, not just like teaching, no. I have a lot of methods, how to teach for example children and adults. Communication is one of the skills that I have. (Ali 28, 2015)*

Another participant was planning to continue his voluntary work in helping asylum seekers find places to live with Finns, as well as helping elders in Finland – among the other plans:

*We go to the like old people house, we help them in the house because they are old and need help.*

*I: So you're already doing this?*

*Yeah we're doing this also and when I get my asylum certificate, I would like to make my own restaurant. --- So my future plan, I continue my study, I open my restaurant, I make nice Arabic food and nice Arabic sweet and these Finnish people come in my restaurant and they enjoy it and they eat nice food. (Isko 25, 2016)*

Considering the different options that were mentioned as dream jobs among the participants, in Finland there actually is a need at least for doctors, teachers, and construction workers at the moment (Occupational Barometer 2016). Given that entrepreneurship would be encouraged, for example by minimising bureaucracy, also Iraqi restaurants could be a success.

## 6.2 Work motivation, premises and challenges

Days tend to feel endless when spent at the reception centres. Sleeping – when possible – and eating as the only activities of the day were said to be a life difficult to get used to. Instead, the participants were dreaming of finding work, and they seemed to be ready to accept any kind of work for a start. The working premises for immigrants, however, are not as good as for the native population. Challenges regarding employment and problems related to different working cultures will be further discussed before the concluding chapter.

## 6.2.1 Work motivation

Without any exception, all of the participants were anxious to find work. The expressed readiness to work was evident and, for many, work equals purpose in life:

***I love the work. I want to work. Yes. I want to make me something for myself.***  
(Hayat 2016)

*I can't imagine my life without a job, when you work, you feel like your life is not going waste, it's really important. (Mustafa 24, 2015)*

*I used to live on my own money that I take it from my job in Iraq. So I never take money from anyone. So I think it's very important for me to get a job. (Rooney 21, 2015)*

*As a person I feel I'm nothing without work. I need to feel that I'm doing something.*  
(Adnan 48, 2015)

*For me it is very important to have a job. And for me it is not all about money, it is about making something to society, having a role in the society, and doing something positive. You feel like you have a value if you are working. If you are just at home, you feel like, you are not feeling that you have a big value for the society. That's why for me it's very important to have a job and work. (Yousif 26, 2015)*

The focus on finding employment and the motivation to work hard to reach that goal was impressively strong, no matter the obstacles:

*I: How much are you ready to work for these plans?*

*It's my only future plan.*

*I: Okay, so you're ready to do whatever it takes or...?*

*Yeah. And I know the obstacles about that, and I think I can manage that.*

*(Husham 27, 2015)*

Ideally, the participants wanted to work in their own fields, but the general attitude was that any work, even voluntary or pro bono work, would be fine to start with:

*Right now, in my situation, I will accept anything. But in the future of course, I will improve it. But now, these months, I will do anything.*

*I: How much are you ready to work for reaching these goals?*

*I'm ready to do whatever it takes.*

*I: What kind of job could you start immediately?*

*Any job.*

*I: What kind of other jobs could you consider doing?*

*Any job. (Zaid 27, 2015)*

Even for professionals that had been earning a good living in Iraq, as in the case of *Mustafa* (an IT engineer), the predisposition to work even outside of their own field was common:

*I will take any job in front of me. (Mustafa 24, 2015)*

Even if the participants were ready to start with almost any job, naturally they were, at the same time, dreaming about either studying more and/or eventually finding work in their own field:

***Well, I want to study. But if I couldn't maybe I'll start to work [on] anything I get. But I am more talented on, I think, on sales, or managing papers and making things ready. --- My maximum would be, like, twelve hours [a day]. --- I am ready to work hard. (Sara 2015)***

However, some participants were afraid that their abilities would go to waste unless attention was being paid to recognise them:

*We have very clever people to work. --- So, when they think about refugee --- because everyone I talked with here was just, yeah, everyone need to start the cleaning. I said, I don't mind to start the cleaning, but make some examinations. Because I know, we have very intelligent, clever engineers here. Oil engineers, and some engineers, and I think they [Finnish society] can get benefit of those people. (Sara 2015)*

*Especially for me as a person I told you I have all the skills to do many things. You just put me in a place and test my skills. If I am suitable, I'll be one of the people who pay the tax. Right? So I will make it easier to the Finnish people. (Yousif 26, 2015)*

It is important to consider, that even if – in a Finnish context – it seems inappropriate to expect or send newly arrived asylum seekers to work, this policy could actually be counterproductive. To be realistic, though, in many aspects it seems that the way of working in Finland does not resemble the ways of working in Iraq. Thus, according to the results now obtained, it seems that it would be beneficial for asylum seekers to have a chance to get to know Finnish working habits through some kinds of low-barrier entrance job opportunities. Providing a possibility for low-income entry-level jobs and working already when registered at the reception centres have been suggested also by the Minister of the Interior in 2015–2016 Petteri Orpo and Minister of Justice and Labour Jari Lindström (YLE 2015). Even the idea that there were no monetary rewards to begin with didn't seem to be a problem for most participants:

***The salary [is] not important for me but what's important, I am with work, important for me [is that] I am not an unemploy[ed]. (Omar 32, 2016)***

*I like organising, the most important for me, I like helping people, so anything with helping people, I really appreciate, I would do it for money or for free, it doesn't matter. (Isko 25, 2016)*

Having the chance to visit Finnish companies, especially those that have immigrants from the same cultural background as employees, would motivate the newcomers to see that they can get employed. A first step towards this has already been initiated in Helsinki, where the different kinds of needs and skills of those who have been granted asylum or a residence permit are assessed through workshops (Stadin osaamiskeskus 2016; see also International House Helsinki 2016). The skills assessment workshops, hopefully spreading to other parts of Finland as well, would also enable directing the most skilled workers faster to the next level, that is, to the labour market with paid jobs. Additionally, initiatives have been taken also by the civil society (cf. Startup Refugees 2016).

This kind of approach to future employment would, apart from preventing the newcomers from passivation prior to finding work, also prepare them to be ready for transitioning to the labour market faster, which they might not feel ready to do otherwise:

*No [I'm not ready to work yet], because I don't know... I have to know something about Finland to be [able to] start. I can't start for something I don't know anything about the rules or. I'm not inside [know enough of] the Finnish people til now, and the Finnish rules itself, maybe there's so many things that are different from Iraq, so I can't go on now. I have to study for two, three, four months before beginning. I think so. (Yassen 56, 2015)*

Of the participants of the study, Yassen was the only one who said that he was not ready to start working immediately. This doesn't mean that he would be less interested in working than other participants of this study, on the contrary:

*I will not feel [as being] myself if I don't work. The person he has to work always. Always. I will not find myself if I'm not working. (Yassen 56, 2015)*

What it, however, might indicate is that he has more realistic expectations regarding the challenges of working in Finland, in comparison with other participants that rarely imagined any obstacles to working other than the Finnish language. Moreover, as both the met and exceeded expectations have been related to better adaptation outcomes among immigrants (e.g. Black, Mendenhall & Oddou 1991; Caligiuri et al. 2001), this kind of attitude may even turn out to promote the future psychological and work adaptation, for example when coping with the challenges possibly faced on the Finnish labour market.

At the time of the interview, one participant, Adam, was doing voluntary work seven hours a day, five days a week, something that a significant number of participants showed interest towards and many were already doing to some extent, as they

expressed that having work was of such great importance to them. In fact, also other kind of helpful activities have already been initiated by some of the participants:

*Like what I do now, I am member in church, every Sunday I go to the camp, I bring maybe ten or twenty person, I take them with me to the church and there we pray to Allah and somebody if [that person] have pain or something, we pray for him to give him [help], and they make some place, take some clothes for kids and some clothes for woman, and we ask him [people] if they need any help, and we make some food for them. And [then] I take him back to the reception centre. And now there is, many Finnish people, they know a lot people [asylum seekers], and they are really friendly and they invite [us] to their house and we have parties in the house and they are not afraid of our people, so it's really nice thing, they know now that our stories, how we think, how we idea to it. So this what I looking for [on a larger scale]. (Isko 25, 2016)*

One of the most powerful resources of work motivation was the feeling of gratitude that the participants feel towards the country that decides to grant them residency:

*I want to stay for the rest of my life in the country that gives me the resident. Because they are making a favour to me, and I want to give back to them, this favour that my country did not give it to me. That's why I prefer to stay in the country who will give me the resident. (Yousif 26, 2015)*

***Yeah, of course [I want to stay], I'm happy with Finland here, because they respect me, they give me many chance, so I feel again I am really human, I'm really person, I'm really active for the people, so my future and for me, if somebody give me something --- I should to give him back. (Isko 25, 2016)***

Clearly, at least this group of asylum seekers seem to be highly motivated towards working. The challenge, which is now in the hands of Finnish policy makers, is to design integration models that are smooth enough to not wither away the motivation and hopeful feelings. Unfortunately, in the light of statistics regarding the actual degree of employed persons among immigrants of refugee background (UTH 2014), the expectations regarding employment seem to be somewhat overly optimistic. The following part of the chapter will shed light on why finding work in Finland, especially among the visible minorities, has proven to be challenging.

## 6.2.2 Challenges regarding Finnish labour market integration

Even if there are about 82,300 (September 2016, TEM 2016) unfilled vacancies at Employment and Economic Development Offices in Finland, according to a number of studies (e.g. Sarvimäki 2011; Yijälä 2016) there are many concerns to be addressed before even this privileged group of Iraqis under study, with supposedly the best predisposition to integrate in the Finnish labour market among the Iraqi asylum seekers, will get employed. Below, some factors that can affect the future employment and work adaptation among those who have come to Finland to stay are discussed. Find-

ing one's place in the labour market of a new country can be seen as crucial when it comes to the economic integration of immigrants. Labour market integration is often challenging, especially in the initial stages of migration, but generally becomes easier over time (Sarvimäki 2011).

In the light of previous studies regarding immigrant employment (e.g. Forsander 2002; Katisko 2011; Kyhä 2011), it is unfortunately much more difficult to find work than the participants in this study expect. Structural obstacles such as high-barrier entrepreneurship, complicated and costly accreditation of credentials from abroad (EMN 2015), as well as the negative attitudes of some employers are not making the task any easier. In addition to the cultural differences that immigrants are dealing with, they have also reported experiences of discrimination in the labour market, much more often than natives (Larja et al. 2012; Liebkind, Larja & Brylka 2016). Additionally, the Finnish language is often seen as a real challenge, as it is inarguably difficult to learn, due to it being extremely different from other languages and, for the Iraqis, even the alphabet is different. In many work places in Finland, apart from the Finnish language, also the Swedish language is a requirement for some positions. In English-speaking companies, the level of English language proficiency required is quite demanding:

*I'm already trying to find a job. It's very difficult. I think [it is because of] the language. Even [if] there is some kind of work [where] you don't need the Finnish language, but they still don't hire you if you don't speak Finnish. Even though I can speak a little bit English, but. Don't know. (Noor 39, 2015)*

When asking the participants to rate on a four-point Likert scale about the expected or experienced (in the case of those who had been volunteering) differences in the working cultures in Iraq and in Finland, 22 per cent (of  $N = 18$ ) had the impression that the working culture in Iraq is extremely different in comparison to Finland. Half of them thought that the working culture in Finland would be different, but not totally, and 17 per cent thought that the working culture in Finland would be somehow different from that of Iraq. Interestingly enough, two participants thought that the working culture in Finland would be exactly the same as it is in Iraq.

One of the participants, who believed that the working culture in Finland would be just like in Iraq, had experience of entrepreneurship in Iraq with very long days, up to 15 hours a day and without days off (*Hamed*). These kind of working hours and days are surely somewhat common among Finnish entrepreneurs as well, although the bureaucratic procedures related to entrepreneurship are, of course, very different between these two countries. As one doesn't pay taxes in Iraq, there is no limit to how much money one can make (e.g. *Rooney*). Also becoming an entrepreneur seems to be much easier in Iraq than in Finland: if you want to open a shop, you open a shop, without having to have a permit to do so (e.g. *Ali*).

Another participant thought that the biggest difference between the two countries' working cultures was in how people got recruited: as described in previous chapters, in Iraq, a boss belonging to the Shia tradition would hire a Shia employee instead of a Sunni employee, even if the latter was the most qualified for the job (*Noor*). This kind of cronyism is found in Finland as well, although perhaps in a more discrete form than in Iraq.

According to Hofstede (1991), long-term orientation is not as characteristic for the Iraqi culture as it is for the Finnish one. When it comes to time perception and punctuality, also many of the participants of this study were pointing out the expected and noticed difference in time perceptions, which seems to be a lot less strict in Iraq:

*The timing, you can come late [in Iraq]. I am not sure, I didn't work here [in Finland], but I think you have to be at work at [an] exact time. In Iraq no, I think. We are messier a little bit. (Sara 2015)*

Rooney was one of those participants who expected the working culture to be different, but not totally. He was used to working in his brother's shop seven days a week, between five and seven hours a day. This kind of working rhythm might well be found in Finnish family businesses as well, even though the workweek in Finland is normally five days long. With the exception of those working for the Iraqi government, where it was said to be common to work for only a couple of hours a day, on average, the endurance of the working day did not differ when comparing these two countries. Talking about practicing specific jobs, another clear difference is the restrictions regarding the freedom of speech in Iraq, which some journalists of this study pointed out. They felt happy about being in Finland and thus being able to write about whatever they wanted. Moreover, according to a participant (and in line with Hofstede 1991), the hierarchies between the employees and their supervisors within companies seem to be more prominent in Iraq than in Finland.

Even participants that have lived in other countries before Finland still have concerns about how to know the specific rules and habits of Finns and how to be accepted as a member of this society:

*Maybe I will make something wrong? When I was walking, when I was riding in the bus and something like that... But as manners and behaving, I can be one of this society. (Hamed 57, 2016)*

Everyday work practicalities aside, one thing in which the two countries clearly differed is the Finnish habit of distributing the housework between the spouses. For Finns this is normal: the Nordic countries being world leaders in terms of equality between genders and, for example, Finland being the second country in the world to give women the right to vote in 1907. In fact, the inferior status of women in comparison to the men is against the very core values of Finnish society: universality and equality, the same rules for all. However, when it comes to Iraqi women, it is often the family who chooses what kind of work a woman is allowed to do (if at all) and also wearing a hijab or not is a decision that was said to belong to the family. These kinds of restrictions could cause challenges in Finland, where the breadwinner model rarely works, as it is difficult to make ends meet if only the man in the household is working outside of the home.

In this study, the participants generally did see that it was the woman's own choice if she wanted to work or not, like in the case of *Adam*, if his wife would decide to follow him to Finland:

*My wife civil engineer. She can to work in company, or. If she want. No problem.  
(Adam 30, 2015)*

On the labour market, Iraqi women and men are often found in very different kinds of workplaces. The restrictions related to the Iraqi culture regarding women at work could also affect the career paths of the Iraqi women in Finland. This is because especially certain fields, like e.g. working as a journalist or on television, are often regarded as unsuitable areas for women to work in. In other areas, such as teaching, office work and health care, women are more likely to be allowed to work:

*I: If you get permission to stay, what kind of work do you think your wife could do here in Finland? Or would she stay at home?*

*No. I don't prefer that the woman stay at home. This is part of the change that I need for my family.*

*I: But what kind of work can you imagine that your wife could do here?*

*A teacher, accountant, but never stay at home. I don't want her to stay at home.*

*(Adnan 48, 2015)*

All participants of this study stated that they would have no problem if their future supervisor was a woman. As a matter of fact, the idea was accepted by all and warmly welcomed by most, when asked how they would feel about having a woman supervisor in Finland:

*Actually I would love that! Because there is a research I read on the internet, [that] says women are more successful than the man in the job, especially when managers and boss[es]. (Mustafa 24, 2015)*

*If I see there is a woman like a boss, maybe I can be in the future like her.*

*(Mariam 2016)*

*I hope I find a boss a woman, I think it's nice, it's fair. (Hayat 2016)*

Even if the idea was welcomed, it is legitimate to wonder how it would actually play out in reality, for example, when receiving orders from a woman, as it was noted that Iraqi women are seen as not being "strong enough" or suitable for such positions:

**I: Why is a woman not allowed to be a boss in Iraq?**

**In Iraq? Yeah, because, this like it's hard job, just the job and it's good just for, for men.**

**I: So there is this thought that women are weak, not strong?**

**Yeah, yeah.**

**I: Even if it doesn't include like any kind of physical, heavy work?**

**Not about just physical, like we can, it can [e.g.] be like minister. In Iraq.**

**I: But now that you have all these men in power in Iraq because they are so strong, do you think it's working well, when you have the men in power?**

**No, no. (Moses 33, 2016)**

This matter could become a problem, especially among uneducated Iraqis or those coming from the south or west of Iraq or from the countryside in general, where it is not usual to find women working outside of the home (*Ali; Adnan*). Another gender-related challenge is how to make a male worker obey a female supervisor:

*Like, even if you have a civil engineer, she cannot deal with the workers, because she would... the builders wouldn't listen to her. So, she will need the help from a man to help her to control all these builders and workers. [Solution:] She can hire someone to help her. It's also regarding the place, I think. In Baghdad, they can [hire women]. But in such other cities, no. (Sara 2015)*

In practice, regardless of motivation to work outside of the home, if the responsibility for the housework and for taking care of the children remains on the Iraqi women, it is understandable that they (and other women from similar cultural backgrounds) could begin to suffer from work exhaustion, if doing this kind of double work for extended periods.

Lastly, the important role of religion in countries like Iraq sometimes raises a question of whether the religion could cause problems on the path to successful integration into the Finnish society and the labour market. According to the participants of this study, however, it seems that following religious rules at work would not be necessary and, thus, not a problem for integration into the Finnish labour market:

*I'm far away [from the idea] to, put the religion in any relation I might have here in Finland, whether [we are talking about] a friend, a neighbour, a colleague, [a] friend of work, [a] boss, [a] girlfriend, so...*

**I: You can keep them separated?**

*Yeah, yeah. --- For example, if I'm a Muslim, and you're a Christian, for me it's exactly like, I like to eat meat, you like to eat chicken. So I consider it a personal matter. Go worship a cow, worship a car, worship this window, it's a personal matter [that has nothing to do with personal relationships]---*

**I: So, very easy [to match religious rules and work in Finland]?**

*Yes yes yes. (Adnan 48, 2015)*

Even for those who would like to continue practicing religious rituals, like praying, it was seen as no problem to skip the praying during work and do it later at home:

*God say that the work is more important and your behaviour with your brother is more important than your behaviour with God. God knows that you have to make your work first and then you will come to me [to God]. (Yassen 56, 2015)*

Rather surprisingly, only one participant thought that it would be a good idea to have praying breaks at work for Muslims. However, upon telling him that religion is something that is left outside of the workplace in Finland, he didn't have a problem with that:

*If the rules are [the] same for everybody, the Muslim people they need to deal with the rules, because we decide to live in this society. In my opinion.*

*I: Yes. And the rules are, the customs are that religious matters are something personal, that are to be dealt with outside of work.*

*So everyone should follow just the rules. (Yousif 26, 2015)*

On first thought, according to the results of this study, it seems that religion would not present a challenge regarding working in Finland. That said, it is difficult to imagine that following religious rules would be totally free of challenges, for example during Ramadan, which in Finland is during the summer. In some parts, the sun does not set at all and fasting for 23 hours a day during a month and working at the same time will most likely represent some kind of challenge to overcome – if not for the society, at least for an individual him/herself. At the time of the interviews, Ramadan during the Finnish summer had not yet been experienced, which is probably why it was not being mentioned in the interviews.

## 6.3 Messages from the participants

The last part of this chapter gathers messages from the participants to Finns regarding the kind of activities they would wish to see organised at reception centres and bringing forth ideas for activities upon leaving the reception centres. Finally, they are sending their greetings to Finns and Finnish decision makers.

### 6.3.1 Suggestions for the reception centres

Having volunteers, for example coming from the Red Cross, to arrange different activities in the reception centres was highly appreciated. However, when asking for ideas of improvement, the most common answer was the wish to be taught Finnish from an early stage. Also being included in the Finnish way of life, even before the decision on receiving international protection, was high up on the wish list:

*Most of the asylum seekers be [would like to] join the society and go to the public activities. Finnish activities like festivals and the carnivals and the parties. And also the occasions, like the independent day and others. So they should [be given the chance to] join this. And to be [able] to prepare themselves to be a part of this society. (Hamed 57, 2016)*

Information of such events could be displayed on the notice boards of the reception centres and some volunteers could take asylum seekers to these events and explain the Finnish cultural context adhered to the events. Moreover, also the importance of distribution of information about what is going on in society in general arose as a crucial point in the ideas of the participants regarding the improvement of the reception centres:

*Give them [the asylum seekers] information. People have stress in the camp. Me, I don't have stress, but some people have stress in this camp, we're hearing news from Facebook and this change[s] the mood of the people. (Saif 29, 2015)*

More precisely, information about a wide range of topics was sought after, from educational opportunities, Finnish laws, procedures regarding the asylum seeking process and conditions for family reunification:

*I think... We need more explanation about the decision that immigration make it. The decision about reunion families. It's very concern... every man here. And the main thing... it's about study. We don't know anything about studying in university. Even people [that] have a permit here, permanent residency here... It's very important to know how to make levelling qualities [degrees] here. Yeah, it's [a] very mysterious thing to us. (Husham 27, 2015)*

Regarding activities already organised for the asylum seekers residing in the reception centres, the female participants pointed out that in order for the women to be able to participate in the activities, the culture-specific gender guidelines should be taken into account: activities arranged for both men and women, in a Muslim context, have the consequence that the women will not be able to participate.

Many participants were also hoping that they would be given the chance to eat Iraqi food. It was also pointed out that making Iraqi food could even be made on a smaller budget than what is currently being used at the reception centres to cover the food expenses. However, as there is a lot of pressure to reduce costs, this could be a point where money could be saved while at the same time improving satisfaction of life of the asylum seekers, given that some modifications were made in the current regulations concerning hygiene and other rules rationalised because of safety.

The best way to promote successful integration, according to the participants, was to encourage personal contact between the asylum seekers and natives, not only rep-

resenting organisations like the Red Cross or staff from the reception centre, but private persons:

*This Christmas, and I went [to a Finnish family and] I shared many things, so the way they are looking to the refugee become different, because I stayed in their house --- [I consider important] Making a communication between the refugees and the Finnish society, in order to remove these gaps, like gathering people together and making more activities. --- (Yousif 26, 2015)*

Regarding leisure activities offered at the reception centres, football, swimming or other sports like basketball were sought after. Also the possibility to play music was mentioned, as well as the possibility to watch Arabic movies or movies with Arabic subtitles.

### 6.3.2 Messages for Finns

Many participants were pleading with Finns to give them a chance to show that all that they really want is a peaceful, safe place where they can live a normal life, as well as an opportunity to work to earn their own living and to contribute to the tax collection. Finns were asked to put themselves in their place, imagining a life with nothing but war:

*I want everyone, in the world, not just Finnish, [to] know what we... just really know. We are not came to here for playing [games] or something. We come here from war. We should be helped. (Samir 24, 2015)*

*I wish that each Finnish person know, knows me well, before giving an opinion about me. This is very important. (Adnan 48, 2015)*

*So we are sorry, that we got money from you. If I work, I will not need the salary again. So they can hire us, they can give us jobs. Then I will not need [the reception allowance]... Yes. (Hamed 57, 2016)*

*We can help [Finland] in the future. (Hayat 2016)*

The participants expressed gratitude and even love towards Finns, or the country that would accept them as new members of society:

*I love them and I would really, if I can return the favour to them, so just I would like to thank them. (Hassan 22, 2015)*

***I say I'm sorry I come here and maybe you say, you know, look at these people that leave their country and come to our country, and maybe you feel afraid from [of] us. But we are human like you guys, so, we feel like you, we laugh like***

***you, so, just we need the chance to prove that and if some refugees make mistakes, don't say all refugees [are] like that. Because we are not all [the] same. Some people [are] bad, some people [are] good. So just give me a chance to prove it. And, thank you for everything. (Zaid 27, 2015)***

*Thank you so much, for invite us in this beautiful country. (Isko 25, 2016)*

### 6.3.3 Messages for decision makers

Firstly, and most importantly, for the decision makers, the participants wanted to stress that Iraq is not a safe country:

*Just I want to say that, Baghdad it's not safe, all people they thought that Baghdad it's safe and it's not safe, every day we have ten people who die, children, womens, men, we always have this bombing, so it's not safe. (Mariam 2016)*

Additionally, it was stressed that anyone who doesn't believe that Iraq is not a safe country to return to could easily find out about the situation for themselves, for example through the internet:

*You don't need to listen to anyone from the Iraqi government, because all of them, they are liars. I think they can just, like anything on the internet to see the daily bombings happening in Baghdad or... I think they can trust [the] internet more than the Iraqi government. And make the decisions based on reality, not just some bad government. We are running also from our government. (Sara 2015)*

Regarding the security situation of the country, questions have been raised why so many have returned to Iraq voluntarily. Here is one possible explanation for the phenomenon:

*Some people went back because they couldn't stay long time away from their families because --- he leave his wife and children, so even if he put some money with them, the money will be enough for them [to survive] for 3-6 months, so after that the moneys will finish. [After that] They don't have any kind of money. When we are here, we cannot support our family because we don't have any work. They came to Finland and found this procedures took long time, and they miss their families and they found this will take more than one year until they bring the families [here] so they know there is no money enough for them. They cannot live with the money they left for them [to survive on]. So they have to went [go] back [to] Iraq. (Yousif26, 2015)*

Secondly, many participants of this study were worried about what kind of people are let in to stay in the country:

*Yes, I want to say to the decision-maker[s] many things. First, make sure that the person that came to this country has no problems, because if you accept someone [who] has problems, and this person has a bad behaviour, he will give a bad impression about all the refugees. (Yousif 26, 2015)*

*I think that the Finnish government has to choose carefully that who will say for him welcome. The government has to choose well. (Yassen 56, 2015)*

When asking for some practical advice for how to tackle this problem, there were suggestions to make use of Iraqi people that have already lived in Finland for a longer time to help authorities with the decision-making process:

*I: Do you have some advice for the government, what should they do so that they could choose well?*

*[For example] People from Mosul they have [a] special accent. They use the letter f well in Arabic --- But in Baghdad and in the south, they didn't use this accent. Maybe they have to use some people who have a good experience for choosing and this people, when I say them [are you] from Mosul, okay can you speak some words, yeah. (Yassen 56, 2015)*

For those who haven't had the luxury of travelling or living abroad, this is what one of the nine participants who had previous international experience recommends:

***It is very important to the government to teach them all of these concept for [being somewhere on a] specific time, and told them, make sure those people are really now qualified to go to the working environment and send them to the working environment [in Finland], better than sending them directly, because there are so many missing things with this concept for them, because they don't use to follow all of this thing in a perfect way. Being organised, following the time system, these things. That's why they need to make effort for this, before they send them [to work]. (Yousif 26, 2015)***

There was also an extreme proposal to motivate better behaviour among asylum seekers, as becoming isolated from other people was seen as the worst possible fate that anybody could have:

*Anyone who do problem, I suggest to make a camp on the north of Finland, anyone who do some problem here --- are afraid if they do the wrong way, they transfer you into this camp. I think it's better way to almost [make sure that asylum seekers], don't do something wrong okay, they respect the rules, they respect the times, and they respect the nainen, the womens. (Yousif 26, 2015)*

Fourthly, personal differences were wished to be taken into account, as the asylum seekers in Finland are by no means a homogenous group:

***Do not deal with all in the same way, because some are educated people, some are they have certificates, some are they have skills, some they don't have. So give opportunity [for working, at least for those who have skills]. (Yousif 26, 2015)***

Another message for the decision makers was to differentiate between atheist Iraqi people and very religious Iraqi people, and understand that the atheist people in Iraq have been, and are still, in a special kind of danger, because of their beliefs (*Mustafa*).

Lastly, decision makers were asked to not be guided by reason, but by heart, when deciding about the fate of another one's life:

*[In] General, I think they [the decision makers] have [a] good heart and they know these people [and that they] come [because it is] really for [an] important reason. So before they take the answer, for know, they should focus from the heart, not from the mind. (Isko 25, 2016)*

## 7 CONCLUSIONS

The study was about well-educated English speaking Iraqis with prior work experience, who came to Finland during 2015–2016 as asylum seekers. In other words, the study covers only a fraction of Iraqis who came here and that have, during the time of the publication of this study, either received or are still waiting to receive a decision regarding their request for international protection. As shown in Part I of the results of this study, the participants came from very challenging circumstances, escaping religious persecution and war and having chosen Finland mainly due to safety and the respect of human rights, characteristic for this country. The journey to Finland had been extremely stressful for the participants and yet the demanding situation was not over having reached Finland, as the physical ordeals often become psychological ordeals when the wait for the permission to stay in Finland begins.

In this final chapter of the study, the main results are discussed and reflected in previous research on immigrant acculturation, addressing the theme of acculturation in the *limbo-like stage* of the migration process that is filled with uncertainties among the particular group of asylum seekers studied. After this, the limitations of the study are discussed and some recommendations given for future research. Lastly, practical implications of the study are presented.

### 7.1 Summary of the main results

Previous research has shown that the acculturation process, specifically in the case of voluntary migration, starts already before the actual move abroad, in the pre-acculturation stage (Jasinskaja-Lahti & Yijälä 2011; Yijälä 2012). Based on the results of this study and a few previous studies (e.g. Al Wekhian 2015; Brekke 2004), also regarding asylum seekers, the acculturation process starts, at the very latest, upon arrival to the country of destination. The fact that the participants did not know whether they would actually be able to start their lives over in Finland or not, as they first had to wait for the decision for their request for international protection, undoubtedly affects their acculturation process, at least in the short-term. Acculturation in this kind of limbo-like stage seems to be very tough due to several different factors, as this study has shown. These factors are summarised below.

#### 7.1.1 Regardless of the participants' strong work motivation, economic adaption may prove to be difficult

The focus of this study was to gather information of the premises of labour market integration of this particular, privileged group of Iraqi asylum seekers. Economic adaptation of immigrants in general, and that of those immigrants from a refugee background in particular, appears to be a major area of public concern, as highlighted on

an almost daily basis in the media. Prior to hearing the stories of the participants, the predisposition of the interviewing researcher was that of an economic point of view, seeing the majority of the asylum seekers that would gain refugee status in Finland as an answer to the growing demand of work force in Finland. However, during the research process, it became clear that the expectations regarding this matter proved to be somewhat unrealistic, as trying to find skilled, English-speaking participants turned out to be a more difficult task than assumed. Moreover, based on the ethnographic observations combined with the information gained from the interviews regarding the experienced levels of stress and trauma, those recruited, regardless of their high work motivation, often didn't seem ready to meet the requirements of the Finnish labour market without preparative training of Finnish working culture. This can partly be explained by the negative effects of having lived in a highly sectarian conflict society as well as the challenges faced during their difficult journey to Finland. Additionally, the poorer language proficiency (both when it comes to the native language and the Finnish language), the lower level of education, skills and work experience, are often not good enough to meet the requirements of the employer. Regardless of having reached this conclusion based on 22 participants only, this raises some worries regarding their short-term economic adaptation, as this group could be expected to present the most promising group of Iraqi asylum seekers as potential employees.

The rough experiences from the past undoubtedly affect the present and future states of health of those coming from such challenging living conditions. After the initial feelings of joy of having reached their destination alive have faded, the psychological issues from the past, together with the new challenges faced can add up to the point of being intolerable, if not dealt with properly. As previous research has shown (Kirmeyer et al. 2011), in comparison with the native population, asylum seekers run a tenfold risk of developing post-traumatic stress disorder, and a manifold risk of depression and other mental health problems. This presents a challenge when it comes to getting and holding onto a job. However, unemployment as such has also been recognised as a risk factor for depression among refugees (Beiser & Hou 2001).

In order to support those who have gained residence in Finland to regain their ability to work, organising diverse and sufficient rehabilitation should be a central focus in the future. In the light of the results of this study, this particular point cannot be emphasised enough. Worrying about the family back in Iraq (or elsewhere), together with the prolonged stress due to the uncertainty regarding one's life situation – including one's economic situation – create even more stress (Mak et al. 2005), and can in fact, prevent the individual from learning new things (Koso & Hansen 2006). Understandably, it is difficult to fully focus on work while waiting for a decision that could ruin one's entire future plan, in case that one is not allowed to stay. These kinds of factors are also being reflected, at least to some extent, in the employment statistics of those coming from refugee backgrounds, who often have a harder time getting employed than representatives of other immigrant groups.

That said, the participants appeared to have a very strong and sincere motivation for finding work – this being the case for all participants of this study. How this motivation develops over time, and what is done with that potential, has a lot to do with the efforts of the newcomers. However, also the attitudes confronted on the labour

market, as well as the readiness of the society to receive and support those having gained permission to stay in Finland, play a huge role in the acculturation process of the newcomers (Bourhis et al. 1997; Zagefka & Brown 2002). For example, according to a survey made on 1,000 asylum seekers residing in Finland, up to 80 per cent were said to be interested in starting companies in Finland (Sioufi 2016). Also participants of this study were interested in starting up businesses in Finland, given that they are allowed to stay in the country. Unfortunately, however, the combination of lacking funds and complicated bureaucracy regarding entrepreneurship – difficult for even Finns themselves to understand – might be reasons why immigrants' dreams of entrepreneurship often remain as dreams. However, it is often forgotten that changing immigration patterns also create new market opportunities.

Regarding life after being granted permission to stay, in line with the previous studies also in this study the older participants seemed to expect more difficulties in their ongoing acculturation process (e.g. Ward et al. 2001, p. 94), being more worried about finding work, establishing new networks and learning the language in comparison to younger participants. Moreover, the more educated participants seemed to have greater culture-specific knowledge and skills due to having more intercultural experience, and were therefore expecting fewer problems in their future adaptation to the Finnish labour market, as well as to society at large – a result that was in line with the findings of previous studies (e.g. Ward et al. 2001, p. 94).

### 7.1.2 Take-up of the reception allowance causes mixed feelings

Iraqis who are not born into rich families seem to be used to working hard, with the exception of those working for the government, as told by the participants. The former “welfare state” of Iraq used to provide its citizens at least free education, medical care, some subsidies and a better standard of living, although ruled by a dictator (i.e. Saddam Hussein). Today, none of these benefits exist there anymore (*Ali*). Thus, it seems that, generally, living in Iraq offers little choice for idleness. In addition, the participants expressed that providing for oneself and for one's family is a question of honour. For this reason, receiving reception allowance was reported as causing mixed feelings, having a negative effect on the self-esteem of the participants. The situation became even more uncomfortable when the participants found out that the reception allowance was paid from the tax money, and not from the UN or the Red Cross as they previously had thought. This realisation increased their sense of unease, as they quickly figured out that this arrangement was the most likely reason behind the negative attitudes among some Finns towards the asylum seekers. Coming to this conclusion made the participants even more determined to find work immediately – any job for a start would do. It was clear that they would prefer to do something in exchange for the reception allowance, as accepting it without doing anything in return didn't feel right.

Apart from being a question of honour to make one's own living, having just about anything to do in order to stop thinking about the past life in Iraq was preferred. The opposite – suddenly having nothing to do – was told as being the worst possible option, and therefore many were asking for opportunities for, if not paid, even some voluntary work. Conversely, as discussed earlier, the asylum seekers are not allowed to work

during the first three (having a certificate of identity) or six months (denizen asylum seekers) upon arrival. In light of this, it is reasonable to question whether this kind of policy regarding work is in fact teaching the newcomers to become passive recipients of social benefits, as take-up of the reception allowance is often the only way to get any money during the waiting period, besides working on the black market. Offering these options instead of offering work benefits no one, and thus, creates real motivation and pressure for change in this particular matter. Time is crucial, while the motivation to work is still high. Failing to use this window of opportunity could have severe psychological and economic long-term effects.

The opportunity to establish social networks through work was presented, by many participants, as a good enough reason for working without a salary, while waiting for the work permission. There is a risk, though, that offering these kinds of unpaid internships could extend for larger periods and that companies could take advantage of the interns by recruiting new interns instead of offering paid work to those who have completed the internship period. That said, based on the results of this study it would seem that the benefits of accepting an internship would still be greater than the possible negative outcomes of the above-mentioned challenges.

### 7.1.3 Shared values facilitate a successful acculturation process

The participants brought up the concern that human rights violations were currently regarded as a norm in Iraq, especially regarding religious views and equality between genders. When it comes to individualism, freedom of expression and equality, many participants felt that their personal values were clearly much more in line with the Finnish cultural values than with those of Iraq, which was often one of the reasons why they had chosen Finland as the country in which to seek asylum. In previous studies, this kind of value congruence has been shown to be connected to better self-esteem (Lönnqvist et al. 2009) and a heightened sense of wellbeing in general (Sagiv & Schwartz 2000), both being important factors in a successful acculturation process.

Even if the aspirations of the participants towards adopting Finnish cultural values is evident, the matter is not totally unambiguous: although the participants claimed to be pro-equality, it was found that uprooting the resilient and partly unconscious beliefs regarding inequality between genders will most likely present a challenge regarding integration to the Finnish society, at least among the less educated Iraqis. The basis and justifications behind the unequal treatment between genders seem to be rooted in Islam, a religion much respected and subject to little questioning. The assumption that men and women are born different makes it difficult to raise the question: are men and women born unequal, or just raised to be unequal? These kinds of issues are the ones that the receiving country has yet to tackle: how to deal with the fact that keeping men and women separate in Arabic cultures is the norm, while this kind of approach is generally not promoted in a Finnish context? To reach even the minimum level of equality according to Finnish standards is bound to require a tremendous amount of hard work, not only among Muslim men but also among Muslim women, who in this study were found to have accepted their culturally imposed subordinate and inferior role in relation to men. The perception of gender relations, among other potential

barriers for successful integration for Arab-Muslim immigrants have also been identified in previous studies (e.g. Al Wekhian 2015).

On a positive note, when it comes to the participants' expectations of future work adaptation in Finland, it was not seen as a problem if the future supervisor would be a woman. Moreover, the participants clearly agreed that practicing their religious manners would not disturb their potential future work in Finland. However, also some of the participants expressed their concerns regarding the adaptation of many of their less educated compatriots: as without sufficient knowledge and discernment, they are bound to be easily swayed by radicalistic influence. Based on the results of this study, it seems that Finland has attracted at least some individuals based on a sense of shared values. This value congruence may well turn out to be a key factor in facilitating one's adaption in a new country. Therefore, in case that some of these participants get permission to stay in Finland, it is possible that their adaptation will proceed smoothly, regardless of the difficulties that many are facing in the limbo-like stage of their asylum seeking process.

#### 7.1.4 Being separated from one's family causes distress

One of the main concerns of the participants, apart from getting permission to stay in Finland, was being separated from their family and friends, which presented an incessant and ongoing worry about their loved ones back in their native countries. In this study, both the participants who were married and/or had children, as well as those who were single and did not have children, were longing to see their families again. The results of this study emphasise the central role of the family in the participants' lives: it seems that the appreciation for the extended family in Iraqi culture is bigger than the value that is generally given to the extended family in Finland, a result in line with the results obtained by Al Wekhian (2015) among Arab immigrants in the United States.

As it is generally not possible to reunite the members of the extended family, such as the parents of a grown up applicant, the role of the spouse and the children seems to be further emphasised, as they may be the only familiar person, a comparable other, in the new culture. This is important, since previous studies have shown that especially the presence of the spouse promotes adaption in a new country, supporting different aspects of adaption (e.g. Black & Stephens 1989; Caligiuri et al. 1998; van der Bank & Rothmann 2006). For example, in a study conducted among social assistance recipients in Finland, the presence of a spouse was found to positively affect a participant's economic adaptation, shortening the duration of the need for social assistance benefit (Yijälä 2016). In contrast to voluntary migrants, where the presence and support of the family is a major asset, in the case of forced migrants, the absence of the family often causes worry instead of being a resource. This is a clear disadvantage for those who have been forced to migrate, as the support of the family usually presents the most important source of social support at least for those voluntary migrants who have a family.

The recent restrictions regarding family reunification in Finland present a threat to the integration of those about to receive international protection in Finland. Currently, only the family of a person who has been granted refugee status may apply for

the family reunification without an income requirement. Moreover, unless the family reunification process is started within three months of gaining asylum, one loses the chance to be reunited with his/her family, unless being able to provide a substantial income (Finnish Immigration Service 2016e). In the case of Iraqis, this time limit is often too short, as the spouse of the individual needs to travel to the Embassy of Finland abroad, as the Embassy of Finland in Baghdad has been closed since 2010 (Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland 2016a). On one hand, if an individual, who has gained asylum is deprived of the possibility to be reunited with his/her family, it is justifiable to assume that (s)he may not stay in Finland. In this case, the resources invested in the acculturation of the individual are wasted, at least from the perspective of Finnish society. On the other hand, if an individual that has gained asylum in Finland still decides to stay, there is a noticeable risk that being separated from one's family increases the stress levels of the individual and consequently, negatively affects his/her ability to work (e.g. due to impaired cognitive functioning, e.g. Koso & Hansen 2006; see also Rask et al. 2016).

Not only have the rules of reunification of the families been restricted, but it is also becoming increasingly hard for Iraqi asylum seekers to gain residence in Finland, as for the time being only 10 per cent of the applications are approved (Finnish Immigration Service 2016b), and thus, many are being sent back to Iraq. Additionally, thousands of Iraqis have decided to return voluntarily. In light of this, and based also on the results of this study, it seems to be clear that when it comes to the willingness of the Finnish society to grant them international protection, their prior-to-move expectations regarding Finland have not been met, often due to disinformation received. That said, it is important to stress that going back to Iraq does not mean that Iraq is a safe country to return to (Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland 2016b). What needs to be understood is that upon leaving Iraq it was believed that Finland was in fact welcoming Iraqis and that the asylum seeking process would be fast. However, the reality has proven to be very different. In cases where families were left behind with enough money to survive for some months – a more affordable option than paying smugglers for several trips to Europe – the application process for international protection can take more than a year and, thus, represents a situation that not many were prepared for financially, emotionally, nor psychologically. Consequently, it seems that leaving one's family behind for extended periods, especially in those very challenging conditions of Iraq, has proven to be an unbearable option for many.

Previous studies have shown that realistic (i.e. met) – or positively exceeded – expectations are linked to better adaptation outcomes, whereas unmet expectations have been linked to less positive adaptation outcomes (e.g. Black et al. 1991; Black & Gregersen 1990; Bürgelt, Morgan & Pernice 2008; Martin et al. 1995). In the case of the participants of this study, the unrealistic expectations seem to have had a negative effect on the acculturation process in terms of disappointments, especially when it comes to the stricter asylum policies and tenser intergroup relations with Finns than they had expected. Still, 53 per cent of the participants stated that they could not or did not ever want to go back to Iraq – a finding in line with the results obtained in a Swedish study about asylum seekers waiting for their asylum decision (Brekke 2004).

### 7.1.5 Acculturation attitudes of Finns play an enormous role in the acculturation process

What became clear also from the results of this study is that the asylum seekers cannot be regarded as one homogenous group. Still, the attitudes of Finns, reflecting the general trend in Europe (Pew Research Center 2016), have become more polarised than ever: as much as 40 per cent of Finns are against receiving more asylum seekers (YLE 2016). In this kind of atmosphere, it is challenging to maintain an open discussion regarding immigrants without being marked either as a spokesperson for asylum seekers, or as a racist. It is, however, fundamental to implement a long-term view regarding integration and to turn the perceived threat regarding asylum seekers in the public debate into an opportunity (European Union 2016).

Also in the context of this study, the media played a huge role when it comes to the formation of the attitudes in the society, affecting the intergroup relations in question. Even during the time lapse of this research, it became evident how the things written in the media had an immediate effect: after headlines of a crime committed by an asylum seeker, the participants reported an increase in experiences of discrimination. In general, as the asylum seekers are in a more vulnerable position (in comparison to voluntary migrants) due to the scarce options other than staying in the country, the effects of the negative writings in the media seemed to affect this group more than generally would be the case among other immigrant groups.

Getting to know some of these asylum seekers while a myriad of fear-inducing headlines were appearing, as mentioned in the Methodology section about Social Constructivism, it became clear how much one's own perception actively shapes the attitudes and experiences of the perceived reality – that we are indeed constantly co-creating. Even if the ethnical and cultural background gives some frames for certain cultural stereotypes, the differences on a personal level are bigger than those, often prejudiced, generalisations. Failing to emphasise this point could lead to further escalating the situation and leading to more negative attitudes towards asylum seekers, which in turn could result in more discrimination. This kind of vicious circle needs to be avoided at all costs, as there is a vast amount of evidence of the negative effects of discrimination of immigrants on mental health (e.g. Aprahamian et al. 2011; Berry & Sabatier 2010; Tummala-Narra & Claudius 2013). In this study, half of the participants had experienced being discriminated against in Finland, yet nobody was adhering to marginalisation or separation acculturation attitudes. These results reflect a high motivation of the participants to adapt to the Finnish culture, strengthened by the observation that contacts with Finns were very much sought after.

As noted also in previous studies on immigrant acculturation, satisfaction of life at the initial stages of acculturation can be very difficult (e.g. Al Wekhian 2015). Interestingly enough, in this study the positive effects of home accommodation on various aspects of adaptation were evident. For example, home accommodation clearly endorsed psychological adaptation of the participants in terms of enhanced satisfaction of life in comparison to those living at the reception centres. Moreover, home accommodation had positive effects on accumulation of social capital: those participants that were staying in home accommodation with Finns had significantly more Finnish

contacts and were more satisfied with their lives than those residing at the reception centres or in private accommodation with other Iraqis. However, also negative effects of privately arranged accommodation have been reported, such as the possible exploitation by the landlords, lack of stability and isolation (Brekke 2004).

Many Finns are, understandably, worried about how the Finnish economy will be able to sustain individuals that, in the light of previous study, have a harder time getting employed and making ends meet when compared with natives. The new and the unfamiliar is bound to awaken some kind of initial reactions of rejection, and the media-induced fear is not helping in this process. However, when given the chance for a genuine encounter between human beings, although from very different cultures, a perhaps feared phenomenon is given a face and, besides the possible initial feelings of suspicion (often rooted in deprivation thinking), a possibility is given for other feelings to emerge, such as feelings of compassion and interconnectedness. From the data based on the interviews of this study it is obvious that these participants' desires of living in peace, getting employed and raising a family do not differ from the most common future plans of Finns themselves, longing to be part of and further develop this society, that undoubtedly is in a time of transition.

The participants interviewed in this study were hoping that the Iraqis staying in Finland would be able to leave their past religious conflicts behind and were eager to develop genuine friendships with Finns and that they would be given the chance to be met as individuals, rather than representatives of a certain group. Being tired of the discrimination faced in their native country, they were hoping that these experiences could be left behind, and not be repeated in Finland. In fact, the way that the asylum seekers are being received and how their acculturation process is supported plays a crucial role in the prevention of marginalisation and separation acculturation attitudes, which were, as mentioned above, not found among the participants of this study. On the contrary, nearly all of the participants supported the integration attitude, being interested in both preserving parts of their own cultural heritage and at the same time adopting aspects of the Finnish culture: a strategy that has been found to lead to the best adaptation outcomes (see Berry & Sam 1997, for a summary). Two participants were found to support the assimilation attitude, which means that they wanted to leave everything behind that had to do with the past culture and totally adopt the new culture. Given the hard circumstances from where the participants are coming from, adopting the assimilation attitude may be a coping mechanism that helps a traumatised individual to postpone the psychological processes that eventually need to take place when recovering from experienced inhumane situations.

As with many other European countries, Finland is becoming more and more divided when it comes to the attitudes about receiving asylum seekers (EUROCITES 2016). It is understandable that this situation is not an easy one to accept and deal with and it is common to fear the unknown. Finland is one of the most multiculturalist countries among western societies (Saukkonen 2016), with equity and tolerance as its guidelines. More effort, however, needs to be put on promoting intergroup relations. If the important stage in the beginning of the acculturation process is seen as an opportunity to create new ways of co-existing, the newcomers could enrich the Finnish culture. On the other hand, if the asylum seekers about to gain residence status are

not given the opportunity to integrate into the society, but are being discriminated against, there is danger of people wanting to isolate and only mingle with their own cultural group, or get alienated from society altogether, and worse, even pose a threat to create radicalistic behaviour.

## 7.2 Limitations of the study and recommendations for future studies

The results of the study are clearly biased towards a privileged group of asylum seekers having more education, work experience and English language proficiency, than is generally the case among Iraqi asylum seekers. This means that those who were not selected for the study – that is, the great majority of the asylum seekers – have fewer tools to cope with the challenges in the limbo-like stage of the migration process while waiting for the decision on their request for international protection. Furthermore, given that they are granted asylum, they will probably face a lot more difficulties in integrating in the Finnish society and labour market.

In all, the interviews were encounters of connection crossing borders, remarkable both in their content and also in their effect on both the interviewing researcher and the participants. Even if it was hard to recall and talk about the situation in Iraq and the reasons for leaving, the participants communicated that they felt good just by being heard. Many of the participants told their story with striking detail including difficult personal matters. That said, the fact that the interviewing researcher was a white woman, a representative of both the western values and the new culture, may have had an effect on the answers of the participants, coming from an extremely male-dominated culture. This was taken into account prior to the interviews by the interviewing researcher dressing more conservatively and making an effort to create a relaxed atmosphere before initiating the interview. The interviews were conducted in neutral environments and the participants either knew by witnessing or had heard by referral about the interviewing researcher having worked as a volunteer in some reception centres, which helped to create feelings of trust between the participants and the interviewer. Furthermore, it was stressed that answering each question was totally voluntary, and that any question could be skipped without further explanation. The interviews were transcribed by the interviewing researcher in order to avoid mistakes, as the accents of some participants were hard to understand.

Additionally, the trustworthiness of the study was enhanced by ethnographic observations that were made during eight months to one year after each interview. These observations were in line with the results from the interviews, with a couple of exceptions that were discussed above. For example, in some cases it became evident that the reported high levels of work motivation and health were not in accordance with some participants' actual psychological health status – challenged by the demands present in the limbo-like stage. This, in the case of some participants, caused problems when confronted with the standards of the Finnish working life.

Even if the participants of this study were from Iraq, the results now obtained are likely to be – at least to some extent – applicable also to other privileged groups of

refugee-background with similar skills. However, researchers planning to use generally well-tested measures in their studies focusing on Iraqis should note that perceiving Likert scales commonly used in these measures developed predominantly for the use in Western countries could pose some serious problems to representatives of culturally more distant cultures. Challenges with the scales used in the interviews became evident right at the time of the first pilot interviews, as the scales used in the Western societies differed from those the participants' had got used to in their culture. After some adjustments to the scales, as well as translation of the interview form and the measures used to the Arabic language, the scales and the English terminology proved to be understandable.

Future studies would benefit from follow-up assessments to find out how living in the limbo-like stage of the migration process has affected the long-term adaptation outcomes of those participants who were granted asylum in Finland. Additionally, there is a lack of studies focusing on the psychological processes evoked among those asylum seekers who get a negative decision for their request for international protection, and are thus sent back to their own countries or elsewhere. In addition, studies focusing on asylum seekers of different educational and occupational backgrounds, as well as of other nationalities, should be conducted, in order to compare the effects of different cultural backgrounds and related values on how different groups of asylum seekers integrate into a new country. Furthermore, regardless of the fact that the recruitment process probably would be quite challenging, also more women could be interviewed.

Moreover, considering the interactional nature of today's social support (e.g. Tabor 2010; Tabor & Milfont 2011), and the enormous role that social media has played among the recent entrance of asylum seekers, more information is needed about how these networks of social support function. It is unclear to what extent social media can be utilised to provide social support when keeping in touch with family and friends, as it can hardly replace the physical presence of loved ones. In addition, it would be interesting to study whether the social networks can provide emotional support for those who have lost contact with their families by connecting with others who have gone through the same.

### 7.3 Practical implications

The integration of the asylum seekers who gain residence in Finland requires a remarkable amount of perseverance, partially due to the significantly more difficult starting point of those who have been forced to migrate, in comparison with voluntary migrants. Effort needs to be made on how to best support the newcomers from an early stage onwards, to ensure their future wellbeing and ability to take part in the different functions of the new society. As the experiences that came up in the interviews were really harsh and traumatic for the participants, there is a clear risk of the development of post-traumatic stress disorder and other severe mental health problems, as has been reported in several studies worldwide (Kirmeyer et al. 2011). Furthermore, post-trau-

matic stress disorder has been shown to cause severe impairments in neuropsychological functions related, for instance, to attention and everyday memory (Koso & Hansen 2006), both of which are crucial abilities when it comes to learning how to navigate in a new culture. Therefore, the importance of providing care for psychiatric and psychological disorders among those who have experienced war and persecution is fundamental. The Arab population living in Finland with the skills to assist in dealing with traumas could also be of help. The initial costs to reach this goal are bound to be remarkable. That said, addressing these concerns would benefit everybody in the long-term, since failing to address them now could lead to a state of permanent passivation, or even worse, to alienation from the new society.

As stated in the theory chapter, employment is an important passage into a new country and plays a crucial role in the acculturation process as a whole. The results of this study show that the participants were eager to start any kind of work in Finland, as finding work was seen to be beneficial, regardless of receiving salary or not. Based on the results of the study, those who had done pro bono work during the waiting time had, for example, managed to significantly broaden their social network in Finland, in comparison to those participants who had not. Thus, in order to facilitate the passage of newcomers to the Finnish labour market, opportunities to do internships could be supported on a larger scale, in, for example, retirement homes, as well as within other sectors suffering from a deficit of staff. Some efforts have already been initiated: for example, the City of Helsinki is providing workshops for immigrants, with the purpose of helping them be directed to the kind of work that is in line with their skills (Stadin osaamiskeskus 2016; see also International House Helsinki 2016). For optimal outcome, it is recommended that these kinds of workshops be led by compatriots representing positive role models for the newcomers. Different kinds of low-barrier job opportunities or internships could have a significant role for both the general wellbeing of immigrants as well as their future employment opportunities, as work experience gained in Finland has, for example, been shown to significantly decrease the need for social assistance benefit among previous social assistance receivers (Yijälä 2016). It is suggested, however, that also more effort should be made to avoid brain-waste, in other words, to help newcomers find jobs that match their education and skills (see also EMN 2015, p. 36, for good practices of employment-related support measures for beneficiaries of international protection).

When it comes to practicing religion at a future workplace, the participants did generally not consider following religious rules at work to be important, and in fact, after decades of religious and political conflicts and war in Iraq, the restricted influence of religion in Finnish society was perceived as liberating and was welcomed. However, regarding potential challenges faced in working life in Finland, the labour market integration will likely be more challenging for the Iraqi women, as they are not used to an independent life, often having their spouses and extended family members making the important decisions for them. For example, for the Iraqi women of this study, leaving Iraq was said to have been the decision of their families, which is likely to have a negative effect regarding their acculturation to Finland. Thus, to help them on their path towards working life, it would be necessary to widen the perceptions on the kind of work tasks they could do in Finland, and to put extra effort in supporting their ac-

culturation process, also outside work life, especially in the beginning of their acculturation process. In addition, when possible, it might be a good idea to educate those Finnish women who work as supervisors in companies planning to employ less educated Iraqis, in order to be better prepared for situations where their authority might be questioned.

As became clear in the theory chapter, the contacts established with natives have been found to enhance positive intergroup attitudes (Pettigrew & Tropp 2006) and play a crucial role in the adaptation into a new country in numerous studies (e.g. Black et al. 1991). Therefore, providing the opportunity for both Finns and newcomers to become acquainted with each other is of utmost importance. One effective way would be the encouraging of private accommodation of asylum seekers and immigrants with Finns, as this was proven to be an effective way to increase psychological wellbeing and social capital among the participants. In their messages directed towards Finnish decision makers, the participants were pleading with the decision makers to put themselves in their place to reach an understanding of their situation. They also expressed a genuine desire to get to know Finns and their culture, and to be given the chance to show who they are, as well as a possibility to share the best parts of their own culture. For this purpose, it was proposed to establish common places to enable the overcoming of stigmas and prejudices related to representatives of different cultures through getting familiarised with each other. These kinds of encounters would be efficient for natives as well: as mentioned in the theory chapter, the process of cultural change does not solely concern the newcomers, but is something that also affects natives of the receiving country, as both cultures are bound to change along the way.

An example of a good practice in promoting more tolerant attitudes among natives is given by a 22-year-old Iraqi asylum seeker, who has visited several schools around Finland to share his story. His experience was that many (if not most) of those whom he had met had hostile attitudes towards him prior to his presentation in the classroom. However, after the students were given a chance to freely ask any question they had in mind regarding asylum seekers, the great majority had totally changed their attitudes and point of views. Promoting these kinds of opportunities where newcomers meet locals could be a very effective way of changing attitudes and increasing tolerance and mutual understanding.

In the case that the asylum seekers about to gain residence are not given the opportunity to integrate into the society, but are instead being neglected or discriminated against, there is a threat of creating radicalistic behaviour. Therefore, newcomers need to be included in each level of society, especially when planning services and activities for immigrants as well as in the decision processes considering them. If they are left out, it is likely that the target group of the services or activities in question will not be reached in the optimal way. Moreover, providing services at least in English in the related offices needs to be assured (see also EMN 2015, p. 36), and discrimination on both the structural as well as on the individual level needs to be prevented. It would also be of the utmost importance to clarify the asylum seeking process in its entirety for the parties involved (cf. Brekke 2004) as well as to inform the source of the reception allowance for asylum seekers.

The cultural distance between the Nordic welfare states and the Iraq is vast (Hofstede 1991). That said, little is known about how different or similar the personal values of the asylum seekers are in comparison to those of natives. In this study it was revealed that the values of the participants were more in congruence with those of Finns than first assumed. This result emphasises that it is important to strive towards understanding the background of asylum seekers and meet each asylum seeker as an individual. Hence, for example in public, instead of highlighting cultural differences, it would be essential to emphasise the possible individual similarities that have made them choose Finland, regardless of the existing cultural and geographical distance. This matter is also of utmost importance when planning activities for promoting different aspects of adaptation of the asylum seekers, if they are to gain a residence permit. However, based on the results of this study it is clear that providing sufficient and diverse education of the Finnish culture, values, everyday practicalities, as well as bureaucratic procedures related to paying taxes and working or becoming an entrepreneur for those who remain in the country, is crucial. For this information to better reach its target audience, it would be best if it was presented by other immigrants from a similar kind of cultural background who have already been living in Finland for some years (Red Cross 2016). The important role of comparable others in successfully delivering the message has been noted in other studies as well (e.g. Caligiuri & Lazarova 2002), as these networks provide immigrants with a sense of affiliation and serve as a valuable source of information regarding the host society as seen through the lens of comparable others.

Finland is still in a position where it could learn a lot from good practices regarding integration and hopefully avoid those practices that have proven to be inefficient in other contexts. A conscious effort needs to be made to change the focus of the public discussion: instead of displaying asylum seekers as either victims or as a threat, it would be refreshing to highlight other aspects, such as the critical examination of the reasons behind the wars and the consequences of the migration policies applied within the European Union. Also, instead of focusing on numbers, the focus should shift towards humanity and the point of view of the immigrants themselves. In order to find solutions to arising challenges, the first necessary step to be taken is to create a safe space for starting an honest discussion where the respect for human rights functions as the baseline.

## CONCLUDING COMMENT

At the time of publication, twelve participants have been denied and seven have been granted international protection. Of them, all have found accommodation, three have completed a Finnish diploma, three are studying and one has found work. Concerning the rest, one of the participants is still waiting for the asylum decision and one has left the country before receiving the decision. One of the participants could not be reached and his whereabouts remain unknown.

Those who were welcomed to stay seemed happy, relieved and excited to start building a new life in Finland, while many of the participants who received a negative decision on their request for international protection are feeling very stressed as their future remains uncertain. For some, the limbo-stage either continues (if they appeal the decision), or they repatriate – voluntarily or forcibly. Others will stay in the EU as undocumented migrants. Whatever the case, for many of the participants, it is difficult to decide what they should do next:

*Iraqi people here don't understand what's going on. Where should we go? --- We don't even want the same rights as Finnish people. Just some [a piece of] paper that says that we belong somewhere. (Safaa 26, 2016)*

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# APPENDIX 1 MAIN THEMES OF THE INTERVIEW

## **1 Background**

- education
- profession
- work experience
- language proficiency

## **2 Migration experience**

- the journey
- push and pull factors
- previous international experience

## **3 Wellbeing and health**

- satisfaction and quality of life
- experiences of stress and trauma

## **4 Social networks**

- family relationships
- social networks in Iraq and in Finland
- intergroup relations

## **5 Culture related issues**

- cultural differences between Finland and Iraq
- acculturation attitudes

## **6 Working in Finland**

- professional goals in Finland
- work related values

## **7 Life in Finland in general**

- preferences and expectations
- take-up of reception allowance
- perceived discrimination

## **8 Future**

- adaptation in Finland
- dreams and future plans

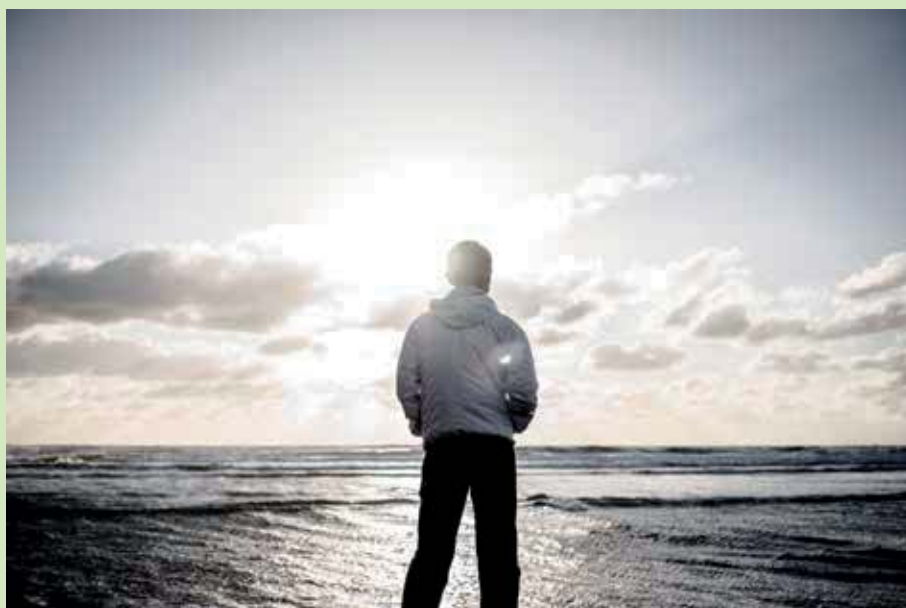
## **9 Sensitive questions**

- religion
- equality between genders

## **10 Closing questions**

- desired activities for asylum seekers and messages for the decision makers and Finns

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Abstract		
<p>This is a qualitative research of skilled, English speaking Iraqi asylum seekers, who came to Finland during 2015–2016. The data was gathered through interviews with 22 persons and by ethnographic observations. During the time of the interview, all participants were waiting for the decision about their asylum request, while being registered at reception centres in Helsinki and Turku. Half of the participants were staying in private accommodations. The focus of the study is on factors potentially relevant for a successful labour market integration among this particular group of asylum seekers, given that they are granted international protection.</p> <p>While the asylum seekers wait for a decision on their request for international protection, they live in a transitory state. Being in a new country, not knowing whether they can stay or not, pose severe challenges to their psychological well-being and integration process. The participants of this study were highly motivated to become an active part of the Finnish society. However, their difficult experiences in their native country and their arduous journeys have left their mark on them, and spending a long time waiting in uncertainty does little to promote their integration into a new country. Being idle and not having the opportunity to earn a livelihood are highlighted in the study as major challenges mentioned by the interviewees themselves. Regardless of a strong motivation of the participants to find work, in order to be ready to start working, preparative training regarding the Finnish working culture, education on everyday practicalities and cultural habits in general, as well as support in handling traumatic experiences from the past are clearly needed. Furthermore, the results of the study highlight that the attitudes and the readiness of the society as a whole to receive and support the newcomers play a crucial role in their integration in a new country. Although the results highlight a variety of challenges related to the system for receiving asylum seekers, also solutions that could potentially enhance the psychological wellbeing of asylum seekers and promote their integration into Finland are being presented in this report.</p>		
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## LIVING IN LIMBO

### Qualitative case study of skilled Iraqi asylum seekers in Finland

The number of forced migrants in Europe during recent years is second to none in history. That said, according to the OECD (2016), in 2015 people of refugee background still formed a relatively small part of the estimated 4.8 million people who migrated permanently to OECD countries. Although the movement towards northern member states of the EU has decreased somewhat by the end of 2016, more forced migrants can be expected to come to Europe in the years to come. Consequently, to be able to constructively discuss both the potential and the needs of the newcomers, it is of utmost importance to gain an understanding of the phenomenon.

This study discusses the findings of a qualitative study of English-speaking skilled Iraqi asylum seekers ( $N = 22$ ) arriving in Finland during 2015–2016. Iraq and Finland can be argued to be two countries with a vast cultural distance. The strong influence of Islam that permeates all aspects of life in Iraq, from politics to the private life behind closed doors, is almost unimaginable for Finns used to freedom of expression, keeping religious beliefs to themselves as an extremely private matter. These apparent differences aside, according to the results of the study, the future hopes and dreams of the participants reflected things that are very similar to those of Finns: finding work, getting married, raising a family and living a peaceful life. Unfortunately, in Finland, especially the visible minority groups are more often unemployed than other immigrant groups. The study discusses the aspirations that this privileged group of skilled Iraqi asylum seekers have regarding their future work life. The study also considers the possible challenges that the differences in the Finnish and Iraqi working cultures might pose to their future labour market integration.