



**EUNPACK**

A CONFLICT SENSITIVE UNPACKING OF  
THE EU COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH  
TO CONFLICT AND CRISES MECHANISM

## WORKING PAPER

# The EU Crisis Response in Iraq: Awareness, local perception and reception

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## 1. Introduction

Since the toppling of the former regime of Saddam Hussein in March 2003, the European Union (EU) has grown to play an active and supportive role in Iraq (Christova 2013). Some EU Member States followed developments inside Iraq well in advance of the 2003 Iraq War given its concerns over the regime's alleged possession of weapons of mass destruction (WMDs), ties to terrorist organisations, and violations of human rights (Kienzle 2013). In the post-2003 era, however, Iraq-EU relations took a turn for the better where collaboration and engagement replaced fear and suspicion.

With the dismantling and revisioning of state institutions during the post-war restructuration phase, the EU increased its outreach and assistance (Klingner and Jones 2005). For example, as part of its efforts, the EU funded projects in fields as diverse as trade, culture, humanitarian aid (European Union 2016) and law enforcement to name a few, with intentions to support these within an overarching reconfigured institutional framework. Moreover, in 2005, the EU launched a €27-million project termed the EU Integrated Rule of Law Mission for Iraq, aiming to strengthen this nation's rule of law by mitigating weaknesses in its criminal justice system (European Union 2014). The EU's engagement in post-2003 Iraq, bar its own political interests, has been cross-cutting and multifaceted. The engagement falls under conflict prevention and crisis response, both of which form part and parcel to the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) (Keinzle 2013) as established by the 1992 Treaty of Maastricht. Understanding how local actors receive and perceive the EU's engagement is critical to designing effective interventions.

In this report we perform a bottom-up analysis to uncover the impacts of the EU's crisis response policies in Iraq. Here we focus on the implementation-information gap by examining local stakeholder's awareness, reception and perception of the EU's crisis response. Moreover, this study unpacks whether EU conflict prevention and crisis response policies are perceived as conflict sensitive and appropriate to the needs of vulnerable groups. This paper, therefore, offers important insights into local perceptions of the EU, and breaking results down by the following sectors: rule of law, development aid, humanitarian assistance and capacity building. In this paper we first provide a brief background to the role of crisis response in the EU's foreign policy and the EU's engagement in Iraq. Within this, we provide an overview of the evolution of conflict resolution as an instrument of the EU's foreign policy. Then we discuss



data and methodology, after which we analyse results concerning awareness, reception and lastly perceptions.

## **2. Background**

### *2.1. Crisis response in EU's foreign policy*

Before diving into the EU's foreign policy in these areas, it's beneficial to untangle just what we mean by these terms. For instance, within EU parlance, terms like 'conflict prevention,' 'crisis response' and 'crisis management' are used interchangeably as 'crisis' and 'conflict' are treated as synonyms (Gross and Juncos 2010: 6). For the sake of clarity, this report employs the term 'crisis response' to describe the EU's overall reaction to Iraq's crisis in 2003.

After the Soviet Union dissolved and Balkan leaders announced a ceasefire in the early 1990's, the notion of 'conflict prevention' gained international currency. As a result, many international actors including the United Nations (UN) and the EU partnered to respond to crises and violent confrontations across the globe, thereby changing their classical mechanisms of dealing with foreign policies on their own and developing new collaborative ones. This generated an enthusiasm to curb international flashpoints based on the international community's failure to prevent or contain clashes in eastern parts of Europe during that time. Alarmed by such developments, EU Member States felt it best to develop a common foreign policy which emphasized taking a more proactive role in future crises and conflicts (Schneckener 2002). For this very reason, the EU formalized the CFSP in 1991.

The CFSP was created as a policy debate and development platform enabling EU Member States to align foreign policies on security and defence issues like counter-terrorism. As set forth by the 1991 Maastricht Treaty, the CFSP was created to meet several objectives including preserving peace and international security and promoting international cooperation. Ratifying this treaty then led to the creation of policy tools termed 'common positions' and 'joint actions' utilized to form common policies actionable on the ground. In addition, the Western European Union, a coalition formed in 1955, was made part of the EU to handle security and defence matters. Additionally, articles incorporated into the 1997 Treaty of Amsterdam and decisions made at the 1999 EU Summit in Cologne, enabled the EU to implement defence and security decisions including peacekeeping and crisis response tasks as part of its CFSP (ibid).



EU crisis response capacity continues to evolve and largely reflects enhancements to the CFSP. These enhancements involved introducing procedures to improve cooperation amongst EU Member States and their institutions. In addition, the EU established committees like the Political and Security Committee, the EU Military Committee, and the Committee for Civilian Aspects of Crisis Management and crafted mechanisms like the EU Monitoring Mission (Schneckener 2002). All these actions served to foster EU's institutional and operational capacity to address and respond to crisis in both Europe and beyond.

## *2.2. The EU's Engagement in Iraq*

Prior to the ousting of Saddam's Ba'athist Regime in 2003, the EU had no political or contractual ties with Iraq besides adhering to UN sanction mandates and extending humanitarian aid through the European Commission (EC) in the aftermath of the 1991 Uprising. Regarding the latter, the EU was the second largest contributor of humanitarian aid coming on the heels of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

The 2003 Iraq War unearthed fault-lines within the EU since key EU Member States failed to unify under one banner, thus calling into question the viability of having a common EU foreign policy. Disagreements within European states can be traced back to the late 1990's when the United States (US) changed its policy towards Iraq from containment to regime change. Suspicious of operating from an international mandate and out of historical distrust towards the US, some EU Member States, including France and Germany, initially boycotted Washington's decision on the use of force. In contrast, other EU Member States including the United Kingdom, Spain, Italy and the Netherlands sided with President Bush's decision, and thus agreed to use military means to meet political goals. These disparate alliances caused major rifts within the EU Member States.

Standing aloof from the Iraq War and post-war dynamics, the EU kept a low profile in Iraq. Its financial contribution to the €33 billion reconstruction process paled in comparison to those of, say, the US and Japan, allocating a mere €1.25 billion of the €33 billion total. Further pledges amounting to €3.5 billion were made over the coming years, but few of these materialized (Gowan 2008). According to Lewis (2009) since 2004, the EU has contributed over €200 million each year allocated to provide humanitarian assistance and rebuild Iraq. In an open seminar, the head of the EU Liaison Office in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI)



stated that ‘EU has spent close to €3 billion in Iraq since 2003 and at least €650 million since 2014’ (Johannes 2018).<sup>1</sup>

The EU’s financial and political footprint remained relatively light in the early years following the invasion but increased, later, in preparation for the two elections held in January and December 2005 by forming a training programme for election observers and dispatching electoral observers to Baghdad to collaborate with the UN. Later on, the EU maximized its engagement when it realized that a failed Iraq would weaken the existing regional order and, in turn, negatively impact the interests of many of the EU Member States.

Gradually, EU-Iraq relations warmed underpinned by two agreements: A Memorandum of Understanding on Energy Cooperation and the Partnership and a Cooperation Agreement. The former, signed in January 2010, pertains to developing energy ties and collaborating on mutually-beneficial projects, while the latter, signed in 2012, deals with partnering on vital political, security, human rights and environmental issues, among others (EU 2016).

Once the EU established a permanent presence in Iraq, its engagement there increasingly involved collaborating with international and national actors to enhance the nation’s capacity in the following realms: rule of law, capacity building, reconciliation, governance accountability and transparency, development assistance, demining and decontamination and return of internally displaced persons (IDPs), counter-terrorism, stabilisation and, most recently, security sector reform (EU Response to Iraq 2018).

Concerning its crisis response in Iraq, the EU’s aspirations boiled down to two key interventions, namely the EUJUST LEX-Iraq as well as its work on reconstruction, development and humanitarian aid. EUJUST sought to promote ‘closer collaboration between the different actors across the criminal justice system’, strengthen ‘the management capacity of senior and high-potential officials for the police, judiciary and penitentiary’ and improve ‘skills and procedures in criminal investigation in full respect for the rule of law and human rights’. However, despite its alleged success in terms of quantitative indicators regarding trained Iraqi personnel, the overall accomplishments were questioned inside the Council and

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<sup>1</sup> Johannes, C. (11 Jan, 2018). EU rep, Kurdish students exchange ideas on Europe’s role in Iraq. Rudaw. Retrieved from: <http://www.rudaw.net/english/kurdistan/110120183>.



the support by MS had vanished after four Mission extensions. This ultimately led to closure of the Mission as of December 2013.<sup>2</sup>

The backdrop for the EU's work on reconstruction, development and humanitarian aid lies in the EU's emphasis on identifying a "comprehensive approach in the support for political and economic reconstruction", which included development and humanitarian aid. The need for humanitarian aid was evident, as the EU pointed to the catastrophic humanitarian situation in Iraq, which was closely linked to the changing level of violence. The need for longer-term development aid was clear too, which had the EU pledge support for improving basic state services to the people.<sup>3</sup> In these efforts, the EU's projects were primarily directed at human rights and rule of law, capacity-building in primary and secondary education, and sustainable energy for all.<sup>4</sup>

### **3. Data and Methods**

In this study we mainly employ quantitative research techniques to interpret data collected over the course of work in 2017. The data set is composed of 75 questionnaires from four governorates: Erbil, Sulaymaniyah, Dohuk and Kirkuk. In total, 295 questionnaires were returned, as we received only 70 in Sulaymaniyah due to access restrictions. To strengthen the data's validity, researchers also conducted qualitative interviews with key informants from external stakeholder organisations, local NGOs and academics from Salahaddin University. These actors, possessing a high level of combined experience and expertise, helped inform the analysis of results. Furthermore, we also organised a comprehensive roundtable discussion to discuss the study's preliminary findings. Respondents were comprised of governmental and EU representatives, academics, and relevant international and local non-governmental organisations (INGOs and LNGOs). Key informants were composed of local actors who either were the beneficiaries of or have implemented EU projects, thereby ensuring we collected a wide range of views of those familiar with the EU's overall roles and activities.

To ensure data reliability and to avoid misinformation, the enumerators underwent a comprehensive training session where the purpose of the study and target sample population were clearly defined. Furthermore, given that some terms such as capacity building and

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<sup>2</sup> Based on Peters et al. (2017: 25)

<sup>3</sup> Based on Peters et al. (2017: 26)

<sup>4</sup> Peters et al. (2017: 34).



development aid were confusingly similar and interconnected, enumerators were trained to differentiate and explain.

The target population included refugees, internally displaced persons (IDPs), local governments and civil society organisations (CSOs) (see Figure 1). The sample was drawn from these groups to guarantee that the study reflected a full range of views by local actors. To ensure reliability, researchers collected data from IDPs and refugees from both inside and outside camps.

Figure 1: Respondents per categories

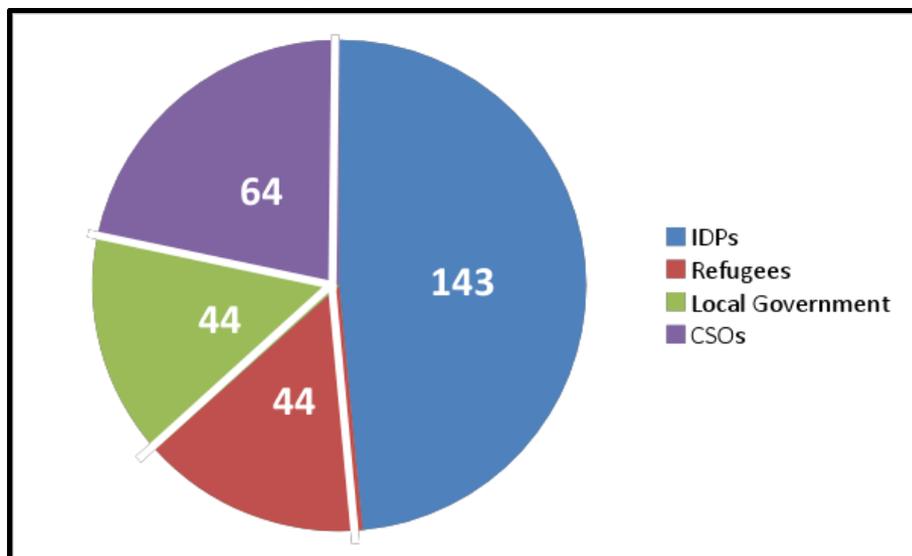


Figure 1 shows the distribution of respondents per category. In total, there were 295 respondents, out of which 192 were male and 103 were female. Around half of respondents were between 26-39 years old. All sampled refugees were Syrian. Respondents comprised various ethnic and religious backgrounds: 35.5 percent identified as Arabs, 56 percent as Kurds, 3 percent as Turkmen and 5 percent as Chaldo-Assyrian. As for religious background, 82 percent identified as Sunni Muslim, 5.5 percent Shia Muslim, 6 percent Christian, 4 percent Yazidi, 1 percent Kakai while 2 percent did not identify with any religion. Finally, as for financial status, 54 percent defined their financial status as ‘average’, 31 percent as ‘less than average’, 9.5 percent as ‘very poor’, 4 percent as ‘above average’ and 1 percent as ‘well off.’



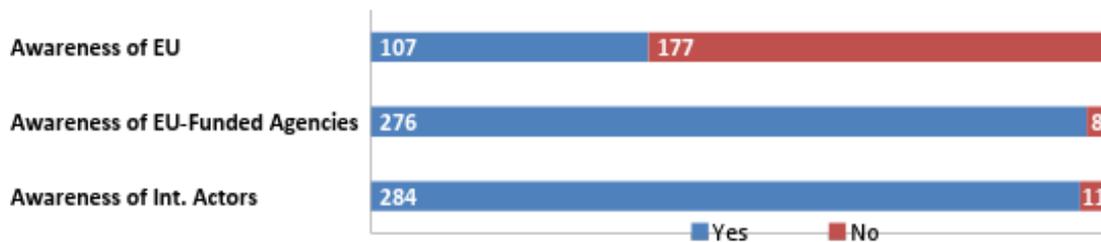
#### 4. Results and analysis

In the following we analyse the EU’s crisis response by using novel quantitative data, comprised of abovementioned questionnaires, along with qualitative data from our key informant interviews. First, we present and analyse results on awareness, then how the interventions were received, and lastly how they—and the EU—were perceived.

##### 4.1. Awareness of the EU’s Crisis Response Intervention

While a minority were aware of the EU’s crisis response in Iraq, a large majority were aware of the work of EU-funded agencies. After defining crisis response and without offering a prompt, respondents were asked about international actor(s’) engagements in Iraq. While 96 percent were aware of international actors’ engagements, only 37.7 percent mentioned the EU by name, while the remaining 62.3 percent mentioned EU-funded agencies like the UN (figure 2). This disparity could be attributed to the fact that the EU-funded organisations, not the EU itself, implement projects on the ground.

**Figure 2:** Distribution of respondents who were aware (YES) vs were not (NO) of the EU, EU-funded agencies and other international actors.



The EU’s lack of visibility in Iraq was commented on both in the roundtable discussion and during key informant interviews. Mechanisms driving this lack of visibility within certain EU programmes are many and varied. We found that one of the primary mechanisms is the absence of a communication strategy that clearly and concisely communicates the EU’s mission and initiatives to local community members. For example, while speaking to key informants, we discovered that, in general, these informants lack knowledge about what the EU does and what it tries to achieve.

A local academic suggested the reason being that ‘the EU itself does not implement projects on the ground’. Rather, it ‘funds other actors to implement projects’. Similarly, a local



government representative suggested people do not differentiate between the EU and Europe. He says, ‘the EU partners, those organizations who get funding from the EU, should inform the people about the EU as an international organization; they need to tell them what the EU is, how it functions, who it represents, and why the EU provides help’.

Within the lack of clear and sufficient communication lies, per the same local government representative, a coordination issue. While they know what the UN does, ‘we don’t know who the beneficiaries are and which area they target. This has created problems for us in terms of coordination’. Hence, better coordination with local stakeholders could maximise the impact of the EU’s presence by avoiding duplication and meet priority needs. Importantly, the EU should put more weight behind its brand and portray itself as a major actor in responding to crisis in Iraq. Doing this will not only afford the EU credit and recognition, but it will also help dispel misconceptions about the EU and its interventions in Iraq.

The lack of visibility in Iraq arises from various factors. One reason is likely the size of the EU delegation in the KRI in specific and in Iraq in general. Currently, there is only one diplomat managing the EU Delegation Office in the KRI, and four diplomats in Baghdad. The limited presence of EU officials in Iraq can be attributed to the unpredictable security situation and its concomitant expenses. Yet, the EU should weigh this issue against the benefit of having an increased number of staff on the grounds. A local government official argues that ‘the magnitude of the crisis (...) requires a skilful team, but the reality is that there is only one person. They have not for example held an annual event to tell people what they have done or at least publish a brochure or something. If there is a dearth of information, then local actors and beneficiaries would not know about their efforts. They have taken their role for granted’.

The reasons for this minimal staff deployment is uncertain, but beyond security concern, cost effectiveness might be one. As the same local government official as above suggested, the EU might consider impact more important than awareness. If that may be reasonable in some ways, it does not take into account the importance of awareness for both coordination among actors (and hence impact) and support for and perception of the EU, which is again related to its impact and success in Iraq.

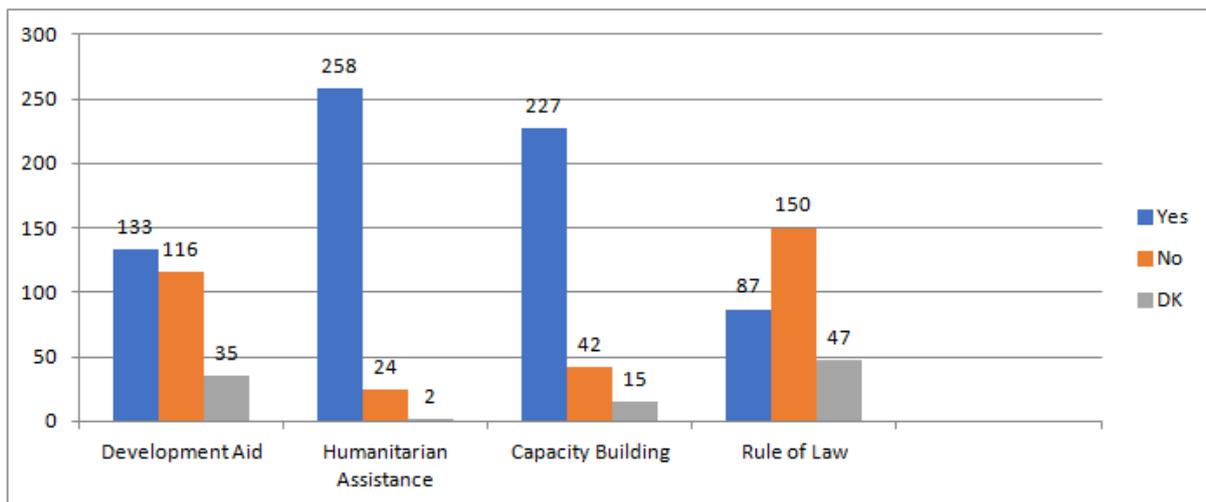
To further break down awareness of the EU in Iraq, respondents were asked about four sectors in which the EU is engaged in Iraq: development aid, humanitarian assistance, rule of law and



capacity building. Firstly, respondents were asked whether or not they were aware of the EU’s involvement in those sectors. Figure 3 shows that the EU’s humanitarian assistance is most known (87.5 percent), followed by capacity building (77 percent) and development aid (47 percent), and last rule of law (29.5 percent).

The high percentages of respondents who knew about the EU’s humanitarian assistance and capacity building might, simply, be a result of greater publicity for these efforts, as they are more urgent and often felt and seen (e.g. through refugee camps). This differs, clearly, with efforts within rule of law, which may not be easily seen in and seldom involves larger groups of society. While characteristics of these efforts may have mattered, however, it could also reflect the sample choices, which are groups that typically receive humanitarian assistance, and may be involved with capacity building. Development aid, on the other hand, might be less pertinent for these groups, but perhaps more for rural communities and others that were not as numerous in this survey as notably refugees and IDPs.

**Figure 3:** Awareness of EU involvement in security, law, capacity building, humanitarian assistance and development aid



#### 4.2. Reception of the EU’s crisis response

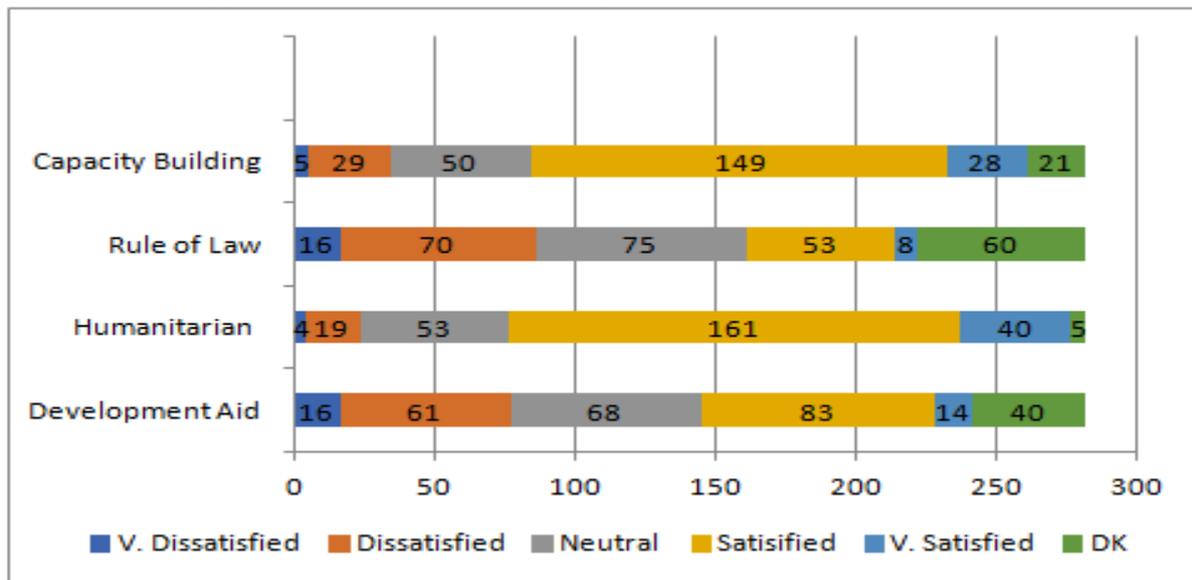
This section deals with the satisfaction of the EU’s crisis response by various targeted groups—how the response has been received. In general, satisfaction with the EU was considerable among those respondents (215 out of 295) who were direct beneficiaries of EU support. While



43.7 percent were ‘satisfied’, 51.6 percent were ‘partially satisfied’, while only 4.2 percent were ‘dissatisfied’ (0.5 percent did not know).

Broken down by sector, Figure 4 suggests respondents were most satisfied with capacity building and humanitarian assistance, and the least satisfied with development aid and the rule of law interventions.

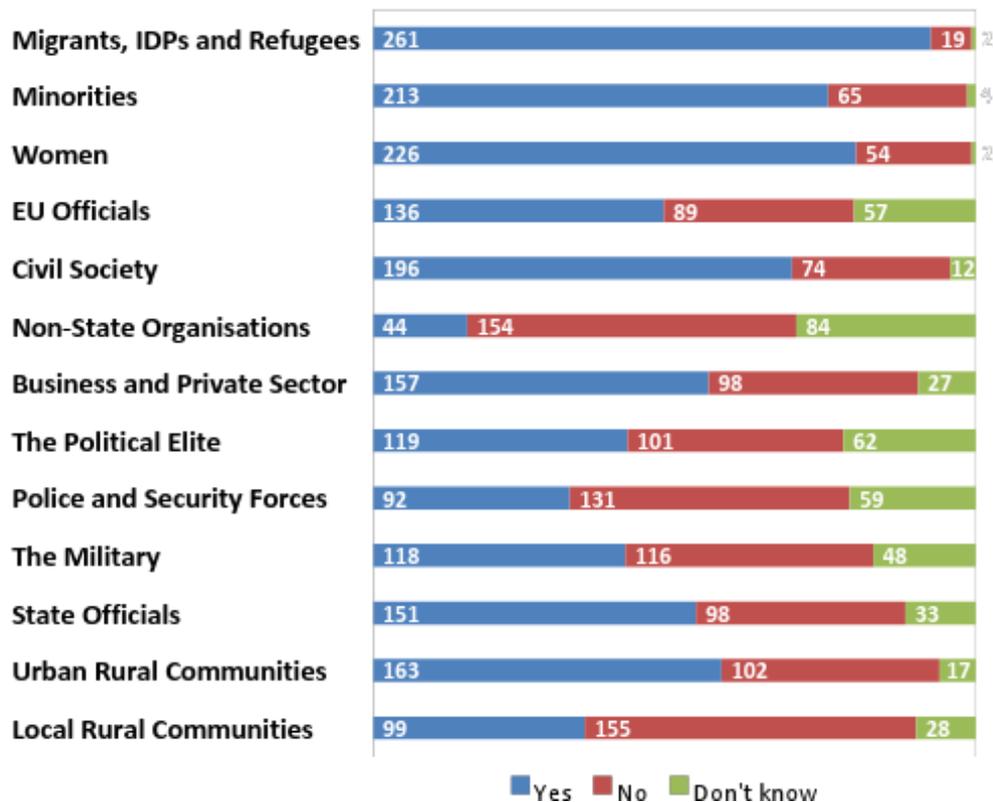
Figure 4: EU support – levels of satisfaction by sector



The satisfaction with humanitarian aid fits at least partly with data on who the respondents understood as the beneficiaries of EU support. Here, migrants, IDPs and refugees—most typically recipients of humanitarian aid—were most often labelled beneficiaries. Relatedly, women and minorities were often labelled beneficiaries, along with civil society. While humanitarian aid has benefitted these groups, other groups, such as local rural communities, were not targeted and were therefore, rightly so, not perceived to have benefitted much from the EU’s projects.



Figure 5: Perceived beneficiaries of EU support



While Figure 5 suggests respondents believed civil society benefitted from EU interventions, NGOs were perceived to have benefitted the least. The most important explanation for this is the EU's preference for international NGOs when selecting implementing partners. One LNGO leader operating across Iraq stated that in Iraq, 'less than 10 percent of the international funds go the LNGOs, while it is the local NGOs who work on the ground (...)'. A possible explanation for this alleged preferential treatment could be that international organisations are often thought to enjoy better capacities compared to their local counterparts. Nevertheless, the EU, as part of its capacity building scheme, and its strong desire to build local ownership, would be served by further exploration of possibilities to develop the capacities of local NGOs and work with them. An alternative arrangement could be that the EU would encourage collaborations between local and international organisations, whereby international NGOs could contribute with greater capacities and local NGOs with local expertise.

Such a cooperation, one local organisation representative argues, could help the local NGOs meet EU standards, hence allowing international and local NGOs to cooperate. In Iraq, this



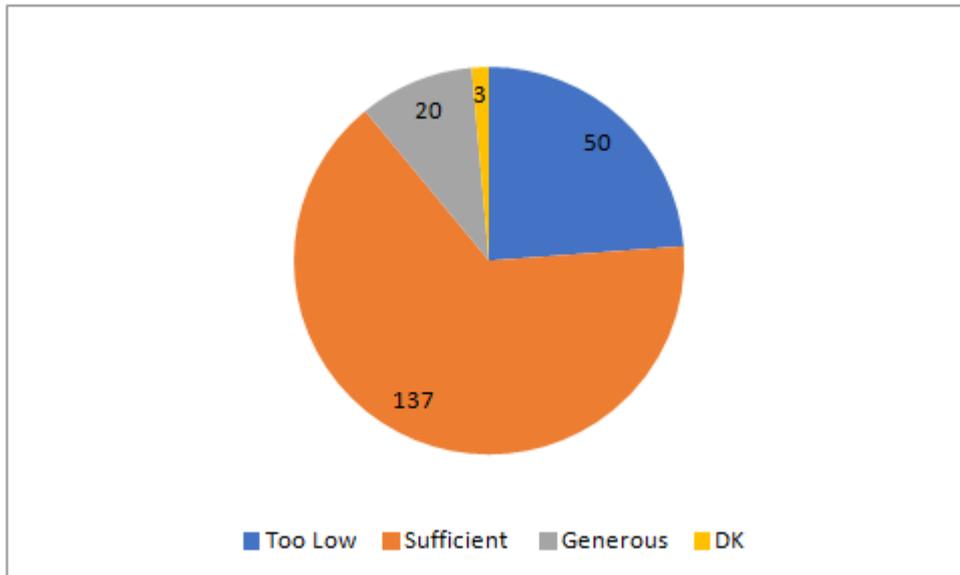
representative adds, German organisations do just this as they train local NGOs to implement projects, something that is often cheaper too. While outside the scope of this paper, a further examination of German organisations in Iraq can prove fruitful for understanding how the inclusion of local partners can produce better results. Essentially, this provides opportunities to build local ownership, which has been found to be the most frequently mentioned concept in EU documents (Peters et al., 2017: 25).

During key informant interviews, the EU's efforts were often contrasted with those of Japan, Germany, and some other EU Member States. In these comparisons the EU was conveyed to be less effective in terms of impact and approach. The EU's projects were characterised as lacking sustainability and continuity. A local stakeholder suggested the EU project on rule of law (EUJUST LEX-Iraq) has had limited impact. 'The EU Just Lex [EU Integrated Rule of Law Mission for Iraq] has not made any impact. I am the regional director of an international NGO and I have been working on the issue of justice issue in Iraq, but I have not seen anything that shows the impact of that project'.

#### *4.3. Perception of the EU's crisis response*

The perception of the EU's crisis response is largely positive among respondents, though key informants are more critical. Indeed, it is notable that while many key informants suggest the EU's crisis response has had a limited impact, most respondents (64 percent, see Figure 6) meant the response was sufficient. This is likely the case as most respondents (215 out of 295) were direct beneficiaries, and therefore felt the response was sufficient for their needs, but that informants, who likely considered also the broader developments, saw that many others needed assistance but were not helped. For future examinations of the impact of the crisis response, it may be beneficial to take a more comparative approach by including more non-beneficiaries in the survey.

Figure 6: Perception of EU support magnitude



While the response by some were sufficient and others too low, the results of the EU's efforts are perceived favourably by most respondents. A local NGO leader suggested "the EU has a good level of acceptance by the people (...) and is better accepted than other international actors." While a minority found the EU's response as the wrong type and misplaced, the majority suggested it was both the right type (70 percent) and well targeted (76 percent).<sup>5</sup> Perhaps more convincingly, a large majority (84 percent) suggested the EU's response helped alleviate the crisis.<sup>6</sup> Finally, 63 percent of respondents stated that they were better off after the EU's efforts, while 33 percent felt that their status had not changed.<sup>7</sup>

Again, while respondents are positive, key informants highlighted a concern. In their views, the EU should have a nuanced approach when dealing the various contexts in Iraq; each area has its own needs and is bound by unique dynamics. An academic suggested that 'the EU considers Iraq as one unit, while on the ground such a thing does not exist'. A civil society

<sup>5</sup> Right type: 19 percent meant it was not the right type, while 11 percent answered «I don't know». Well-targeted: 17 percent meant it was not well targeted, while 7 percent answered "I don't know".

<sup>6</sup> Alleviated the crisis (84.6 percent), aggravated the crisis (1.4 percent), no impact (9.8 percent), N/A (3.3 percent) and 0.9 percent answered "I don't know".

<sup>7</sup> Better off (70.7 percent), about the same (27.4 percent), worse off (1.4 percent), I don't know (0.5 percent).



activist argues the EU's 'one Iraq policy' has hindered the EU's efforts to meet the individual needs of governorates. Essentially, the one Iraq policy, per the activist, means 'the EU cannot do any project in Iraq unless the same is done in Baghdad or another part of Iraq'. Also in this regard, respondents were more positive, as 82 percent of respondents meant the EU's response had been conflict sensitive.

## **5. Conclusions**

The EU's crisis response in Iraq has primarily been directed towards the rule of law and its work on reconstruction, development and humanitarian aid. While its rule of law project lost support among EU member states and was closed in 2013, efforts in reconstruction, development and humanitarian aid continues as part of the EU's 'integrated approach'. Moreover, projects have been influenced by a volatile security situation in Iraq, which has put priority to emergency and humanitarian efforts over longer-term development aid engagements.

This context is important to understand the lack of awareness of EU efforts in Iraq. However, this report also finds very limited communication staff and the lack of a clear communication strategy to be key reasons behind only 37.7 percent of respondents being aware of the EU's efforts. However, also the EU's outsourcing of implementation of projects, most notably to the UN, helps explain this. By sector, the EU is most known for its humanitarian assistance, and least for its work on development aid and rule of law. This is probably so due to the raised attention humanitarian assistance usually gets, and the importance of humanitarian work in Iraq, especially after the displacements caused by the so-called Islamic State. Moreover, the lack of progress and shutting down of its rule of law project can explain the lack of awareness about rule of law, along with probably very few beneficiaries of such support present in the sample.

The EU is by key informants, including local government representatives, academics and civil society activist, criticized for lack of conflict sensitivity. However, the survey, which primarily consisted of direct beneficiaries, were generally satisfied with the EU's efforts. It seems that while more areas and people would need EU assistance, those who received it were generally satisfied.



In the future, The EU should develop a clearer and more pronounced communication strategy in Iraq. It could also, by including more local NGOs as implementing partners, perhaps as collaborators with international NGOs, build more capacity and enhance its understanding of local dynamics and, hence, improve conflict sensitivity.

## 6. Policy Recommendations

This study provides the following policy recommendations:

1. The EU should develop a clearer and more pronounced communication strategy in Iraq, which could help the EU be recognized for its efforts and avoid misconceptions about its projects. Greater coordination and collaboration with local actors could also avoid duplications and overlaps, and help identify needs on the ground. To do so, the EU should consider increasing its staff members in Iraq in general and in the KRI in specific, given the size of its engagements and the magnitude of the crises in Iraq.
2. The EU should also consider engaging more local actors as implementing partners to build local capacities and increase the projects' sensitivity to local contexts. A promising design could be engage local actors as collaborators with international once, which could become beneficial for all actors and enhance effectiveness of interventions.

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