

POLICY BRIEF

Perceptions about the EU crisis response in Iraq – a summary of perception studies

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Summary and Recommendations

This policy brief provides a bottom-up analysis of the impact of the European Union's (EU) crisis response policies in Iraq. It examines how the EU's engagement in crisis response is received and perceived by different local actors throughout the conflict cycle. The EU's engagement in Iraq is multifaceted and encapsulates, but is not limited to, the fields of reform; capacity building; rule of law; security sector reform; humanitarian assistance; and development aid. Furthermore, this study seeks to unpack whether the EU's responses correspond to the needs of target groups and are perceived as conflict-sensitive and geared to the needs of vulnerable groups. Although the findings indicate that general attitudes towards the EU are favourable, we suggest the following policy recommendations:

- The EU should place more emphasis on its image as a contributor in crisis response in Iraq. The data indicate that a significant number of participants were unaware of the EU's efforts in this perspective. The EU should also increase awareness about its roles in the fields of security sector reform, rule of law and development aid. The results show that these sectors are less known than the others.
- The EU should do more in the areas of security sector reform, development aid and rule of law. Participants have shown inconclusive satisfaction levels about these sectors. With an increasingly weak rule of law, limited capacities and widespread insecurity, expectations of increased EU engagement in these sectors are evident.
- The EU should identify the causes behind the partial satisfaction with its assistance scheme in responding to the crisis in Iraq. A sizeable share of the respondents stated that the EU's support had not improved their status in the crisis. This should warrant an investigation into the effectiveness of the EU's contributions and programmes in various fields.

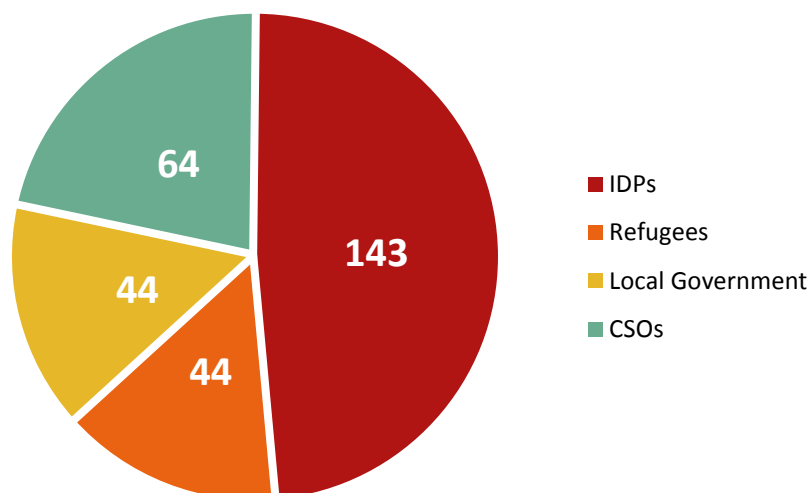
Methodology

The findings of this study are based on field research carried out in August 2017. Over the course of one week and under the supervision of experienced research fellows from MERI, four researchers administered 295 questionnaires across four governorates: Erbil, Sulaimaniah, Dohuk and Kirkuk – with the aim of conducting 75 interviews in each. In Sulaimaniah, however, only 70 participants were met due to access restrictions.

Work package 7 of the EUNPACK project developed a questionnaire to analyse local actors' perceptions of the EU's crisis response policies in three case studies in Europe's extended neighbourhood: Mali, Afghanistan and Iraq. The questionnaire was adapted to fit the local context of the investigation and translated into Kurdish and Arabic. To ensure the reliability of the data and to avoid misinformation, the researchers underwent a comprehensive training session where the purpose of the study and the target sample population were clearly defined. Furthermore, on the grounds that some of the variables are confusingly similar and interconnected, such as capacity building and development aid, the trainers highlighted the differences and made sure that the terms were well-explained and understood during the process of data collection.

The perceptions of local actors towards the EU's crisis response interventions in Iraq was the main focus of this study. In order to ensure a fair representation of local actors, researchers included refugees, internally displaced persons, local governments and civil society organisations (CSOs) in the sample population (see **Figure 1**). Out of the total 295 participants, 50.5% were direct beneficiaries of the EU's involvement, and 35% were female. The average age of the female and male subjects ranged between 26-39 years. The refugees in the sample were all Syrians.

Figure 1. Sample Population of the Survey.



Each questionnaire took around 10-15 minutes to complete. The researchers collected the data from both refugees and IDPs in various settings, including outside and inside camps. This process added quality to the data and made it more representative. It is also worth mentioning that in each governorate various camps and settings were targeted to ensure reliability. After gaining access to

camps and having the researchers trained about the nature of the study, the researchers were dispatched to the four governorates to collect data.

Findings

Awareness of the EU's Crisis Response Intervention

The collected data indicate that an absolute majority of the respondents were directly or indirectly aware of the EU's engagement in crisis response in Iraq. After defining crisis response and without offering a prompt, respondents were asked whether or not they were aware of any international actor(s) involved in the field in Iraq. In response, more than 96% of the participants said 'yes', while only 3.7% replied 'no'. However, among the former group only 37.7% mentioned the EU by name, the rest, 62.3%, mentioned EU-funded agencies. This disparity could be attributed to the fact that the EU does not implement projects on the ground; rather it funds other organisations to deliver projects in various fields. The data also show that only 2.8% of the 284 individuals who were aware of international actors involved in crisis response mentioned organisations other than the EU or EU-funded agencies (**Figure 2**).

Figure 2. Awareness of the EU, EU-funded agencies and other international actors.



In addition to gauging awareness of the EU, the questionnaire also unpacks the respondents' perceptions of the EU on a sectorial level. In other words, it tries to examine how local actors see the EU's efforts in the various sectors to which it endeavours to contribute. Such sectors include development aid; humanitarian assistance; rule of law; capacity building; and security sector reform. Firstly, participants were asked whether or not they were aware of the EU's involvement in those sectors. As illustrated in the chart below, the highest number of respondents, 87.5%, was aware of the EU's engagement in the humanitarian field and the second highest number, 77%, was reported in the capacity development field. Conversely, the lowest level of awareness was found in security sector reform, with only 18% of the participants claiming prior knowledge. Almost half of the respondents, 45%, knew about the EU's engagement in the sector of development aid while only 29.5% were aware of the EU's efforts in the field of rule of law (**Figure 3**).

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

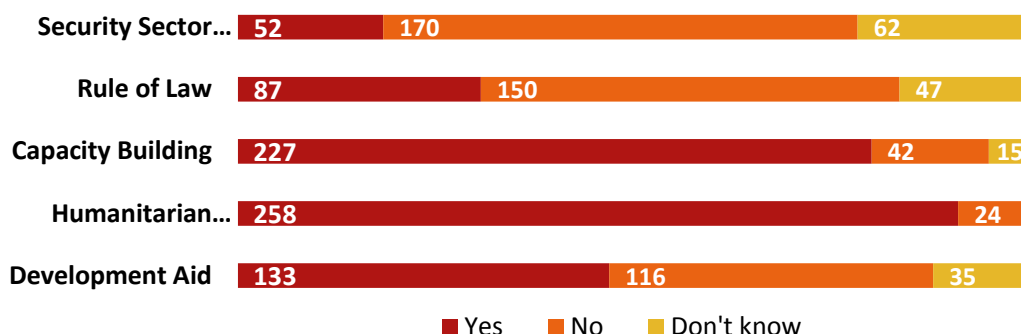
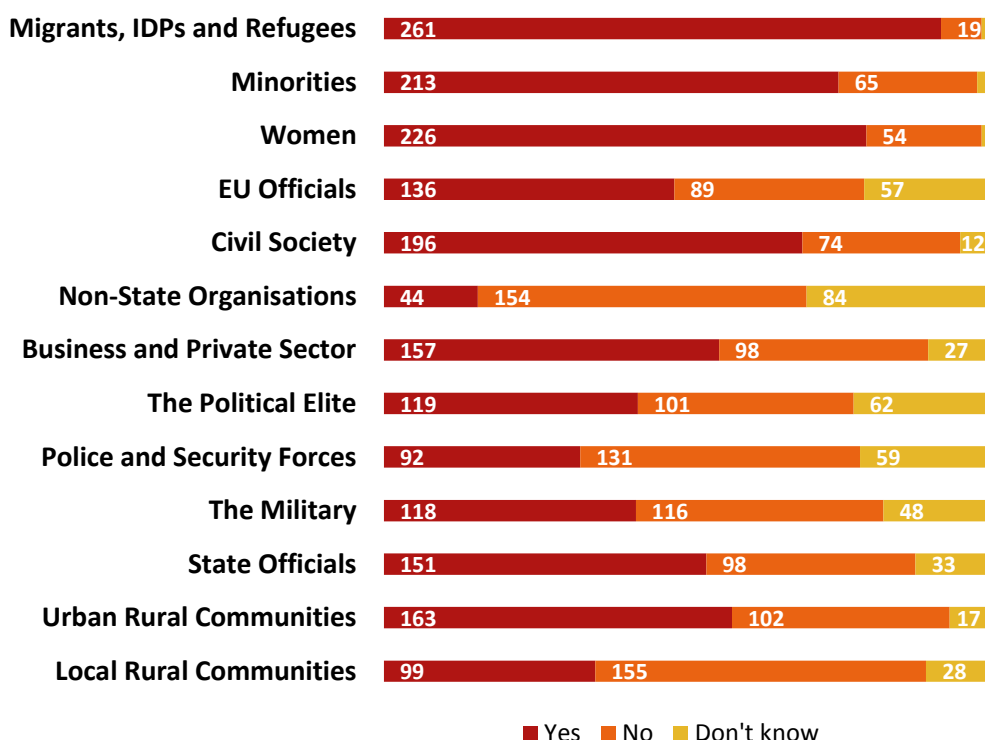


Figure 4. Perceived beneficiaries of EU support.

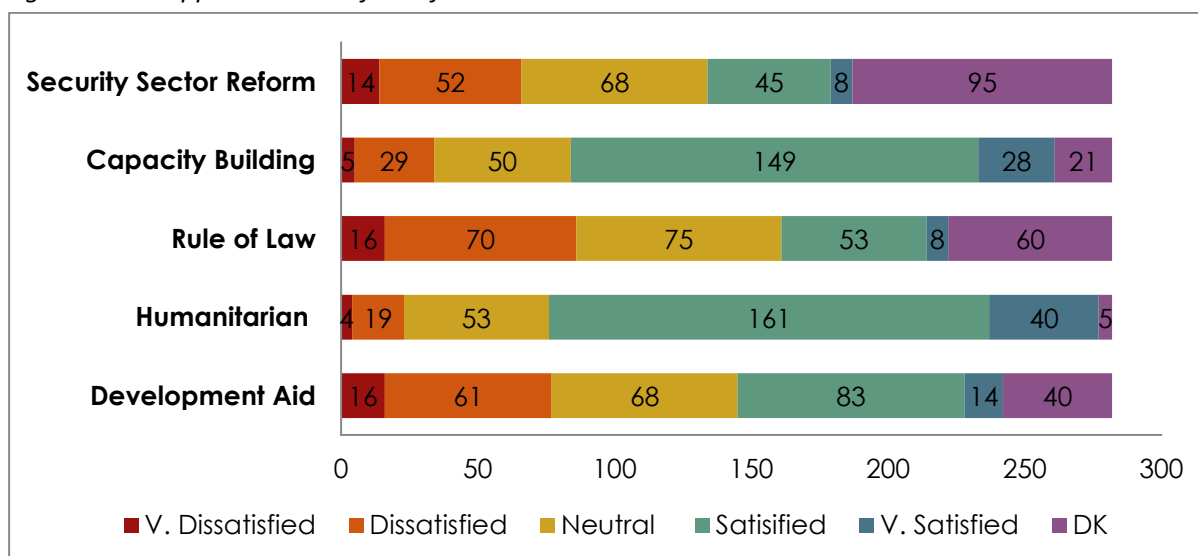


When the participants were asked about who they thought were the beneficiaries of EU support, migrants, IDPs and refugees, women, minorities and civil society came top of the list, with respective mentions of 92%, 79.5%, 75% and 69% of the participants questioned (Figure 4). By contrast, local rural communities were thought to benefit least from the EU's support, with more than half of the subjects believing that the EU's engagement did not include this group. Furthermore, the data revealed a pattern to the EU's involvement in the security sector. The responses showed that out of 284 participants, 54% believed that non-state organisations did not benefit from the EU's efforts and 46% thought similarly about the police and security forces. However, views on the EU's engagement with the military are inconclusive, with 41.5% of the subjects stating that the military was a beneficiary of EU support and 41% presenting the opposite view.

The view that the security sector benefits less than the other sectors mentioned above is congruent with the previous finding where 60% of the participants showed no knowledge of the EU's efforts in reforming the security sector. It is therefore important for the EU to increase public awareness about its efforts in these schemes.

The EU expends efforts in various sectors in Iraq, among others, development aid, humanitarian assistance, rule of law, capacity building and security sector reform. The data reveals a high level of satisfaction in the fields of humanitarian assistance and capacity building (Figure 5). Furthermore, it also shows that levels of dissatisfaction are not significant across all sectors. Only 6% of individuals voiced dissatisfaction with development aid or the rule of law.

Figure 5. EU support – levels of satisfaction



As far as development aid, rule of law and security sector reform sectors are concerned, there is a marginal disparity between the perspectives. If only satisfaction and dissatisfaction are examined, then the differences are 8% in development aid, 6% in rule of law and 2% in security sector reform. Among the other sectors, an increased level of satisfaction is attached to the humanitarian assistance field, where 57% were satisfied and another 14% of participants were very satisfied with the EU's endeavours in this sector. Additionally, what stands out in the figure above is that 34% of the participants expressed no knowledge of the EU's efforts in reforming the security sector. This could be due to the fact that the majority of the sample population were IDPs and refugees living in camps. It would therefore be very unlikely for them to be aware of the EU's role in this field.

In terms of levels of satisfaction with the EU's overall engagement in crisis response in Iraq, the survey responses tend to be rather positive (Figure 6). Around 39% of participants were partially satisfied, 33% expressed satisfaction and a minority, 5%, expressed dissatisfaction.

There is a positive attitude towards the scale of EU's crisis response intervention among the participants (Figure 7). A significant number, 66%, of participants think that the magnitude of the EU's intervention in the face of the crisis is sufficient. What is more, around 9% of participants thought that what the EU does in this perspective is generous. On the other hand, 24% of participants believed that the EU's efforts are too limited.

Figure 6. Satisfaction with EU assistance

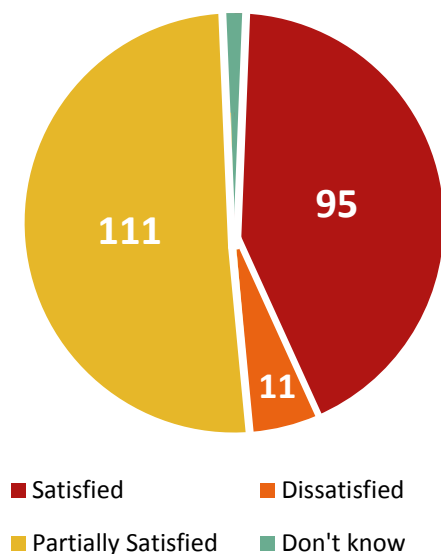
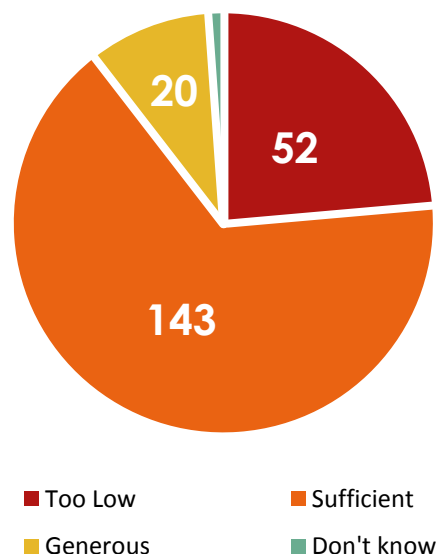
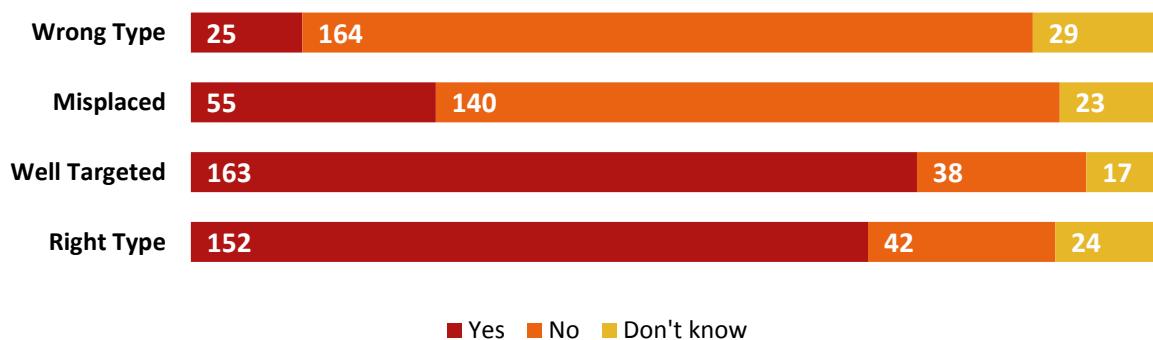


Figure 7. The magnitude of EU support



It is clear from the results that the EU's efforts are perceived favourably by interviewees (**Figure 8**). More than half of them thought that the EU's support was of the right type and was well-targeted. To be specific, 70% of those interviewed stated that the EU's support in the crisis reflected their needs, and that it offered the right type of assistance. Furthermore, an even higher number of respondents, 75%, characterised the EU's support as 'well targeted'. Significantly fewer people considered the EU's assistance to be 'misplaced' and an even smaller number regarded it as the wrong type.

Figure 8. Characterisation of EU assistance



The great majority of the interviewees stated that the EU's response to the crisis in Iraq has been conflict sensitive (**Figure 9**). When asked about whether or not the EU's approach takes into account the local context, 82% of respondents stated 'yes'. Moreover, 83% of subjects believed that the EU's intervention had had a positive impact on the crisis and had alleviated it (**Figure 10**). Finally, 63% of participants stated that they were better off after the EU's efforts to ameliorate the crisis while 33% felt that their status have not changed (**Figure 11**).

Figure 9. Is the EU conflict-sensitive?

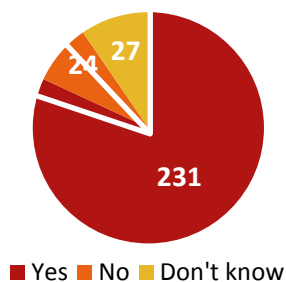


Figure 10. What was the impact of the EU on the crisis?

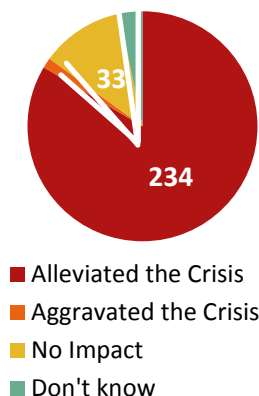
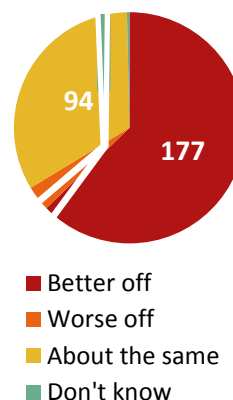


Figure 11. What is the perceived status of the crisis after EU intervention?



Conclusions

Given the magnitude of the crisis that resulted from the invasion of so-called Islamic State and the ensuing dynamics, it was initially expected that respondents would not indicate a very high or detailed awareness of the EU's involvement. However this study shows that the overall perception is favourable. The analysis shows that the subjects were predominantly satisfied with the EU's efforts to deal with the crisis; only 5% dissatisfaction was reported.

This study also reveals that the EU's engagement in security sector reform, rule of law and capacity building is considered to be limited by the participants. It is thus important for the EU to evaluate its efforts in these sectors and to examine their impacts. The EU may also consider raising awareness of its endeavours in these fields since the misconceptions might be due to a lack of awareness.