

Towards an Iraqi diaspora engagement policy

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Dr. Martin Russell and Marion Noack

1 Introduction

The historical and contemporary trajectory of Iraqi development has been inextricably linked to migration. An important yet relatively silent component of this narrative is the Iraqi diaspora and their engagement remains a relatively new policy discussion in Iraq. A situational analysis on the Iraqi diaspora¹ in three European countries – Germany, Sweden and the United Kingdom – was developed in the framework of the programme “Support to the Silk Routes Partnership for Migration under the Budapest Process”² to inform the policy development process towards Iraqi diaspora engagement. In the course of developing the situational analysis, it became clear that the Iraqi diaspora possesses various forms of diasporic capital that can help in the development of Iraq. The country has already recognised the potential and is eager to work with the diaspora.

Likewise, the needs of the Iraqi diaspora can be addressed by such policy engagement as they continue to negotiate their relationship with their origin country. In this policy brief, we aim to explore the changing parameters of opportunity for diaspora engagement for Iraqi development across local, regional and global contexts. We provide a short overview of key findings from the non-exhaustive situational analysis and conclude by offering concrete next steps in terms of policy and practice to ensure that diaspora engagement can become a force of positive change for Iraq and its communities at home and abroad.

2 Context

The current migration situation in Iraq³ is characterised by the unstable political, economic and security situation in the country and in the wider region, which is shaped by ongoing conflict between Iraqi Security Forces and associated forces and the so-called ‘Islamic State of Iraq and Al-Sham’ (ISIS), as well as the ongoing civil war in the neighbouring country Syria. This conflict environment and its consequences has led to internal displacement and refugee movements and, at the end of 2015, UNHCR reported a total Iraqi population of concern of 4.915.827, including both internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees. At the end of 2015, the main countries of asylum for Iraqi refugees were Germany, Jordan, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Turkey, Sweden, the Syrian Arab Republic, the Netherlands and others. Iraq became the third-ranked country of origin for asylum seekers in the European Union, with 130,295 applicants in 2015 and relatively high recognition rates.

¹ Developed by Dr Martin Russel (2017): The Iraqi diaspora and policy development: A situational analysis (*not published*). The methodology of the analysis was focused on desk-based research of primary and secondary sources on Iraqi migration and diaspora, consultation with Iraqi stakeholders during an initial assessment mission, and outreach to the Iraqi diaspora in key destination countries, namely Germany, Sweden and the United Kingdom.

² Funded by the European Commission, co-funded by Bulgaria, Hungary (lead state), Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey and the United Kingdom, implanted by ICMPD from February 2014 – July 2017.

³ Budapest Process, Migration Profile Iraq, 2017, not yet published.

The priority of the government of Iraq is to address the internal and external displacement of its population. One additional major concern of the government is the emigration of skilled Iraqis. Iraq encourages its nationals abroad to return home and support the development of the country, with a strong emphasis on attracting qualified and skilled Iraqis. The development of a diaspora engagement policy and related measures aiming to involve its diaspora for the development of the country should be seen against this background.

3 The policy development process thus far

Following a request submitted by the Central Government of Iraq, ICMPD agreed to support the development of a diaspora engagement policy in late 2016. The concrete cooperation started with an assessment visit to the country, involving both Central Government and Kurdish Regional Government stakeholders. This visit laid the groundwork to formulate the vision of the policy. In addition, ICMPD commissioned a situational analysis to acquire a better understanding of the diaspora needs and identify opportunities for engagement. The results from this analysis were discussed in a collaborative workshop with all relevant stakeholders in March 2017, addressing expectations from the government and the diaspora, discussing best practices, and drawing up a timeline for the delivery of this policy.

The policy development process is furthermore embedded in the region through the Budapest Process and its commitment to “further dialogue and mutual cooperation in managing migration flows taking place along the Silk Routes”, implemented through the projects *Support to the Silk Routes Partnership for Migration under the Budapest Process* as well as through the *Improving Migration Management in the Silk Routes Countries*⁴. Diaspora engagement has been an important element of discussion on strengthening the link between migration and development and is recognised as one of six priority areas of cooperation for the Budapest Process.

In addition, the level of global attention on the interconnectedness of diaspora and development has greatly increased over the past 5-10 years.⁵ The ongoing discussion from the Global Compact for Migration has also pinpointed the potential of a diaspora-engaged development agenda. The development of a national diaspora policy can therefore also help Iraq to become an active participant in the growing area of global diaspora policy .

4 Findings from the situational analysis

4.1 Method and definition

The situational analysis was based on desk-based research of primary and secondary sources on Iraqi migration and diaspora, consultation with Iraqi stakeholders during the initial assessment mission, and outreach to the Iraqi diaspora in the key target countries. Within existing literature, given the political complexities associated with historical emigration from Iraq, there was a lack of an operationally-viable definition of the Iraqi diaspora. Therefore, the analysis proposed a definition that can be negotiated as the policy development and outreach process progresses. The Iraqi diaspora is defined as:

⁴ Funded by the European Union and implemented by ICMPD. The project started in August 2017.

⁵ For more information see, *The Global Diaspora Strategies Toolkit*, Diaspora Matters, 2011. Also see A. Gamlen, M. Cummings, P. Vaaler, and L. Rossouw, *Explaining the Rise of Diaspora Institutions*, International Migration Institute, University of Oxford, Paper 78, November 2013.

consisting of Iraqi emigrants – of all ethnicities – and their descendants who live outside the country of their birth or ancestry – either on a temporary or permanent basis – yet still maintain affective, affinity and material ties to their countries of origin. It also includes non-Iraqi emigrants residing abroad who have built up an affective or affinity-based link to Iraq, along with those who are displaced within Iraq itself.

4.2 Iraqi emigration: historical and contemporary dynamics

The history of Iraqi emigration is cyclical and tied to the political realities of the time. This has created a theme of exclusion at a cultural, ethnic, religious and societal level within the Iraqi diaspora and implies that there remain significant points of distance between the Iraqi diaspora and their origin country. The often-traumatic emigration journey has resulted in complex collective memories and emotional distance from home.⁶ More recent emigration flows have seen an evolving motivational base, and career development and economic needs have become more influential. The combined histories of Iraqi emigration illustrate the need to develop a nuanced portfolio within the action plan of the policy to ensure that it caters for the diversity of the Iraqi diaspora.

4.3 Composition of recent Iraqi diaspora

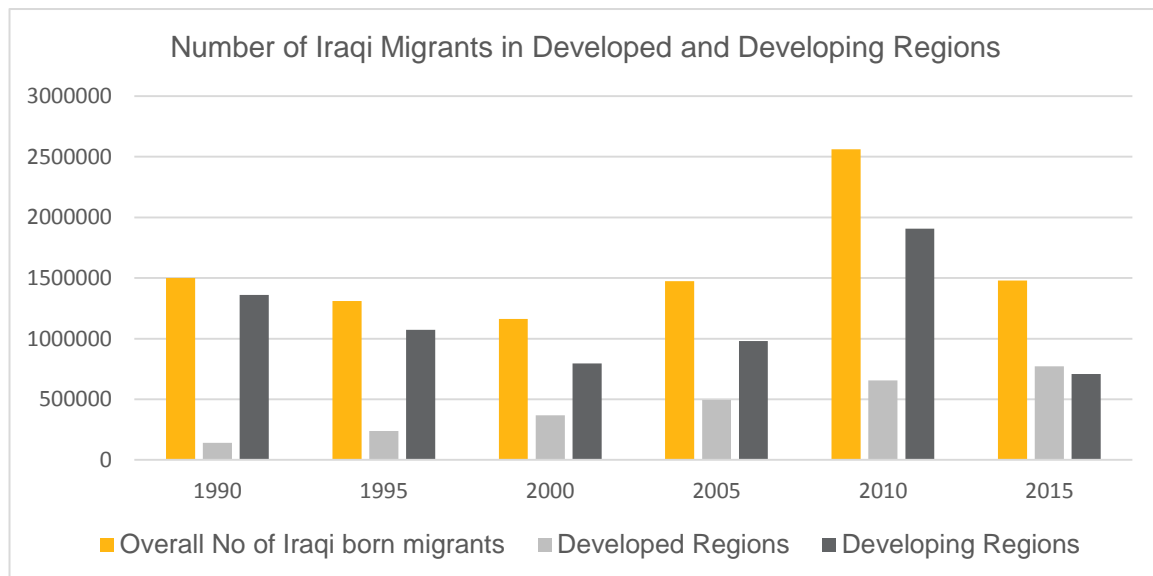


Figure 1 Breakdown of Iraqi Born Migrants in Developed and Developing Regions⁷

There has been an incremental growth in the number of Iraqi born migrants settling in developed⁸ countries. Within the remit of this project, the situational analysis examined these flows in Germany, Sweden and the United Kingdom. The number of Iraqi born migrants grew from 6,844 (1990) to 115,041 (2015) in Germany; from 38,795 (1990) to 133,118 (2015) in Sweden; and from 15,166 (1990) to 80,939 (2015) in the United Kingdom.⁹

The growth in the number of Iraqi born migrants in Germany is remarkable and further growth is predictable given the scale of the overall number of Iraqi born migrants. Female emigration is becoming more important and, in Germany, female Iraqi born migrants grew from 24.01% to

⁶ For a more detailed analysis see Martin Russell, "The Iraqi Diaspora and Policy Development: A Situational Analysis." Available via ICMPD.

⁷ As defined within the UNDESA Population Division Data on Total Migrant Stock.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ UNDESA Population Division Data on Total Migrant Stock. Available via <http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/data/estimates2/estimates15.shtml>.

39.83% in 1990 to 2015 respectively. Between 2010 and 2015, the percentage growth levelled off and stabilised at 39.83%.¹⁰

The numerical increase in the migrant stock of Iraqi born migrants in Sweden is also a narrative of continuous growth. Again, the gender breakdown is relatively stable – with Iraqi born male migrants 56.97% in 1990 and 54% in 2015 along with a slight increase in female migrant stock.

In addition to the notable growth of Iraqi born migrant stock in the UK, the gender breakdown is interesting because, of the three, the UK is the only location in which, there is a percentage increase in the number of male Iraqi born migrant stock. In 1990, the percentage was 60.40%, increasing to 62.32% in 2015.

Such data only considers the Iraqi born migrant community and, as the definition offered earlier notes, we can assume a wider base of engagement when we include concepts of affinity and generational ties through the diaspora lens.

A (non-representative) survey among 473 emigrants who left Iraq in 2015 and are now residing in Europe showed that 72% of respondents were 30 years old or younger with the median age 28; 93% were male and 7% female; 66% were recorded as single and 32% married.¹¹ Education and employment-based findings also provide insight into those emigrating from Iraq: 41% of those surveyed had a tertiary (university) level education, 47% secondary level education; 53% were employed at time of departure. According to the survey, 40% use word of mouth as the main source of information, 23% cited social media, and 22% the internet – these results are of key interest when considering the evolving communication needs of Iraqi diaspora engagement.¹²

4.4 *Characteristics of the Iraqi diaspora and implications for policy design*

The Iraqi diaspora is not singular and homogenous. Its *diversity* contains various forms of Iraqi identities and more needs to be done to dilute senses of difference that exist within the diaspora. Tensions arising from perceived differences need to be taken into account in the policy engagement process.

The Iraqi diaspora also presents *inter-generational* dimensions. With the evolution and growth of digital communications, generations are beginning to engage in multitude ways. These trends and channels need to be considered when engaging the diaspora.

Whilst the remit of this project was European focused, it is important to envision and encapsulate the *global* nature of the Iraqi diaspora. Most diaspora engagement fails because it is a one-size-fits-all approach; Iraq's future diaspora policy needs to be geographically and diversity sensitive, as well as gender and generation aware.

The internal migration realities within Iraq and the ongoing security issues mean that there are clear **regional** sensitivities that need to be shaped into the development agenda. The means and methods through which emigrants and diaspora communities **communicate** are ever-shifting and partners will need to be identified for the communication challenge ahead. Increasingly, the Iraqi diaspora are relying on close-knit **networks** for information or support.

¹⁰ UNDESA Population Division Data on Total Migrant Stock. Available via <http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/data/estimates2/estimates15.shtml>.

¹¹ *Migration Flows from Iraq to Europe*, IOM Iraq, February 2016.

¹² *Migration Flows from Iraq to Europe*, IOM Iraq, February 2016.

There are a limited number of Iraqi diaspora community organisations that have viable sustainability so it is important to connect such organisations through **networks**.

There is a clear **trust gap** within the diaspora towards Iraq. Diaspora engagement does not work without trust. A subset of the trust dynamic, **credibility** is also an issue for the diaspora. They feel overburdened at times and therefore long-term relationship building must be central to any policy. There are clear signs that whilst the Iraqi diaspora is open to participation in Iraq’s development, the **return option** is not strongly favoured. Therefore, bridging projects through technology and other means, such as investment, need to be explored. **Familial re-unification** is strongly desired within the Iraqi diaspora. More needs to be done to understand this dynamic when coupled with the falling likelihood of short-term return. The developmental vision of Iraq will naturally skew focus towards engagement of the successful Iraqi diaspora. However, the harsh reality is that many in the Iraqi diaspora are highly **vulnerable**. Diaspora engagement needs to focus on both the successful and the vulnerable in order to be successful and sustainable.



Figure 2 Micro level characteristics of Iraqi diaspora

The below quotes from interviews contextualise the diaspora characteristics discussed:

The problem we have is that we are not a community, I don’t know where to find other Iraqi diaspora other than online; The biggest challenge remains “helping on the integration journey”; The Kurdish diaspora is “united in its aims,” and, “more active as a result”; There is a need to develop networks along professional interest, and a peer to peer level with limited government involvement. People do not know how to help and the longer they are away the less they like to face what’s happened in Iraq.

You do not want to upset the government, but you do not want to be dependent on them; We should not over-burden the diaspora; There is a cultural gap and over expectation on what is achievable from stakeholders in Iraq – which is naive; We need to ensure value is really seen in Iraq for what you are trying to achieve; There is a fatigue in the diaspora on wanting to engage. Yet there remains a regret and emptiness that means we still want to help; There is an increasing level of mental health issues, particularly depression, within the Iraqi diaspora.¹³

4.5 Examples of existing Iraqi diaspora engagement practices

Whilst institutionalising diaspora engagement through government policy is a new departure in Iraq, Iraqi diaspora engagement has been more visible in recent years as the initiatives below show:

Iraqi’s Rebuilding Iraq was “implemented jointly by IOM, UNDP and Ministry of Planning and development Cooperation (MoPDC) in the Iraq IRI objective. The objective is to fill gaps in Iraqi ministries with expatriate expertise in order to encourage emigrants to return to their home country, to develop local experience, exchange local and international experience gained by

¹³ These are a sample of the insights from the interviews with the Iraqi diaspora during the research for the situational analysis.

expatriates, in addition to creating a roster of potential experts with the willingness to return to their home country.”¹⁴

Rehabilitation of the Higher Education System (UNESCO) was “designed to support Higher Education Institutes’ initiatives and ensure both their continuous improvement and coordination.”¹⁵ The Iraqi diaspora is defined as a key implementing partner.¹⁶

Iraqi Medical Sciences Association (IMSA-USA) is a “non-profit, non-political educational and humanitarian organisation. The members are physicians, dentists, pharmacists, scientists, and other health science professionals of Iraqi descent or other individuals who are committed to the goals of IMSA. Its broad mission is to develop and promote professional, educational, cultural, and humanitarian charitable efforts for the community nationally and for the international community of our country of origin, Iraq.”¹⁷

SPARK (Migrant Entrepreneurship [MEP]) “offers training and coaching packages for diaspora in the Netherlands with ambitions to start a business back in their country of origin.” One of the key target countries is Iraq.¹⁸

The Iraq Britain Business Council “brings together business, trade and investment, for the benefit of the Republic of Iraq and its members. It is a powerful network of some of the most important global corporations as well as key Iraqi and British companies and trade chambers and enjoys the highest-level of support from governments and the European Union.”¹⁹

Iraqi Youth Foundation (IYF) – UK is “a non-profit organisation that aims to bring together young Iraqis from all walks of life and promote a common identity beyond the differences emphasised in recent years. Founded in 2005 by a group of young Iraqis, we aim to: Encourage constructive dialogue and respect for all opinions amongst Iraqi youth; educate youth in the United Kingdom on Iraq’s history, culture and current affairs build bridges between Iraqi youth in the UK and in Iraq, and encourage an active interest in helping Iraq and its people build their future.”²⁰

Access Germany Iraq (AGI) is a “German consultancy company based in the former capital city of Bonn. Since 2005, hundreds of Iraqi scientists, medical doctors and company leaders gained expertise through qualification programmes arranged by AGI. AGI builds a human bridge between Germany and Iraq that brings knowledge, understanding and development from each side to the other.”²¹

Swedish-Iraqi Chamber of Commerce “was established in 2007 to strengthen relations and increase trade exchanges between Sweden and New Iraq. The initiative to establish the Chamber of Commerce has been taken as a necessary step to participate and assist in the direction and policy aimed at stabilising Iraq through improvement of economy, increased employment and well-functioning trade and prosperity.”²²

¹⁴ For more information, see

https://www.iom.int/jahia/webdav/shared/shared/mainsite/microsites/IDM/workshops/return_migration_development_070708/iraqis_rebuilding_iraq.pdf.

¹⁵ For more information, see UNESCO Office for Iraq, <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/iraq-office/education/higher-education/rehabilitation-of-higher-education/>.

¹⁶ Project Proposal available via, <http://idefie.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/rehabilitation-of-the-iraqi-higher-education-system.pdf>.

¹⁷ For more information, see http://www.imsausa.org/About%20us/mission_vision.html.

¹⁸ For more information, see <http://www.spark-online.org/projects/migrant-entrepreneurship/>.

¹⁹ For more information, see <http://www.webuildiraq.org/our-work/>.

²⁰ For more information, see <http://www.iraqiyouth.com/about/>.

²¹ For more information, see <http://www.access-germany-iraq.de/>.

²² For more information, see <http://www.svenskirakiska.se/>.

5 Policy Recommendations

This policy brief has shared an overview on the challenges and opportunities afforded by engaging the Iraqi diaspora and will conclude with setting some thematic parameters for the development of the policy. It will therefore focus on identifying key strands of diaspora policy along with a roadmap of concrete actions to deliver the policy in a timely and transparent manner. One key recommendation is that any policy development process will need to be nurtured based on extensive listening and trust building.

5.1 *A policy that reflects the needs of Iraqi diaspora*

This brief overview of characteristics, experiences, and testimonies from the Iraqi diaspora pinpoints some of the key needs of the community. Firstly, the range of activities already underway from community to business illustrates that there is an opportunity to leverage engagement of the Iraqi diaspora to help further the development of Iraq. However, the testimonies illustrate some operational and reputational needs that will be barriers to growth unless engaged through carefully developed and implemented engagement policy. Against this background, the following dimensions need to be embedded in the diaspora engagement policy:

Within the policy's development and implementation, securing an **active voice** for the diaspora is important. The methodology of the situational analysis has been a good start. Creative thought is needed to determine which model of participation is best suited to ensure the diaspora is a core constituent of the policy's creation.

To build scalable diaspora work, better **collaboration** is needed amongst the Iraqi diaspora communities. Providing support to diaspora organisations and platforms is important to support this process.

Vulnerability remains a key part of the Iraqi diaspora narrative. A **culture of care** needs to be embedded in the policy and it should also provide spaces where different memories can be respected. Hence, it is important that the policy also includes activities around the promotion of culture, heritage, sport, youth and so forth as these often act as the portal through which more direct developmental projects can be nurtured. This will require further research on the evolving needs of the diaspora, including quantitative and qualitative analysis to gain an in-depth understanding of the Iraqi diaspora. Diaspora engagement is a two-way street and ensuring the support of the vulnerable diaspora will be key to overcoming issues of credibility and distrust.

5.2 *A policy embedded in Iraq's government vision*

The **definitional framework** needs to be explored and clarified in the policy discussion. In addition, within the initial assessment mission it has become clear that there is no clear developmental vision for Iraq and that there is a need for greater political support for the engagement work. High-level **political leadership** and diaspora community leadership need to be nurtured as gatekeepers for the policy development process. However, the Iraqi diaspora are still unsure of the precise developmental "ask" to be pursued through this policy. It is imperative that the policy inspires the Iraqi diaspora with the "ask" and the **causes**, catering for and engaging through the wide variety of diaspora interests.

Given the current situation of Iraq's relationship with its diaspora, the diaspora policy needs to be **pragmatic in its aims and mindset**. Repeatedly, diaspora communities expressed

concerns around over-expectation of what the diaspora can achieve for stakeholders in Iraq. The policy should ensure the Iraqi diaspora have a mutually beneficial relationship with their origin country and that the **government** understands its role as a facilitator rather than implementer, taking into account that the two most important skills in diaspora engagement are **listening and networking**.

5.3 *Four strands of work*

Currently in diaspora engagement there is an overemphasis on remittances and skills. Whilst important to the narrative, there is a need to develop a nuanced portfolio that will widen the developmental impact for Iraq. To date, effective diaspora policies tend to institutionalise four strands of work to accommodate this scope. Iraq can emulate this four strand approach as follows:

Institutional and leadership development: Ensuring leadership and institutional capacity is secure for policy implementation, both within and outside Iraq.

Iraqi diaspora and human capital: Operating through the skills paradigm and including areas such as cultural exchange programs, mentoring, and Iraqi diaspora women networks.

Iraqi diaspora and economic development: As an extension of the remittance debate, this strand includes development of investment mechanisms, localised development programmes and so forth.

Supporting the Iraqi Diaspora: Rather than imagining “getting from the diaspora”, there must be a spirit of “giving to” the Iraqi diaspora. It will need to be designed to nurture trust and build credibility with the diaspora and will embolden a practice and culture of care for vulnerable members of the Iraqi diaspora.

5.4 *Parameters for Developing Diaspora Engagement Policy for Iraq*

Enhancing government capacities of stakeholders in Iraq and their representatives abroad: Greater leadership and institutional capacity is needed as diaspora engagement is a new policy area in the region. Iraqi and diaspora stakeholders should review what other countries are doing in diaspora engagement which will enable lesson sharing and develop international awareness of Iraq’s work on diaspora. Embassies and consulates remain at the frontline of diaspora engagement and the foreign service should be well trained on the topic.

Whole of Government Approach: A diaspora policy can only be successful if all relevant government stakeholders are involved in an inclusive process that mirrors the plurality of all those with a stake in diaspora engagement.

Building partnerships: Iraq will need sizeable and systematic donor support in the early phases of developing the policy and implementing its action plan to make it viable and sustainable. A key parameter in developing the policy will be the development of tailored public-private partnerships through which specific projects or needs can be tackled. Furthermore, the policy must embed a donor relationship management structure to ensure sustainability through the lifecycle of the policy. Partnerships also need to be developed with academic institutions and other conduits of data.

Establishing diaspora participation models: It will be important to spread the message on the development of the policy throughout the Iraqi diaspora. A networked approach will ensure a multiplier effect and establishing diaspora members or organisations as advisors in the policy process will be important.

Building diaspora community infrastructure: The Iraqi diaspora is in various states of community development in different countries of destination. The policy development process needs to offer support and platforms through which communities can network and partner.

Sparking Debate: The policy should aim to spark debate, draw in ideas from the diaspora and set the pathway towards future cycles of this policy. It should inspire not only Iraqi stakeholders, but also the diaspora and other supporters.

6 Concrete next steps

A clear timeframe of delivery was designed for the finalisation of the policy and its action plan by mid-2018 and concrete next steps proposed include:

- ❖ Establishing a core drafting team with representations from the KRG and Iraqi government with increased participation from other governmental representatives/departments, ensuring high-level political support.
- ❖ Development of a series of thematic workshops identified by stakeholders in Iraq as most pertinent, for example diaspora investment and policy development skills.
- ❖ Study trips for core stakeholders to other regions with successful track records on diaspora engagement.
- ❖ A series of consultative sessions with the Iraqi diaspora in identified European countries of destination and development of digital outreach to the global Iraqi diaspora to ensure their voice in the policy development.
- ❖ Identification and engagement of external partners to support the policy development process, such as academia, foundations, additional donor agencies and the private sector.
- ❖ A national diaspora conference to debate the final draft of the policy.

Contact Information

For more information please contact Marija Raus at ICMPD

Silk Routes Region
International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD)
Gonzagagasse 1, 5th floor
1010 Vienna, Austria
Tel: +43 1 504 46 77 2443 (extension of contact person)
Fax: +43 1 504 46 77 2375
Email: Marija.Raus@icmpd.org

Information about the authors

Martin Russell completed his PhD on diaspora engagement at the Clinton Institute at UCD and recently was a visiting fellow at the United Nations University (UNU-MERIT) and Associate Director at Diaspora Matters. He has advised and worked on diaspora engagement globally and is currently collaborating with the ICMPD in the development of a diaspora policy in Iraq.

Marion Noack works at the Directorate for Policy, Research and Strategy at ICMPD with a focus on the linkages between migration and development, engagement of migrant and diaspora associations as well as communication on migration with schools and the wider public.