The newly established refugee:

A qualitative study of Iraqi refugees in the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg

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ABSTRACT

THE NEWLY ESTABLISHED REFUGEE:
A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF IRAQI REFUGEES IN THE GRAND DUCHY OF LUXEMBOURG

by Alina-Beth D. Knoll

This thesis examines the self-reported satisfaction of Iraqi refugee families resettling within the country of Luxembourg. Are Iraqi refugee families satisfied in Luxembourg? Are they able to culturally assimilate into Luxembourg? The purpose of this study is to gain a greater understanding of the Iraqi refugee experience in Luxembourg, to assess the satisfaction of Iraqi refugee families resettling in Luxembourg, and to observe the functioning of Iraqi families in their new Luxembourg surroundings. A qualitative study was conducted to explore these questions. A sample of two Iraqi refugee heads-of-household were gathered on a rolling basis, with those meeting requirements and arriving in Luxembourg most recently offered the opportunity to participate first. Participants were required to be over the age of eighteen and to have children under the age of eighteen with them in Luxembourg in order to gather a sample with a strong Iraqi family heritage. A sample of one Luxembourg staff-member who works directly with Iraqi refugees on a regular basis was also interviewed. This staff member was randomly selected and provided by a Luxembourg refugee agency. Based on literature available on asylum in Luxembourg and the European Union as a whole, the hypothesis was made that Iraqi refugees would be unsatisfied with their experiences in Luxembourg and that this situation will place strains on the family. The study uncovered four important themes: resources available to the Iraqi refugees, their family ties, their ability to retain culture, their assimilation, and their overall satisfaction in Luxembourg. The hypothesis was refuted. The Iraqi refugee families resettling in Luxembourg were found to be highly satisfied with their experiences to date and to be highly assimilated in many ways. Four potential reasons for this were pinpointed: religion, availability of resources, a sense of community for the refugees within Luxembourg, and the Luxembourg people’s acceptance of this population. Results should be most helpful to assist in determining the next steps that future research should focus on in order to produce more generalizeable findings.
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Introduction and Literature Review

The Luxembourg national motto is "Mir wölle bleiwen wat mir sin", which translates to "We want to remain what we are" (Conserva, 2006). How well can Iraqi strangers meld into this Luxembourgish culture? A relatively small number of Iraqi refugees have found asylum in the country of Luxembourg since 1997. Refugees, as referred to here, are defined as people who have left their country because of an established fear of being persecuted for any of the reasons set forth in the Geneva Convention (race, religion, nationality, social group, and political ideas) and whom the home state cannot or will not protect against this persecution (Fortin, 2001; United Nations High Commissioner For Refugees, 1990). This study looks at the Iraqi refugee population’s experiences in the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg. The Grand Duchy of Luxembourg is one of the most financially prosperous countries in Europe, and has a GDP per capita income surpassing the United States (Allegrezza et al, 2004). Far away, Iraq struggles with one of the bloodiest conflicts in the world, with Iraqis representing the sixth largest asylum seeking group in the world in 2004, and this number is rising (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2005). Using qualitative data, this thesis examines the quality of Iraqi refugees’ resettlement experience in the country of Luxembourg.

Luxembourg has been a popular destination in recent years for refugees seeking more permanent resettlement. In 1999, Luxembourg received the highest per capita proportion of asylum seekers in the European Union (Waringo, 2004, as cited in Nickels, 2007). In 2002, (the year the participants in this study arrived in Luxembourg),
Luxembourg was one of only seven industrialized countries to report an increase in asylum claims of more than one quarter, receiving 1,043 applications, up from 686 in 2001 (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2002).

Although Luxembourg is one of the top countries receiving enormous volumes of applicants per capita (Waringo, 2004, as cited in Nickels, 2007), they are equally known for the high volumes of applicants they decline (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2002). This is in part due to native Luxembourgers’ fear of “the effect on national identity if foreign nationals outnumber Luxembourgers, as they are expected to do within the next few decades” (Nickels, 2007, p. 38). There is also a prominent fear of illegal immigration, and research has found that these fears sometimes affect policy making and public opinion concerning asylum seekers (Nathwani, 2000; Steiner, 1999; Nickels, 2007; Haddad, 2008). Nathwani (2000) states, “Asylum is increasingly seen simply as an alternative path to immigration” (p. 355) in Europe, and later states that the policy in place “threatens to undermine the institute of asylum” (p. 356). It is apparent that the moral argument of human rights and providing adequate services to “real refugees” conflicts with the underlying current of negative attitudes towards “economic refugees” (Steiner, 1999, p. 47) and that this clash is characterized “by a tug-of-war between national interests pulling for tighter asylum policies and moral arguments pulling for looser ones” (Steiner, 1999, p. 46).

Laws regarding asylum seekers and refugees in the European Union are topics of hot debate and have undergone modification in recent years (Robinson, 1995). “Luxembourg… is at the forefront of European integration” (Nickels, 2007, p. 37). The
small size of Luxembourg, its status as an active immigration and asylum country, and its
historic tendency to go along with European Union legal trends when dealing with
asylum affairs (Nickels, 2007) makes it an especially interesting country to examine.

The current refugee and asylum laws in Luxembourg follow the guidelines set
forth by the European Union. When changes in refugee and asylum policy are
encouraged by the European Union, Luxembourg frequently makes such alterations.
Nickels writes, “The authorities in Luxembourg have always been eager to adopt
European legal instruments” (2007, p. 39). For example, in April 2004 the Qualification
Directive was adopted by the Council of the European Union. This directive defines two
international protection statuses: refugee status and subsidiary protection (United Nations
High Commissioner for Refugees, 2007). Luxembourg adopted the protection statuses of
refugee and subsidiary protection, and this acceptance of the leanings of the European
Union exemplifies typical Luxembourg behavior.

The current Luxembourg regulations and procedures provide asylum seekers
certain provisions. Asylum seekers have the same right to health care as nationals in
Luxembourg (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2000; Norredam et al,
2005), but only after three months in the country (Norredam et al, 2005). Free
psychological services are also available to asylum seekers in Luxembourg through the
national health system (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2000), but
specific treatment especially for traumatized asylum seekers is nonexistent (Norredam et
al, 2005).
In Luxembourg, all asylum seekers at first are accommodated in reception centers and different forms of assistance during the admissibility stage are given only to those who are living in these reception centers (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2000). Other provisions include free education to children, free language classes in German or French to those over the age of sixteen who have been accepted to participate in the normal admission determination procedures (which is described in more depth in the following paragraph), an allowance for basic food and living expenses, and an allowance all parents receive from the government for each of their children under the age of twenty-six years (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2000). United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (2000) also notes asylum seekers are not given the right to work during the status determination procedure, but that they are given the right to remain in the country of Luxembourg until a final decision is made regarding their application.

When asylum seekers enter Luxembourg they must file an application for international protection with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and of Integration. When their application is processed, one of three main outcomes will be determined for them (Ministère des Affaires Etrangères et de l'Immigration du Grand Duché de Luxembourg, N.D.). While they are waiting, they are housed in collective housing units and provided with assistance for basic living requirements.

According to the brochure which is given to asylum seeking applicants by the Luxembourg government to guide them through their legal rights and the application process, the first and most desirable outcome of the asylum seeker’s application is to gain
status as a refugee (Ministère des Affaires Etrangères et de l'Immigration du Grand Duché de Luxembourg). This outcome entitles them to at least three years residence in Luxembourg, and often leads to the refugee eventually establishing permanent residence in Luxembourg. This outcome is the least common of the three.

The second outcome is to gain subsidiary protection (Ministère des Affaires Etrangères et de l'Immigration du Grand Duché de Luxembourg). This is an incidence where the applicant is not believed by the court to fit into the refugee definition, but acknowledges that the home country of the individual is currently unsafe for them. As such, they are granted a renewable one year permit to reside in Luxembourg, but when the situation in their home country is determined by the court to be safe and the permit timeline has expired, they are asked to return to their country of origin. If they refuse to comply, their return is forcefully mandated.

The third and final outcome is to be denied acceptance in any form (Ministère des Affaires Etrangères et de l'Immigration du Grand Duché de Luxembourg). In this case, the asylum seeker is ordered to return to their country of origin, and this is forcefully carried out if the asylum seeker does not obey. There is also a fourth option of temporary protection that should also be mentioned. This outcome is for mass influxes of a certain refugee population who cannot reasonably return to their country of origin but are overwhelming the system. In this case, temporary protection is applied to the entire population, but this option is only instigated by the Luxembourg government or by a European Union decision, and it is very rare, temporary, and easily terminated by the
government. For a visual explanation of the totality of the applicant procedure, refer to Appendix A.

While waiting for their application to be processed, all asylum seekers are given housing (usually collective housing with large numbers of people), food provisions, monthly monetary assistance (see Table 1.1), at least partial coverage of medical care, free public transportation, and social guidance. Children are also required to go to primary or secondary school, and free-of-charge assistance by an attorney is optional. As soon as the applicant has obtained refugee status or subsidiary protection status they are granted a residence permit, in some cases they are given travel documents, they are entitled to find employment and professional and vocational training is made available to them. Luxembourg has established figures regarding the minimum income required to survive in Luxembourg according to family size. The Fonds National de Solidarité provide each family assistance according to this Revenue Minimum Guarantee. If the aid provided to the family exceeds this amount, funds may be decreased, but if the aid provided does not reach this amount, other assistance will be provided in order to match the Revenue Minimum Guarantee standards (Ministère des Affaires Etrangères et de l'Immigration du Grand Duché de Luxembourg).
Table 1.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Monthly cash allowance for those receiving housing and food</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>For each adult person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For each child from 2 years up to 11 years of age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For each teenager between 12 and 18 years of age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For each child under 2 years of age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For each unaccompanied minor between 16 and 18 years of age</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Monthly cash allowance for those lodged by a Luxembourg resident and thus         |
| not given meal supplies                                                          |
| For each lone adult person                                                        | 294.00 Euros |
| For each two-person household                                                     | 534.15 Euros |
| For each additional person                                                         | 214.30 Euros |
| For each teenager aged from 12 up to 18                                            | 174.45 Euros |
| For each child under 12 years of age                                               | 133.50 Euros |
| For each unaccompanied minor between 16 and 18 years of age                       | 294.00 Euros |


Asylum policy in Luxembourg and the European Union has faced a substantial amount of criticism in recent years (Thomas, 2006; Nathwani, 2000; Steiner, 1999; Nickels, 2007; Haddad, 2008; Robinson, 1995). The asylum situation in Europe is far from perfect, and these circumstances combined with the uncertainty of the Luxembourgish people to trust the legitimacy of asylum seeking foreign nationals could create a negative atmosphere for Iraqi refugees. Therefore, this thesis hypothesizes that Iraqi refugee families resettling in Luxembourg will feel unsatisfied with their experiences in Luxembourg, and that this situation will place additional strains on the family.
The purpose of this study is to gain a greater understanding of the Iraqi refugee experience in Luxembourg, to assess the satisfaction of Iraqi refugee families resettling in Luxembourg, and to observe the functioning of Iraqi families in their new Luxembourg surroundings. This is accomplished by exploring themes of Iraqi refugee family life, experiences in Luxembourg, expectations for life in Luxembourg, and difficulties in Luxembourg.

This study is very important for several key reasons. Although the current Iraqi refugee crisis is not completely devoid of research, modern Iraqi refugees are a population who has received limited attention in the literature, and Iraqi asylum seekers resettling in Luxembourg have not received any noteworthy academic attention. For this reason alone, the results of this study have the possibility of filling this important gap in the body of knowledge on Iraqi refugee families. Additionally, Iraqi refugee families will likely undergo tremendous stress and change as their entire family is relocated to a new culture and a new life. Observing Iraqi family adjustment in Luxembourg could potentially provide insight into better ways to serve Iraqi refugees and help to pinpoint problems which could potentially be addressed by welcoming countries and resettlement agencies. This study is also important because Luxembourg is a member of the European Union, which places it amongst a great current debate on asylum policies in the European Union. Due to its small size, the Luxembourg situation may be considered slightly less complex than that of larger countries, potentially allowing the research to take a targeted snapshot of the situation for newly resettled Iraqi refugees within the European Union system. Nevertheless, because of the small sample size of this study, results should be
most helpful to assist in determining the next steps that future research should focus on in order to produce more generalizeable findings. Finally, the sheer volume of Iraqi’s forcibly displaced from their country and flooding into countries all around the world makes the Iraqi refugee a nearly global population of interest, and any research on Iraqi refugees can potentially aid anyone working with them.

Methods

The sample for this qualitative study was composed of two smaller samples, the first of which consisted of two Iraqi refugee heads of household from separate families, Hassan and Zaid. These refugees were parents older than eighteen, in order to gain a sample that has a strong Iraqi heritage and well-established ethnic history. Participants were required to have at least some living immediate family with them in Luxembourg, in order to gain insight into the struggles associated with resettling a family unit. Subjects were recruited through their resettlement agency, and the participants who agreed to participate were selected on a rolling basis, with those who had arrived most recently being offered an opportunity to participate first. All participants were recruited and participated through an informed consent process. Research was conducted in the refugee’s homes, and an Arabic interpreter assisted with every interview. Minimum payment incentive of thirty Euros was offered to the participants to reimburse them for their time. Each head of household and the staff member were offered this amount, regardless of the number of questions they chose to answer.

1 Real names replaced with pseudonyms.
The two families each have backgrounds unique to them, but they also have many similarities as well. Both families came to Luxembourg in 2002. Both families also come from the same small region of Baghdad and were neighbors when living in Iraq. Both families then fled to Turkey (at different times), where they stayed for a short time before coming to Luxembourg. Both families are Catholic and received assistance when coming to Luxembourg from the Catholic Church in Luxembourg.

Hassan is a middle-aged man. He came with his wife and his three children, who range in age from sixteen years old to twenty-two years old. They chose to come to Luxembourg because his extended family who is resettled in Canada encouraged it. They thought Luxembourg would be safe and quiet. The church reached out to them, so the Catholicism of Luxembourg also encouraged them to settle in the Grand Duchy. Hassan has a Secondary level education.

Zaid’s immediate family is spread across several countries. There are eight children in the family, although some are grown. Of those eight, two are in Canada and one son is still in Iraq. The remaining five live in Luxembourg and range in age from seventeen years-old to thirty-seven years of age. Zaid is middle aged and is educated at the Primary level. He came to Luxembourg because his oldest daughter (now thirty-seven) came to Luxembourg as a refugee in 1997, and she encouraged him to come because she had found Luxembourg to be a safe place suitable to their families needs.

The interviews of Iraqi refugees were based upon a pre-written interview guide. The Iraqi refugee participants were asked a series of questions falling under four categories: Background, Expectations and Experiences in Luxembourg, Difficulties in
*Luxembourg,* and *Family.* Questions asked in the *Background* section intend to create a framework for understanding the rest of the interview (e.g., “Did you choose to come to Luxembourg?”). The *Expectations and Experiences in Luxembourg* questions sought to discover the perceived quality of their Luxembourg stay and how the refugees perceived Luxembourg prior to their arrival (e.g., “What resources did you expect the Luxembourg government or related agencies to provide for you, and did this happen?”). The *Difficulties in Luxembourg* section uncovered any negative experiences they have faced in Luxembourg and gauged the importance of these events to the refugee (e.g., “Does your Iraqi heritage make it difficult for you in Luxembourg?”). Finally, the *Family* section primarily surveyed the family situation (e.g., “What is your role in the family, and how has that changed since arriving in Luxembourg?”).

The second sample consisted of one refugee resettlement agency staff member. This staff member was required to have direct contact with Iraqi refugees at least once per week and to have been working at the agency for at least one month to be eligible. The subject volunteered to participate in the study, through an informed consent process. The interview took place in the staff member’s private office space. Minimum payment incentive was offered to the participant to reimburse her for her time.

The staff member interviewed was the head of one of the Caritas offices in Luxembourg. She has been working with Iraqis for twelve years and is fluent in Arabic, which is a rarity amongst Social Workers in Luxembourg. She says she knows every Iraqi refugee in Luxembourg and has more contact with them than almost any other person assisting them in Luxembourg. She is trained in Anthropology and Sociology and
feels she understands Iraqi refugees incredibly well because of her experience and training.

The interview questions for the agency staff member were based upon a pre-written interview guide and centered around two main topics: *Career* and *Experiences with Iraqis*. The *Career* section asked questions providing background for the staff member (e.g., “How much contact and personal experience have you had with Iraqi refugees?”). The *Experiences with Iraqis* section asked questions revealing staff perceptions of the Iraqi refugee situation in Luxembourg (e.g., “In your experiences, do Iraqi refugees assimilate well into Luxembourg’s culture? Why or why not?”).

**Results**

The interviews uncovered several important themes regarding the resources available to the Iraqi refugees, their family ties, their ability to retain culture, their assimilation, and their overall satisfaction in Luxembourg.

**Resources**

Asylum seekers are granted access to many of the same benefits as Luxembourg nationals. Iraqis interviewed reported receiving the resources they felt they needed. Both families reported receiving money from the government for their children, which was an essential form of assistance. Despite unemployment, Hassan even said that they “have no problem of money” because of this monetary allowance for each of their children. When asked how he feels about the services that have been provided to him in Luxembourg, Hassan responded, “God Bless You. We get everything here in Luxembourg. Democratic
country with security, and we thank the government, we thank the system, we thank the Luxembourg people.”

It was not always this easy for the families. Resources were scarcer when they first arrived. Zaid complained about the first three years he lived in Luxembourg, stating that “It was hard”, “there was no stability”, and that “it was very long to not have papers.” Hassan also noted that the first two and a half years in Luxembourg they did not have their statute paperwork, so they were not given a “right to look for a job or for housing.” Hassan said they received “help from the Ministry (of Family and Integration) to live.” His wife wanted him to get a job, but he could not for the first two and a half years in Luxembourg.

Both families left Iraq before the 2003 American invasion for the same reason, and this reason had to do with the lack of safety they felt in their home country. Hassan explained the situation, saying they felt unsafe:

“But in Iraq the majority is Muslim, and (we) are not, (we) are Catholic, and (we were) afraid because Muslim people (thought we were) with America. (We) were afraid also by the Muslim people because they (said we) may make a coalition with America… Muslim people said, ‘If you don’t leave your house, we (will) make… problems.’”

Because of this situation, they mainly desire to feel a sense of “stability” in their new housing, and since they have no fears living there, “it is better here in Luxembourg.” At first, both families lived in collective housing with other refugees, but after two to three years, both families were given “second-chance housing” and given a “private home.”

One major resource both families did not yet have was Luxembourgish nationality. The most frequently expressed complaint by both families had to do with
their inability to attain status as a Luxembourgish national. Without this, they felt unable to gain access to all resources which might be available to them, and Hassan stated his specific need to gain nationality in order to leave the country and visit his dying mother. He was unable to get this nationality yet because he had not lived in the country for seven years. Zaid could not gain nationality because of his self-proclaimed inability to learn Luxembourgish, “because (I am) old”.

Without Luxembourgish language skills, he cannot be granted nationality, and Zaid noted that this limits his access to resources. The interviewed staff confirmed this. She claimed that the previous law to acquire nationality required them to live in the country for five years and to know French, German, or Luxembourgish, but today they must live in the country for seven years and learn the Luxembourgish language, regardless of the French or German skills. She noted that most refugees choose to learn French first, because it is the easiest language, but that Luxembourgish is important for them to learn if they wish to gain citizenship.

Refugee agencies also provide a plethora of program activities to ease in the transition for refugees. In the center that the staff participant heads, language courses in French, German, and Luxembourgish are provided, and they provide this instruction in a variety of languages including Arabic. The center also provides homework assistance for the children twice a week, cultural activities, computer classes, and programs specifically for women. Additionally, they provide general assistance by helping to guide the refugees in their application processes, assisting the refugees with finding employment, and helping them with whatever problems they may run into.
Family Ties

Family ties were a recurring theme in the interviews, and there were definite similarities between the two families’ situations. Both families spoke fondly of their family with them in Luxembourg. The heads of household spoke of their families as if they were close-knit, and placed a strong emphasis on the well-being of their children.

Both men interviewed described themselves as “the god of the family.” Hassan described his family as living “with great solidarity” and that because “of this value of solidarity they get no problems, because the parents make every project of working for the children.” Maintaining these family ties and relationships in Luxembourg was stated as a priority for both families.

Despite their contentment with family life in Luxembourg, both families raised concerns about family outside of Luxembourg. Zaid was deeply concerned about his son and his son’s wife, who remained in Iraq. He complained:

“(I) must send them every month some money to live and (my) dream is to bring this whole family here… because they have nothing in Iraq, they are in bad condition, and the family and the other children must help to send some money to live… (and) to leave. (We) want him to come, but it’s very difficult.”

Hassan’s family also worried about their family members outside of Luxembourg. The participant spoke of his mother, who is fatally ill in Canada. Without nationality, he cannot leave to visit her before she dies. Hassan would always state how the family is “so happy”, then would often tack on sentences such as, “But (we) have this dream about nationality” because he wants to visit his mother. In both families, their ties with family stationed in Luxembourg have remained strong, but their ties with those in other
countries are a source of great distress for them. This is because the families value strong family ties and place great worth on the solidarity of their families. Specifically, Zaid felt that his son was not safe in Iraq, which distressed him, and Hassan was upset because he is unable to visit his dying mother.

Culture Retention

In situations where people are immigrating, loss of important cultural values sometimes arises, and this can cause difficulties for the family. The refugees interviewed in this study did not have significant complaints about retaining their culture. Hassan commented that his family’s ease of adjustment was thanks, in part, to their Iraqi heritage:

“(Our) Iraqi heritage helps (us) to adjust here because (we) are a people of culture, of values. (We) are educated and it was not difficult to adjust… because (we) have the principles that stem from (our) values. (We) are a people with civilization, with culture, with history. No problems. What is important for (us) is peace.”

It was obvious that he was proud of their culture, and felt that the Luxembourgish culture and Iraqi culture were compatible together. Zaid felt that his family had maintained the essentials of their Iraqi culture. He said, “The principle tradition is… respect between the parents and the children. It was so in Iraq and also here… And to this day there is no problem, but after we don’t know, because it’s an evolution.” Zaid also stated, “Today (we) live always with the Iraqi education, with Iraqi traditions and values.” He also expressed uncertainty for the future of his family’s cultural retention, stating that “Today there is no problem, but after we don’t know what comes next.” Neither participant made any comments about whether or not they had lost any of their Iraqi culture, but both felt
as though the essential elements of their culture have remained intact since finding asylum in Luxembourg.

Hassan and Zaid both come from Catholic families, making them a minority in Iraq, but not in Luxembourg, which is a country where 87 percent of people are registered as Roman Catholic (CIA, 2008). Zaid notes, “It is not difficult” for his family in Luxembourg, “Because they are Catholic also, so no problem.” They feel that their Catholic heritage helps them feel like they belong in the country of Luxembourg. It is easy for them to practice Catholicism in Luxembourg, so they no longer feel at risk because of their religion like they did in Iraq.

Both men also seemed somewhat unhappy about their employment status. They are both currently unemployed, but both emphasized their desire to find work. Both men, but Hassan in particular, believed they had sufficient money to live, but both wanted to find work regardless. Hassan pointed out that he is “every time looking for work and don’t look for help.” Hassan, who had been unemployed for almost three months at the time of the interview, spoke of this situation multiple times, stating that, “This is a problem.” Zaid also points out that when he first moved to Luxembourg he did not have the proper paperwork to work, and he described this period as “Hard…. because there was no stability.” Both Hassan and Zaid value employment and want to maintain their role as provider for their family. Hard-work and employment are important values to them, and their current inability to find work in Luxembourg bothers them, but they are also hopeful that they will be able to find work soon.
The refugee agencies in Luxembourg and the Ministry of Family and Integration do not specialize in employment services for the refugees, but they often do assist them in finding work, teach them the customs of Luxembourg, and help them gain relevant language skills. Refugees can put their names on an unemployment list through the Administration for Employment, and when the Administration finds the refugee work they will contact them, but there is nothing the refugee can do to speed this process. All but two of the Iraqi refugee families in Luxembourg have opened snacks (a restaurant shop selling kabobs and similar foods), but some, such as Hassan, have been forced to shut down because of the strong competition from other snack restaurants. Hassan has completed secondary level education (high school equivalency) and he owned a club in Iraq with music entertainment and food. Zaid has a primary level education (sixth grade equivalency) and was a hairdresser in Iraq.

**Assimilation**

To what extent are Iraqi refugees able to assimilate into Luxembourg’s society? According to the data gathered, they are able to assimilate with relative fluidity. For example, the children were noted to be well-behaved and happy, and were progressing in their studies. Also, partially because of their Catholic religion, both families felt a part of Luxembourg society. The staff participant said that they keep their traditions and values, but they slowly begin to mix it with the Luxembourgeois culture. She noted that the older generations have a more difficult time assimilating than the young people and that their transition is slower, but that for the youth assimilation is very easy.
However, language is a substantial constraint on assimilation with particular relevance in the country of Luxembourg. For the children, language was unsurprisingly not a long-standing barrier. When asked if his children had any language difficulties when they started school in Luxembourg, Hassan replied, “At first yes, because they did not speak the language, but no problems after six months.” He also spoke of their bilingual abilities with pride, bragging that his son speaks German, French, Luxembourgish, Arabic, and Aramean.

For the parents, however, language does not come as easily. Hassan immediately began learning French and now speaks it quite fluently, but he is still learning Luxembourgish. Zaid has almost no language abilities apart from Arabic and Aramean, and this is a substantial barrier for him, limiting access to various forms of assistance. He laments, “It’s possible to get more help, but … (I) can’t go because (I) cannot speak the language.” In Luxembourg, language is a key aspect of their culture, including their own distinct Luxembourgish language and almost universal fluency in French, German, and often English as well. Without speaking one of these languages, such as in the case of Zaid, an essential part of Luxembourg culture is missing from the equation and assimilation is difficult. Hassan acknowledges this, so he has become fluent in French and is working on his Luxembourgish language skills.

Satisfaction

It was clear that the participants’ overall perception of their experiences in Luxembourg was positive. One of the most common phrases used in both refugee
interviews was, “No problems,” which was used in reference to life in Luxembourg eleven times in Hassan’s interview and thirteen times in Zaid’s interview. Additionally, the only real complaints the refugees had revolved around problems external to Luxembourg (i.e. worrying about their family abroad) or around their inability to further integrate into Luxembourg (i.e. finding steady employment or gaining citizenship).

Discussion

The data suggests that Iraqi refugees are very content in Luxembourg and that the transitions for their families are relatively uneventful. The hypothesis that Iraqi refugee families resettling in Luxembourg will feel unsatisfied with their experiences in Luxembourg, and that this situation will place additional strains on the family is not supported. Overall, the exact opposite seems to be the case. As such, important questions arise.

Namely, why are the Iraqi refugees in Luxembourg so content and why are their families so well adjusted? The satisfaction of the refugees is significantly higher than proposed in the hypothesis and their ability to adapt is also very high, which was not foreseen. The data gathered suggests that there are four specific areas which result in high satisfaction for the Iraqi refugees: Luxembourg’s culture, issues of religion, availability of resources, and a strong Iraqi community.

Analysis

The data suggests that Iraqi refugees who have settled in Luxembourg since 2002 are incredibly satisfied with the resettlement process and that they have been able to
transition to Luxembourg with remarkably few difficulties affecting their family functioning. Family functioning was based upon self-report by the refugees, and discussion on family functioning was spurred by questions such as, “What changes have occurred in the relationship between you and your children since you left Iraq?” Families reported few significant changes and used descriptions such as “no problems” and reported high levels of inter-family “respect” to indicate high satisfaction with their family functioning. What are the factors which have led to these results? Several key factors have been identified: religion, availability of resources, a sense of community for the refugees within Luxembourg, and the Luxembourg people’s acceptance of this population.

Religion

It can be quite difficult for refugees to be granted asylum in Luxembourg. As stated in the introduction, only a small minority of the asylum requests are processed in favor of admittance into Luxembourg, sometimes numbering as low as only three percent (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2002). However, the situation of the Iraqi refugees in this study proved to be quite unusual. When the Catholic Iraqi refugees in the study were still in Turkey under a temporary asylum status, the Catholic Church of Luxembourg offered them an invitation to come to Luxembourg. In place of the usually arduous and uncertain process refugees normally go through to gain admittance into Luxembourg, these refugees had the Catholic Church advocating for them and were able to nearly forgo much of this transitional process.
In addition to the assistance with refugees’ admittance, the Catholic Church also played a vital role in the successful assimilation of Iraqi refugees once they were in Luxembourg. According to the staff interview, a significant majority of Iraqi refugee families in Luxembourg are Catholic and left Iraq because of reasons relating to religious persecution. In some cases, the Church provides substantial resources to the refugees, including low cost housing provided to Zaid’s family. The church also provided the refugees with a sense of community within Luxembourg, and helped them to feel at home. The refugees’ situations have changed from one of religious persecution because of their Catholic minority status to one of religious community and security.

These Iraqi refugees found it relatively easy to fit in to Luxembourg’s culture, and this is partially due to their Catholic roots. Despite speculation that the Catholic Church in Europe is visibly struggling with the commitment of its parishioners (Sullivan, 2000), to Iraqis what matters is how accepted, at home, and a part of the church they feel. In comparison to the ostracizing they experienced in Iraq as a religious minority Luxembourg feels culturally comfortable and welcoming to them.

*Availability of resources*

It is common knowledge that people need at least minimal money and resources to successfully survive within industrialized societies. Therefore, availability of resources is an essential element to successful refugee integration. Asylum seekers in Luxembourg receive help for their children up until the age of 26, unless the children are working or married (Ministère des Affaires Etrangères et de l'Immigration du Grand Duché de Luxembourg). This consistent, reliable flow of income is a perk that many other
industrialized countries do not offer and particularly not to this extent. According to the participants in this study, the security of this assistance is a major source of relief for the refugees and provides greater stability in their lives.

Additionally, the unemployment benefits allotted to the refugees is very high. Hassan noted that he received eighty percent of his income still, even though he is unemployed. In regard to the availability of governmental monetary help, it was stated in an interview that “Luxembourg is the best country in Europe in this domain,” particularly regarding the allowances offered per child.

Finally, the assistance available to them via the church is also a substantial benefit that many other refugees may not have the same level of access to. They received aid getting into Luxembourg through the church and now receive other assistance (such as housing) once in Luxembourg from the church as well. In particular, the assistance provided to some of the Iraqi refugee families entering Luxembourg who were invited by the Church has been especially helpful. The process of gaining statute (i.e. refugee status) in Luxembourg can be arduous and difficult, but according to the staff participant, for these refugees “it was very easy for adaptation, for adjustment” compared to other asylum seekers, and this is because the church invited them.

It is important to note that refugee agencies are incredibly overloaded. For example, the staff worker interviewed said her agency has only three employees (and she is the only full-time employee), and they serve approximately 800 refugees, approximately thirteen percent of which are Iraqi. The staff are highly committed and maintain this substantial workload on their own and with the help of some volunteers as
well. The staff worker shared without any hint of exhaustion that they are “always here to help them in every minute… I have this mission.” The dedication of the staff is evident; they do all they can to complete their sizeable workload and to provide whatever resources they can to the refugees.

Community

Luxembourg holds a relatively small number of Iraqi refugees. According to the staff participant, approximately one-hundred Iraqi refugees within approximately twenty families are currently settled in Luxembourg. They are spread out amongst different neighborhoods and communities in Luxembourg. They still, however, maintain a certain sense of solidarity. For example, the agency staff participant shared that many of the Iraqis know each other and have friendly relations with each other, and when a new Iraqi family comes to Luxembourg the established families are willing and open to help them. This value of helping others has carried over from their Iraqi values, and can be seen as a value which glues the community together and eases any speed-bumps which could be present in the transition to Luxembourg.

Of the Iraqi refugees in Luxembourg, the staff interview revealed that approximately eighteen out of twenty families (ninety percent) of them are Catholic. In the country of Iraq, they were a persecuted religious minority, but here they are a part of a larger Luxembourg Catholic majority as well as an Iraqi refugee Catholic majority. In Iraq they were ostracized and the religious differences between them and the majority of Iraqis were made known via threats. Here, they are a part of a majority and allowed to exercise their religious practices and fellowship freely. This creates a real sense of
religious community for them amongst other Iraqi refugees and also within the Luxembourg Catholic Church as a whole.

The many activities and courses available to them through refugee agencies also serve to strengthen this community. Participation in language classes, women’s activities, various festivities, and other interactive group experiences could strengthen this community as well. Additionally, some of the Iraqi refugees have come from the same neighborhoods in Baghdad, and many fled to Turkey prior to coming to Luxembourg. The commonalities in background and story serve to strengthen the Iraqi refugee community within Luxembourg, and this sense of community provides a backbone for the Iraqi refugees as they seek to assimilate successfully into the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg.

Luxembourghish acceptance of Iraqi refugees

Luxembourgers are a people of culture, with many nationalities combining to create one larger Luxembourghish one. Hassan believes that his Iraqi culture made it easier to fit in, because he held many values regarding education and the importance of culture, which were similar to Luxembourghish values. Luxembourg places a high focus on education, and multi-lingual education in particular (Cenoz and Genesee, 1998). The similarly strong emphasis on education as indicated by the success of Iraqi refugee students reported in the interview offers a possible explanation for their ease of adjustment.

The staff worker interviewed emphasized that her organization provided help to all refugees, regardless of origin, race, or religion, and that the Luxembourg people
welcome the refugees with open arms. Whether or not equal treatment is given to the Iraqi refugees or the refugees are received warmly by all Luxembourgish people, this study examines how refugees perceive their experiences in the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, and the Iraqi refugee population interviewed seems to perceive their situation to-date as positive. These refugees are coming from a dangerous minority status in Iraq, so the highly Catholic and at least relatively welcoming country of Luxembourg feels to them secure and hospitable.

There is some concern in Luxembourg and in the whole European Union regarding the separation of “economic refugees” versus “real refugees” (Steiner, 1999, p. 47). Many people are skeptical of newcomers to the country, and make a distinction between legitimate refugees and refugees who have come solely for economic betterment (Nickels, 2007). The refugees in this study felt accepted by the Luxembourgish people, and the staff member felt the Iraqi refugees have been warmly received by the Luxembourgish population. This suggests Catholic Iraqi refugees are an accepted population within Luxembourg and are considered by the population to be “real refugees.”

It is also important to note that this research had one central weakness. The Arabic interpreter in the refugee interviews was a staff member for the refugee agency that serves them. Her presence may have affected the answers given by the refugee participants. However, it should be noted that elements in the setting help to refute this claim. Most importantly, the research took place in refugee homes. The homes were very well kept and furnished, indicating that the financial resources were present to maintain a
comfortable standard of living. Therefore, it is highly likely that when the refugee participants indicated their satisfaction because they have “everything” in Luxembourg, they were probably telling the truth. Additionally, the presence of the interpreter could also be a strength of the study, because the interpreter’s presence could have assisted in developing rapport and making the refugees feel more comfortable answering questions.

Additionally, the researcher noted that the family members, and particularly the children, seemed to dress in the Luxembourghish fashion and to behave in a manner typical of Luxembourg. For example, Hassan’s children were dressed fashionably, and his daughter is finishing hairdresser school. Although they stated that her opportunities to work would be limited in Iraq, the whole of-age family is eligible to work in Luxembourg; she is preparing to get a job here and the whole family is receptive to this. They also were incredibly well-behaved and polite, and the parents stressed the importance of respect which carries over from their Iraqi tradition. Although it is certainly possible that the presence of the interpreter was influencing their answers, these factors suggest that the Iraqi refugees were speaking with general honesty.

Conclusion

The data collected in these interviews suggests that Iraqi refugees who manage to settle in Luxembourg tend to assimilate relatively successfully and are generally satisfied with their new life. In light of these findings, the hypothesis that Iraqi refugee families resettling in Luxembourg will feel unsatisfied with their experiences in Luxembourg, and that this situation will place additional strains on the family is not supported. This can be explained by several key elements. These elements are: The Iraqi refugee in
Luxembourg’s tendency to be Catholic, the generous availability of resources available to them, the sense of community they feel with the Luxembourg people and with the other Iraqi refugees in Luxembourg, and the willingness of the Luxembourg people to embrace them as “real” refugees.

Future research should focus on substantiating the degrees of acceptance Iraqi refugees in Luxembourg actually receive from the Luxembourgish people; this would expand upon the present study which examined how accepted the Iraqi refugees in Luxembourg perceived themselves to be accepted. More research should also be conducted on refugees in general in Luxembourg, so that the satisfaction and adjustment of Iraqi refugees can be compared to that of other refugees resettled within the country.

Future research should also examine general and specific issues relating to refugee assimilation in Luxembourg. For example, the selection process of Catholics should be further examined. Questions should be asked about the positives and limitations of this system of selection and the cultural appropriateness of the services provided to refugees upon arrival. Research should also map the political, policy-making, and structural coordinates of Luxembourg’s refugee system to pinpoint where they stand within the larger European Union. Additionally, research should study how the Catholic identity of Luxembourg effects asylum policy, and additional research should be conducted to give further insight into the effect of Catholic identity on Catholic refugee resettlement in Luxembourg.
References


database.


APPENDIX A: FILING OF THE APPLICATION FOR INTERNATIONAL PROTECTION

Examination of the application

Inadmissibility of the application

Declaration of incompetence

NORMAL PROCEDURE

ACCELERATED PROCEDURE

Dismissal of the application + order to leave the territory

Granting of the international protection

Dismissal of the application + order to leave the territory

Recourse for reforming before the Administrative Court + recourse for cancellation against the order to leave the territory

Recourse for cancellation before the Administrative Court

The court confirms the decision taken by the Minister

The court reforms the decision of the Minister

The court reforms the decision of the Minister

The court confirms the decision of the Minister.
The procedure is closed. The applicant will be removed from the territory

Recourse for cancellation before the Administrative Court

The court cancels

Order to leave the territory

The court confirms the decision of the Minister. The procedure is closed. The applicant will be removed from the territory