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| Unravelling the Mediterranean migration crisis |

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| * **Mahmod’s story** |

Mahmod was 22 years old and living in Mosul (Iraq) where he was studying accountancy at university. In June 2014, IS took over the city. Mahmod told us that people were happy because they wanted to overthrow the government and thought that their situation would improve.

Very quickly however they came to realise that IS would severely affect their quality of life and what they were, and were not, allowed to do. The university was closed down and Mahmod was no longer able to continue with his studies. He told us that he decided to leave with his younger brothers:

*‘My idea was to leave alone, but I took my younger brothers with me. We bought fake documents for my younger brother, which said that he was sick. So, 40 days after IS came, in August 2014, we went from Mosul to Kirkuk legally. It was easy to leave back then. Then a law which forbid leaving Mosul was implemented. We went to a hotel in Kirkuk. We were not thinking of going to Europe yet*.’

Mahmod and his brothers travelled on to Baghdad where they met their father who decided to return to Mosul in order to be with their mother. Determined to continue with his studies, Mahmod submitted an application to the University of Baghdad but it was rejected. Then he went back to Kirkuk but his application to attend the university there was also rejected. After being rejected for another university course in Kurdistan, Mahmod decided to travel to Turkey and his brothers returned to Mosul to join their parents.

The family tried to leave Mosul and join Mahmod in Turkey but it was too late: by that time, it was nearly impossible to leave the city. Mahmod took up various jobs in Turkey but was paid very little. When his brothers joined him, it was impossible to live on a single low salary so Mahmod applied to the UN for assistance but his meetings with them were constantly postponed. He tried to find ways to travel legally to Europe in order to be able to study but it proved impossible:

‘*I was constantly thinking that I wanted to finish my studies. I had also applied to go to the USA, Australia or Canada through the UN. I had never thought till then to go illegally to Europe. I don’t like illegal things*.’ After his aunt left Turkey travelling across the Aegean and through the Balkans to Austria, Mahmod decided that he and his brothers had no choice but to take the same route: ‘*My father sold the house that would be my present for my university graduation and he sent us the money*.’

They borrowed some additional money from an uncle living in Qatar and paid a smuggler to get them to Greece. From there Mahmod told us he wanted to go first to Germany and then perhaps Sweden with the aim of continuing his studies and, ultimately, securing a job to support his family.