

Iraqi Refugee Resettlement

Arriving in the U.S. looking for peace

Iraqi families identified as most vulnerable by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) are now arriving in the United States. These families, traumatized by physical and psychological violence and the loss of support from their extended family members, will need the help of communities as they rebuild their lives. These Iraqi refugees are the human face of war – people who have experienced first-hand the violence of military occupation. Among those being resettled are scholars at risk, single parent families, and individuals coping with debilitating injuries.

Too many broken promises

After failing to reach an earlier goal of resettling 7,000 Iraqi refugees in the U.S., the State Department pledged that 12,000 Iraqis would be accepted for resettlement as permanent residents by September 30, 2008. Six months after the announcement of the new goal, the actual number of Iraqi resettled reached about 2,000—again, tragically short of the goal.

The number of Iraqi families to be resettled due to the crisis in Iraq represents a small percentage of those



The path forward in Iraq

1 Iraq is a humanitarian catastrophe, with elements far beyond a war and occupation. The country is crippled by sectarian violence, death squads, kidnappings, and criminal gangs. Deteriorating basic services, including a collapse of the health care system, lack of electricity and potable water, and personal and economic insecurity, makes orderly daily life for Iraqis nearly impossible. Military blockades and raids, sieges, secret detention centers, and imprisonment without charge or trial have caused many to leave Iraq.

2 The refugee and displacement crisis is a regional and international issue with no military solution. Foreign military intervention has exacerbated the humanitarian catastrophe. A comprehensive regional political solution is essential for a future of peace in Iraq, the region, and the U.S.

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in need of protection. They deserve a speedy and dignified resettlement. But resettlement is just one part of a two-step process. It is essential that the U.S. government also provide assistance to host countries and humanitarian agencies that are currently aiding Iraqis.

Who is resettled?

UNHCR conducts interviews with Iraqi refugees in host countries – primarily Jordan and Syria – screening them according to 11 criteria that will help identify those with the most critical needs. Iraqis who have suffered torture or severe trauma, individuals or groups that have been targeted, women at risk, and people with medical emergencies or disabilities are given priority. Iraqis are again screened by agencies in the State Department and Homeland Security before they enter the U.S.

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3 More than 4.5 million Iraqis have been displaced by the war and occupation; more than 2.5 million have left the country seeking safety. This represents the largest refugee flow in the Middle East since the establishment of Israel and the forced displacement of Palestinians in 1948. The people and governments of the region are responding to the crisis of Iraqi refugees through the experience of a Palestinian refugee population that has grown over 60 years of exile and remains a source of regional unrest.

4 The path to peace in Iraq must include creating conditions for the safe and voluntary return of Iraqi displaced, including those displaced internally and refugees outside the country. Security, legal support, and economic opportunities are not yet available in Iraq. Poor living conditions, as well as a lack of legal status and economic opportunities within host countries, are pushing Iraqis to return.

5 The U.S. has a binding moral and legal responsibility to all Iraqis. The complete withdrawal of U.S. and Coalition forces is a moral and political necessity and an important first step. Diplomacy and support for new UN, Arab League and other regional political initiatives are necessary next steps. Substantial long-term and transparent funding for humanitarian relief, reparations, and Iraqi-led reconstruction efforts will then begin to fulfill the needs and hopes of Iraqis.

6 Humanitarian necessity dictates significant refugee resettlement of the most vulnerable refugees to other countries. Pressure to grant asylum to Iraqi refugees will continue to grow as Jordan and Syria feel the strain of supporting more than 2 million refugees. The United States should lead by example. It should accept the largest number of refugees and provide substantial assistance to humanitarian agencies helping refugees. The U.S. also should provide direct financial support to the countries hosting the largest number of refugees.

7 In U.S. advocacy efforts, primary attention must be paid to building relationships with Iraqis and listening to what they have to say. Only the Iraqi people can establish security and build a future for their country. This includes Iraqi refugees and the internally displaced, who are critical players in Iraq's future. It is an important step toward regional stability.

How you can help

Although the State Department provides some funding for resettled refugees, the stipend allotted to an Iraqi family arriving in the U.S. is not enough to cover their plane tickets (which they are required to repay) or their first month's rent. Every arriving family will need to get housing, clothing, and basic household items. Most will need extensive English language instruction and help finding work. Many professionals will need additional schooling and recertification to work in the U.S. College-age youth will need to find schools and scholarships.

The local agencies working with Iraqis depend on volunteers to provide many of these services. Faith communities, school groups, organizations, and individuals can help Iraqi refugees make this difficult transition. Volunteers help locate housing, find schools, fill out job applications, cook meals, and provide transportation. Helping Iraqi refugees displaced from the invasion and occupation will begin the process of reconciliation.

How to get started

AFSC compiled a list of resettlement agencies helping Iraqi families begin a new life in the United States. These agencies can tell you more about resettlement volunteer opportunities in your community:

Church World Service
Ethiopian Community Development Council
Episcopal Migration Ministries
Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society
International Rescue Committee
U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants
Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops
World Relief Corporation
State of Iowa, Bureau of Refugee Services

To find a local affiliate working in your area, visit us online:

www.afsc.org/iraq

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