

Refugees of Iraq

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Throughout the past 100 years, there have been a growing number of refugees fleeing Iraq and settling throughout the world, peaking recently with the latest Iraq War. The Iran–Iraq War from 1980 to 1988, the 1990 Iraqi Invasion of Kuwait, the first Gulf War and subsequent conflicts all generated hundreds of thousands if not millions of refugees. Iran also provided asylum for 1,400,000 Iraqi refugees who had been uprooted as a result of the Persian Gulf War (1990–91). The United Nations estimates that nearly 2.2 million Iraqis have fled the country since 2003,^[1] with nearly 100,000 fleeing to Syria and Jordan each month.^{[2][3]} In October 2006, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the Iraqi government estimated that more than 365,000 Iraqis had been displaced since the 2006 bombing of the al-Askari Mosque, bringing the total number of Iraqi refugees to more than 1.6 million.^[4]



Iraqi Chaldean Christians fleeing to neighboring Jordan.

According to UNHCR estimates, over 4.7 million Iraqis have been displaced since the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003.^[5] The humanitarian crisis in Iraq is the worst in the Middle East since Palestinians were displaced in 1948.^[6] In FY 2007, the U.S. resettled 1608 Iraqi refugees.^[7] Just one in six of all the Iraqis seeking asylum in the United Kingdom is accepted.^[8]

Not all Iraqis have fled abroad, of the 4.7 million displaced, 2.4 million people are internally displaced, of which 58% rent housing, 18% live with host families or relatives, 24% live in public buildings, but only 1% live in tented camps.^[9] This has caused a strain on infrastructure and further deterioration in the humanitarian situation where 4 million are food insecure (25% of children are chronically malnourished) and only one in three children has access to safe drinking water.^[9]

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Iraq War

As of April 29, 2008, the UNHCR estimated that over 4.7 million Iraqis have been displaced, with 2.7 million within Iraq and 2 million in neighboring countries.^[10]

Most ventured to Jordan and Syria, creating demographic shifts that have worried both governments. A fear persisted in both countries, and others hosting sizeable Iraqi refugee populations, that sectarian tensions would spill over amongst the exiles. These refugees were estimated to have been leaving Iraq at a rate of 3000-per-day by December 2006.

Roughly 40% of Iraq's middle class is believed to have fled, the U.N. said. Most are fleeing systematic persecution and have no desire to return.^[11] Refugees are mired in poverty as they are generally barred from working in their host countries.^{[12][13]} In Syria alone an estimated 50,000 Iraqi girls and women, many of them widows, are forced into prostitution just to survive.^{[14][15]}

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder Post Traumatic Stress Disorder is a common anxiety disorder that develops after exposure to a terrifying event in which graves physical harm occurred or was threaten^[16] Research has shown that refugees are more likely to experience PTSD than a migrant that voluntarily left their native country. 25% of war-affected refugees with suffer some kind of psychological disorder.</ref> Risk, Suffering, and Competing Narratives in the Psychiatric Assessment of an Iraqi Refugee. Pauline Savy and Anne-Maree Sawyer.</ref> There is currently no studies on the mental health treatment efficacy with Iraqi refugees. People that have a higher level of education, speak the language in the country they have exiled to,and by having have a strong religious belief can sometimes decrease the chances of experiencing PTSD.^[17]

Sectarian violence

Main article: Sectarian violence in Iraq

Entire neighborhoods in Baghdad were ethnically cleansed by Shia and Sunni militias and sectarian violence has broken out in every Iraqi city where there is a mixed population.^[18] Sunnis have fled Basra, while Shias were driven out of cities and towns north of Baghdad such as Samarra or Baquba.^{[19][20]} Satellite shows ethnic cleansing in Iraq was key factor in "surge" success.^[21] Some areas are being evacuated by every member of a particular secular group due to lack of security, moving into new areas because of fear of reprisal killings.^{[2][22]} As of 2007, the title "*Kidnapping Capital of the World*" belongs to Baghdad.^[23]

For decades, Saddam Hussein 'Arabized' northern Iraq.^[24] Now his ethnic cleansing is being reversed.^[25] Thousands of ethnic Kurds pushed into lands formerly held by Iraqi Arabs, forcing at least 100,000 of them to flee to refugee camps.^[26] Sunni Arabs have driven out at least 70,000 Kurds from the Mosul's western half.^[27] Nowadays, eastern Mosul is Kurdish and western Mosul is Sunni Arab.^[28] The policies of Kurdification by KDP and PUK after 2003 (with non-Kurds being pressures to move, in particular Assyrian Christians and Iraqi Turkmen) have prompted serious inter-ethnic problems.^[29] Assyrian and Turkmen villages, towns and communities have more recently formed their own armed militias to protect themselves from violence and intimidation from Arab Islamist and Kurdish Nationalist elements. Shabaks, Yazidis and Armenians are also suffering under the policy of "Kurdification".

Host countries

United States

As of May 25, 2007 article notes that in the past seven months only 69 people from Iraq have been granted refugee status in the United States.^[30] In fiscal year 2006, just 202 refugees from Iraq were allowed to resettle in the United States.^{[31][32]} As a result of growing international pressure, on June 1, 2007 the Bush administration said it was ready to admit 7,000 Iraqi refugees who had helped the coalition since the invasion. In 2006, 1.27 million immigrants were granted legal permanent residence in the U.S., including 70,000

refugees.^[33] According to Washington based Refugees International the U.S. has admitted fewer than 800 Iraqi refugees since the invasion, Sweden had accepted 18,000 and Australia almost 6,000.^[34] As many as 110,000 Iraqis could be targeted as collaborators because of their work for coalition forces.^[35]

Jordan

Main article: Iraqis in Jordan



The growing Chaldean Catholic population in Jordan.

Jordan had taken in roughly 750,000 Iraqi refugees since the war began by December 2006. Jordan had been criticized by human rights organizations for not classifying the newcomers by the title "refugee" and instead labeled them "visitors," disinclining the Jordanian government from extending to the Iraqis the same benefits enjoyed by 1.5 million Palestinian refugees residing in Jordan.

Jordanians expressed resentment to the newcomers, built up since the influx of refugees during and following the Persian Gulf War in 1990-1991. Then, affluent Iraqis arrived and invested in the Jordanian economy, sending prices soaring too high for many working class or lower class Jordanians. Following the 2003 war and subsequent reconstruction, the arrival of mostly poor Iraqis compounded problems, increasing demand and applying more pressure on the Jordanian economy.

The government had also been accused of cracking down on Shiite activities in the country while allowing Sunni Iraqis to carry on their lives without harassment from the government. The authorities denied any discrimination, claiming it treated any illicit activity by Sunnis or Shiites from Iraq equally.

Syria

Main article: Iraqis in Syria

Syria had taken in roughly a million refugees by December 2006, with it possible as many as half of them were Assyrian Christians^[citation needed]. Most of them had settled in and around the city and suburbs of Damascus. The reason for its large refugee population can be attributed to more than just geography. Syria maintained an open-door policy to Iraqis fleeing the war-ravaged country. In the case of the Assyrian Christians, Syria has a large Assyrian and Syriac Christian population, and many Assyrians have found help and support from them.

Syrian authorities worried that the new influx of refugees would limit the country's resources. Sources like oil, heat, water and electricity were said to be becoming more scarce as demand had gone up.^[36]

In Syria alone an estimated 50,000 refugee girls and women, many of them widows, are forced into prostitution just to survive. Cheap Iraqi prostitutes have helped to make Syria a popular destination for sex tourists. The clients come from wealthier countries in the Middle East - many are Saudi men.^[37]

Restrictions on refugees

On October 1, 2007 news agencies reported that the Syrian government decided to implement a strict visa regime to limit the number of Iraqis pouring into the country at up to 5,000 per day, cutting the only accessible escape route for thousands of refugees fleeing the civil war in Iraq. Under Syria's new rules, only Iraqi merchants, businessmen and university professors with visas acquired from Syrian embassies may enter Syria.^{[38][39][40]} Until then, Syria was the only country resisting strict entry regulations for Iraqis.^{[41][42]}

Egypt

Egypt, which does not border Iraq, became a major destination for Iraqi refugees in 2006. As of December, the refugee population was approaching 150,000, 50 percent more than early October. Only 800 refugees were in Egypt in 2003.^[43] In 2007, Egypt imposed restrictions on the entry of new refugees into the country.

Minorities

Jews

Main article: Jewish exodus from Arab lands#Iraq

About 120,000 Iraqi Jews fled Iraq and moved to Israel in 1951. Over the next decades, the community would further dwindle to an estimate of no greater than 100 in 2008.

Assyrian Christians

Perhaps as many as half a million Iraqi Christians, Aramaic speaking ethnic Assyrians (also known as Chaldo-Assyrians) are thought to have fled the sectarian fighting in Iraq. They are of ancient Mesopotamian heritage, and the oldest ethnic group in Iraq. Most chose to go to Syria due to the cultural similarities between the two countries, Syria's open-door policy to Iraqis, and the large population of Assyrians and other Christians in the country which perhaps totals as high as 2 million. The large influx of Iraqis may tip the demographic scale in a country with a diverse population.^{[44][45]} Although Christians probably represent less than 5% of the total Iraqi population, they make up to 13% of the refugees now living in nearby countries.^{[46][47]} Between October 2003 and March 2005 alone, 36% of 700,100 Iraqis who fled to Syria were Assyrians and Armenian Christians, judging from a sample of those registering for asylum on political or religious grounds.^{[48][49][50][51][52]}

Armenian Christians

Iraq is home to an ancient Armenian community of between 20,000 and 50,000. Since 2003, many Armenians have suffered the same level of Islamic extremist violence as the Assyrians. Many have fled to Syria or Europe. There are now only one or two Armenian villages left in Iraq.

Mandaeans

Mandaeans are an ancient Aramaic speaking ethnoreligious group in southern Iraq.^[53] Like the Assyrians they are of ancient Mesopotamian heritage. They are the last practicing gnostic sect in the Middle East. There are thought to have been about 40,000 Mandaeans in Iraq prior to the US-led invasion. As a non-Muslim, non Arab group, they have been abused by sectarian militias. The vast majority of Baghdadi Mandaeans left Baghdad many have fled to Syria, Jordan and elsewhere^[54] while Mandaean communities of southern Iraq are still more or less secure with the exception of Basra where the Mandaean Manda (Temple) was attacked by an unknown militia. Mandaean diaspora organizations are reportedly focusing all their resources on evacuating all the remaining Mandaeans in Iraq^[citation needed].

Being such a small community the Mandaeans do not enjoy the same militia protection and this has left them vulnerable to the extremist elements in both the Sunni and Shia communities. This has led to numerous instances of torture, rape, theft and murder.^[55]

These very real threats coupled with the inability of the US and Iraqi government to offer protection has resulted in the Mandaean population falling from circa 50,000 to less than 13,000 (September 2005) ^[55] and 5,000 (March 2007) ethnically cleansing them from Iraqi society.

Palestinians

See also: Palestinians in Iraq

A Palestinian population of about 38,000 also faced pressure, with many living in the Baghdadi neighborhood of al-Baladiya.

Denied access by Syria, more than 350 Palestinians remained in "inhumane conditions" on the Syrian border until finally being allowed into the country. They face more uncertain conditions because most Palestinians do not hold Iraqi citizenship and consequently do not hold passports. The UNHCR appealed to Israel to allow this particular group of refugees admission into the occupied territories of Gaza and the West Bank. The agency said that from resettlement countries, only Canada and Syria had taken Palestinians from Iraq in the past.

Yazidis

The Yazidi people are an ethnic and religious minority in Iraq. Despite having their own language, culture and distinct religion, there have been attempts to Kurdify them. The Yazidi community was also affected by several acts of violence in 2007. On April 23, 2007 masked gunmen abducted and shot 23 Yazidis near Mosul. On August 14, 2007 Yazidis were targeted in a series of bombings that became the deadliest suicide attack since the Iraq War began.

Gypsies

The Kawliya or Qawliya are a small Roma minority in Iraq. Since the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq it has been difficult for Iraq's Qawliya population to seek autonomy and safety. Many of their villages have been destroyed or taken over by religious militias, and this has forced Qawliya to flee to the north. One of these destroyed villages was itself called *Qawliya*, located about 100 miles southeast of Baghdad.^[56]

Shabaks

There are about 60,000–400,000 Shabaks in Iraq.^[57] Despite having their own language and culture unique from other groups, Kurdish authorities have attempted to Kurdify the Shabaks by occupying Shabak villages and referring to them as "Kurdish Shabaks". In 2005, two Assyrians were killed and four Shabaks were wounded by the KDP during a demonstration organized by the Democratic Shabak Coalition, a group which wants separate representation for the Shabak community.^[58]

Gays

Further information: LGBT rights in Iraq

On February 5, 2005 the IRIN issued a reported titled "Iraq: Male homosexuality still a taboo." The article stated, among other things that honor killings by Iraqis against a gay family member are common and given some legal protection. The article also stated that the 2001 amendment to the criminal code stipulating the death penalty for homosexuality "has not been changed", even through Paul Bremer clearly ordered the criminal code to go back to its original 1969 edition.^[59]

CNN reports that gay Iraqis continue to be subjected to threats, rape, kidnapping and murder based on their sexual orientation.^[60]

Women

As many as 133 women were killed in the city of Basra alone in 2006—79 for violation of "Islamic teachings" and 47 for honour killings, according to IRIN, the news branch of the U.N.'s Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. Amnesty International claims honour killings are also conducted by Shia militias upon politically active women and those who did not follow a strict dress code, as well as women who are perceived as human rights defenders. The attacks on the women have intensified since British forces withdrew to their base in September 2007. Iraqi security forces are heavily infiltrated by militias.^[61]

In Sulaymaniyah, there were 400 cases of the burning of women in 2006. In Iraqi Kurdistan, at least 255 women had been killed in just the first six months of 2007, three-quarters of them by burning.^[62] Beheadings, stoning (see stoning of Du'a Khalil Aswad), rapes, abduction, beatings, suicides through self-immolation, genital mutilation, trafficking and child abuse masquerading as marriage of girls as young as nine are all on the increase.^{[63][64]}

Many of the Iraqi women fleeing the Iraq war are turning to prostitution to feed their children.^{[65][66]} An estimated 50,000 prostitutes, some as young as 13, are among the 1.2 million Iraqis who fled to Syria.^[67]

Refugee settlement beyond the Middle East

In early February 2007 the United States and the United Nations developed a plan to settle several thousand

refugees in the United States. In an initial step, refugees would apply for applicant status. The UN aims to register 135,000 to 200,000 to determine which people had fled persecution and would thus qualify for refugee status.^[68]

The US aims to settle at least 5,000 of this group in the US by the end of 2007. Since the 2003 invasion, the US has settled 466 Iraqi refugees. The first group of anticipated refugees are presently in Turkey, and had fled during the rule of Saddam Hussein. Subsequently, refugees would be accepted from Syria, and then from Jordan. Kristele Younes of Refugees International supported these moves towards resettlement, but she said that "the numbers remain low compared to what the needs are."^[69]

A July 22, 2007 article notes that in the past nine months only 133 of the planned 7000 Iraqi refugees were allowed into the United States.^[70]

Of the refugees' status, US Senator Edward M. Kennedy (Massachusetts) said, "We can't solve the problem alone, but we obviously bear a heavy responsibility for the crisis."^[69]

According to Washington-based Refugees International the U.S. has admitted fewer than 800 Iraqi refugees since the invasion, Sweden had accepted 18,000 and Australia had resettled almost 6,000.^[71] More than 2 million refugees have arrived in the U.S. since 1980, including about 1 million from Vietnam, while Australia and Canada accepted more than 250,000 Vietnamese refugees.^{[72][73]} In 2006, 1.27 million immigrants were granted legal residence in the United States.^[74]

Sweden, known for liberal asylum policies, has seen a surge of refugees from war-torn Iraq in the last year. Sweden currently accepts more than half of all asylum applications from Iraqis in Europe. In 2006, more than 9,000 Iraqis fled their country and came to Sweden seeking shelter, a four times increase over 2005. Sweden's immigration authority expects up to 40,000 Iraqis seeking asylum in 2007. An estimated 79,200 Iraqis call Sweden their home. Many Iraqis fled to Sweden during the 90's as well. Current refugees like Sweden because many of their relatives are there and because of the generous refugee policies.^[75]

The need for aid and essential services

The United Nations in February 2007 appealed for \$60 million to assist displaced Iraqis.^[69]

At the end of July 2007 the NGO Coordinating Committee in Iraq (NCCI) and Oxfam International issued a report, *Rising to the humanitarian challenge in Iraq*, that said that one-third of the populace was in need of aid. (The NCCI is an alliance of approximately 80 international NGOs and 200 Iraqi NGOs, formed in Baghdad in 2003.) The report, based on survey research of the nation's civilian population, reports that 70 percent of the population lacks proper access to water supplies. Only 20 percent of the population has proper sanitation. Almost 30 percent of children experience malnutrition. About 92 percent of children experience problems learning. These figures represent sharp increases since 2003.^[76]

International conferences on Iraqi refugee crisis

- On April 17, 2007 an international conference on the Iraqi refugee crisis began in Geneva, Switzerland. Attendees included Human Rights Watch representatives, U.S. Undersecretary of State Paula Dobriansky, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees representatives and members of 60 other Non-Governmental Organizations.^[77]
- The World Health Organization began a two day conference in Damascus, Syria, on July 29, 2007. The conference would address the health requirements of the more than two million refugees from Iraq. Aside from the UHO, participants in the conference included the International Committee of the Red Cross, the Red Crescent, and various UN agencies.^[78]



These Palestinian Iraqis were prevented from fleeing across the border into Jordan because of their unclear legal status.

See also

- Iraqi diaspora
- Arab diaspora
- Asylum in the United States
- Human Rights in the Middle East
- Human rights in Iraq
- Human rights in post-Saddam Hussein Iraq
- Minority politics in Iraq
- Sectarianism
- Civil war in Iraq
- Ethnic cleansing
- Religious war

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Iraq War Coalition troop deployment

Troops at time of MNF-I deactivation	Withdrawn troops (2008 - 2009)	Withdrawn troops (2003 - 2007)
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TOTAL INVASION DEPLOYMENT

- Less than 200,000 troops

DEPLOYMENT DECEMBER 2009

(Approximate numbers)

- United States: **150,000 invasion** 165,000 peak-112,000 (12/09)
- NATO: A contingent of around 150 advisers under the separate command NATO Training Mission - Iraq

Multinational Force Iraq units

- **Multi-National Force - West**
- **Multi-National Division - Baghdad**
- **Multinational Division Central-South**
- **Multi-National Division - North**
- **Multi-National Division (South-East)**
- **Logistics Support Area Anaconda**

- | | |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Australia: 2,000 invasion (<i>withdrawn 7/09</i>) ▪ United Kingdom: 46,000 invasion (<i>withdrawn 7/09</i>) ▪ Romania: 730 peak (<i>deployed 7/03-withdrawn 7/09</i>) ▪ El Salvador: 380 peak (<i>deployed 8/03-withdrawn 1/09</i>) ▪ Estonia: 40 troops (<i>deployed 6/05-withdrawn 1/09</i>) ▪ Bulgaria: 485 peak (<i>deployed 5/03-withdrawn 12/08</i>) ▪ Moldova: 24 peak (<i>deployed 9/03-withdrawn 12/08</i>) ▪ Albania: 240 troops (<i>deployed 4/03-withdrawn 12/08</i>) ▪ Ukraine: 1,650 peak (<i>deployed 8/03-withdrawn 12/08</i>) ▪ Denmark: 545 peak (<i>deployed 4/03-withdrawn 12/08</i>) ▪ Czech Republic: 300 peak (<i>deployed 12/03-withdrawn 12/08</i>) ▪ South Korea: 3,600 peak (<i>deployed 5/03-withdrawn</i>) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Slovakia: 110 peak (<i>deployed 8/03-withdrawn 12/07</i>) ▪ Lithuania: 120 peak (<i>deployed 6/03-withdrawn 08/07</i>) ▪ Italy: 3,200 peak (<i>deployed 7/03-withdrawn 11/06</i>) ▪ Norway: 150 troops (<i>deployed 7/03-withdrawn 8/06</i>) ▪ Hungary: 300 troops (<i>deployed 8/03-withdrawn 3/05</i>) ▪ Netherlands: 1,345 troops (<i>deployed 7/03-withdrawn 3/05</i>) ▪ Portugal: 128 troops (<i>deployed 11/03-withdrawn 2/05</i>) ▪ New Zealand: 61 troops (<i>deployed 9/03-withdrawn 9/04</i>) ▪ Thailand: 423 troops (<i>deployed 8/03-withdrawn 8/04</i>) ▪ Philippines: 51 troops (<i>deployed 7/03-withdrawn 7/04</i>) ▪ Japan: 268 troops (<i>deployed 8/03-withdrawn 12/08</i>) |
|--|---|

- 12/08)
-  Japan: 600 troops (*deployed 1/04-withdrawn 12/08*)
-  Tonga: 55 troops (*deployed 7/04-withdrawn 12/08*)
-  Azerbaijan: 250 peak (*deployed 8/03-withdrawn 12/08*)
-  Singapore: 175 offshore (*deployed 12/03-withdrawn 12/08*)
-  Bosnia and Herzegovina: 85 peak (*deployed 6/05-withdrawn 11/08*)
-  Macedonia: 77 peak (*deployed 7/03-withdrawn 11/08*)
-  Latvia: 136 peak (*deployed 5/03-withdrawn 11/08*)
-  Poland: **200 invasion** — 2,500 peak (*withdrawn 10/08*)
-  Kazakhstan: 29 troops (*deployed 9/03-withdrawn 10/08*)
-  Armenia: 46 troops (*deployed 1/05-withdrawn 10/08*)
-  Mongolia: 180 peak (*deployed 8/03-withdrawn 09/08*)
-  Georgia: 2,000 peak (*deployed 8/03-withdrawn 8/08*)
-  Honduras: 508 troops (*deployed 8/03-withdrawn 5/04*)
-  Dominican Republic: 302 troops (*deployed 8/03-withdrawn 5/04*)
-  Spain: 1,300 troops (*deployed 4/03-withdrawn 4/04*)
-  Nicaragua: 230 troops (*deployed 9/03-withdrawn 2/04*)
-  Iceland: 2 troops (*deployed 5/03-withdrawal date unknown*)

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