



# **THE IRAQI REFUGEE CRISIS: THE NEED FOR ACTION**

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# I. Overview of the Iraqi Refugee Crisis

The situation in Iraq remains extremely precarious for civilians, with additional thousands being displaced by violence and persecution even as refuge becomes harder to find — either internally or in neighboring countries. The relatively few refugees who have returned from Syria to Iraq cite legal and financial difficulties as their motive for return far more frequently than they cite improved security within Iraq. More than 2 million refugees remain in Syria, Jordan, and other neighboring states, straining local resources and unprepared, underresourced governments. Nearly an equal number are internally displaced. As border restrictions both within and outside Iraq tighten, resources dwindle, and sectarian violence persists, the options for Iraq's estimated 4.5 million internally and externally displaced appear bleak.

Options for fleeing from danger are narrowing.

- Eleven of Iraq's 18 governorates have restrictions on movement within Iraq,<sup>1</sup> and internally displaced persons (IDP) are often forced to return to neighborhoods plagued by the sectarian violence they were trying to flee. Among the 2.3 million IDPs,<sup>2</sup> religious minorities are particularly at risk, as are former employees of the US and other coalition governments.
- Syria, Jordan, and Lebanon, the top refugee-receiving countries, are not signatories to the 1951 UN Convention relating to the Status of Refugees.<sup>3</sup> Refugees in those countries have limited means of legal protection, and they are continually subject to changing requirements for entry and stay.
- Syria introduced visa restrictions October 1, 2007, although some reports from the field indicate that many Iraqis who approach the border are able to get visas there.<sup>4</sup> Jordan closed its borders at the end of 2005, and Saudi Arabia is building a 560-mile fence along the Iraq border to keep out illegal migrants and insurgents from Iraq.<sup>5</sup>
- According to the Iraqi Red Crescent Organization (IRCO), between September and December 2007, 45,913 Iraqis returned to Iraq from Syria.<sup>6</sup> Only 14 percent of those surveyed by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) said they returned because of improved security conditions. Almost 70 percent identified not being

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations High Commission for Refugees, *Cluster F: Internally Displaced Persons in Iraq. Update*, July 16, 2007, [http://www.internal-displacement.org/8025708F004CE90B/\(httpDocuments\)/F8DA6A3CBC860000C125735C002ECB59/\\$file/pdf/Cluster\\_F\\_Update\\_on\\_IDPs\\_-\\_16Jul07.pdf](http://www.internal-displacement.org/8025708F004CE90B/(httpDocuments)/F8DA6A3CBC860000C125735C002ECB59/$file/pdf/Cluster_F_Update_on_IDPs_-_16Jul07.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> UNHCR Briefing Notes, Ron Redmond, *Iraq: Pressure on safe havens inside and outside fuels fears of increased internal displacement*, October 23, 2007, [www.unhcr.org/news/NEWS/471dc5653.html](http://www.unhcr.org/news/NEWS/471dc5653.html)

<sup>3</sup> UNHCR, *States Parties to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1967 Protocol*, November 1, 2007, <http://www.unhcr.org/protect/PROTECTION/3b73b0d63.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Ron Redmond, "Syria: UNHCR advocating for increased bilateral aid and 'humanitarian visas' for Iraqi refugees," UNHCR Press Briefing, October 5, 2007, <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/iraq?page=briefing&id=470607922>; UNHCR Iraq update of January 4, 2008.

<sup>5</sup> Middle East Media Research Institute, *Saudi Arabia to Build Fence Along Iraqi Border*, October 12, 2006, <http://memri.org/bin/articles.cgi?Page=countries&Area=saudiArabia&ID=SP131806>

<sup>6</sup> Iraqi Red Crescent Organization, *Iraqi Returns From Syria*, December 30, 2007, [http://www.iraqredcrescent.org/Returnees\\_update\\_2\\_EN.pdf](http://www.iraqredcrescent.org/Returnees_update_2_EN.pdf)

able to afford living in Syria, coupled with stricter visa policies and the inability to work, as their motivations for returning to Iraq.<sup>7</sup>

- The ability of Iraqis to seek asylum outside the region is constrained by both the cost of the journey and restrictive administrative practices in receiving countries. Nonetheless, Iraqi asylum claims in the 36 industrialized countries that report data to UNHCR more than doubled in the first six months of 2007 compared to the first six months of 2006. Sweden received the largest number of claims and accepted most Iraqis as *prima facie* refugees.
- By the beginning of December 2007, fewer than 5,000 Iraqis had departed for various resettlement countries through organized resettlement programs.<sup>8</sup> In fiscal year (FY) 2007 (October 1, 2006, to September 30, 2007), only 1,608 were admitted to the United States as refugees<sup>9</sup> although the US Refugee Resettlement Program had allocated space for 7,000 Iraqis and UNHCR had referred over 10,000 to the United States.

First-asylum countries are fearful of Iraqi refugees settling permanently as Palestinians displaced in 1948 and 1967 have done. Iraqi refugees, fearful that their host countries will deport them, are often too afraid to venture outside their homes to access what few services are available. Housing is their largest expense,<sup>10</sup> and many of them have depleted their financial resources — some to pay ransom for kidnapped family members during the sectarian conflict or earlier, under the regime of former Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein.<sup>11</sup>

Education is a primary concern, with Iraqis fearing that an entire generation of Iraqi children could essentially go unschooled. In Jordan, the government has confirmed that Iraqis will be allowed to access all levels of public education. In Syria, the number of children enrolled in school increased from 24 percent in May 2007 to 68 percent in November. However, of the 1,109 children surveyed by UNHCR, 46 percent had dropped out. The majority of Iraqis cannot find employment, either because they are treated as illegal immigrants or because jobs are not available. Resentment among local populations soars as the competition for resources rises.

The Iraqi displacement is unlike many refugee crises because of the dispersed, urban settlement patterns of most of the refugees. While the concentration of refugees in camps often produces pathologies, such as domestic and criminal violence, militarization, and radicalization, it does simplify the distribution of aid through humanitarian agencies. Because of the urban living arrangements of most Iraqi refugees in Syria and Jordan, they blend in with the local culture, making it more difficult for aid agencies to identify, register, and assist them, and for Iraqis to access

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<sup>7</sup> UNHCR, *Iraq government busses refugees home from Syria*, November 28, 2007, <http://www.unhcr.org/news/NEWS/474d996c4.html>

<sup>8</sup> UNHCR, *Statistics on Displaced Iraqis Around the World- Global Overview*, September 2007, <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/home/opendoc.pdf?tbl=SUBSITES&id=470387fc2>

<sup>9</sup> Human Rights First, *2007 Iraqi Refugee Overview*, [http://www.humanrightsfirst.org/asylum/lifeline/pages.asp?country=iq&id=19&misc1=overview\\_admissions](http://www.humanrightsfirst.org/asylum/lifeline/pages.asp?country=iq&id=19&misc1=overview_admissions)

<sup>10</sup> Refugees International, *Iraqi refugees: Critical Needs Remain Unmet*, December 8, 2006, [www.refintl.org/files/9711\\_file\\_iraqi120806.pdf](http://www.refintl.org/files/9711_file_iraqi120806.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> See n.10.

assistance. As Iraqis are forced to move to the peripheries of urban centers due to the cost of living, they are even further removed from assistance.

The United States, Australia, Sweden, and Greece, among others, have accepted a small number of refugees for resettlement, but third-country resettlement options paled in comparison to the more than 2,000 Iraqis estimated to be fleeing each day in the beginning of 2007.

The number of displaced Iraqis rose dramatically after the February 2006 bombing of the Al-Askari Shia mosque in Samarra ignited sectarian and ethnic conflict throughout Iraq (see Map 1). By the end of the fiscal year, UNHCR estimated that 4.5 million Iraqis had been displaced both before and after the 2003 US invasion — 2.2 million crossing the border and 2.3 million remaining internally displaced within Iraq. In February 2007, UN High Commissioner for Refugees António Guterres declared the exodus of Iraqis the largest population shift in the Middle East since the displacement of Palestinians following the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948.<sup>12</sup>

**Map 1. Displaced Iraqis in the Region as of April 12, 2007**



Note: The number of Iraqi refugees in Jordan was revised to 450,000 to 500,000 as of May 2007 as a result of a survey requested by the Jordanian government, carried out by the Norwegian Research Institute Fafo, and funded by the Norwegian government.

Source: Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, UNHCR, Displaced Iraqis, April 2007.

<sup>12</sup> UNHCR, *UNHCR's Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Iraqi Asylum-Seekers*, August 2007, <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/tehis/vtx/home/opendoc.pdf?tbl=SUBSITES&id=46dec4da2>

## II. Internally Displaced Iraqis

The pace and scope of displacement within Iraq are difficult to specify in the midst of conflict. UNHCR estimates that some 60,000 Iraqis per month, or just over 80 people per hour, are being displaced within Iraq. The Iraqi Red Crescent Organization (IRCO) puts the monthly displacement figure at closer to 100,000 (see Table 1).

**Table 1. Cumulative Number of Iraqis Displaced by Month, March 2006 to September 2007**

2006	Number of individuals	Number of families
March	46,409	6,615
April	87,300	11,879
May	125,169	19,138
June	149,772	23,450
July	174,056	28,027
August	191,169	32,409
September	358,537	42,255
October	447,214	54,728
November	380,213	65,703
December	408,319	75,943
<b>2007</b>		
January	447,337	85,368
February	498,976	99,714
March	575,773	106,779
April	852,310	116,032
May	1,024,430	140,607
June	1,037,615	142,260
July	1,128,086	152,002
August	1,930,946	282,672
September	2,299,425	349,979

Note: Statistics were compiled by the Disaster Management Coordinators in the 18 Iraqi governorates in cooperation with Iraqi Red Crescent Organization volunteers.

Source: Iraqi Red Crescent Organization, *The Internally Displaced People in Iraq- Update 26*, September 16, 2007.

Estimates as to the number of IDPs vary:

- UNHCR estimates that, of the 4.5 million Iraqi who have left their homes, over 2.4 million were internally displaced as of November 21, 2007. Of these, 1,021,962 were displaced prior to the US-led invasion in 2003. Another 190,146 were displaced between 2003 and 2005, and 1,199,491 were displaced after the February 2006 Samarra bombing; 28,017 were displaced during October 2007.<sup>13</sup>
- In September 2007, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) said that 1,050,000 Iraqis had been displaced since February 2006. Combined with the 1.2 million people already

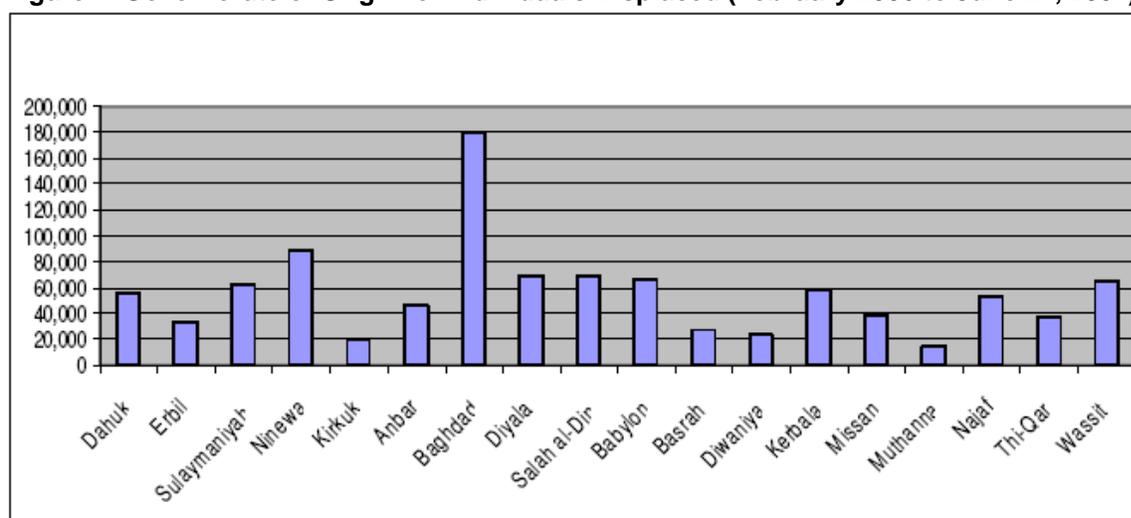
<sup>13</sup> UNHCR Briefing Notes, Jennifer Pagonis, *Iraq: UNHCR cautious about returns*, November 23, 2007, <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/teaxis/vtx/iraq?page=briefing&id=4746da102>

displaced before the Samarra incident, IOM agrees that a total of 2.25 million Iraqis have been internally displaced.<sup>14</sup>

- IRCO reports considerably higher numbers of internally displaced. In its September 2007 report, IRCO said 282,672 families nationwide (some 1,930,946 individuals) became displaced *after* the Samara bombing.<sup>15</sup>

Almost 70 percent of the displaced originate from Baghdad and Iraq’s geographic center.<sup>16</sup> The majority flee to northern Iraq on the Iraq-Turkey border, which is considered the most secure part of the country and is home to 800,000 IDPs.<sup>17</sup> The rest flee to the southern governorates (see Figure 1 and Map 2). As of September 30, 2007, IRCO estimates that 83 percent of IDPs were women and children under the age of 12.<sup>18</sup>

**Figure 1. Governorate of Origin for Individuals Displaced (February 2006 to June 24, 2007)**



Source: UNHCR, Cluster F, *Internally Displaced Persons in Iraq- Update 16 July 2007*.

<sup>14</sup> IOM Emergency Needs Assessments, Post February 2006 Displacement in Iraq, Bi-Weekly Report, November 1, 2007, [http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/RWFiles2007.nsf/FilesByRWDocUnidFilename/YSAR-78JGT3-Full\\_Report.pdf/\\$File/Full\\_Report.pdf](http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/RWFiles2007.nsf/FilesByRWDocUnidFilename/YSAR-78JGT3-Full_Report.pdf/$File/Full_Report.pdf)

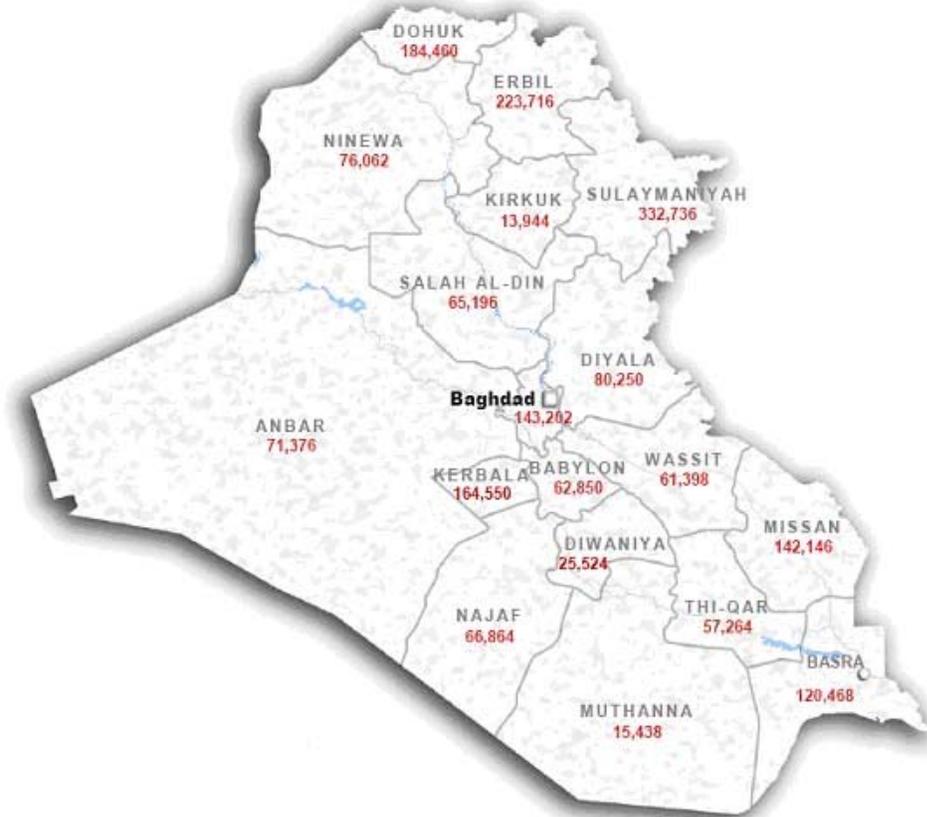
<sup>15</sup> Iraqi Red Crescent Organization, *The Internally Displaced People in Iraq, Update 26*, September 16, 2007, [http://www.iraqredcrescent.org/IDP\\_26th\\_update.pdf](http://www.iraqredcrescent.org/IDP_26th_update.pdf)

<sup>16</sup> UNHCR, Cluster F, *Internally Displaced Persons in Iraq*, September 19, 2007, page 7 [http://cbbk.org/Public/ClusterFUupdates/Cluster%20F%20Update%20on%20IDPs%20September%2019\\_f.pdf](http://cbbk.org/Public/ClusterFUupdates/Cluster%20F%20Update%20on%20IDPs%20September%2019_f.pdf)

<sup>17</sup> See n.2.

<sup>18</sup> Iraqi Red Crescent Organization, *The Internally Displaced People in Iraq- Update 27*, October 24, 2007 [http://www.iraqredcrescent.org/IDP\\_27\\_update\\_EN.pdf](http://www.iraqredcrescent.org/IDP_27_update_EN.pdf)

**Map 2. Total Number of IDPs by Region of Current Residence within Iraq as of April 2007**



Source: UNHCR, *Displaced Iraqis*, April 2007, Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre.

### **Dates of Displacement**

The numbers of displaced Iraqis began to rise steadily in November 2006, when 200 people were killed in car bombings and Saddam Hussein was sentenced to death. In February, March, and April of 2007, over 530 individuals in all were killed, instigating further displacement, with 276,537 individuals displaced between March and April alone. August 2007 was another deadly month, with over 250 people killed and the number of displaced nearing 2 million. The largest number of people displaced in one month —802,860— occurred between July and August 2007 (see Sidebar 1).

## Sidebar I. Timeline of Events Triggering Displacement

**February 22, 2006:** Bombing of al-Askari Mosque in Samarra ignites sectarian violence and kills tens of thousands.

**September 2006:** Vehicle bombs kill 23 people in Kirkuk.

**November 2006:**

- Saddam Hussein is sentenced to death.
- Iraq and Syria repair diplomatic relations after almost a quarter century.
- Car bombings kill more than 200 people in Baghdad, considered the worst attack on the capital since the US-led invasion in 2003. A curfew is instated as a result.

**February 2007:** More than 130 people are killed when a bomb strikes a market in Baghdad, constituting the worst single bombing since 2003.

**March 2007:**

- Hundreds are injured after insurgents detonate three trucks with toxic gas in Falluja and Ramadi.
- Former Vice President Taha Yassin Ramadan is executed.

**April 12, 2007:** A member of the Iraqi Parliament is killed in a bomb blast.

**April 18, 2007:** Bombings kill 200 people in Baghdad, the worst day of violence since February 2007.

**May 2007:** The leader of al-Qaeda in Iraq, Abu Ayyub al-Masri, is reported killed.

**August 2007:**

- The Iraqi Accordance Front withdraws from the cabinet, forcing the government into a crisis.
- Vehicle bombs strike two villages of Yezidi Kurds and kill at least 250 people, the deadliest attack since 2003.

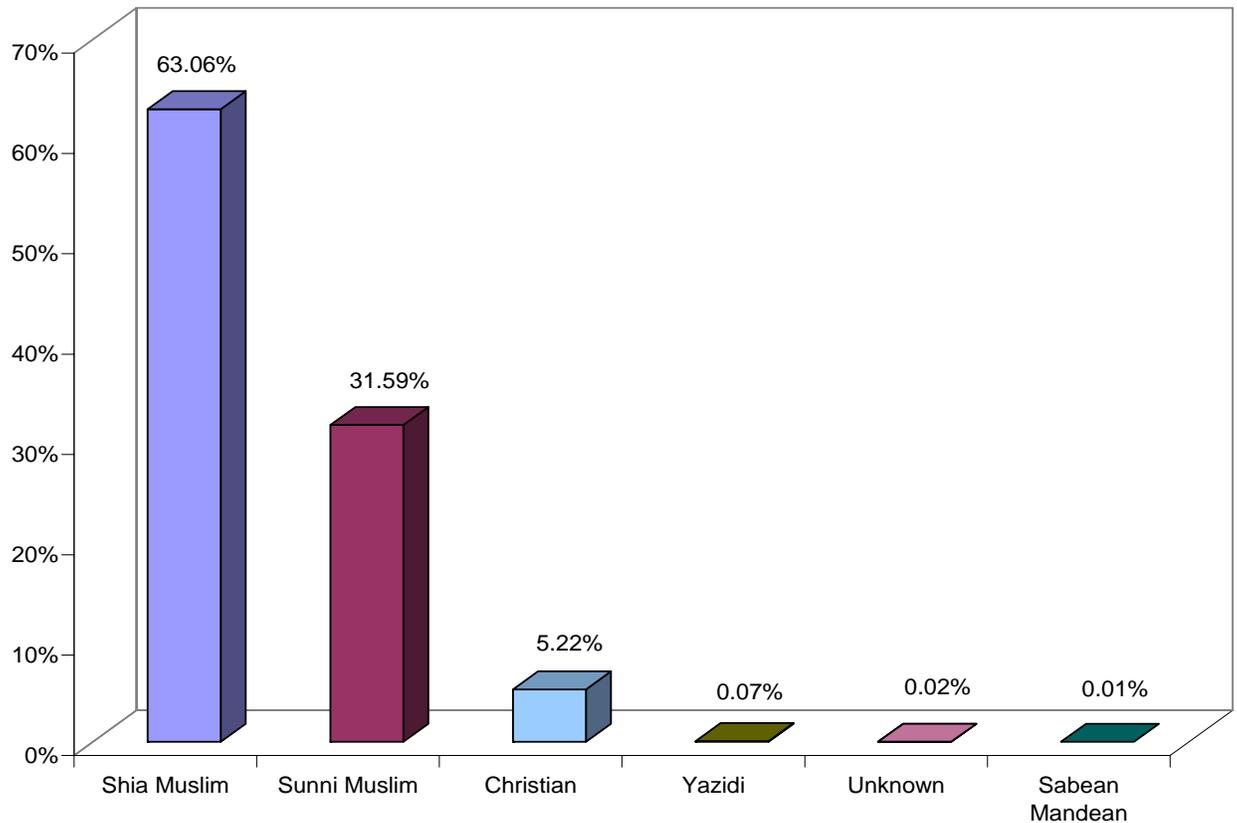
## Religious and Ethnic Breakdown

The majority of displaced Iraqis are Shia and Sunni Muslims. According to IOM, about 63 percent of the internally displaced Iraqis were Shia Muslim and about 32 percent were Sunni Muslim (see Figure 2). This is in comparison to the total Iraqi population, which is 60 to 65 percent Shia Muslim and 32 to 37 percent Sunni Muslim.<sup>19</sup> Information in Figure 2 is based on in-depth assessments by IOM of 131,809 families (790,800 individuals) displaced throughout Iraq from February 22, 2006 to November 15, 2007 (note that this figure represents the total number IOM monitors have assessed, not the total number of displaced in Iraq since February 22, 2006).<sup>20</sup>

<sup>19</sup> CIA, The World Factbook, 2007, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/iz.html>

<sup>20</sup> International Organization for Migration, *Emergency Needs Assessments, post February 2006 Displacement, 15 November 2007, bi-weekly report*, [http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/RWFiles2007.nsf/FilesByRWDocUnidFilename/EGUA-78YMMV-Full\\_Report.pdf/\\$File/Full\\_Report.pdf](http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/RWFiles2007.nsf/FilesByRWDocUnidFilename/EGUA-78YMMV-Full_Report.pdf/$File/Full_Report.pdf)

**Figure 2. Religion of Registered IDPs Displaced between February 2006 and November 2007**



Source: International Organization for Migration, *Emergency Needs Assessments, Post February 2006 Displacement*, 15 November 2007, biweekly report.

### **Sectarian Violence and Religious Persecution**

Among the most vulnerable are Iraq's minorities, who make up about 3 percent of Iraq's population. Chaldo-Assyrians, Sabeen Mandaean, and Yazidis report being targeted because they do not adhere to Muslim practices or are suspected of being employed by the US government. According to the Iraqi Ministry for Migration and Displacement, almost half the members of Iraq's non-Muslim minorities have fled abroad.<sup>21</sup> Although comprising only 4 to 5 percent of Iraq's prewar population, UNHCR reports that almost 40 percent of registered refugees are Christians. According to the Mandaean Society of America,

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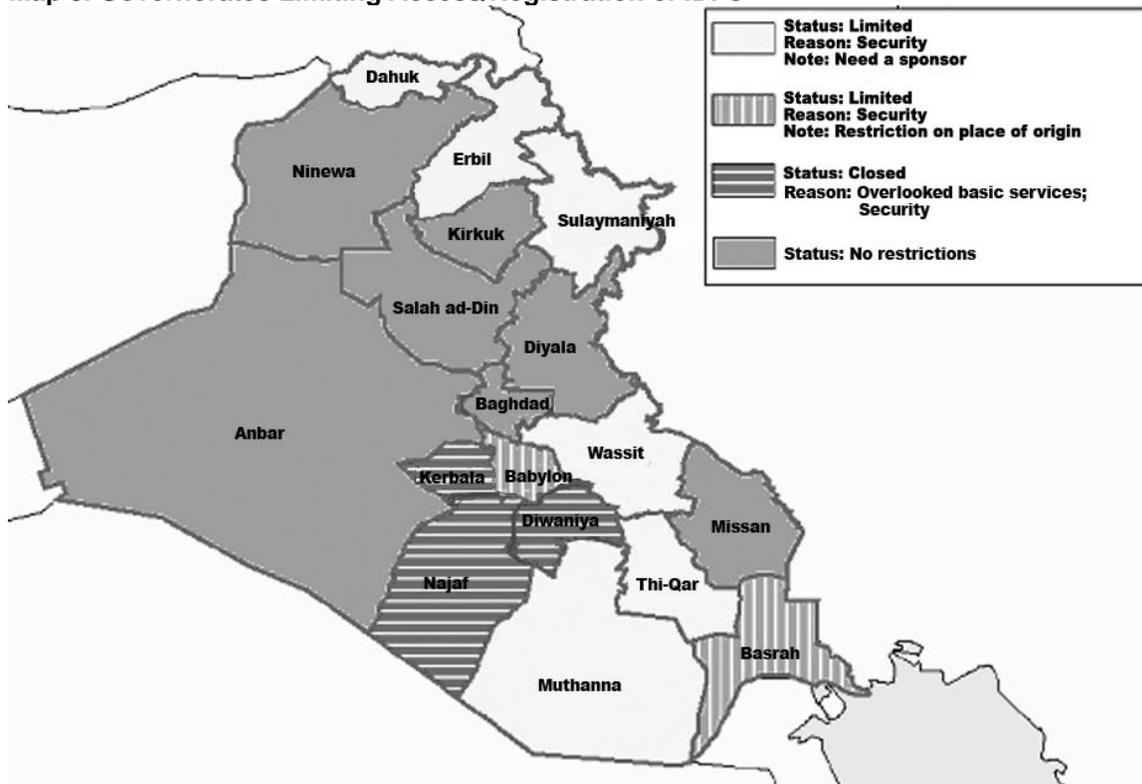
<sup>21</sup> United States Commission on International Freedom, *Iraq: Urgent Action Needed to Protect Religious Minorities*, March 12, 2007, <http://www.uscirf.gov/mediaroom/press/2007/march/20070312IraqReligMinorities.html>

approximately 85 percent of Iraqi Mandaeans have fled Iraq since 2003.<sup>22</sup> Sixty-two percent of Iraqi refugees who have arrived in the United States for resettlement are Christian.<sup>23</sup>

### Internal Restrictions

In 2007, governorates began to restrict IDP entry due to security concerns and the strain that increasing numbers of displaced people placed on local resources (see Map 3). Moreover, IDPs from unstable regions are often suspected of collaborating with insurgents. Local authorities ordered the Ministry of Displacement and Migration (MoDM) to stop registering refugees in some of Iraq's governorates. This caused resident IDPs to become ineligible for assistance.<sup>24</sup>

**Map 3. Governorates Limiting Access/Registration of IDPs**



Source: UNHCR, *Cluster F: Internally Displaced Persons in Iraq*. Update, 16 July 2007.

Eleven of the 18 governorates in Iraq restrict IDP entry and registration (Dahuk, Sulaymaniyah, Erbil, Kerbala, Najaf, Qadissiya, Wassit, Babylon, Thi-Qar, Basrah, and

<sup>22</sup> United States Commission on International Freedom, Press Release, *USCIRF to Secretary Rice: U.S. Must Address Threats to Religious Minorities in Iraq*, September 6, 2007, <http://www.uscifr.gov/mediaroom/press/2007/september/20070906RiceLetterIraq.html>

<sup>23</sup> US Department of State, Ellen Sauerbrey Remarks to USCIRF, *Sectarian Violence and the Refugee Crisis in Iraq*, September 19, 2007, <http://www.state.gov/g/prm/rls/92551.htm>

<sup>24</sup> International Organization for Migration, *Iraq Displacement, 2007 Mid-Year Review*, <http://www.iom-iraq.net/Library/2007%20Iraq%20Displacement%20Mid-Year%20Review.pdf>

Muthanna). Those not restricting entry, such as Baghdad, Anbar, and Diyala, are the governorates from which the largest numbers of internally displaced are leaving.<sup>25</sup>

Many IDPs find it too expensive or too dangerous to return to their place of origin to file a request to transfer their food ration cards. Ration cards are distributed in the town of residence and serve as the basis for the voter registration system for postwar Iraqi elections. Because voter roles depend on the issuance of ration cards, towns are reluctant to allow people to take the cards when they move. Without ration cards, people cannot get food or diesel fuel.<sup>26</sup>

In the southern governorates, IDPs are often only registered if they can prove they are from that governorate or have family connections to the area. Failure to register means IDPs are unable to transfer their ration cards or access other basic services. In Anbar, although no official restrictions on entry exist, IOM reports the “intensity of intertribal conflict requires IDPs to have tribal ties to the governorate in order to stay.”<sup>27</sup>

Because the northern Kurdish region is protected by its own security forces, it experiences much less violence than other parts of Iraq. Entering Kurds, Christians, and Sunni and Shiite Arabs must pass through a number of security checkpoints and either originate from the governorates or provide the name of a Kurdish resident to vouch for them. Single Arab men are rarely allowed to enter. Christians appear favored and receive \$85 per month from the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG), land in their village of origin, and assistance to build houses.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Kristele Younes, *The World's Fastest Growing Displacement Crisis*, Refugees International, March 2007 [http://www.refugeesinternational.org/files/9915\\_file\\_RI\\_Iraqreport.pdf](http://www.refugeesinternational.org/files/9915_file_RI_Iraqreport.pdf)

<sup>27</sup> International Organization for Migration, *Iraq: IOM emergency needs assessments (post Feb 2006 displacement) Central and Southern 15 governorates, 01 September 2007 Report*, [http://www.iom-iraq.net/library.html#IDP\\_Assesst\\_stats](http://www.iom-iraq.net/library.html#IDP_Assesst_stats)

<sup>28</sup> See n.26.

### III. Countries of First Asylum

Out of the 4.5 million displaced Iraqis, 2 million crossed into countries of first asylum in the region, such as Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, Egypt, Turkey, Iran, and some Gulf states (see Table 2). None of the four major refugee-receiving countries are signatories to the 1951 Refugee Convention.<sup>29</sup> These governments treat Iraqi refugees as guests and will only issue most of them tourist visas at best.

In Jordan and Lebanon, most Iraqis (excepting some highly skilled professionals) are prohibited from working given their entry status. In Lebanon, this has led to detentions and “voluntary” deportations where detainees are given a choice: stay in prison or return to Iraq.<sup>30</sup>

**Table 2. Number of Displaced Iraqis in the Region**

Country	Number
Syria	1,200,000 to 1,400,000
Jordan	450,000 to 500,000
Egypt	Up to 70,000
Lebanon	20,000 to 40,000
Iran	57,000
Turkey	10,000
Gulf states	200,000

Source: UNHCR, *Statistics on Displaced Iraqis Around the World*, September 2007.

Although these countries are not parties to the convention, most refugee law experts maintain that they are still bound by international law to observe the principles of *nonrefoulement*, which prevents a country from returning a refugee to a country where his or her life would be threatened.<sup>31</sup>

### IV. Examination of Syria, Jordan, and Lebanon

#### Syria

Syria has the largest population of Iraqis outside Iraq with an estimated 1.2 to 1.4 million as of September 2007. There were 2,000 crossings per day before Syria put visa restrictions in place in October 2007. Over 128,000 Iraqi refugees (83,000 in 2007) have been registered. Most come from Baghdad, and 36 percent have special needs, such as being a women or child at risk (see Figure 3).<sup>32</sup>

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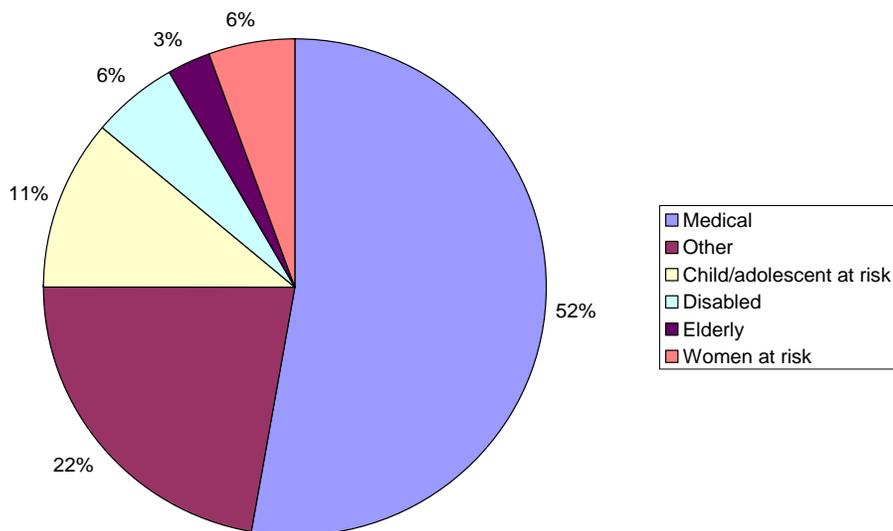
<sup>29</sup>UNHCR, *States Parties to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1967 Protocol*, November 1, 2007, <http://www.unhcr.org/protect/PROTECTION/3b73b0d63.pdf>

<sup>30</sup> Human Rights Watch, December 4, 2007, *Lebanon: Refugees Coerced to Return to Iraq* <http://hrw.org/english/docs/2007/12/04/lebano17450.htm>

<sup>31</sup> UNHCR, *Definitions and Obligations*, last updated December 18, 2007, <http://www.unhcr.org/au/basicoblig.shtml>

<sup>32</sup> See n.2.

**Figure 3. Registered Iraqis in Syria by Special Need**



Source: UNHCR Briefing Note, *Iraq: Pressure on safe havens inside and outside fuels fears of increased internal displacement*, October 23, 2007.

**Entry Restrictions.** On September 10, 2007, Syria announced visa restrictions limiting entry to Iraqis applying for commercial, scientific, educational, and transport purposes. Visa requirements became effective after the month of Ramadan, on October 12, 2007. Previously, Iraqis were permitted a six-month renewable permit at the border. The new documents are single-entry visas valid for three months. Qualified Iraqis must first obtain them from the Syrian Embassy in the Al Mansour district of Baghdad, which is reportedly a scene of frequent violence. (However, some reports from the field indicate that Iraqis, in some cases, are still able to obtain a visa at the border.) Moreover, UNHCR has received reports that the visas take two weeks to process.<sup>33</sup> Iraqis attempting to renew visas in Syria have in some cases had their documents stamped for deportation.

For months, Syria refused to grant visas to officials from the US Department of Homeland Security so they could screen Iraqis in person for admission to the US Refugee Resettlement Program. During the week of November 11, 2007, however, Syria lifted the ban.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>33</sup> See n.4.

<sup>34</sup> Boston Globe, *Syria Will Allow US to Screen Iraqis*, November 9, 2007, [http://www.boston.com/news/world/articles/2007/11/09/syria\\_will\\_allow\\_us\\_to\\_screen\\_iraqi\\_refugees/](http://www.boston.com/news/world/articles/2007/11/09/syria_will_allow_us_to_screen_iraqi_refugees/)

Many Iraqis are concerned that they will be made to leave Syria once their current three-month visas expire, or if they try to renew them. UNHCR stated that, so far, Syria has reassured the agency no Iraqis will be forced to return to Iraq.<sup>35</sup>

**Economy.** The influx of Iraqis has created an enormous economic and security burden on Syria, with the Syrian government estimating that the cost of hosting Iraqi refugees is US\$1 billion per year.<sup>36</sup> Syria already struggles with a poor economy and high unemployment. Social services are deteriorating from the influx of Iraqi refugees.

**Employment.** When Iraqis cross the border, their passports are stamped banning them from working. Many end up working illegally, although some professionals (e.g., medical doctors, teachers, and engineers) are issued work permits and allowed to take jobs.<sup>37</sup>

**Education/Health Care.** The Syrian government offers free education for all Iraqi refugees. However, at the end of last school year, less than 15 percent — 35,000 out of an estimated 250,000 school-aged Iraqi children — were actually enrolled in Syrian schools.<sup>38</sup> In addition, although education is free, many Iraqi families cannot afford the additional expense of uniforms and school supplies and are forced to decide between sending their children to school or to work.<sup>39</sup> UNHCR has launched a Back to School campaign aimed at getting more Iraqi children into schools.

**Assistance.** On December 16, 2007, UNHCR began a cash assistance program for very needy families in Syria (starting with 7,000 families). Each family will receive US\$100 to US\$200 per month via ATM cards.<sup>40</sup> The 7,000 families will also receive food from the UN World Food Program, which is planning to quintuple the number of refugees who are able to receive direct food assistance by 2008.<sup>41</sup>

**Returns from Syria.** For the first time since 2003, figures from UNHCR in Damascus released in December 2007 suggest that more Iraqi refugees were returning home than were entering the country.<sup>42</sup> The Iraqi Red Crescent Organization (IRCO) estimated that between 25,000 and 28,000 refugees had returned to Iraq from Syria between September 15 and the

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<sup>35</sup> Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN), *Iraq-Syria: UNHCR Urges "Humanitarian Component" in New Syrian Visa Regime*, September 4, 2007,

<http://irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=74100>

<sup>36</sup> IRIN, *Iraq-Syria: Confusion over Syrian visa requirements for Iraqi refugees*, September 3, 2007,

<http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=74072>

<sup>37</sup> Amnesty International, *Millions in flight: the Iraqi refugee crisis*, September 24, 2007,

<http://web.amnesty.org/library/Index/ENGMDE140412007>

<sup>38</sup> IRIN, *IRAQ-SYRIA: Iraqi pledge to Syria fails to assuage refugees*, August 23, 2007,

<http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=73895>

<sup>39</sup> UNHCR, *Education for Iraqi Refugee Children in Syria*,

<http://www.unhcr.org/events/EVENTS/46ee8da12.html>

<sup>40</sup> UNHCR, *UNHCR Issues ATM cards to 7,000 Iraqi Families in Syria*, December 17, 2007,

<http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/iraq?page=news&cid=4766a44f2>

<sup>41</sup> UNHCR, *Iraq Returns Latest*, December 7, 2007, [http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-](http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/iraq?page=briefing&cid=47592e1a6)

[bin/texis/vtx/iraq?page=briefing&cid=47592e1a6](http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/iraq?page=briefing&cid=47592e1a6)

<sup>42</sup> See n.41.

end of November 2007.<sup>43</sup> Another report released by IRCO stated that 45,913 had returned by December 27, 2007.<sup>44</sup>

This movement back to Iraq does not necessarily indicate that conditions are improving or that returns are even voluntary. A UNHCR survey of 110 Iraqi returnees from Syria found that 70 percent cited decreasing options in Syria — depletion of funds, lack of employment and tougher visa restrictions — as their primary reason for return.<sup>45</sup> The government of Iraq was promoting returns at one time, but, currently, neither UNHCR nor the government of Iraq is doing so. However, the US\$700-US\$800 the Iraqi government<sup>46</sup> is offering to Iraqi families who do return has proved a powerful incentive to refugees faced with impoverishment.

In order to assist returnees, on December 4, 2007, the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) and the Iraqi government launched a Rapid Response Plan that aims to assist 5,000 returned families immediately (about 30,000 individuals) with relief packages delivered through IOM and UNHCR.<sup>47</sup>

## Jordan

Jordan already hosts tens of thousands of Palestinian refugees and Iraqi refugees displaced under Saddam Hussein. For a country with a population of approximately 6 million, these numbers, combined with the additional influx of Iraqi refugees, have stretched resources and motivated Jordan to close its borders to Iraqi refugees earlier this year.<sup>48</sup> In a report that the Jordanian government commissioned, the Norway-based Institute for Applied International Studies (FAFO) found that, despite estimates of as many as 750,000 to 1 million Iraqi refugees in Jordan out of a population of 6 million, there were approximately 450,000 to 500,000 as of May 2007.<sup>49</sup> FAFO stated that the overestimation was due to a lack of consistent border patrol and registration.

As of October 2007, 48,833 Iraqis were registered with the UNHCR — a small fraction of the total. Of those registered, 87 percent originated from Baghdad and 14.4 percent were identified as having special needs. UNHCR believes that the number of those with special

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<sup>43</sup> Iraqi Red Crescent Organization, *Iraq Returnees from Syria*, November 30, 2007, [http://www.iraqredcrescent.org/Returnees\\_update\\_1\\_EN.pdf](http://www.iraqredcrescent.org/Returnees_update_1_EN.pdf)

<sup>44</sup> See n.6.

<sup>45</sup> UNHCR, *Iraq government busses refugees home from Syria*, November 28, 2007, <http://www.unhcr.org/news/NEWS/474d996c4.html>

<sup>46</sup> UNHCR, Briefing Notes, *Iraq: UNHCR cautious about returns*, November 23, 2007, <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/news/opendoc.htm?tbl=NEWS&id=4746da102>

<sup>47</sup> UNAMI, *Iraqi Ministry of Migration and the United Nations Launch Plan to Assist Returnees* December 4, 2007, <http://www.uniraq.org/newsroom/getarticle.asp?ArticleID=467>

<sup>48</sup> IRIN, *Iraq-Jordan: Border Closed with Iraq, Refugees Refused Entry*, March 29, 2006, <http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=26217>

<sup>49</sup> FAFO, *Official FAFO Report from Jordan*, May 2007, <http://www.fafono.no/ais/middeast/jordan/Iraqis%20in%20Jordan.pdf>

needs will increase when UNHCR sends outreach teams to access those families too afraid to approach its office.<sup>50</sup>

**Entry Restrictions.** Jordan is not a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention or the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees and has no asylum procedure for recognizing refugees. As a result, Iraqis are treated as “guests” at best and, at worst, as illegal immigrants who may be deported if they overstay their short-term visas.<sup>51</sup> The Jordanian government was lenient toward the entry of more than 500,000 Iraqis living in Jordan until the November 2005 suicide bombings of Amman hotels by three Iraqi nationals, in which 60 people died. Jordan then rounded up and began deporting Iraqis. The government limited the number of residence permits and prohibited the entry of men between the ages of 18 and 35.

At present, only people with Jordanian residency, or those invited for medical or educational purposes, are permitted entry.<sup>52</sup> According to a report by FAFO in May 2007, only 22 percent of the poorest section of the Iraqi community surveyed had a valid residency permit; 56 percent overall had a valid residency permit.<sup>53</sup>

**Economy.** The cost of living has risen for all residents of Jordan, leading to sharp resentment of both Iraqis and the government. According to the International Monetary Fund, Jordan’s consumer price index rose 6.3 percent in 2006, the highest increase since 2003. The surge in population has created an increase in demand and a subsequent increase in the cost of housing, transportation, food, and fuel. A financial manager at Khalaf & Eshtayy Company for Housing, told IRIN that “housing prices increased by 300 percent over the past four years.”<sup>54</sup>

**Employment.** Most Iraqis are denied the right to work. Iraqi refugees have allegedly caused resentment among the local population by driving down wages, as they will work illegally for significantly less than Jordanians.<sup>55</sup> In May 2007, only 22 percent of Iraqi adults were employed. Forty-two percent survived on remittances from family members in Iraq and abroad, making their financial situations volatile.<sup>56</sup>

**Education and Health Care.** In August 2007, the Jordanian government granted all Iraqi children access to public education regardless of whether their parents have entry permits.

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<sup>50</sup> See n.2.

<sup>51</sup> Bill Frelick, “*The Silent Treatment*” *Fleeing Iraq, Surviving in Jordan*, Human Rights Watch, November 2006, <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2006/jordan1106/jordan1106web.pdf>

<sup>52</sup> See n.37.

<sup>53</sup> See n.49.

<sup>54</sup> IRIN, *Iraq- Jordan, Iraqis Cause Black Market for Jobs*, March 28, 2007, <http://www.irinnews.org/report.aspx?ReportId=71004>

<sup>55</sup> Radio Free Europe, *Iraq: Refugee crisis could become regional security threat*, July 19, 2007, <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2007/07/125f9bb7-46a1-4c2c-904a-f250a09c3393.html>

<sup>56</sup> See n.49.

The Jordanian government predicted 50,000 to be registered for the 2008 academic school year.<sup>57</sup> As of September 2007, 22,000 Iraqi children had been registered. There are concerns however, that Iraqis won't register their children out of fear of identification and subsequent deportation and that the school systems are unprepared to handle the increase in students.<sup>58</sup>

Amnesty International reported that there are 20 private hospitals and two public hospitals in Jordan. Iraqis are eligible for emergency treatment regardless of their resident status. However, if Iraqi refugees want continued treatment, they either have to be residents to use public hospitals and have to pay to access private hospitals. Most Iraqis cannot afford the latter.<sup>59</sup>

## **Lebanon**

Iraqis in Lebanon face the most serious protection problems. Lebanon is not a signatory to the 1951 UN Convention relating to the Status of Refugees or its 1967 Protocol. Refugees are not granted asylum, have no legal status, and are subject to detention and deportation. UNHCR estimates there are 50,000 Iraqi refugees in Lebanon, 10,000 of who arrived before 2003.<sup>60</sup> Although this is a small population compared to others in the region, Lebanon, a country of 4 million, also hosts somewhere between 350,000 and 400,000 Palestinians.

***Detentions.*** Because Lebanon's borders are closed, 95 percent of Iraqi refugee and asylum seekers are smuggled into the country through Syria. In an effort to crack down on those living in Lebanon illegally, the Lebanese government detains Iraqis who are picked up at checkpoints or in other encounters with authorities, placing them in jail initially for one- to three-month sentences but then holding them indefinitely or until they "volunteer" for repatriation.

As of November 6, 2007, 500 Iraqis were in detention.<sup>61</sup> Detainees, mixed in with common criminals, are placed in overcrowded conditions with some cells as small as 8.2 by 8.2 feet containing six inmates.<sup>62</sup> The only way out is to "choose" to go back to Iraq. UNHCR estimates that 50 to 60 Iraqis are arrested per month. UNHCR is only able to obtain release without deportation of five or six Iraqis per month.

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<sup>57</sup> UNHCR, *Jordan, Iraqi Refugee Children Start School*, August 21, 2007, <http://www.unhcr.org/news/NEWS/46cab8284.html>

<sup>58</sup> Human Rights Watch, *Fleeing Iraq: Surviving in Jordan*, [http://www.hrw.org/reports/2006/jordan1106/6.htm#\\_Toc151445640](http://www.hrw.org/reports/2006/jordan1106/6.htm#_Toc151445640)

<sup>59</sup> See n.52.

<sup>60</sup> Human Rights Watch, *Rot Here or Die There Bleak Choices for Iraqi Refugees in Lebanon*, November 2007, <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2007/lebanon1207>

<sup>61</sup> IRIN, *Lebanon: Iraqi refugees face prison and deportation*, November 6, 2007, [www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportID=75172](http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportID=75172)

<sup>62</sup> See n.60.

**Employment.** Refugees in Lebanon find it nearly impossible to gain legal employment. To obtain an employment visa, refugees have to pay US\$2,000 a year in administration fees and have a Lebanese sponsor agree to be legally responsible for them.<sup>63</sup> Because Iraqi men can be arrested on the streets, they are afraid to leave their homes and some send their children out to work. Consequently, many children do not attend school and are subject to exploitation.<sup>64</sup>

## V. Third-Country Resettlement

By the beginning of December 2007, only 4,575 Iraqi refugees had left their countries of first asylum for resettlement in a third country through a formal resettlement program. According to UNHCR, from 2003 to 2006, just over 3,100 Iraqi refugees were resettled to industrialized countries.<sup>65</sup> UNHCR exceeded its goal to refer 20,000 Iraqis for resettlement by the end of calendar 2007.

Between January 1 and December 7, 2007, 20,472 Iraqis were referred for resettlement consideration to 16 countries. Of those nearly 21,000 Iraqis, UNHCR referred 14,798 to the United States and 5,674 to Australia, Canada, Denmark, United Kingdom, New Zealand, the Netherlands, Sweden, Finland, Norway, Ireland, Spain, Germany, Chile, Ireland, and Brazil.<sup>66</sup>

### The US Response

The history of Iraqi resettlement reveals that only 202 Iraqi refugees were admitted to the United States in all of FY 2006, and fewer than 600 were admitted between 2003 and 2005 (see Table 3).

One reason for these low numbers was that, following the attacks of September 11, 2001, the Department of Homeland Security established security screening procedures in the region that significantly slowed the processing of applicants.<sup>67</sup> Another reason is that, after the overthrow of Saddam Hussein, many Iraqis were initially hopeful about the stabilization of the country; indeed, several thousand refugees returned home from neighboring countries in the 2003-2004 period.

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<sup>63</sup> See n.61.

<sup>64</sup> See n.60.

<sup>65</sup> UNHCR, *Resettlement of Iraqi Refugees*, March 12, 2007, <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/home/opendoc.pdf?tbl=SUBSITES&id=45f80f9d2>

<sup>66</sup> UNHCR, *UNHCR Meets 2007 Resettlement Referral Target for Iraqi Refugees*, December 12, 2007, <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/iraq?page=press&id=475fba5d2>

<sup>67</sup> US Department of State, *Briefing With United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Antonio Guterres, and Assistant Secretary for Population, Refugees, and Migration Ellen Sauerbrey* February 14, 2007, <http://www.state.gov/g/rls/rm/80532.htm>

**Table 3. Resettlement of Iraqi Refugees, 1992 to 2006\***

Country	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999
United States <sup>+</sup>	3,440	4,610	4,980	3,480	2,530	2,680	1,410	1,960
Canada	1,170	2,230	1,340	1,160	1,140	1,150	780	690
Australia	-	1,330	950	2,880	1,680	1,360	1,730	1,750
Sweden	1,580	110	650	540		330	270	150
Netherlands	230	220	460	470	390	120	30	10
Denmark	160	250	170	330	250	290	200	130
New Zealand	100	10	220	320	140	270	240	170
Norway		200	20			620	220	180
Finland						340		120
Country	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	
United States	3,150	22,470	460	300	70	200	200	
Canada	1,160	1,130	920	530	720	520	90	
Australia	950	620	2,140	1,940	1,560	1,850	120	
Sweden	340	250	250	90	30	60	80	
Netherlands	10	10	20	10				
Denmark	60	70	210					
New Zealand	50	80	220	300	30	120		
Norway	90	130	170	60			10	
Finland	150	90	110	20	10			

Notes: \* UNCHR referred cases only. Final figures for some countries will be higher. +Figures for US fiscal year. Data include family members resettled for the purposes of family reunion. Source: UNHCR, Statistics on Iraqi Refugees around the World, September 2007.

The United States has a greater capacity to receive Iraqi refugees than it has exercised to date. At the beginning of each fiscal year, the president signs the Presidential Determination on Refugees, which authorizes the number of refugees that can be resettled in the United States during that fiscal year. In FY 2007, 70,000 resettlement places were authorized; 20,000 were assigned to unallocated reserves. According to this statute,<sup>68</sup>

“[Authorization can be given] to use unallocated admissions in regions where the need for additional admissions arises. [Authorization may also be given] to transfer unused admissions allocated to a particular region to one or more other regions, if there is a need for greater admissions for the region or regions to which the admissions are being transferred.”<sup>69</sup>

The United States therefore had the ability to resettle as many as 20,000 additional Iraqi refugees in FY 2007. On February 14, 2007, the US Bureau for Population, Refugees, and Migration (BRPM) announced that the United States would resettle 7,000 Iraqis by the end of FY 2007 (September 30, 2007). However, as noted earlier, by that date, only 1,608 Iraqi

<sup>68</sup> Section 207 and 101(a) (42) of the Immigration and Nationality Act, and Section 2(b) (2) of the Migration and Refugee Assistance Act.

<sup>69</sup> US Department of State, Press Release, *Presidential Determination No. 2008-1: FY 2008 Refugee Admissions Numbers*, October 2, 2007, <http://www.state.gov/p/af/rls/93213.htm>

refugees had been admitted (see Table 4). In the early months of FY 2008, refugee admissions actually fell from 2007 levels, but the pace of processing picked up around the turn of the calendar year for refugees in first asylum in Jordan.

As of November 30, 2007, the second month of FY 2008, 812 Iraqi refugees arrived in the United States.<sup>70</sup> In January 2007, Syria, which had refused visas to US processing officials, granted the visas, raising hope that the processing “pipeline” might begin to fill and result in greater admissions in the second half of the fiscal year. The US government has said it aims to admit as many as 12,000 Iraqi refugees during FY 2008.<sup>71</sup>

**Table 4. Country of First Asylum of the 1,608 Iraqis Resettled in the United States in 2007**

Turkey	Jordan	Syria	Lebanon	Egypt	Other Countries
660	537	242	67	28	74

Source: Human Rights First, 2007 Iraqi Refugee Overview.

In November 2006, the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom urged the State Department to allow members of Iraqi religious minority groups who have fled Iraq to be given access to the US Refugee Resettlement Program.<sup>72</sup> It also recommended the creation of an interagency task force to address the issues of Iraqi refugees and IDPs.

The State Department established the Iraq Refugee and Internally Displaced Persons Task Force in February 2007. It is designed to coordinate the work of US and international organizations involved in assisting or resettling refugees and IDPs. Ambassador James Foley was appointed as Senior Coordinator for Iraq Refugee issues. However John Merrill, Director for Refugees, IDPs, and Parole Programs, Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense, Middle East Iraq Office, said at a conference held at the Center for American Progress on December 6, 2007, that, “the task force never meets.”

Washington also recognized that Iraqis who were former employees of the US government in Iraq were being targeted for their associations. As such, on June 19, 2007, bipartisan legislation was introduced in the Senate entitled “Refugee Crisis in Iraq Act.”<sup>73</sup> Congress passed the legislation in early December 2007 in the form of the Kennedy Amendment to the Department of Defense Authorization bill.

Under this legislation

- refugee processing facilities will be established in Iraq and in countries in the region (Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan, and Syria);
- priority for resettlement will be given to Iraqis facing persecution or who are at risk for having worked with a US government agency, contractor, media organization, or

<sup>70</sup> US Department of State, Fact Sheet, *Humanitarian Assistance for Displaced Iraqis*, December 5, 2007, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2007/dec/96398.htm>

<sup>71</sup> FY 2008 runs from October 1, 2007 to September 30, 2008.

<sup>72</sup> US Department of State, *Iraqi Volunteers, Iraq Refugees: What is America’s Obligation?* March 26, 2007, <http://www.state.gov/g/prm/rls/82184.htm>

<sup>73</sup> Senator Edward M Kennedy, Press Release, *Kennedy, colleagues fight to end Iraqi refugee crisis*, June 19, 2007, [http://kennedy.senate.gov/newsroom/press\\_release.cfm?id=299DE47C-BDE6-43AE-AB8F-6F0477084030](http://kennedy.senate.gov/newsroom/press_release.cfm?id=299DE47C-BDE6-43AE-AB8F-6F0477084030)

nongovernmental organization (NGO). They would be eligible to apply directly to the US refugee resettlement program rather than having to apply outside of Iraq through the UN referral system;<sup>74</sup>

- 5,000 special immigrant visas will be available yearly for five years for Iraqis who have worked for the US government in Iraq;
- Iraqis in the United States who have been denied asylum because conditions in Iraq changed after Saddam Hussein's government fell can have their cases reheard;
- special coordinators will be assigned to handle Iraqi refugee and IDP issues at American embassies in Baghdad, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria.

***US Financial Assistance Provided.*** The US government increased its funding for Iraqi refugees from \$43 million in 2006 to almost \$200 million in 2007 (see Table 5).<sup>75</sup> Although this is a marked improvement, the majority of NGOs and international organizations recommend that the United States increase the numbers of Iraqis who are resettled to the United States as well as the amount of bilateral assistance provided to Iraq and regional host countries.

**Table 5. US Funding for Iraqi Humanitarian Assistance by Organization Type, 2007 (in millions)**

Government agency	International organizations	NGOs	Other <sup>*</sup>	Total
US State Department/Population Refugees and Migration)	\$99.26	\$18.55	\$ 5.00	\$122.81
US Agency for International Development/ Office of US Foreign Disaster Assistance	\$6.00	\$ 57.40	N/A	\$ 63.40
US Agency for International Development/Office of Food for Peace	\$0.65	N/A	N/A	\$0.65
US Agency for International Development, Jordan**	N/A	N/A	\$10.30	\$10.30
TOTAL	\$105.91	\$75.95	\$15.30	\$197.16

\*State Department/Near Eastern Affairs Bureau supplement to the Department Scholar Rescue fund grant. \*\*USAID support to Jordanian government to reinforce ongoing health and education programs in communities affected by large numbers of Iraqi refugees.

Source: US Department of State, Fact Sheet, United States Humanitarian Assistance for Displaced Iraqis, November 9, 2007.

***Specific Projects.*** The US government has received appeals from UNHCR and the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, among others, but it has also designated funds for existing US programs (see Table 6). The UNHCR/UNICEF Joint

<sup>74</sup> Currently, Iraqis have no method for seeking refugee status in Iraq and must leave for neighboring countries, locate an official from UNHCR, and then be referred back to the US government by the UN to apply.

<sup>75</sup> US Department of State, Fact Sheet, *United States Humanitarian Assistance for Displaced Iraqis*, November 9, 2007, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2007/nov/94849.htm>

Education Appeal, to which the United States has committed \$39 million, will help 155,000 children, including 100,000 in Syria and 50,000 in Jordan.

**Table 6. Funding Appeals for Iraqi Refugees and US Commitments to Date**

<b>Date</b>	<b>April 16, 2007</b>
Type: Appeal	International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent <sup>a</sup>
Description	Provide up to 100,000 families (60,000 in Syria and 40,000 in Jordan) with health services over the next 12 months, including general medicine and dentistry, as well as psychological support.
Amount requested	\$15 million
Amount funded	\$3.7 million on August 28, 2007 <sup>aa</sup>
<b>Date</b>	<b>July 27, 2007</b>
Type: Appeal	UNHCR/UNICEF Joint Education <sup>b</sup>
Description	Provide educational opportunities for as many as 155,000 Iraqi children in Syria, Jordan, Egypt, and Lebanon during the 2007-2008 school year (see Table 6). The appeal came as a response to increasing concerns that an entire generation of Iraqis could grow up uneducated.
Amount requested	\$129 million
Amount funded	\$30 million on August 28, 2007 <sup>aa</sup> (\$39 million as of November 9, 2007)
<b>Date</b>	<b>September 12, 2007</b>
Type: Fund created by United States <sup>c</sup>	\$12 million made available for Iraq-related humanitarian programs
Description	\$9 Million for the UNHCR/UNICEF Education Fund. \$2 million to support health/education activities of NGOs in Jordan and Syria. \$1 million to IOM for an antitrafficking program in Syria, Jordan, Iraq, and Lebanon.
<b>Date</b>	<b>September 16, 2007</b>
Type: Fund created by United States <sup>d</sup>	\$10.3 million
Description	To USAID Jordan to support health and education in Jordanian communities affected by a large arrival of Iraqis.
<b>Date</b>	<b>September 18, 2007</b>
Type: Joint appeal	UNFPA, UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP, and WHO: Meeting the Health Needs of Iraqis Displaced in Neighboring Countries <sup>e</sup>
Description	Aimed to improve access to health care for displaced Iraqis living in Syria, Jordan, and Egypt, and to support the health care systems of those countries to meet the needs of their Iraqi refugee populations.
Amount requested	\$84.8 million
Amount funded	Pending

Sources: <sup>a</sup>ICRC, *International Federation launches 18-million-Swiss-franc appeal to help displaced Iraqis in Syria and Jordan*, April 17, 2007. <sup>aa</sup>Department of State, *US Helps Iraqi Refugee Children Return to School*, August 28, 2007. <sup>b</sup>UNHCR/UNICEF Joint Appeal, *Providing Education Opportunities to Iraqi Children in Host Countries, A regional perspective*, July 2007. <sup>c</sup>Department of State, *New Funding Announced: US Contributes \$24 Million for Relief of Refugees and Displaced Persons in the Middle East and Sri Lanka*, September 12, 2007. <sup>d</sup>USAID in Jordan, *US to Provide \$78 Million in Additional Economic and Security Assistance to Jordan*, September 16, 2007. <sup>e</sup>Joint Health Sector Appeal by UNFPA, UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP, WHO, *Meeting the Health Needs of Iraqis Displaced in Neighboring Countries*, September 18, 2007.

## Iraqi Asylum Seekers

Iraqis were the largest group of asylum seekers to industrialized countries, with 22,000 arrivals in 2006. Numbers have continued to rise dramatically during the first six months of 2007. A total of 19,800 Iraqi asylum applications were submitted to 36 industrialized countries (those with data available).<sup>76</sup> Nearly half of these asylum claims were filed in Sweden (see Table 7).

In 2006, Sweden (population 9 million) granted protection status to more Iraqis than in all other EU Member States combined.<sup>77</sup> Between January and August 2007, Sweden took in 12,259 Iraqi asylum applicants and expects 20,000 for all of 2007. Sweden's Minister for Migration and Asylum Policy, Tobias Billström, pointed out that Sweden's intake is proportionally equivalent to the United States taking in about 500,000 refugees.<sup>78</sup>

**Table 7. Number of Iraqi Asylum Applications by Country, 2006 and January to June 2007**

Country of Asylum	2006	January to June 2007
Sweden	8,950	9,329
Netherlands	2,765	562
Germany	2,065	817
Greece	1,415	3,485
United Kingdom	1,305	665
Norway	1,000	485
Switzerland	815	513
Belgium	695	372
Denmark	505	459
Austria	380	188
Finland	225	106
Ireland	215	141
Slovakia	205	76
Canada	190	129
Australia	185	86
Cyprus	130	90
USA	535	385
France	115	69

Source: UNHCR, *Statistics on Displaced Iraqis Around the World*, September 2007.

<sup>76</sup> UNHCR, *Statistics on Displaced Iraqis Around the World*, September 2007, <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/home/openssl.pdf?tbl=SUBSITES&id=470387fc2>

<sup>77</sup> Markus Sperl, *UNHCR Fortress Europe and the Iraqi 'intruders': Iraqi asylum-seekers and the EU, 2003-2007*, October 2007, <http://www.unhcr.org/research/RESEARCH/470c9be92.pdf>

<sup>78</sup> Roger Cohen, *New York Times*, *Refugees? What Refugees?* September 27, 2007, <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/09/27/opinion/27cohen.html>

**European Union.** To enter the European Union, Iraqis must first obtain a passport and visa, but EU Member States do not accept the commonly used “S” series passport due to the number of forgeries. They accept the “G” series, which can only be obtained in Baghdad.<sup>79</sup> Even if an Iraqi has the right type of passport, getting a visa from an EU diplomatic representative is next to impossible.<sup>80</sup> Military installations and embassies within Iraq do not accept asylum claims. Likewise, European governments have restricted airlines from transporting persons without valid papers, leaving Iraqis to obtain documents on the black market and rely on human smugglers.<sup>81</sup>

Currently, illegal entry is practically the only way for Iraqis to enter an EU Member State in order to claim asylum. It is estimated that the cost to reach Europe from Iraq is as much as \$10,000.<sup>82</sup> Not surprisingly, it is usually the elite who are able to make the trip. Even within Jordan and Syria, the majority are middle class and well educated, while the poor are left behind in Iraq.

A number of discrepancies have been identified in how EU Member States treat Iraqi asylum and refugee claims. While Sweden gained notability by automatically granting asylum to most Iraqis in 2006, Greece, the most common entry point, decided to suspend decision-making on all claims made after 2003. The decision was apparently to prevent potentially denied applicants from being returned to Iraq. In doing so, however, asylum seekers are forced to survive on government support without the right to work for several years.

Since the fall of the Iraqi Ba’ath regime (and the threat specifically from the Ba’ath party was no longer present), Germany has been the only EU Member State to revoke refugee status for the 18,000 refugees who entered before 2003. In June 2007, after intense criticism, the German government temporarily suspended the retraction of refugee status for certain groups, such as those from Baghdad, single women, and members of religious minorities.<sup>83</sup>

In August 2005, British authorities stated that, due to the existence of a safe route of travel to Iraq, all rejected Iraqi asylum seekers would be expected to return home. Several thousand have done so. Even without precise numbers, it is estimated that the majority end up staying in the United Kingdom despite having neither permission to work nor additional monetary assistance.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Migration Policy Group, *Migration News Sheet* April 2007, p. 13.

<sup>80</sup> Migration Policy Group, *Migration News Sheet*, February 2007, p. 15.

<sup>81</sup> International Herald Tribune, *Iraqis Turn to Gangs to Flee for Safety*, July 27 2007.

<sup>82</sup> See n.77.

<sup>83</sup> *Erlasslage :Widerruf von Flüchtlingsanerkennungen irakischer Staatsangehöriger*, 4 July 2007, <http://www.migrationsrecht.net/content/view/929/55/>

<sup>84</sup> All information for the European Union originally found at: Markus Sperl, UNHCR, *Fortress Europe and the Iraqi ‘intruders: Iraqi asylum-seekers and the EU, 2003-2007*, October 2007, <http://www.unhcr.org/research/RESEARCH/470c9be92.pdf> (for further examples of EU state policies, see ECRE Guidelines (n.18).

## VI. Conclusion

The international response to the humanitarian crisis resulting from the war in Iraq is, thus far, wholly inadequate. The financial, social, and, increasingly, political burden of hosting over 2 million refugees has been left to the host countries in the region, themselves poor and fragile. Syria and Jordan have been extraordinarily generous to Iraqi refugees but are at the limit of their ability to absorb them without substantial help from other states. The restrictive visa regimes of neighboring countries, and the refusal of most governorates within Iraq to accept more IDPs, have further endangered the 4.5 million Iraqis displaced from their homes.

As individuals, Iraqi refugees are limited in their movement, and those who have been able to leave the country are at the mercy (which so far has been considerable in the cases of Jordan and Syria) of their host countries, the most important of which have not accepted the formal obligations of the 1951 Refugee Convention. Many refugees lack employment or legal recognition. Their private resources are dwindling. Although UNHCR has referred more than 20,000 Iraqi refugees for resettlement in calendar year 2007, more than 80 percent of the referred are still in peril. Those who can afford the transnational journey to seek asylum are continually met with restrictive policies while the poor who remain need solutions that, so far, continue to be insufficient.

The added complexity of social tensions and an unstable political, ethnic, and religious landscape demand greater creativity and urgent cooperation among the members of the international community. A number of recommendations have been made by NGOs, such as increasing bilateral assistance to regional host countries and humanitarian agencies, devising a strategy for return and reintegration, and increasing the number of refugees resettled in third countries. Although a consciousness of the displacement in and around Iraq has emerged in the past year, and many recommendations have been made, urgent action, beginning today, is needed to build toward an enduring, comprehensive solution to one of the most desperate humanitarian crises of our day, that of the Iraqi refugees.