

THE REPUBLIC OF IRAQ

Country Information

- Population: 41.18 million (2021)
- Location: in the Middle East and Western Asia, bordered by Turkey in north, Iran to east, the Persian Gulf and Kuwait in southeast, Saudi Arabia in south, Jordan to southwest, and Syria to west.

Recent History and Reasons for Displacement

Iraq has seen almost four decades of war, conflict and unrest, including: the Iraq-Iran war of 1980-1988, the Gulf War of 1990-1991, the bombing of Iraq in 1998 and, the Iraq War from 2003 to 2011. Each of these conflicts have created waves of Iraqi refugees. As of 2021, it is reported that over 9.2 million Iraqis are Internal Displaced People (IDPs) and refugees in neighbouring countries and in other states.

Many parts of Iraq remain unsafe for civilians, due to sectarian violence and armed conflict. Mass executions, systematic rape and acts of violence are widespread, and human rights and rule of law are under constant attack. “Voluntary return in safety and dignity is difficult” according to UNHCR.

In addition, free speech is limited, authorities harass and arrest journalists, and sometimes use excessive force against protesters.

Where do People Go?

- Turkey: more than 700,000 Iraqis refugees in Turkey (2022)
- Syria: over 1.2 million Iraqi refugees in Syria
- Jordan: 750,000 refugees are in Jordan mainly living in Amman
- Lebanon: Over 50,000 Iraqis Refugees are in Lebanon

Why Can't They Stay There?

Turkey:

- Refugees have protection in Turkey, but it is limited. Recent refugees usually receive “temporary protection” through a document that must be renewed every six months. Temporary protection, unlike full refugee status, does not provide complete legal protection. Most refugees in Turkey have no prospects for local integration. Movement within Turkey is limited, requiring refugees to request permission to travel within the country for more than one day.
- Social services and education are provided, but work permits are limited and must be renewed periodically. Refugees are limited to living in the area or camp where they were first registered, even though employment may only be available in other regions. Poverty has led to early marriage and child labour.

Jordan:

- Iraqi refugees in Jordan are considered “guests” and do not receive refugee protection. Full residency is often tied to wealth. Local integration is generally not possible. The large influx of Syrian refugees, added to other refugee populations, has put pressure on Jordan’s scarce resources.
- Iraqis are not recognized as refugees by the Jordanian government and as a result, most live in the country illegally and can be deported at any time. They cannot lawfully work and have little or no source of sustainable income. They have limited access to basic health services; many Iraqi women and children with treatable illnesses are suffering from preventable diseases. In addition, Iraqi refugee children are banned from attending public schools and private schools are expensive.
- Refugee communities have high rates of early marriage and child labour. Domestic violence is increasing, and Iraqi refugee women and girls are increasingly vulnerable to exploitation. Women and girls may be forced into prostitution and sex work as families struggle to survive. Women-at-risk, LGBTI individuals, persons with disabilities and those with serious medical conditions need protection. Resettlement is the only available option for these individuals.

Syria:

- The majority of refugees in Syria are from Iraq. As “temporary guests” they do not have refugee protection. Conditions for obtaining or renewing temporary guest visas can be unclear. Due to the current instability within the country, integration is not an option. During the Syrian Civil War, Iraqis in Damascus reported being targeted by sectarian violence and threats. “Refugees risk arbitrary arrest, recruitment by armed groups, and harassment due to their ethnic or religious backgrounds,” according to UNHCR.
- The ongoing conflict has limited refugees’ ability to move about the country. Some have been trapped in besieged areas for significant periods of time.
- Refugees have no access to formal employment and are vulnerable to exploitation in the informal labour market.

Lebanon:

- Iraqis in Lebanon are considered “guests” and do not have protection as formal refugees. Long-term local integration is not possible, as they cannot become permanent residents. Lebanon hosts the largest number of refugees per capita of any country. A large influx of Syrian refugees following the Syrian Civil War has led to some resentment toward all refugee populations.
- There is limited access to employment services and other social services and refugees are at risk of deportation. Residency permits are difficult and expensive to acquire and to renew. Refugees without up-to date permits risk arbitrary arrest, detention and forcible return to their home

country. The lack of a current residency permit restricts access to work, education and health care. Those with permits can only work in certain sectors.

Refugee Sponsorship Opportunities

The Blended Visa-Office Referred (BVOR) program helps to resettle refugees identified by the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) as those who are the most vulnerable and most in need of resettlement. BVOR is a partnership program between sponsor groups in Canada, Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada (IRCC), and the newcomers. IRCC provides up to six months of income support for the newcomers, while the private sponsors provide the start-up costs, remaining six months financial support, along with social and emotional support for the newcomers' first year in Canada.

For more information about the BVOR program, please visit:

www.rstp.ca/en/bvor/info

Sources:

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