



Fact Sheet

May 16, 2008

IRAQI REFUGEE PROCESSING

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and the U.S. Department of State (DOS) have been committed to streamlining the process for admitting Iraqi refugees to the U.S. while at the same time ensuring the highest level of security. Starting in May 2007, DHS and DOS have worked cooperatively to administer the overseas component of the U.S. refugee admissions program (USRAP).

DOS' Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration (PRM) has overall management responsibility for the USRAP and has the lead in proposing admissions ceilings and processing priorities. Within DHS, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) has responsibility for interviewing refugee applicants and adjudicating applications for refugee status.

Through its cooperative agreements with Overseas Processing Entities (OPE), PRM handles the intake of refugee referrals from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and U.S. embassies, and the prescreening of cases. USCIS and PRM share responsibility for initiating security checks. Part of the refugee program's important humanitarian mission is to offer resettlement opportunities to especially vulnerable Iraqi refugees who are unable to return to Iraq due to persecution.

U.S. Refugee Admissions Program

USRAP is an inter-agency effort involving a number of governmental and non-governmental partners, both overseas and domestically, whose mission is to resettle refugees in the U.S. In the last year, the USRAP expanded its capacity dramatically to consider Iraqi refugees for resettlement.

- Since the program began last spring, a total of 26,904 Iraqi individuals have been referred for resettlement to the USRAP. USCIS has interviewed a total of 16,949 Iraqi refugees, and a total of 5,763 Iraqi refugees have been welcomed to the U.S. as of May 14, 2008.
- In FY 2007, between May and September alone, a total of 11,787 Iraqi individuals were referred for resettlement to the USRAP. USCIS interviewed 4,550 Iraqi refugees, and the U.S. admitted 1,608 Iraqi refugees.

- In FY 2008 through May 14th, a total of 15,117 Iraqi individuals have been referred for resettlement to the USRAP. USCIS has interviewed 12,456 Iraqi refugees, and the U.S. admitted 4,155 Iraqi refugees.

Process for Resettlement

In identifying cases for referral to the USRAP, the UNHCR and DOS have been prioritizing eleven categories of especially vulnerable refugees, including individuals who are affiliated with the U.S. Government and religious minorities, among others.

Iraqi refugees may gain access to this program through referrals by UNHCR, a U.S. Embassy, or a nongovernmental organization (NGO). Iraqi applicants who worked for the U.S. government, a U.S. contractor, or a U.S.-based media organization or NGO and their family members, can apply directly without a UNHCR referral in Jordan and Egypt. In addition, Iraqi applicants will be considered for resettlement if an eligible family member applies on their behalf in the United States. The vast majority of cases processed so far by the USRAP have been referrals from UNHCR.

USCIS officers are interviewing Iraqi refugee applicants primarily in Jordan, Syria, Egypt, Turkey, and Lebanon. In addition, DOS and DHS have begun in-country refugee processing in Iraq for U.S. Embassy staff (direct hires) who have decided to avail themselves of this opportunity. This will allow these individuals to seek resettlement in the U.S. while they continue to assist coalition efforts in Iraq.

Determining Eligibility for Refugees

Eligibility for refugee status is decided on an individual, or case-by-case, basis. A USCIS officer conducts a personal interview of the applicant designed to elicit information about the applicant's claim for refugee status. During the interview, the officer confirms the basic biographical data of the applicant; verifies that the applicant was properly given access to the USRAP; determines whether the applicant has suffered past persecution (or has a well-founded fear of future persecution) on the basis of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion in his or her home country; determines whether the applicant is admissible to the United States and whether he or she has been firmly resettled in another country; and assesses the credibility of the applicant.

Ensuring Security

We are committed to conducting the most rigorous screening that will ensure that the Iraqi refugee population is not infiltrated by individuals seeking to harm the United States. On May 29, 2007, DHS announced and implemented an Administration-coordinated, enhanced background and security check process for Iraqi refugees applying for resettlement in the United States. No case is finally approved until results from all security checks have been received and analyzed. The enhanced security checks do not impede the flow of genuine refugees to the United States, since this process runs concurrently with other out-processing steps. On average, the total processing time for Iraqi cases is significantly less than for any other refugee group worldwide.

Procedures for Iraqi Citizens Currently in the U.S.

Iraqis currently in the United States who are not able to return to Iraq because they have been persecuted or fear they will be persecuted on account of their race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion may apply for asylum with USCIS. Information on the process of applying for asylum in the U.S. can be found on our website at <http://www.USCIS.gov/asylum>.

Procedures for Iraqi Citizens Living Outside of Iraq

Refugees and asylum seekers should seek to comply with all legal requirements of the country in which they are located, including registration with host governments if required. In addition, all Iraqi asylum seekers located in third countries should register with the nearest UNHCR office.

UNHCR has the international mandate to provide protection and assistance to refugees and can provide a protection document and possibly other assistance if needed. For a small number of extremely vulnerable individuals, this could include referral to the USRAP or another country's resettlement program. UNHCR will identify individuals for resettlement referral based on an assessment of their vulnerability at the time of registration.

In Jordan and Egypt, direct access to the USRAP is available to direct-hire employees of the U.S. Mission in Iraq and other Iraqis who worked for the U.S. Government or U.S. Government contractors, or for U.S.-based media organizations or non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Any Iraqi who has fled to Jordan or Egypt because of his/her association with the U.S. is encouraged to contact the International Organization for Migration (IOM) to receive guidance. IOM can be reached in Jordan at AmmanInfoCenter@iom.int and Egypt at CairoInfoCenter@iom.int.

Please visit the DOS/PRM website: www.state.gov/g/prm/ for additional information.

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