Office of Communications

U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services

Fact Sheet

Revised: July 15, 2008

IRAQI REFUGEE PROCESSING

U.S. Refugee Admissions Program

The U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) is an inter-agency partnership of many governmental and non-governmental organizations (NGO), both overseas and domestically, whose mission is to resettle refugees in the United States. The U.S. Department of State's (DOS) Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration (PRM) has overall management responsibility for the USRAP and has the lead in proposing admissions numbers and processing priorities. U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) within the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS), is responsible for interviewing refugee applicants and adjudicating applications for refugee status. Through its cooperative agreements with overseas processing entities, PRM handles the intake of refugee referrals from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and U.S. embassies, certain NGOs, the prescreening of cases and the out-processing of individuals for travel to the United States.

Iraqi Refugee Processing

Part of the refugee program's important humanitarian mission is to offer resettlement opportunities to especially vulnerable Iraqi refugees. Since large-scale Iraqi refugee processing was announced in February 2007, DHS and DOS have worked cooperatively to increase the number of Iraqi refugees admitted as part of the worldwide commitment. DHS and DOS have been committed to streamlining the process for admitting Iraqi refugees to the United States while ensuring the highest level of security. DHS and DOS share responsibility for initiating security checks for Iraqi refugee applicants.

In the last year, the USRAP dramatically expanded its capacity to consider Iraqi refugees for resettlement.

Since the program began in fiscal year 2007, as of July 2, 2008, 30,184 Iraqi individuals have been referred for resettlement to the USRAP. USCIS has interviewed 22,536 Iraqi refugee applicants, approved 15,533 for resettlement and 8,217 Iraqi refugees have arrived in the United States.

	FY 2007	FY 2008 thru July 2	Totals thru July 2
Referrals to USRAP	11,787	18,397	30,184
USCIS Interviews	4,550	17,986	22,536
Approved by USCIS	3,164	12,369	15,533
Admitted to the United States	1,608	6,609	8,217

Process for Resettlement

In identifying Iraqi cases for referral to the USRAP, UNHCR and DOS have prioritized 11 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 from UNHCR, a U.S. embassy, or certain NGOs. 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, Egypt and Iraq. 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. DOS and DHS have also begun refugee processing in Iraq for certain Iraqis who are associated with the United States and their family members.

Determining Eligibility for Refugees

Eligibility for refugee status is decided on a case-by-case basis. A USCIS officer conducts a personal interview of the applicant designed to elicit information about the applicant's admissibility and 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. The officer also 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 in order to ensure that those being admitted through the refugee program are not 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 that 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 United States is on the USCIS website: www.USCIS.gov. To view the asylum information, click on the *Services and Benefits* link, then *Humanitarian Benefits* and then *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 may be able to 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 NGOs and their family members. Any Iraqi who has fled to Jordan or Egypt because of his or her association with the United States is encouraged to contact the International Organization for Migration (IOM) to receive guidance. E-mail IOM in Jordan at AmmanInfoCenter@iom.int and in Egypt at CairoInfoCenter@iom.int.

Procedures for Iraqi Citizens Currently in Iraq

In Iraq, 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 United States-based media organizations or NGOs, and their family members. Any Iraqi who believes he or she is at risk or has experienced serious harm as a result of association with the United States is encouraged to contact the IOM to receive guidance. E-mail IOM in Iraq at BaghdadInfoCenter@iom.int.

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

Special Immigrant Visas for Iraqis

Iraqi nationals who supported the U.S. armed forces or Chief of Mission authority as translators or interpreters, or Iraqi nationals who were or are employed by or on behalf of the U.S. government in Iraq on or after March 20, 2003, for a period of at least one year may be eligible for Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) processing. The SIV program is separate and distinct from the USRAP. However, certain Iraqi SIV recipients are eligible for the same resettlement assistance, entitlement programs, and other benefits as refugees admitted under the refugee program.

Additional information regarding the SIV program may be found on the following websites:

- USCIS Announces New Special Immigrant Visa for Certain Iraqi Nationals Who Worked for the U.S. Government: http://www.uscis.gov/portal/site/uscis/menuitem.5af9bb95919f35e66f614176543f6d1a/?vgnextoid=91b661ccdc20b110VgnVCM1000004718190aRCRD&vgnextchannel=68439c7755cb9010VgnVCM10000045f3d6a1RCRD

- USCIS Fact Sheet, Expanded Special Immigrant Status for Afghan and Iraqi Translators and Interpreters**:** http://www.uscis.gov/files/pressrelease/TranslatorExpansionFS02Jul07.pdf

- Special Immigrant Visas for Iraqi and Afghan Translators/Interpreters, FAQs for Applicants Living Overseas: http://travel.state.gov/visa/immigrants/info/info_3738.html

- Special Immigrant Visas for Iraqis Employed by or on Behalf of the U.S. Government: http://travel.state.gov/visa/immigrants/info/info_4172.html

- Department of State Worldwide Refugee Admissions Processing System, FAQ regarding the SIV Program: www.wrapsnet.org/RPCWRAPS/FAQ/tabid/75/language/en-US/Default.aspx