



Observations  
and recommendations

**On the resettlement expectations of Iraqi refugees  
in Lebanon, Jordan and Syria**

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'They are no longer in their homeland, but their homeland is still in them'  
(Arabic proverb)

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## Part one

### INTRODUCTION

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimates that more than four million Iraqis have been displaced by the war in Iraq. Two million found asylum in neighbouring countries like Syria and Jordan, smaller numbers fled to Egypt, Iran, Lebanon, and Turkey. Their lives are threatened by sectarian violence, kidnapping of family members (including children), and when they are perceived as sympathisers of an international military presence, international contractors or international humanitarian agencies (UN, NGOs). If Iraqis are perceived as supporters of the former regime or current Iraqi government their lives are in danger as well.

Most Iraqis are unwilling to return to Iraq in the near future. With permanent legal residence in countries of first asylum not on the horizon and large numbers of Iraqis putting a strain on the hosting capacities of their Arab neighbours, resettlement to a third country is so far the only durable solution. Western nations have been resettling those refugees who are considered by UNHCR to be at greatest risk ever since the beginning of 2007. In line with the criteria established in the Resettlement Handbook, UNHCR has established 11 profiles for Iraqi refugees who will be prioritised for resettlement submissions.

Resettlement of Iraqi refugees from the Middle East is the largest individual (non-group) program in the world. Over 50,000 Iraqi refugees have been submitted for resettlement to the US, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, UK, Germany, Sweden, Finland and Norway. The United States has the biggest resettlement program.

This study on expectations of Iraqi refugees with respect to resettlement countries was commissioned by UNHCR's Department of International Protection Services (DIPS) in Geneva, following recent reports from resettlement agencies on a rising number of Iraqi refugees who are unhappy with their lives in resettlement countries. Complaints that apartments are too small, furniture substandard, professional profiles not reflected in job opportunities, financial assistance insufficient, homesickness unbearable, and general disappointment with life in the West, challenged the daily work of service providers in resettlement countries. The phenomenon of resettled refugees returning to Iraq or the country of first asylum (Syria and Jordan) puzzled seasoned refugee workers.

Over a period of eight weeks (23 March–18 May 2009), 54 individual interviews and four focus group interviews with a total of 41 refugees, were conducted with Iraqi refugees in the three host countries – Lebanon, Syria and Jordan. What emerged from these weeks of conversations was that Iraqis are not sure how to prepare for resettlement and it was striking how modest or how grand their hopes and expectations were. A great deal of what the Iraqis expect out of life in a resettlement country holds constant across their different ethnic backgrounds as Arab Muslims (Shia, Sunni,) or Arab Christians (Assyrian, Chaldeans, Sabeans)—and overall tend to have rosy images of what life will be like in the West.

Refugees are aware, though that the ongoing global economic downturn is likely to impact services for refugees in resettlement countries and the employment market. Reports from previously resettled refugees that entry-level jobs have become less available trickle back into the refugee community in the countries of asylum. Some of the optimism associated with being

approved for resettlement is dampened by truthful accounts of already resettled refugees. Despite the mixed reviews on life elsewhere, Iraqis continue to be preoccupied with moving elsewhere, leaving, getting out.

This paper does not purport to be a fully-fledged scientific study or anthropological survey. Nevertheless, its intent was to move beyond the anecdotal and collect specific information from Iraqi refugees of all social and educational backgrounds, ethnicities and ages to better understand their visions of life and anticipated support in the West. The following findings should inspire discussions on expectations management and assist resettlement countries and UNHCR in using suitable tools to prepare refugees in host countries for the challenges that lie ahead in an unfamiliar culture and environment.

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

One in every five displaced Iraqis in Jordan has concrete plans to emigrate to a third country and the mostly urban population of Iraqis in Lebanon, Syria and Jordan migrates as families. The majority lives in rented one- or two-bedroom apartments in inner city neighborhoods, resides illegally in the host country, and has a median monthly income of 300 USD (1). In Jordan, 42 percent of the refugees live on transfers from Iraq, whereas in Lebanon the principal source of income for 75 percent is employment (2).

Eighty percent of the Iraqi population in Jordan and Lebanon do not intend to integrate in the host community. They perceive the situation they live in as temporary and avoid investing in integration and self-enhancement plans (3). Many Iraqi refugees come originally from comfortable socio-economic backgrounds but their savings may be depleted by now, forcing them to live on charity, the black job market, borrowed money, or various combinations of all three.

Registration of Iraqi refugees at a UNHCR Office is considered equivalent to entering the resettlement process. Registration is vital for detecting vulnerabilities, be they social, psychological, legal, physical or material, and to ensure that UNHCR can fulfil its protection mandate. This, however, is not on the minds of the refugees. Feedback from CARITAS, the Middle East Council of Churches and the Danish Refugee Council in Lebanon, indicates that resettlement is the dominant preoccupation. "I was threatened in Iraq, therefore I need to be resettled" is a common conclusion. Moreover, NGOs that offer humanitarian assistance, sometimes encounter an attitude whereby refugees "approach us like an ATM-machine." Rules and regulations for receiving non-food items or medical assistance are frequently challenged by refugees. NGO staff in the field hear many questions on resettlement to a third country or how to expedite resettlement procedures.

Based on the interviews conducted for this study, the majority of refugees see UNHCR as the prime decision maker on the resettlement destination. UNHCR distributes booklets in Arabic informing the refugee community on the rules and procedures of resettlement during their first contact with the Office. The booklet, "Questions and Answers on Resettlement" clearly states that resettlement is an option, limited to only a small number of refugees globally. The role of the resettlement countries is also clearly outlined. However, since UNHCR submits cases for resettlement and can resubmit to another resettlement country if a case is rejected, refugees

are reluctant to understand the restricted quota system but continue to believe that they can choose a preferred resettlement country.

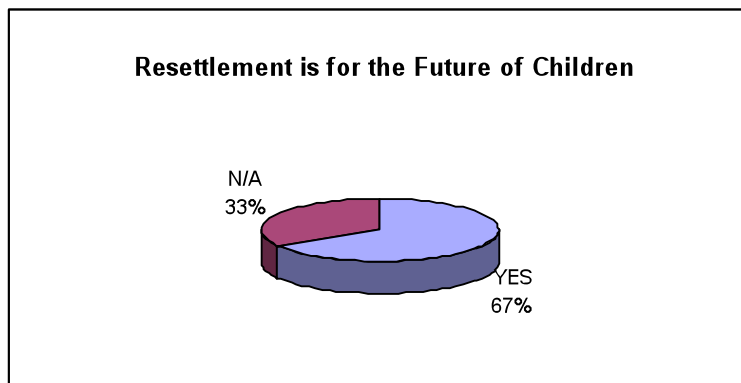
In line with the criteria established in the Resettlement Handbook, UNHCR has established 11 profiles of refugees who will be prioritised for resettlement submissions. Priority Profiles are: persons who have been victims of severe trauma; members of minority groups; women-at-risk; dependants of refugees living in resettlement countries; older Persons-at-Risk; medical cases and refugees with disabilities; high profile cases; Iraqis who fled as a result of their association with the MNF; foreign institutions; stateless persons from Iraq; and Iraqis at immediate risk of *refoulement*.

The desire to be taken care of by a “democratic, strong and compassionate government” in a resettlement country permeates the refugee community. While conversations with cooks, tailors, elementary school teachers, and car mechanics revealed that they are aware that finding employment in a resettlement country is crucial, high expectations in terms of sustained financial governmental support persist.

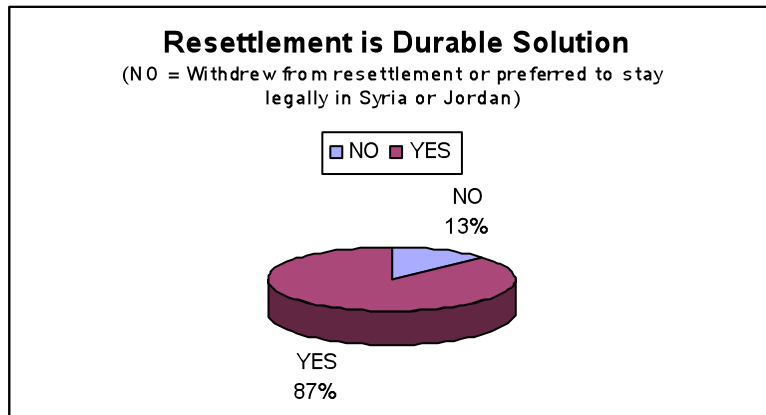
Elderly refugees with university degrees appear to have a more realistic take on life in the West. Doctors, professors, businessmen who at some point in their youth have experienced life abroad through studies and business trips are more aware of what to expect and what not once they arrive in their resettlement destination. Elderly parents count on their children to support them upon arrival, especially if they are reunited with their grown, gainfully employed children who are naturalized citizens. These parents also expect to receive a pension from the government and medical treatment for chronic health issues they could not afford to treat in the host country.

The scenario of refugees’ expectations of resettlement countries is broad and all kinds of creative visualizations of life in the USA, Canada, Australia, Germany, the UK, Norway, Sweden and Netherlands circulate. **The common denominator is the desire to build a life for their children in physical safety and stability, enjoying freedom of religion. Sixty-seven percent of all interviewed adults stated that resettlement is all about their children’s future, 33 percent either did not have children in the host country or had withdrawn from resettlement.** Parents in their 50’s and older tend to focus solely on career opportunities and education for their children, referring to themselves as “old and tired.”

Family reunification with grown children who are settled in resettlement countries is very much on the minds of the middle-aged Iraqis, i.e. 45 years old and older.



Expectations of Iraqis in the work force are tied to their professional past, their status in society and multifaceted versions of municipal or federal regular payments (refugees tend to call them 'salaries') are anticipated by refugees as a jump-start foundation at least in the first year.



If the approval for resettlement came from a country that was not on a refugee's wish list, or is not the US state to which the refugee envisaged to go, the designated state or country is seen as yet another transitory stage from which they will eventually legally travel to their preferred locations.

**The desire to live close to Iraq, while remaining in Jordan or Syria protected through legal residence and the right to work, was also expressed frequently. Other responses indicated a desire to exchange an Iraqi passport for a valid travel document that would open up avenues for wealthy Iraqis to travel wherever business opportunities were available and/or scholarships for higher education could be pursued.**

None of the interviewed refugees expressed a desire or tentative plan to return to Iraq with the exception of one middle-aged Iraqi widow who longed to go home with her 11-year-old daughter. Middle-aged and elderly refugees are convinced that a stable Iraq will not be achieved in their lifetime.

It is not uncommon among international and local staff working with refugees to interpret high expectations as a necessary survival mechanism. Visualization of a good life is fuel for the survival spirit in a nerve wrecking and humiliating pre-resettlement phase. This stance is also taken by a Senior Project Manager of a Community Services Center in Beirut. She sees the long and daunting waiting period between first interview and final decision rather problematic. "To make life tolerable, the refugees need to have high expectations, embellished with elements of a really good future to fill them with life energy. Low expectations would not have the same effect, and realistic expectations would not be the remedy they need to make it through the waiting period." As of which point in the resettlement process should the high expectations then be addressed? They might be "fuel for survival" but may also serve as the recipe for disappointment and very problematic integration experiences.



## **DO EXPECTATIONS FORESHADOW INTEGRATION BEHAVIOUR?**

In an article “Resettlement: A Cultural and Psychological Crisis” (4) P. Hulewat addresses the fact that “all immigrants go through stages of resettlement and need to integrate their past cultural experience into their new life and culture. Resettlement is a life crisis.” Three adjustment groups delineated in this article, represent the recurring answers from respondents in the expectations study. Do prevailing patterns of expectations of resettlement countries then already foreshadow integration attitudes and integration potential?

Hulewat’s first adjustment group is referred to as the “help me get started” group and was encountered in interviews when refugees visualize themselves as responsible adults with a proactive, engaged and open mind toward opportunities and new relationships with people of a different culture. They recognize the fact that wherever they are, life is not for free and you need to work hard on rebuilding your life. Her second group, the “take care of me group” are the refugees in the expectations study who very much explore the avenue of ‘I am a refugee, therefore the service providers in resettlement countries need to find me a job and support me in many other ways.’ The third group is termed the “you must do it my way group” and summarizes the attitudes of Iraqi refugees who refuse jobs, apartments, etc., which are not acceptable to them due to their upbringing, educational background and previous status in society.

## **Part two**

### **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR RESETTLEMENT COUNTRIES**

Post a summary of resettlement policies in Arabic and the language of the resettlement country on the internet as part of their website chapter on Migration. Clearly stating the responsibilities of adult refugees in the country could address the “take care of me” attitudes. The computer savvy and educated refugees already access blogs and websites in Iraq as well as the host country when scouting for the best of all possible worlds. The information originating from this group is then passed on to the less educated friends and neighbours and circulates widely. [If resettlement countries are reluctant to post policies on the internet, since they might change and resettlement countries do not wish to be held accountable for out-of-date policies, an alternative could be to summarize the most likely hurdles of integration that tend to startle Iraqis who have not been exposed to life outside the Arab strictures.]

Sensitise and educate refugee case workers, employees of municipalities, volunteers working with refugees, and all other service providers in resettlement countries on the social, political and historical aspects of life in Iraq. Knowledge of this collective past, how authoritarian regimes and living conditions shaped present-day attitudes (on respectability, dignity, pride, shame) as well as particular habits, and traditions could increase the tolerance level of overwhelmed staff when faced with demanding, upset Iraqis. Refugees are expected to learn everything about their new culture and the way life works in resettlement country x, however it is also vital that refugees are met by informed support staff and counsellors. Helpful resources or so-called “backgrounders” on Arab culture or on Iraqis in particular have been published on the internet.(5)

Hold an “Annual Resettlement Fair” where best practices for cultural orientation and smooth integration are “traded” among resettlement countries. IOM and ICMC could exchange ideas and experiences with cultural orientation for Iraqis heading to the US; the Swedish Migration Board could share their three-hour cultural orientation with the State Department; the Vermont Refugee Resettlement Program could share their foster family approach with European, Canadian and Australian resettlement agencies. Sharing best practices with respect to:

- Engaging new arrivals
- Addressing passive entitlement thinking
- Confronting age, gender, language issues

could assist most resettlement countries – irrespective of whether they have a strong self-sufficiency approach to resettlement or a more lenient version of standing on their own feet – since most resettlement countries face the same challenges with Iraqi refugees.

Each resettlement country could introduce a monitoring system for resettled refugees in the first year, to observe the effectiveness of money, time and effort invested in getting the refugees there. This mechanism, for example, could be administered by the municipalities in European countries, the resettlement agencies in the US, and by the equivalent local players in all the other resettlement countries. In countries where such monitoring systems are already in place, share them in global recommendations at international conferences.

Make pre-departure cultural orientation brief and lean, conveying a positive arrival spirit and practical attitudes needed to master the first weeks in the new country. It should reflect real life in the resettlement country. It should engage refugees in discussions on their own role in successful integration and empower them with stimulating examples in which way they are the masters of their own destiny, while respecting their belief that everything depends on the will of God. Though refugees like to focus on the financial aspects of the cultural orientation, it is more fruitful to steer away from prolonged discussions on entitlements and benefits. Arrangements for childcare should be made to ensure that refugee women with smaller children do not miss out on the Cultural Orientation because they had to stay home to watch children.

Accelerate the development of pre-departure cultural orientation for young refugees. ICMC is already conducting cultural orientation for refugee children in Turkey and IOM is in the process of preparing scripts for youth programs. These programs are vital since the majority of parents count on their adolescent and older children for support during the integration phase. Pre-departure cultural orientation for the young is also an opportunity to brief students on common, respected ways in western countries to finance higher education by working in a part-time job.

Educate refugees during pre-departure cultural orientation on what resettlement is *not* about, i.e., an extended family visit abroad, a holiday, a spring board to visit Iraq one month after arrival in the resettlement country, etc.

The Pre-departure Cultural Orientation Team of Trainers should consider having a resettled refugee from Iraq as part of their team of presenters, living proof that resettlement is worthwhile and that the receiving service providers can be trusted.

## FOR UNHCR

Leaflets on resettlement published in Arabic already exist in UNHCR's offices but do not address the prevailing "rosy" versions of life in resettlement countries. Designing a poster depicting two columns with information might be an alternative. The left column, with the heading NOT TRUE lists a brief description of resettlement myths and misconceptions, using literal quotes from refugees. These quotes are then crossed out with a big X. On the right hand side, under a column of TRUE, corrected information would be presented. It is important to mention common denominators and helpful integration attitudes in resettlement countries, without getting into the specifics of each resettlement country so that the information in the TRUE list is indeed, correct. The Poster could be called "Your first 100 days in a new country." Most returnees from resettlement countries returned to Syria or Jordan within the first three months after arrival.

Counselling on resettlement prior to submission is vital. Specific details on individual resettlement countries cannot be covered, however, the phenomenon of no-shows and withdrawals needs to be addressed. **In order to give refugees a taste of what life in any resettlement country in the West entails, UNHCR staff could point out some general characteristics of life to help the refugees make an informed decision whether resettlement is the desired solution for them. If this 'first informant' role is carried out by UNHCR Resettlement Officers, resettlement staff, national as well as international, will have to be well oriented themselves.** Local staff in the Resettlement Unit of the UNHCR Branch Office Beirut was recently briefed by an ICMC-employee on resettlement to the US. This was her own initiative and at the end of the presentation, local resettlement staff shared with her how uninformed and how rosy their ideas about life in the US had been.

Iraqis who never had family members working outside the country, as is common among Jordanian or Lebanese families, have not necessarily been exposed to Western ways of life. Pinpointing some issues can help raise awareness among refugees on "different cultures, different mores" during a registration interview or counselling appointment. Since UNHCR Resettlement staff in the host country cannot afford to spend a lot of time with each single refugee, relevant topics could be followed up more thoroughly in group briefings by staff in the Community Development Centers, initiated by UNHCR Community Service Officers.

**Employment:** Iraqis are used to having one job for a long time; switching jobs is not common. As a resettled refugee, Iraqis may occupy an entry level job for six months and then have the opportunity to move on to a more appealing and better paying job. Job mobility is not seen negatively in the West but can be by some Iraqis. Job mobility is an important part of the time-consuming period of re-credentialization or recertification of degrees and can occur during the initial stages of integration.

**Dual income** may slowly be on the rise among young couples in Iraq because the cost of living has soared. However, the thought of leaving children in the hands of school teachers or babysitters can be frightening for parents who witnessed the kidnapping of a child. The reluctance of some Iraqi women to look for a job may be linked to a deep-seated fear due to a kidnapping trauma. Missing language skills can also contribute to a much longer period of learning whom one can trust in terms of childcare, etc.

**Education:** In Iraq boys and girls only attend mixed classes until the age of 12. As of 13 there are no more co-ed classes and gender separation takes place. This is not the case in public schools in the West. Young people in the West who pursue additional training or higher education work in a part-time job or even a full-time job to be able to afford rent, tuition fees, education materials etc. Iraqis might view a student of dentistry who works in a café or restaurant as “immoral” and “inappropriate.” Iraqis may need to learn that this “juggling act” is respectable, commendable and sometimes also the only way to afford further education.

**Sports:** As young Iraqis enrol in elementary and high schools, they may witness female students in the West wearing shorts in the summer or wearing shorts during sports activities like soccer, basketball etc. This may come across as inappropriate for Iraqis but is considered decent and practical in the West.

**Rules of Engagement:** Iraqis tend to get suspicious quickly if they feel treatment or benefits are not fair. Transparency in the modus operandi of any kind of assistance or business transaction is vital. Iraqis are used to a socialist regime where promotions and rewards were not necessarily based on performance but rather on who you know and the family tribe to which you belong. Local NGO staff in Lebanon, Syria and Jordan were sometimes put under pressure to deliver assistance to refugees fast “because their salaries were paid with revenues from Iraqi oil” according to refugees. Similarly Iraqi refugees in resettlement countries may adopt somewhat arrogant attitudes, “I am a refugee and you receive a salary to assist me...”

**Taxes:** The responsibility of paying taxes and how tax money is channelled back into the community needs to be shared with Iraqis. Deduction of taxes on a pay slip can cause misunderstanding among Iraqis. (“Who is this person named ‘FICA’ who took money from my salary” is one example of a disgruntled refugee’s reaction in the US). Even though the fourth pillar of Islam is the giving of alms and a good Muslim is expected to give 1/40 of their income (2.5 %) to someone in need, the concept of a governmental body taking 30 % out of a pay slip each month for taxes can cause suspicion and anger.

**Rent:** Iraqis lived in 200m<sup>2</sup>- 600m<sup>2</sup> compounds, sometimes even bigger. Squeezing into a small apartment in a resettlement country, paying rent, electricity and heating bills can be quite a challenge, even if Iraqis experienced this way of life already in the host country. Refugees need to know that timely payments of bills related to cost of living are their responsibility at some stage.

**Mind-set:** Two common questions from Iraqis during the expectation interviews were:

- If I am not provided with a job, how will I live?
- If I cannot get childcare for free, how will I be able to save money when I work?

Sometimes kind but clear messages that a promising start of a new chapter in life is not necessarily dependent on duration of benefits but on the survival skills and mentality of the individual refugee makes a difference. Community Services Staff could use regularly set up meetings with refugee women to spread the general message of what to expect or not to expect in Western cultures.

Tapping into already established information dissemination mechanisms or blogs for refugees. Examples in Lebanon would be the DRC Newsletter (in Arabic) or the recently created blog ([www.janah-lebanon.blogspot.com](http://www.janah-lebanon.blogspot.com)) by Le Projet Janah. Similar use of mechanisms currently in place within Syria and Jordan could likewise serve refugees there.

Most Community Services Centers funded by UNHCR are equipped with computers used for vocational training and learning English. Introducing an official 'communication day with resettlement country x' for approved resettlement candidates once a week in the Community Service Center could be a pilot project. Authorizing controlled use of the computers in order to connect refugees in host countries with already resettled refugees to share encouraging experiences, the ups and downs of integration, could make a difference as a preparatory tool. Refugees could use the long waiting period between approval notice and first day of Cultural Orientation, or the waiting period after Cultural Orientation and departure date, in a fruitful way.

## **METHODOLOGY**

Over a period of eight weeks, 54 individual interviews, including four interviews with returnees to Jordan(2) and Syria(2), and five withdrawal cases, were conducted. In addition, four focus groups were convened, comprising a total of 41 refugees (refugees approved for the same resettlement country). Venues chosen for the study were: UNHCR Offices in Syria, Jordan and Lebanon, Community Services Centers, premises of pre-departure cultural orientation programs, and refugees' homes.

Since Iraqis enjoy prima facie status, the whole spectrum of Iraqi society is met in the refugee communities: all ethnicities and layers of society were encountered. Interviews were held with school-aged children, teenagers, single and married men, single and married women and the elderly. Data were collected in structured and unstructured settings. Informed consent was sought prior to each interview by describing the purpose of the study and ensuring confidentiality. The original use of a questionnaire (see ANNEX 3 for questions in interviews) was relinquished since interviewees seemed to feel more at ease sharing thoughts if they did not see a formal questionnaire filled in by an interviewer. If refugees did not have privacy to talk or were rushed, conversations did not render information beyond general statements on expectations like "I heard life is good, people are nice". (See ANNEX 2 for a collection of expectations).

Focus groups with refugees bound for different resettlement countries proved challenging since some resettlement countries are more popular than others. Refugees approved for a popular destination dominated discussions, while the other refugees were jealous and remained silent. The study also integrates information derived from conversations with UNHCR Protection, Resettlement and Community Services, NGOs, IOM, ICMC and Resettlement Officers at the HUB.

## BACKGROUND

Literature on the more recent history of Iraq, the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988), the First Gulf War (1991) as well as the trade sanctions on Iraqi civilians from 1991 to 2003, show that all these events left marks on the current Iraqi population prior to March 2003. Under Saddam Hussein, Iraqis lived under Stalinistic totalitarianism and “in the hands of a master propagandist, there was enough reality to make almost any rumour or fear believable. Saddam acted as though enemies were everywhere.” (6)

Iraqi refugees have endured years in a closed society. Refugees keep mentioning that prior to 2002, the average Iraqi did not have access to satellite TV or mobile phones. Internet costs per month were high and most websites were blocked. E-mail access was only possible through an Iraqi server, controlled by the government. Refugees frequently mention how they could only watch two TV channels and they refer to themselves as “closed off from the world” or “uneducated in worldly matters.” Only big businesses and government ministries had computers. Nowadays, almost every Iraqi family in the country of first asylum owns a mobile phone and a TV.

In order to fully comprehend the excitement and relief refugees feel, the trust and high expectations Iraqi place in resettlement countries, perceiving them as “strong and merciful,” it is important to bear in mind the totalistic yoke Iraqis have lived under for so long.

On the other hand, most Iraqi families used to live in 300 m<sup>2</sup> compounds and had sufficient space for all family members. A five-member family could live comfortably on the income of one family member, utility bills were negligibly low (10 cents a month) and health care was free. Service in the Iraqi army was mandatory and plots of land were allocated on a reward basis to high ranking officers in the Ba’th party. It did not take generations to acquire land. Although a government-run public food distribution system was set up to provide food during the time of severe sanctions, it was estimated in 2000 by UNDP that the average family still spent as much as 75% of their income on food. (7)

Most Iraqis never left their country prior to flight.

Life in the country of first asylum is an experience of hardship with immense challenges. Fear of detention if they cannot afford proper residence permits, and a volatile status as refugees, create daily stress and uncertainty despite the humanitarian assistance of UNHCR and NGOs.

The 2003 invasion of Iraq initially precipitated only a trickle of refugees to Cairo, Damascus and Amman. Wealthy families came and settled in the most affluent neighbourhoods. The stereotype of “all Iraqis are rich” began to spread, and real estate and food prices in these locations soared. Even after Sunni insurgents clashed with US troops in Fallujah and militants from both sects began to tighten control over areas in 2004, it was still mostly secular and often more affluent families who sought refuge elsewhere.(8)

A refugee crisis was feared before the coalition invasion of Iraq in 2003, but it came later than anticipated, and on a greater scale. The bombing of a holy Shiah shrine, the al-Askari mosque in Samarra, in February 2006, sparked a series of violent retaliatory strikes between Shiah and Sunni militias and caused the first wave of over two million refugees spilling into Jordan and Syria. Smaller numbers fled to Lebanon, Turkey, Iran, Egypt and Gulf States.

As of May 2009, the Jordanian government estimated that between 400,000 and 500,000 Iraqis live in Jordan (based on the Norwegian Research Institute Fafo Survey, May 2007), while 52,388 refugees are registered with UNHCR (UNHCR Fact Sheet on Jordan, April 2009). The Syrian government estimates there are over one million Iraqis in that country, while 205,754 are registered with UNHCR (UNHCR March 2009 sitrep). The Lebanese government estimates that 50,000 Iraqi refugees reside in Lebanon (based on the DRC Population Survey, November 2007) while UNHCR reports 10,568 registered Iraqi refugees in Lebanon (UNHCR sitrep April 2009).

All Iraqi nationals from central and southern Iraq who sought asylum in Jordan, Syria, Egypt and Turkey were granted refugee status by the governments on a prima facie basis. UNHCR hosted an international conference on the Iraqi humanitarian crisis on 17 April 2007 in Geneva. This event created awareness of the situation of hosting countries and addressed burden sharing among the international community to alleviate the plight of the largest urban caseload in UNHCR's history.

Neither Jordan, nor Syria, nor Lebanon are State Party to the 1951 Refugee Convention and have no national refugee legislation. Persons of concern to UNHCR are treated as foreigners under the "Law for Aliens and Residency" and are "guests" of the countries. Iraqis are granted tourist visas, which must be renewed every three to six months. To renew visas they must exit and re-enter the host country, which is dangerous.

Most Iraqis depend on life savings or on money transfers from relatives in Iraq or elsewhere in the world. Humanitarian assistance from UNHCR and NGOs only applies to the most vulnerable cases and is expected to gradually decrease. The International Crisis group reports that 37 percent of Iraqis in Syria use savings as their primary financial source and 75 percent receive assistance from relatives. In Jordan, 42 percent rely on transfers and the majority live primarily on savings.<sup>(9)</sup> Upon arrival in Lebanon, refugees need to demonstrate that they have 2,000 USD in cash or check, a hotel reservation or residential address, a telephone number, and a two-way non-refundable ticket.

In all three countries, Iraqi refugees are forced to work in the black market as daily labourers, underpaid or paid irregularly. Although the authorities of host countries have shown commendable tolerance of their presence, police and security forces still arrest Iraqi refugees without valid visas or residence permits.

## RESETTLEMENT MYTHS

Myths and wild rumours circulate in any given refugee community and are not particular to Iraqi refugees. However, preference for resettlement “welfare” states like Canada, Australia, and countries in Europe is not a secret. Myths circulate among all ethnicities but tend to prevail more among the less educated. Examples include the following:

“You need to get divorced in order to qualify as a vulnerable single head of household for resettlement, your husband has to stay behind and can somehow follow later.”

“You need to be healthy to be admitted to the USA. If you have cancer, you will not be treated several months after your arrival in the USA .You lose health care if you did not find a job.”

“If you are seriously ill, you have higher chances of being resettled, since you will be considered a medical emergency.”

“Do not mention any affiliation with the army in your registration interview, you will automatically be disqualified from resettlement.”

“Before you board a plane to the USA, you will need to sign a statement that you are aware that you might be a potential recruit for the US army and you could be sent back to Iraq serving in the US army.”

“If you come to Lebanon you have higher chances of being resettled fast since the paperwork in the UNHCR Office in Beirut takes less time than in Damascus or Amman.”

“Housing is free in the beginning, afterwards you are on the street. Churches only offer spiritual or social support, not material assistance.”

“Housing is free in the first month and then you will have to sleep in a mosque.”

“If I get resettled, I will have to take off my hijab (veil).”

“When you arrive in Europe, the Government will pay you monthly allowances and take care of you. If you go to Sweden or Netherlands, you will not have to work. If you are old, you will receive a pension and medical treatment. Surgery you cannot afford in Syria will be performed in Sweden.”



## Part three

“When will I receive my salary?”  
“Which salary? Did you find a job?”  
“Well, I am a refugee, I need assistance”.  
“Is being a refugee your job?”

### **EXPECTATIONS ACROSS THE REFUGEE COMMUNITY IN LEBANON, JORDAN AND SYRIA**

When interviewing Iraqi refugees on their expectations of life in resettlement countries, reactions range from euphoric statements like “I am going to a powerful, democratic country. Life will be like a salvation. Life will be very good, my children will go to school and I will be able to build a new life for them,” to more subdued comments “Wherever you go you will need to support your family. I hope to find a job. Resettlement will be a tough challenge, the worldwide recession is everywhere, but safety, security and stability will be waiting for me and, inshallah, it will all work out.”

In most cases, a detailed vision or scenario of life in a resettlement country is not offered. Platitudes or comments stemming from relatives living abroad, circulating within the refugee community in the country of first asylum, describe a general state of well-being linked to physical safety, freedom of religion, enjoyment of legal status, and regaining control over their lives in a new country.

A Shiah father of four small children living in the area of Dahieh in Beirut pointed out that as soon as he reaches the United States, he would enrol his children in a Christian school so they can receive free education far away from any “extremist elements.” Following on the heels of more euphoric answers, vague ideas and grand hopes of governmental support follow suit. Visions of assistance that may last from one month to forever are accompanied by visions of a welfare state that provides much more support to its people than the Iraqi Government ever did.

A senior CARITAS staff member commented that, “Generally speaking, the Iraqi moved from a subsidies dependency on the Saddam government to a humanitarian assistance dependency. They live day by day on handouts if they can’t find a job. They have few survival skills – except for the women. I noticed a change of roles within the family. Wives and mothers work while the older Iraqi men tend not to work.” Some men let their wives, and sometimes even their children, work because they are less likely to be arrested if the family is illegally in the host country; though it is also very common for mothers with young and elementary school aged children to stay at home while the husbands work (illegally) in factories, warehouses, repair shops, and restaurants.

### **EXPECTATIONS OF THE LESS EDUCATED**

The notion of a rich, powerful, democratic country leads, in the minds of the less-educated Iraqis, to assumptions of receiving regular allowances once refugees arrive. No distinction is made between ‘humanitarian assistance’ (musa’ad) and salary (rateb). Entitlement thinking

manifests itself in the belief that Iraqi refugees will be supported by any of the resettlement countries on account of their status and suffering.

Mikha(60) lives in a two-bedroom apartment in a Chaldean neighbourhood with eight children and his wife Hanaa. His grown children work in a patisserie, at a printing press, or a boutique. Per month the family pays 250 \$ for rent, 50 \$ for the mobile phone, minimum cost for bare survival is 600 \$ per month. The family is expecting to be sponsored by a relative in Australia and is eagerly waiting for news.

Hanaa heard good and bad things from her siblings in Australia but she does not want to talk about or believe the negative news. Life will be good; her smaller children will go to school and that counts. Most of all, Australia will offer stability and safety. The host country is an unstable transit location; they had always planned to move on elsewhere.

Mikha looks drained and has no intention to ever return to Iraq. "Living among terrorists is impossible," he says, and he reminisces with a sparkle in his eyes about life in Iraq. "My country was the best country in the world for me. It was rich and lacked nothing. I was selling chocolates and cigarettes on the streets of my village and was not obliged to do anything else to secure income. Saddam took good care of us. He made no distinction between Christians and Muslims. In our old neighbourhood we had Shiah, Sunni, Chaldeans, it was no problem."

Zeinab is expecting to be resettled to the US. She finished high school but never worked in Iraq. She claims she is also not working in the host country because the only jobs available for women are jobs as maids and she does not wish to join the women from Sri Lanka or the Philippines. She comes from a middle class family, her father owns three houses in Baghdad and ran a prosperous textile business. "But all the houses mean nothing without stability."

She admits that her knowledge of the US is rather limited but she believes she will receive more assistance in the US than in Iraq. "In the USA there is no terrorism, human rights are respected, and there is personal freedom. The US government will take care of us. We had free education in Iraq but what good is free education if there is terror all around you? Free education without security is useless."

Regarding the multinational character of the US, she says she would have no problem living with people from different countries. However she could not imagine living in an African-American or Hispanic neighbourhood. When the UNHCR poster on the office wall depicting refugees of different skin colour from all over the world, is drawn to her attention, she insists that she would prefer a state "without dark people" because she saw on TV what they are like. "They are problematic, they have gangs and guns," and she "does not like their dark external appearance."

When the resettlement countries are countries of the Coalition Forces (US, UK Australia) they tend to be higher on the list of expectations for generous financial support. Refugees see resettlement to these countries as payback for having "caused the misery, the displacement," even if they are grateful that Saddam was removed. The number of refugees who explicitly expressed a "compensation" attitude was low. (10 out of 95 interviewees) It is more of a mindset that permeates the refugee community and refugees tend not to say it aloud.

Sabah is the 35-year-old mother of six children. She completed 9<sup>th</sup> grade and is a Sunni, married to a Shiah. They came from Nasra where they developed good relations with the American

soldiers and were threatened accordingly by fundamentalists. Her husband works as a concierge in an elementary school, and earns 165 \$ per month. Living on the school campus is free.

The family was rejected for resettlement to the US. She would have liked to go to the US since her stepsister who is married to an Iraqi journalist has been living in the US for 14 years. The resettlement case has now been submitted to Australia. Her expectations of life in a resettlement country are clearly defined: She expects to live in a house, her children will enjoy good schools, and her husband will work in any job linked to the construction business. "We were well taken care of by the Iraqi government. Education was free; food was delivered to our house. I remember 5 kg of rice, 3 kg of sugar, beans, tea, cooking oil, soap. Hospitals were free, medical care only required a symbolic fee. When you go to the US or Australia you will receive even better services since the government is more compassionate than the Iraqi Government. I know that there is democracy, progress, security and a citizenship waiting for my children."

### **EXPECTATIONS OF THE MORE EDUCATED AND WELL-OFF REFUGEES**

Well-educated Iraqis who have been living on savings, predominantly in Amman or Damascus over the last five years and approved for resettlement to various countries display a more realistic picture of life abroad. Some of them studied in the UK or the US in their youth and returned to Iraq to run clinics, teach at universities, work in a ministry. For the majority of the better-off elderly people, (usually parents or single parents age 50 to 80) resettlement tends to be family reunification. Adult children who are gainfully employed and settled in resettlement countries prepare for the arrival of their parents and this group of elderly refugees has a clear picture of what to expect and what not to expect. Some of them were quite confident that they could skip attending pre-departure cultural orientation, they already know all about life in the US or Europe.

Febron is a distinguished man who will soon turn 65. He worked as a certified public accountant for 30 years and when he retired in Iraq, he continued his private accounting business. His current pension from Iraq amounts to 300 \$. He boasts that he earned 20,000 \$ per month, owned four cars and a huge house. Before they fled, they sold all their furniture and his wife's jewellery. He complains that the so-called free services in Iraq might have been free but food subsidies were of inferior quality. Rice, tea, sugar, flour were sub-standard. The public hospitals were bad, only the private hospitals provided decent medical care. "I am sick of Iraq. I do not wish to go back. My house was modern and in Arasat, a good neighbourhood of Baghdad. Now it is all gone."

Febron, his wife Vivian (60), and their son Martin (27) are approved for resettlement to the US. They had hoped to go to the Netherlands, where the second son lives. The Netherlands would also have been their country of preference with regard to treatment of his clogged artery. His wife is a history teacher and retired early. Both expect to receive a pension in the US. "I cannot depend on my son's income, I will have to live on my pension." Emotionally they have no qualms about resettlement in the US. "The US rescued us from a dictator. I could not even speak freely to my son in my own house. You always had to be prepared that someone was listening to your private conversations."

Upon arrival in the US, he expects to receive food stamps for eight months and 400 \$ in cash per person (no mention of the pension he expects). “They want us to work.” He reiterates how much he had longed to go to Europe because of the good social system. According to what he heard, financial aid is not available for very long in the US and he compares how his daughter and her husband have been supported by the Dutch government since 1997 with 1,250 Euro per month plus rental subsidy.

His son used to maintain medical equipment for Siemens in Erbil but gave up his job to come to Amman when his father needed surgery. Now they live on borrowed money. Febron laments his situation as an old man in Jordan and emphasizes that he wants to settle and rest in a new country—but in the right country, not the wrong country. As soon as he is permitted to leave the US, he would move to the Netherlands. He is deeply depressed about what happened to him, his former life, and where he will be growing old.

“I will not wash dishes as an old, sickly man and a former well-educated accountant. I have to borrow money to live in Jordan. I want to return to Iraq. I want to see my house; I want to see my business and what is left of it. I want to see my sister who lives alone in Iraq. But I cannot go back. Job opportunities in Iraq are rising in the contracting and auditing business. From 2003 until 2006 approximately 7,500 new companies set up base in Iraq. Now they are subcontracting out to Jordan and Dubai. The sewage and construction business is left to the Iraqis. There is no surveillance in Iraq. Nobody pays taxes or customs on any products entering Iraq. I received my PhD at 45 and sometimes worked two jobs. During the day I was an auditor and in the evening from 5-8 pm I taught at the university. I worked 20 hours a day for 30 years. The current laziness among the Iraqis is linked to the Iraqis getting used to the low wages, few working hours and high corruption. The lack of work ethics is permeating everything. Among the Chaldeans we have strict work ethics and now I am sitting in Amman doing nothing. I have not picked up a pen in two years. I am not sure I can even still write. “

In a focus group meeting in Amman with refugees approved for resettlement to the US or with family members who had recently been resettled to the US, it became apparent that well off Iraqis and poor Iraqis have mixed feelings, compared to focus groups with refugees approved for European countries. A group of refugees heading for Germany was indeed focused, content and eager to learn more about the country itself, more concerned with how hard it would be to learn the German language, less preoccupied with benefits.

During a meeting with a group of refugees from different educational and societal backgrounds but all heading to the US, the group was asked if they felt that resettlement was a good durable solution for them. The majority of the respondents complained that if resettlement meant splitting up couples and separating families across the world then resettlement was painful and harmful. Then the one resettlement country available as the only option would just be another transit destination until they were eligible for citizenship and consequently allowed to travel where they had wanted to settle originally.

One well-off woman in her late forties lamented that “they took my two girls to San Diego, I am a doctor in Amman with my son and my husband is a doctor in Iraq. Why does resettlement mean family separation across the globe?” When asked to elaborate on the expression ‘they took’ since it conjured up images of kidnapping, she explained that her adult daughters were recently resettled to San Diego. “They already have degrees from Iraq and need to attend

Community College in the US, which is not as prestigious as their university degrees. Why don't you help us get rid of our Iraqi passports so we can move freely in the world? We are well educated, we have money, we will not be a burden on any government. Why do we have to wait five years to get an American passport? Let's be honest, resettlement is all about exchanging the Iraqi passport for a new valid travel document! We need an alternative citizenship, one day there will be another Bush."

A young man wanted it to be known that on behalf of all Iraqis who did not have to resort to illegal, expensive and dangerous measures to be smuggled abroad, he wanted to thank UNHCR and resettlement countries for making it possible to travel abroad legally. He felt that the rich Iraqis had very different priorities and interests in life but for himself, he very much needed a new chance in another country for his education, his development and he was truly grateful to be given that chance.

After all frustrations had been vented, the middle-aged wealthy refugees reiterated they were indeed hoping for a valid travel document, issued in a shorter period of time than it took to acquire citizenship in a resettlement country. All of them agreed they would certainly be able to take care of themselves. The less well off and younger refugees stated their wish to rebuild a shattered existence in physical safety and stability where they could sleep through the night. Ten refugees, out of this group of 13, asserted that if their stay in Jordan could be legalized, they would welcome the opportunity to remain in an Arab country, close to Iraq, close to the people they left behind in Iraq.

#### **EXPECTATIONS OF WOMEN AND THEIR ROLES IN THE REFUGEE COMMUNITY**

There are refugee women who completed 9<sup>th</sup> grade at school, never pursued higher education in Iraq and stayed home with their children. Women from upper-class families with university degrees worked as accountants, engineers, doctors, surgeons and gynaecologists. Some women with higher education were either not gainfully employed because their husbands provided sufficient income or because higher education was seen as a safeguard to marry within the same class. Before the Gulf War and 2003 Iraqi women were generally among the most liberated in the Arab world and well integrated into the workforce.

Marwa works as a concierge, earning 100.000 Lebanese pounds (66USD) per month. She takes the garbage from each apartment to the local dumpster, runs errands for the residents and lives in one room rent-free with her husband and son. She mingles with the Sri Lankan "servants" in the apartment block and they confide in her that they do not feel respected by the Lebanese. "So I know that the Lebanese do not respect me either." Loss of status in society and the necessity to readapt social roles in the host country cause Iraqis considerable stress.

Iraqi women are faced with managing the multiple operations of their households in the first country of asylum and if no money transfers from Iraq or elsewhere can be counted upon, they are forced to seek gainful illegal employment in hospitals, supermarkets, hair salons, cafeterias, factories, as concierges, or wherever they are least likely to be discovered by General Security Forces. In many cases they accept jobs that have nothing in common with their original professional profile, while the men follow the same "de-professionalization" pattern or prefer to

stay at home for fear of being detained or deported back to Iraq. Sometimes men suffer from medical problems that prevent them from doing hard physical work. It is tempting to dismiss men in their fifties who are not working while their wives do, yet it is important to bear in mind the potential reasons behind the scenes (fear of detention, deportation, heart conditions, living on savings).

During a focus group meeting in Syria with refugees approved for resettlement to Germany, emotions ran high between a refugee woman with a diploma in accounting who worked as a cleaning lady in the bathroom of the Ministry of Tourism in Syria and a refugee woman who is an engineer. The latter stated that she would never earn a living as a cleaning lady in a public bathroom and be humiliated. Just like men, women feel diminished or undervalued and suffer from depression when faced with certain jobs.

Iraqis feel very strongly about their children. Less educated women who were not gainfully employed in Iraq tend to naturally assume that they can stay at home with their children in the resettlement country while the husband (if he is with the family) will provide income. Surprised reactions are elicited from women during cultural orientations when the subject of dual income is raised (10). Single women with children and no other adult member of the family expect the government to support them for a long time since they see no alternative to staying with the children, especially if child day care is not for free. If single women with small children have family members in the resettlement country, they very much count on their support.

## **EXPECTATIONS OF YOUNG IRAQI REFUGEES**

To hear the young Iraqi refugees on their expectations of life in a resettlement country, individual interviews with university and vocational training students were conducted. Iraqis who studied in Baghdad did not necessarily study the subject of their choice, sometimes due to insufficient grades, sometimes due to weak affiliation with the Baath party. Thus they tend to express expectations of wanting to “study some more” in a resettlement country, even if they could use their already acquired expertise in a certain field to find a job that is somewhat linked to their training. Also, local teachers coaching elementary and secondary level Iraqi students in remedial classes were asked to invite the students to write down their notions of life in a resettlement country in a short paragraph. Some answers gave a glimpse into the parental discussions at home (status in society, prejudices towards some people of resettlement countries, mores) others were typical of children their age. Responses covering ages 9-30 were the following:

Jalal is a thirty-year-old single man who graduated with a BSc in Mathematics from Baghdad University in 1997. He also obtained a diploma on Prosthetics and Orthotics. “My illegal status prevents me from pursuing “proper” jobs, so I work for an electrical company during the day and study English at a community center at night. I dream about going to Canada or Australia to study pharmacy, get married and lead a stable life. I do not want to earn a living as a teacher in mathematics. I was “obliged” to study mathematics in Baghdad, my grades were not sufficient to study pharmacy - my real passion.” As the Representative of the Shiah Youth Committee, Jalal meets many young male Iraqis in the evening. He confides how embarrassed they feel that they have not accomplished much in the host country and shy away from returning to Iraq, not only because of lack of security but also because their peers in Baghdad would look at them as

“losers.” Among Iraqi Arabs, everyone is expected to marry and marriages among single Iraqi men and women from Jordan, Syria or Lebanon are on the rise. Jalal points out that young married couples in Iraq have had to become more ambitious since Saddam fell because the cost of living has soared. Iraq’s previous socialism meant low wages and lack of incentive to work hard. “You were tired at the end of the day but you had not much to show for your efforts. Now more and more couples in Iraq are becoming dual breadwinners and I know from telephone conversations with my friends in Iraq that the roles of husband and wife in the family are slowly changing, husbands are even beginning to help more in the household and with the children.”

Ramzi is a 32-year-old single Shiah who finished his vocational training at the Technical Institute in Baghdad. He considers himself an “expert on metal” and earns his living illegally as a blacksmith. His friend Ziad was recently resettled to the US and now works in a pizza restaurant owned by an Iraqi. Ziad told Ramzi on the phone “if you do not work, you cannot live. If you are a pro at what you do and speak English, you will earn between five and seven US an hour. However, you will need to work secretly in the beginning since food coupons are not sufficient to survive. If you admit that you work in a restaurant, your food coupons will be cut.” Ramzi dreams about going to Australia where he would like to work for an NGO. “After what happened in Iraq, I want to learn all about human rights and help people.”

Fatma is 20 years old, Sunni, and studies Civil Engineering at the Beirut Arab University. Her father is a psychologist but works as an editor; her mother has an M.A. in Philosophy and works as a teacher. Although Fatma’s parents cannot rely on regular income for the family, they support her studies as best as they can. They do not, however, approve of Fatma accepting a job “on the side” to supplement income. “I cannot work as a waitress when I am an academic,” Fatma explains, and elaborates on her plans to continue her studies in management of industrial engineering in the US, UK or the Gulf States once she earned her Master in Civil Engineering. “I dream of inventing something, rather than work for somebody.”

Omar is 12 years old and attends remedial classes after school. He dreams about travelling to the USA and imagines the scenery to be stunning. People in the US will be good and the streets will be clean. He is looking forward to going to the US because there is no racism. He knows that there are some “outlaws” in the US but it does not really matter since his education will be good and his future will be perfect.

Hassan is 11 years old. He loves Iraq, the US and Brazil. The mountains and nature of Brazil fascinate him and he wants to become famous there. He knows that wherever he goes, he will always have a special place in his heart for Iraq, missing his truthful friends. Homesickness will not go away. His thirteen-year-old brother Abdullah wishes to go to Canada to study architecture. His goals are to become an important person there, “to build Canada” and to support his parents. Canada is a country without war and beautiful nature. He likes all the people in the world and cannot wait to go.

Their friend Jawad is 14 years old and imagines the US to be a safe country without airplane attacks. He emphasizes that “the US is a country that walks with the rules and nobody breaks the law.” Travelling to such a country is in his mind difficult for Iraqis since Arab people cannot easily adapt to a new way of life. He was told that for Iraqi boys it is particularly hard to adapt to American girls. “When American girls turn 10 years old, they learn all about sexual matters.”

Nour is an 11-year-old girl who imagines the US to be a beautiful country with a lot of space, clean air, clean streets and freedom. She expects to become a citizen in the US and looks forward to “feeling like someone from this country.” The negative side is that some people may be corrupt and dishonest and it will take such a long time until she becomes a citizen.

Children voice the same concerns as adults in children’s pre-departure cultural orientation classes and have many serious questions about the new life ahead of them. In the cultural orientation program for children, ICMC covers US geography, pre-departure process and flight, communication skills, education, friendship and peer pressure, transportation, safety, and aspects of US culture. According to ICMC, “many problems in the family will stem directly from the widening cultural gap between adolescents and their parents, the feeling of powerlessness of the parents, and the lack of communication about inter-culturally sensitive topics, as the children adapt norms of the host culture. Refugee children often find themselves with a heavy adult burden and parents rely on them to interpret the new culture, its rules and values.

Teachers at an American public elementary school in Dearborn, Michigan describe that it is difficult to communicate with refugee parents on behavioural problems of their children since the parents do not speak English, and refrain from attending parent teacher conferences. Thus the students, with their rudimentary English have to become the intermediaries between teachers and parents, even if it concerns their own misconduct.

## **Part four**

### **ATTITUDES OF GRATITUDE MIXED WITH THOSE OF ENTITLEMENT**

Despite widespread assumptions of governmental support upon arrival, refugees in their twenties and thirties are eager to do whatever it will take to make integration in an unknown world successful. They are grateful for liberation from a dictator and despite the enormous negative impact on their lives, cannot wait to open a new chapter after enduring years of hardship, censorship and deprivation.

That unrealistic expectations are impervious to information on the “real deal” is an observation that pre-departure cultural orientation trainers as well as counsellors in UNHCR and NGO lament. “Refugees cling to what they want to believe, no matter how many times you counsel them, or they will try to negotiate an amended version of assistance which would be acceptable to them if they do not want to drop out of the resettlement process.” (ICMC CO trainer)

Even though refugees are aware that the services and entitlements available in each resettlement country differ widely, especially the less-educated refugees feel that somehow, no matter where they are resettled, they will be receiving support that supersedes the services that were provided to them in Iraq or the country of first asylum. The general notion is that when you arrive in Canada or Europe, you will be “paid” by the government a little longer, whereas in the US, you need to find a job much earlier.



## REASONS FOR INDIVIDUAL WITHDRAWAL FROM RESETTLEMENT

Iraqi refugees who are in the resettlement process for the US often give more negative or pensive answers compared to Iraqi refugees about to be resettled to Canada, Australia or Europe. Refugees bound for the US have mixed feelings about limited rental support for one month, obligations to pay back the cost of their ticket in instalments three to six months after arrival, devaluation of their degrees or certificates, and general lack of a reliable support cushion beyond eight months. A few cases withdraw voluntarily from the resettlement process prior to or after the IOM or ICMC Cultural Orientation Programs.

According to IOM, most recently the top four reasons for withdrawal from resettlement to the US were:

fear of the swine flu (H1N1);  
uncertainty over the economic recession in America;  
negative feedback from already resettled refugees in the US; and,  
availability of more generous benefits in resettlement programs of other countries.

IOM's database shows that 154 cases have withdrawn this calendar year.

An increasing number of refugees are aware of the effects of the global recession on resettlement countries. Up-to-date and realistic feedback from recently resettled friends and neighbors is trickling into the refugee community. "Please do not come, the minimum wages for refugees have dropped substantially and you will not be able to support your family, even if you are lucky to find a job." Though enthusiastic spirits are dampened, expectations management is taking place naturally. IOM's Coordinator for the Middle East in Amman confirmed that entry-level jobs for refugees are affected by the global financial crises in some US States, not in all.

Examples of reasons for individual withdrawal based on expectation study interviews are:

If the refugee has no family members in the resettlement country, there is less incentive to go, especially if family members reside in another country.

Sometimes refugees do not trust the support structure in the resettlement country or admit that they are simply not the "self-sufficiency type" in a totally new environment.

Some heard discouraging stories from relatives and were advised not to come.

Some married Lebanese, Syrian or Jordanian nationals and wish to stay in the Middle East.

Sometimes husband and wife have irreconcilable differences about the resettlement country they are eligible for.

Some refugees had to borrow money for major medical treatment in the host country, incurred debts to survive in the host country, or they will have to borrow money for the penalty exit fee in Lebanon if they were illegal. When they learn about the promissory note in the pre-departure cultural orientation for the US and realize that the plane tickets for all family members need to be reimbursed at some point, that childcare in the US is not for free, that rental subsidy is short-lived, refugees sometimes find the mere thought of these financial challenges insurmountable.

Signing a statement that does not rule out potential military service in the American army can be disconcerting for some male refugees. (11)

Refugees approved for resettlement in Germany withdrew because they felt the German language was too difficult to learn.

Especially the “free” cases, i.e. refugees heading to a resettlement country with no sponsor, know that they will rely heavily on the service providers. When refugees are informed that amenities (hospitals, schools, supermarkets) are not necessarily close to where they will be living, anxiety levels go up. During the first 90 days in the US, for example, there is a fair degree of similarity to what happens to refugees as State Department funding is given on a per capita basis. However, since state assistance programs (employment assistance, welfare, schools) vary after this initial period, and refugees are aware of this, Iraqis want to know what exactly they will be entitled to in their state. Most questions in pre-departure cultural orientation programs for the US can only be answered in a general manner. Similarly, in European resettlement countries, the resettlement benefits can also vary, depending in which municipality, region the refugees settle.

“Would you consider returning to Iraq, should the situation improve and become stable?”

“Why do you ask this question? You do not believe in God?”

“Yes, I believe in God and I was wondering how you feel about eventual return to Iraq?”

“Well, if you believe in God the way we do, then, inshallah, we will all be resettled.”

## **POINT OF NO RETURN**

When asked if they would eventually consider return to Iraq under acceptable security conditions, all of the 95 respondents answered in the negative. It is striking to learn that none of the interviewed refugees felt that Iraq would stabilize in their lifetime. Occasionally refugees would express an interest visiting Iraq, to check on their homes and relatives but return intentions were not articulated.

Martin is a Chaldean chef who worked for the Americans in a restaurant in the Green Zone. He arrived in Lebanon in March 2009 and summarized three options of survival in Iraq: “You are working for the Americans, risking your life. You are with the terrorists. Or you hide and live on life savings, still risking your life.”

Another middle-aged Chaldean laughingly responded: “Do you see embassies in Baghdad? Do you know that minorities are eradicated with scientific precision? Improvement of the situation in Iraq would be like a miracle. There are no ethics left in Iraq, and if separation between state and religion cannot be achieved, there will never be an Iraq again.”

Another elderly male refugee put it more bluntly: “Saddam kept the lid on Iraq for many years...until the Americans came. They opened the lid, let the cockroaches out and they are now eating up Iraq.”

## **RESETTLEMENT RETURNEES TO IRAQ, JORDAN AND SYRIA – A RECENT DEVELOPMENT**

At the beginning of 2008, several months before the financial crisis became apparent and on Wall Street, articles on resettled Iraqi refugees returning to the Middle East puzzled seasoned refugee workers in Washington. (12) It is hard to determine the number of returnee cases from other resettlement countries. France reported one returnee family to Jordan due to adaptation problems in mid May and one family returned from Australia.

Interviews with four disappointed returnees from the US in Jordan and Damascus revealed that the first weeks after arrival in the USA are crucial. Most of them decided to return to their country of first asylum during the first 10 weeks in the US.

The reasons are manifold but point towards disappointment with Government and/or personal anchor. Either the resettlement agency did not overly attend to the cases on various issues like housing, food stamps, cash assistance and/or the personal friend/relative could not deliver promises made prior to arrival. Sometimes the anchor is overwhelmed by the needs of the new arrivals or simply has to work all week to support his own family and cannot drive hundreds of miles on weekends to see the relatives. Newly arriving Iraqi refugees who do not speak English are not proactive. Passive waiting in the apartments for someone to come and facilitate the initial hurdles of integration is common. Single women with small children and no English language skills can be desperate for help in daily matters. Nervous breakdowns, constant crying and helplessness were reported when caseworkers or relatives were unable to be there for them. However, in some cases, the relatives who contributed to the disappointment would in the end finance the return ticket back to the host country.

It also became apparent in conversations with returnees that they were no sure what kind of official responsibilities a family member after airport pickup had and what exactly the role of the resettlement agencies was. It is all one big blur of disappointment.

So far there is no database monitoring the return of resettled refugees from the USA. Examples of resettled refugees who decided to return have been known to originate from the former Soviet Union and the Balkans. The Director of the Refugee Council USA senses “that when refugees come from middle class or secure material background, they have more options and are more inclined to consider and act on returning. The Refugee Council is aware of many Bhutanese and Burmese who are struggling and facing great difficulties, but the number of returns from these communities is negligible, probably because the return would be to camps.” IOM staff that have previously been involved in resettlement of Kosovar and Bosnian refugees groups compare their experiences to the challenges faced with Iraqis.(13) None of the

interviewed returnees had any regrets about having come back to Jordan or Syria, even if the support structure was fragile.

**RESETTLEMENT EDUCATION:  
UNHCR, CULTURAL ORIENTATION AND INTERNET**

“You have learned something. That always feels at first as if you lost something”  
(Edith Wharton)

Ideas on life in resettlement countries are influenced by a variety of sources: relatives, movies, information on the internet (websites, blogs, see ANNEX 4), rumors in the community, and recently departed family members and friends.

Pre-departure cultural orientation programs are designed for refugees to learn what the resettlement package entails and what it does not. Iraqis are mostly interested in the ‘economic orientation;’ they state they are already aware of the physical safety and freedom in resettlement countries. To feel welcome, safe, ‘expected and respected’ after years of living day by day in dark uncertainty, instability and fear, refugees emphasized that they need to know how thin or thick the layer of municipal or state support will be, to assess whether they are really up to yet another challenging new chapter.

A great deal of information from the refugee community as well as resettled friends and family members has influenced the refugees, some true, some not. In a very short period (ranging from three hours by the Swedish CO to three to four days for the IOM CO for the US) refugees are asked to absorb a complex presentation of all facets of their future life. Most of it will be repeated again upon arrival. Pre-departure cultural orientation can trigger last minute withdrawal from the resettlement process and increased anxiety. Sometimes it feels “like a reassuring embrace that everything is going to be alright, though not necessarily easy.”

A flurry of activity relating to pre-departure cultural orientation programs for refugees bound for resettlement countries exists in all three countries in the study. IOM prepares for the US, Canada, Australia, the UK, France, Belgium and Norway. ICMC prepares for the US in Lebanon, while those refugees bound for Sweden are prepared by the Swedish Migration Board. Germany distributes a two-page document in the country of first asylum and briefs extensively upon arrival. Each country has its own version and modus operandi. This is also the most crucial phase for planting the right seed in terms of attitudes, open mindedness. If the information is shared earlier in the resettlement process, it can be counterproductive, refugees’ focus in that case revolves around all aspects of life in the country of first asylum: When should I give up my job? For how many months should I pay my rent? Is it worthwhile enrolling my children in school? Etc.

Attention levels are at their highest when it comes to education, care for the elderly and financial assistance. IOM refers to its pre-departure cultural orientation program as “risk education” and clearly communicate that the resettlement process in the USA is based on self-sufficiency and should not be compared with other countries.

The IOM Program Manager for the Overseas Processing Entity in Amman is aware of the disappointment level among refugees after attending the pre-departure cultural orientation for the USA. "Refugees have to come to terms with the fact that the US Refugee Resettlement Program is not a welfare program and it differs from state to state, from city to city. It takes dedicated staff to work in resettlement agencies; some are very well funded with great resources, while others are not. It may not be the best for well educated and well off Iraqis but there is a certain type of refugee who will make it wherever he or she lands. It is always hard to know who the truly deserving refugees are and even if they have been identified, are they also the ones with the best integration potential?"

Even if IOM is successful in tackling a huge amount of misinformation during the pre-departure cultural orientation, which naturally disappoints refugees, and leaves them pensive and apprehensive, there is no mechanism in place to evaluate how much the refugees really absorbed. In which way they reconcile disheartening, realistic information with high expectations after the attendance of the orientation is hard to tell. Polite refugees who feel insecure after the CO tend to say: "I want to see it all with my own eyes first."

When the role of the personal sponsor versus the anchor person in the resettlement country is addressed, the IOM Coordinator points out that in some cases the personal anchor (usually an Iraqi family member or friend settled in the US) promises the new arrival too much support prior to their arrival. If the personal anchor fails to follow up on promises made, the refugees feel abandoned, confused and the resettlement agency cannot always quickly bridge the gap. "There are some responsibilities which the voluntary agency cannot dispose of. The whole integration process is a well-coordinated system."

IOM's pre-departure cultural orientation program in Damascus is delivered in a lively fashion, engaging the refugees in exercises, role-play, personal visualization of adaptation scenarios, highlighting the dark and funny sides to the various challenges that lie ahead. The daily sessions last from 8 till 3 pm with breaks. They are conducted in Arabic by trainers specializing on one particular resettlement country or continent. Refugees tend to bond during this experience and discussions become more intense as the program progresses. Overall, it is well conceived and executed with care.

To increase the knowledge of geography and how things work in the resettlement country, IOM Amman created an e-mail address, ([uscoamman@iom.int](mailto:uscoamman@iom.int)) where refugees can forward questions pertaining to resettlement after attending the CO as well as upon arrival in the US. In this way the CO Coordinator is kept abreast of concerns, worries, mind-sets on either side of the resettlement arena. IOM-Amman also established a resource center with five computers where refugees are invited to use the computer to conduct research on their particular destination. IOM is planning to have a database on all major resettlement destinations in the US. Backup for the research is provided by an Arabic speaking student intern who will be present in the center as of summer 2009. IOM is preparing scripts for Cultural Orientation for the Youth and aware that Iraqi refugees are "tough clients." IOM summarized their CO script in two pages in Arabic, highlighting the most important aspects they want refugees to bear in mind. IOM is optimistic that with their latest initiatives they have found an affordable solution for expectations management.

A PowerPoint presentation in which refugees of different nationalities briefly describe their integration challenges in the US and Australia is a common feature in all COs. It would be helpful if an Iraqi refugee could be included in the multinational presentation to ensure that the Iraqi viewer will not perceive everyone else on the screen as “them” and the message might be lost that he/she will also become part of this multicultural world.

The Swedish Migration Board adapted its Cultural Orientation Programs for Iraqi refugees, shortening it to a three-hour period in the host country and briefing the refugees at length upon arrival in Sweden. Focus in the host country is on the active role of adults as they take their first steps in the new country. Childcare options are discussed at length to reassure mothers that while they leave their children in good care, it is vital to learn the language and get adjusted. Refugees are informed that they will receive monetary incentives for successful attendance of the language classes. Three persons conduct the presentation, two Swedes and one naturalized Kuwaiti Swede. Participants are encouraged to drop some ideas of their previous life to make room for elements of Swedish culture (women working outside the house, independent mobility, etc). To avoid misunderstandings or a too laid back approach regarding financial assistance, housing and healthcare, problematic integration attitudes are also clearly addressed by the Swedish trainers.

Some Cultural Orientations might come across as “egocentric” if they concentrate too much on the rules and regulations in the resettlement country and do not address the clients’ traditions and “ways of life.” Some can be stiff and formal, while others are lively, displaying a sense of humour. Some are served in digestible pieces; some are long-winded, mental and emotional marathons. What is sometimes missing in these portraits of countries is the consideration for the perspective of the viewer. How does an Arab Muslim or Arab Christian mind perceive all this? What do they read into it, based on their own culture, their traditions, based on the history of their country? Based on their expectations?

Some refugees leave the COs confused and nervous; some are inspired and feel optimistic. At the end of an ICMC pre-departure cultural orientation for the US, a young man who had actively participated during the entire two days admitted that even though he really paid attention, he could not piece together how it will all work practically, in real life. It should also be noted that the content of the orientation is afterwards shared by the resettlement candidates with their neighborhood.

Just as the refugees are expected to process a lot of information on the country and the culture they are going to, should not the service providers on the other side be well informed and sensitised as to who the refugees are? The website [culturalorientation.net](http://culturalorientation.net) for example, offers a comprehensive cultural profile on Muslim refugees. (14)

Though service providers in resettlement countries can be overwhelmed with a constant barrage of demands, the refugees’ attitude and behaviour needs to be seen in the light of pre-war trends and Iraq’s social policies. Even though refugees have spent several years in a country of first asylum, their mental and emotional point of reference is still Iraq, not life in Lebanon, Syria or Jordan. It is important not to underestimate the capabilities of Muslim women and it is important not to overestimate the adaptability of Iraqis in the West.

## **VIEWS FROM THE OTHER SIDE: A GLIMPSE AT RESETTLEMENT AGENCIES IN THE US**

American resettlement agencies like the Vermont Refugee Resettlement Program ([www.vrrp.org](http://www.vrrp.org)) and the Nationalities Service Center in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania ([www.nscphila.org](http://www.nscphila.org)) have noticed a decline in arrivals of highly educated Iraqis. They report challenges assisting with securing jobs for the unskilled, non-English speaking Iraqis over 50. The pressure on resettlement agencies to place 80 percent of the refugees within four months of their arrival in an employment scenario is becoming increasingly challenging.

Some Iraqi women have shown no interest in job hunting and some Iraqis who are not keen on entry-level jobs perform poorly and lose them quickly. Educated Iraqis who speak English tend to do better, some even found jobs through the Craig's list website. One refugee woman recently confided with a director of a resettlement agency that she enjoys her new found freedom so much, she feels like "singing in the street and nobody will give me funny looks."

Another resettlement case worker reported that, after mourning the loss of their country, loss of their identity, loss of their professions, most Iraqis with high expectations have adjusted their perspectives over the last year. Once the Iraqi refugees learn that many Americans do not have healthcare and have to work two jobs to make ends meet, their overall mind set changes and high expectations are being lowered. Jobs in retail stores or factories are accepted, though the overall conditions are harsher now for new arrivals than for summer 2008 arrivals. A resettlement agency staff member also reported that hourly wages are dropping, the pool of financial resources is shrinking and less utility bills, for example, are paid by the resettlement agencies. The more unemployed refugees a resettlement agency has under its wings, the less money is available for new arrivals after three to four months. The matching grant program requires them to start working within four months of arrival in the US. If refugees complain about the duration of financial support they are reminded by case workers that they were not resettled for a better life but for a *safer* life.

Refugees are informed in pre-departure cultural orientations on the US that they will only receive rental support for one month; however, the reality in the US is less extreme. Resettlement agencies reserve the right to adjust, prolong, or cut funds for rent as each case merits. Therefore, refugees often receive rental support beyond one month, depending on job placement, vulnerability criteria, and available funds.

In Vermont, newly arriving refugee families are placed with an American foster family for a maximum of 10 days. This welcoming nest assists refugees getting over the jet lag and initial culture shock. One adult American family member who is home during these 10 days acts an inaugurator to the local scenario. The new arrivals are shown where the schools are, how to use public transportation, where to shop for Middle Eastern food, how to shop in bulk to keep grocery expenditures low, etc. Iraqis learn about high school girls playing soccer and other "confusing behaviour." No matter how offensive or mind boggling, and irrespective of how many American movies Iraqis have watched, refugees get their first taste of a new world they are all of sudden a part of. After this initiation experience, the refugee family is moved to an apartment or house. Newly arriving single mothers with children are naturally connected to a volunteer to assist with all kinds of initial hurdles.

Resettled Iraqis with good English skills and educational backgrounds are sometimes employed by resettlement agencies as case workers. The mere fact that a resettled Arabic speaking person with know-how of the local community and conditions welcomes new arrivals makes a big difference.

For material support, especially in times of recession, creative approaches are explored and sometimes successfully implemented. Outreach to retail stores for donations of household goods, furniture, and bedding is just one example. The Nationalities Center for instance has a standing arrangement with Bed, Bath & Beyond to deliver discarded goods regularly to the agency. The only costs involved are payment for transportation to the office. Maybe similar arrangements are in place with IKEA or other companies elsewhere but this avenue is worthwhile exploring.

Approaching the already established or fledgling local American Arab Community in the area is vital to tether collaborations. Even though mobilizing resources is hard work, connecting, networking, awareness raising does pay off and often young Americans are involved who in turn educate the American community on the plight of refugees. Publishing a newsletter in English and Arabic for Iraqi refugees in the community is also a helpful tool to stimulate and educate. Information on summer camps for children, health fairs, Arab culture days, food baskets is circulated and Iraqi refugees are encouraged to contribute ideas, and come up with initiatives.

Engaging Iraqi refugees in this way addresses the hampering effects of entitlement thinking that may have been cultivated during the years of waiting for resettlement. It invigorates refugees with the spirit they need to start all over again in a new world.



## ANNEX 1 References / footnotes

(1) Norwegian Research Institute Fafo Survey on the Iraqi community in Jordan (May 2007), p.43

(2) DRC Iraqi Population Survey in Lebanon, November 2007

(3) IOM Survey Report, Assessment of the Psychosocial Needs of Iraqis displaced in Jordan and Lebanon, February 2008, p.73

(4) Phyllis Hulewat, Resettlement: A Cultural and Psychological Crisis. Social Work, March 1996, 42,2 Research Library

(5) COR Center Enhanced Refugee Backgrounder No. 1, October 2008, Refugees from Iraq [www.cal.org](http://www.cal.org), or [www.cal.org/co/muslims](http://www.cal.org/co/muslims)

(6) William Polk, Understanding Iraq, The whole sweep of Iraqi history, from Genghis Khan's Mongols to the Ottoman Turks to the British Mandate to the American Occupation, Harper Perennial, 2005, p.123

Listening to many personal stories of Iraqis, their daily challenges in countries of asylum, uncertainty about where their children will grow up and where they will grow old, one feels compelled to learn about the history of life in Iraq. Seeing Iraqi expectations of life in resettlement countries in the light of the events that shaped modern Iraq proved helpful

(7) UNICEF, Evaluation Report 2003: Iraq Watching Briefs- Overview Report, July 2003) In 1989, the oil sector comprised 61 % of the GNP, services (primarily in the public sector) contributed to 22 %, followed by other industries with 12 % and agriculture with 5 %. The oil sector, however, does not have strong horizontal and vertical linkages with the domestic economy that could have a multiplier effect on employment and economic growth. One of the results of this overdependence on oil export economy has been the narrowing of the economic base over the last three decades, with the agricultural sector's contribution rapidly declining in the 1970s. Therefore, the impositions of sanctions post 1990 had a particularly severe effect on Iraq's economy and food security levels of the population. Not being self sufficient in food production, after the sanctions, the Iraqi government introduced free food rations comprising of 1000 calories per person/day or 40 % of the daily requirements. After 1997, with the introduction of the OFFP, this gradually increased over time. Only in 1999 could the per capita food consumption per day increase to approximately 2150 calories. In 2000, it was estimated by UNDP that the average family spent as much as 75 % of their income on food.

Since 1991, when the current public food distribution system was put in place by the government, most Iraqis became dependent on the food rations they received through this system. It is estimated that 60 % of the Iraqi population rely on food rations to substantially supplement their daily food requirements. A survey on the extent and geographical distribution of poverty in central and southern Iraq in May 2003 by WFP found that even with the above food rations, one in five Iraqis suffered from chronic poverty and was unable to meet all their basic needs.

(8) Al-Khalidi, Ashraf, et al. 2007 "Iraqi refugees in the Syrian Arab Republic: A Field Based Snapshot". Washington, DC.

(9) International Crisis Group 77, Failed Responsibility: Iraqi Refugees in Syria

(10) The types of job opportunities available to refugees, especially those with limited English language skills, often mean that families need the income from two working adults in order to meet basic needs. In the case of Muslims from some cultural backgrounds, family members, especially husbands or fathers, may be resistant to having women work outside the home in an unfamiliar environment. Islam stresses the role of the husband as the provider for the family, and Muslim men from some cultural groups may regard the need for the wife to work as an embarrassment, although this is not always the case. In addition, Muslim women from some cultural backgrounds may be uncomfortable with the idea of interacting on a regular basis with strangers, particularly with men who are not family members. These women may be ill at ease with the jobs that require frequent contact with the public, and may express the desire to stay at home. The feelings of these Muslim men and women do not necessarily arise solely from religious considerations; they also grow out of a complex blend of cultural traditions."(see [culturalorientation.net](http://culturalorientation.net) or [www.cal.org/co/muslims](http://www.cal.org/co/muslims))

(11) Refugees do not understand the difference between the US Selective Service and the US military. All males between the age of 18 and 25 are required to register with the US Selective Service. It is legally required and generally reinforced by making numerous US benefits, like welfare, Medicaid, scholarships, federal employment, etc. tied to proof of selective service registration. However, registering with the Selective Service, a civilian agency, is not the same as signing up for the military. Their function is solely to collect names in the event that there would be a draft to identify and notify candidates. The US has not had any conscription (or a draft) for 35 years. The US armed forces are 100 percent voluntary.

(12) Examples of some of the articles published:

10 January 2008, Christian Science Monitor: Struggling in the U.S., some Iraqi refugees now want to go back – With few good job prospects in depressed Lansing, Michigan, many yearn for their old life in Baghdad.

10 June 2008, Principle Pictures: Iraqi Refugees Struggle to Find Jobs in America

17 June 2008, Central New York News: Iraqi refugees start over in Central New York

05 August 2008, The Age: Resettled Iraqis left feeling dumped (in Australia)

21 December 2008, Christian Post: Refugees in U.S. Hit Hard by Economic Troubles

30 January 2009, The New York Times: For Refugees, Recession Makes Hard Times Even Harder

02 March 02, 2009, The Associated Press Sate & Local Wire: Life in Utah frustrating for Iraqi refugees

23 March 2009, The Free Lance Star: Two disillusioned Iraqi families leave Stafford for Middle East

28 February, 2009, The Salt Lake Tribune: Iraqi refugees returning to danger zone to escape poverty in Utah

(13) Somach, Susan D. 1995. Bosnian Refugee Resettlement in the US: Survey Report. Washington, DC: Center for Applied Linguistics Refugee Service Center, p 22 ff.

Some service providers in the USA have compared the challenges they face with Iraqis to similar challenges with the Bosnian or Kosovars. 'While the resettlement program yielded significant numbers, it also suffered many challenges with the refugees. For example, many Bosnians face numerous difficulties adjusting to their new lives, despite the best efforts of the NGOs. These included learning to speak English, finding work, cultural shock, continued trauma, distress over current events in Bosnia, and the general stress of starting life over from scratch. Many also arrived in poor health, but had difficulty finding the treatments they needed at affordable costs. In other cases the roles and distinctions between NGOs and US governmental authorities were not made clear to Bosnians, and many sought out the wrong agencies for various needs. Finally, it has been reported that some Bosnians came to use their refugee status as a crutch, and expected amounts of sympathy from their new American communities, which in turn often did not understand who the refugees were or what they wanted.'

(14) This guide provides information on the beliefs, customs, and traditions that may inform the worldviews of Muslim refugees and suggests ways of helping them integrate those beliefs, customs, and traditions successfully into their new lives. It was written for Muslim refugees going to the USA but can be applied to other resettlement countries as well.

## **ANNEX 2 List of expectations**

I am going to a powerful, rich country, I will not need to work

I will live in safety, enjoy stability

I will have control over my life again

Life will be like salvation

I will cherish religious freedom

No more fear of detention, I will be legal, enjoying the same rights as the other citizens, even if a natural disaster or civil war happens

Monthly payments (rateb, musa'ada) from the Government will be provided to me

If the Government runs out of money for me, the Churches will take over

Housing is only free in the beginning and then you are on the street

As a Shiah I will send my children to Christian schools to avoid exposure to extremists

I want to further my own education as well as my children's education

Medical care is not for free, if you have cancer, you will not be treated in the USA, only in Europe

Doctors, Lawyers, Engineers, Business people can exercise their profession freely

Doctors, Lawyers, Engineers, Business people need to go through the re-certification period which takes time - in the meantime you need to work in a car wash

The Government will provide me with a job when I arrive

I do want to resettle but I am not interested in waiting 5 years until I get my new citizenship. All I need is freedom of movement from country to country and my Iraqi passport prevents me from doing that. Can you at least make my stay in Jordan legal?

I used to live like a Sultan in Iraq but education for my children means everything to me. I only wish to resettle for the education of my children. When I arrive in the USA, I will not need support. I own an import-export business and will employ 100 Iraqi upon arrival.

### **ANNEX 3 Questions asked during interviews**

Interviews were opened with general remarks, thanking the refugee for taking time to talk and making sure that he/she knows that this conversation will have no bearing on their resettlement case, that the information shared is confidential. Original names of interviewees were changed in the report for their protection.

What does resettlement mean for you (and your family). How are you preparing yourself?

What do you know about country x? What do you know about cultural and religious diversity, customs, clothing etc.

Do you have friends, relatives in the country? Do you talk to them frequently? How? On the phone, through e-mails?

Do you expect to enjoy religious freedom in the country?

Are you aware of different nationalities and races in neighbourhoods, schools and will you feel comfortable sending your children to schools with mixed ethnicities?

What kind of housing do you expect to find? What is your housing in the host country like? What was housing in Iraq like?

What are your cost of living in the host country? How do you make ends meet?

How do you expect to support yourself in the resettlement country? Do you have any particular plans regarding employment?

Do you think employment will be guaranteed by the Government of the resettlement country?

Would you be prepared to work in an entry level, low income job while you are learning the language of the resettlement country?

Would you be prepared to accept a job that does not necessarily relate to your occupation in your home country?

Are you aware that certificates, degrees from your home country may not be accepted right away but you are required to undergo a recertification process?

Are you yourself interested in acquiring new skills or would your focus be more on your children?

Do you have any particular interests in music or art or dance or something else?

Would you be prepared to adapt different roles within your family to become self-sufficient?

Do you expect to enjoy health care even if you have not found a job yet? Do you have a health condition?

Do you wish to learn English or do you think you will get by speaking your mother tongue?

Would you consider returning to Iraq if the situation there stabilizes?

## ANNEX 4 Blogs and websites

### WEBSITES

[www.iraqrefugeedoc.com](http://www.iraqrefugeedoc.com)

[www.hardwayhome.org](http://www.hardwayhome.org)

[www.iraqirefugeestories.org](http://www.iraqirefugeestories.org)

[www.iraqiartinexile.com](http://www.iraqiartinexile.com)

[www.iraqi-refugees.org/index3.php?do=article&id=6906](http://www.iraqi-refugees.org/index3.php?do=article&id=6906)

[www.asharqpress.com](http://www.asharqpress.com)

[www.ankawa.com](http://www.ankawa.com)

<http://eastkurd.blog.co.uk/2009/03/13/germany-to-resettle-2-500-iraqi-refugees-5751853/>

[www.tebayn.com/indexar.asp](http://www.tebayn.com/indexar.asp)

### BLOGS

<http://livingbeyondborders.blogspot.com/>

[www.humanrightsfirst.org/blog/refugees/index.asp](http://www.humanrightsfirst.org/blog/refugees/index.asp)

[www.pbs.org/wnet/wideangle/tag/iraqi-refugees-blog/](http://www.pbs.org/wnet/wideangle/tag/iraqi-refugees-blog/)

<http://therefugeesblog.blogspot.com/2008/10/refugees-on-move.html>

### FACEBOOK PAGES

<http://www.facebook.com/home.php?#/s.php?ref=search&init=q&q=iraqi%20refugees&sid=ff28f0f4d9be8cd0f658e34d51862008>