

THE WORLD'S FASTEST GROWING DISPLACEMENT CRISIS



DISPLACED
PEOPLE
INSIDE IRAQ
RECEIVING
INADEQUATE
ASSISTANCE

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This report is based on a two-week assessment mission in the Kurdish areas of northern Iraq undertaken by Kristèle Younès and Nir Rosen, Fellow at the New America Foundation. Refugees International would like to thank the staff members of the U.N. and international and local non-governmental organizations for taking the time to talk and provide information on the situation for displaced people inside Iraq. We are also indebted to those who have been displaced inside the country and bravely shared their personal stories with us.

In addition, this report would not have been possible without the support of the Open Society Institute, The Philanthropic Collaborative, and the many individuals who have donated to our work on Iraqi refugees. Refugees International thanks them for their generosity.

ABOUT REFUGEES INTERNATIONAL

Refugees International generates lifesaving humanitarian assistance and protection for displaced people around the world and works to end the conditions that create displacement. Based on our on-the-ground knowledge of key humanitarian emergencies, Refugees International successfully pressures governments, international agencies and non-governmental organizations to improve conditions for displaced people.

Refugees International is an independent, non-profit humanitarian advocacy organization based in Washington, D.C. We do not accept government or United Nations funding, relying instead on contributions from individuals, foundations and corporations. Please help support Refugees International's efforts for Iraqi refugees by donating online. Learn more at www.refugeesinternational.org.

*Cover Photo:
This Sunni Arab
was forced to flee
the violence in
Mosul. She now
teaches at an
Arabic school
in Erbil.*

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*After an uncle
was killed and
their father
kidnapped,
this Kurdish
family fled
Baghdad and
now lives in
Suleimaniya.*

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DISPLACED PEOPLE INSIDE IRAQ RECEIVING INADEQUATE ASSISTANCE

INTRODUCTION

Four years after the U.S. launched its attack against Iraq, the civil war there has produced a humanitarian crisis marked by the world's fastest growing refugee and internally displaced populations. But Iraq, Washington and the U.N. do not acknowledge the magnitude of the humanitarian crisis. This has led to an inadequate response, both within Iraq and in the region.

The U.S. is spending \$10.3 billion a month in Iraq, but little of that is going to ease the strain of displacement, and the U.N. has not established a strong presence. "Iraqis don't see the U.N. anywhere," a relief worker says. While Iraqis are flooding into neighboring countries—some two million have taken refuge outside Iraq—the population of internally displaced, while far less visible, is just as desperate and growing just as fast. The U.N. estimates that 1.9 million people are displaced within Iraq. This includes 1 million people who had been forced from their homes before 2003 and an additional 727,000 displaced since the February 2006 bombing of Samarra.

The agency is preparing for internal displacement to increase by as much as one million more people this year.

If the U.N. is right, more than 12 percent of those within Iraq would be displaced, as Iraqis race to escape sectarian violence and *de facto* ethnic cleansing in southern and central areas. Iraq is becoming Balkanized as formerly mixed neighborhoods disintegrate into Sunni and Shiite redoubts, all afraid of one another, and leaving minorities such as the Christians or the Mandaeans with no safe place to go to. A Sunni imam born and raised in Basra, a largely Shiite area, said: "I used to have Shiite friends and neighbors. But everything changed. After I was beaten up and threatened several times, I had to leave to protect my family."

According to estimates by the Iraqi Red Crescent Society, he is one of 160,000 Iraqis who have moved to Iraq's most stable region, the three governorates of Dohuk, Erbil and Suleimaniya in the north. During a two week survey of conditions in this largely autonomous area administered by the Kurdish Regional Government, Refugees International found that many of the internally displaced are struggling to survive, the victims of inattention, inadequate resources, regional politics, and bureaucratic obstacles. But as one woman who fled north from Baghdad said, "Here at least, we are safe."

While U.S. and Iraqi forces are finding it difficult to make Iraq stable and secure, it should be easy to help the displaced—once authorities recognize the magnitude of the problem.

FLEEING TO THE KURDISH REGION

Because the Kurdish region, protected by its own security forces, is largely immune to the violence in other parts of Iraq, Kurds, Christians, and Sunni and Shiite Arabs are trying to resettle there, but getting in is not easy.

IRAQI REFUGEES IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Numbers based on March 2007 UNHCR estimates. The vast majority have been displaced since 2003, but estimates include an unknown number of people displaced before 2003.

COUNTRY OF ASYLUM	NUMBER OF IRAQI REFUGEES
Syria	1,000,000
Jordan	700,000 – 800,000
Egypt	130,000
Lebanon	40,000 – 50,000
Iran	54,000
Turkey	5,000
United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Yemen	Unknown
Iraq (internally displaced people)	1,900,000*

* Includes 1 million people displaced before 2003.

First, internal refugees must pass through a series of security checkpoints. Second, they must provide the name of a guarantor, a Kurdish resident of one of the three Northern Governorates, who can attest to the morality and identity of the displaced. Single Arab men rarely get in, and Refugees International found that it is harder for Muslim Arabs to get entry than for Christians or Kurds.

In addition, Kurds from disputed areas such as oil-rich Kirkuk or Khanaqain, whose status is to be settled by referendum later this year, are systematically discouraged or prevented from moving into the Kurdish governorates. Planning for this referendum, the Kurdish authorities are actively seeking to discourage Kurds from leaving Kirkuk and other disputed towns to settle in existing, recognized Kurdish territories. Left with no other alternatives, these Kurdish families have to return to their place of origin, where they are often in serious danger.

Thus, for security and political reasons, it is harder for Arabs and Kurds to resettle in the Kurdish regions of Iraq than for Christians, who sometimes get preferential treatment. Christians going to Dohuk receive financial assistance from the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) of about \$85 per month, as well as land in their villages of origin and assistance to build houses. Muslims, both Kurd and Arab, are left to fend for themselves, while many Arabs are kept out for security reasons. The pro-Christian policies seem to reflect the fact that the KRG's Minister of Finance is Christian and actively supports his own group. There is also pressure from outside groups who had previously accused the Kurds of mistreating their Christian population. But at least some people are getting into the Kurdish regions. Other relatively safe governorates, such as Karbala and Basra, have been forced de facto to shut their borders because their infrastructure can't accommodate an influx of internally displaced people.

PROBLEMS FACED BY THE DISPLACED

Whereas many Iraqis worry most about security, in the stable Kurdish area, the biggest concerns are economic. Those who reach the Kurdish governorates must surmount difficulties in

A KURDISH FAMILY FLEES MOSUL

In the small town of Kalak, an hour away from Erbil, Refugees International met with Mahmoud, a father of 3, who had moved to Kalak from Mosul with his family six months earlier.

“As Kurds in Mosul, we did not feel safe anymore,” Mahmoud told Refugees International. “Three of our Kurdish neighbors were killed. We had to leave if we did not want to suffer the same fate.” Mahmoud, a former Iraqi government employee, and his family rented two vehicles and left Mosul in the middle of the night to avoid raising suspicion from his neighbors, many of them Arabs, as the family lived in a mixed area of town. “Under Saddam, there were no problems between Kurds and Arabs in Mosul,” Mahmoud told RI. “Now, most Kurds have left Mosul. I don’t know what happened.”

Although Mahmoud is grateful for the Kurdish Regional Government’s hospitality, he and his family haven’t received any help since their arrival in Kalak. Unable to transfer their food ration cards, they can not afford diesel or oil for cooking. And while they would eventually like to return to Mosul, they might have to wait a while. They heard from neighbors that “terrorists” had written on the house they left behind: “Not for sale, Not for rent,” so as to claim it as their own.

finding housing, shelter, employment and education for their children.

Most internal refugees can't find work, except for professionals such as doctors or engineers, who are welcomed and sometimes even sought by the Kurdish authorities. Some of the displaced are staying with host families, and others are staying in public buildings, depending entirely on the host community's willingness to help. “We depend on our neighbors’ generosity to feed our children,” a displaced Kurd said. With an inflation rate over 70 percent, and fuel and electricity prices that have increased by 270 percent in the course of 2006, it is unlikely that the economic situation for internally displaced people will improve in the near future.

Most of the new arrivals have to pay rent, which has risen drastically in the past couple of years, particularly in the main

	<p>urban areas. High rents are exhausting the resources of displaced families. In the town of Shaklawa alone, in the Erbil governorate, out of 215 displaced families to arrive in four years, 10 had to return to their place of origin in February alone because the cost of living was too high. In Erbil, a Sunni Arab woman from Baghdad told Refugees International that she and her husband had decided to return to Baghdad with their two children despite the threats they had received for being Sunni. “My husband can’t find work here, and the rent is too expensive. Everything is cheaper in Baghdad. God will protect us, I hope.”</p> <p>Before 2003, 80 percent of Iraqis depended on monthly food and fuel distributions from the U.N.’s Oil for Food program. With the economy in chaos, the program, now run by the Iraqi government, is more needed than ever.</p> <p>To qualify for food, Iraqis need ration cards that are distributed in their towns of residence. The cards also serve as the basis for the voter registration system for post-war Iraqi elections, so the ration cards have acquired a political significance. Since voter roles depend on the issuance of ration cards, towns are reluctant to allow families to take their ration cards when they move.</p> <p>Without ration cards, these people cannot get food or diesel. In theory, after acquiring a residence permit from the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG), displaced people can return to their place of origin to file a request to transfer the food ration cards, but many find it too costly or too unsafe to return to the areas they fled. If they do return to initiate a transfer, the application must go to Baghdad, but neither the central government nor the Kurdish authorities have much interest in promoting migration, particularly of Arabs. No family Refugees International interviewed said it had been able to transfer its food ration card. They blame the lack of access to food and fuel rations on bureaucratic resistance, general inefficiency, and rampant corruption.</p> <p>Displaced people in the KRG can go to public hospitals, but their children frequently cannot enter school. To be admitted into a school, children must present an official certificate from their former school attesting to the grade they have completed. Many families left in a hurry and were not able to obtain these papers before they fled.</p>
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<p>Another obstacle for displaced children is the lack of Arabic language schools in the Kurdish region. A large number of the displaced are Arabs or Kurds who have been living in Arab areas for decades and many do not know how to speak Kurdish. There are Arabic schools in the KRG, but only in the main urban areas. Many of the displaced have chosen to settle in smaller towns or villages where the cost of living is lower. As a result, their children are not able to go to school. Even in the main cities, access to Arabic language schools is a problem, as there are very few of them. In Erbil, there are only two of them in the city, with two shifts to allow as many children as possible to attend classes. In Suleimaniya, there are three with three shifts each, and still they are unable to cater to the growing Arab community.</p> <p>INADEQUATE RESPONSE TO GROWING HUMANITARIAN PROBLEMS</p> <p>No Iraqi, U.S. or U.N. institution is taking the displacement crisis seriously enough to mount an effective response. In Baghdad the national Ministry of Displacement and Migration (MoDM) is reluctant to admit the level of unprecedented displacement in Iraq. The result of this lack of political will, combined with the deficiencies in Iraqi bureaucracy and the country’s generalized insecurity, has been a lack of government services to the displaced. In fact, the Iraqi Government’s refusal to declare a humanitarian crisis is leading donors to question whether their funds are really needed to assist the displaced. Many argue that since the Iraqi Government has billions of dollars of unspent funds, it should not be the international community’s role to provide additional funding.</p> <p>Kurdish authorities have provided <i>ad hoc</i> assistance. Some mayors provide the most vulnerable with some form of assistance. Elsewhere, nobody gets anything. One consistent desire of all Kurdish authorities is to build camps for internally displaced Arabs. Refugees International met with officials from all three governorates, and they all said that camps are the best solution to the large influx of displaced fleeing to the North. Many said that camps would be the most efficient way to “control” displaced Arabs while providing them with assistance. Both U.S. officials and the U.N. High Commissioner for</p>	
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A SUNNI FAMILY FLEES BAGHDAD

Hiba, her husband and five children fled from Baghdad to Shaklawa, in Erbil governorate 2 months ago. After her husband's cousins, her sister's husband and her own cousin were killed because they were Sunnis, Hiba and her husband decided to take their kids to safety.

Leaving the country was out of the question, as the family did not have proper documents or means to pay for transportation. "Getting a passport is too dangerous in Baghdad," Hiba told Refugees International. "It is impossible to go to the Ministry, so one must pay a \$700 bribe per passport. We just couldn't afford this." As they knew someone in the Kurdish region willing to vouch for them, Hiba's family moved to Shaklawa.

Her husband now works daily jobs, and thanks to their landlord's generosity, who lets them stay in his house for free, Hiba's family can survive. But things are difficult. The family hasn't been able to transfer their ration cards. The kids are not in school, as there are no Arabic language schools.

Still, Hiba thanks God everyday. "In Baghdad, the kids were not going to school because Mahdi's army [Sadr's Shia militia] would kill Sunni students in the streets. We had to ask neighbors to take care of our house because Mahdi's army would have taken it. Here at least, we are safe."



Refugees oppose camps as possible "ghettos," favoring instead the local integration of the displaced. However, more assistance would aid integration.

International non-governmental organizations, local relief agencies and religious groups are providing some assistance to the displaced. The Iraqi Red Crescent Society (IRCS) continues to function at a national level, albeit in a fragile way. In Erbil Governorate alone, it has provided some form of assistance to 8,000 families. Depending largely on volunteers, the IRCS is doing the best it can with limited resources.

Although security is not an issue in the North, all of the IRCS's stocks come from Baghdad, which makes transport dangerous and unreliable. Resources sent to the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) branches by the IRCS's central administration are insufficient to cover the needs of vulnerable displaced families. Increased assistance to the International Committee of the Red Cross and the IRCS from the U.S. and other donors could dramatically improve conditions for the displaced in Kurdish areas. Christians often do the best because churches have generous aid programs for the displaced in some areas.

So far, the U.N.'s response has been close to non-existent. After the U.S.-led invasion in 2003, the U.N. started operating on the assumption that the Iraqi challenge would be rehabilitation, reconstruction, and development. A new Iraqi Trust was supposed to finance U.N. efforts to assist Iraq's new government to rebuild the country. Similarly, most programs led by international non-governmental aid agencies have also focused more on rehabilitation or community assistance projects. Only last month did U.N. agencies officially declare Iraq a humanitarian crisis, where the emphasis must be on saving lives, not spurring development. Some U.N. agencies are reluctant to let go of the "development approach," as they would lose important budgets and face resistance from their U.S. donor.

The U.N. faces three other obstacles—a lack of resources, a lack of credibility and a lack of mobility. The U.N. Refugee Agency (UNHCR), which has primary responsibility for the displaced people in the Kurdish and southern regions only has about \$9 million to spend on them this year. "If we were

looking at responding to real needs, then even \$150 million would not be enough,” said one UNHCR official. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) is charged with assisting internally displaced people in the rest of Iraq, but the IOM is also short of funds.

Among Iraqis, the U.N. has a low reputation. Many blame it for the painful sanctions imposed on Saddam Hussein’s Iraq because of the Gulf War. Some blame the U.N. for not blocking the invasion that produced the current humanitarian problems. In fact, many see them as an adjunct to the military forces occupying their country. Finally, they don’t think the U.N. has done much to ease current security and humanitarian problems.

This Kurdish family fled from Mosul after they were threatened and their house attacked. They now live in Kalak, a small town in Erbil Governorate.

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One problem is that the U.N., which wants to play a greater humanitarian role, is not well-organized to do so in Iraq; it doesn’t even have a real humanitarian coordinator assigned to the country. Another issue is that since the bombing of the U.N. headquarters in Baghdad, the agency has operated largely out of Amman, Jordan. For security reasons U.N. officials in Baghdad stay mainly in the heavily fortified Green Zone, “and when they come out, they are escorted by the Multi-National Force,” says one non-government relief operative in Iraq. Even in the Kurdish area, where conditions are secure and travel safe, U.N. workers stay largely in their compounds. When they leave, they travel in armored vehicles, making it difficult for them to collect data and manage programs.

The humanitarian and displacement problems in and outside Iraq have reached critical levels. Given the failure of the Iraqi government to address the needs of its people, the international community must react now to protect and assist the most vulnerable in Iraq.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Refugees International recommends that:

- The U.S. government and other members of the international community acknowledge the gravity of the humanitarian situation inside Iraq, as well as its impact on the civilian population. In particular, the U.S. must see easing the burden of displacement as a key step in restoring stability to Iraq and easing tensions in the region.
- The Iraqi government, with help from the World Food Program, devise new ration card rules that allow displaced people to receive government food and fuel distributions in their new location.
- The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, which anticipates a possible increase of one million displaced people inside Iraq this year, and other U.N. agencies seek more money for the current year 2007.

- The U.S. provide more money for U.N. agencies and work aggressively and generously with local agencies, such as the Iraqi Red Crescent Society, to get more aid to vulnerable displaced people.
- The U.N. acknowledge that national and regional Iraqi government units cannot meet the needs of displaced people and design a comprehensive response involving other appropriate U.N. agencies.
- The U.N. Special Representative of the Secretary General in Iraq craft a comprehensive U.N. strategy to address humanitarian needs.
- The U.N. design an advocacy campaign aimed at the Iraqi public to explain what the humanitarian role of the U.N. is, and how it is distinct from what the Iraqi government and U.S. led Multi-National Force are trying to do.
- The U.N. adopt more flexible security procedures to allow greater mobility in safe areas in Iraq, such as the north.

A SUNNI FAMILY FLEES BASRA

Ghana, Hussam and their two kids fled Basra, afraid of being killed because they are Sunnis. Ghana's husband was told Shia militias had offered money to whoever would kill him. They saw their neighbors' two children killed because they were Sunnis, and the Imam of their mosque was killed as well by Shia militias. Ghana is unable to explain the roots of this hatred.

"Under Saddam, we lived like brothers," she told Refugees International. "I was born in Basra. Now I can't set foot in my hometown because I am Sunni." Unable to take anything with them when they left, Ghana and Hussam couldn't even sell their house because an order from a Shia cleric prevented anyone from buying anything from Sunnis. The couple took their children to Syria, but returned to Iraq a few months later because they couldn't afford the cost of living in Damascus.

They then arranged to go to the Kurdish region after a man agreed to act as their guarantor. "The road from Basra to Kurdistan was so dangerous," says Ghana. "We were terrified we would get stopped by militias." The family made it to Chamcharan in Suleimaniya Governorate where Hussam now works on a month-to-month contract as a mechanic. Unable to transfer their food ration cards, Ghana and Hussam have asked their friends to collect their food and diesel for them in Basra and either sell it or send it to them. Although Ghana would eventually like to return to Basra, Hussam swears he will never go back. "I saw what they do to Sunnis there. I will never take my kids back."



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