

## **Refugees from Iraq** **[published January 2008]**

RSC Middle East and North Africa (International Organization for Migration [IOM] Middle East) and RSC Turkey and the Middle East (International Catholic Migration Commission [ICMC] Turkey) both provide Cultural Orientation to incoming Iraqi refugees. This profile of the RSC Middle East and North Africa program includes sections on caseload, CO classes, general environment for CO attendees, and considerations for domestic resettlement agencies.

### **IOM MIDDLE EAST**

The International Organization for Migration's Middle East program is providing CO to Iraqi refugees being processed through Amman, Jordan; Damascus, Syria; and Cairo, Egypt. Of the 1,076 refugees served by the program in CY2007, 604 were Iraqis: 574 in Amman, 114 in Damascus, and 16 in Cairo. All programs served small numbers of Somali and Sudanese refugees as well. The overall caseload was 55% female.

### **Caseload**

Classes have contained a high percentage of Christian refugees as well as Muslims. There are numerous bilingual participants in each class, although fewer in Syria than in Jordan. Many of the refugees provided CO in Jordan have a high level of education. In addition, many refugees in Jordan have some savings.

### **CO Classes**

CO classes are held at IOM Amman and IOM Damascus for a maximum of 25 participants. Courses are three days in length, five hours per day, and lunch is provided. In Damascus childcare is on-site, while in Amman, arrangements are made for single parents with no childcare options to attend a one-on-one or small group session.

The Middle East curriculum was adapted from other IOM CO programs and developed around the topics of Pre-Arrival Processing, Role of the Resettlement Agency, Employment, Education, Housing, Money Management, Transportation, Health Care, Rights & Responsibilities, U.S. Laws, and Cultural Adjustment. Teaching methodology includes group work, real life case studies, and role plays.

During CO class, particular emphasis is given on early employment as a means to both self-sufficiency and community integration. Having received numerous questions on the issue, we stress that professional doctors, lawyers and teachers will not be able to practice their current professions since their licenses will not be recognized in the U.S. We do inform them that, with guidance, they can research what they need to do in order to become re-certified. We also discourage refugees from attempting to live off savings instead of seeking early employment.

During class, we often receive questions regarding family reunification with relatives still residing in Iraq. In addition, in each class, there are some refugees who express a wish to return to the Middle East to visit family within one year. We strongly encourage them to consult with immigration staff on travel document issues and do not encourage travel before adjusting status.

Other questions often heard in class include: "How will we pay for everything?," "How will we be treated as Muslims? What about as Arabs and specifically Iraqis?," and "Will we find halal food?" In addition, the Selective Service is an area of great concern in each class and refugees are very anxious that it means that they will have to serve in the military.

### **General Environment for CO Attendees**

The Iraqi refugees receiving CO in Jordan and Syria live in rented apartments rather than in refugee camps. Rentals in Amman include modern amenities, so the refugees have access to televisions and even satellite television reception, resulting in their expectation that these items and services will be available and provided in the U.S. as well. We do emphasize that these are not standard items in U.S. rental homes, however, and that they will not be provided upon their resettlement.

In Jordan, one particular stressor involves overstaying residency permits, which results in a 1.5 JD fine per day (U.S. \$2 per day). This fine is covered by UNHCR upon departure. Other stressors include working illegally and being taken to a border camp if caught. There are reports of employers taking advantage of Iraqi refugees in Jordan and not paying them for months of work.

Even though Jordan has a reputation for being a very generous host community, the strains on the country from the Iraqi refugees is a topic of interest for many Jordanians. Many in the general public blame the refugees for the dramatic increases in property values in Amman.

### **Considerations for Domestic Resettlement Agencies**

Many refugees report that they have heard that Iraqi refugees are struggling in the U.S., and there have been a number of cases that have withdrawn their applications for resettlement or not shown up for their flights. Anxiety around resettlement is very high for many (but not all) of the refugees. The refugees that were more affluent are usually more hesitant to depart.

As with other refugee groups, many Iraqi refugees may be suffering from post-traumatic stress, as a consequence of being victims of or witness to violence and having suffered the loss or disappearance of loved ones.

**If you would like to share your agency's experience of resettling Iraqis processed through Jordan, Syria or Egypt with IOM Middle East's CO program, please e-mail [COR@CAL.org](mailto:COR@CAL.org)**