



Iraqi Refugees in Jordan: Desperate and Alone

Humanitarian Needs Dire; US and International Community Must Act Now

THE WAR IN IRAQ has created the fastest growing refugee crisis in the world. Approximately two million are displaced within Iraq and another two million have fled to neighboring countries. As in any refugee crisis, the vast majority of the displaced are women and children; they are also the most vulnerable. Iraqi women and children who have escaped the war in their home country to neighboring Jordan face enormous challenges to their survival and well-being. Current estimates are that up to 750,000 refugees have fled to Jordan, a country of approximately six million people, and are putting a strain on the country's already limited resources. Many women have come to Jordan only with their children—their husbands were either killed in the war or remain in Iraq. They are not recognized as refugees by the Jordanian government and as a result, most live in the country illegally and can be deported at any time. They cannot lawfully work and have little or no source of sustainable income and are struggling to support themselves and their children. They have limited access to basic health services; treatment for any health need beyond the most fundamental costs more than the average refugee can afford. As a result, many Iraqi women and children with treatable illnesses are suffering greatly and are at risk of dying from even the most preventable maladies.

IRAQI PARENTS were despairing that they could not send their children to school because Iraqis are barred from attending public schools and private schools are far too expensive.* Iraqi refugee women and girls are increasingly vulnerable to exploitation: Because

My daughter and I were kidnapped while we were shopping. We stayed there for 19 days...I was nine months pregnant at the time...We were tortured very much...They raped me. I had just one week to deliver the baby...but she was dead inside me.

men are most likely to be deported, women sometimes go outside the home to work, but have no protection from abuse. The situation is ripe for women and girls to be forced into prostitution and sex work as families struggle to survive. Some Iraqis we met said this is already happening. Refugees reported that domestic violence is a growing problem as a result of the incredibly stressful, frightening and

desperate situation the families are in. Nearly every refugee we talked to knew someone who died in Iraq and witnessed horrific violence. Some were tortured and targeted for rape in Iraq. We heard that many refugees have experienced trauma, creating a need for psychological and social support.

THE FOLLOWING RECOMMENDATIONS are the result of the Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children's June 6-23 field mission to Amman, Jordan. The Women's Commission interviewed UN officials, local nongovernmental organization (NGO) and international NGO staff and talked to Iraqi families and individual Iraqi refugees about their plight.



Iraqi refugee mother and child in Amman, Jordan
(Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children – June 2007)

* On July 27, UNHCR and UNICEF launched a \$129 million joint appeal to ensure 155,000 uprooted Iraqi children in Jordan, Syria and other host countries can resume their education in the 2007-08 school year. The day before, the government of Jordan had announced that it would give all Iraqi children in the country access to Jordanian schools.

Our recommendations:

1. **US HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE.** The U.S. government should develop a comprehensive assistance strategy for Iraqi refugees that reflects the magnitude of the refugee crisis, the great strain on refugee receiving countries, especially Syria and Jordan, and the special responsibility the U.S. has to these refugees. This should include strong support of UNHCR, UNICEF and other international, national and local organizations assisting Iraqi refugees, as well as a robust and efficient U.S. resettlement program.
2. **ASSISTANCE FROM THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY.** To ensure continued protection and assistance for Iraqi refugees and provide much-needed support to Jordan and Syria in particular, which have received a huge influx of refugees, the international community should provide generous humanitarian assistance for displaced Iraqis and their host communities, and offer resettlement opportunities to the most vulnerable. The U.S. should take the lead in encouraging other countries to help, particularly the countries of the European Union and the Arab League.
3. **PROTECTION AND NON-REFOULEMENT.** Countries of first asylum, especially Syria and Jordan, should keep their borders open to Iraqis fleeing the conflict. Refugees should not be forcibly sent back to Iraq. Refugee receiving countries should work closely with local, national and international organizations to provide the necessary services to the displaced.

*“We need a doctor, we need to get medicine. We need help. No one is helping us.”
- 45-year-old Iraqi refugee widow*

4. **HEALTH CARE.** Much greater assistance is needed to meet the health needs of Iraqi refugees. Health programming needs to be scaled up considerably, with particular attention and resources given to chronic disease. Humanitarian organizations should work closely with Ministries of Health to make these services available and accessible.
5. **PRIORITY REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH SERVICES.** Refugee women and girls need immediate access to priority reproductive health services, including prevention of sexual violence and care for survivors, services for women with obstetric emergencies and the prevention of HIV transmission. The Ministry of Health and the international community should therefore ensure that these reproductive health services are readily available to Iraqi refugees and that they meet the guidelines on reproductive health care in emergencies that have become the standard for humanitarian response.
6. **PSYCHOSOCIAL CARE.** In view of the trauma and abuse that many refugee families have suffered, it is vital that refugees have access to quality psychosocial services and that health staff are appropriately trained to provide these services. Community education on gender-based violence, particularly rape and domestic violence, should be established.
7. **EDUCATION.** Educating Iraqi refugee children and youth must also be a top funding priority. Children are missing many months or, in some cases, several years of education and the strain on the children and their families is tremendous. Adolescents in particular are highly vulnerable to negative influences the longer they are denied schooling.
8. **LIVELIHOODS.** Countries of first asylum should also allow refugees to work so that they can provide for their families and reduce their vulnerability to exploitation and abuse. To ease the concerns this might raise among the local population, the international community should work with host governments to develop and implement economic programs that will benefit both the refugees and the local communities.

“I studied to the 8th grade. I would like to go to school, but I don’t have any papers so I can’t. I stay in this room all day and clean it. I have no friends. I don’t leave.”

– 14-year-old Iraqi refugee girl

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