



From Words to Action: The Iraqi Displacement Crisis and the Role of the European Union.

Currently, more than 4.4 million Iraqis have fled their homes and need help now. This crisis of displaced Iraqis remains a massive and lasting challenge. The political, social and financial impact on Iraq and the region will be felt for many years to come. Iraq's neighbours have shown themselves ready to allow persons displaced by the conflict to enter and remain on their territories. According to UNHCR statistics Jordan has hosted an estimated 500,000 refugees from Iraq, whilst Syria has accepted an estimated 1.4 million Iraqis. However, the large number of refugees hosted by the two countries has placed significant strains on these country's resources – Jordan decided to tighten border regulations in mid-2007 to stem the flow of refugees, while Syria followed suit in September 2007. By way of contrast, of the estimated 1.4 million Iraqis who have fled Iraq since the 2003 invasion, only some 60,000 have submitted asylum claims within the European Union (EU).

The EU and its Member States cannot ignore one of the world's most significant displacement crises. They have a responsibility to provide substantial and meaningful assistance to Iraqis inside Iraq, Iraqi refugees and asylum-seekers and to host countries in the region. **This does not require massive new financial resources. The EU institutions and the Member States must acknowledge the scale and urgency of this crisis and adequately allocate resources for the region. They must also ensure that access and protection is offered to Iraqis who apply for asylum in the EU and to make available an increased number of resettlement places for refugees from Iraq.**

Share the Responsibility:

1. An individual Iraqi's chance of receiving protection in the EU varies widely depending on the country of application. The EU and its Member States must ensure access to protection and fair asylum procedures to all Iraqi asylum seekers arriving in EU Member States and end the current protection lottery by:
 - Adopting a common, protection-oriented approach toward asylum seekers, based on a broad interpretation of subsidiary protection and *non-refoulement* obligations so as to ensure that effective protection is granted to Iraqi refugees wherever they apply in the EU;
 - Ensuring that no one is forcibly returned to Iraq. Any return of failed asylum-seekers should only take place when the situation in the whole of Iraq has stabilized and there are adequate conditions for a stable and durable peace. Member States are strongly urged to postpone the introduction of measures that are intended to promote voluntary return;
 - Maintaining or granting a legal status to Iraqi asylum seekers whose asylum claims have been rejected with entitlements to housing, healthcare, employment and education, in order to prevent them from becoming destitute.
2. Europe accepts roughly 5% of the worldwide resettlement cases. Only 7 EU Member States offer resettlement to refugees in need of durable solutions, totalling 4,400 places a year. Resettlement of a portion of the refugee population eases the strain on the countries of first asylum and thus provides refugees with further protection options and an additional durable solution. Because of the resettlement possibilities throughout Europe, EU Member States are urged to:
 - Engage and expand resettlement programmes to accommodate greatly increased numbers of Iraqis as stated in the European Parliament's Resolution of 12 July 2007.

- Offer resettlement to the most vulnerable refugees - as determined by UNHCR - including women at risk, children and adolescents, survivors of violence and torture, elderly and refugees with urgent medical needs.

Respond to the Humanitarian Crisis:

3. Within Iraq. As a result of the conflict, the UN estimates that six million people are now in need of emergency assistance inside Iraq. Humanitarian aid and particularly access to psycho-social care and trauma related services should be increased. Due to the volatile situation and the lack of capacity, the Iraqi government is yet to take full stock of this crisis and to address it adequately. Meanwhile, international humanitarian assistance is urgently needed. This necessary assistance will not transform the plight of Iraqis, but will help alleviate the current suffering and may facilitate the later implementation of reconstruction and development measures in due course. As the EU policy is to contribute towards a safe, stable and democratic Iraq, to achieve these goals, the EU must urgently.

- Redirect some of the funds from the *International Reconstruction Fund Facility for Iraq* (IRFFI) towards urgent humanitarian needs, to be implemented through humanitarian agencies (UN, Red Cross / Red Crescent and NGOs) within Iraq; and
- Allocate significant funds for emergency response and rehabilitation as well as mobilize ECHO Funds to its implementing partners to relieve the plight of internally displaced persons inside Iraq.

4. Refugees in the region. The willingness of Syria and Jordan to host more than 2 million refugees from Iraq is commendable and stands in contrast to the approach of other neighbouring countries, such as Saudi Arabia. However, most Iraqis are in an irregular situation in their host countries as they have not been officially recognized as refugees and have overstayed their visas. Without the protection of a legal status, these Iraqis live in the fear of being deported and have limited access to essential services. Impoverished Iraqis have been barely coping, surviving through savings, remittances from relatives abroad and work where it is available, usually illegally. All of these resources are very fragile. Additionally, the host countries' health, education, and other services and infrastructure have been heavily impacted by this large influx of refugees from Iraq. **Greater attention and resources are needed to respond to the daily needs of refugees from Iraq. Therefore, the EU and its Member States ought to:**

- Acknowledge the generosity of neighbouring host countries (Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey, and Egypt) by providing technical and financial assistance through bilateral programmes that directly assist refugees from Iraq.
- Provide sufficient funds to the United Nations Implementing Agencies, international and non-governmental organizations that are assisting refugees from Iraq and their host communities.
- Encourage and work with host countries and the Government of Iraq to uphold the principle of non-refoulement, including non-rejection at borders. Assure that refugees have access to basic services, such as education, healthcare, adequate shelter and employment.

