

Refugees from Iraq

[published January 2008]

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

ICMC TURKEY

In FY2007, ICMC Turkey provided CO in Turkey for an Iraqi caseload of 396 cases of 830 individuals, of whom 719 are adults and 111 are minors who received youth-specific orientation. ICMC Turkey continues to provide CO to Iraqi refugees in FY2008. ICMC Turkey also provides CO to non-Iraqi refugees in Turkey as well as to refugees in a number of other countries: for information on ICMC Turkey's non-Iraqi caseload and regional activities, [click here](#).

Iraqi Caseload

ICMC Turkey's current Iraqi caseload is composed primarily of members of the Chaldean and Assyrian minority groups (we have recently started processing some other cases, both Shi'a and Sunni, but do not have a broad base of information on these groups yet. They appear to be much more highly educated than the Chaldean and Assyrian minorities, however). We generally see large families with many children, often intergenerational family compositions including members from birth to their 80s as people travel with elderly relatives. Singles are usually related to other cases. The families are not usually highly educated, although there is a small group that worked as translators or in other functions with the multinational forces or international entities in Iraq. This group already speaks English and may have higher levels of education. If the families have resided in Turkey for some duration, the women will usually have work experience. The newly arrived refugees are more resistant to the idea of the women becoming employed, so we place a greater emphasis on employment and money management issues for those refugees. The Iraqi children that we have seen thus far from this community have resided for a long time in Turkey, so they generally speak Turkish as well as or better than their mother tongue.

CO Classes

ICMC Turkey provides three-day, 21-hour, CO courses for Iraqi refugees in Turkey. CO classes are open to those who are of age 14 and above, and when possible, ICMC provides Children's and Youth CO to younger Iraqi refugees as well.

ICMC Turkey tries to limit class size to 20 people. In Istanbul, we train on-site in our three classrooms, with an additional room for the Children's and Youth CO, as well as a room for nursing mothers and small children. There are small kitchenettes so that tea and coffee breaks can be provided for the students. Classrooms have chairs and small tables that four to five people can use for group work. A whiteboard and a projector with screen are provided in each classroom and rooms are air-conditioned in summer and heated in winter. In Kayseri, a small city in central Turkey, we provide training in a language school, but so far, this training facility has only been used for the Iranian refugee population. All Iraqis come to Istanbul. (Refugees in Turkey are spread throughout 26 different satellite towns and some must travel up to 20 hours to arrive in Istanbul).

Usually we have an intensive adult-centered three-day experiential learning model accompanied by a visually projected curriculum as well as realia. Refugees are encouraged to work in groups to solve problems, and they complete group activities related to the upcoming challenges they will face when they arrive to the United States. The team takes a lot of time to identify and then address the fears and

expectations of each class, with the aim that by day three, the refugees will have a more realistic perspective on the upcoming transition and what will be required from them in order for them to be successful. Overall, the main emphasis is realistic expectations and self-sufficiency, related to all themes, including employment, housing, health system and costs, education requirements, access and opportunities, legal rights and responsibilities, cultural integration. All activities serve to highlight the need for people to take personal initiative to address upcoming challenges and help to identify the skills they already possess that are going to aid them in their adjustment. Trainers modify materials and methods as appropriate given classroom composition. For example, with a group of singles, the early childhood education and parenting sections are omitted as they will not be relevant.

We also provide Children and Youth CO both in Istanbul and in Kayseri, as well as in external training sites. This was developed over the years to mirror the adult curriculum but to target those topics that were most relevant to the younger children or preteens, giving them a safe place to ask questions and discuss issues that would be overlooked in an adult classroom. In addition, we have a room for nursing the youngest children and for them to nap or play. We provide videos and simple toys, and we have someone who is able to speak the children's language available to take care of the children during class time.

* While courses are ordinarily 21 hours, ICMC did develop and deliver an abbreviated ten-hour program in response to the time constraints involved with processing and moving a substantially- increased Iraqi caseload during the 3rd and 4th quarters of FY2007.

General Environment for CO Attendees

According to UNHCR, as of July 31, 2007, approximately 41 percent of the Iraqi asylum seekers and refugees in Turkey resided in Istanbul, while the rest lived in medium-sized provincial or “satellite” cities. The Iraqi Chaldean and Assyrian communities have tended to gravitate towards Istanbul. However, now all refugees seeking resettlement must report to one of 26 satellite cities that the Turkish authorities assign to them and must register with the local authorities in order to be permitted to be resettled out of Turkey. In principle, refugees can only leave their assigned cities with permission from the police. Due to inability to find work in the satellite cities however, some refugees do leave to work in the informal economy of Istanbul.

Considerations for Domestic Resettlement Agencies

Most of the Iraqi refugees provided CO by ICMC Turkey have had little exposure to modern Western life and amenities, and their English language skills vary greatly. However, Iraqis are optimistic and willing to learn about the United States, including the language, work values and educational opportunities—especially for their children.

Iraqi refugees are generally in good physical health, yet caseworkers have observed that the group of Iraqis with whom ICMC Turkey is currently working, especially recent arrivals to Turkey, are suffering from high levels of trauma and other psychological disorders. Caseworkers should also be alert to any signs of domestic abuse.

There are no areas of conflict between groups that the resettlement workers should be aware of and a caseworker of a particular ethnic background would not pose a problem for these Iraqis. However, if a caseworker or interpreter’s mother tongue is not Arabic, they may face difficulties in understanding the Iraqi-Arabic accent: the dialect is a little different and not very easy to understand for all. Children may be able to communicate better in Turkish if they have been in Turkey for a length of time.

If you would like to share your agency’s experience of resettling Iraqis processed through Turkey with ICMC Turkey’s CO program, please e-mail COR@CAL.org