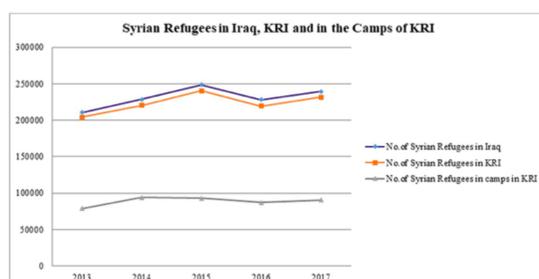


# Refugees in Iraq: from worse to bad

William Kh. Warda and Hamed Shihad Almaffraji  
Hammurabi Human Rights Organization



## Abstract

Between 2011-2018, 95% of the refugees that entered Iraq were fleeing the civil war in Syria. Unfortunately, they entered Iraq while it was also facing many of its own challenges, including endemic corruption, mismanagement, poor security and a deteriorating economy. In addition, Iraq is still rebuilding from the sectarian violence that peaked from 2005 to 2008, while also confronting ISIS violence and destruction that began in 2014. ISIS occupied a third of Iraqi territory, took control of critical resources and used excessive violence to destroy communities, rape and kill thousands of Iraqi men, women and children. Minority communities such as Yazidis, Christians and others witnessed and fell victim to the most extreme ISIS barbarism. As a result, the harsh conditions that refugees would find in most circumstances were exacerbated by flight to a receiving state facing so many existential challenges. Iraq was simply not prepared to properly receive nor provide for those who sought protection.

## References

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## Contact

William Kh. Warda (HHRO)  
info@hhro.org  
<http://www.hhro.org>

## Introduction

Iraq was one of many countries to accept refugees fleeing the Syrian Civil War, taking in approximately 250,000 refugees from 2011 to 2018. During the same period, due to ISIS attacks millions of people were internally displaced.

## Main Results

- Iraq lacks a clear legal framework to protect refugees, and does not have integrated policies and plans in place to ensure their safety and protection. Iraq has not ratified the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol, as well as other international instruments.
- Iraq lacks the infrastructure to receive refugees as well as clear standards for refugee reception. Questions of housing, education, physical and psychological health, participation, citizenship and naturalization have not been adequately answered by the Iraqi governments.
- Iraq's response to the influx of Syrian refugees was fragmented and motivated by ethnic or local political agendas, as demonstrated for example by the Kurdish Regional Government's treatment of Syrian Kurd refugees. On the other hand, local authorities in the province of Anbar have historically dealt with Arab refugees crossing the border from Syria, and have family and clan ties to many refugee groups.
- Most refugees in Iraq have lost hope of ever returning home, but generally do not consider Iraq as their final destination. Rather, they see Iraq as primarily a transit zone into a safer and more stable third country, where they can build a long-term future for their families.
- There are additional structural and demographic challenges: internal displacement inside Iraq exceeded 5 million persons after ISIS violence.
- An insufficient legal framework, inadequate protections, lack of security and a fragile economy are huge obstacles for refugees to find a safe and decent life in Iraq.

## Methods and Material

HHRO researchers conducted 29 interviews with Syrian refugees and 29 interviews with internally displaced persons, including Christian and Yazidi internally displaced persons in Baghdad, Najaf, Karbala, Babel, and cities in the Iraqi Kurdish Region. The research team conducted various interviews with decision-makers and opinion leaders, as well as representatives of local and international organizations.



The refugees and IDP children practicing dancing in a Service Hub established by the RESPOND project

## Lessons Learned

Syrian refugees were received when Iraq was facing a number of critical challenges reaching from ISIS to a bankrupted treasury due to the decline in oil prices. This has affected responses at all levels.

Iraq is no place to be a new, final home for refugees because of its longstanding problematic security and economic environment. However, Iraq represents at least a temporary option for asylum seekers and serves as a transit zone to other countries which can provide better assistance and protection.

Iraq's ability to host refugee populations is directly linked to the further development and progress on the rebuilding of the Iraqi state.