

Lifeline for Iraqi Refugees



FACT SHEET A History of Refugee Protection

A History of Refugee Protection

The United States has a long history of refugee protection, but in 2007 it resettled only 2,631 of the more than 2.2 million Iraqis who have fled violence and persecution in their country. The U.S. has the capacity to bring hundreds of thousands to safety, as it has done many times in the past.

Overall Picture

- More than 2.6 million refugees have been resettled by the U.S. since 1975.¹
- 41,300 refugees from more than 60 nations were resettled by the U.S. in 2006.²
- 98,000 refugees on average have been resettled annually by the U.S., with a high of 207,000 refugees in 1980 and a low of 27,110 refugees in 2002.³

Europe

- 400,000 displaced persons, including approximately 96,000 Jewish refugees, were resettled by the U.S. between 1945 and 1952,⁴ the years following the end of World War II.

Former Soviet Union

- 209,000 Soviet Union refugees were resettled by the U.S. under the Refugee Relief Act of 1953.⁵
- 493,040 Soviet refugees were resettled by the U.S. between 1983 and 2004.⁶

Cuba

- 200,000 Cuban refugees were resettled by the U.S. between 1959 and 1962.⁷
- More than 55,000 Cuban refugees have been resettled by the U.S. since 1975.⁸ These include former political prisoners, persecuted religious minorities, human rights activists, forced labor conscripts, and those discriminated against or harmed based on their political or religious beliefs.

Vietnam

- 131,000 Vietnamese refugees arrived in the U.S. between May 1 and December 20, 1975.⁹ The first arrivals were ex-military and government officials, who had worked for the U.S. and feared reprisals, and their families. Others included former political prisoners and those escaping the fall of the Saigon government, the 1979 Chinese invasion of Vietnam and communist re-education camps.
- More than 900,000 Vietnamese refugees have been resettled by the U.S. since 1975.¹⁰

Somalia

- More than 58,000 Somali refugees have been resettled by the U.S. since 1980.¹¹ Somalia has faced a protracted crisis of civil war and failed governance.

Ethiopia

- More than 39,000 Ethiopian refugees have been resettled by the U.S. since 1980.¹² Many fled to escape the bloody border conflict with Eritrea, widespread famine, and political repression and violence under former Ethiopian military leader Mengistu Haile Mariam.

Former Yugoslavia

- 143,000 Bosnian refugees were resettled by the U.S. between 1993 and 2003.¹³
- 14,000 Kosovar refugees were evacuated and resettled by the U.S. in 1999.¹⁴ During the conflict in former Yugoslavia, tens of thousands were arbitrarily arrested, tortured, raped, murdered, and otherwise deprived of their human rights. More than 1.5 million persons were forcibly expelled from their homes.¹⁵

¹ Department of State (<http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/82929.pdf>)

² Department of State (<http://www.wrapsnet.org/Reports/Archives/tabid/215/language/en-US/Default.aspx>)

³ Refugee Council USA (<http://www.rcusa.org/index.php?page=history>)

⁴ U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum (<http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/article.php?ModuleId=10005139>)

⁵ UNHCR (<http://www.usaforunhcr.org/usaforunhcr/dynamic.cfm?ID=66>)

⁶ Migration Policy Institute (<http://www.migrationinformation.org/feature/display.cfm?ID=585>)

⁷ Library of Congress (<http://memory.loc.gov/learn/features/immig/cuban5.html>)

⁸ Department of State (<http://www.state.gov/g/prm/rls/fs/44172.htm>)

⁹ International Rescue Committee (<http://www.theirc.org/news/refugee-scandal0614.html>)

¹⁰ Department of State (<http://www.state.gov/g/prm/rls/fs/44170.htm>)

¹¹ Department of State (<http://www.state.gov/g/prm/rls/fs/2006/66017.htm>)

¹² Id.

¹³ Department of State (http://www.state.gov/www/global/prm/fv2000_budget.pdf)

¹⁴ Id.

¹⁵ NATO (<http://www.nato.int/kosovo/history.htm>)