

Who are the Iraqis?

The war in Iraq has caused North Americans to take notice of the Iraqi people either through the media or in a more personal and possibly difficult way. Since the start of the war in 2003, over 15% of all Iraqis have fled their homes. Many of those have applied for refugee status and are now living in neighboring countries in the Middle East or in North America. Iraq is located in the Middle East, bordered by Syria, Iran, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey. Today the Iraqi population is comprised of Shiite (14.5 million) and Sunni Muslims (6 million), various denominations of Christians, and other minority religions. It consists of 70% to 80% Arab and the other 15% to 20% Kurdish. The population of Iraq is about 31 million, and 37,700 live in the U.S. and Canada.

All Iraqi refugees go through a very thorough application process with the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) before they are approved for refugee status. The definition of a refugee is someone who has been forced to flee their country because of a well-founded fear of persecution (religious, ethnic, or political), and it is not safe for them to return home. Only 1% of all refugees who apply for refugee status are granted it, and less than half of those are settled in the United States through one of 10 refugee resettlement agencies.



**Population in North America:
37,700**

**Languages spoken by Iraqis:
Arabic, Kurdish, and English**

**Top 6 locations with highest
population of Iraqis in North
America:**

1. Michigan
2. California
3. Illinois
4. Texas
5. New York
6. Pennsylvania

What is their heritage?

The Iraqi people are descendents of many ancient cultures that thrived in Mesopotamia. They have a rich history and are known for their artists and poets. In the center of Mesopotamia, Sumer (now Baghdad) is where scientists believe the first wheel was invented. These people also had an early writing system, agricultural innovations, and the arch to account for just a few of the early inventions found in Iraq.

“The largest sect of Iraqis are Muslim, either Sunni or Shiite.”

What are their beliefs?

You will find four main religious sects of Iraqis living in North America. The largest sect of Iraqis are Muslim, either Sunni or Shiite. The second largest religious sect found in the states are cultural Christians, meaning these Iraqis were born into a Christian family, Assyrian, Chaldean, or Syriac Orthodox. Sabians are a unique sect of Iraqis who follow John the Baptist and have their own holy book. There is also a small and very private sect of Iraqis called Yazidis (devil worshipers) that are known among the Kurds. All four groups believe there is one God and know about Jesus, but do not yet understand the truth of why He came.

How can we pray?

- Pray for laborers to enter the harvest of Iraqis in North America.
- Pray that God’s passion to be worshiped by Iraqis will be fulfilled.
- Pray and ask God how you can reach Iraqi refugees in your community.
- Pray for God to raise up the Church to build relationships with these Iraqi refugees and to share the hope of Jesus with them in culturally relevant ways.

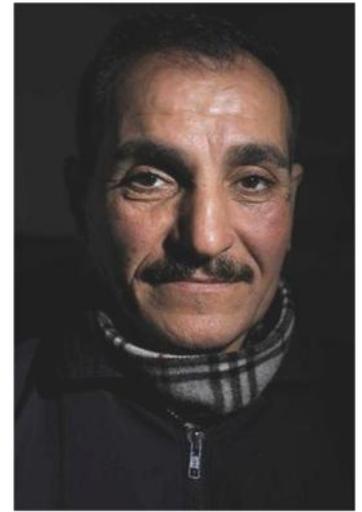
What can my church do?

Endvisioning — beginning with the end in mind

- Locate where Iraqis live within the community and discover what their needs are as a starting point to reaching them for Christ.
- After learning where these Iraqis live, find ways to have your life intersect with theirs so a relationship/friendship can be built.

Prayer — focusing on the people as well as calling out workers to the harvest

- Pray that God will bring one of these individuals into your life that you can share His love with.
- Pray that God will move in the hearts of Iraqi American people and that He would draw Himself to them.
- Prayerwalk the community where Iraqi Americans live.



Networking for Evangelism — identifying relationships

- Have your church contact your local refugee resettlement agency and find out how you can help a local refugee family. Be ready to commit and enter into a deep friendship for many years to come with the Iraqi family.
- Begin teaching English conversation to the Iraqi refugee community and share truth as you talk with them.
- Every year around Father's Day in June, many Iraqis gather in Dearborn, Michigan, a suburb of Detroit, for an Arab American Festival. Send a volunteer team from your church to love and serve Iraqi families during the festival.
- Provide English and cultural classes for Iraqis who wish to learn.
- Offer assistance to Iraqi families who need to start setting up their new lives in America, such as getting a driver's license, going to the grocery store, enrolling their children into a local school, and so forth.

Starting Small Groups — that can become churches

- Offer a small group study on the differences between Islam and Christianity.
- Offer a small group where stories are told through chronological Bible storying.
- Have a small group established for Iraqi Christians to participate in as a cell group.

Leadership Training — identifying and equipping

- Contact NAMB and the IMB and invite a missionary to share about Islam with your group.
- Train Iraqi Christians on leadership within their community, church, or their small Bible group that has been established.
- Train Iraqi Christians to go out, share the love of Christ among their community/family, and lead them to Christ.

Scripture

- After you build a good, solid relationship with an Iraqi, offer to give an Arabic Bible to them. It's not easy to have a Bible accepted by a stranger. It's good to have a strong relationship built first.
- Find ways to use chronological Bible storying to share the love of Christ with an Iraqi.

Communication

- Start a radio station or broadcast in Arabic where Bible stories are told and the gospel is shared.

What are their needs?

Most Iraqis arriving in the States since 2007 are refugees with many needs. Some Iraqi arrivals speak no English, and others are very educated doctors and university professors in Iraq who have had to start all over in the U.S. where their education is not recognized. Iraqi refugees have little cultural understanding of the West, except what they have been exposed to through movies and rumors, which are not very accurate. English classes, work opportunities, housing, transportation, and children's schooling are just a few of Iraqi refugee's greatest needs upon arrival, but the number one need is your time and friendship. Many Iraqis have experienced some type of trauma from war, such as the death of a loved one or a kidnapping, and so they are in need of love and healing. Iraqis are charismatic, kind, and hospitable and will welcome your help with open arms and a grateful heart. Unfortunately, most refugees never have an American friend, and many are never invited into an American home.

What is keeping the gospel from them?



www.peoplegroups.info

If you cannot locate this people group in your community, find them online at www.peoplegroups.info, a site sponsored by the North American Mission Board, SBC.

Fear seems to be the biggest reason average church members do not make friends with Iraqi refugees. There are many misconceptions about who Muslims are and what they believe. Most Americans think all Muslims are terrorists, when in reality only less than 5% of the Muslims in the world could be described as radical. American Christians are afraid to make friends with Muslims from Iraq and thus, Iraqis often don't meet people who follow Jesus and live their faith. Muslims have many misconceptions about Christians too, as their only window to the Western world is their TV. They commonly think that all Americans are Christian, and Christian is defined by Hollywood, so they believe that American Christians have no good morals or values. In addition to our fear, our lack of prayer and passion to get equipped to bring the gospel to Iraqis also hinders the gospel from reaching them.

Information may be updated by writing peoplegroups@namb.net.

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