

## **Iraqi Cultural Overview**

### **Who are they?**

Iraqis are comprised of several different ethnic groups, the largest being Iraqi Arabs (75-80%, this document will focus on this group). Their main language is Arabic and 97% of the population is Muslim. Islam is influential in all components of personal and public life. Iraqi society is patriarchal, but women often are highly valued as well. They place a great value on the extended family and on education, and prefer to have children in the home until they reach school age. Families tend to operate in a community-based culture and generally prefer in person communication.

### **Why have they fled?**

Iraqi refugees have fled in the last thirty years due to war or persecution. Instead of fleeing to refugee camps, most Iraqi refugees flee to urban areas. The first Iraqi refugees fled during the Persian-Gulf War (1990-1991), and more fled during the Iraq War (2003-2011). Then in 2013 to present, ISIS took advantage of the tensions in the region to take over parts of northern Iraq. Due to these conflicts, there are 230,000 Iraqi refugees in the region who have fled to other countries in the Middle East such as Jordan, Egypt and Lebanon. An additional 3.3 million Internally Displaced People (IDPs) remain in Iraq. Some refugees have come to the United States, and it is estimated that about 2,000 Iraqis live in Minnesota. One unique thing about Iraqi refugees is that many are educated professionals who speak English. While they are educated, their certifications may not be valid in the United States which can be frustrating to many. Also, refugees coming to the U.S. are more likely to be Christians than the general Iraqi population.

### **Main dos and don'ts with Iraqi/Arabic people**

#### **Do**

- Display your relationship with Christ. Pray before your meals. Religion is not a taboo topic.
- Say “Salaam Waa Naama” instead of “Salaam Alekum”. This phrase means Grace and Peace be with you. They will see that you are a Christian by how you greet them, while also being excited about you speaking Arabic.
- Dress modestly: no shorts, tank tops, etc.
- Seek to build trust.
- Receive and extend hospitality. Recognize that this displays how much you value them.
- Recognize that they will mostly value relationships above time.

#### **Don't**

- Offer the family food with pork: hot dogs, gelatin, marshmallows, etc.
- Share personal information about the family with others or post personal pictures on social media.
- Show romantic affection in public, even if you are married.
- Be in a private place with people of opposite gender. Limit interactions with other gender.

### Some good Arabic words/phrases to know

English	Arabic
Hello!	marHaba
Good morning!	SabaaH al- khayr!
Good evening!	masaa' al- khayr!
Goodbye.	maxa s- salaama.
See you soon.	'araaka qariiban.
Where do you live?	'ayna taqTun? / 'ayna taxiish?
I had a wonderful time.	Laqad 'amDaytu waqtan jamiilan.
My name is _____.	'ismii _____.
What is your name?	ma 'ismuk?
How are you?	kayfa Haaluka? (m.) kayfa Haaluki? (f.)
Fine/Very well	bikhayr/jayyid jiddan
Thank you.	shukran
It's nice to meet you.	saxiidun bi liqaa'ika
This is my friend.	haadha Sadiiqi.

### Resources

- UNHCR Iraq Situation: <http://reporting.unhcr.org/node/8419>
- Iraq – International Rescue Committee (IRC): <https://www.rescue.org/country/iraq#what-caused-the-current-crisis-in-iraq>
- BRYCS – Refugee Families from Iraq: <http://www.brycs.org/documents/upload/iraqi-cultural-backgroundunder.pdf>
- Iraqi Refugee Backgrounder: <http://www.culturalorientation.net/content/download/1340/7833/version/4/file/Refugees+fro m+Iraq.pdf>