

# Iraqi Perspectives on Iraqis Perceptions of Resettlement

*During a recent ORR-funded workshop on orientation skills held in Boston, two Iraqi participants (one who came to the U.S. via Jordan, the other via Turkey) were kind enough to offer their thoughts on some issues regarding Iraqi perceptions of resettlement. While these comments reflect the perspectives of only two individuals and cannot be expected to pertain to all Iraqis, they might be useful as you consider the needs of your Iraqi clients.*

## Images of the U.S.:

Under sanctions, people in Iraq did not have access to satellite communications, and available images of life in the U.S. were limited. People had only seen the “bright side” of life in the U.S., rather than a full picture of life here.

## Housing:

- Many of the Iraqis resettling here had lived in better situations in Iraq.
  - In Iraq, people build and furnish their homes “for a lifetime,” with no intention of ever moving. (For those in Baghdad, there was a particular disincentive to move, since services in other areas of the country were of comparatively poor quality.)
  - Also, the Iraqis being resettled usually owned a house (rather than living in an apartment), so they did not have to pay rent, and are unfamiliar with the practice.
- ⇒ As such, moving to a very mobile society can be confusing and intimidating for Iraqis.

## Education and Employment:

- In Iraq, higher education is free, and many people are highly educated. However, it is very difficult to change professional fields there. (“In Iraq, if you’re a teacher, you’re going to die as a teacher.”)
- The U.S. is seen as “the land of opportunity.”
- But Iraqi arrivals to the U.S. can be frustrated because their certifications do not apply or are not recognized, and their experience is not respected.
- In addition, due to the war, Iraqi professionals are surprised and disappointed not to be helped by the U.S. government with regard to their employment qualifications.
- [Paraphrased] “They have big hopes, but are running up against a concrete wall.” It’s hard to adapt to the laws and rules.

## Sense of Community

From their experiences under the old system of government in Iraq, Iraqis may feel a lack of trust for each other or be afraid of each other. So they may lack the “spirit of sharing information.”

## Long-term Perspective

Some Iraqis consider their time in the U.S. as transitional. They may plan to go back to Iraq in the future, but want to do the best they can with what they are provided in the U.S.

## Considerations

Aside from providing services such as assistance with job searches and with managing financial issues:

- Strive to connect Iraqis to social networks, to create communities
- Create opportunities for religious leaders or gatherings for Iraqi communities to address their issues
- Help Iraqis adjust to the system and laws, through more frequent home visits and for longer than eight months

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