

United States Refugee Admissions Program

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BACKGROUND

Since 1998, IOM has had a cooperative agreement with the U.S. Department of State's Bureau for Populations, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) to prepare eligible refugee cases for consideration for resettlement to the United States through the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) in the Middle East. This agreement is implemented through a Regional Overseas Processing Entity (OPE) based in Amman, and OPE Remote Sites in Cairo and Damascus. An OPE team implementing the USRAP in Baghdad is also currently based in Amman.

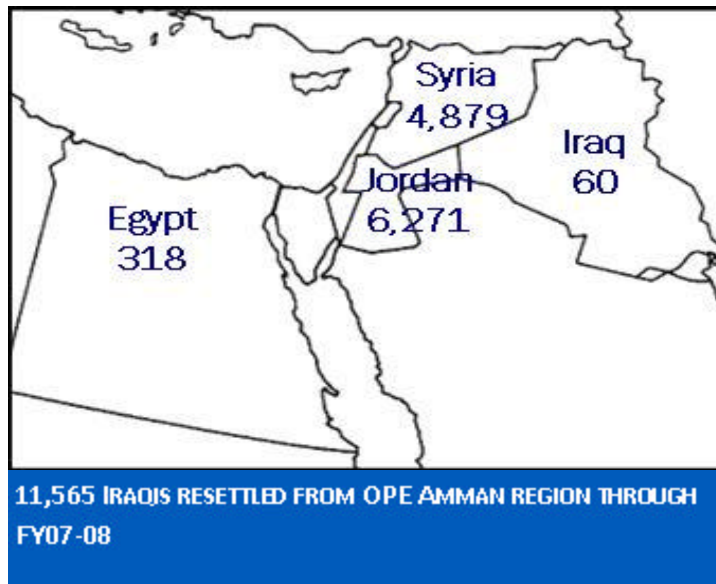
In March 2009, the epicentre of the OPE successfully transitioned from Cairo to Amman. This transition entailed a significant growth for local and international staff in Amman, as well as a major transfer of resources from Cairo to Amman. The OPE was designated as a Regional OPE in 2003. Its area of responsibility extends to twelve countries in the region, namely: Egypt, Jordan, Syria, Iraq, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Qatar, Libya, Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia.

All OPE Amman offices receive refugee referrals from UNHCR, while the Cairo, Amman, and Baghdad offices also receive applications from the U.S. Embassy and directly from refugees through the Refugee Resettlement Program for Iraqis with U.S. Affiliations. The OPE's function is to gather and record the necessary information through a series of interviews, for immigration officers from U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) to adjudicate cases and determine whether or not applicants meet the criteria for admissions to the United States as refugees.

The OPE program in the Middle East significantly expanded over the last two and a half years, as a part of U.S. efforts to resettle vulnerable Iraqi refugees. Considered to be vulnerable are also those who were affiliated with the U.S. government as employees in Iraq such as translators, direct-hire employees of the U.S. Government, contractors, media workers, and others. Many of these current and former Iraqi employees and their families face persecution in Iraq due to their association with the United States. In late January of 2008, Senator Kennedy's legislation known as the "Refugee Crisis in Iraq Act" was passed. The legislation expanded the number of Iraqis who could access resettlement. For OPE Amman, this required continued growth on all fronts to meet this expansion. This legislation also called for resettlement activities to take place inside Iraq, leading OPE Amman to manage USRAP activities in the International Zone in Baghdad since April 2008.

In U.S. Fiscal Year 2006, OPE Amman received referrals for only 86 individuals of Iraqi nationality. The number of Iraqi applications processed by OPE Amman increased every following year, OPE Amman staff having interviewed a total of 5,249 Iraqi individuals in U.S. Fiscal Year 2007, 18,487 in U.S. Fiscal Year 2008.

The number of Iraqi refugees who resettled to the U.S. from the OPE Amman region in U.S. Fiscal Year 2007 amounted to 844 individuals. OPE Amman was tasked to ensure the departure of 10,000 Iraqis from Egypt, Jordan, Syria, and Iraq in U.S. Fiscal Year 2008. However,



a total of 13,823 Iraqi refugees were admitted to the U.S. during this past fiscal year, 10,721 of whom were resettled from the OPE Amman region during U.S. Fiscal Year 2008.

Such a quick expansion of the program over the two years was made possible by the assistance of a number of temporary IOM staff from around the world, and a sharp increase in OPE staff in Cairo, Amman, and Damascus, increasing from only 14 staff in October 2006, to 139 staff in September 2008, and to even more in 2009.

The U.S. Government has pledged to admit at least 17,000 Iraqi refugees over the course of U.S. Fiscal Year 2009. The departure of the majority of these 17,000 Iraqi nationals will be expected to originate from the OPE Amman region. This sharp increase in expected Iraqi departures from the region to the U.S. will entail a continued expansion of operations in the region, most especially in Damascus and Baghdad.

For more information about IOM's United States Refugee Admissions Program in Egypt, please contact Ms. Mervat Abou El Rous - mabouelrous@iom.int (updated: May 2009)