



**ETHNIC COUNCIL
OF SHEPPARTON AND DISTRICT Inc.**

Reg. No. A6321

Iraqi Community Profile



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Country Background

Location

Iraq is in the Middle East and is bordered by Jordan, Turkey, Iran and Kuwait and Saudi Arabia to the south. Iraq has a narrow section of coastline measuring 58 km (35 miles) on the northern Persian Gulf. The capital city, Baghdad, is in the center-east of the country.

Iraq borders Syria to the northwest, Turkey to the north, Iran to the east, Jordan to the west, Saudi Arabia to the south and southwest, and Kuwait to the south.

Two major rivers, the Tigris and Euphrates, run through the center of Iraq, flowing from northwest to southeast. These provide Iraq with agriculturally capable land and contrast with the steppe and desert landscape that covers most of Western Asia.



Iraq's modern borders were mostly demarcated in 1920 by the League of Nations when the Ottoman Empire was divided by the Treaty of Sèvres. Iraq was placed under the authority of the United Kingdom as the British Mandate of Mesopotamia. A monarchy was established in 1921 and the Kingdom of Iraq gained independence from Britain in 1932. In 1958, the monarchy was overthrown and the Republic of Iraq was created. Iraq was controlled by the Ba'ath Party (Iraqi-led faction) from 1968 until 2003. After an invasion led by American and British forces, the Ba'ath Party was removed from power and multi-party parliamentary elections were held. The American presence in Iraq ended in 2011. Iraq is home to two of the world's holiest places among Shias; Najaf and Karbala.

Population

In year 2013 estimate of the total Iraqi population was 33.42 million. Iraq's population was estimated at only 2 million in 1878. Iraq's population as announced by the government has reached 35 million amid a post-war population boom.

According to the Central Intelligence Agency, Arabs form 75%–80% of the population. Minorities include a 15%–20% of Kurds, and Turkoman, Assyrian, or other make up 5% of the population. Around 20,000 Marsh Arabs live in southern Iraq. The Iraqi population includes a community of around 30,000 Circassians, 20,000 Armenians, and a community of 2,500 Chechens. In southern Iraq there is a community of Iraqis of African descent, a legacy of the slavery practiced in the Islamic Caliphate beginning before the Zanj Rebellion of the 9th century, and Basra's role as a key port

History

Iraq was carved out of the Ottoman Empire by the French and the English. Under British rule it became a state in 1920. Britain imposed a monarchy on the new state and defined the territorial limits without regard for the politics of different ethnic and religious groups in the country, particularly the Kurds. During British occupation the Shi-ites and Kurds fought for independence but the rebellion was quashed with the appointment of a new British Civil Commissioner Sir Percy Cox in 1920. Cox managed to quell the rebellion, yet was also responsible for implementing the fateful policy of close cooperation with Iraq's Sunni minority.

In the Mandate period and beyond, the British supported the traditional, Sunni leadership (such as the tribal shaykhs) over the growing, urban-based nationalist movement. The Land Settlement Act gave the tribal shaykhs the right to register the communal tribal lands in their own name. The Tribal Disputes Regulations gave them judiciary rights, whereas the Peasants' Rights and Duties Act of 1933 severely reduced the tenants', forbidding them to leave the land unless all their debts to the landlord had been settled. The British resorted to military force when their interests were threatened, as in the 1941 Rashīd `Alī al-Gaylānī coup.

The Monarchy

Emir Faisal, leader of the Arab revolt against the Ottoman sultan was proclaimed King in 1921 although nominal independence was only achieved in 1932 when the British mandate officially ended.

In 1927, huge oil fields were discovered near Kirkuk and brought economic improvement. Following the King's death from an accident his four year old son succeeded him to the throne (1939 - 1958) with his uncle appointed as regent.

Republic of Iraq

The royal family was overthrown and killed in 1958 and Iraq declared a republic. Brigadier Abd al-Karīm Qāsīm headed the government until his assassination in 1963. The Ba'ath Party took power under the leadership of General Ahmed Hasan al-Bakr (prime minister) and Colonel Abdul Salam Arif (president). Nine months later `Abd as-Salam Muhammad `Arif led a successful coup against the Ba'ath government. However, following the Six Day War of 1967, the Ba'ath Party felt strong enough to retake power (17 July 1968). Ahmad Hasan Al-Bakr became president and chairman of the Revolutionary Command Council (RCC).

In 1967-1968 Iraqi communists launched an insurgency in southern Iraq. In addition Barzānī and the Kurds who had begun a rebellion in 1961 were still causing problems in 1969. The secretary-general of the Ba`th party, Saddam Hussein, was given responsibility to find a solution. It was clear that it was impossible to defeat the Kurds by military means and in 1970 a political agreement was reached between the rebels and the Iraqi government. Iraq's economy recovered sharply after the 1968 revolution.

Economic development to 1980

Perhaps the greatest assets of the Ba'th regime were the ambitious plans for reconstruction and development laid down by its leaders. The struggle for power during 1958-68 had left little time for constructive work, and the Ba'th Party sought not only to transform the economic system from free enterprise to collectivism but also to assert the country's economic independence. The immediate objectives were to increase production and to raise the standard of living, but the ultimate objective was

to establish a socialist society in which all citizens would enjoy the benefits of progress and prosperity.

The five-year economic plans of 1965-70 and 1971-75 concentrated on raising the level of production in both agriculture and industry and aimed at reducing dependence on oil revenues as the primary source for development. But agriculture lagged far behind target, and industrial development was slow. In the third five-year plan (1976-80), greater emphasis on agricultural production was noticeable, and industrial production slowed.

The nationalisation of the oil industry was considered by the Ba'th leaders to be their greatest achievement. Between 1969 and 1972 several agreements with foreign powers--the Soviet Union and others--were concluded to provide the Iraq National Oil Company (INOC) with the capital and technical skills to exploit the oil fields. In 1972 the Iraq Petroleum Company (IPC) was nationalised (with compensation).

Several laws were implemented to support agrarian reform. They provided for the distribution to peasants of lands in excess of a certain maximum ownership but after ten years less than half had been distributed. Next, peasants were relieved from payments for their land and compensation for landholders was abolished. A third law aimed at improving peasant conditions, increasing agricultural production, and correlating development in rural and urban areas. The results were disappointing, however, because of the difficulty of persuading the peasants to stay on their farms and their inability to improve the quality of agricultural production.

The Ba'th regime also completed work on irrigation projects that had already been under way and began new projects in areas where water was likely to be scarce in the summer. In the five-year plan of 1976-80, funds were allocated to complete dams on the Euphrates, Tigris, Diyala, and Upper Zab rivers and the lake known as al-Tharthar (in northern Iraq).

Recognising that a rapid transition to full socialism was neither possible nor in the country's best interest, the Ba'th provided for a private, though relatively small, sector for private investors, and a third, mixed sector was created in which private and public enterprises could cooperate.

Iraq under Saddam Hussein

In July 1979, Saddam Hussein, assumed the offices of both President and Chairman of the Revolutionary Command although he was the de facto ruler of Iraq for some years before he formally came to power.

Territorial disputes with Iran led to an inconclusive and costly eight-year war, the Iran - Iraq War (1980 – 1988), which devastated the economy. Iraq declared victory in 1988 but actually achieved a weary return to the status quo. The war left Iraq with the largest military establishment in the Persian Gulf region but with huge debts and an ongoing rebellion by Kurdish elements in the northern mountains. The government suppressed the rebellion by using weapons on civilian targets. Between 1986 and 1989, Hussein's Al-Anfal Campaign killed an estimated 100,000 to 200,000 Kurdish civilians. A mass chemical weapons attack on the city of Halabja in March 1988 during the Iran - Iraq War is usually attributed to Saddam's regime, although responsibility for the attack is a matter of some dispute. Nevertheless, the Iraqi government continued to be supported by a broad international community including most of the West, the Soviet Union, and the People's Republic of China, which continued sending arms shipments to combat Iran. Indeed, shipments from the US (though always a minority) increased after this date, and the UK awarded £400 million in trade credits to Iraq ten days after condemning the massacre.

In the late 1970s, Iraq purchased a French nuclear reactor. Construction began in 1979. In 1981, before the reactor could be completed, it was, in violation of International Laws, destroyed by the Israeli Air Force greatly setting back Iraq's nuclear weapons program. Diplomatic relations with the United States had resumed in 1984.

On July 20, 1987, the UN Security Council unanimously passed Resolution 598, urging Iraq and Iran to accept a cease-fire, withdraw their forces to internationally recognized boundaries, and settle their frontier disputes by negotiations held under the auspices of the United Nations. Iraq agreed to abide by the terms of the resolution if Iran would also do so. It was not until 1988 that both Iraq and Iran finally agreed to settle their differences on the basis of the 1975 agreement and carry out the terms of UN Resolution 598.

Invasion of Kuwait and the Gulf War

A long-standing territorial dispute led to the invasion of Kuwait in 1990. Iraq accused Kuwait of violating the Iraqi border to secure oil resources, and demanded that its debt repayments should be waived. Direct negotiations began in July 1990, but they soon failed. Iraq responded to the sanctions by annexing Kuwait as the "19th Province" of Iraq on 8 August. Over the ensuing months, the United Nations Security Council passed a series of resolutions that condemned the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait and implemented total mandatory economic sanctions against Iraq.

When Saddam Hussein failed to comply with this demand, the Persian Gulf War (Operation "Desert Storm") ensued on January 17, 1991 with allied troops of 28 countries, led by the US launching an aerial bombardment on Baghdad. The war, which proved disastrous for Iraq, lasted only six weeks. One hundred and forty-thousand tons of munitions had showered down on the country, the equivalent of seven Hiroshima bombs. Probably as many as 100,000 Iraqi soldiers and tens of thousands of civilians were killed.

A cease-fire was announced by the US on 28 February 1991. Iraq agreed to UN terms for a permanent cease-fire in April 1991, and strict conditions were imposed, demanding the disclosure and destruction of all stockpiles of weapons.

Iraq under UN Sanction

On 6 August 1990, after the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, the U.N. Security Council adopted Resolution 661 which imposed economic sanctions on Iraq, providing for a full trade embargo, excluding medical supplies, food and other items of humanitarian necessity, these to be determined by the Security Council sanctions committee. After the end of the Gulf War and after Iraq's withdrawal from Kuwait, the sanctions were linked to removal of weapons of mass destruction by Resolution 687.

The United States, citing a need to prevent the genocide of the Marsh Arabs in southern Iraq and the Kurds to the north, declared "air exclusion zones" north of the 36th parallel and south of the 32nd parallel. The Clinton administration judged an alleged assassination attempt on former President George H. W. Bush by Iraqi secret agents to be worthy of a military response on 27 June 1993. The Iraqi Intelligence

Headquarters in Baghdad was targeted by Tomahawk cruise missiles. During the time of the UN sanctions, internal and external opposition to the Ba'ath government was weak and divided. In May 1995, Saddam sacked his half-brother, Wathban, as Interior Minister and in July demoted his Defense Minister, Ali Hassan al-Majid. These personnel changes were the result of the growth in power of Saddām Hussein's two sons, Uday Hussein and Qusay Hussein, who were given effective vice-presidential authority in May 1995.

During the latter part of the 1990s the UN considered relaxing the sanctions imposed because of the hardships suffered by ordinary Iraqis. According to UN estimates, between 500,000 and 1.2 million children died during the years of the sanctions. The United States used its veto in the UN Security Council to block the proposal to lift the sanctions because of the continued failure of Iraq to verify disarmament. However, an oil for food program was established in 1996 to ease the effects of sanctions.

Iraqi cooperation with UN weapons inspection teams was questioned on several occasions during the 1990s. In due course, US President Bill Clinton authorised air strikes on government targets and military facilities. Air strikes against military facilities and alleged WMD sites continued into 2002.

2003 invasion of Iraq

After the terrorist attacks by the group formed by the multi-millionaire Saudi Osama bin Laden on New York and Washington in the United States in 2001, American foreign policy began to call for the removal of the Ba'ath government in Iraq. Conservative think-tanks in Washington had for years been urging regime change in Baghdad, but until the Iraq Liberation Act of 1998, official US policy was to simply keep Iraq complying with UN sanctions. In addition, unofficial US policies, including a CIA backed coup attempt, were aimed at removing Saddam Hussein from power. After the terrorist attacks of September 11th, regime change became official policy. The alleged links between Saddam Hussein and Al-Qaeda were later found non-existent by the September 11 commission.

The US urged the United Nations to take military action against Iraq. A team of U.N. inspectors, led by Swedish diplomat Hans Blix was admitted, into the country; their final report stated that Iraqis capability in producing "weapons of mass destruction" was not significantly different from 1992 when the country dismantled the bulk of their

remaining arsenals under terms of the ceasefire agreement with U.N. forces, but did not completely rule out the possibility that Saddam still had Weapons of Mass Destruction. The United States and the United Kingdom charged that Iraq was hiding Weapons and opposed the team's requests for more time to further investigate the matter. Resolution 1441 was passed unanimously by the UN Security Council on November 8, 2002, offering Iraq "a final opportunity to comply with its disarmament obligations" that had been set out in several previous UN resolutions, threatening "serious consequences" if the obligations were not fulfilled. The UN Security Council did not issue a resolution authorizing the use of force against Iraq.

In March 2003 the United States and the United Kingdom, with military aid from other nations, invaded Iraq. After the American and British invasion, Iraq was occupied by Coalition forces. And in 2003, the UN Security Council unanimously approved a resolution lifting all economic sanctions against Iraq. As the country struggled to rebuild after three wars and a decade of sanctions, it was racked by violence between a growing Iraqi insurgency and occupation forces. Saddam Hussein, who vanished in April, was captured on 13 December 2003. The initial US interim civil administrators were appointed with the last being John Negroponte who left Iraq in 2005.

Terrorism emerged as a threat to Iraq's people not long after the invasion of 2003. Al Qaeda now has a presence in the country, in the form of several terrorist groups formerly led by Abu Musab Al Zarqawi. Many foreign fighters and former Ba'ath Party officials have also joined the insurgency, which is mainly aimed at attacking American forces and Iraqis who work with them. The most dangerous insurgent area is the Sunni Triangle, a mostly Sunni-Muslim area just north of Baghdad.

Coalition withdrawal

In 2004 the conservative government of Spain was voted out of office. The War had been deeply unpopular and the incoming Socialist government followed through on its manifesto commitment to withdraw troops from Iraq. Following on the heels of this, several other nations that once formed the Coalition of the willing began to reconsider their role. Soon after the decisions to withdraw in the spring of 2004, a number of smaller forces left, or were planning to leave as well. Other nations (such as Australia, Denmark and Poland) continued their commitment in Iraq. On 28 June 2004, the occupation was formally ended by the U.S.-led coalition, which transferred power to an interim Iraqi government led by Prime Minister Iyad Allawi. The Iraqi government

has officially requested the assistance of (at least) American troops until further notice. On January 30, 2005 the transitional parliamentary elections took place.

By the end of 2006 violence continued as the new Iraqi Government struggled to extend complete security within Iraq. U.S. forces, as well as lesser amounts of "coalition" forces remained in Iraq. An increasingly disturbing trend had arisen - sectarian fighting. As the country attempted to move from occupation by western forces to a new entity within the Middle East, a new phase of conflict seemed to have erupted within Iraq. This new phase of conflict was waged predominately along religious sectarian lines.

Reported acts of violence conducted by an uneasy tapestry of Sunni militants steadily increased by the end of 2006. These attacks become predominately aimed at Iraqi civilians rather than coalition forces. Violence was conducted by Sunni militants that include the Iraq Insurgency, which has been fighting since the initial U.S. invasion of 2003. Also, criminal elements within Iraq's society seemed to perpetuate violence for their own means and ambitions. Iraqi nationalist and Ba'athist elements (part of the insurgency) remained committed to expelling U.S. forces and also seemed to attack Shia populations, presumably, due to the Shia's threat to the Ba'athist aspirations. Further, Islamic Jihadist - of which Al Qaeda in Iraq is a member - continued to use terror and extreme acts of violence against civilian populations to progress their religious and political agenda(s). The aims of these attacks were not completely clear, but it was argued in 2006/7 that these attacks were aimed at fomenting civil conflict within Iraq to destroy the legitimacy of the newly created Iraqi government (which many of its Sunni critics saw as illegitimate and a product of the U.S. government) and create an unsustainable position for the U.S. forces within Iraq.

The militias, it appeared in late 2006, had the capability to act outside the scope of government. As a result these powerful militias, it seemed as of late 2006, were leading reprisal acts of violence against the Sunni minority. A cycle of violence thus ensued whereby Sunni insurgent or terrorist attacks followed with Shia reprisals - often in the form of Shi'ite death squads that sought out and killed Sunnis. Many commentators on the Iraq War began, by the end of 2006, to refer to this violent escalation as a civil war.

Disputes in the Kurdish north have continued with the Kurdish leadership threatening to declare independence when it suits them. The dispute exposes a widening rift

between Arabs and Kurds, the second great threat to Iraq's survival as a state after the growing sectarian conflict between Arab Sunnis and Shi'ites.

On December 30, 2006, Saddam Hussein was hanged. Some of his closest associates were also executed. Ali Hassan al-Majid (aka Chemical Ali) was executed in 2010 for his role in the Halabja poison gas attack in 1988.

There have since been many attacks on Iraqi minorities such as the Yezidis, Mandaeans, Assyrians and others. A U.S. troop surge was enacted to deal with increased violence; in September 2007, General Petraeus stated that the surge's goals were being met. Violence in Iraq began to decline from the summer of 2007. Iraq also suffered a cholera outbreak in 2007.

Crime and violence initially spiked in the months following the US withdrawal from cities. Despite the initial increase in violence, in November 2009, Iraqi Interior Ministry officials reported that the civilian death toll in Iraq fell to its lowest level since the 2003 invasion.

U.S. troops continued to work with Iraqi forces after the pullout.

The Status of Forces Agreement stated that U.S. troops would leave the country on December 31, 2011. On the morning of December 18, the final contingent of U.S. troops to be withdrawn ceremonially exited over the border to Kuwait, though the U.S. still maintains two bases and approximately 4,000 troops in the country.

The Iraqi National Movement, reportedly representing the majority of Iraqi Sunnis, boycotted Parliament for several weeks in late 2011 and early 2012, claiming that the Shiite-dominated government was striving to sideline Sunnis. In January 2012, Vice President Tariq al-Hashimi, a Sunni, fled to the semi-autonomous Kurdish region after the government accused him of running a sectarian death squad; in February, a panel of Iraqi judges concluded that "death squads commanded by Mr. Hashimi carried out 150 attacks over six years against religious pilgrims, security officers and political foes".

Insurgent forces continue to be active.

In February 2011 the Arab Spring protests spread to Iraq; however, the initial protests had largely ended by the end of 2011. In December 2012, a new series of protests began, largely driven by Sunni Arabs who feel marginalized by Iraq's Shia government.

Sectarian violence continued in the first half of 2013— at least 56 people died in April

when a Sunni protest in Hawija was interrupted by a government-supported helicopter raid and a series of violent incidents occurred in May. On May 20, 2013, at least 95 people died in a wave of car bomb attacks that was preceded by a car bombing on May 15 that led to 33 deaths; also, on May 18, 76 people were killed in the Sunni areas of Baghdad. Some experts have stated that Iraq could return to the brutal sectarian conflict of 2006.

During 2013 Sunni militant groups stepped up attacks targeting the Iraq's Shia population in an attempt to undermine confidence in the Nouri al-Maliki-led government.

In 2014 Sunni insurgents belonging to the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) terrorist group seized control of large swathes of land including several major Iraqi cities, like Tikrit, Fallujah and Mosul creating hundreds of thousands of internally displaced persons amid reports of atrocities by ISIL fighters.

After an inconclusive election in April 2014, Nouri al-Maliki served as caretaker-Prime-Minister.

On September 9, 2014, Haider al-Abadi had formed a new government and became the new prime minister. Intermittent conflict between Sunni, Shiite and Kurdish factions has led to increasing debate about the splitting of Iraq into three autonomous regions, including Kurdistan in the northeast, a Sunnistan in the west and a Shiastan in the southeast.*

Ethnicity, language and religion

Ethnicity

There are a number of ethnic groups in Iraq. Approximately 77% are Arab, 19% Kurdish, and the remaining 6% either Turkomen, Assyrian or Armenian.

Language

Arabic is the majority language, Kurdish is spoken by approximately 15–20% of the population, South Azeri (called Turkmen locally), Neo-Aramaic and others by 5%. Other smaller minority languages include Mandaic Shabaki, Armenian, and Persian. Arabic, Kurdish, Persian, and South Azeri are written with versions of the Arabic script, the Neo-Aramaic languages in the Syriac script and Armenian is written in the

Armenian script.

Prior to the invasion in 2003, Arabic was the sole official language. Since the new Constitution of Iraq approved in June 2004, both Arabic and Kurdish are official languages, while Assyrian Neo-Aramaic and South Azeri (referred to as respectively "Syriac" and "Turkmen" in the constitution) are recognized regional languages. In addition, any region or province may declare other languages official if a majority of the population approves in a general referendum.

Religion

In Iraqi 97% of the people are Muslims. Islam is a religion and a total way of life. It prescribes order for individuals, societies and governments and codifies law, family relationships, business matters, etiquette, dress, food, hygiene and much more. The *ummah*, or community of believers, is unified across national boundaries by its conscious acceptance of the oneness of God and its dedication to the teachings of Islam. There is no human hierarchy that intervenes between the individual and God; in the eyes of Islam, all people are equal.

The *Qur'an*, the holy book of Islam, is the Word of God as revealed to the Prophet Muhammad in the Arabic language. It is the final revelation and Muhammad is the final Prophet. For 14 centuries the *Holy Qur'an* has illuminated the lives of Muslims with its eloquent message, shaping their everyday lives, anchoring them to a unique system of law and inspiring them by its guiding principles. The *Sunnah* (teachings and sayings of the Prophet Muhammad) complements the *Holy Qur'an* as it embodies his meticulously documented teachings that were preserved by his companions in a body of writings called the *Hadith*.

The *Holy Qur'an* and the *Sunnah* provide the framework for *Shari'ah*, the sacred law of Islam, which governs all aspects of the public and private, social and economic, religious and political life of every Muslim.

Family Values

Family

The institution of the family plays a very important part in Muslim society. The concept of family includes the immediate and extended family. The traditional form of this is three or four generations of a patrilineal family, consisting of man, wife (or wives) and unmarried children, as well as their married sons and families. This importance is reflected in the many Islamic laws aimed at supporting and protecting the family institution.

Relationships and marriage

Girls are expected to remain chaste before marriage. Marriage within the kinship group is preferred because the property remains within the family and because the young bride has the security of living among people with whom she is raised.

Marriage in Islam is not a sacrament but a bond or contract between two partners. The contract requires that these two adults are consenting to marry each other. No woman should be married unless she consents. Islam permits polygamy.

Marriage is intended for an entire lifetime. However dissolution is permitted if it fails to serve its objectives and has irretrievably broken down. A husband can divorce his wife by an act of solemn repudiation. The repudiation must be made three times to be effective and lawful. The law also demands that after the first and second repudiation the husband and wife deal with their dispute and try to resolve domestic harmony through arbitration by near relatives or others of their mutual choice. After the third repudiation the divorce becomes final. There are some differences between the ways Sunnis and Shi'ites divorce.

Role of men and women

The primary responsibility of a woman is the home and family. She will have certain social responsibilities, rights and duties but the family is the main focus. Traditionally the responsibility for earning a living rests with the husband. Most men consult their wives before making decisions.

Children and childcare

The Koran (Holy Book) gives clear guidance in the upbringing of children. The birth and care of children is very important and customs relating to the care and protection vary according to different Ethnic groups and whether the family is from a rural or

urban life-style. Most families have four or five children.

Children are considered to owe their parents a great debt for bringing them up. Children on the whole are very obedient to their parents. The Koran instructs children (first God, second Mum and Dad) to be kind to their parents and sanctions parental authority. The father has absolute authority over the children but it is recognised that the mother provides a young child with affection and tenderness.

Babies are breastfed usually on demand until the second year of age. Contraception is generally used. As soon as the child learns to walk and talk the amount of care diminishes. In males, circumcision in accordance with religious beliefs is usually performed seven days after the birth. After a child is three the mother becomes less important as her authority is limited but husband and wife do discuss the management of children together. Parents are generally more permissive with male children than female but expect them to do better at school. When the boy is six to seven years of age, he leaves his mother's care and is treated as an adult spending his time in the company of males and attending mosque with the men. The eldest son will grow up to be his mother's support in old age or widowhood and will also assume the support of her divorced or widowed sister.

The elderly

The elderly have a special place in Muslim society. They are considered knowledgeable and are consulted about bringing up children.

Hospitality

Muslim families are very hospitable and feel ashamed if friends arrive with food, or drink. Flowers and chocolates are permitted. If a visitor calls the host must offer a drink and after five minutes must also offer fresh fruit, sweets, nuts or seeds.

Pre-arrival experiences

Before 1979 few Iraqis choose to migrate. In 1980 the first wave of deportations to Iran began. The next wave occurred after the Gulf War uprising and many were held in refugee camps from 1991 - 1994. Iraqi refugees began to arrive in Australia after fleeing the regime during the period 1994 - 1999.

The majority of refugees came between 1994 and 1996, from refugee camps in Saudi Arabia, under United Nations humanitarian program. Some came by applying through Australian Embassies in Iran and Syria. There were no refugee camps Iran or Syria thus people were living freely within these countries. Since 1999 refugees started coming to Australia in boats mainly from Iran and Syria.

Throughout the past 30 years, there have been a growing number of refugees fleeing Iraq and settling throughout the world, peaking recently with the latest Iraq War. The Iran-Iraq War from 1980 to 1988, the 1990 Iraqi Invasion of Kuwait, the first Gulf War and subsequent conflicts all generated hundreds of thousands if not millions of refugees. Iran also provided asylum for 1,400,000 Iraqi refugees who had been uprooted as a result of the Persian Gulf War (1990–91). The United Nations estimates that nearly 2.2 million Iraqis have fled the country since 2003, with nearly 100,000 fleeing to Syria and Jordan each month between 2003 and 2006

Iraqi's in Australia

In 2015, it was estimated that Iraqi-born Australian population was high as 80,000. At the end of June 2011, 50 450 Iraq-born people were living in Australia, 34 per cent more than 30 June 2006. This is equivalent to 0.8 per cent of Australia's overseas-born population and 0.2 per cent of Australia's total population.

For Australia's Iraq-born migrants:

- The median age of 36.9 years was in line with the general Australian population.
- Males slightly outnumbered females—52 per cent compared with 48 per cent.

The employment outcomes of those born in Iraq are poor compared with the general population. At the time of the 2011 Census, only 30 per cent of Iraqis aged 15 years and over were working. Another 6 per cent were unemployed and 64 per cent were not in the labour force. Among those who were employed, the most common occupations were technicians and trades workers as well as professionals accounting for 19 per cent and 17 per cent of all Iraqi-born workers respectively.

The Iraqi Community in Shepparton / Cobram

Several research projects have explored the settlement of Iraqis in Shepparton including the Building Links Project (Centrelink 2002) and *Refugees and regional settlement: Balancing priorities May 2005 Brotherhood of St Laurence*. These reports and discussions with workers in the field have shaped this summary of settlement in

Shepparton.

Population

It is estimated that approximately 500 families (4000 - 4500 people) from Iraq are residing in the City of Greater Shepparton. Another 70 families (300 – 400 people) reside at Cobram about 70 kilometers to the north of Shepparton. Most Iraqis have relocated to the region from other areas within Australia to pursue work opportunities and/or to join family or friends. Others may have relocated because they prefer a small town rather than a city. In the 2005 Report by the Brotherhood of St Laurence it was revealed that some Iraqis also had chosen to move to Shepparton because of its reputation for tolerance, its cheaper cost of living, cleaner air, its multicultural population and its special services for Arabic speakers.

Education

The level of education varies amongst the Iraqi community. Many completed their study prior to coming to Australia whilst the education of many was interrupted by war.

Employment

A number of Iraqis in Shepparton are highly skilled with degrees and advanced diplomas: they included engineers, biologists, teachers, food technicians and doctors. Some had worked in their field, others who become refugees soon after graduating but have limited work experience. Some women have qualifications, for example as a microbiologist and a teacher. Some qualifications are recognised in Australia, however many still face barriers to work. Some of these barriers include a lack of local work experience and knowledge of the Australian work environment. The impact of psychological stress, concern about family in Iraq and the continued fighting there, can also impact on some of the new arrivals ability to work.

Language

English proficiency varies widely within the Iraqi community. Parents and older people are more inclined to have limited English compared to the younger people. Parents consider the maintenance of the Arabic language important for their children. There

are two schools for Arabic languages. One is held on Saturday through the Victorian School for Languages while the other is the Al-Sajad Arabic School through Al-Sajad Association on Sunday. It receives funding from the Department of Education & Training Multicultural Programs Unit

Contacts

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Issues - Shepparton

Employment

Although some women have managed to secure employment but the women feel that there are many barriers for a majority of the women. There is a concern that many of the young women are completing courses to increase their skills and knowledge but are still not to secure employment within mainstream organisations. Access to employment is a growing issue for young people

Social isolation

The Iraqi women have expressed a need to socialise outside of the home and lack opportunity to have group outings or visit places of interest. There are no specific programs to address the feelings of isolation.

Health and well-being

The Iraqi women request access to information about health and well-being and an opportunity to participate in exercise activities. Interest in single gender bathing remains high and the development of group activities would be well received. (Also Cobram)

Accommodation

The community reports that accessing affordable rental accommodation for larger families is a continuing problem. Community members mostly live in 4 bedroom housing. Their family sizes range from 3-8 members.

In the last 3-5 years, some have transitioned to buying their own houses. There is also a perception that property manager prefers not make properties available.

The challenge of applying for private rental without a rental history was described as a community problem as was the perception of discrimination and assumption by property managers that large families will cause damage to rental properties.

Language was seen as a barrier to accessing rental properties and all communities are seeking further information on rights and responsibilities in the public and private rental systems.

Language

Many in the community have limited or poor English skills with women in general being more proficient than the men. This lack of skills highlights the need for increased interpreter training, better access to English training and the need for more community resources.

The community has identified a need for increased English language training linked to day to day activities and vocational training.

Establishment of an Arabic / Islamic school is a longer term objective. There is concern in the community that many young people have limited literacy in Arabic and the older community members need additional access to English language training.

Immigration Services

Access to free / low cost immigration services is the highest community priority.

Many cannot afford the fee structure of migration agents. (Also Cobram)

Many parents are concerned that the rate of change is impacting significantly on the community resulting in a sense of loss of culture, identity, lifestyle and religion.

Young people's values are different to their parents. (Also Cobram)

Poverty

Long term unemployment, health issues and poor language skills have resulted in some Iraqis living in circumstances of poverty.

Citizenship Test

Many community members have struggled with the citizenship test due to poor language skills.

The Law

People find it very difficult going to a tribunal or court. They have limited knowledge of the process, the costs, the law and they find it is an embarrassment for their families.

There is also an ethics issue. Stress, pressure on the family, scared to go to court. Residents hold a belief that people can get fined after going to court and that there are extortionate costs associated with going to court.

Family Violence

Family Violence is fairly well understood in the Iraqi community; primarily the community would try and resolve family violence issues. Alternatively the community will turn to support agencies and only if the violence resulted in a physical assault would they involve police.

On occasion Family violence has occurred and come to the attention of Victoria Police and Child Protection although the level of incidence is well below the occurrence in the mainstream community which suggests an issue of under reporting. When these issues occur Community Leaders are the first response and other authorities will become involved if the threat increases.

The community identifies contributing factors to family violence as:

- Culture shock from adapting to a new way of life.
- Differing systems from Iraq to Australia.
- Family frustration at the loss of culture, language and tradition as younger generation assimilates to Australian culture and systems.
- Loss of parental influence.
- Lack of knowledge about supports and assistance if family violence is an issue.

All new arrival communities have expressed concern at their lack of knowledge or understanding of the Child Protection systems which they view as more favourable to their children and do not respect the rights of families. They are seeking more information on the capacity to discipline children and impose family curfews. There is concern that children who leave the family home bring shame to the family and community.

According to the Muslim faith family violence should not occur and the shame of reporting of such may relate to the under-reporting of family violence in the Iraqi community.

Racism

Racism generally it hasn't been an issue. However when events that are flared up in the media such as Sydney Siege and the ISIS conflict, members in the community

feel the burden of racism. The women feel too scared to leave their homes and wait it out until the media attention calms. Often the racism comes from teenagers driving past or groups taunting them at a shopping centre. These incidents are not reported to police or any other support agency.

Communication

The best way to communicate with the community is through their leaders and information sessions. These sessions could include Australian culture, Family Law, violence, career pathways, health, computer literacy, Centrelink, Medicare, purchasing property, consumer rights, local government, civil and criminal law and specific training courses.

Education

Parents indicate a concern that the school system does not adequately involve them in the school processes and that the schools could be more culturally appropriate and inclusive. Language is a huge barrier for parents as is literacy and parental education as they find it difficult to assist their children with studies and homework.

There is concern that young people are dropping out of school and becoming disengaged from their community.

Issues - Cobram

Isolation / Access to Information

There are few services available for the community in Cobram with most agencies with Headquarters in Shepparton offering at best an outreach service.

The community has identified a need to get appropriate information on Australian service providers, the legal system, government operations, health and food purchasing.

Mosque / Community Centre

There are occasions for community celebrations when the mosque could be used to bring the community together and promote better community relations.

Language

Many in the community have limited or poor English skills with women in general being more proficient than the men. This lack of skills highlights the need for increased interpreter training, better access to English training and the need for more community resources.

References

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Islam

www.saudiembassy.net/Country/Islam/Isl.asp

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iraq>*

Issues raised in community consultation in conjunction with GO TAFE, Victoria Police, Department of Justice & Regulation and Department Health and Human Services.