



## **Iraqi Community Profile**



**April 2010**

**Updated June 2013**

**Updated June 2015**

**Updated August 2017**

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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.

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## 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.

During 2017 Iraq population is projected to increase by 1,263,175 people and reach 39,518,029 in the beginning of 2018. The natural increase is expected to be positive, as the number of births will exceed the number of deaths by 1,138,464. If external migration will remain on the previous year level, the population will be increased by 124,711 due to the migration reasons. It means that the number of people who move into Iraq (to which they are not native) in order to settle there as permanent residents (immigrants) will prevail over the number of people who leave the country to settle permanently in another country (emigrants).<sup>1</sup>

## 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

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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

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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.

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## ***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.

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## ***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

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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

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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

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"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'athis 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.

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There have since been many attacks on Iraqi minorities such as the Yezidis, Mandeans, 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.

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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.\*

Transparency International ranks Iraq's government as the eighth-most-corrupt government in the world. Government payroll have increased from 1 million employees under Saddam Hussein to around 7 million employees in 2016. In combination with decreased oil prices, the government budget deficit is near 25% of GDP as of 2016

The **Iraqi Civil War** is an ongoing armed conflict in the Middle East. In 2014, the Iraqi insurgency escalated into a civil war with the conquest of Fallujah, Mosul, Tikrit and major areas in northern Iraq by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL, also known as ISIS). This resulted in the forced resignation of the Prime Minister, Nouri al-Maliki, airstrikes by the United States, Iran, Syria, and at least a dozen other countries, the participation of Iranian troops and military aid provided to Iraq by Russia.

Both the Iraqi armed forces, Kurdish peshmerga and various Turkmen Muslim, Assyrian Christian, Yezidi, Shabaki and Armenian Christian forces are facing the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant. Although some 35,000 Kurdish peshmerga are incorporated into the Iraqi armed forces, most peshmerga forces are operating under the command of the President of Iraqi Kurdistan in the Kurdish autonomous region of Iraq.

In the course of their Anbar campaign, ISIL militants seized at least 70% of the Anbar

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Province by June 2014, including the cities of Fallujah, Al Qaim and half of the provincial capital of Ramadi. ISIL forces also infiltrated Abu Ghraib in Baghdad Governorate.

In early June 2014, following further large-scale offensives in Iraq, ISIL seized control of Mosul, the second most populous city in Iraq, the nearby town of Tal Afar and most of the surrounding Nineveh province. ISIL also captured parts of Kirkuk and Diyala provinces and Tikrit, the administrative center of the Salahuddin Governorate, with the ultimate goal of capturing Baghdad, the Iraqi capital. ISIS was believed to have only 2,000–3,000 fighters up until the Mosul campaign, but during that campaign, it became evident that this number was a gross underestimate. There were also reports that a number of Sunni groups in Iraq that were opposed to the predominantly Shia government had joined ISIS, thus bolstering the group's numbers. However, the Kurds—who are mostly Sunnis—in the northeast of Iraq, were unwilling to be drawn into the conflict, and there were clashes in the area between ISIL and the Kurdish Peshmerga.

ISIL executed 1,700 Iraq soldiers who had surrendered in the fighting and released many images of mass executions via its Twitter feed and various websites.

In late June, ISIS militants captured two key crossings in Anbar, a day after seizing the border crossing at Al-Qaim. According to analysts, capturing these crossings could aid ISIL in transporting weapons and equipment to different battlefields. Two days later, the Syrian Air Force bombed ISIL positions in Iraq. Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki stated: "There was no coordination involved, but we welcome this action. We welcome any Syrian strike against Isis because this group targets both Iraq and Syria."

At this point, The Jerusalem Post reported that the Obama administration had requested US\$500 million from the US Congress to use in the training and arming of "moderate" Syrian rebels fighting against the Syrian government, in order to counter the growing threat posed by ISIS in Syria and Iraq.

On 29 June, ISIL announced the establishment of a new caliphate. Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi was appointed its caliph, and the group formally changed its name to the Islamic State. Four days later, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the self-proclaimed caliph of the new Islamic State, said that Muslims should unite to capture Rome in order to "own the world." He called on Muslims the world over to unite behind him as their leader.

On 24 July, ISIL blew up the Mosque and tomb of the Prophet Yunus (Jonah) in Mosul, with no reported casualties. Residents in the area said that ISIS had erased

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a piece of Iraqi heritage. Jonah's tomb was also an important holy site in the Jewish heritage as well. A few days later, ISIL also blew up the Nabi Shiyt (Prophet Seth) shrine in Mosul. Sami al-Massoudi, deputy head of the Shia endowment agency which oversees holy sites, confirmed the destruction and added that ISIS had taken artifacts from the shrine to an unknown location.

In an August offensive, ISIL captured Sinjar and a number of other towns in the north of the country. Almost 200,000 civilians, mostly Yazidis, managed to flee from the fighting in Sinjar city, about 50,000 of them fled into the Sinjar Mountains, where they were trapped without food, water or medical care, facing starvation and dehydration. They had been threatened with death if they refused conversion to Islam. A UN representative said that "a humanitarian tragedy is unfolding in Sinjar." By the end of the month, ISIL massacred 5,000 Yazidi men, with killings running in the hundreds in different villages. In addition, during this latest offensive, the Islamic State advanced to within 30 km of the Iraqi Kurdish capital of Erbil in northern Iraq.

Prompted by the siege and killings of the Yazidis, on 7 August, President Obama authorized targeted airstrikes in Iraq against ISIL, along with airdrops of aid. The UK offered the US assistance with surveillance and refuelling, and planned humanitarian airdrops to Iraqi refugees. The US asserted that the systematic destruction of the Yazidi people by the Islamic State was genocide. The Arab League also accused the Islamic State of committing crimes against humanity.

On 13 August, U.S. airstrikes and Kurdish forces broke the ISIL siege of Mount Sinjar. Also, five days later, Kurdish Peshmerga ground troops, with the help of Iraqi Special Forces and the US air campaign, overran ISIL militants and reclaimed the Mosul Dam.

On 31 August, the United States, France, United Kingdom and Australia began humanitarian aid drops, like food, water and medical supplies, to help prevent a potential massacre against the Shi'a Turkmen minority in Amirli. The US also carried out air strikes on ISIS positions around and near Amirli. Iraqi officials stated that they had reached Amirli and broken the siege and that the military was fighting to clear the areas around the town. This is known to be the first major turning point against the ISIL in Iraq.

In September, the United States sent an additional 250 US troops to protect American personnel, while the first engagement of the British military against IS targets took place when a British Panavia Tornado jet dropped a Paveway IV bomb on "a heavy weapon position" operated by ISIS in northwest Iraq at the end of the month. In

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addition, Australia offered 200 Special Forces to the Kurds and 600 Australian troops landed in the UAE. The following month, Australia authorized its Special Forces troops to go to Iraq as part of the anti-ISIS coalition that day, as well as authorizing airstrikes.

Mid-October, ISIL forces captured the city of Hit, after the 300-strong Iraqi Army garrison abandoned and set afire its local base and supplies and about 180,000 civilians (including refugees of the previous Anbar offensive) fled the area. Later that month, Operation Ashura is launched by Iraqi forces and Iranian-backed Shia militias, scoring a major victory and retaking the strategic town of Jurf al-Sakhar near Baghdad, and securing the way for millions of Shia pilgrims who were going to Karbala and Najaf On the Day of Ashura. Kurdish forces, meanwhile, recaptured Zumar.

On 21 October, ISIL seized terrain north of the Sinjar Mountains, thus cutting the area's escape route to Kurdish areas. The Yazidi militias then withdrew from there into the mountains, where the number of Yazidi civilian refugees was estimated at 2,000–7,000. The mountains had once again been partially besieged by ISIL.

In mid-November, Iraqi forces retook control of most part of the strategic city Baiji from the Islamic State and breaks the siege of the nearby oil refinery. However, by the following month, ISIL recaptured Baiji and reestablished the siege of the refinery.

On 17 December, Peshmerga forces, backed by 50 U.S.-led coalition airstrikes on ISIL positions, launched an offensive to liberate Sinjar and to break the partial ISIL siege of the Sinjar Mountains. In less than two days, the siege was broken. After ISIL forces retreated, Kurdish fighters were initially faced with clearing out mines around the area but quickly opened a land corridor to those mountains, enabling Yazidis to be evacuated. The operation left 100 ISIL fighters dead.

Late on 21 December, Syrian Kurdish YPG fighters south of the mountain range reached Peshmerga lines, thus linking their two fronts.<sup>1</sup> The next day, the YPG broke through ISIL lines, thus opening a corridor from Syria to the town of Sinjar. By the evening, the Peshmerga took control of much of Sinjar.

In late January, Iraqi forces recaptured the entire province of Diyala from the Islamic State. Also, beginning of the Mosul Offensive in which Peshmerga forces captured large amount of territory surrounding Mosul.

On 2 March, Second Battle of Tikrit began and after more than a month of hard fighting, government troops and pro-Iranian Shiite militias overcame ISIL fighters and

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took Tikrit. This success was off-set in late May, by ISIL's capture of the provincial capital of Ramadi in Anbar province.

On 17 July, a suicide bomber detonated a car bomb in a crowded marketplace in the city of Khan Bani Saad during Eid al-Fitr celebrations, killing 120–130 people and injuring 130 more. Twenty more people were reported missing since the bombing.

On 13 August, a suicide bomber detonated a truck bomb in a crowded marketplace in Sadr City, Baghdad, killing at least 75 people and injuring 212 more.

On 27 August, a suicide bomber assassinated General Abdel Rahman Abu Ragheef, deputy commander of operations in the province of Anbar, and Brigadier Safeen Abdel Majeed, a divisional commander.

ISIL forces lost Sinjar on November 13 to Kurdish forces.

On December 16–17, ISIL forces mounted a major offensive north-east of Mosul against Kurdish position but were repelled.

Starting December 22, the Iraqi Army began a campaign to recapture Ramadi.

On December 28, Iraq declared Ramadi liberated from ISIL forces and under the control of the Iraqi government.

Iraqi forces regained control of Hit and Ar-Rutbah in offensive operations in 2016 and then Fallujah as well in the Third Battle of Fallujah ending in June 2016.

On 16 October 2016, Battle of Mosul (2016-17) began.

- The Iraqi Army, with the help of Popular Mobilization Forces, launched the Western Nineveh offensive (2017).
- Iraqi Army forces capture Mosul on the 10th of July.
- The Iraqi Army launched the Tal Afar offensive (2017) on the 20th of August.
- The battle of Tal Afar ends on the 31th of August with a major Iraqi Army victory.

Nearly 19,000 civilians were killed in Iraq in ISIL-linked violence between January 2014 and October 2015. ISIL executed up to 1,700 Shia Iraqi Air Force cadets from Camp Speicher near Tikrit on 12 June 2014. The genocide of Yazidis by ISIL has led to the expulsion, flight and effective exile of the Yazidi people from their ancestral lands in northern Iraq.

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According to Newsweek, Amnesty International claimed that "Iraqi government forces and paramilitary militias have tortured, arbitrarily detained, forcibly disappeared and executed thousands of civilians who have fled the rule of the Islamic State militant group". The report, titled 'Punished for Daesh's crimes', alleges that thousands of Sunni men and boys have been forcibly disappeared by Iraqi government forces and militias



The current military situation, June 11, 2017:  
Controlled by Iraqi government  
Controlled by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL)  
Controlled by Iraqi Kurds

## 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.

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## 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.

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## 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.

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## **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.

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## 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.

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## The Iraqi Community in Shepparton

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,

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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**

#### **Shepparton**

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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

### **Health and well-being, 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.

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)

In broad terms the community like the people and environment, town, river, lake etc. and have a feeling of belonging through celebration of events, citizenship, cultural activity, festivals and food.

A café catering to community would be good.

Community is concerned that some agencies do not have a good awareness of issues important for the community including faith and culture.

### **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.

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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.

Poor English skills are seen as a serious barrier to participating in a range of activity including study and employment.

Interpreter services could be improved and not all interpreters have the same accent or dialect as community.

Concerns around privacy of information if local interpreters used.

## **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.

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## **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.

Iraqi people expressed and demonstrated a need to understand the law and what is a crime in Australia. Topics that need explaining include Family violence and Child Protection. These sessions need to be delivered in their language and could be half day short courses and people could receive a certificate for their attendance.

The Iraqi's suggested holding the courses at the Mosque. They indicated that there are no barriers at the Mosque. The Iraqi offered to work with agencies to make a program with the provider. They would prefer that women speak to women and men speak to men.

Some in the community feel unsafe in Shepparton due to living in neighbourhoods where anti-social behaviour is occurring which impacts everyone in the community including people from non Iraqi background.

When tragic incidents occur overseas it obviously impacts the community when they have family in that area however when the incident occurs in Australia (Sydney Siege) Police are encouraged to contact community leaders for reassurance purposes. The Community would like education in Drugs/Alcohol, Crime Prevention and Australian law to be delivered to the community at the Mosque. They also raised concerns that the community did not understand a range of local government functions including parking enforcement, planning, building controls and rating.

## **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

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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.

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## **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.

Community leaders have identified a deficiency in planning to meet community expectations.

The community wants to engage in longer term planning to develop a community centre and expanded parking at the Mosque.

## **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.

Cultural awareness training for school staff alongside the community would be a benefit.

Community feel they would like to know earlier if there is a problem and be part of identifying solutions that will keep the students involved in school.

Schools should look for opportunities to increase staff diversity (reflective of student diversity)

Information sessions with staff from education (not necessarily school based staff) re involvement in school council and an area based support or capacity building role similar to that of a Koori Education Support Officer (KESO)

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## Intergenerational Changes

The communities expressed their frustration and dismay regarding the freedom provided to young people in the Australian culture and the loss of their parental influence. The communities explained that in their homeland, children remain part of the family unit, under strict parental control, until they are at least 21 years. They now raise their children in a culture that provides children with independence and freedom at a much younger age.

Many parents are concerned that their children are rapidly changing and they fear a loss of culture, identity and respect for parents. The community needs to bring a spiritual leader to Shepparton to support families and young people. There needs to be a range of sporting activities appropriate for young people to participate.

Young people expressed frustration with the strictness of family life.

Intergeneration change issues are a community priority. They perceive a disengagement from 18 to 30 year olds who despite some qualifications may struggle to get permanent employment and are not regularly involved in community activity.

It concerns the older generation that these young people predominantly male have only informal soccer in the park as a social outlet.

Parental response to young people is concern at loss of culture, language and religion and questions about drug and alcohol use.

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