

English Supplement

Al-Muntada

of the Iraqi Association

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Post Sangatte Settlement Hurdles



The Sangatte reception centre in north-east France, a facility opened in September 1999 to provide food and shelter to homeless migrants in the region. Because migrants from the centre frequently attempted to illegally travel to the UK where they would claim

asylum, the centre became a source of controversy between the two countries. It is argued that negotiations between the two countries were constructed in ways to achieve the particular aims of the governments of the UK and France; respectively, the closure of the centre and the introduction of tighter asylum policies in the UK.

Once the centre had been closed to new arrivals on 5 November 2002, the UNHCR then began interviewing the residents in order to find specific solutions to their individual cases. On 2 December, the UK agreed to take two hundred Afghans from Sangatte who had strong family links in the UK. The UK also

offered four-year work visas, not refugee status to nearly one thousand Iraqi Kurds. France agreed to take responsibility for the remaining three hundred migrants still in the reception centre.

The proposal to offer Iraqi Kurds work visas did blur the distinction between economic migrants and refugees because many were indeed fleeing from a regime with documented human rights abuses (see Human Rights Watch, 1994). Nonetheless, given the scale of political and public interest in Sangatte, many people had already formed an image of its residents before the UK government agreed to offer some of them work visas. In Britain, they were dispersed by the Home Office to different parts of the country. Those being granted leave to stay in Britain will be given four-year work visas rather than being granted refugee status.

However, their legal status remains to be uncertain, in November 2007, Iraqi Association, despite its prudent budget, started to deal with more than 300 referral from other agencies, and the number is increasing. Thanks to our staff and volunteers. The charity began processing their initial paperwork to be sent to the Home Office for further consideration for Indefinite Leave to Remain.

The recent individual legal test case of Sangatte judicial review proved that the Home Office must consider their cases based on the original Sangatte Agreement. The situation is far from ideal, they were originally told that support in relation to initial settlement needs would be offered such as learning the language, training, and help towards employment opportunities. But of them were facing hurdles and without any support.

At Iraqi Association, we have been able to assist with their settlement needs, ranging from training and employment queries. Although they are here legally, but their needs were accumulated because of isolation and lack of knowledge to access local services, majority of them lives in other parts of the country, and tailor made services are not available to assist with their needs.

What is most disturbing is the way that the UK government justified granting work visas to the Iraqi Kurds. The justification appears to have been based on portraying 'burden, precisely because they do not arrive through officially sanctioned channels. The effect of this was to undermine the government's own asylum system, so the needs of the asylum seekers were subsequently ignored. In this way, the offer of work visas to Iraqi Kurds from Sangatte essentially treated them as an economic resource, but did not take into account their needs as potential refugees who had fled from persecution in Iraq pre 2002. Despite this precarious decision, after five years, many of those who were granted work visa, live in a terrible limbo.

Iraqi Association Comment

Integration is the Key

When Trevor Phillips, formerly the head of the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) and now in charge of the Commission for Equality and Human Rights, mentioned that Britain was "sleepwalking into segregation" he sparked a major public debate.

Are we "sleepwalking to segregation"? Is multiculturalism to blame and, if so, can we now pronounce it dead? And how can we help communities to integrate to become part of this society?

The recent report "Our Shared Future", by the Commission on Integration and Cohesion (CIC), chaired by Darra Singh, even avoided using the word "multiculturalism", claiming that it means such different things to different people that it is no longer a useful term. The commission's report, Our Shared Future, took the view that funding minority groups increases segregation and should become the exception. But this analogy is wrong. Britain is a country containing many cultural groups, is obviously multicultural. That's what the word means. It's a fact, a state of affairs.

However, multicultural society is not about imposing your way of life on others. Often sociologists and politicians have coined the term not as another way of saying "tolerance" or "integration" but as an alternative approach to either. However, integration is not about the "melting pot" theory, just like the old American ideal and France.

For exiled communities, integration is about successful settlement, including employment, access to services, equal rights and making positive contribution towards the host society and a sense of belonging. The settlers must be able to keeping their cultural identities, and to compliment the dominant majority identity of the host society.

Our experience in the field demonstrates that the notion of funding ethnic and refugees groups reinforces segregation is far from truth. Every year we help more than 6000 people with settlement needs and the vision of making a positive contribution to this society. Many groups like ours, have a responsibility to build bridges between communities in order to improve understanding and acceptance. Many also provide valuable local services, tailored to meet the needs of people whom mainstream services frequently fail.

What is failing us is the lack of resources and recognition. We do not want to reinvent the wheel, integration is the key to promote and assist successful settlements. By helping exiled community groups, we will build our self-sufficiency and will enable us to take an active part in civil society. Removing support would disadvantage the most vulnerable and socially excluded. Yes, we must all promote integration, but we should never apologise for offering support to those who needs it.

Due to the forced nature of their migration and their experiences, compared with other migrant groups, refugees will often have specific needs that have to be met in order to support their integration. They will often be one of the most vulnerable groups in society while also being the most resilient. It is therefore important that the special needs of refugees are recognised in integration policies and practice, including those of specific groups such as women and children, within an overall policy of mainstreaming.

The debate often places the onus on the responsibilities of refugees to integrate themselves. But settlement has a two-way process which begins from the day a refugee arrives, to assist them to live in harmony with the host population of which they form a part. It is therefore places demands both on receiving societies and on the individuals and communities concerned. But equally we do not want to see ghettos, even prosperous ones. We need to bring down the cultural barriers. For example, the sight of school playgrounds in which many races mingle happily without apparent consciousness of race, religion or colour is an ideal. We can brake cultural barriers by mixing and by losing race consciousness.

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Returning Iraqi Refugees Face Dire Conditions

The latest sign of diminishing violence in Iraq and their desperate conditions in Syria have led thousands of Iraqi refugees to return home. People will inevitably return to their homes when they feel safe, these people are joining thousands of other Iraqi citizens that have said enough to the violence. However, the growing number of returning refugees are becoming a major challenge for the Iraqi government. Iraqi Red Crescent is struggling to cope with demands of returnees.

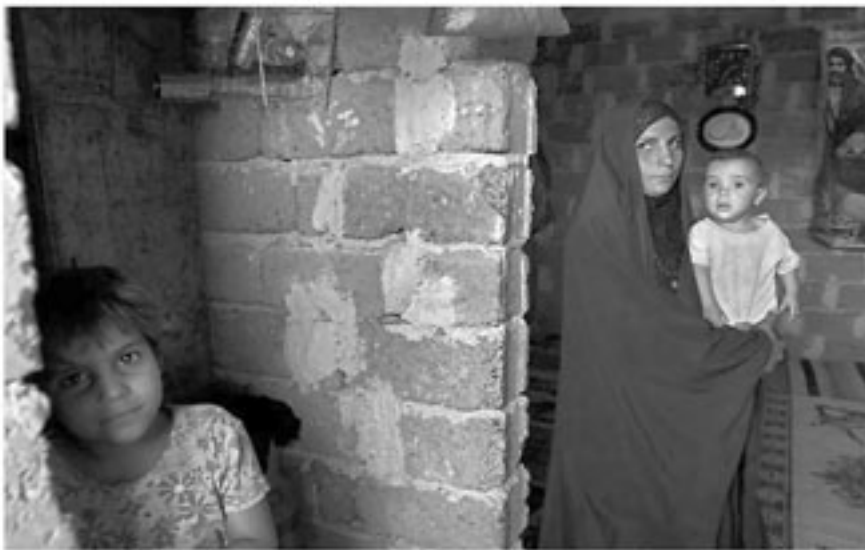
The crisis is not only the resettlement of returnees, but the internally displaced people, those who fled sectarian violence or forced out of their homes are also in facing dire conditions. Although accurate data is not available to confirm the returnees numbers, but figures which were reported by international and local agencies confirms that over 50,000 Iraqi refugees, mainly from Syria have returned home.



The Iraqi minister of displacement and migration, Abdul Samad Rahman Sultan, said in an interview recently that the growing number of returning refugees was becoming a major challenge for his ministry, which has not yet received money to support them. Sultan, the displacement and migration minister, said his agency has budgeted supplies for internally displaced people -- including 1 million shoes, 300,000 blankets and 140,000 mattresses -- but none for refugees from Syria. He hoped parliament would approve a budget including new funding in the next two months.

Meanwhile, the Iraqi Red Crescent said there were almost 2.18 million internally displaced people in Iraq as of the end of November 2007, compared with almost 2.3 million at the end of September. The figure represents 344,236 families, with 58.7 percent of the total number being children. Over 4.5 million Iraqis have been displaced since 2003, with nearly 2.5 million Iraqi civilians fleeing to neighbouring countries, and over 2 million displaced internally within Iraq.

Despite the marginal improvement in the situation, the plight of the displaced remains dire. They are suffering from many serious hardships such as lack of accommodation and high rentals, inadequate health services, a large number of students have left their studies while many displaced people have lost their jobs and it is hard for them to buy food or fuel. The returnees, particularly women and children are increasingly vulnerable, and a sense of frustration, despair, and abandonment permeates communities of displaced Iraqis.



For most Iraqi refugees, the trip home is just the beginning of their troubles. Many return to find their homes destroyed or filled with squatters, most of them displaced people themselves. Iraqi government lacks ability to cope with this and it sees that it's not an urgent priority. Muna returned home from Syria

early December 2007, four weeks later, Muna is sharing her uncle's two-bedroom apartment with her four children, in the once tortured Baghdad neighbourhood around Haifa Street. She has vowed not to stay long, but has no job and cannot afford an apartment of her own. Her husband, a policeman, was murdered by terrorists in mid-2006, and her old house in southern Baghdad was destroyed by a truck bomb.

Other contributing factor is the housing crisis, as the sectarian violence driven thousands of people to live in different locations, the movement of people and abandoned houses and flats of returnees are becoming serious disputes. A speedy government mechanism does not exist to resolve the issue, and the owner can move in quickly.

The housing situation in Baghdad resembles a metaphorical activity where people are repeatedly and usually pointlessly shuffled among various locations. Some displaced people are renting refugees' homes; others moved in secretly or by force. Still others, like Muna, has nowhere to move back to, because her home has gone and her neighbourhood is unsafe. And as refugees return in greater numbers, and find strangers, especially strangers from a different sect, living in their homes, security gains here could be erased. Yet the American forces in Iraq have emphasized repeatedly that they do not want to get involved in property disputes, and the Iraqi government appears to be ignoring calls from its own ranks to step up a speedy appeals process. In the meantime, people will continue to suffer because of ignorance and corrupt politicians.

Fear and insecurity equally deters many returnees to register with their neighbourhood areas for the the government's aid programs. The government insist that they should go back to their original district in order to receive the available food aid.

Thousands of returning refugees face similar uncertainties throughout Iraq, where the government's inability to manage the uneven reverse exodus has left the most vulnerable in an uneasy, potentially explosive limbo.

This crisis has grave humanitarian implications as well as potential negative ramifications for regional security. It is vital that international and local NGOs, including UNHCR and the Iraqi government, to engage proactively to deal with the impacts of Iraqi displacement.



Life Returning to parts of Baghdad

Of those who have fled Iraq to neighbouring countries, various reports indicate that many of them were from Iraq's now decimated middle class. Numerous interviews of Iraqi refugees conducted outside Iraq have revealed that Iraqi professionals who fled the country were the least sectarian elements in society, and many fled to escape both the general threat of sectarian violence and the specific threat of kidnapping, which has become a common criminal enterprise conducted by militias and organised gangs. The violence and insecurity resulting from the ongoing sectarian strife, and terrorism, in Iraq has had a marked impact on civilian displacement in different parts of the country. Some experts think that the Iraq situation could well begin to outpace other refugee crises worldwide.

Most of those internally displaced are moving in with family and friends who live in areas where one sect overwhelmingly predominates. When this is not possible they go to public facilities, such as schools and factories (some people are squatting in damaged or abandoned property, such as mosques) and in much smaller numbers, to camps set up by the Iraqi Red Crescent Society or Ministry of Displacement and Migration MoDM). Repeat-displacement, which means moving a second time, or repeatedly, most commonly applies to those displaced by military operations. Daily behaviour by those who are displaced or living in fear for their lives may also vary to avoid establishing any predictable pattern: Micro and nighttime displacement means that a person is living in his or her home, but sleeping elsewhere. Daylight displacement involves shifting routines, routes, and activities. And fake displacement are those who pretend to be displaced and build homes on government

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No hand no leg."
Fehan 42 with daughter Shama

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Charity No. 1101109

Rafyidian Health Trainer Project (RHTP)

The development of this project by Iraqi Association, with the support of the local Primary Health Care Trust, will provide vital services to reduce health inequalities and improve the wellbeing of local users of the Iraqi community members in the borough of Hammersmith and Fulham. The project facilitate and sustain behaviour change within diverse and disadvantaged populations. The current profile and significant needs of the target people can be described in the following areas:

- Inactive lifestyle and poor eating habits
- Prevalence smoking
- Early death rates from heart disease, stroke and cancer
- Feeling 'in poor health'
- High number of people with diabetes
- Heavy drinking affecting family life
- High number of CVD sufferers



PRHTP Priorities:

1. Tackling health inequalities
2. Reducing the numbers of people who smoke
3. Tackling obesity
4. Promoting healthy and active life style amongst older people
5. Helping children and young lead healthy lives
6. Promote walking and cycling
7. Reducing harm and encourage sensible drinking
8. Raising awareness on major diseases which affects the community such as CVD, strokes, diabetes, cancer, heart disease and gum disease.



Integration bid conditions is ill-conceived

The Border and Immigration Agency recently invited the Refugee Council to tender for the provision of Refugee Integration and Employment Services in London, the East of England and the West Midlands. Then the Refugee Council subsequently invited refugee groups to subcontract some of the work.

However, this invitation had eligibility conditions, among them was a strange point which community refugee groups could find it difficult to meet, "a minimum annual income of 250,000 is required". There was no explanation behind this figure. We considered this as wholly unacceptable condition. Although we have sent our concern to the Council and explained the position that the financial condition threshold will prevent refugee groups to send the expression of interests, but we had a muted response from the Council.

However, we support any integration support towards the work of the refugee groups who work tirelessly in the field, to assist and help their clients directly to settle and integrate.

The lack of recognition and understanding may weaken this work. It is naive to measure the competency of refugee community groups by using their financial ability. We do not have a fundraising investment budget, we rely on committed volunteers and staff. Every year our Charity deals directly with more than 6000 people, assist them with settlement and integration needs.

The fact is that the available government funds to help refugees is shrinking further, particularly when it comes to refugee community groups. We hope that future government integration support programme will also be available for the refugee community groups.

Volunteers Wanted
We offer volunteer opportunities for 3,4 and 6 months in our offices in Hammersmith. You will be working on data and case studies or fundraising work. Please email your C.V. to info@iraqiassociation.org

4th Quarter 2007 Iraqi Association Clients	OCT.07	NOV.07	DEC.07	Total
Employment & Training	34	38	18	90
Welfare Advice	144	133	205	482
Healthy Lifestyle Advice	45	42	32	119
Family Reunion	11	7	4	22
Immigration Advice	88	78	61	227
Media Enquiries & Interviews	4	5	2	11
Telephone Advice & Enquiries	150	127	110	387
Volunteersim	7	7	5	19
Elderly Service	120	117	104	341
Referral From Agencies	140	110	98	348
Referral To Agencies	45	42	38	125
Education	34	62	32	128

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Mesopotamian Storytelling Workshops

Learn and listen to the ancient stories of Mesopotamia and experience the music of the harp. Discover the literature of Sumer, Assyria and Babylon written in the Akkadian language. See the clay tablets of King Ashurbanipal's library in the British Museum. Write cuneiform signs on wet clay tablets like the scribes who lived beside the Tigris and Euphrates rivers thousands of years ago.

Discover	16 Feb 08
Mesopotamia	1 March 08
in	5 April 08
Bloomsbury	3 May 08
	7 June 08
	5 July 08
	6 Sept 08
	4 Oct 08
	1 Nov 08

Saturdays 3.30–5.30 p.m.

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The Poetry Café, 22 Betterton Street, Covent Garden, London WC2

Enrolment fees £25 in advance for all nine workshops or £5 for each workshop.

Places are limited. To book your place and for more information contact

Liqaa Yousef 07946 556587 or email zipang03@btopenworld.com

Organised by the Enheduanna Society (registered educational charity number 1097515) in collaboration with Iraq-in-Common, New Generation Assyrians, the Iraqi Association, ArtRole, the Camden Ceilidh Storytelling Club, and the British Institute for the Study of Iraq (formerly the British School of Archaeology in Iraq).