



EMBASSY OF SWEDEN

Washington, April 10, 2008

Washington
The Ambassador

To the members of the U.S. Helsinki Commission before the hearing on the Iraqi Refugee Crisis, April 10, 2008

With a historic background of mass emigration mainly to US until 1930, Sweden is since half a century an immigration country. Until the first years of the 70s, immigration was dominated by labor migrants from other parts of Scandinavia and from South-Eastern Europe. Refugees arrived at intervals, usually in connection with wars or crises. Since the 1980's people in considerable numbers have each year asked for asylum in Sweden, as a consequence of ongoing wars and crises but sometimes because of poverty and lack of faith in the future of their home country. Many asylum-seekers have come from the Middle East, from countries as Iran and Iraq, Lebanon, Syria and Turkey.

Since 2004, Sweden has received 567 000 applications for asylum and accepted 308 000 of them for needs of protection or on humanitarian grounds. Another 37 000 refugees have been resettled in cooperation with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees. As a significant example, after the collapse of Yugoslavia in the 90's over 100,000 ex-Yugoslavs, mostly Bosnians and Kosovars, found a new home in Sweden. Immigrants constitute about 13% of Sweden's population.

When it comes to Iraqi refugees, which is the focus in today's important and timely hearing, Sweden has been accepting Iraqi refugees already since the late 1960s. However, the migration of Iraqis increased as a result of the Iran-Iraq war of the 1980s and the 1991 Gulf war, but especially since 2003. Currently more than 80 000 persons from Iraq live permanently in Sweden. Another 26 000 are borne in Sweden by Iraqi parents.

Attached is a fact sheet but I would just like to mention a few figures: Since 2003 about 36 700 Iraqis have applied for asylum in Sweden. The peak year was 2007 with 18 559 applications – an increase by 107% since the year before. About 50 percent of all asylum applications from Iraqis to European countries in 2006 and 2007 were made in Sweden.

Sweden will continue to take its responsibility but it is of utmost important that the international community – the EU, the US and other countries - work together to assist Iraqis in need and help Iraq's neighbors, that receive the majority of the Iraqi refugees, in this difficult situation. To that end the reconstruction and stabilization of Iraq is crucial.


Jonas Hafström
Ambassador

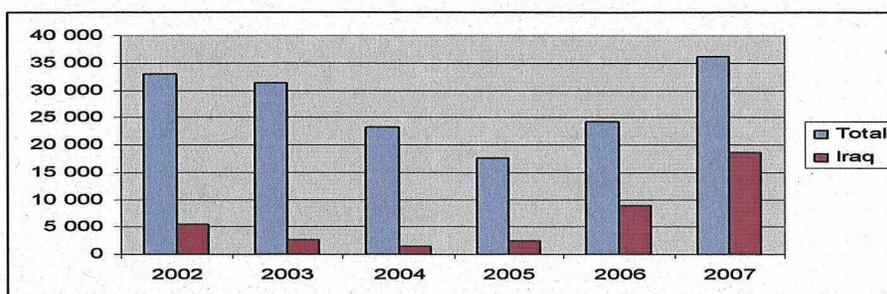
International protection to Iraqis in Sweden

A. Statistics – asylum-seekers and resettled refugees

Iraqis have arrived to Sweden in significant numbers since the beginning of the 90's. The Swedish population now includes more than 80 000 persons of Iraqi origin, or about one percent.

Year	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	-08 Jan-March.
Asylum seekers	33 016	31 355	23 161	17 530	24 300	36 207	7 054
... from Iraq	5 446	2 700	1 456	2 330	8 951	18 559	2 701
	16,5%	8,6%	6,3%	13,3%	36,8%	51,3%	38,3%

Since 2003 36 700 Iraqis have applied for asylum in Sweden. The peak year was 2007 with 18 600 applications. About 50 percent of all asylum applications from Iraqis to European countries in 2006 and 2007 were made in Sweden.



Residence permits by first instance 2004– 2007, on grounds of protection or on humanitarian grounds.

	2004	2005	2006	2007
of all asylum cases	10 %	13 %	42 %	48 %
of Iraqi asylum cases	8 %	21 %	80 %	72 %

Among those not granted a residence permit are applicants referred to other EU countries for a decision. The acceptance rate for Iraqi applications decided *on their substance* is therefore higher, in 2007 93 percent as compared to 72 as the percentage if all Iraqi applications are included.

Sweden has the largest resettlement program in Europe, in close cooperation with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees. In 2007 732 Iraqi refugees were resettled to Sweden, most of them from the near region to Iraq. About 40 percent of the refugee quota was used for Iraqis.

In addition, in 2007 more than 5 000 Iraqis got a residence permit for family reunion in Sweden, since 2003 more than 15 000.

Since 2003 about 38 000 Iraqis have been granted a residence permit in Sweden, more than 20 000 of them after an application for asylum and more than 1 000 for resettlement. The caseload of asylum applications at the first instance amounts to 11 000.

B. Reception of asylum-seekers

While the application for asylum is investigated, the asylum-seeker has a caseworker he or she can contact when necessary. The asylum-seeker can choose between living with a relative or friend, or in an apartment rented by the Migration Board. If an asylum-seeker does not have any money he or she is entitled to a daily allowance or other facilities for daily life.

Asylum seekers are entitled to acute medical treatment and dental service. Asylum seekers under the age of 18 have the right to free medical treatment and dental service. However, all asylum seekers and their relatives are entitled to a free, voluntary examination of health.

Children and young people are not obliged to attend school although the municipal authority is responsible for ensuring that those who wish to attend school are offered a place on the same terms and conditions as other children and young people. This applies to pre-school, primary/secondary school and high school. The Migration Board pays for the costs.

During the waiting period the asylum seeker is expected to participate in organised activities, such as learning the Swedish language or practical helping to other foreigners coming to Sweden.

If it is estimated that it will take more than four months to process the application the asylum-seeker is excepted from the requirement to hold a work permit.

The Migration Board reduces the daily allowance if the asylum-seeker makes the asylum investigation more difficult – e.g. by not assisting in clarifying his/her identity – or does not take part in organized activities.

C. Introduction of newly arrived immigrants in Sweden

Once a residence permit has been granted, there are no restrictions on where the new immigrant can settle in Sweden. However, the level of service and support that the State can offer to new immigrants depend on where they settle. A person who does not arrange for his/her own living can get support to find housing in a municipality. Approximately 1/3 of all new immigrants are allocated housing in a municipality by the Swedish Migration Board.

The municipalities are responsible for the implementation of introduction programs for newly arrived migrants, who are entitled to Swedish language tuition and education/employment advice as part of an individualized introduction program.

The municipalities are also responsible for supporting persons with no other means of income, and for providing education for children. Migrants with a residence permit have the same basic rights as Swedish citizens. With these rights come certain responsibilities, and a person with municipality support can be asked to fulfill certain requirements. For example, to participate in language classes, actively seek employment or take part in vocational training. For new immigrants supported by the municipality through a so-called "introduction grant" these responsibilities are specified.

The central government reimburses the municipalities for their costs in connection with receiving new immigrants. This is done within a framework of voluntary agreements between the central government and the municipalities. These agreements are based on the premises that the municipality assumes the responsibility for finding housing for those in need and delivering the introduction program for a set number of persons. In return the municipality is refunded for its work.

The Government finances the municipal reception and introduction work through a system with one-off standard grant, and a fixed amount for each person received, with different sums for adults and children. In 2008 the grant for an adults between 16 and 65 years of age is approx. \$ 30 600, for a child below 16 years of age approx. \$ 18 800 and for persons 65 years old and older approx. \$ 11 300. The grant is paid out over a period of 24 months and follows the person if he or her moves to another municipality. If the municipality signs an agreement over three years, an extra \$ 1 700 is paid out. Municipalities can also apply for reimbursement for certain costs in connection with reception of unaccompanied minors, elderly or persons with disabilities.

Most municipalities in Sweden have signed such an agreement on reception and introduction. However, in some municipalities the actual number of settled new immigrants can be significantly larger than the agreement covers for, whereas others receive fewer than the agreement stipulates. An individual's rights are not dependent on whether the municipality has signed an agreement or not. However, the municipality might have difficulty in offering services of the same high quality to a person that independently moves to a municipality which has already received more than was planned for.

The agreements also take into consideration the situation on the local labor market. Therefore, the Government informs newly arrived migrants of the advantage of settling in a municipality that has signed an agreement, and where one is guaranteed appropriate housing and an individualized introduction program in an area where there are opportunities to find work.

At the moment Sweden does not require a certain knowledge of Swedish language skills in order to receive a residence permit or citizenship.

D. Return

Iraqis, as others who have got international protection in Sweden and decide to return to their country of origin, can get an individual economic support to enable them to do so. Last few years very few Iraqis have made use of this support for fully voluntary return.

A person who is not granted a residence permit must leave Sweden, according to the law within a few weeks. The Migration Board provides support and information to facilitate the return. Since August 2007 there is also an individual economic reestablishment support (20 000 Swedish crowns for each adult person, maximum 50 000 for a family). Iraqis returning voluntarily are among those eligible. The payment is made by the International Organization for Migration within three months after return to Iraq. There are also projects funded by Sweden to support reintegration in northern Iraq.

On 18 February 2008 Sweden and Iraq signed, in Baghdad, a memorandum of understanding (MOU) concerning the readmission of Iraqi nationals. It is underlined that rejected applicants for asylum primarily shall return voluntarily to Iraq. Swedish authorities may, however, also resort to enforced returns. So far only a very limited number of persons have de facto been returned by force. Lately the number of Iraqis returning voluntarily has increased significantly.

This MOU is of great importance for Sweden and paves the way for closer cooperation with Iraq in a number of areas. The MOU does not have an influence on the examination of requests for asylum. The examination of such requests is regulated by the Swedish aliens legislation.

E. Support to Iraqis in the near region

The international community should continue to fulfill its share of the responsibility of supporting those displaced within Iraq as well as Iraqi refugees in the region. We should do this primarily because of the severe humanitarian suffering but also because of the consequences for stability in Iraq and in the region. While acknowledging that the humanitarian needs are greatest within Iraq, Sweden and the European Commission have focused parts of its humanitarian assistance on needs in Jordan and Syria. The international community should explore new ways to support the countries in the region, which are extremely exposed to the difficult situation in Iraq.