



UNHCR

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
Haut Commissariat des Nations Unies pour les réfugiés

Iraq: Country of Origin Information on Access and Residency Requirements in Iraq (Update I)

Ability of Persons Originating from Formerly ISIS-Held or Conflict-Affected Areas to Legally Access and Remain in Proposed Areas of Relocation

November 2019

This document provides decision-makers with specific country of origin information in relation to access and residency restrictions applicable to Iraqis originally from areas formerly held by the Islamic State of Iraq and Al-Sham (ISIS) or affected by conflict, who seek to return from abroad to areas other than their area of origin. This document is not intended to provide comprehensive guidance on the assessment of the availability of an internal flight or relocation alternative (IFA/IRA), which includes an assessment of the relevance as well as the reasonableness of the proposed IFA/IRA. Instead, this document is limited to factual information on access and residency restrictions as applicable at the time of writing.

Unless specified otherwise, information contained in this document has been collected and verified by UNHCR. The information reflects the situation as of 4 November 2019.

This information updates information on access and residency restrictions in Iraq contained in *Iraq: Country of Origin Information on Access and Residency Requirements in Iraq – Ability of Persons Originating from Formerly ISIS-Held or Conflict-Affected Areas to Legally Access and Remain in Proposed Areas of Relocation* of 25 April 2019.¹ Given the volatility of the situation in Iraq as well as changes to regulations and practices concerning access to and residency in relatively safer areas, decision-makers need to verify the accuracy of the information at the time of making a decision. UNHCR intends to update this document as needed.

For further information on access and residency restrictions as part of the “relevance analysis” when considering the availability of an Internal Flight or Relocation Alternative (IFA/IRA), see UNHCR, *International Protection Considerations with Regard to People Fleeing the Republic of Iraq*, May 2019, <https://www.refworld.org/docid/5cc9b20c4.html>, pp. 118-119.

In the face of large-scale displacement of people due to ISIS' expansion and subsequent anti-ISIS military operations between 2014 and 2017, many local authorities introduced stringent entry and residency restrictions, including, among others, sponsorship requirements and, in some areas, near-complete entry bans for persons fleeing from conflict-affected areas, particularly Sunni Arabs. At the time of writing, security screenings remain in place for persons from formerly ISIS-held or conflict-affected areas across Iraq. Access bans have been lifted while sponsorship requirements remain in place for entry to and residency in several governorates for persons from formerly ISIS-held or conflict-affected areas.

¹ UNHCR, *Iraq: Country of Origin Information on Access and Residency Requirements in Iraq: Ability of Persons Originating from Formerly ISIS-Held or Conflict-Affected Areas to Legally Access and Remain in Proposed Areas of Relocation*, 25 April 2019, <https://www.refworld.org/docid/5cc2c30d7.html>.



UNHCR

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
Haut Commissariat des Nations Unies pour les réfugiés

Access Requirements

At the time of writing, persons from formerly ISIS-held or conflict-affected areas, particularly Sunni Arabs (including persons who returned to Iraq from a third country) require a sponsor for access to the following governorates:

- **Missan and Muthanna Governorates:** The sponsor must receive the individual at the governorate entry checkpoint in order to facilitate the entry. In case an individual entered the governorate without being checked, s/he needs to approach the concerned security branch for clearance, accompanied by the sponsor. Inability to secure a sponsor will likely result in the individual being denied access to the governorate, although security actors have a level of discretion to exceptionally grant access, depending on the profile of the person and their reasons for relocation.
- **Dohuk Governorate:** Arabs from formerly ISIS-held or conflict-affected areas and Turkmen from Tal Afar (Ninewa Governorate) require a sponsor from Duhok in order to enter, unless they obtain a temporary travel authorization from the checkpoint near Hatara village. This authorization is issued for short-term visits for medical or similar reasons.

No sponsor is required for entry to Babel, Baghdad, Basrah, Diyala, Erbil, Kerbala, Kirkuk, Najef, Qadissiyah, Sulaymaniyah and Wassit Governorates. Sponsorship requirements in order to enter Basrah, Erbil, Qadissiyah and Sulaymaniyah Governorates via air or at internal land borders were lifted in early 2019.

Residency Requirements

Depending on the area, persons from formerly ISIS-held or conflict-affected areas, particularly Sunni Arabs, require a sponsor and/or confirmation/recommendation letter from the *mukhtar* and/or the local council in order to take up legal residency. In addition, security clearance from relevant security agencies is needed in all areas.

At the time of writing, UNHCR is aware of the following residency requirements in respect to persons from formerly ISIS-held or conflict-affected areas, particularly Sunni Arabs (including for persons who returned to Iraq from a third country):

- **Baghdad Governorate:** Persons from formerly ISIS-held or conflict-affected areas require two sponsors from the neighbourhood in which they intend to reside as well as a support letter from the local *mukhtar*.
- **Dohuk Governorate:** Arabs from formerly ISIS-held or conflict-affected areas and Turkmen from Tal Afar must regularize their stay by obtaining the approval from the local *Asayish*, based on which they obtain a residency permit. When approaching the *Asayish*, the individual must be accompanied by the sponsor from Duhok who facilitated his/her entry into Dohuk Governorate.
- **Diyala Governorate:** With the exception of Khanaqin District, persons from formerly ISIS-held or conflict-affected areas require a sponsor from the neighbourhood in which they intend to reside as well as a support letter from the local *mukhtar*. In Khanaqin District, letters from three entities are required (*mukhtar's* office, National Security, and Intelligence).



UNHCR

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
Haut Commissariat des Nations Unies pour les réfugiés

- **Kirkuk city:** Following the re-establishment of central government control on 16 October 2017, sponsorship requirements have been lifted. Persons from formerly ISIS-held or conflict-affected areas however require a support letter from the local *mukhtar* in the neighbourhood in which they intend to reside.
- **Southern Governorates:** Persons from formerly ISIS-held or conflict-affected areas require a local sponsor as well as a support letter from the local *mukhtar* in order to legally reside in Babel, Basra, Dhi-Qar, Kerbala, Missan, Muthanna, Najef, Qadissiyah and Wassit Governorates.
- **In Erbil and Sulaymaniyah Governorates:** Persons originating from outside the KR-I must approach the local *Asayish* in the neighbourhood in which they seek to reside in order to obtain a residency card ("*information card*"). They do not require a sponsor. Single Arab and Turkmen men, however, require regular employment and must submit a support letter from their employer in order to obtain a one-year, renewable residency card. Those without regular employment receive only a one-month renewable residency. Holders of a one-month residency card face difficulties to finding regular employment due to the short duration of their permits.

Access and residency requirements are not always clearly defined and/or implementation can vary or be subject to changes depending mostly on the security situation. Sponsorship requirements are generally not grounded in law nor are they officially announced.

In numerous areas, persons from formerly ISIS-held or conflict-affected areas are increasingly pressured or forced by local authorities or other actors to return to their homes areas, despite concerns over their safety on account of their perceived affiliation with ISIS,² often resulting in their renewed displacement.³

² UNHCR, *International Protection Considerations with Regard to People Fleeing the Republic of Iraq*, May 2019, <https://www.refworld.org/docid/5cc9b20c4.html>, pp. 59-66 (and sources therein).

³ "Camp closures and consolidations resulting in forced evictions, forced relocations and coerced departures continued in Anbar, Kirkuk, Ninewa and Salah Al-Din Governorates"; UNHCR, *Iraq Protection Update – August 2019*, 14 October 2019, <https://bit.ly/2JpQh3r>, p. 1 (see also previous monthly updates). "Some were forced to return to their home regions, despite fears for their safety, including from former neighbors who perceive them as being linked to the Islamic State (ISIS). Some have come under attack since being forced home"; Human Rights Watch (HRW), *Iraq: Camps Expel over 2,000 People Seen as ISIS-Linked*, 4 September 2019, <https://bit.ly/2IAXVPK>. "Since 23 August [2019], Ninewa governorate authorities have begun repatriating IDPs who are not from Ninewa to their governorates of origin, often with little notice or apparent planning. The situation on the ground is fluid, and reported numbers fluctuate, but thus far, approximately 300 families (an estimated 1600 people) have been returned from Hamam Al Alil, As Salamiyah and Nimrud camps in Ninewa to locations in Al-Anbar, Kirkuk and Salah Al-Din governorates. (...) Protection partners advocated on behalf of those IDP families [from Al-Anbar] who expressed fears regarding their personal safety if compelled to return to areas of origin, but such apprehensions were reportedly disregarded by Ninewa authorities. (...) Numerous IDP families [from Kirkuk], especially those from Hawiga, again expressed fears that they would be threatened upon their return, and had reportedly received threatening phone calls from community members in their areas of origin warning against return. Despite such concerns, security actors confiscated the IDP's civil identification, informing the families that their documents would only be returned once they boarded the convoy"; United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) / UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator in Iraq, *United Nations Expresses Concern over Return of IDPs from Ninewa to Al Anbar, Kirkuk and Salah al-Din Governorates*, 2 September 2019, <https://bit.ly/2MlutXC>. "Hundreds of displaced families in Iraq are being forced by authorities to leave their camps and transferred back to their areas of origin even if they have nowhere to return or may face possible persecution"; Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), *Iraq: Displaced Families Being Forced Out of Camps with Nowhere to Go*, 29 August 2019, <https://bit.ly/30ZqGel>. "There are political considerations which may affect camp closures and consolidations in the coming months. Reportedly, some provincial governors are becoming less willing to host IDP populations comprised of Iraqi citizens who were not originally residents of the governorate where the camps are based, and are making arrangements for the transfer of these IDPs to their home governorates"; OCHA, *Iraq: Humanitarian Snapshot (July 2019)*, 15 August 2019, <https://bit.ly/2oW6tSO>.