

**FACT SHEET on
U.S. Resettlement for Yazidi Interpreters**



AUGUST 2018

FACT SHEET ON U.S. RESETTLEMENT FOR YAZIDI INTERPRETERS (August 2018)

- During the time of U.S. military operations in Iraq (2003-2011), many members of the Yazidi ethno-religious minority group worked for American troops as civilian interpreters.
- Due to their work with U.S. troops during Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF), many of these Yazidi interpreters were targets of blacklists, extrajudicial imprisonment and killings, death threats, and threats against their families because they worked with U.S. troops.
- The Yazidi genocide of 2014 resulted in the killing, kidnapping, and enslavement of an estimated 12,000 Yazidis in northern Iraq, as well as the destruction of their ancestral homeland of Shingal (Sinjar). Many Yazidis who once worked for the U.S. Army were killed or displaced by the attack on Yazidis by Islamic State in 2014, and were required to live in substandard tent camps for Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in Iraqi Kurdistan and other areas.
- Most Yazidi interpreters were unable to apply to immigrate out of Iraq using the U.S. Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) program for Iraqi interpreters because the program closed on September 30, 2014. The genocidal attack on Yazidis occurred on August 3, 2014, leaving Yazidi interpreters only two months to apply for SIV status. Many Yazidis could not submit their documentation in time because the attack caused their homes to be destroyed, their personal belongings (including passports and IDs) to be lost or ransacked, and family members and friends to be killed or abducted. They were thus unable to escape persecution in Iraq by applying for an SIV in time.
- The number of Yazidi interpreters remaining in Iraq whose IOM applications still have not been processed is very small. Some estimate that only about 200 Yazidis who translated for U.S. forces during Operation Iraqi Freedom remain in Iraq. This very small number would not place an undue administrative burden on USCIS immigration processors.
- Of the estimated 200 Yazidi interpreters remaining in Iraq, some have experienced the triple hardship of (1) surviving military combat operations with U.S. troops in Iraq, (2) being blacklisted or targeted as pro-American after the U.S. withdrew, and (3) being displaced or otherwise impacted by the extreme violence of the Islamic State's genocidal attack in 2014.
- The Yazidis from the Shingal (Sinjar) region of Iraq were most severely affected by ISIS crimes and displacement from their homes and villages during the 2014 attack. Many Yazidis from this region cannot return to their homes because of unexploded ordnance planted by ISIS in houses and other property (“booby traps”).
- Despite numerous hardships, Yazidi interpreters are outstanding candidates for successful resettlement in the U.S. because of their English language skills and pre-existing knowledge of the United States because of their work with the U.S. military.

- A number of Yazidi interpreters have already resettled in locations like Lincoln, Nebraska on Special Immigrant Visas with their immediate family members (spouse, children).
- Yazidi interpreters are able to submit immigration applications for their extended family members (mothers, siblings) through the International Organization for Migration's (IOM's) P-3 program. Nearly four years after the extreme violence and disruptions of the Yazidi genocide, many of these P-3 applications are still awaiting processing. Because of the extended family structure of Yazidi society, allowing these interpreters' families to remain intact is critical to maintaining the health and well-being of these interpreters and Yazidi culture as a whole.
- Expediting applications for extended family members of Yazidi interpreters who have resettled in the U.S. is essential because members of an extremely small and threatened population that endured extreme violence and displacement requires as much family cohesion as possible to survive and feel supported in a new country.
- Unmarried or widowed mothers and sisters of Yazidi interpreters should be prioritized when processing P-3 applications for Yazidi interpreters because minority Yazidi women in Iraq face particular hardships and discrimination when the primary male members of their family have emigrated abroad.
- It is not difficult for USCIS to verify who is a Yazidi in Iraq because most forms of Iraqi identification, including the national ID card, clearly display the individual's religious affiliation.
- It is possible to determine who was a Yazidi interpreter for U.S. forces during Operation Iraqi Freedom through work confirmation letters from defense contractors such as Global Linguist Solutions (GLS LLC), Titan, and L3 which were contracted by the U.S. Defense Department during the Iraq War. These serve as proof of their service as professional linguists to American armed forces.
- Biometric identifiers (fingerprints, etc.) and other official records for Yazidi interpreters from Operation Iraqi Freedom may still exist at the Pentagon. If so, these materials could further facilitate vetting for Yazidi interpreters.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Expedite processing for all OIF Yazidi interpreters in Iraq who have submitted applications through IOM for resettlement to the United States. Any application with evidence of unusual hardships (safety and security concerns, long-term displacement or lack of permanent shelter, loss of family members or friends during the 2014 genocidal attack, etc.) should be processed within 30 days of receipt.
- Applications for all family members of Yazidi interpreters impacted by genocidal crimes by ISIS (including not only spouses and children but also parents, grandparents, siblings, nieces, and nephews of the interpreter) should be processed within one (1) year of receipt.