

Iraq



Working environment

Recent developments

Although the Iraqi Government has reiterated that the overall situation is not currently conducive to large-scale refugee return – a position shared by UNHCR – many Iraqis have asked UNHCR for assistance to return to their homes. At the time of writing, UNHCR and its partners have facilitated the return of some 15,000 people from the Islamic Republic of Iran, Lebanon, and Saudi Arabia. Meanwhile, the Iranian Government believes that over the past year up to 100,000 refugees may have left the country to return to Iraq of their own accord.

Those taking part in the UNHCR-supported repatriation programme are all provided with a voluntary repatriation form that serves as proof of

identity in Iraq, and receive transport assistance and a package of relief items once they return to the country. Most return through the Shalamchek border point, but a few groups have recently gone back to northern areas via Hajj Omran. However, the prevailing insecurity has meant that UNHCR has frequently had to suspend organized repatriation movements.

The Office has supported the Ministry of Displacement and Migration (MoDM) in its efforts to lead and coordinate assistance to IDPs, and keep track of newly displaced populations inside Iraq, and any problems they may be facing.

The influx of returnees has exacerbated Iraq's acute housing shortage. In some areas this is further inflamed by property rights issues. UNHCR has therefore prioritized the provision of shelter assistance via a community-based programme

that is already well established in the north of the country. At the same time, it has supported the Iraqi Government's Property Claims Commission in an effort to prevent conflicts over land and property.

Building the capacity of the Iraqi authorities has been another priority. The Office has maintained regular communication with the MoDM and made available consultants and support staff, as well as specialized training and workshops for MoDM staff in Amman and Kuwait. All UNHCR projects for refugees, returnees and IDPs have been formulated in close coordination with the MoDM and with local authorities at governorate and district levels.

UNHCR's requirements for the Iraq situation are currently under review.

Constraints

The situation in Iraq is so fluid that it is currently impossible to describe constraints expected in 2005 with any accuracy.

Strategy

Protection and solutions

UNHCR will maintain its focus on building governmental capacity to address the issues of property and statelessness. Together with IOM, it will assist the Iraqi Property Claims Commission (created earlier this year) to resolve property disputes. The Commission is setting up out-of-country offices to help Iraqis abroad who require information on how to address their problems and file property claims. For UNHCR, this is particularly valuable work.

The protection of Iranian, Palestinian, Syrian, and Turkish refugees inside Iraq will be a key priority. The Office will support the establishment of a framework securing refugees' rights in Iraq and advocate the creation of national protection structures. UNHCR and its partners will endeavour to monitor the conditions of returnees and IDPs.

UNHCR and its partners will monitor refugees and IDPs, including returnees from the Islamic Republic of Iran and from within Iraq, collecting data using tools developed in 2003. These cover detailed protection issues, vulnerability criteria, and also land and property issues, all of central importance to the effective planning of housing projects.

Assistance

UNHCR and its partners will provide returnees with a cash grant, medical screening, mine-awareness education, a package of domestic non-food items (such as blankets, jerry cans for water, kitchen sets), transport (buses and trucks for personal belongings) as well as assistance at transit facilities, at immigration/customs control, and security escort services. Projects will be implemented with government partners and through sub-agreements with NGOs employing national and international staff on the ground in Iraq, to be monitored by UNHCR offices in Iraq and in neighbouring countries.

The Office will continue to run community-based reintegration activities including in the water, education and income generation sectors. To address some of the most pressing housing shortages, the organization will provide returnee families with construction materials. In many cases, the returnees themselves help to build their own houses, with technical supervision from UNHCR's implementing partners.

Organization and implementation

Management structure

UNHCR has temporarily relocated its Baghdad office to Amman and its Basra office to Kuwait. About 20 international staff are based in Amman and Kuwait while 50 Iraqi national staff operate out of Baghdad, Erbil, Sulaimaniyah, Dohuk, Mosul, Kirkuk, Nassiriyah and Basra.



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In spite of the turmoil at home, a number of Iraqis who had been in exile for many years returned home in 2004.
UNHCR / A. Van Genderen Stort



Coordination

The cluster approach being pioneered by the United Nations Country Team (UNCT) in Iraq is proving effective, allowing strategic planning and maximizing complementarities among the UN Agencies. There are ten clusters, with UNHCR's acting Chief of Mission being appointed Task Manager of Cluster 8, which is responsible for refugees and displaced people. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) is Deputy Task Manager.