



The Middle East

Working environment

Lebanon's efforts to rebuild its shattered economy after the civil war suffered a serious blow when Israel attacked Hezbollah targets in the country in 2006. Homes and offices, infrastructure and livelihoods were devastated by the attack. Up to one million people, mainly from southern Lebanon, the southern suburbs of Beirut and the Bekaa Valley, were displaced by the crisis. They returned at the close of the hostilities to towns, villages and neighbourhoods ravaged both socially and economically.

Four other situations continued to require UNHCR's attention in the Middle East: the unabated flow of asylum-seekers and migrants from the Horn of Africa to Yemen; the impact of the Sudan situation on Egypt, the Syrian Arab Republic and Jordan; the situation in Iraq and its effect on surrounding countries; and the protracted plight of Palestinian refugees living outside UNRWA's area of operations.

The Arab States and neighbouring countries in the Middle East continue to host large numbers of refugees from Palestine, Iraq, Somalia and Sudan. Most have fled to Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan, Syria and the Gulf countries. However, many States in the region have not signed international refugee instruments, and where refugees are not covered by a formal protection regime, most do not enjoy basic rights.

Strategy

UNHCR will engage governments in the region to assume greater responsibility for protecting refugees

Bahrain

Egypt

Iraq

Israel

Jordan

Kuwait

Lebanon

Oman

Qatar

Saudi Arabia

Syrian Arab Republic

United Arab Emirates

Yemen



and others of concern in accordance with international law, and will also seek their political support and financial contributions. Partnerships with the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), the League of Arab States, civil society institutions and prominent figures will be strengthened to promote refugee rights in the region.

UNHCR will make every effort to ensure that Iraqi refugees in surrounding countries are protected, notably against detention and deportation. The Office will ensure that the basic humanitarian needs of the most vulnerable Iraqi refugees are addressed in cooperation with government authorities and other partners.

An emergency preparedness and response capacity will be maintained in the region to respond to population movements both within and outside Iraq. Contingency plans will be updated regularly in coordination with key stakeholders.

Constraints

Options for durable solutions are limited at the present time. Resettlement opportunities for refugees from the Middle East have shrunk since the events of 11 September 2001, and voluntary repatriation will remain a limited option for the major refugee groups until political solutions are achieved in their respective countries of origin to allow secure and dignified returns.

Operations

UNHCR’s country programmes in **Iraq** are described in a separate chapter.

UNHCR’s office in **Egypt** has improved the quality of registration of refugees and asylum-seekers. It has also strengthened national capacity for protection and asylum management by helping develop refugee legislation and refugee status determination (RSD) procedures.

The Office will ensure the right to education, aid voluntary repatriation when conditions in countries of origin permit and strengthen refugees’ self-sufficiency to help with their local integration. Resettlement of deserving cases will be used as a strategic protection tool.

Local partnerships for protection and durable solutions will be bolstered by better public-awareness efforts and support for NGOs promoting tolerance and respect for asylum-seekers, refugees and others of concern.

In the absence of national refugee legislation, UNHCR’s Honorary Representation in **Israel** supports the Government with the registration and status determination of asylum-seekers. While working to boost its own capacity in the country, the Office plans to train the authorities in asylum procedures. It will also explore areas of legislation to enhance the protection of asylum-seekers and refugees, such as asylum-seeker visas and amendments to border procedures and social security legislation.



Yemen: Henna skills training for Somali refugees in Kharaz camp. UNHCR / R. Ek

Political, economic and security conditions in countries bordering **Jordan** – Iraq to the east, Israel and the West Bank to the west – continue to have a direct bearing on Jordan. A large proportion – estimated at 65 per cent – of Jordan's population is of Palestinian origin. More than 500,000 Iraqis are also living in the country, many of whom left Iraq after the war in 2003. This group benefited from the Temporary Protection Regime until the Government declared it to be no longer applicable to Iraqis in 2005. However, UNHCR is counting on the Government of Jordan to show flexibility and tolerance for persons of concern to the Office.

In 2007 the Office in Jordan will strengthen registration and counselling of Iraqi asylum-seekers. Special attention will be paid to women at risk and traumatized children, and psychiatric care provided to those needing it.

The Office will also pursue durable solutions for stateless persons, and will try to resettle some 100 Palestinian refugees who fled Iraq in 2003 and are still confined in a camp situation without freedom of movement. Those refugees for whom resettlement is not possible, will be assisted.

Having responded to the emergency situation during the 2006 conflict in **Lebanon**, UNHCR will focus its attention on the protection of the remaining vulnerable IDPs and returnees in the early recovery and reconstruction phase in coordination with the Government of Lebanon, local actors and other international agencies. In addition, UNHCR has two main objectives in Lebanon: first, to bring about a significant improvement in attitudes to refugee and asylum-seekers in the country; and second, to protect and assist asylum-seekers and refugees.

UNHCR will negotiate a new version of its Memorandum of Understanding with Lebanon and promote a more flexible interpretation of the existing legal framework to decriminalize the "illegal entry or presence" of refugees and asylum-seekers in the country. In consultation with the Lebanese authorities, UNHCR will address the problem of recognized refugees who have been in Lebanon for more than five years without legal residence permits and who have very little prospect of being resettled to a third country.

The resettlement function will be a major priority for the Office, with the new Regional Resettlement Hub in Beirut covering the Middle East, North Africa, South-West and Central Asia.

As a result of the seriously deteriorating situation in Iraq, many Iraqis are trying to get into **Syria**. According to a survey conducted by UNHCR, UNICEF and WFP, there are more than 500,000 Iraqis currently living in Syria. The Office will continue to provide basic medical care and protection under the temporary protection regime whenever required. Registered Iraqi refugees are encouraged to become self-reliant and benefit from job training.

A small number of Palestinians who entered Syria seeking security after living in Iraq for decades, and who do not fall under UNRWA's mandate, are also present in the country. UNHCR expects that more Palestinians will arrive from Iraq, where conditions are deteriorating and where they are often targeted by sectarian groups. UNHCR's goals in Syria are to encourage the country to accede to the 1951 Refugee Convention and develop more resettlement possibilities.

None of the Gulf countries, **Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, Oman and the United Arab Emirates**, is a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention or its 1967 Protocol. While promoting accession to the 1951 Convention, UNHCR will work to strengthen the Gulf countries' adherence to the principles of refugee law, improve protection and advocate for the introduction of domestic asylum legislation. The Office will also strengthen partnerships with the authorities through training, promote public awareness of refugee issues, seek partnerships and raise funds.

The UNHCR Office in Riyadh will continue to monitor the implementation of the alternative arrangements secured for Iraqi refugees previously living in Rafha camp by the Saudi authorities. It will monitor the authorities' plans to formalize these refugees' status by providing identity documents and residence permits, access to work and medical and education assistance.

As a signatory to the Refugee Convention and its Protocol, the Government of **Yemen** supported Somali refugees in 2006. The Office is concerned about ongoing migration from Somalia resulting in the death at sea of hundreds of would-be migrants and asylum-seekers. UNHCR is working on a Comprehensive Plan of Action for Somalia to address the problem both on the African continent and in Yemen.

The operational goals for 2007 will be to aid the authorities to provide adequate protection and assistance. Priority areas range from women and children, refugees with special needs, HIV/AIDS and the environment to shelter, health care, water, sanitation and support for refugee-hosting communities.

The Office will also promote voluntary return of refugees whenever possible. Assessments of the reintegration prospects of returnees and the sustainability of returns will be undertaken. Other durable solutions, including resettlement, will be pursued for those in need of them.

Budget (USD)		
Country	Annual Programme Budget	
	2006	2007
Egypt	4,569,179	4,294,356
Iraq	2,151,057	1,305,042
Israel	93,200	144,000
Jordan	2,098,883	1,755,137
Lebanon	3,204,282	3,667,704
Saudi Arabia	2,348,944	2,118,995
Syrian Arab Republic	1,885,381	2,050,212
United Arab Emirates	0	684,983
Yemen	5,168,295	4,755,782
Total	21,519,221	20,776,211

