

THE MIDDLE EAST

Egypt,
Iraq,
Israel,
Jordan,
Kuwait,

Lebanon,
Saudi Arabia,
Syrian Arab Republic,
United Arab Emirates,
Yemen.

THE MIDDLE EAST REGIONAL OVERVIEW

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Recent Developments

The continuing political instability in the region since the 1991 Gulf War has led to an increase in the number of asylum-seekers approaching UNHCR offices. To meet this increase, UNHCR has strengthened its protection capacity in the region and maintains offices in eight countries, in addition to the one in Israel, where UNHCR has honorary representation.

In view of the limited scope for regional integration and voluntary repatriation, third country resettlement remains the only viable lasting solution for a large number of refugees in the Middle East. During 1999, UNHCR enhanced its resettlement efforts through the Middle East Resettlement Project. This project facilitated increased staffing levels in various countries in the region and enhanced UNHCR's capacity to interview asylum-seekers and to process the resettlement paperwork for those recognised as refugees. The project has helped reduce the backlog of cases awaiting refugee status determination and resettlement processing. Considering its positive impact, UNHCR has decided to extend these objectives to its 2000 programme.

In June 1999, the Government of Iraq announced an exemption from prosecution for Iraqis who had left the country by illegal or fraudulent means. This announcement was followed by the issuance by the Iraqi embassy in Teheran of travel documents to Iraqis wishing to return to their country of origin. The Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran then sought UNHCR's assistance to facilitate the spontaneous return of Iraqis who fall in this category. During the period from August to mid-October 1999, some 870 Iraqi Arabs returned to Iraq from the Islamic Republic of Iran with UNHCR's assistance. Similarly, the decree may have contributed to an increase in the rate of spontaneous returns of refugees from Rafha Camp in northern Saudi Arabia, since in the first months after the announcement of the decree, some 60 persons voluntarily returned from Rafha refugee camp to Iraq.

In Iraq, UNHCR provides complementary assistance for some 11,800 Turkish refugees of Kurdish origin in Makhmour Refugee Camp, and in the five refugee settlements in the north of Iraq. UNHCR also assists some 15,800 Iranian refugees of

Kurdish origin in Al-Tash refugee camp and a smaller group of 3,200 Iranian refugees of Kurdish origin residing in the cities of Erbil and Sulamaniya in the north of Iraq. As of October 1999, UNHCR assisted some 110 Turkish refugees of Kurdish origin to return from Iraq to their country of origin. Meanwhile, as of mid-October 1999, some 11,400 Iraqi Kurds have reportedly left their places of residence in the Islamic Republic of Iran and returned spontaneously to the north of Iraq.

At the end of August 1999, the Government of Iraq asked UNHCR to provide basic complementary assistance to some 10,000 Iranian refugees originating from Ahwaz who have lived in southern and central of Iraq since the Iran-Iraq war of the 1980s. These refugees had been assisted by the Government of Iraq. The current economic situation in Iraq, however, has caused hardship for the Iraqi civilian population in general, and for refugees in particular.

At the regional level, UNHCR continues to focus on helping concerned governments and national NGOs to address the needs of asylum-seekers and refugees. Furthermore, UNHCR is actively promoting the accession by concerned governments to the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol.

During the recent Kosovo crisis, UNHCR worked closely with Middle Eastern governments and NGOs to channel their assistance on behalf of refugees and displaced persons. This coordination took place within UNHCR's regional campaign to promote public awareness of its activities, with a view to increasing governmental and private sector fund raising.

Strategic Objectives

UNHCR's objectives for 2000 are to: provide international protection and basic assistance to asylum-seekers and refugees in camps and urban areas with special emphasis on the needs of refugee women and children; provide lasting solutions, including assistance for voluntary repatriation or resettlement; expand the expertise and resources of governments and NGOs and promote accession to the 1951 Convention; improve public information and fund-raising activities; and maintain and regularly update its contingency planning in the event of a regional emergency, which could result in large-scale population displacement.

Operations

In addition to the country programmes in **Egypt, Iraq and Yemen**, which are presented in separate

chapters, UNHCR has operations in seven countries in the region. Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Syrian Arab Republic and the United Arab Emirates are not yet a party to the 1951 Convention and its 1967 Protocol. In these countries, UNHCR is training government officials and national NGOs in refugee law and promoting accession to the Convention and its additional Protocol.

Despite being party to the 1951 Convention and 1967 Protocol, **Israel** has yet to develop a procedure for refugee status determination. Efforts will be made in 2000, through training and awareness-raising, to enable the Government to assume this responsibility. Meanwhile, UNHCR will continue to provide, under its mandate, protection and assistance to a few individual refugees and asylum-seekers.

UNHCR in **Jordan** provides international protection and assistance to some 900 urban refugees primarily from Iraq, Sudan, and Somalia. Jordan is also host to some 1,263,000 Palestinian refugees who fall under the mandate of UNRWA. Although not yet a party to the 1951 Convention and its 1967 Protocol, the Government of Jordan maintains a very cooperative attitude towards UNHCR's role to protect and assist refugees pending a lasting solution. The continuing instability in the region has led to an increase in the number of asylum-seekers approaching UNHCR in Jordan. Since the Government of Jordan does not allow refugees to remain in the country on a long-term basis, almost all recognised refugees have to be resettled in third countries. In this context, UNHCR's primary goal in Jordan is to provide international protection and assistance to refugees, while also carrying out its institution-building programme for government officials and national NGOs.

UNHCR's office in **Kuwait** focuses on providing international protection and assistance to a registered population of some 4,300 refugees, including Afghans, Iraqis, Palestinians, and Somalis. The Government of Kuwait generally allows refugees to stay in the country on a temporary basis, pending the identification of a lasting solution. While UNHCR provides direct material assistance to the most needy refugees, the Kuwaiti agency Zakat House and the Kuwaiti Red Crescent provide material or financial assistance to needy cases referred to them by UNHCR.

In addition to the Palestinian refugees who fall under the mandate of UNRWA, **Lebanon** also hosts

some 4,000 UNHCR-assisted refugees mainly from Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia and Sudan. The country does not have national legislation dealing with refugees, and the Lebanese Government allows refugees to remain in the country for a very limited period pending a lasting solution. UNHCR provides international protection and assistance, including medical care, to needy refugees. It is expected that UNHCR's vocational training activities in Lebanon will enhance the integration prospects for refugee women in resettlement countries.

Saudi Arabia continues to host some 5,400 Iraqi and 160 Afghan refugees who live in the Rafha Camp. While UNHCR provides international protection, all the infrastructural assistance is given by the Government. The main focus of UNHCR's activities is refugee protection and facilitating lasting solutions for recognised refugees in the Kingdom. Moreover, UNHCR's office in Riyadh acts as the coordination centre for UNHCR's operations in the five countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council.

In addition to the Palestinian refugees who fall under the mandate of UNRWA, **Syrian Arab Republic** is also host to some 5,000 refugees registered with UNHCR who originate from Iraq, Somalia, Yemen, and other countries. Approximately 3,950 urban refugees live in Damascus and another 1,000 live in El-Hol Camp in Hassakeh Governorate. UNHCR will continue to provide international protection to recognised refugees in Syrian Arab Republic. Basic assistance is provided for some 5,000 refugees on the basis of individual needs assessment. Assistance includes monthly subsistence allowances, basic health care, primary education or vocational training. While resettlement to third countries will continue to be an option for some qualified refugees, voluntary repatriation will also be pursued for those willing to return to their countries of origin. UNHCR, through its local partner, will continue to provide special services for refugee women. This assis-

tance will include training on various health issues such as pregnancy, family planning and the prevention of AIDS.

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) is host to some 530 recognised refugees who originate mainly from the Islamic Republic of Iran, Iraq, Somalia, and Uganda, but also include a number of Palestinians. Although the Government is not a signatory to the 1951 Convention and does not yet have established procedures for refugee status determination, the local authorities do allow refugees to stay, upon UNHCR's request, pending the identification of a lasting solution. In the meantime, UNHCR provides international protection to the refugees while their assistance needs are met primarily by local NGOs (after referral by UNHCR). UNHCR's primary focus in the UAE is to ensure refugee protection and assistance. A secondary focus is for UNHCR to enhance awareness of its activities and programmes and increase its visibility with a view to private sector fund-raising for UNHCR's operations globally.

THE MIDDLE EAST	
BUDGET (USD)	
Country	Annual Programme
Egypt	3,977,010
Iraq	3,292,701
Jordan	1,665,487
Kuwait	891,015
Lebanon	2,667,045
Saudi Arabia	1,373,137
Syrian Arab Republic	2,258,251
United Arab Emirates	174,000
Yemen	3,090,192
Regional Project*	264,200
Sub-total	19,653,038
Bureau at Headquarters	687,600
Total	20,340,638

* Covers scholarships for refugee students in countries in the Middle East.