

A young child is sitting on the ground in a refugee camp, looking thoughtful. The child is wearing a white shirt and dark pants. The background shows a large, open area with many white tents or structures, suggesting a temporary settlement. The overall tone is somber and reflective.

Middle East

Working environment

Security concerns dominate asylum policies in the Middle East, a region which both produces and hosts a large number of refugees. The vast majority of countries have not acceded to the main international refugee instruments, nor do they have in place asylum laws or procedures consistent with international standards. National and regional strategies to deal with external and internal population displacements, including mixed migration movements, are also lacking. Nevertheless, this is a region where millions of refugees and other people of concern to UNHCR have found safety, and where States show a great deal of hospitality and a sincere interest in strategic partnerships with the Office.

The humanitarian situation of Iraqi refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) is of great concern to UNHCR. The presence of hundreds of thousands of Iraqi refugees in the Syrian Arab Republic and Jordan imposes a heavy burden on the economies and social structures of these countries, which are also host to a significant number of Palestinian refugees. Some of the pressure has been allayed by the generous support of the international community, which has had a positive impact on the overall protection climate for Iraqi refugees in the Middle East. Nevertheless, these two countries need more robust solidarity to enable them to cope with the situation.

Although the conditions prevailing in Iraq are not conducive to organized voluntary repatriation, many refugees are opting to return spontaneously. The Office has adopted a new individual case management policy

Bahrain

Egypt

Iraq

Israel

Jordan

Kuwait

Lebanon

Oman

Qatar

Saudi Arabia

Syrian Arab Republic

United Arab Emirates

Yemen



to provide repatriation assistance to these returnees. Given the improvement in security in Iraq, as well as the growing concern of the refugees in the neighbouring States over their deteriorating conditions, the pace of voluntary repatriation is likely to increase significantly in 2009.

In Yemen, protection concerns arise from mixed movements of thousands of asylum-seekers and migrants. These are mainly Somalis and Ethiopians fleeing violence and/or seeking better economic opportunities. They make their way across the Gulf of Aden in unseaworthy boats, and often fall prey to torture, abuse, exploitation and even death.

The Government of Yemen has applied an open door policy towards Somalis, granting them refugee status on a *prima facie* basis. As the number of refugees and other migrants increases, however, this hospitality is being strained. Unless the international community shares more of the burden, the Government may be forced to restrict its welcome. The situation is aggravated by the presence of some IDPs uprooted by internal conflict in northern Yemen.

Asylum-seekers and refugees from Sudan, Eritrea and sub-Saharan countries continue to cross from Egypt to Israel in search of protection and economic opportunities. This has hurt protection in Egypt, where in June 2008 the authorities *refouled* a significant number of Eritrean asylum-seekers to their country of origin.

Strategy

UNHCR's main focus in the Middle East includes: ensuring that basic humanitarian needs of refugees and other people of concern are met; addressing gaps in the protection of refugees, asylum-seekers and others of concern to the Office such as the non-accession to international refugee instruments and the lack of national asylum policies and procedures; and addressing statelessness.

The Office seeks to tackle these challenges by finding durable solutions and providing basic humanitarian assistance, including care and maintenance and self-reliance opportunities, to refugees and IDPs. It also mobilizes support for major refugee-hosting countries—particularly the Syrian Arab Republic, Jordan and Yemen. Furthermore, it helps to build the capacity to deal with asylum issues among governmental structures, civil society institutions and regional organizations, such as the League of Arab States. In this regard, UNHCR's partnerships with the Gulf States help it to secure their political, humanitarian and financial support.

Another tier of UNHCR's strategy involves efforts to reduce statelessness. This includes the preparation of situation papers, training and discussions with governments on ways to reduce statelessness.



Iraqis at the al Tanf border seeking refuge in the Syrian Arab Republic.

UNHCR/P. Sands

Constraints

Security concerns in the region overshadow States' national policies and practices. The war in Iraq, the long-standing Palestinian problem, and the increase in extremist activities hamper refugee protection and humanitarian work in the Middle East. The absence of responsive national asylum systems is another constraint.

Operations

UNHCR's operations in **Egypt** and **Yemen** and the supplementary programme for the Iraq Situation are covered in separate chapters.

In **Jordan**, **Lebanon** and the **Syrian Arab Republic**, in addition to activities related to the Iraq Operation, UNHCR conducts core mandate activities on behalf of a few thousand refugees, mostly from Sudan and Somalia. This includes registration and individual refugee status determination (RSD), as well as the provision of basic humanitarian assistance to the most vulnerable refugee families. UNHCR also seeks durable solutions, mostly through resettlement, for refugees in these countries. In Lebanon, UNHCR has a regional support office to aid registration, RSD and resettlement in the entire Middle East and North Africa region.

UNHCR is strengthening its presence in **Israel** to support the authorities in registering and determining

the status of several thousand asylum-seekers. The Office also aims to assist in the establishment and implementation of asylum procedures and is looking into areas of legislation that could be modified to improve protection.

UNHCR's operations in **Bahrain**, **Kuwait**, **Oman**, **Qatar**, **Saudi Arabia** and the **United Arab Emirates** are managed by the regional office in Riyadh. Public awareness, fundraising, RSD and resettlement are the main components of UNHCR's activities in the Gulf region. The Office also promotes accession to international refugee instruments, the adoption of national legislation consistent with international standards, and the reduction of statelessness.

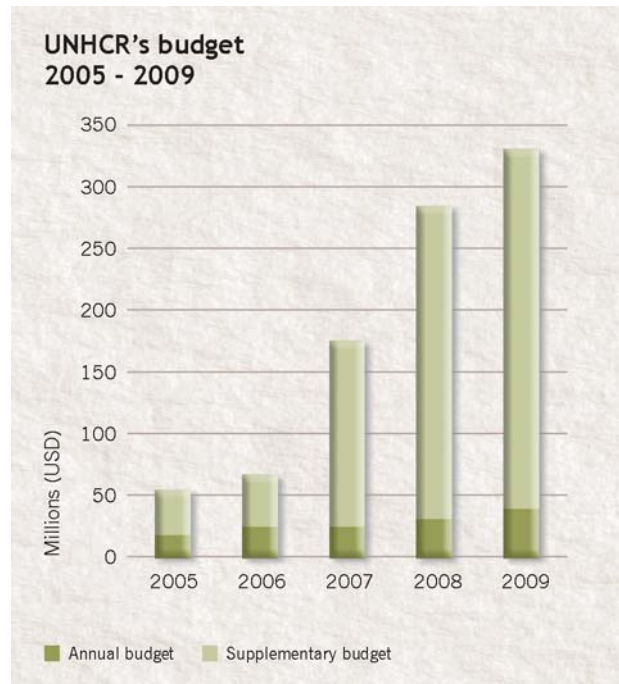
UNHCR encourages governments in the region to assume greater responsibility for the protection of refugees and others of concern in accordance with international law. In this regard, the Office is strengthening partnerships with governments and international organizations, such as the Gulf Cooperation Council, the Organization of the Islamic Conference, the League of Arab States, civil society institutions and prominent individuals to promote the protection of refugees and stateless people in the Muslim world.

Statelessness issues concern most countries in the Gulf region. UNHCR monitors the situation and advocates for the full local integration of stateless people in their societies of habitual residence. It also looks for partnerships with civil society institutions to further this goal.

Financial information

UNHCR's financial requirements in the region have increased significantly in recent years due to the situation in Iraq. In 2009, all requirements related to Iraqi refugees will be covered under a supplementary programme. The supplementary programme for the Somalia Situation also has a budgetary component for activities in Yemen.

The Annual Programme Budget for 2009 remains relatively stable. The requirements under this budget are growing most significantly in Israel and Yemen, due to an increase in staffing to cope with the growing number of asylum-seekers arriving in these countries.



Budget (USD)						
Countries	2008			2009		
	Annual budget	Supplementary budget	Total	Annual budget	Supplementary budget	Total
Egypt	5,002,166	2,798,471	7,800,637	5,920,580	3,867,787	9,788,367
Iraq	632,337	51,189,623	51,821,960	666,701	75,806,938	76,473,639
Israel	723,075	0	723,075	2,176,844	0	2,176,844
Jordan	1,266,529	50,884,309	52,150,838	1,846,833	44,966,843	46,813,676
Lebanon	3,019,565	6,548,991	9,568,556	2,650,476	6,566,945	9,217,421
Saudi Arabia	2,286,449	300,000	2,586,449	2,430,997	394,909	2,825,906
Syrian Arab Republic	1,750,058	128,807,716	130,557,774	2,088,608	127,714,185	129,802,793
United Arab Emirates	3,220,876	0	3,220,876	3,205,263	0	3,205,263
Yemen	6,713,913	6,553,946	13,267,859	18,930,355	13,441,080	32,371,435
Regional activities ¹	0	5,571,625	5,571,625	0	17,415,886	17,415,886
Total	24,614,968	252,654,681	277,269,649	39,916,657	290,174,573	330,091,230

¹ Includes regional support activities for procurement and stockpiling, as well as durable solutions.

Note: Supplementary programme budgets exclude 7 per cent support costs that are recovered from contributions to meet indirect costs for UNHCR.