

Middle East

Bahrain
Egypt
Iraq
Israel
Jordan
Kuwait
Lebanon
Oman
Qatar
Saudi Arabia
Syrian Arab Republic
United Arab Emirates
Yemen

A Palestinian woman holds a young child at Al Tanf refugee camp on the Syria- Iraqi border



| OPERATIONAL HIGHLIGHTS |

- The Middle East subregion faced a complicated picture of displacement in 2008. This included millions of Iraqis who had fled their homes to seek safety in other parts of their country and hundreds of thousands more who found refuge in Jordan, the Syrian Arab Republic and other countries in the region and beyond. Both Syria and Jordan remained particularly generous in their treatment of Iraqis despite already bearing the burden of large numbers of Palestinian and other refugees.
- There was some improvement in the situation in Iraq, with many parts of the country seeing a notable reduction in the number of security incidents. Furthermore, there was a rise in the number of people returning to their home areas, especially among internally displaced persons (IDPs). Anticipating more such returns, UNHCR has developed an individual case management mechanism to respond to the returnees' protection and assistance needs. However, the security situation in Iraq remains fragile and is not conducive to large-scale returns.
- The humanitarian crisis in Gaza dominated events in the region in late 2008. Though the hostilities between Israel and the Hamas Government in Gaza did not lead to significant external displacement, UNHCR provided non-food items and logistical support to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). The High Commissioner issued a public statement reiterating the need to protect civilians fleeing the violence.
- In 2008, UNHCR recorded a 70 per cent increase in the number of asylum-seekers and migrants arriving in Yemen from the Horn of Africa, with more than 50,000 people making the dangerous journey across the Gulf of Aden on smugglers' boats. Some 950 individuals were reported to have drowned or gone missing during the voyage.
- The traditionally positive protection climate in Egypt was negatively affected in 2008 by an increase in the number of asylum-seekers and migrants attempting to cross the Sinai desert to Israel. Several asylum-seekers and migrants were returned by the Israeli authorities, without prior assessment of their protection needs, and hundreds of Eritreans were detained and deported from Egypt, despite UNHCR's appeals to the authorities of the two countries to refrain from forcible return and to grant the Office access to detention centres. With the exception of a group detained in the Aswan prison in Egypt, UNHCR has not been permitted access to detained Eritrean asylum-seekers or received verifiable information about them.
- UNHCR made significant progress in fostering partnerships in the region. In October, the Office and the League of Arab States organized a conference on asylum and migration for Arab Parliamentarians in the Egyptian town of Sharm el Sheikh. A follow-up conference is planned for July 2009 in Tunis. UNHCR also organized a workshop on asylum and migration for Arab government officials in Doha, Qatar in July.



Working environment

The Middle East subregion has begun to feel the consequences of the global financial crisis, especially in the countries hosting large numbers of refugees. Increases in the cost of food and other essential commodities, combined with a rise in refugee numbers, may affect the generosity of host countries.

The growing number of asylum-seekers and migrants crossing the Gulf of Aden is straining the overstretched resources of the Government of Yemen, and may have a negative impact on the country's traditional hospitality towards Somali refugees. The situation was aggravated in October 2008 by severe floods that damaged infrastructure and displaced some 25,000 people in the governorates of Hadramaout and al-Mahara.

Generous international support and the collaboration of host governments have been crucial to maintaining the asylum space for Iraqi refugees in the region. However, the uncertainty of return prospects, the lack of local integration opportunities and a decline in international interest could increase the burden shouldered by the main host countries.

Achievements and impact

UNHCR's objectives in the region revolve around four major themes: protecting refugees and others of concern; meeting these groups' basic humanitarian and social needs; identifying and implementing durable solutions for refugees; and helping to build the capacity of governmental bodies dealing with the displaced.

UNHCR's major protection and assistance programme for Iraqi refugees entered its third year in 2008. The programme covered the provision of food and non-food items, cash grants, health care and education; projects to prevent and address sexual and gender-based violence; and legal and social counseling.

In Syria and Jordan, over 600,000 medical interventions were made with UNHCR's assistance for Iraqi refugees. Additionally, some 19,000 needy families received monthly cash grants in both Syria and Jordan, while some 155,000 Iraqi refugees benefited from the distribution of non-food items in Syria. More than 90,000 children in Syria were enrolled for formal and informal educational activities.

UNHCR made some 33,000 resettlement submissions on behalf of Iraqi refugees in the region in 2008. Meanwhile, more than 250,000 Iraqi IDPs and returnees benefited from all or parts of UNHCR's reintegration activities in Iraq, including shelter rehabilitation, the provision of emergency shelter kits, quick-impact projects in the water/sanitation and education sectors, and the distribution of non-food items.

In Yemen, UNHCR's programme benefited tens of thousands of Somali refugees and Yemeni IDPs, helping to maintain the asylum space in this major refugee-hosting country.

Constraints

The global financial crisis, big hikes in the cost of food and other basic commodities, armed conflicts, the deteriorating economic situation in the Horn of Africa and security concerns were the major constraints for UNHCR operations in the Middle East subregion in 2008.

With the exception of Egypt, Israel and Yemen, no country in the Middle East subregion is party to the international refugee instruments. The absence of national asylum frameworks and a sharp increase in the number of people involved in mixed migration to and through the region presented significant protection challenges for UNHCR.

Operations

UNHCR operations in **Iraq, Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, Egypt** and **Yemen** are covered in separate chapters.

UNHCR operations in **Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia** and the **United Arab Emirates** were managed from the regional office in Riyadh. The Office worked to enhance partnerships with governments, regional organizations such as the Gulf Cooperation Council and the Organization of the Islamic Conference, civil society institutions and prominent individuals to promote their engagement in protecting and assisting refugees and stateless persons.

Besides the workshop on asylum and migration conducted for Arab government officials in July in Doha, another is planned for Medina, Saudi Arabia in the second half of 2009. Moreover, work on a partnership agreement with the Khalifa Bin Hamad Foundation, which is sponsored by the Government of the United Arab Emirates, has advanced significantly.

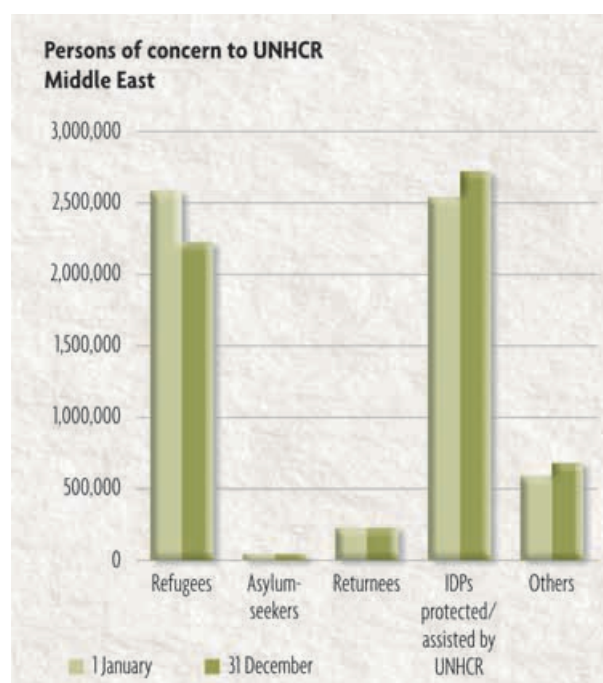
In **Israel**, a strengthened UNHCR presence has helped to build the Government's capacity to protect and assist refugees. Towards this end, the Office supported the Government's efforts to establish responsive national asylum systems consistent with international standards. It also intervened in detention and other protection cases. The granting of work permits to Eritrean asylum-seekers who had entered Israel before 2008 and the provision of temporary protection to hundreds of Sudanese from the Darfur region have been important positive developments in Israel.

Meanwhile, mindful of the highly sensitive nature of the Israel-Egypt border, UNHCR has expressed readiness to work with the concerned authorities to ensure respect

for the principle of *non-refoulement* while addressing the security concerns of the concerned States.

Financial information

UNHCR's operations in the Middle East were generally well-funded. The Iraq operation budget, which grew from USD 210 million in 2007 to USD 271 million in 2008, was 98 per cent funded in 2008. Requirements for other operations in the region increased significantly in the course of the year, although in many cases they did not cover all needs. In Yemen, the operational budget increased from USD 9 million in 2007 to nearly USD 18 million in 2008, but the Supplementary Programme for IDPs received only 57 per cent of required funding. A Global Needs Assessment exercise in 2008 showed serious gaps in the response to the humanitarian needs of refugees and asylum-seekers in Yemen.



Budget and expenditure in the Middle East (USD)						
Country	Final budget			Expenditure		
	Annual budget	Supplementary budget	Total	Annual budget	Supplementary budget	Total
Egypt	5,125,026	2,803,602	7,928,628	4,991,669	2,003,536	6,995,205
Iraq	407,337	51,089,623	51,496,960	334,744	50,372,657	50,707,401
Israel	1,897,919	0	1,897,919	1,753,201	0	1,753,201
Jordan	1,183,449	49,884,309	51,067,758	1,066,544	44,489,944	45,556,488
Lebanon	2,868,526	6,548,991	9,417,517	2,611,592	6,194,481	8,806,073
Saudi Arabia	2,825,203	400,000	3,225,203	2,761,054	394,191	3,155,245
Syrian Arab Republic	1,238,911	128,297,716	129,536,627	1,103,582	107,019,047	108,122,629
United Arab Emirates	2,158,503	0	2,158,503	2,133,220	0	2,133,220
Yemen	11,761,739	8,188,937	19,950,676	10,860,232	4,810,579	15,670,811
Regional activities ¹	0	5,571,625	5,571,625	0	3,519,163	3,519,163
Total	29,466,612	252,784,803	282,251,415	27,615,838	218,803,598	246,419,436

Note: Excludes indirect support costs that are recovered from contributions against supplementary programmes and the 'New or additional activities – mandate-related' (NAM) reserve.

¹ Includes emergency assistance for Iraqi refugees and others of concern.

Voluntary contributions to the Middle East (USD)				
Earmarking	Donor	Annual Budget	Supplementary Budget	Total
Egypt	European Commission	368,455		368,455
	Netherlands	224,230		224,230
	United States of America	1,319,833	156,661	1,476,494
Egypt Subtotal		1,912,518	156,661	2,069,179
Iraq	Australia		1,231,439	1,231,439
	Belgium		1,446,345	1,446,345
	Canada		1,426,380	1,426,380
	CERF		2,523,365	2,523,365
	Croatia		37,200	37,200
	Denmark		4,524,761	4,524,761
	European Commission		416,667	416,667
	Germany		2,068,429	2,068,429
	Ireland		2,304,665	2,304,665
	Kuwait		930,000	930,000
	New Zealand		512,988	512,988
	Norway		180,934	180,934
	Poland		294,768	294,768
	Australia for UNHCR		9,969	9,969
	Private Donors in Canada		15,915	15,915
	Private Donors in Greece		3,227	3,227
	Japan Association for UNHCR		42,324	42,324
	Brighter Vision Foundation (Japan)		18,600	18,600
	<i>España con ACNUR</i>		14,576	14,576
	HQ Online Donations		18,107	18,107
	Private Donors in Syria		29,143	29,143
	Charities Aid Foundation (United Kingdom)		1,143	1,143
	Private Donors in the United Kingdom		8,327	8,327
	USA For UNHCR		63,240	63,240
	Sweden		4,222,165	4,222,165
	Switzerland		1,014,827	1,014,827
	United Kingdom		263,068	263,068
	United States of America		9,300,000	9,300,000
Iraq Subtotal			32,922,572	32,922,572
Jordan	CERF		3,311,326	3,311,326
	European Commission		2,790,310	2,790,310
	France		271,137	271,137
	Germany		733,438	733,438
	Iraq		7,440,000	7,440,000
	Japan Association for UNHCR		77,691	77,691
	USA for UNHCR		93,000	93,000
	Spain		602,332	602,332
	United Kingdom		52,700	52,700
	United States of America	194,305	38,038,000	38,232,305
	Jordan Subtotal		194,305	53,409,935

Earmarking	Donor	Annual Budget	Supplementary Budget	Total
Lebanon	Denmark	57,236	188,849	246,085
	European Commission		343,858	343,858
	Norway	242,148		242,148
	Australia for UNHCR	634		634
	Private Donors In Greece	125		125
	Japan Association for UNHCR	263		263
	United States of America	312,401		312,401
Lebanon Subtotal		612,808	532,707	1,145,515
Syrian Arab Republic	Australia		497,220	497,220
	Denmark	24,712		24,712
	European Commission		9,211,807	9,211,807
	France		406,706	406,706
	Germany		1,466,877	1,466,877
	Italy		4,216,321	4,216,321
	Netherlands		2,513,513	2,513,513
	Japan Association for UNHCR		218,513	218,513
	Private Donors in the Netherlands		8,649	8,649
	<i>Stichting Vluchteling</i> (Netherlands)		15,552	15,552
	Spain		1,204,663	1,204,663
	United States of America	19,575	7,375,339	7,394,914
Syrian Arab Republic Subtotal		44,287	27,135,160	27,179,447
Yemen	Canada		231,904	231,904
	CERF		1,243,805	1,243,805
	European Commission	2,225,541	323,834	2,549,375
	Germany	60,233	240,621	300,854
	Japan	1,500,000	469,255	1,969,255
	Netherlands	2,027,351		2,027,351
	Red Crescent Society (United Arab Emirates)	13,924		13,924
	USA for UNHCR	109,600		109,600
	Sweden	1,078,582		1,078,582
	Switzerland	398,179		398,179
	United States of America	54,688	1,569,100	1,623,788
Yemen Subtotal		7,468,098	4,078,519	11,546,617
Middle East Subregion	Australia		4,102,941	4,102,941
	Italy		1,559,038	1,559,038
	Sweden	3,697,997	2,149,461	5,847,458
	United Kingdom		5,546,720	5,546,720
	United States of America	4,372,000		4,372,000
Middle East Subtotal		8,069,997	13,358,159	21,428,156
Total		18,302,013	131,593,712	149,895,724

Note: Contributions shown exclude indirect support costs that are recovered from contributions against supplementary programmes and the "New or additional activities - mandate-related" (NAM) reserve.