

The Middle East

Working environment

Four major political situations have had a significant impact on UNHCR's work and resources in the region:

- the Iraq crisis and its effect on neighbouring countries;
- the conflict in the Horn of Africa and its impact on the Middle East, particularly Yemen;
- the situation in Sudan and its impact on Egypt, the Syrian Arab Republic and Jordan; and
- the protracted Palestinian problem and its influence on attitudes towards asylum in the Middle East.

UNHCR has reviewed its programmes in order to respond to the massive internal and external displacement that the developments in Iraq have provoked. This has led to a shift away from the previous priorities of reintegration and rehabilitation inside Iraq. The focus now is on finding solutions for three groups: the most vulnerable among Iraqi internally displaced persons (IDPs), non-Iraqi refugees inside Iraq, and Iraqi refugees in neighbouring countries.

By September 2007, the number of IDPs in Iraq was estimated at more than 2.2 million, with nearly a million displaced after the Samara bombings in February 2006. As the violence continues to erupt and the humanitarian situation inside Iraq to deteriorate, the outflow of persons across the country's borders is estimated to be at the rate of some 40,000 to 50,000 people per month.

Bahrain

Egypt

Iraq

Israel

Kuwait

Lebanon

Jordan

Oman

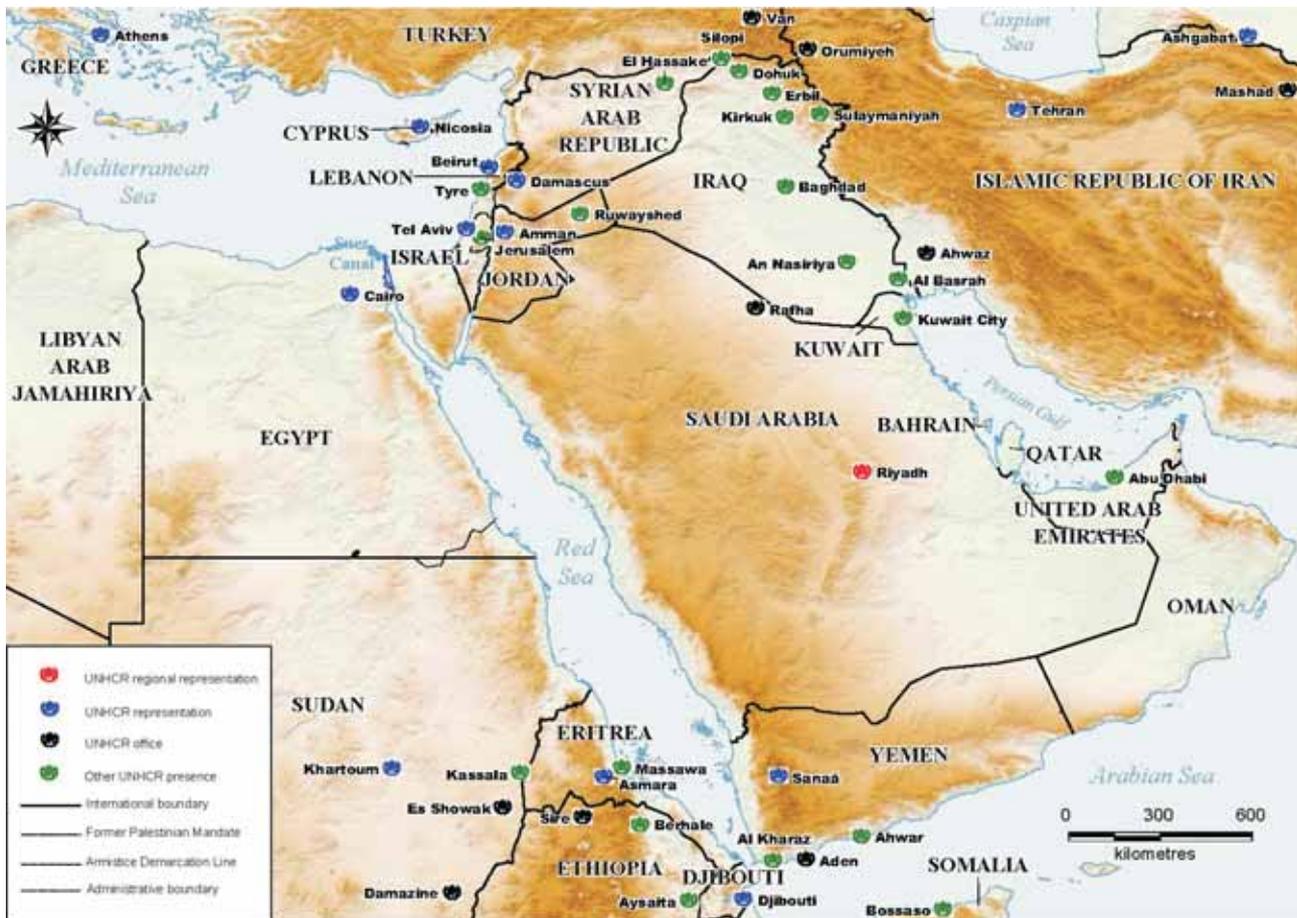
Qatar

Saudi Arabia

Syrian Arab Republic

United Arab Emirates

Yemen



Up to two million Iraqis have sought refuge in neighbouring countries, mainly Syria and Jordan, with others in Lebanon, Egypt and further afield. In addition, some 48,000 refugees inside Iraq have been affected by the violence, particularly Palestinian refugees. Of the 34,000 Palestinian refugees who lived in Baghdad before the war, only an estimated 13,000 remain in the city. Many of them have tried to leave the country; currently, some 1,700 are stranded at the Iraqi-Syrian border in extremely harsh conditions.

For more than 60 years, Syria and Jordan have hosted hundreds of thousands of Palestinian refugees, whom UNRWA has been responsible for assisting under its mandate. The current massive influx of Iraqis into urban centres in both countries has taken a toll on their respective economic and social infrastructures, mainly in the education and health sectors. Rising living costs, particularly for housing, affect nationals and refugees alike. Women and children, both inside Iraq and in neighbouring countries, are increasingly subject to gender-based violence and other forms of exploitation. As a result, the generous hospitality accorded to Iraqis is starting to wane, and both Syria and Jordan have applied restrictive measures on Iraqis seeking to enter their territories.

Elsewhere in the Middle East, and particularly in the Gulf region, UNHCR continues to try to widen national

partnerships. The aim is to encourage countries in the region to become further engaged in UNHCR's governing mechanisms and operations. In Yemen, the working environment is characterized by a continued influx of boats from the Horn of Africa carrying mixed groups of migrants and asylum-seekers.

Strategy

UNHCR will seek to ensure that Iraqi refugees in neighbouring countries, refugees inside Iraq and IDPs in Iraq are protected according to international law and standards. The Office will campaign against *refoulement* while ensuring that the basic humanitarian and social needs of persons of concern are met.

The Office will make every effort to develop an international protection regime by helping governments in the region to build their asylum capacities. It will also develop dynamic partnerships with key stakeholders to address refugee and IDP issues in a comprehensive manner.

UNHCR will maintain its emergency-preparedness capacity to respond in the region. Its regional contingency plan will be updated regularly in coordination with stakeholders.



UNHCR/S. Malkawi

A Palestinian refugee in the Karamah camp, in Rwaished. The first group of Palestinian refugees who fled Iraq is being resettled in Brasil.

Only progress towards political reconciliation will open up sustainable humanitarian solutions for refugees in the Middle East. Meanwhile, UNHCR will make every effort to find durable solutions, including voluntary return and reintegration in countries of origin; to support self-reliance; and to promote resettlement as an effective protection tool.

Constraints

Voluntary repatriation continues to be a limited option for the region's major refugee groups, pending political solutions in their countries of origin. At the same time, the legal status of Iraqis in neighbouring countries requires close monitoring. It is difficult to respond adequately to their legal, social and humanitarian needs in an environment of vulnerability and uncertainty about their future prospects.

Resettlement opportunities for refugees from the Middle East are limited in an international climate where xenophobia is on the rise and refugees from the region are often faced with discriminatory assumptions and perceptions.

Operations

UNHCR's operations in Egypt and Yemen, as well as the Iraq situation response are described in separate chapters.

In the Gulf region UNHCR will encourage the Governments of **Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, Oman, Saudi Arabia**, and the **United Arab Emirates**, to assume greater responsibility for the protection of refugees and others of concern in accordance with international law. There are some 1,550 recognized refugees under UNHCR's mandate in the Gulf States, while an estimated 240,000 Palestinian refugees come under the purview of UNRWA. Saudi Arabia has 600 asylum-seekers.

Statelessness is also an issue in these countries. The largest group of stateless persons in the region are the *Bidoons* in Kuwait, estimated to number between 88,000 and 100,000 people. Saudi Arabia is estimated to have some 70,000 stateless persons. UNHCR will continue to monitor these groups and advocate for their full local integration while seeking partnerships with civil society and other institutions.

The Office is seeking comprehensive partnerships with the Gulf States to enhance their political and humanitarian support for refugees and broaden UNHCR's donor base. Partnerships with the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), the League of Arab States (LAS), the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), as well as with civil-society institutions and prominent figures, are being strengthened to promote asylum principles and refugee rights in the region. UNHCR supports the forthcoming OIC conference on refugees in the Muslim world, to be hosted by the Government of Pakistan in the second quarter of 2008.

Israel is seeing the arrival of Sudanese and other asylum-seekers from sub-Saharan Africa in search of protection. UNHCR's presence, previously an honorary representative, was expanded in 2007 with the establishment of a liaison office in Tel Aviv. In the absence of national refugee legislation, UNHCR will continue to support the Government in the registration and status determination of asylum-seekers, train the authorities in asylum procedures and explore the possibilities of legislation to enhance protection. The Office will also provide some financial assistance to a growing number of vulnerable refugees and asylum-seekers.

Jordan, which hosts hundreds of thousands of Palestinian refugees assisted by UNRWA, received over 500,000 Iraqis fleeing the war. Although refugees are not legally permitted employment, some work in the informal labour market and others enjoy the support of relatives abroad. However, many cannot meet their basic needs. UNHCR will make every effort to protect and assist refugees and persons of concern in Jordan, while working towards durable solutions as stipulated in the 1998 Memorandum of Understanding between the Government of Jordan and UNHCR. In a positive development, the Government of Jordan has allowed all Iraqi children access to Jordanian schools, regardless of their families' residence status.

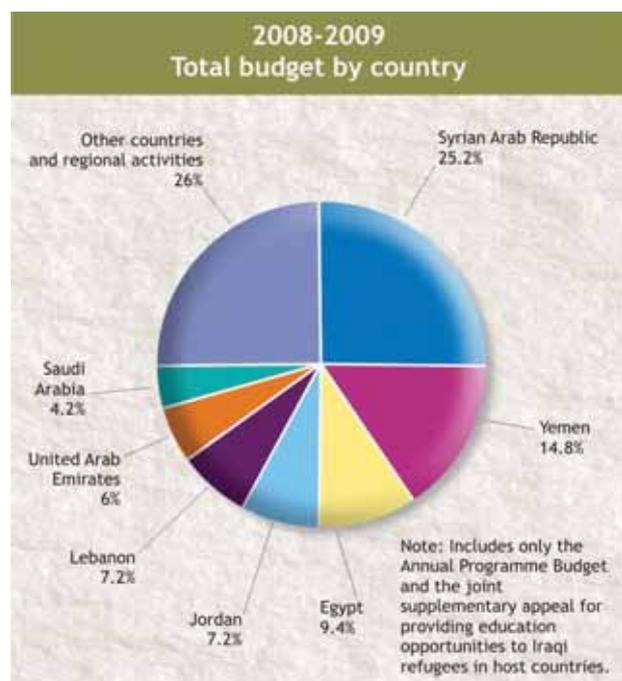
Lebanon hosts some 30,000 Iraqi and Sudanese refugees, mostly in urban areas. Many are vulnerable and seek assistance from UNHCR and others. Due to the complex socio-political context in Lebanon, the local integration of refugees is not an option. Pending an improvement in the Iraq situation, resettlement is the only realistic solution for this group.

Following the July 2006 conflict, UNHCR has been implementing projects designed to assist IDPs and build the capacity of community-development centres to

provide humanitarian and longer-term relief, based on an agreement between UNHCR and the Ministry of Social Affairs in early 2007. UNHCR also cooperates and supports the authorities and civil society in providing assistance and protection to those displaced by the conflict.

The Resettlement Hub, as well as a number of regional functions such as community services, refugee status determination (RSD) and registration, are now concentrated in Beirut. The office in Beirut supports other offices in the Middle East and North Africa, ensuring consistency in the region and contributing to policy development. UNHCR will raise awareness of international law and asylum procedures among the authorities and civil-society institutions.

In the **Syrian Arab Republic**, the refugee population is composed mostly of Iraqis, with some Sudanese and Somalis. Although not a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention, Syria has demonstrated laudable generosity in welcoming some 1.2 million Iraqis fleeing the war over the past few years. Iraqi refugees have access to educational, health, other social services and commodities subsidized by the Government. However, due to the lack of commensurate support from the international community, the Government has imposed some entry restrictions for Iraqis. UNHCR is advocating for support by the international community for Syria in its humanitarian relief efforts, whether through bilateral channels or through UNHCR and other UN agencies. UNHCR's assistance programme in Syria focuses on education, health, food, shelter and counselling.



Budget (USD)							
Country	2007			2008			2009
	Annual Programme Budget	Supp. Programme Budget	Total	Annual Programme Budget	Supp. Programme Budget	Total	Annual Programme Budget
Egypt	4,294,356	3,190,383	7,484,739	5,002,166	75,000	5,077,166	5,126,616
Iraq	1,305,042	26,774,269	28,079,311	632,337	0	632,337	632,336
Israel	144,000	0	144,000	723,075	0	723,075	723,075
Jordan	1,755,137	31,373,117	33,128,254	1,266,529	4,896,332	6,162,861	1,665,940
Lebanon	3,667,704	5,016,513	8,684,217	3,019,565	1,275,000	4,294,565	3,512,068
Saudi Arabia	2,118,995	120,344	2,239,339	2,286,449	0	2,286,449	2,286,449
Syrian Arab Republic	2,050,212	58,631,698	60,681,910	1,750,058	23,775,000	25,525,058	1,867,583
United Arab Emirates	684,983	0	684,983	3,220,876	0	3,220,876	3,291,927
Yemen	4,755,782	1,238,217	5,993,999	6,713,913	2,594,476	9,308,389	6,788,092
Regional activities	0	24,150,780	24,150,780	0	25,478,669	25,478,669	0
Total	20,776,211	150,495,321	171,271,532	24,614,968	58,094,477	82,709,445	25,894,086

Note: The Supplementary Programme Budget excludes a 7 per cent support cost that is recovered from contributions to meet indirect costs for UNHCR.