

Iraq



Working environment

The context

Insurgent attacks and sectarian strife have created a climate of constant insecurity in regions of Iraq which, along with continued military operations, spurred massive population displacement in 2006. The year saw considerable political progress, including the entry into force of a Constitution approved by popular referendum and the formation of the first democratically-elected Government of Iraq. Parallel to these political developments, targeted and brutal violence in mixed areas caused mass movements between Iraq's centre, north and south. The Iraqi Government reports that since February 2006 alone, more than 400,000 people have been displaced within the country. That brings the total number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the country to over 1.6 million. The mass displacement of Iraqis that was feared in 2003 is now occurring — but without the international concern that it deserves.

The violence in Iraq is worsening the humanitarian climate dramatically. Insecurity, a severe shortage of basic social services and a stagnant economy have propelled a steady outflow of Iraqis to neighbouring countries. Some 1.5 million Iraqis, 90,000 of whom are registered with UNHCR, are believed to have moved to other

countries in the region: at least 500,000 to 700,000 are believed to be in Jordan and more than 500,000 in Syria. While neighbouring States have been relatively accommodating, the exodus is placing a strain on resources and creating tensions with host nations, leading to a deterioration in protection for Iraqis in the region. To ensure consistent and predictable treatment, UNHCR has adopted a situational approach to deal with the displaced Iraqi population.

The needs

Refugees

UNHCR's focus within Iraq remains the protection of some 50,000 refugees from the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Syria, Sudan and Turkey. The Office is particularly concerned that these refugees are increasingly targeted and becoming inaccessible in the centre and south, especially Palestinian and some 500 Iranian Ahwazi refugees. In Baghdad, Palestinian refugees have been increasingly threatened, and a number of them killed, by local factions, leading to the flight of several hundred to Syria and Jordan. UNHCR will work with the relevant authorities to provide security and basic protection for all refugee groups, while continuing to assist the local integration of Iranian refugees and helping Turkish refugees in northern Iraq.

Planning figures					
Type of population	Origin	Jan 2007		Dec 2007	
		Total in country	Of whom assisted by UNHCR	Total in country	Of whom assisted by UNHCR
Refugees	Occupied Palestinian Territories	22,620	22,620	18,000	18,000
	Islamic Rep. of Iran	11,960	11,960	11,150	11,150
	Turkey	16,110	16,110	8,953	8,950
	Various	820	820	1,330	1,330
Asylum-seekers	Islamic Rep. of Iran	990	990	650	650
	Syrian Arab Rep.	870	870	-	-
	Turkey	360	360	100	100
Returnees (refugees)		20,000	15,000	7,000	1,000
IDPs ¹		1,800,000	70,000	2,000,000	600,000
Returnees (IDPs)		150,000	52,000	100,000	80,000
Others of concern	Stateless Bidoons	100,000	-	100,000	100,000
	Stateless	30,000	-	15,000	15,000
Total		2,153,730	190,730	2,262,180	836,180

¹ Based on trends. The number of IDPs, currently over 1.6 million, is expected to increase at the current rate till the year 's end.

IDPs

Iraqi civilians are now the deliberate target of human rights abuses perpetrated by groups with a mix of ethno-religious, political and criminal agendas. Many are leaving their places of origin with little or no prospects of return, contributing to a redefinition of the demography of the country with long-term implications for political stability, national reconciliation and Iraq's human development.

The main needs of the IDPs are of an emergency nature: shelter, food, water and non-food items (including stoves, mattresses, blankets, hygiene kits, medical supplies and kerosene). Return in the near term is not a viable option for many IDPs; supporting their coping mechanisms during displacement is therefore a priority. Shelter remains a pressing need for recently displaced Iraqis: the majority live with host families and in public buildings.

Returnees

Returnee monitoring data from 2005 and 2006 indicates that 80 per cent of returnees to northern Iraq and more than 35 per cent in the south have found themselves in a situation of internal displacement upon return to the country. Inside Iraq, they face insecurity, a lack of adequate housing, deteriorating health care and educational infrastructure, unemployment and obstacles to obtaining identification. They also need water, food and non-food items. The number of voluntary and spontaneous returns has fallen from more than 300,000 from 2003 to 2005 to some 15,000 in 2006. This trend is likely to continue in 2007.

Stateless persons

Statelessness or *de facto* statelessness principally affects three groups in Iraq: approximately 100,000 Bidoons, a nomadic group who live in the Iraq/Kuwait border areas and whose legal status is a matter of continuing dispute; some 30,000 children of mixed marriages; and an estimated 100,000 Faili Kurds and Arab Shiites who are *de facto* stateless as they are unable to obtain Iraqi documents.

Total requirements: UNHCR's requirements for the Iraq situation are currently under review.

Main objectives

- Help the Government of Iraq to protect all refugees, asylum-seekers, returnees, stateless and internally displaced people.
- Provide emergency assistance to cover the basic needs of the 50,000 Syrian, Palestinian, Iranian, Turkish and Sudanese refugees in the country for food, water, medical assistance and rental subsidies until durable solutions are identified.
- Ensure a comprehensive and harmonized regional approach to provide sufficient protection to Iraqis, and support neighbouring country governments as they continue to provide protection and assistance to those fleeing Iraq.
- Provide direct assistance to IDPs in the three northern governorates and six southern governorates; provide



Iraq-Jordan border: Some 200 Iranian Kurds have been stranded in no-man's-land for nearly a year. UNHCR / M. Alfaro

complementary assistance to IDPs in the centre and south; provide nationwide protection of IDPs through interventions including legal aid and information and ensuring adherence to the *Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement* by national, regional and local authorities; monitor displacement conditions and arising needs throughout Iraq.

- Review and update contingency plans and emergency stockpiles to face increases in internal and external displacement.
- Support the Ministry of Displacement and Migration to address the needs of returnees, refugees and IDPs by boosting the operational capacity of its 15 field offices.

Strategy and activities

Refugees

UNHCR will review all potential durable solutions for refugees in Iraq, focusing on voluntary repatriation and local integration. It will enhance refugees' self-reliance by supporting income-generation projects and vocational training, reducing their dependency on cash assistance and rental subsidies. For those refugees with no prospect for voluntary repatriation or local integration, including Sudanese, Iranian Ahwazis and some 180 Iranian refugees, the Office will pursue resettlement.

Key targets for 2007

- The Government of Iraq registers all refugees inside the country and issues residency and identification documents in cooperation with the Kurdistan Regional Government.
- The emergency response capacity of the Ministry of Displacement and Migration, the Kurdistan Regional Government and relevant line ministries is built.
- Comprehensive assessments of the needs of IDPs, refugees and returnees in Iraq and Iraqis in neighbouring States are completed. Programmes designed to address the needs of the most vulnerable groups are implemented.
- 50,000 IDPs, returnees and refugees receive legal aid and counselling through the strengthening of 13 existing legal information centres and the establishment of three more such centres.
- A national policy on displacement challenges and durable solutions is developed and implemented.
- Emergency shelter to some 4,000 IDP families is provided.
- Community-based assistance in displacement-impacted areas improves infrastructure and livelihood prospects for some 171,000 persons of concern and local residents.
- Emergency non-food items are provided to 200,000 IDPs.
- Contingency stockpiling of relief items for 200,000 people in or outside Iraq.
- 1,000 refugees from Iraq are resettled.

IDPs and returnees

As a cluster coordinator for “Cluster F” (refugees, IDPs and durable solutions), UNHCR bears the primary responsibility for coordinating programmes related to displacement throughout Iraq. It also provides direct assistance in the region of Kurdistan and the southern governorates. The Office will continue to work closely with the Ministry of Displacement and Migration as well as other key agency and NGO partners. Through its national and international partners, UNHCR will distribute emergency shelter packages (tents, blankets, mattresses, stoves, lanterns, jerry cans, plastic sheets and kitchen sets) and support families hosting IDPs through the provision of “one room” extensions. It will renovate community infrastructure in areas of IDP concentration, continue supporting and expanding existing legal aid and information centres and support income-generation projects. These activities are consistent with the objectives of Iraq’s national development strategy in relation to IDPs.

Constraints

Security constraints greatly limit the options available to UN agencies operating in Iraq. In northern Iraq, where conditions have remained relatively stable, UNHCR has re-established its international presence and expects to strengthen it further in 2007. Continued violence in central Iraq and significant instability in the south require that international staff manage operations remotely in these regions from Amman and Kuwait City; unfortunately, due to a lack of funding, UNHCR will considerably downsize its presence in Kuwait in the first quarter of 2007. Nonetheless, while foreseeing remote activities through government and NGO partners, UNHCR is considering re-establishing an international presence in Baghdad should security conditions permit in 2007.

Organization and implementation

UNHCR presence

Number of offices	9
Total staff	50
International	16
National	29
UNVs	2
Consultants	3

Coordination

Under the overall coordination by the UN Country Team and the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), UNHCR works in close partnership with national, regional and local authorities, international organizations, national and international NGOs, community-based organizations and other civil society actors. UNHCR coordinates the UN Cluster for refugees, IDPs and durable solutions and also chairs the Working Group on IDPs. The Office has developed a network of over 20 trusted national and international NGO partners throughout Iraq, for implementation of most in-country interventions.