

Middle East

A family that escaped from Mosul settle in a camp for internally displaced persons northwest of Baghdad.

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

| Working environment |

UNHCR remains the main provider of protection in the Middle East and the Arab Gulf region, where only Egypt, Israel and Yemen have signed the 1951 Refugee Convention. All other countries in the subregion have not yet adhered to international refugee instruments, nor put national asylum laws and procedures in place. Issues related to asylum are mostly governed by national laws on foreigners that do not necessarily meet international protection standards, nor ensure the fair processing of asylum claims. State priorities are driven by security concerns, which dominate asylum policies. Nevertheless, refugees and other people of concern have been assisted in these countries based on long-standing traditions of hospitality and religious solidarity.

The limited engagement of governments in protection matters makes it difficult for UNHCR to ensure that protection is provided in accordance with international standards. This situation is further complicated by the protracted nature of many refugee situations in the region, and a growing number of mixed migration movements against a background of national security concerns.





The humanitarian situation of Iraqi refugees in neighbouring countries, and of IDPs inside Iraq, continues to pose a major challenge to the international community. Even as Jordan, Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic continue to struggle with the effects of the global economic crisis, the need to cope with hundreds of thousands of Iraqi refugees—as well as the protracted presence of large numbers of Palestinian refugees—inflicts a heavy burden on their economies. The support of the international community plays a significant role in mitigating the effects of this burden.

UNHCR provides assistance to Iraqi returnees under its individual repatriation scheme. Large-scale voluntary repatriation cannot yet take place due to the prevailing security conditions inside Iraq. Fears of a potential security vacuum following the American military phase-down, combined with limited employment opportunities and a lack of basic services, inhibit returns. The majority of refugees who return, do so without taking advantage of UNHCR's help, preferring to maintain a link in the asylum country while assessing the conditions in Iraq. Significantly, the overall decrease in violence in Iraq since late 2008 has resulted in a noticeable reduction in the number of those still fleeing the country.

In Yemen, the Office has registered more than 170,000 refugees, mostly from Somalia, as well as hundreds of thousands of IDPs, the latter concentrated in the north. The Government continues to recognize Somali refugees on a *prima facie* basis. However, the arrival of large numbers of asylum-seekers and migrants in mixed groups across the Gulf of Aden threatens to restrain Yemen's hospitality, especially if more international support is not forthcoming.

The overall security situation in Yemen is increasingly volatile. Government forces are in confrontation with a secessionist movement in the south, and with the Al Houthi forces in the north. There are also mounting threats from other armed groups in the region. The poor security situation impedes UNHCR's access to the affected areas and to people of concern.

Egypt is both a transit and receiving country for refugees, with some 40,000 people of concern registered with UNHCR, most of them from Iraq, Somalia and Sudan. As these refugees live primarily in urban areas, Egypt was chosen as a pilot country for the implementation of UNHCR's new urban refugee policy. In addition, large numbers of people, mainly from countries in sub-Saharan Africa, continue to cross the Egypt-Israel border through the Sinai desert, with the support of smugglers. The number of asylum-seekers with protection risks among these arrivals is growing.

| Strategy in 2011 |

UNHCR's strategy in the region will focus on addressing the protection and assistance gaps identified through comprehensive needs assessments conducted throughout the Middle East. In order to bridge these gaps, the Office will enhance its existing partnerships with relevant regional and national organizations. Most of the unmet needs can be attributed to funding shortfalls and the lack of legal protection frameworks.

While pursuing durable solutions where possible, UNHCR continues to advocate for self-reliance opportunities for refugees and others of concern across the subregion.

UNHCR is also increasing its partnership efforts with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) and the League of Arab States (LAS) in order to address existing challenges, including statelessness. In cooperation with national and regional partner organizations, it will engage in campaigns to raise awareness of statelessness as well as in capacity-building and research initiatives. Finally, UNHCR will redouble its efforts to persuade more States to sign the 1951 Refugee Convention, and develop national asylum systems. A book entitled *The Right to Asylum between Islamic Shari'ah and International Refugee Law – a Comparative Study*, which was launched in June 2009, is being disseminated widely among governments and civil society institutions. UNHCR and the LAS will also hold a series of refugee and statelessness law workshops for Arab Parliamentarians.

| Constraints |

National security concerns dominate asylum policies and practices, and the absence of regional and national legal frameworks to deal with population displacement are a major hindrance to progress in the region. In particular, the increase in extremist activities, the prolonged state of insecurity in Iraq and the protracted Palestinian problem, continue to obstruct refugee protection and humanitarian efforts in the Middle East.

| Operations |

UNHCR's operations in **Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen** are covered in detail in separate chapters.

In addition to its activities for displaced Iraqis, UNHCR assists several thousand refugees of other nationalities in the region. Most are from the Islamic Republic of Iran, Somalia, Sudan and Turkey. The most vulnerable among them receive basic humanitarian assistance from UNHCR, which also conducts registration and refugee status determination (RSD), and seeks durable solutions, including resettlement.

UNHCR has no offices in Bahrain, Oman or Qatar. Operations in these countries, as well as those in Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates are managed by the **Regional Office in Riyadh**. Public awareness, fund-raising, RSD and durable solutions—primarily resettlement—are the main components of the programme in the Gulf region, whereby resettlement processing is facilitated by the Regional Resettlement Hub in Lebanon.

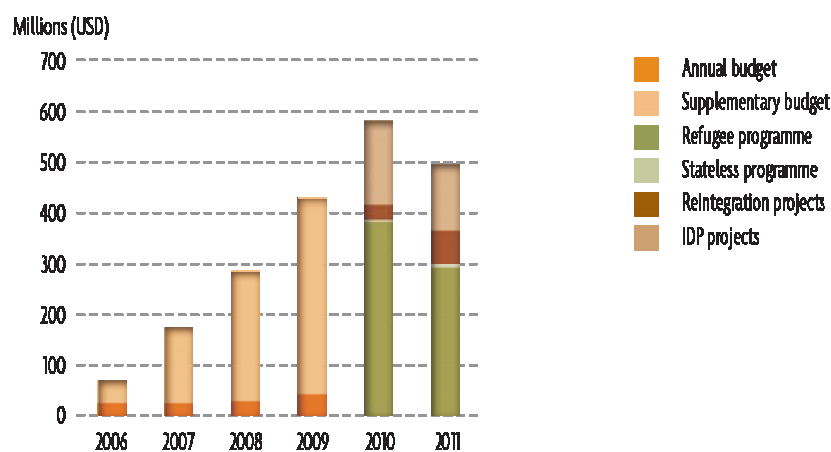
Fund-raising activities in the Gulf region will soon be expanded through the strengthening of an external relations hub in the United Arab Emirates and possibly the establishment of a liaison office in Qatar. At the same time, strategic partnerships with national and regional organizations will be enhanced and efforts to reduce statelessness will intensify by means of public awareness campaigns, capacity-building and research initiatives.

Israel continues to receive and accept asylum-seekers, the majority of whom are of sub-Saharan African origin. Some 1,000 persons per month cross the Egypt-Israel Sinai border in an irregular manner. These arrivals have demonstrated the need for the Israeli Government to increase its capacity to manage mixed migration flows, as well as to establish an adequate legislative and procedural framework. In July 2009, UNHCR handed over RSD responsibilities to the Israeli authorities, who are in the process of drafting comprehensive status determination regulations.

| Financial information |

After rising in previous years, UNHCR's financial requirements for the Middle East show a drop in 2011. The budget for 2011 amounts to USD 498.3 million, representing a 14 per cent decline from 2010, mainly due to a phasing down of activities in Iraq and neighbouring countries. However, the 2011 budget covers an increase in activities in Yemen (the IDP situation), Egypt and the Gulf. More than half the budget is devoted to refugee operations, followed by IDP situations (27 per cent), reintegration (12 per cent) and statelessness (2 per cent).

UNHCR's budget in Middle East 2006 – 2011



UNHCR's budget for the Middle East (USD)

OPERATION	2010 REVISED BUDGET	2011				TOTAL
		REFUGEE PROGRAMME PILLAR 1	STATELESS PROGRAMME PILLAR 2	REINTEGRATION PROJECTS PILLAR 3	IDP PROJECTS PILLAR 4	
Egypt	14,073,888	18,845,937	679,846	0	0	19,525,783
Iraq	264,285,219	37,232,724	4,087,597	61,210,298	108,067,620	210,598,239
Israel	3,067,763	2,689,268	0	0	0	2,689,268
Jordan	63,459,834	43,412,779	0	0	0	43,412,779
Lebanon	13,665,524	12,453,792	661,358	0	0	13,115,150
Saudi Arabia Regional Office [†]	3,186,375	3,110,018	946,131	0	0	4,056,149
Syrian Arab Republic	166,756,208	117,734,272	409,849	0	0	118,144,121
United Arab Emirates	1,752,402	2,714,634	340,826	0	0	3,055,460
Yemen	50,200,066	33,842,457	0	0	25,861,689	59,704,146
Regional activities	0	22,000,001	2,000,000	0	0	24,000,001
Subtotal	580,447,278	294,035,882	9,125,607	61,210,298	133,929,309	498,301,096

[†]Covers the Arab Gulf States including the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, the Sultanate of Oman, Bahrain and Qatar.