

Middle East and North Africa

The Middle East
North Africa



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Working environment

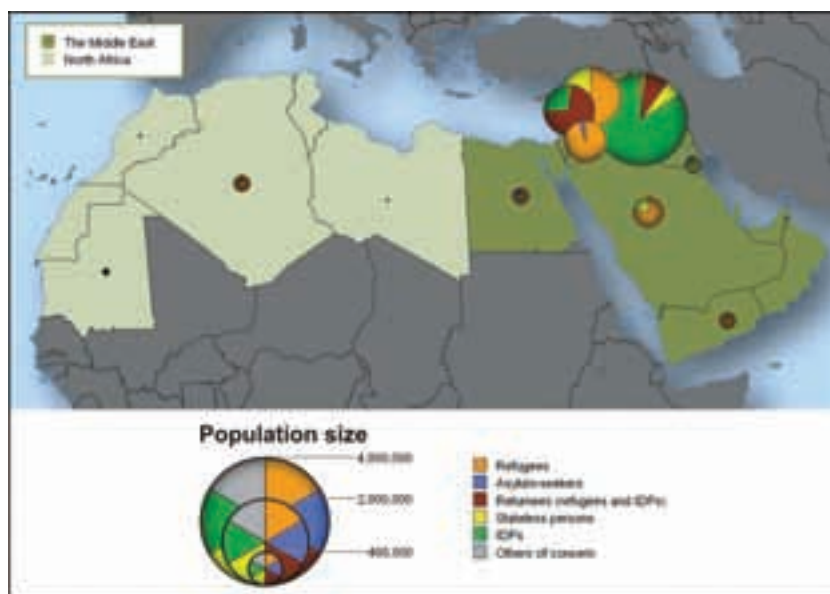
The humanitarian focus in the Middle East is currently on the massive displacement of Iraqis, both inside and outside their country. The numbers of those fleeing Iraq rose steeply following the bombing of the Samara mosque in February 2006. The plight of these people received international recognition at UNHCR's *International Conference on Addressing the Humanitarian Needs of Displaced Iraqis*, which took place in April 2007 in Geneva. The Conference raised awareness of the need for urgent and robust assistance for internally and externally displaced Iraqis as well as for their host communities in neighbouring countries.

The coping mechanisms and resources of Iraqis in neighbouring countries are being eroded, while the services host countries can provide to them are overstretched. Under the circumstances, helping the most vulnerable displaced Iraqis, particularly in the Syrian Arab Republic and Jordan, is a priority for UNHCR. In this regard, the momentum generated by the Geneva conference has been instrumental in mobilizing international support.

Syria and Jordan have, for more than 60 years, hosted hundreds of thousands of Palestinian refugees under the mandate of UNRWA. The current influx of Iraqis comes as an additional burden on the economic and social infrastructure of the two countries, particularly in the education, health and housing sectors. The rising cost of living affects nationals and refugees alike. Women and children, both inside Iraq and in neighbouring countries, are increasingly prone to gender-based violence and other forms of exploitation. As a result of the pressure on social services, the host countries are considering more measures to limit the numbers of Iraqis entering their borders.

Given these developments in the region, UNHCR regularly reviews its programmes to respond to the massive needs of the displaced and alleviate the burden on host governments and populations. Close cooperation with local and international partners will be essential to implement these goals.

Elsewhere in the Middle East, and particularly in the Gulf region, UNHCR continues to strengthen its national partnerships. The Office is encouraging States



to play a bigger role in UNHCR's governance mechanisms and operations. Following visits by the High Commissioner, new relationships forged with regional leaders will hopefully foster political, humanitarian and financial support for UNHCR. Several initiatives have also recently been undertaken in order to engage Member States of the Gulf Cooperation Council in addressing the needs of displaced Iraqis in neighbouring countries.

In Yemen, mixed groups of migrants and asylum-seekers from the Horn of Africa arrive regularly by sea. As at October 2007, 21,600 people arrived in Yemen, while several hundred died trying to cross the Gulf of Aden in unseaworthy vessels, or due to the exploitative treatment of smugglers. However, the country's limited economic and social structure affects its ability to continue absorbing such large numbers. More meaningful burden sharing by the international community is needed to allow Yemen to remain generous towards refugees and asylum-seekers. UNHCR aims to expand operations in Yemen in 2008-2009.

Similarly, in North Africa the number of asylum-seekers mixed with economic migrants from sub-Saharan Africa transiting *en route* to Europe challenges Governments in the region to respond in protection-sensitive ways. UNHCR recently signed a cooperation agreement with the Government of Morocco to strengthen the Office's protection role in addressing the migration and asylum challenges.

Finally, UNHCR's operations in North Africa are focused on the continuing plight of the Sahrawi refugees. In 2007, UNHCR provided basic assistance in the Sahrawi



UNHCR/K. Brooks

Iraq. A twice displaced Iranian Kurdish girl in Northern Iraq.

camps in the Tindouf region in Algeria. The Office has continued to implement the Confidence Building Measures Project initiated in 2004 in close coordination with the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO). In the absence of a political solution, UNHCR will continue to support family visits and telephone communications between refugees in the Tindouf camps and their family members in the Western Sahara.

Strategic objectives

UNHCR's strategic objectives for the MENA region are to:

- Protect refugees and others of concern.
- Identify and implement comprehensive solutions for refugees.
- Support state and civil-society institutions dealing with refugee issues.

In light of the complex political environment in the region, these objectives will be underpinned by improvements in UNHCR's emergency-response capacity.

In North Africa, the 10-Point Plan of Action for management of the migration and asylum nexus serves as the frame of reference for regional policy. The plan has a dual strategy: to strengthen UNHCR's structure and interventions in the region while simultaneously defining cooperation with partner governments, NGOs and civil-society actors. The goal is to ensure protection-sensitive management of mixed migratory movements. To be effective, efforts in this regard will require field research on migration in North Africa, to be carried out by independent consultants, which will identify the most appropriate ways of addressing problems. The project will also help build North African countries' capacity to receive, screen and manage mixed-migration flows.

In the Middle East, UNHCR will seek to ensure that Iraqi refugees in neighbouring countries as well as refugees and internally displaced persons in Iraq are protected according to international law and standards. The Office will guard against *refoulement* while ensuring that the basic humanitarian needs of persons of concern are met. In the absence of national asylum institutions, UNHCR will also seek to develop an international refugee and IDP protection regime in the region by forming dynamic partnerships with governments and other key stakeholders.

Only progress towards political solutions will truly open up humanitarian solutions for refugees in the Middle East. Nonetheless, UNHCR will seek durable solutions, including voluntary return and sustainable reintegration; support self-reliance; and will promote and apply resettlement as a protection tool and burden-sharing mechanism.

Challenges

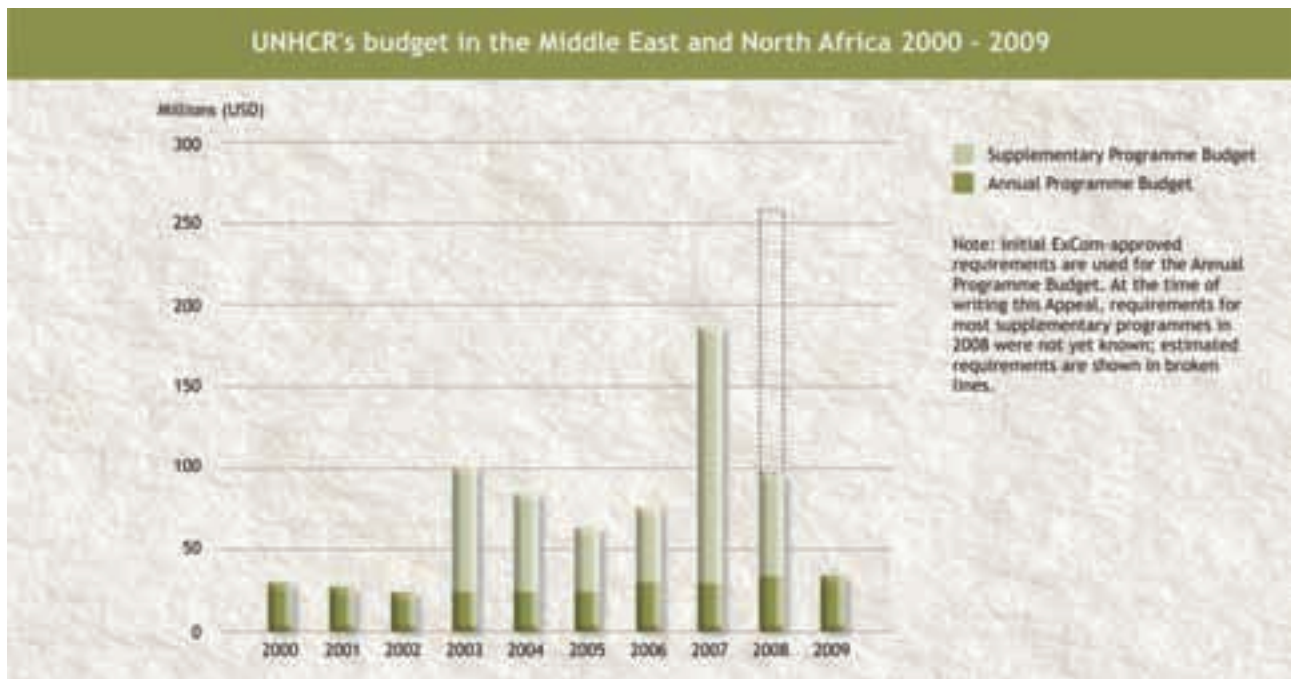
In the Middle East, one of the biggest challenges remains the persistence of the Palestinian refugee problem, which for more than 60 years has shaped the regional perception of refugees and their needs, as well as the role of the international community in addressing the problem. While the majority of Palestinian refugees around the world fall under UNRWA's mandate, the political complexities of their situation influence attitudes towards UNHCR and non-Palestinian refugees in the region.

In Iraq, the volatile and unpredictable security situation restricts the movement of UN staff, and consequently their ability to assist the most vulnerable displaced persons. UNHCR has to work through local

governmental and non-governmental partners to distribute emergency relief items in the country. The Office will maintain an emergency-preparedness and response capacity for different scenarios, and its regional contingency plan will be updated regularly in coordination with stakeholders.

In North Africa, UNHCR faces a formidable task in protecting and assisting refugees and asylum seekers within the massive flow of illegal migrants. The Office has responded to the growth of mixed migration-asylum flows by strengthening its capacity and resources. The changes entail a significant increase both in protection staff across countries in North Africa, as well as an increased budget. Indeed, the magnitude of the challenge will require the expansion of operations throughout 2008 and 2009. New alliances will be forged to create more effective and protection-sensitive asylum and migration systems in the region.

The lack of a political solution for Sahrawi refugees and the ongoing need to provide assistance and protection to camp-based refugees in Algeria presents ongoing challenges to UNHCR to seek funds and partners to deliver adequate assistance and support.



Budget (USD)							
Activities and services	2007			2008			2009
	Annual Programme Budget	Supp. Programme Budget	Total	Annual Programme Budget	Supp. Programme Budget	Total	Annual Programme Budget
Algeria	4,268,794	633,842	4,902,636	4,900,313	330,957	5,231,270	4,900,313
Libyan Arab Jamahiriya	984,270	17,736	1,002,006	1,314,586	89,300	1,403,886	1,314,585
Mauritania	885,472	2,175,171	3,060,643	897,903	2,924,223	3,822,126	907,212
Morocco	983,475	593,900	1,577,375	1,202,897	462,765	1,665,662	1,335,282
Tunisia	358,096	22,038	380,134	406,312	37,031	443,343	406,312
Western Sahara	0	2,667,257	2,667,257	0	0	0	0
Regional activities	0	823,625	823,625	0	1,061,907	1,061,907	0
Sub-total North Africa	7,480,107	6,933,569	14,413,676	8,722,011	4,906,183	13,628,194	8,863,704
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
Sub-total the Middle East	20,776,211	150,495,321	171,271,532	24,614,968	58,094,477	82,709,445	25,894,086
Total the Middle East and North Africa	28,256,318	157,428,890	185,685,208	33,336,979	63,000,660	96,337,639	34,757,790

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