

THE MIDDLE EAST

Regional Overview

Egypt • Iraq • Israel • Jordan • Kuwait • Lebanon • Saudi Arabia • Syrian Arab Republic • United Arab Emirates • Yemen



MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS

In the Middle East, UNHCR continued to face several complex challenges linked to the impact of the economic sanctions imposed on Iraq and the stagnation of the Palestinian-Israeli peace process.

In Iraq, the living conditions of the entire population, including refugees, have deteriorated continuously over the past ten years. The sanctions have led to increased internal displacement and have contributed to the outflow of Iraqi nationals into neighbouring countries and into Europe. More than 12,000 Iraqi refugees have approached UNHCR offices in the region seeking refugee status as a way to legalise their stay outside Iraq. Conversely, about 1,360 Iraqi Arabs returned from the Islamic Republic of Iran with UNHCR's assistance during 2000, bringing the total number of returnees to

nearly 4,000 since August 1999. The repatriation occurred after the Iraqi Government issued an amnesty law in 1999 granting Iraqis who had left the country illegally exemption from prosecution if they returned. UNHCR encouraged the dialogue between the Governments of Iraq and the Islamic Republic of Iran on the subject of repatriating their respective displaced populations.

Persons of Concern to UNHCR



In May, Israeli forces withdrew from southern Lebanon, marking an end to two decades of occupation. Some 6,500 Lebanese, both civilians and some members of the South Lebanese Army (SLA) and their families, crossed into Israel, and 2,200 ex-SLA members surrendered to the Lebanese authorities. The major challenges were then the stabilisation of the region through restored security and national authority, and the reintegration of the population.

In June, UNHCR and the League of Arab States signed a Co-operation Agreement intended to enhance collaboration between the two organisations. The aim is to enable the League of Arab States to assist UNHCR in developing regional legal instruments for the protection of refugees. As an initial step, the League will be involved in UNHCR's regional initiatives for the Global Consultations on International Protection.

Contingency plans were put in place, and regularly updated throughout the region, to enable UNHCR to react quickly to potential major refugee flows.

CHALLENGES AND CONCERNS

Egypt and Israel are the only countries in the Middle East region to have acceded to the 1951 Convention and its 1967 Protocol. The refugees and asylum-seekers in most countries in the region are therefore considered to be illegal migrants. The problems that refugees and asylum-seekers face in the region, including the fact that they do not have the right to work, are believed to have prompted irregular movements to other countries (Western Europe, North America and Australia), a trend both UNHCR and governments are trying to prevent.

PROGRESS TOWARDS SOLUTIONS

At the regional level, UNHCR actively promoted the accession by governments to the 1951 Convention and 1967 Protocol. As a step towards the handover of responsibility for refugee status determination, UNHCR focused on capacity-building through training of national authorities and local NGO staff.

In view of the limited prospects for local integration and voluntary repatriation in the Middle East region, resettlement in a third country continued to represent the only viable solution for a large number of refugees. In total, 346 persons voluntarily repatriated to their respective countries of origin, while 7,846 refugees were resettled in a third country. Although UNHCR strengthened its capacity to process eligibility and resettlement sub-

missions, by employing United Nations Volunteers to assist in interviewing applicants, many cases were still pending at the end of the year.

UNHCR also tried to find alternative solutions for refugees living in camps. In the Syrian Arab Republic, the remaining refugees accommodated in the El Hol Camp in Hassake Governorate were resettled, enabling UNHCR to close the camp at the end of the year. The number of refugees accepted for resettlement from Rafha Camp in Saudi Arabia was much lower than the previous year, obliging UNHCR to keep the camp open. Negotiations on the possibility of local integration of the remaining 5,300 Iraqi refugees, living in the camp since the Gulf War in 1991, were still ongoing at year's end.

For the many refugees and asylum-seekers not protected by any legal status, basic humanitarian assistance was provided pending durable solutions. In order to reduce irregular population movements, UNHCR held a number of sub-regional meetings to streamline and harmonise the criteria and procedures for asylum, resettlement processing and basic humanitarian assistance in the region. UNHCR also continued to streamline its basic humanitarian assistance programmes and was more selective in the identification of vulnerable groups.

As a result of regional consultations and the appointment of a UNHCR Goodwill Ambassador to the region, the actor Adil Imam, regional public information and private sector fund raising structures were developed.

OPERATIONS

UNHCR's operations in **Egypt, Iraq and Yemen** are presented in separate chapters.

In **Israel**, UNHCR concentrated on training and raising awareness on refugee issues among government officials and the general public. UNHCR also provided protection and assistance to detained persons and persons awaiting resettlement (these being refugees eligible for direct assistance under UNHCR's mandate). The assistance included medical aid and translation of protection documentation. In addition, a database with country of origin information was created in order to facilitate refugee status determination.

In **Jordan**, UNHCR registered a total of 7,259 new asylum-seekers, mainly from Iraq, and recognised 1,912 persons as refugees. During the course of the year, 1,837 persons departed from Jordan: 42 persons left for voluntary repatriation, while 1,795 were resettled in third countries. At the end of the year, there were 8,979 refugees and registered asylum-seekers, of whom 1,072 were recognised refugees. Due to financial constraints,

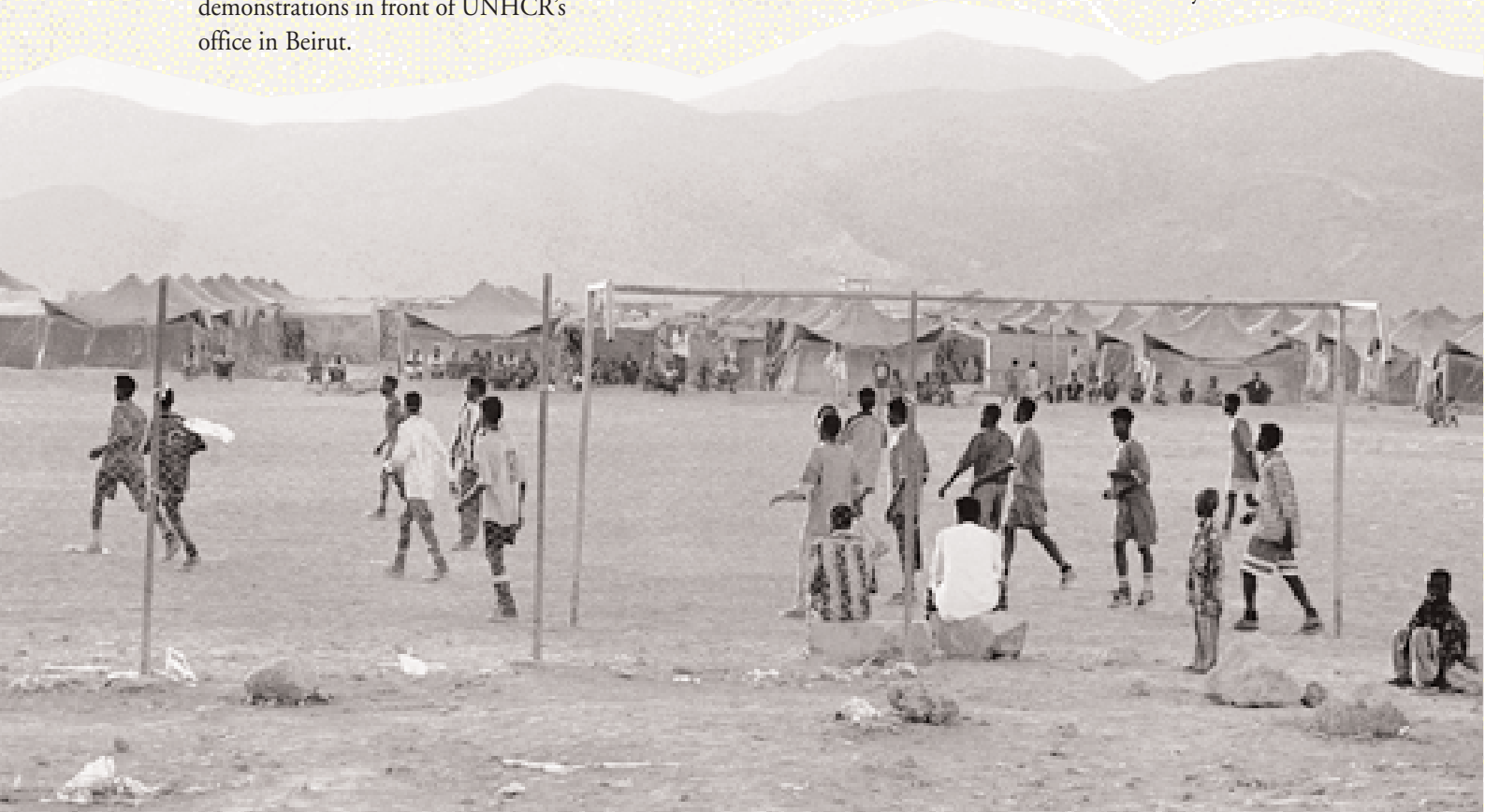
basic humanitarian assistance to refugees and asylum-seekers was reduced to cover only the most vulnerable, including women and children.

Kuwait hosted 2,776 registered refugees, mainly of Afghan, Iraqi, Palestinian and Somali origin. The Office provided protection and limited needs-based assistance to these mainly urban refugees and stateless Bedouins. UNHCR focused on securing legal residence in Kuwait, preventing deportation of persons of concern while seeking resettlement opportunities in third countries for those who meet the criteria. During the year, 108 persons departed for resettlement. The 117,000 stateless Bedouins continued to be a contentious humanitarian and legal issue. There was a positive development with the prospect of the naturalisation of some Bedouins, through an amendment to the 1959 Nationality Law, but the law lays down a quota of only 2,000 persons per year.

Lebanon hosted a total of 2,672 recognised refugees, mainly of Iraqi, Somali and Sudanese origin. Of this group, 2,332 persons were provided with basic humanitarian assistance. In addition 200,000 IDPs from the south of the country continued to request assistance from the Government. The arrest, detention and deportation of refugees and asylum-seekers remained a serious concern. Local integration was not achievable as refugees and asylum-seekers were denied legal status. Four refugees voluntarily repatriated to Nigeria, and a total of 1,522 persons resettled in third countries. As the application of the law against illegal residents was tightened during the year and deportations continued, there was mounting fear and frustration among refugees and asylum-seekers, culminating in peaceful demonstrations in front of UNHCR's office in Beirut.

Saudi Arabia continued to host 5,309 people, mainly Iraqis previously granted *prima facie* status and still living in a closed camp. Although 291 refugees were resettled, the slow process of finding durable solutions created tension among the refugees. However, on the positive side, the Government established the Saudi Committee on Accession to the 1951 Convention, raising hopes of the country's eventual adherence to the Convention. UNHCR's office in Riyadh continued to supervise the UNHCR operations in Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates, co-ordinated activities in the six countries of the Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) and assessed claims for refugees status submitted by individual asylum-seekers in **Bahrain, Oman and Qatar**. UNHCR organised and delivered two refugee law promotion courses and one emergency management training workshop for government officials and NGOs in the GCC countries.

The **Syrian Arab Republic** hosted a large number of citizens from mainly Iraq, Somalia, Sudan and Palestine. UNHCR's activities targeted three main groups: camp-based and urban refugees and asylum-seekers. In addition, UNHCR focused on capacity-building and public information. Complicating protection activities during the year was the fact that UNHCR was not always allowed access to persons forcibly returned from Lebanon to Syria. In total, the refugee population consisted of 6,474 persons, while an additional 4,344 persons filed asylum applications during 2000. Urban refugees constituted the vast majority, but 311 Iraqi refugees were accommodated and assisted in El Hol camp until they were resettled. The camp was closed at the end of the year. Some



camp structures will be maintained as a part of a regional contingency plan. Some urban refugees, selected according to fixed criteria, were provided with basic humanitarian assistance including sanitation, health, nutrition and education (Syria does not allow non-Palestinian refugees the right to employment). During the year, 11 refugees voluntarily repatriated and a total of 1,734 refugees departed for resettlement in third countries.

The United Arab Emirates hosted 562 refugees of various nationalities; they were recognised by UNHCR under its mandate. In addition, UNHCR provided assistance to 21 stateless persons. During the year, 17 refugees were resettled in a third country. UNHCR continued its

fund raising efforts in the private sector, targeting students, women's groups and business corporations.

FUNDING

The general funding shortfall had a significant negative impact on programmes in the region, especially those covering basic humanitarian assistance. This was particularly noticeable for refugees in countries where UNHCR was the main provider of assistance (Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria). As basic humanitarian assistance was drastically cut, both in terms of the level of assistance and the number of beneficiaries, some refugee families, unable to pay the rent, were evicted from their homes and some refugee children were unable to go to school.

Voluntary Contributions - Restricted (USD)			
Donor	Earmarking ¹	Annual Programme Budget	
		Income	Contribution
Japan	Iraq	300,000	300,000
	Yemen Republic	190,000	190,000
Saudi Arabia	Saudi Arabia	106,402	106,402
Sweden	Iraq	900,901	900,901
	Middle East	1,126,126	1,126,126
United States of America	Middle East	6,629,300	6,629,300
	Yemen Republic	500,000	500,000
Private Donors Japan	Middle East	72	72
Total²		9,752,801	9,752,801

¹For more information on the various earmarkings, please refer to the Donor Profiles.

²Total funds available for obligation in the region also included unearmarked voluntary contributions, broadly earmarked contributions, opening balances and adjustments.

Budget and Expenditure (USD)						
Country	Revised Budget			Expenditure		
	Annual Programme Budget	Supplementary Programme Budget	Total	Annual Programme Budget	Supplementary Programme Budget	Total
Egypt	3,758,753	0	3,758,753	3,318,240	0	3,318,240
Iraq	3,945,642	0	3,945,642	3,374,195	0	3,374,195
Israel	10,000	0	10,000	9,090	0	9,090
Jordan	1,558,283	0	1,558,283	1,471,990	0	1,471,990
Kuwait	785,381	0	785,381	766,022	0	766,022
Lebanon	2,504,530	0	2,504,530	2,237,995	0	2,237,995
Saudi Arabia	1,485,307	0	1,485,307	1,273,499	0	1,273,499
Syrian Arab Republic	2,258,902	0	2,258,902	2,030,781	0	2,030,781
United Arab Emirates	226,900	0	226,900	226,900	0	226,900
Yemen	4,259,727	100,000	4,359,727	3,866,860	47,423	3,914,283
Regional Projects ¹	407,902	0	407,902	282,000	0	282,000
Bureau at Headquarters	730,014	0	730,014	699,416	0	699,416
Total	21,931,341	100,000	22,031,341	19,556,988	47,423	19,604,411

¹ Covers scholarships for refugee students.