

# THE MIDDLE EAST

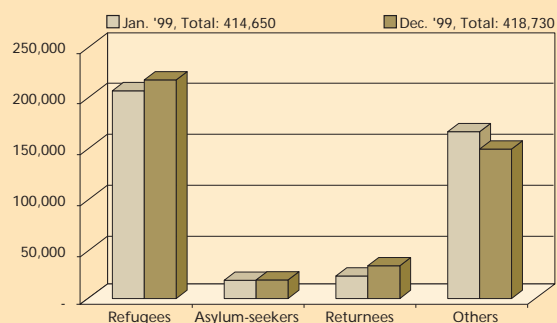
Bahrain	Jordan	Qatar	Yemen
Egypt	Kuwait	Saudi Arabia	
Iraq	Lebanon	Syrian Arab Republic	
Israel	Oman	United Arab Emirates	



## MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS

During the course of the year, continuing political instability in the Middle East led to an increase in the number of asylum-seekers approaching UNHCR offices in the region. UNHCR provided international protection and assistance to some 218,200 refugees who live for the most part in urban settings, although there are also some camp-based refugee populations in Iraq, Saudi Arabia and the Syrian Arab Republic (Syria). In order to meet the increased needs of refugees and asylum-seekers in the region, UNHCR maintained offices in ten countries: Egypt, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Syria, United Arab Emirates and Yemen. The unresolved conflict involving Iraq and the deteriorating economic situation in the country, owing to economic sanctions imposed since 1991, prompted more Iraqis to leave their country. Continued unrest in Sudan prompted a large number of Sudanese to seek asylum in Egypt and elsewhere in the region. Due to continued clan fighting and the unsettled political situation in Somalia, a monthly average of 1,000 Somali asylum-seekers entered Yemen throughout the year.

## Persons of Concern to UNHCR



## CHALLENGES AND CONCERNS

UNHCR continued to encourage regional governments to accede to the 1951 Geneva Convention relating to the Status of Refugees. A prime concern for UNHCR was to preserve respect for the principle of *non-refoulement*. This involved efforts to develop the legal and institutional capacity of states to respond efficiently and in a principled way to the flow of refugees, and the problems of statelessness. In the meantime, refugees relied on UNHCR's assistance, as national leg-

isolation prohibits their legal employment. Continued instability in the region required UNHCR to focus on early warning and contingency planning in the event of a large-scale population movement.

### PROGRESS TOWARDS SOLUTIONS

With the support of traditional resettlement countries, UNHCR made efforts in 1999 to strengthen its ability to determine refugee status and expedite refugee resettlement, to provide durable solutions for eligible refugees and also to reduce the irregular movements of asylum-seekers in the region. In 1999 UNHCR recruited or temporarily deployed 38 additional staff to undertake initial refugee status determination interviews and resettlement processing. Twenty-five of the new recruits were national staff, supported by three UNHCR international staff and staff seconded from NGOs. A significant resettlement backlog was cleared and 5,495 persons were resettled in third countries from the Middle East during the course of the year.

For many refugees in the Middle East, there are only very limited opportunities for voluntary repatriation and local integration. The year nevertheless witnessed the return of some 20,900 Iraqis, mainly from the Islamic Republic of Iran (Iran). Additionally, some 7,000 Iranian refugees from Al-Tash Camp and some 10,000 Iranian Ahwazi refugees in Iraq continued to express their desire to repatriate voluntarily to Iran. UNHCR continued efforts to facilitate bilateral discussions between the concerned authorities in Iraq and Iran on the return of refugees and displaced persons.

UNHCR continued to develop its relationship with governments in the region, national institutions, NGOs and civil society, with a view to promoting refugee law. At the same time, the Office maintained its emergency preparedness through training and a regular update of its contingency planning. Emergency Management Preparedness Training was held in Amman, Jordan in August 1999 for NGOs, government officials and UNHCR staff. Training of this sort strengthened co-operation on contingency planning by the various parties concerned.

### OPERATIONS

In **Egypt**, UNHCR assisted some 6,600 urban refugees. The refugees originated mainly from Somalia, Sudan and Yemen. As a result of its increased capacity to carry out refugee status determination interviews, the

Regional Office for the Middle East in Cairo was able to interview some 2,900 cases (5,400 persons) during the year. Some 2,475 refugees were resettled from Egypt in 1999. Pending the identification of appropriate durable solutions, refugees were assisted by UNHCR on the basis of a thorough and on-going assessment of their needs. A monthly average of 4,500 refugees received a subsistence allowance to cover basic living costs; 54 refugee women participated in maternal/child health services courses; 1,219 children received education grants (683 of them for primary education), and 339 refugees attended vocational training. Women, children and the elderly were given special attention and priority in terms of assistance. During the year, efforts continued to finalise UNHCR's Memorandum of Understanding with the Arab League, to strengthen mutual co-operation.

**Iraq** hosted some 130,000 refugees in 1999. Of these, UNHCR assisted some 15,800 Iranian refugees of Kurdish origin in the Al-Tash Refugee Camp and approximately 3,200 Iranian refugees of Kurdish origin in urban areas in Erbil and Sulemaniya in the north.

During 1999, the Government provided basic assistance to all refugees in Iraq. This included a food ration and some medicines currently financed under UN Security Council resolution 986 (Oil for Food). The deteriorating economic situation and the continuing economic sanctions, however, have adversely affected the Government's ability to maintain the level of assistance it offered to refugees before the 1991 Gulf Crisis. This made it necessary for UNHCR to provide supplementary assistance.

Major activities in Al-Tash Camp included the completion of two primary schools, bringing the total in the camp to five schools benefiting some 5,429 children. Income-generation training and assistance was provided for 300 women, and a monthly average of 150 pregnant women and 100 nursing mothers benefited from health sessions provided by the authorities. Warm clothing and shoes were given to 1,200 children under 12. UNHCR continued to provide assistance to some 9,000 Turkish refugees of Kurdish origin in Makhmour Refugee Camp located in territory controlled by the Government of Iraq, and to 2,800 Turkish refugees residing in five local settlements in the Dohuk Governorate in the north of the country. In Makhmour Camp, a school with eight classrooms was built, and equipped with furniture and supplies. A women's centre was set up. Other activities in the camp included:

distribution of warm clothing (2,155 sets) and footwear (3,758 pairs) to refugee children under 12, the installation of a water supply system linked to Makhmour town, and completion of 1,200 latrines, which gave all refugees access to family latrines. Finally, 2,044 families in Makhmour received shelter-repair packages to protect their dwellings against the elements in winter. In addition to these groups, Iraq hosts approximately 62,000 Palestinian refugees, some of whom sought UNHCR's assistance on an individual basis.

During the year, some 800 Iranian refugees were resettled from Iraq while some 20,900 refugees returned to Iraq from Iran (2,880 to the south and central regions and 18,000 to the north), and 126 returned from Saudi Arabia. In August 1999, the Government of Iraq approached UNHCR seeking its support and assistance for a group of some 10,000 Iranian Ahwazi refugees in Wasit and Basrah Governorates in the south of Iraq. This group of refugees entered Iraq in the early 1980s (during the Iraq-Iran conflict). A joint UNHCR-Government of Iraq assessment mission was planned to evaluate refugee needs.

In **Israel**, UNHCR maintained close contacts with the authorities and established positive relationships in pursuance of its Mandate. Discussions were held with the authorities both on the promotion of refugee legislation and the creation of a refugee board. In addition, long-term solutions were identified and implemented for a few individual asylum-seekers, who had been held in detention for several years.



In **Jordan**, UNHCR's principal function was to provide international protection to a growing number of refugees. By the end of 1999, UNHCR had registered about 1,000 refugees, primarily from Iraq, the Sudan, and Somalia. Of this number some 740 received UNHCR's assistance for food, accommodation, health and education. School allowances benefited 252 refugee children. Training activities for women were expanded in 1999. Of 617 adults receiving vocational training or studying English, 45 per cent were women. The most needy were given 110 heaters and 512 blankets. During the year, some 5,200 asylum-seekers were interviewed, to determine their refugee status. In 1999, another 900 recognised refugees left Jordan to be resettled in third countries. Institution-building activities organised by UNHCR's office in Jordan included further training courses on refugee law for government officials and national NGO partners.

During the year, UNHCR's office in **Kuwait** focused on providing international protection and assistance to a registered refugee population of some 4,300 refugees. This population included Afghans, Iraqis, Palestinians and Somalis. A modest care and maintenance programme targeted some 585 of the most needy refugees. Assistance was provided to help refugees obtain or renew residence permits for themselves and family members. Ten refugees resettled in third countries during the year. UNHCR continued its public awareness activities in Kuwait and during 1999 there was greater interest in the activities of UNHCR, particularly in connection with the Kosovo crisis.

In **Lebanon**, some 4,200 refugees were registered with UNHCR, mainly from Iraq, Somalia and the Sudan. UNHCR provided international protection and assistance to refugees to meet their basic needs, as they were not legally allowed to work. Assistance to cover domestic and household needs was provided to some 715 families (2,279 people), as well as 30 single women/heads of household, 11 elderly, four minors and five disabled people. Thirty-five destitute asylum-seekers received a one-off cash grant. A total of 589 refugee students received assistance; 12 women and two men benefited from support for income-generation. In 1999, 172 refugees left Lebanon for resettlement elsewhere.

In **Saudi Arabia**, UNHCR continued to provide international protection to some 5,400 Iraqi refugees and some 160 Afghan refugees in Rafha Refugee Camp in the north of the country. The Government of Saudi Arabia provided material assistance to the Rafha refugees. In 1999, 126 Iraqi refugees from Rafha Camp

opted to repatriate spontaneously to their country of origin. UNHCR increased its public awareness and fund-raising activities in Saudi Arabia, particularly in connection with the Kosovo refugee crisis. UNHCR's office in Saudi Arabia is also responsible for assessing claims for refugee status submitted by individual asylum-seekers in **Bahrain, Oman and Qatar**.

As of December 1999, the **Syrian Arab Republic** hosted some 900 Iraqi refugees living in El Hol Refugee Camp and some 5,570 urban refugees of primarily Iraqi, Somali and Yemeni origin living in Damascus and other urban areas. UNHCR provided these refugees with international protection and assistance as needed. For example, 153 pupils (nearly half of them girls) were assisted to attend school; 135 to primary school and the remainder to secondary school. Five scholarships were awarded to refugees under the DAFI scheme (three males, two females) enabling them to attend university-level classes. A total of 6,500 new seedlings were planted at El Hol as part of continuing environment-related efforts. As voluntary repatriation and local integration were not feasible solutions for most of the refugees, resettlement remained the only viable solution. In this context, additional resources were provided for increased resettlement processing and 1,147 refugees were enabled to leave Syria in 1999 and resettle elsewhere.

In 1999, the **United Arab Emirates (UAE)** was host to some 500 recognised refugees who originated mainly from Iran, Iraq, Somalia and Uganda. There was also a number of Palestinians. UNHCR provided international protection while the refugees' assistance needs were met primarily by local NGOs. During the year, 11 refugees resettled to third countries. UNHCR continued to focus on public awareness and sought to improve its fund-raising strategy in the UAE. In October 1999, a Memorandum of Understanding was concluded between UNHCR and the Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahayan Charitable and Humanitarian Foundation of the United Arab Emirates.

A monthly average of 1,000 Somalis fleeing clan fighting in their country entered **Yemen** during 1999, bringing the total number of refugees in Yemen to almost 70,000. Of these, approximately 60,000 received UNHCR protection and assistance services throughout the year. All new arrivals were screened and registered at the Mayfa'a transit centre, and moved to the Al-Gahin temporary camp. During their stay at the transit centre, UNHCR provided all basic assistance including cooked meals, water, shelter and health services, as well as security services. During the same

period, the Mayfa'a transit centre also received 649 Ethiopian, seven Eritrean, and two Sudanese asylum-seekers. During the last quarter of the year, UNHCR and the Government began preparations for the relocation of the refugees from the Al-Gahin temporary camp to a new site at Al-Kharaz. Plans were formalised for the transfer of a first group of 300 families during the first quarter of 2000.

UNHCR also provided protection to some 35,000 Somali refugees dispersed throughout Yemen, as well as food (WFP contribution), health and sanitation, education and social counselling to some 13,500 needy refugees living in Al-Gahin camp and another 12,000 persons in the Basateen urban area of Aden. Vocational training activities were implemented in Basateen and Sana'a, particularly for refugee women, in order to increase their opportunities for gainful employment. Close to 400 of the 1,300 Ethiopian refugees registered with UNHCR in Yemen received similar assistance.

Furthermore, UNHCR facilitated the voluntary repatriation of 1,878 refugees, who were assisted to return to safe areas in Somalia and Ethiopia. Assistance included the provision of travel documents, transport from different destinations in the country to Aden, charter flights and a cash grant. ID cards were also renewed, in co-operation with a government team, providing documentation for 23,320 refugees in ten urban locations in Yemen. Two lawyers provided legal advice and support to refugees involved in disputes with employers.

Finally, various activities were undertaken in Yemen to promote refugee law and adherence to international protection principles. A workshop on refugee law was organised for 64 government officials and senior staff of NGOs working with UNHCR. Two government officials also attended Protection and Emergency Management Workshops in Amman.

## FUNDING

As funding for the region was insufficient, UNHCR increased its public information and awareness activities with the aim of raising governmental and private sector funds. During the year, UNHCR conducted a public awareness campaign in selected countries in the region. This, together with the events in Kosovo, raised the profile of UNHCR's activities and had a positive impact with regard to public and private support for refugee programmes.

## Voluntary Contributions - Earmarked (USD)

Donor	Earmarking*	General Programmes	
		Income	Contribution
<b>ITALY</b>			
	Egypt	135,057	135,057
	Yemen	108,046	108,046
<b>JAPAN</b>			
	Iraq	300,000	300,000
<b>SAUDI ARABIA</b>			
	Saudi Arabia	60,051	60,051
<b>UNITED STATES OF AMERICA</b>			
	Near East	9,400,000	9,400,000
<b>SAUDI ARAB RED CRESCENT (SAU)</b>			
	Saudi Arabia	21,826	21,826
<b>PRIVATE DONORS JORDAN</b>			
	Jordan	2,118	2,118
<b>TOTAL**</b>		<b>10,027,098</b>	<b>10,027,098</b>

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

\*\* Total funds available for obligation in the region also included unearmarked voluntary contributions, lightly earmarked contributions, opening balance and adjustments.



## Budget and Expenditure (USD)

Country	Working Budget*		Expenditure*	
	General Programmes	Special Programmes	General Programmes	Special Programmes
Egypt	4,057,799	113,400	3,994,540	112,574
Iraq	3,018,778	301,000	2,922,201	100,614
Jordan	1,666,456	108,700	1,614,677	112,708
Kuwait	1,019,404	0	1,015,540	0
Lebanon	2,831,312	139,200	2,566,202	108,203
Saudi Arabia	1,263,619	400	1,252,604	659
Syrian Arab Republic	2,418,314	137,759	2,429,656	142,677
United Arab Emirates	0	51,107	0	51,107
Yemen	3,516,086	0	3,483,998	0
Regional Projects	214,746	327,272	209,343	275,000
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>20,006,514</b>	<b>1,178,838</b>	<b>19,488,762</b>	<b>903,543</b>

\* Figures do not include costs at Headquarters.