



The Middle East

Recent developments

The Middle East has been dominated by events in Iraq, as well as continued tension over the Israeli-Palestinian situation.

In the early part of 2003, the United Nations and its humanitarian partners prepared for possible large-scale population movements within Iraq and into neighbouring countries. UNHCR adopted a regional approach, pre-positioning non-food relief items and equipment in countries bordering Iraq, and placed some 50 international staff members on emergency mission in the region. Neighbouring countries were asked to extend temporary protection to all Iraqis, a request that was generally granted.

Ultimately, very few people left Iraq during the conflict, but assistance was provided to those arriving in Syria, Jordan and the no man's land between Iraq and Jordan. By early summer, some Iraqis were already asking UNHCR to help them repatriate. Since then, small groups have received assistance to enable them to return to their homes from the Rafha Camp in Saudi Arabia. Others have returned without UNHCR's assistance from the Islamic Republic of Iran, Jordan, and Syria.

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



Meanwhile, concern about national security has once again affected Middle Eastern governments' policies relating to the entry and stay of asylum-seekers. The pace of resettlement from the region has remained slow since 11 September 2001. Decisions are protracted and departure dates delayed by increasingly tight security controls in countries accepting refugees for resettlement.

Strategic objectives

Only three countries within the Middle East region (Egypt, Israel, and Yemen) have so far acceded to the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1967 Protocol; UNHCR is working to encourage more States to do so. By raising awareness of refugee issues among authorities, national NGOs, and the general public throughout the region, UNHCR aims to help governments and humanitarian organisations to develop domestic legislation and promote and establish national asylum procedures.

Although there are hopes that developments in Iraq will enhance prospects for voluntary repatriation, resettlement to third countries is likely to remain the other possible durable solution for many refugees currently living in the Middle East. The Office will therefore continue to conduct RSD and identify durable solutions for non-Iraqi

refugees, whilst providing some assistance to refugees and asylum-seekers in the region. Iraqis, meanwhile, remain in the region under a temporary protection regime. To discourage people from trying to use asylum procedures to move to other countries for economic reasons, UNHCR will try to improve and harmonise regional policies on assistance criteria and resettlement submissions. Staff will also maintain contacts with colleagues in neighbouring countries to enable them to cross-reference asylum applications where necessary. UNHCR will continue to pursue unhindered access to refugees and asylum-seekers in detention. Care will be taken to ensure that gender concerns are addressed. UNHCR has appointed one senior regional community services officer as well as five national officers, creating a network that highlights and addresses gender and child-related issues consistently throughout the Middle East.

Operations

The programme in **Iraq** is covered in a separate country chapter.

Though **Egypt** is a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1967 Protocol, it has no national asylum legislation and institutional arrangements for the

protection of refugees. UNHCR is therefore responsible for implementing RSD procedures, providing basic assistance to destitute refugees, seeking durable solutions, and co-ordinating with relevant authorities on measures to prevent detention, deportation or *refoulement*. The Office's priority activity in 2004 will be its ongoing work to promote a national legislative framework on refugee protection and to establish asylum mechanisms. It is estimated that there will be some 18,000 registered refugees in Egypt by 1 January 2004 (mostly Sudanese, living mainly in Cairo). UNHCR will seek assurance that these refugees may enjoy basic social and economic rights, as laid out in the Convention. They do not currently have automatic access to state education or health care, and do not benefit from labour legislation. The Office will provide some very basic assistance in the areas of health, education and subsistence to the most vulnerable. It will also initiate some vocational training, job placement and micro-credit schemes, as well as cultural orientation and literacy programmes. At the same time, and in close co-ordination with the authorities, UNHCR

will adjust its approach to protection activities in Egypt. Through more active involvement of Egyptian institutions, the Office aims to reduce the RSD burden whilst extending protection to all those in need.

In 1998, UNHCR and the Government of **Jordan** signed a Memorandum of Understanding, whereby non-Palestinian refugees are granted a six-month stay. During this time UNHCR is expected to identify durable solutions for them. As voluntary repatriation has rarely been feasible (most refugees in Jordan are Iraqi), and local integration is currently excluded, the main focus has traditionally been resettlement to a third country.

Since signing the MOU, UNHCR has worked to develop national legal and institutional mechanisms to process asylum claims. This work will continue in 2004, alongside efforts to help prepare the way for Jordan to accede to the Convention. UNHCR will provide administrative support to the relevant ministries to encourage Government co-operation in protecting refugees and asylum-seekers,



Iraq: Newly installed camps. AP / D. Lopez-Mills

as well as promoting protection training for government and law-enforcement personnel. It will also strengthen links with national human rights organisations and provide basic assistance to recognised refugees pending the identification of durable solutions, paying particular attention to refugee women, children and adolescents. For example, UNHCR tries to provide access to childcare for refugee women taking part in training courses.

The Office is also providing assistance to some 600 refugees in the Ruwayshid Camp near the border with Iraq, and supporting efforts by the Ministry of Health to provide basic medical care in the camp and to the 1,200 people, mostly Iranian Kurds, in the No Man's Land site.

In September 2003, UNHCR signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Government of **Lebanon**, the first such agreement between the two parties, giving asylum-seekers the right to reside in the country for three months. Recognised refugees will then be allowed to stay for a further six to nine months, during which period a durable solution must be found. UNHCR will provide limited assistance to recognised refugees whilst a solution is being sought. The Office will continue to register Iraqi refugees who wish to repatriate when conditions are suitable. However, resettlement remains a key protection tool in Lebanon.

In the **Kingdom of Saudi Arabia**, UNHCR will continue to monitor repatriation from the Rafha camp to southern Iraq, until security conditions and prospects for sustainable return have reached the point at which it can begin to promote and assist repatriation and reintegration. The Office will also provide international protection to the increasing number of people seeking asylum in Saudi Arabia, and monitor the situation of those of concern to UNHCR, primarily Afghans, Eritreans, Palestinians, Somalis, and Sudanese. Refugee law seminars will be held at national and regional levels, and training provided to government officials, local authorities and NGOs. UNHCR will also continue to promote accession to the 1951 Refugee Convention and the adoption of refugee laws that are in line with in-

ternational standards, as well as pursue fund raising and networking efforts with both the authorities and NGOs.

In **Syria**, UNHCR will focus on providing international protection to refugees and on promoting voluntary repatriation to Iraq as soon as this becomes feasible. The Office will aim to complete voluntary repatriation of Yemenis remaining in Syria, and will continue to assist the repatriation of Afghans and refugees from Northern Somalia. As in other countries within the region, there will be a considerable focus on resettlement of refugees who cannot return to their countries of origin, and on efforts to strengthen the protection framework through advocacy and the promotion of refugee law.

UNHCR operations in **Yemen** will focus on protection and providing basic material assistance to some 10,000 Somali refugees in Kharaz camp, as well as community assistance to urban refugees. Special emphasis will be put on self-sufficiency projects, income generation and vocational training for both camp and urban refugees. Particular attention will also be paid to the situation of refugee women and refugee children. For example, more responsibility will be given to women in food distribution, and counselling will be provided to guard against sexual harassment and other kinds of exploitation.

UNHCR will focus on capacity-building, training and technical assistance to local authorities and NGOs. It will strengthen its co-operation with the Government to introduce national refugee legislation. UNHCR will raise public awareness of refugee matters through co-operation with local universities. The well-advanced registration campaign, which aims to provide all refugees with identification cards, will be streamlined and extended to all cities. The Office will continue to monitor the steady arrival of Somalis (on average 1,000 per month). It will provide them with some material assistance and protection. In close co-ordination with WFP, UNHCR will review and improve food distribution.

Budget (USD)

Country	Annual Programme
Egypt	3,641,239
Iraq ¹	3,370,636
Israel	81,200
Jordan	1,533,997
Lebanon	2,907,214
Saudi Arabia	1,601,344
Syrian Arab Republic	1,759,772
Yemen	3,926,968
Total	18,822,370

¹ Financial requirements under a Supplementary Programme will be published in a separate appeal document.