

Iraq



Main objectives

- Support building institutional and legal capacity of governmental and local institutions, particularly the Ministry of Displacement and Migration (MoDM), the Iraqi Property Claims Commission and local NGOs, through management and technical programmes tailored to enhance protection and assistance of refugees and other persons of concern.
- Coordinate and facilitate, where feasible, the voluntary, safe and orderly return of Iraqi refugees and asylum-seekers, advising on conditions in areas of return and addressing obstacles to return. Contribute to sustainable reintegration through a community-based approach.
- Promote the creation of a national protection regime in accordance with international law, including accession to the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol.
- Provide protection and assistance to refugees in Iraq and pursue durable solutions through registration, refugee status determination and assessment of potential solutions for different persons of concern to UNHCR.
- Guided by the UN Strategic Plan on Assistance and Durable Solutions for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Iraq, coordinate orderly return and reintegration programmes where conditions permit. Identify alternative solutions for those unable or unwilling to return.
- Strengthen the authorities' emergency preparedness and response capacity.

UNHCR's requirements for the Iraq situation are currently under review. It is envisaged that the total requirements for the 2006 Iraq Supplementary Budget will not exceed the 2005 level of USD 42 million, including operations to assist Iraqis in Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, Turkey and the Islamic Republic of Iran.

In the absence of accurate figures, it is estimated that there are approximately one million Iraqis in the region (including more than 90,000 registered refugees) in addition to more than 300,000 refugees and persons under complementary protection further afield. In Iraq, there are some 1.2 million IDPs, more than 400,000 IDP returnees, some 250,000 returnees from abroad and 46,000 refugees (Palestinian, Turkish, Iranian and Syrian). The number of stateless persons is thought to be anywhere between half a million and two million.

Working environment

Recent developments

Although 2005 saw several significant political developments, such as National Assembly elections, the formation of a new Transitional Government and the drafting of a constitution, as outlined in the Transitional Administrative Law, the situation remains precarious, with the risk that further instability could swiftly cause renewed internal and external displacement.

Despite ongoing efforts, basic services are often in a rudimentary state, with infrastructure lacking or in urgent need of upgrading or replacement. This situation seriously hampers the reintegration of Iraqi returnees from abroad. Internally displaced people, returnees and refugees are particularly affected by the difficult economic and humanitarian conditions, especially since their traditional support networks have been destroyed. Protection problems are mounting, with increasing reports of harassment, arrest and detention of refugees in Iraq.

UNHCR will continue to support populations of concern through the facilitation of return from abroad, reintegration projects for returnees and development of a durable solutions strategy for the different refugee groups inside Iraq. However, continued fighting and localized ethnic and religious tensions are resulting in new population displacements. In addition, new groups of people are the target of persecution and are fleeing to safer areas within Iraq or abroad.

As in previous years, the experience of Iraqi returnees highlights the central importance of housing and property issues to sustainable return. The Iraqi Government has approved the extension to the end of June 2007 of the deadline for submission of property claims to the Iraqi Property Claims Commission. This is a major step, which will now allow those who were not previously aware of their options to seek redress for losses.

In order to improve the legal framework relative to refugees and other displaced populations, UNHCR has started to assist the MoDM to review its mandate and to draft the Law on the Ministry of Migration and Refugee Affairs. The Transitional National Assembly has presented the draft Law to the State Advisory Council for consideration.

Constraints

The security situation continues to hinder operational access to populations of concern in Iraq. UNHCR will, however, maintain remote management, whereby its national staff and NGO implementing partners are able to keep most essential activities up and running for populations of concern.

Strategy

Protection and solutions

UNHCR will provide essential protection and assistance and seek to implement durable solutions for the Palestinian, Turkish, Iranian and Syrian refugees. The Office will further support the establishment of a framework securing refugee rights and advocate for the creation of national protection structures. For instance, the relevant national and local authorities have approved a plan to relocate Iranian refugees remaining in Al-Tash camp to safer locations in northern Iraq, where UNHCR and local authorities will provide initial assistance to support their self-reliance.

Through the IDP Working Group, UNHCR will address policy issues, provide operational



A local NGO is helping Iranian Kurd refugees to build houses in Barika in Sulaymaniya, northern Iraq. *UNHCR / A. Eriksson*

guidance, undertake contingency planning and assist the Iraqi authorities to develop and implement a national strategy on displacement and durable solutions. UNHCR will further assist the authorities to create conditions conducive to the return of refugees and internally displaced people. Wherever security conditions allow it, UNHCR and its NGO partners will monitor the situation of returnees and IDPs more widely. The data collected will be used to advise returnees on conditions in return areas, address return obstacles and prioritize reintegration assistance. UNHCR will employ the “4Rs” concept, incorporating key elements such as facilitating access to social services, promoting employment-generating activities, community-based reconciliation, awareness raising and establishing an adequate legislative framework for return, relocation and reintegration.

UNHCR will promote accession to the two Statelessness Conventions and support MoDM to enable it to discharge its responsibility to assist stateless persons to recover their nationality.

UNHCR will also provide assistance in drafting a new nationality law in accordance with international human rights standards.

Assistance

Despite security and logistical constraints, UNHCR will continue to provide essential humanitarian assistance for vulnerable groups. Housing assistance will include the establishment of settlements as well as tents and rental subsidies. The Office will also provide medicines, kerosene and household items such as blankets and jerry cans.

UNHCR offices in the region will continue to collaborate on updating the profile of uprooted Iraqi populations, in order to survey their intentions, to provide protection and assistance and to formulate comprehensive voluntary repatriation and reintegration programmes. For voluntary repatriation, UNHCR will continue to register and issue identity cards to returnees and provide transport,

transit facilities, basic health care services and household items.

Returnee monitoring and technical studies will be expanded to areas particularly impacted by the presence of refugees, returnees and internally displaced people to assess conditions of return and guide interventions, where possible, to ease obstacles to successful reintegration of returnees. Governorate Assessment Reports will be updated based on the results of UNHCR's returnee monitoring projects, with additional input from Government and NGO partners.

Desired impact

While UNHCR assists the local authorities to develop a national strategy on displacement and durable solutions for returnees and internally displaced people, as well as national protection structures for refugees, only a limited number of vulnerable groups will enjoy access to humanitarian and reintegration assistance. Voluntary repatriation will be facilitated and registration and issuance of identity cards will strengthen the protection of returnees.

Organization and implementation

Management structure

UNHCR has offices in Baghdad, Al Basrah, Dahuk, Erbil, Kirkuk, Mosul, An Nasiriya and Sulaymaniyah. The UNHCR Iraq Operations Unit is based in Amman, whereas the Cross-Border Base is situated in Kuwait City. Under the prevailing security conditions, the remote management structure, put in place in 2003, has proved viable and will remain the best option under the circumstances, with a strong emphasis on partnership.

Coordination

Under the overall coordination by the UN Country Team and the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), UNHCR is contributing to the development of a National Strategy on Displacement Challenges and Durable Solutions. UNHCR is one of the participating organizations of the Iraq Reconstruction Fund Facility for Iraq (IRFFI) which is administered by UNDG/UNDP. The UNHCR Chief of Mission is the Task Manager of Cluster F (refugees, internally displaced people and durable solutions) and UNHCR also chairs the IDP Working Group and actively participates in the UN Emergency Working Group.

Over 20 NGO partners participate in regular review and planning exercises in Amman (for central and northern Iraq) and Kuwait City (for southern Iraq). Main government partners include the Ministry of Displacement and Migration, the Kurdish Regional Government (Ministry of Humanitarian Assistance and Cooperation, Ministry of Human Rights) and the Iraqi Property Claims Commission.