



The Middle East

Major developments

Events in Iraq continued to overshadow the entire region, giving rise to an outflow of large numbers of Iraqi nationals, mostly to neighbouring countries, with, nevertheless the return of small numbers of Iraqi refugees and internally displaced persons. In a move welcomed by UNHCR, the Syrian Arab Republic (Syria) announced its intention to accede to the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees.

In Yemen, fighting in the summer of 2004 between government troops and followers of a dissident cleric caused the internal displacement of several thousand people. Thousands of Somali and Ethiopian asylum-seekers and refugees continued to embark on risky sea journeys to Yemen in 2004.

The countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council have shown an increasing interest in refugee law training – an interest borne out by the number of requests for workshops and conferences on this issue. In Egypt, the refugee status determination of Sudanese asylum-seekers was suspended as of June 2004, in view of progress towards peace in Southern Sudan.

Bahrain

Egypt

Iraq

Israel

Jordan

Kuwait

Lebanon

Oman

Qatar

Saudi Arabia

Syrian Arab Republic

United Arab Emirates

Yemen



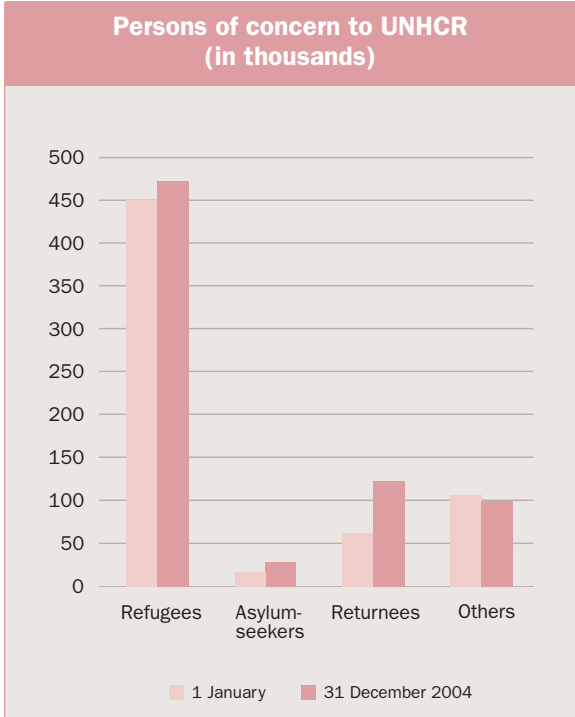
Challenges and concerns

In Iraq, the security situation remained volatile, despite the transfer of authority from the Coalition Provisional Authority to the Interim Iraqi Government in June 2004. As described in the Iraq chapter of this report, UNHCR’s operations in Iraq continued to be administered remotely from Jordan and Kuwait.

In the course of 2004, thousands of Iraqi nationals fled their country, most of whom arrived in Syria, Jordan and Lebanon. These large, steady influxes dramatically changed the pattern of asylum in all three countries. Efforts to provide timely and effective protection under a temporary protection regime placed a huge strain on both governmental and UNHCR resources.

Two camps situated between the borders of Iraq and Jordan, Ruwayshed and No Man’s Land, continued to house Palestinian and Iranian Kurd refugees, respectively. Both groups remained in a precarious situation stranded in remote locations without solutions in sight. Despite the resettlement of approximately

400 Iranian Kurds to Sweden, and the admission of around 400 Palestinians into Jordan, approximately 900 refugees still remained in the two camps at the end of 2004.



The resettlement of refugees of Middle Eastern and other origins continued to be constrained by the security concerns which intensified after 11 September 2001 (with the sole exception of the Sudanese refugees in Egypt). As a result, resettlement processing remained slow, and the waiting lists grew longer, leading to considerable frustration and tension among the refugees.

In what has now become a growing phenomenon, thousands of Somali and Ethiopian nationals attempted to reach Yemen on board smugglers' boats from Somalia. Hundreds lost their lives in the process, when the boats either sank or were abandoned by their crew.

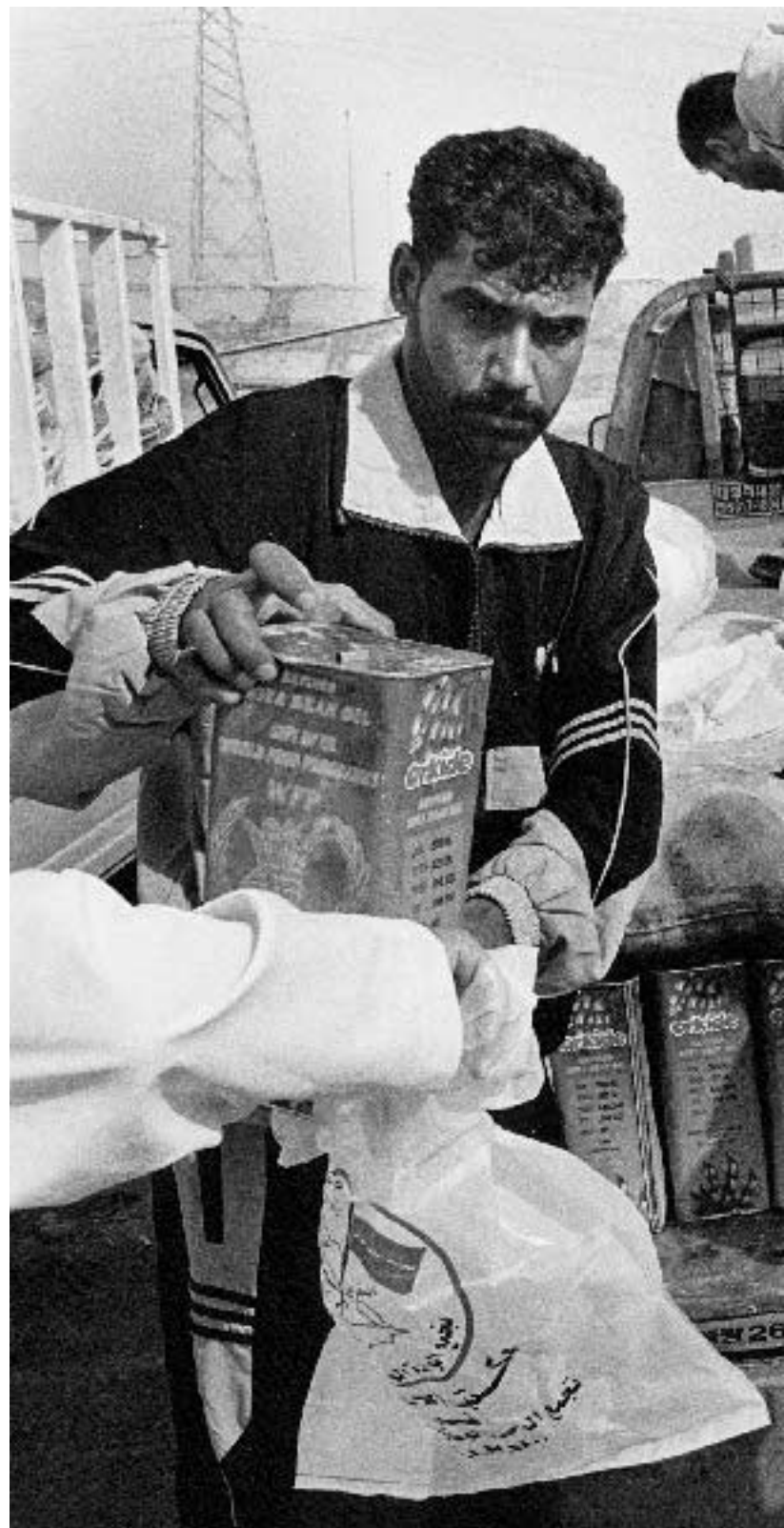
Progress towards solutions

UNHCR's ongoing efforts in the Middle East region to promote accession to the international refugee conventions have been rewarded by the announcement by the Government of Syria of its intention to accede to the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees. It is hoped that other countries in the region will follow.

In terms of durable solutions, the volatile security situation in Iraq did not deter the spontaneous repatriation of approximately 350 Iraqi refugees from Rafha camp in Saudi Arabia during 2004 as well as many others from the Islamic Republic of Iran and further afield. UNHCR welcomed the amendments to the Saudi nationality laws, which now open the door to the naturalization of a number of stateless Bedouin and long-term expatriate residents.

Although the refugee status determination of Sudanese asylum-seekers in Egypt was suspended in June in light of the political developments in Southern Sudan, around 4,000 Sudanese refugees who had already been recognized departed for resettlement in the United States, Canada, Australia, and Finland. In Yemen, some 600 Ethiopian refugees were proposed for resettlement to the United States under the group resettlement scheme.

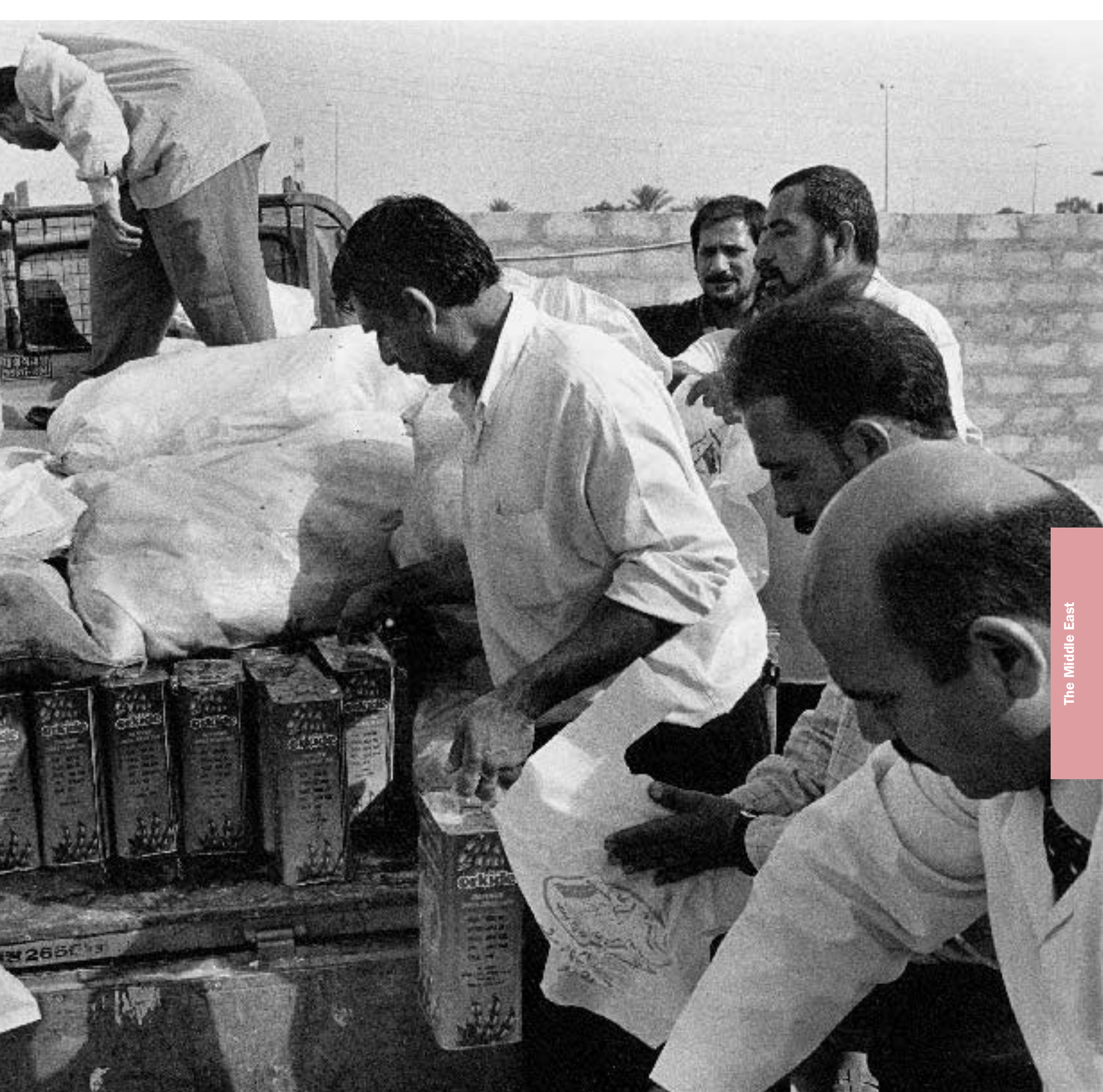
In Syria, Jordan, Lebanon and Egypt, UNHCR piloted a project aimed at enhancing a community development approach to protection and assistance operations for refugees, while mainstreaming age and gender concerns in these activities. These pilot projects have resulted in the enhancement of reception



facilities, protection monitoring, refugee status determination and mechanisms for the distribution of assistance.

Operations

The UNHCR operations in **Iraq** will be described in a separate country chapter.



Iraq: A distribution of food donated by an Islamic charity. *UNHCR/T. Voeten*

In **Egypt**, UNHCR continued to provide protection and basic humanitarian assistance to the largest urban refugee population in the Middle East: some 20,500 refugees, originating mainly from Sudan and Somalia. The focus in 2004 continued to be on refugee status determination and the identification of durable solutions. As a result of these efforts, 4,000 refugees departed for resettlement.

In 2004, UNHCR developed a joint plan of action with the League of Arab States, focusing on capacity building, and strengthening the implementation of the international refugee instruments in the League's Member States. Implementation of the plan is scheduled for 2005.

UNHCR made considerable efforts to move away from the provision of basic assistance to refugees

and towards self-sustaining projects, including vocational training, job placement services and the strengthening of community structures. In addition to its usual activities, UNHCR implemented an HIV/AIDS awareness and impact mitigation project in collaboration with UNAIDS; set-up a breakfast feeding programme in refugee schools; and established a community resource structure aimed at addressing incidents of sexual and gender-based violence and ensuring their confidential referral to the appropriate local services.

In **Israel**, UNHCR continued to focus its attention on reinforcing the refugee status determination procedures, and succeeded in reducing the duration of the process from 18 to 6 months. UNHCR was also engaged in training on human rights and refugee law for university students as well as governmental and non-governmental officials. The Israeli authorities provided a form of temporary protection to some 200 Liberian and Sierra Leonean refugees and asylum-seekers. The authorities and NGOs continued to provide basic humanitarian assistance to the most vulnerable of the refugees in the country.

In addition to hosting UNHCR's Iraq Operations Unit in Amman, **Jordan** focused in 2004 on the situation of the Palestinian and Iranian Kurd refugee populations in the camps of Ruwayshed and No Man's Land, as well as the rapidly increasing Iraqi population, estimated at some 250,000 persons. The populations of concern to UNHCR also included some 300 refugees of other nationalities. Basic humanitarian assistance was provided to the refugees in the camps as well as to the most vulnerable amongst the urban refugees and asylum-seekers. A sub-agreement was concluded with an NGO in order to conduct research on the profile of the Iraqis living in Jordan, so as to aid UNHCR in planning and delivering protection and assistance to this population.

UNHCR provided literacy classes, computer training and vocational skills training, including typing, satellite and mobile phone maintenance, hotel management, beauty and sewing classes to some 300 refugees, in order to ensure their eventual self-reliance. Women and youth committee meetings were also held on a regular basis, and a monthly refugee newsletter was published, so as to foster a sense of community amongst the refugees and to keep them informed about events, courses and assistance available to them. Efforts are ongoing for Jordan's accession to the 1951 Convention Relating

to the Status of Refugees, as well as in regard to the development of national legal mechanisms to process asylum claims.

In **Kuwait**, which continued to host UNHCR's operational structure for southern Iraq, UNHCR's activities focused on providing protection for over 1,500 refugees and asylum-seekers, principally of Somali, Iraqi, Palestinian or Afghan origin. These activities were carried out in close coordination with the Government of Kuwait. UNHCR also enlisted the help of local NGOs in providing basic humanitarian assistance to the most vulnerable of these persons.

In **Lebanon**, UNHCR monitored the proper implementation of the Memorandum of Understanding concluded between UNHCR and the Government of Lebanon in 2003 relating to the registered refugees' right to temporary residence, their freedom of movement, and identity cards. Despite the MOU's objective to reduce the detention of refugees and asylum-seekers charged with illegal entry, there were continuing concerns over the number of arrests and detentions of persons of concern to UNHCR, on that ground. In this respect, UNHCR sought to streamline the procedures for access to asylum-seekers and refugees detained for illegal entry.

UNHCR's assistance activities aimed to enhance the refugees' self-reliance. Mainstreaming gender and age considerations into all activities had a positive impact on empowering women and girls, helping them to participate effectively in the decision-making processes governing the provision of services. UNHCR strengthened the Community Development Centre, which provided training, counselling, and other services to refugees. Courses for women covered accounting, English, jewellery design, sewing, and hairdressing. Support groups were also established for women and adolescents in order to provide them with a forum in which they could express their concerns.

In **Saudi Arabia**, new asylum-seeking populations, including some 150 Eritreans, sought refuge during the course of the year. Activities on their behalf included refugee status determination, and the identification of durable solutions to their situation. UNHCR continued to enjoy a close working relationship with the Saudi Government, notably in relation to the approximately 400 Iraqi refugees still remaining in the Rafha Camp. UNHCR was encouraged by the significant number of voluntary repatriations

from this camp, despite continuing instability in extensive areas of Iraq. A persistent cause for concern was the situation of the large numbers of stateless persons in the country. However, UNHCR warmly welcomed the amendments to the Saudi nationality laws which pave the way for the possible, gradual naturalization of a number of stateless persons and long-term foreign residents.

In the **United Arab Emirates**, UNHCR was actively involved in training activities. A workshop on refugee law, held in Dubai in close collaboration with the Human Rights Department of the Dubai Police Department, was attended by 42 participants from seven Middle Eastern Gulf countries, including representatives from governments and the NGO community.

In the **Syrian Arab Republic**, UNHCR registered 13,000 Iraqi asylum-seekers in 2004 out of a total of an estimated 400,000 including those under temporary protection (the pace of registration accelerated sharply over the course of the year). While these persons were able to remain in the country, they required support from UNHCR and its local NGO partners for vocational skills training, health care and financial assistance. UNHCR's provision of school supplies to refugee children reinforced the Syrian Government's policy of universal free school education. UNHCR entered into partnership with a local charitable organization in order to establish a shelter for refugee women living without any male or community support.

In 2004, UNHCR facilitated the resettlement to third countries of some 430 refugees, mainly of Somali, Afghan, or Sudanese origin. Priority cases for resettlement were women at risk, victims of torture, serious medical cases and unaccompanied minors. The numbers of refugees opting for voluntary repatriation remained low, with only seven persons returning to Yemen during the course of the year.

In **Yemen**, Somali and Ethiopian refugees continued to arrive, having endured hazardous sea journeys. UNHCR has expressed its deep concern regarding the numbers of asylum-seekers and refugees

reported to have lost their lives in the process. It is hoped that the already drafted Comprehensive Plan of Action (CPA) for Somalia, in which Yemen will participate as an asylum country, will eventually serve to prevent these outflows (cf. the country chapter for Somalia on CPA).

The priority issues for UNHCR in Yemen were the enactment of a national refugee law and the planned opening by the Government of six refugee registration centres around the country. While capacity-building efforts were made, it is hoped that the year 2005 will see rather more substantial progress on these issues than was seen in 2004. Working in close collaboration with WFP and NGO partners, UNHCR also focused its activities on reinforcing the assistance structures in Kharaz Camp, which is home to some 7,000 refugees. These activities included social counselling, needs assessments of vulnerable refugees through regular home visits and vocational training activities. Particular attention was paid to the situation of refugee women and refugee children. Similar services were provided to urban refugees, mostly in the Basateen area in Aden, as well as in Sana'a. The Mayfa'a Reception Centre continued to provide new arrivals with food, health care, and optional onward transportation to Kharaz Camp.

Working in close coordination with the Faculty of Law of the University of Sana'a and the Ministry of Human Rights, UNHCR organized a series of workshops on refugee law for groups of interested students. It is hoped that this initiative will pave the way for the eventual introduction of international refugee law into their law curricula.

Funding

Funding remained a problem for UNHCR's operations in the Middle East region, notably its operations in Yemen. The unprecedented number of Iraqi asylum-seekers arriving in Jordan, Syria and Lebanon placed a further strain on UNHCR's resources.

Restricted voluntary contributions (USD)			
Earmarking ¹	Donor	Annual programme budget	Supplementary programme budget
Egypt			
	Angelina Jolie	25,000	0
	European Commission	274,139	0
	Miscellaneous donors / Private donors in Austria	8,905	0
	United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS	16,000	0
	United States of America	989,085	0
Sub-total		1,313,129	0
Iraq			
	Denmark	891,266	2,673,797
	El-Eslah Society of Bahrain	0	9,941
	Islamic Association of Bahrain	0	4,891
	Japan	0	700,000
	Miscellaneous donors / Private donors in Greece	0	130,329
	New Zealand	0	955,414
	Poland	0	10,000
	Portugal	0	609,756
	Switzerland	396,825	0
	UNDG Iraq Trust Fund	0	7,126,200
	United Kingdom	0	400,000
	USA for UNHCR	100	100
Sub-total		1,288,191	12,620,428
Jordan			
	USA for UNHCR	0	30,000
Sub-total		0	30,000
Middle East			
	Japan Association for UNHCR	0	97
	Miscellaneous donors / Private donors in Italy	0	9,428
	Norway	0	1,032,448
	Spain	0	456,423
	Sweden	4,120,879	0
	United States of America	4,000,000	16,200,000
	USA for UNHCR	0	4,727
Sub-total		8,120,879	17,703,121 ▶▶

Earmarking ¹	Donor	Annual programme budget	Supplementary programme budget
Saudi Arabia			
	Saudi Arabia	32,755	0
Sub-total		32,755	0
Syrian Arab Republic			
	United States of America	132,025	0
Sub-total		132,025	0
Yemen			
	Italy	245,701	0
	Japan	300,000	0
	Netherlands	985,222	0
	Oman Charitable Organization	10,000	0
Sub-total		1,540,923	0
Total		12,427,902	30,353,549

¹ For more information on earmarking, please refer to the donor profiles.

Budget and expenditure (USD)						
Country	Revised budget			Expenditure		
	Annual programme budget	Supplementary programme budget ¹	Total	Annual programme budget	Supplementary programme budget ¹	Total
Egypt	4,153,629	401,373	4,555,002	4,099,390	75,234	4,174,624
Iraq	1,999,036	50,951,144	52,950,180	1,921,983	24,241,621	26,163,604
Israel	97,657	0	97,657	97,657	0	97,657
Jordan	1,535,401	3,904,799	5,440,200	1,501,632	3,739,544	5,241,176
Lebanon	2,723,643	637,047	3,360,690	2,662,557	334,321	2,996,878
Saudi Arabia	1,853,646	557,889	2,411,535	1,841,781	364,189	2,205,970
Syrian Arab Republic	1,597,507	561,209	2,158,716	1,510,475	125,895	1,636,370
Yemen	4,196,053	0	4,196,053	4,096,336	0	4,096,336
Regional projects ²	0	1,138,378	1,138,378	0	598,296	598,296
Total	18,156,572	58,151,839	76,308,411	17,731,811	29,479,100	47,210,911

¹ The supplementary programme figures apply to the Supplementary Appeal for the Iraq Operation.

Note: The supplementary programme budget does not include a 7 per cent charge (support costs) that is recovered from contributions to meet indirect costs for UNHCR.

² Includes reintegration and repatriation for Iraqi refugees and other persons of concern to UNHCR.