

UNHCR SYRIA

August 2010

Background

- As of end July 2010 the population of **registered Iraqi refugees in Syria stands at 151,907 individuals.**
- Since the start of the war in Iraq, UNHCR Syria has registered over 260,000 Iraqis. Some have since been resettled in third countries, or have departed to third countries by other means; some have decided to return to Iraq, mostly spontaneously and in a few cases with limited assistance from UNHCR.
- UNHCR Syria regularly updates the number of registered Iraqi refugees based on the verification of their physical presence in Syria. As of 1 July, it estimates that 15,900 individuals who did not have any form of contact with UNHCR (through its protection, social counselling and assistance programmes) since the beginning of 2010 are no longer in Syria. As a result, their files have been inactivated. If these Iraqis approach UNHCR again, their files may be reactivated following an assessment of their situation.
- The vast majority of Iraqi refugees have settled in and around Damascus with a small proportion in Aleppo, Homs, Hama, Deir Ezzor, Lattakia, Tartous and Hassaka. The urban nature of this refugee population makes detection and identification of vulnerable Iraqis challenging.
- The high refugee numbers have put significant strain on Syria's economy as well as on the country's Education and Health infrastructures which are open to all Iraqi refugees.
- Refugees have very limited access to legal employment. With price increases, especially in rent, food, fuel and diesel, UNHCR Syria is focusing on preventing the negative consequences of refugee impoverishment that include homelessness, child labour, early marriage and other negative coping mechanisms.

Priorities

Protection

UNHCR identifies vulnerable refugees through registration and outreach. Protection and Legal Counselling takes place at UNHCR offices with lawyers engaged to intervene on individual cases.

Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV)

Several hundred survivors of Sexual and Gender Based Violence have been identified by UNHCR. Staff dedicated to supporting these survivors and preventing such violence work closely with local counterparts.

Outreach

120 Iraqi Outreach Workers and Education, Health and Support-Group Volunteers (in cooperation with Community Centres in Damascus and Aleppo) carry out home visits to identify vulnerable refugees and refer them for services.

Assistance

Direct Assistance: 119,760 Iraqi refugees (33,815 families) across Syria received food, non-food assistance in the third distribution cycle of 2010 (May-June). This included over 11,000 refugees who used WFP's electronic voucher system. There are currently 12,355 families (36,104 individuals) receiving monthly financial assistance.

Education

UNICEF, International NGOs and UNHCR, in cooperation with the Ministry of Education, are actively working to provide education opportunities for Iraqi refugees as part of an effort to address the issue of large numbers of children not attending school.

Health

A high proportion of the registered population has serious health issues. UNHCR provides subsidized healthcare to refugees through its Implementing Partner, the Syrian Arab Red Crescent and designated public hospitals.

Co-ordination with UN Agencies

UNHCR is prioritizing coordination with sister UN agencies and International NGOs on issues related to health, gender based violence, psychosocial support, education and vocational training, with a special focus on women and children, youths and adolescents at risk.

Advocacy

UNHCR continues to lobby for accession to relevant international instruments and adoption of national refugee legislation.

Current Vulnerabilities*

- There are currently **62,309** Iraqi refugees registered with UNHCR considered as having specific needs (41% of the registered population):

Special Needs	Individuals
Child or adolescent at risk	5,932
Refugee with disabilities	4,420
Critical medical condition	33,406
Older person at risk	3,943
Survivor of torture	18,210
Woman at risk	8,965

* One individual can have more than one specific need.



Resettlement

- UNHCR continues to encourage resettlement countries to receive the most vulnerable Iraqis.
- Submissions and Departures since February 2007 (as of end of July 2010):

Country of submission	Individuals submitted 2007-2010	Individuals departed 2007-2010
Australia	2,049	907
Belgium	39	29
Canada	3,864	2,050
Denmark	20	11
Finland	894	452
France	102	102
Germany	2,944	2,046
Ireland	21	7
Luxembourg	38	25
Netherlands	655	252
Norway	480	218
New-Zealand	280	164
Portugal	39	5
Sweden	735	431
Switzerland	31	0
UK	206	64
USA	34,343	14,255
Total	46,740	21,018

Voluntary Repatriation

- UNHCR does not promote or encourage repatriation but remains prepared to facilitate voluntary returns. It assists families making a free and informed decision to return to Iraq after individual counselling.
- Since the start of its voluntary repatriation programme in October 2008, less than 1,500 Iraqi refugees have received UNHCR assistance to return to Iraq. The majority cite financial hardship as the reason for their decision to repatriate.
- There are indications that more returns are taking place without being officially declared with UNHCR or the Iraqi and Syrian authorities.

Palestinian Refugees from Iraq

- **Al Tanf Camp, located in the desert at the border between Iraq and Syria, was closed on 1 February 2010.**
- Out of the 1,300 Palestinian refugees who lived there at different times, around 1,000 were relocated to third countries. The rest have been temporarily moved to Al Hol Camp in northeastern Syria.
- Al Hol Camp, located in Hassaka Governorate, currently hosts 460 Palestinians from Iraq (including those originally from Al Tanf). The camp is entirely dependent on assistance from UNHCR and its partners.
- UNHCR is advocating for the urgent resettlement of all residents to avoid their having to endure prolonged habitation in a camp setting.

International NGOs

There are currently 14 International NGOs registered with the Syrian Arab Red Crescent and working in Syria to assist refugees. They are: Première Urgence, International Medical Corps, the Danish Refugee Council, the International Blue Crescent, IECG, Islamic Relief France, HELP, Médecins du Monde, Action Against Hunger Spain, Terre des Hommes Italy, Italian Institute for University Cooperation, Ricerca e Cooperazione, the Danish Centre for Culture and Development and the Civil Volunteers' Group (Italy).

Refugees from other Countries than Iraq

- Syria has also long played host to thousands of individuals fleeing from countries other than Iraq. These refugees, almost all of whom live in the suburbs of Damascus, face considerable social and economic hardship. UNHCR's aim is to ensure that the assistance and protection they receive matches in so far as possible what Iraqis receive. UNHCR has been able to resettle 67 refugees from other countries than Iraq since the start of 2010.
- The table below shows UNHCR's breakdown of recognised refugees and asylum seekers as of end of July 2010:

Country of Origin	Recognised Refugees	Asylum Seekers
Afghanistan	1,430	264
Iran	186	98
Somalia	2,713	197
Sudan	508	290
Others	265	254
Total	5,102	1,103