

# UNHCR SYRIA UPDATE ON IRAQI REFUGEES

## LATEST NEWS

- UNHCR has observed that the return movement to Iraq that increased immediately after the imposition of new visa regulations appears to have subsided.
- UNHCR and WFP have agreed to provide food distribution to 91% of registered Iraqi refugees as of February 2008 (150,000 refugees).
- 13 International NGOs have received finalized (MoUs) from the Syrian Government.
- UNHCR is currently planning its future mobile registration missions in Aleppo, Homs, Hama and Tartous.

## REFUGEE NUMBERS

- No census has yet been completed for Iraqi refugees. However, based on Government estimates, reports from implementing partners and Registration, UNHCR estimates that 1.5 million Iraqis are currently in Syria.
- To date, UNHCR has registered over 153,516 Iraqi refugees (53% male, 47% female).
- 18,969 registered since 2007 are classified as victims of torture/violence in Iraq.
- 21,546 registered since 2007 have an important medical condition.
- 2,654 registered since 2007 are considered to be women at risk.

## REFUGEE MOVEMENTS

- UNHCR did not see the large numbers they expected following the start of the military intervention in Iraq in 2003.
- The bombing of the Golden Mosque of Samara in 2006 marked the decline into extreme sectarian violence that has forced hundreds of thousands of Iraqis from their homes.
- From February 2006-October 2007 Syria received between 30,000-60,000 refugees each month.
- A sharp decline in the number of Iraqis entering Syria was noted following the imposition of visa regulations in October 2007.
- According to the immigration officials at Al-Tanf, the daily average number of those entering Syria from Iraq in late January is over 1,200 while an average of under 700 are going back to Iraq from Syria.



## REFUGEES RETURNING TO IRAQ FROM SYRIA

- According to an Iraqi Red Crescent report issued in January 2008, some 46,000 refugees returned home to Iraq from Syria between September and December 2007, a much lower figure than that given by the Iraqi government.
- In November 2007, UNHCR/IPSOS carried out a sample survey of 110 Iraqis at the UNHCR Registration Centre in Damascus and asked why they, or people they knew, were returning to Iraq. 46.1% of respondents answered that they could no longer afford to live in Syria. 25.6% answered that people's visas had expired and they were forced to leave. 14.1% had heard that the security situation had improved and that they could go home.
- On 27 November a convoy organized by the Iraqi government left Damascus with 870 returnees.
- Most refugees interviewed do not agree with the idea that security has sufficiently improved in Iraq.
- Refugees discussing returning to Iraq cite financial pressures as the driving reason for return.



## VISA ISSUES AND DEPORTATION

- Visa regulations for Iraqi nationals who wish to enter Syria have been modified at least 3 times since February 2007. According to the new visa regulations which came into force after 17 October 2007, only 15 categories of Iraqis can obtain a visa for Syria.
- New regulations have noticeably reduced the number of Iraqis (re)entering Syria.
- The visas issued under the new regulations are generally valid for three months.
- Refugees with children in school or suffering from health problems are managing to renew their visas when they can provide adequate justification.
- In a number of complex cases, the lawyer appointed by UNHCR has been successful in securing visa extensions by providing legal justification.
- As far as UNHCR is aware, simple overstay in Syria does not automatically lead to deportation.
- Iraqis facing a greater risk of deportation are those who:
  - Have been arrested or detained
  - Have destroyed their documents
  - Have entered Syria illegally
  - Have committed any type of criminal acts (such as forging documents, being involved in prostitution, petty crimes)

## REGISTRATION

- UNHCR has a registration team of 42 clerks and 11 supervisors (mostly based in Douma).
- The waiting time for refugees to obtain a registration appointment has been reduced to 2.5 months.

Active Iraqi population by Ethnicity (as of 18 January 2008)

Nationality	Individuals	Percentage
Arab	127,222	83
Armenian	1,175	0.8
Assyrian	6,477	4.5
Chaldean	14,414	9
Kurd	1,848	1.5
Turkmen	248	0.2
Other	2,132	0.9

Active Iraqi population by Religion (as of 18 January 2008)

Religion	Individuals	Percentage
Muslim – Sunni	84,471	53.6
Muslim – Shiite	29,694	21.6
Christian	25,843	16.9
Sabeen-Mandean	7,810	4.6
Yezidi	995	0.9
Islam (not specified)	3,630	2.1
Other	1,017	0.3

## MOBILE REGISTRATION TEAM

- In October 2007, mobile registration for Iraqi populations residing outside Damascus was launched in the El-Hol Camp (Hassake governorate) with the aim of making international protection available to those who are unable to travel to the capital. The exercise, which concluded in early January 2008, registered 1199 cases (4809 individuals), in addition to processing 267 'renewal' cases.
- A second mobile registration exercise is due to commence in Albu Kamal and Deir al-Zour in late February 2008 in collaboration with the Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC).
- Mobile Registration in other cities (Aleppo, Homs, and Lataqia, Hama and Tartous) in 2008 will enable UNHCR and partners to provide food and non-food assistance to residents outside Damascus.

## BUDGET AND PARTNERS

- Since the beginning of 2007, UNHCR has signed agreements with the Syrian Government (including the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education, Governorate of Al Hassake and Ministry of Higher Education), Palestinian Red Crescent, Syrian Arab Red Crescent, local NGOs and UN Agencies.

- To date agreements amount to a total of US\$38 million. In addition the joint UNICEF-UNHCR appeal for US\$129 million for the region has started to receive funding (US\$15 million) enabling UNHCR to sign an additional agreement for US\$10 million with the Ministry of Education. At least US\$20 million will have been committed to education in Syria during 2007.
- It is hoped that the recent health appeal (UNICEF, UNHCR, UNFPA and WHO) will allow UNHCR to significantly increase its health programmes.

### During 2007 these funds have been used to:

- rehabilitate 100 schools and start the building of 8 new schools in 2008
- provide tens of thousands of Iraqi schoolchildren in Syria with textbooks, uniforms and other necessary school supplies
- provide schools with computers and teaching material
- give food to over 43,000 refugees in need
- support the construction of a new hospital in Damascus (one floor) and support expanded capacity at a number of other hospitals
- provide medical services for 190,000 Iraqi refugees
- rehabilitate 50 government health clinics
- support 9 Red Crescent health clinics dedicated to refugee healthcare
- provide emergency services for Palestinian refugees at the borders with Iraq
- provide treatment for 500 cancer patients
- open community centres in areas of high concentration of refugees
- support vocational training for Iraqi refugees
- support two safe houses for victims of gender-based violence
- provide 270,000 hot meals to 9,000 Iraqi refugees during Ramadan
- provide heart surgery for 150 refugees

### Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs)

- 13 international NGOs are in the process of examining MoUs that will enable them to work with refugees in Syria.
- According to the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour, national NGOs do not have the right to work with refugees.

### The Syrian Arab Red Crescent

- UNHCR's main implementing partner is the Syrian Arab Red Crescent.
- In February UNHCR signed an agreement with the Syrian Arab Red Crescent for over US\$4 million, which has now expanded to US\$8.396 million. These funds are being used to build and manage new clinics, provide health services, support community outreach, distribute food, manage community centres and provide school supplies to Iraqi children.



- To date the Red Crescent has opened nine clinics and one dispensary in areas of high concentration of refugees. These clinics provide subsidized health services for Iraqi refugees that have either registered or applied for an appointment to register with UNHCR. The agreement also includes financial support for the referral of patients to Syrian public hospitals for cases that cannot be treated at primary health care facilities.
- All refugees that apply for a UNHCR registration appointment, or who are registered, have access to subsidized health care at Red Crescent clinics.

## UNICEF, UNFPA, WFP and WHO Joint Programmes



- UNHCR is working closely with sister UN Agencies in order to expand the reach of its assistance programmes. UNHCR has joined forces with the following UN Agencies:
  - **UNRWA** – to support Palestinian refugees from Iraq at Al Hol and Al Tanf refugee camps (MOU signed)
  - **UNFPA** – to support a programme that aims to prevent and respond to Sexual Gender Based Violence in the Iraqi refugee community (MOU between UNHCR and UNFPA signed)
  - **UNICEF** – to support the Back to School campaign, establish UNICEF child friendly spaces for refugees, cooperate on child protection and cooperate on health issues (Joint UNHCR-UNICEF regional appeal, US\$129 million, for education)
  - **WFP** – to support food distribution of dry food rations in coordination with the UNHCR complimentary food ration (MOU signed with UNHCR, Joint Assessment Mission completed in October) Food distribution is based on referral from registration to community services.
  - **WHO** – to support healthcare for Iraqi refugees (Joint UNHCR-WHO-UNICEF-UNFPA appeal for US\$82 million launched in September – no funding so far)
- The UNHCR Registration Centre at Douma provides a good opportunity for many of these initiatives to model interventions. UNICEF has established a child friendly space and UNFPA has a women's clinic.

## EDUCATION – BACK TO SCHOOL CAMPAIGN

- The Government of Syria has a clear policy that welcomes all children from the Arab world living in Syria to enrol in school.
- The UNHCR budget for education activities for 2007 was US\$25 million. The funds enabled UNHCR Syria to sign a US\$20 million agreement with the Ministry of Education.
- Many of the refugees have concentrated in areas that are already overcrowded and where schools are already facing space constraints.
- 43 749 Iraqi school children enrolled in Syrian schools by December 2007.
- UNHCR has provided 15,655 school uniforms to Iraqi refugee children comprising the following: 6 091



for primary level, 7 404 for elementary level, 2 160 for secondary level. And 15,967 units of school stationary have been distributed comprising 6,117 for primary, 7,406 for elementary and 2,444 for secondary levels.

- UNHCR has rehabilitated 100 existing educational facilities.
- UNHCR is offering opportunities to 300 Iraqi refugee students to have access to higher education with scholarships to public and private universities in Syria.
- UNHCR is supporting textbook supply and teachers' allowances

**In order to achieve their aim of enrolling 155,000 Iraqi refugee children in 2008/2009, UNHCR and UNICEF will support the Ministry of Education to:**

- Start the construction of schools for Iraqis and Syrians (6 in 2008)
- Bus children to new schools with space (starting in 2008)
- Institute a 'shift' system so that schools operate both mornings and afternoons
- Rehabilitate and improving more schools
- Install prefabricated classrooms in schools that have external space to spare

**To address the challenges that poor Iraqi families face in registering their children, UNHCR and UNICEF plan to:**

- Provide financial, food and non-food assistance whenever necessary
- Provide uniforms, books, school supplies and school kits
- Support NGO programmes for working children
- Support community centres to provide extra-curricular support for Iraqi children
- Establish agreements with institutions and charities that can support extra-curricular and non formal education for Iraqi children



## HEALTH

- In 2007 a total of 200,000 Iraqi refugees received subsidised consultations and medical care from UNHCR's health partners.
- There are seven clinics that provide refugee healthcare in areas of high concentration of Iraqi refugees in Damascus (1 is administered by the French Red Cross and 6 by the Syrian Arab Red Crescent).
- UNHCR supported facilities provide comprehensive treatment as well as referrals to secondary or tertiary level hospitals.

**UNHCR has agreements with:**

- The Ministry of Health
  - UNHCR is implementing the agreement signed with the Ministry of Health in May 2007, providing drugs for chronic diseases and medical

- equipment for 50 primary health centres. The value of purchased medical equipment is around US\$3 million.
  - UNHCR has completed the rehabilitation and extension of several health facilities in Damascus, al Hassakeh and Deir al Zour.
- The Syria Red Crescent (SARC)
  - SARC operates 11 clinics across Syria: 6 in Damascus and one in Homs, Deir al Zour, Hassake, al-Raqqa and Edleb.
  - UNHCR is setting up a health management information system in Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC) clinics.
- The Palestinian Red Crescent
  - UNHCR signed an agreement with the Palestinian Red Crescent in June 2007 to provide emergency health services in the Palestinian refugee camp in Al Tanf.
  - More than 4,500 refugees were treated by the Palestinian Red Crescent in 2007.
- Al-Bairouni Hospital
  - An agreement was signed to provide services to 500 cancer patients for a total of US\$1 million.
  - Over 100 patients are currently receiving cancer treatment in this hospital.
- Other Partners
  - UNHCR is continuing to cooperate with the Ibn Sina Mental Health Hospital and Al Maali Health Centre, a specialized centre for disabled children, until agreements are finalized.
  - Some 6,300 Iraqi patients have received medical treatment through the Ibraheem Al-Khalel Convent.
  - Syrian NGO Terre des Hommes is providing rehabilitation and health care to children in need of surgery, orthopaedic prostheses, and vision and hearing apparatuses.
  - Al-Bassel Hospital gave operations to 450 refugee patients suffering from severe cardiac problems.
  - UNHCR also has an agreement with two private clinics (the Italian Hospital and the Tobi El-Jerashi Hospital) to treat emergency cases.



### FOOD AND NON-FOOD ITEM ASSISTANCE

- In September 2007, UNHCR and the World Food Program (WFP) launched the first food distribution program implemented the Syrian Arab Red Crescent for Iraqi refugees.
- The second round of food distribution started in November ended on December 5, with food being distributed to over 43,600 people across Syria, mostly women, children and the most vulnerable refugees.
- UNHCR and the World Food Programme have broadened the criteria for food (and non food item) assistance to include some 155,000 refugees as of 1 February. This figure is expected to reach 360,000 by the end of December 2008.
- The food packages consist of dry food items provided by WFP such as oil, rice and lentils and other complementary items provided by UNHCR such as sugar, tea, tomato

paste, pasta, cracked wheat. The non-food item packages include mattresses, bed linen, blankets, detergents, diapers and hygiene items for women.

- UNHCR plans to build facilities in the Syrian Arab Red Crescent warehouse compound and to purchase four trucks to facilitate food distribution to Iraqi refugees outside Damascus.

## CASH ASSISTANCE

- UNHCR started the distribution of 7,000 ATM cards to Iraqi refugees identified as urgently needing financial assistance in December.
- So far the families (over 17,900 individuals) were identified based on a vulnerability assessment by UNHCR's community services.
- Heads of households will receive approximately US\$100 per month, with an additional \$10 for each dependent.
- The cash assistance is intended to support the back to school campaign and prevention efforts problems such as sexual gender based violence, homelessness and child labour.

## COMMUNITY SERVICES

- Three Community Centres have so far been established under direct implementation by UNHCR and managed by the refugee community itself.
- Three additional community centres run by SARC have opened, with a further centre to open shortly.
- The six centres are located in the main four areas around Damascus that have the largest refugee concentration, namely: Mazaken Barzeh, Sayyedah Zeinab, Jaramana and Qudsaya.
- At present the community centres offer English, French, Arabic, computer skills, and classes for the disabled and Library services.
- After school activities prioritize curriculum support for Iraqi refugees struggling at school.

## Outreach

- UNHCR has engaged 22 Iraqi outreach workers living in areas of high concentration of Iraqi refugees.
- The target is to engage around 100 volunteers who can help UNHCR access the most vulnerable, unregistered population.



### Sexual Gender Based Violence (SGVB)

- Around 400 survivors of SGBV have been identified since Feb 2007
- UNHCR is supporting survivors and working towards prevention
- The Office is following up to secure access to 50 Iraqi women in Douma Prison, and Iraqi Girls (12-17 years old) in the Juvenile and Rehabilitation Centre. The majority of the women are charged because of their involvement in prostitution acts, and the majority of the girls are survivors of SGBV including rape and forced prostitution.
- UNHCR is supporting several safe houses in Damascus, with a large new safe house to accommodate 120 women planned to open in February.

### RESETTLEMENT (AS OF 24 JANUARY 2008)

- UNHCR is encouraging resettlement countries to make rapid decisions to facilitate the departure of the most vulnerable Iraqis. Over 20% of cases submitted by Jordan and Syria are women at risk.

The chart below is the resettlement submission breakdown by Country of Submission:

Country of submission	Cases	Individuals
NEW-ZEALAND	43	169
USA	1420	5742
AUSTRALIA	243	922
CANADA	179	742
DENMARK	4	10
UK	27	67
NETHERLAND	42	171
SWEDEN	52	159
FRANCE	2	4
HQ	2	7
IRELAND	2	9
FINLAND	53	208
NORWAY	10	46
<b>Total</b>	<b>2079</b>	<b>8256</b>

The chart below is the resettlement departure breakdown by Country:

Country of submission	Cases	Individuals
USA	93	318
CANADA	18	82
UK	2	4
NEW-ZEALAND	14	44
DENMARK	1	1
FINLAND	4	16
NETHERLAND	24	100
SWEDEN	26	87
NORWAY	4	25
<b>Total</b>	<b>186</b>	<b>677</b>