

# Middle East

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

## | Working environment |

UNHCR faces several complex challenges in the Middle East, where many countries have not acceded to international refugee instruments and do not have national asylum laws and procedures in place. Refugees and others of concern have nonetheless been received with considerable hospitality by host States in the region, but the lack of legal frameworks has meant that ad hoc approaches are adopted to deal with asylum-seekers and migrants. As a result, those in need of international protection are sometimes not identified or offered access to protection.

UNHCR is the main provider of international protection in the Middle East, with little involvement on the part of national governments. This task is made more complex by the protracted nature of the Palestinian refugee situation, the dominance of national security concerns, and the growing number of mixed-migration movements.

The humanitarian situation of Iraqi refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) is especially disturbing. As the Syrian Arab Republic and Jordan struggle with the effects of the global economic crisis, the presence of hundreds of thousands of Iraqi refugees—in addition to large numbers of Palestinian refugees—imposes a heavy load on their economies. The generous support of the international community has helped to alleviate some of the burden; however, if the asylum space for Iraqi and other refugees in the region is to be preserved, that support will have to continue.

Although the conditions prevailing in Iraq are not conducive to organized voluntary repatriation, many refugees are opting to return spontaneously. UNHCR provides repatriation assistance to these returnees under its individual case management scheme. A deterioration in living conditions for Iraqi refugees in neighbouring States (mainly due to dwindling savings) and improvements in the security situation in Iraq are expected to boost voluntary repatriation in 2010.

In Yemen, the Office cares for more than 154,000 refugees, mostly from Somalia, as well as tens of thousands of internally displaced persons (IDPs). The operational environment is becoming increasingly difficult, with the volatile security situation hindering access to people of concern in parts of the country. The situation has been aggravated by a recent escalation of the internal conflict in the northern Sa'ada province, leading to growing population displacements.

The Government of Yemen has maintained an open-door policy towards Somalis, recognizing them as refugees on a *prima facie* basis. However, the increase in the number of asylum-seekers and migrants arriving in mixed groups across the Gulf of Aden makes it difficult to sustain this hospitality without additional support of the international community.

The protection climate in Egypt has been affected by the rise in the number of asylum-seekers from Sudan, Eritrea and other sub-Saharan African countries attempting to cross into Israel illegally. Many are reported to have been detained or refouled. UNHCR has only limited access to detained Eritreans.

**Thousands of Iraqi IDPs live in settlements north of Baghdad.**

UNHCR/B. HEGGER



## Strategy

The comprehensive needs assessments conducted in the Middle East revealed important gaps in the provision of both protection and assistance to refugees and others of concern to UNHCR. These include the lack of legal frameworks, such as national legislation and procedures for dealing with refugees and asylum, and unmet basic needs. UNHCR's strategy to bridge the gaps focuses on enhancing asylum space through dialogue and interventions in specific situations. It also entails ensuring that the basic humanitarian needs of people of concern are met, even as they are encouraged to take advantage of opportunities for self-reliance.

To bridge protection gaps, including in relation to statelessness, UNHCR will conduct awareness campaigns and implement institution- and capacity-building projects. In addition to seeking durable solutions for refugees, UNHCR will mobilize international support for major refugee-hosting countries, particularly the Syrian Arab Republic, Jordan and Yemen. It will contribute to building the capacity of governments, civil society institutions and regional organizations to address asylum issues. UNHCR will also forge partnerships with the Gulf States to secure their political, operational and financial support. Finally, it will tackle statelessness through advocacy, training and discussions with governments.

## Constraints

The absence of regional and national legal frameworks and comprehensive policies to deal with population displacement is a major constraint in the region. Furthermore, national security concerns dominate asylum policies and practices. The increase in extremist activities, the continuing violence in Iraq and the long-standing Palestinian problem all hamper refugee protection and humanitarian work in the Middle East.

## Operations

UNHCR's operations in **Egypt, Jordan, Iraq, Lebanon, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen** are covered in more detail in separate chapters.

In **Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon** and the **Syrian Arab Republic**, in addition to activities related to the Iraq Operation, UNHCR cares for several thousand refugees of other nationalities. Most come from the Islamic Republic of Iran, Somalia, Sudan and Turkey. This includes the provision of basic humanitarian assistance to the most vulnerable refugee families, registration and refugee status determination (RSD). UNHCR also seeks durable solutions, including through resettlement, for refugees from these countries. In Lebanon, UNHCR has a regional support hub for registration, RSD and resettlement.

In **Israel**, UNHCR helps the authorities to register and conduct RSD for several thousand asylum-seekers, mostly from Eritrea, Sudan and other sub-Saharan African countries. The Office also seeks to help in the establishment and implementation of asylum procedures and legislation to improve protection.

UNHCR's operations in **Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia** and the **United Arab Emirates** are managed by the regional office in Riyadh. Public awareness, fund raising, RSD and durable solutions—primarily resettlement—are the main components of the programme in the Gulf region. An increase in the financial contributions from some Gulf countries to UNHCR programmes has been noted in 2009. The Office will increase its fund-raising efforts in 2010. UNHCR will also intensify its work to reduce statelessness by lobbying for the full integration of stateless persons in their societies of habitual residence. Through enhanced refugee law training activities, the Office will continue to promote accession to international refugee instruments and the adoption of national asylum legislation consistent with international standards.

Partnerships with governments and international organizations, such as the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), the League of Arab States (LAS), and civil society institutions will be enhanced to promote the protection of refugees and stateless

persons in the Arab world. In June 2009, UNHCR and the OIC jointly published a book on the right to asylum in Islamic *Shari'ah* and international refugee law, which will be used as an advocacy tool. The book highlights the deep-rooted Arab traditions and customs which have served as a solid foundation for the protection of those in need, and stresses that *Shari'ah* embraces a number of humanitarian principles which are at the heart of international refugee protection.

In 2010, a series of refugee law training sessions for Arab Parliamentarians will be conducted jointly by UNHCR and the LAS. UNHCR will also cooperate with the LAS to sponsor a comprehensive study on the situation of refugees in the Arab world.

## | Financial information |

UNHCR's financial requirements in the Middle East have increased significantly in recent years, mainly due to Iraqi displacement. The Budget has also increased in Israel and Yemen because of the growing number of asylum-seekers being assisted in these countries.

For 2010, the total financial requirements for the region amount to more than USD 558 million. This includes the costs of addressing needs identified through comprehensive assessments.

## Iraq Situation

The plight of displaced Iraqis remains a major concern to UNHCR and to the countries in the region. Although security inside Iraq has improved gradually, the political and security situations in the region remain unstable. Security concerns may limit UNHCR's mobility, especially inside Iraq. International efforts are required more than ever to develop a safe and secure environment in Iraq. The people of concern to UNHCR – some 1.4 million people in Iraq – all need immediate assistance to realize their basic rights.

Iraq and its neighbouring countries – the Syrian Arab Republic, Jordan and Lebanon – have not signed key international legislation on refugees and stateless persons. In 2009, UNHCR issued new eligibility guidelines which identified Iraqis from five central governorates as *prima facie* refugees. The protection space in the region remains fragile although the neighbouring countries have shown great hospitality for displaced Iraqis. By the end of 2009, some 250,000 registered Iraqi refugees were scattered in urban areas in the neighbouring countries. They need basic assistance as most of them do not have the right to work.

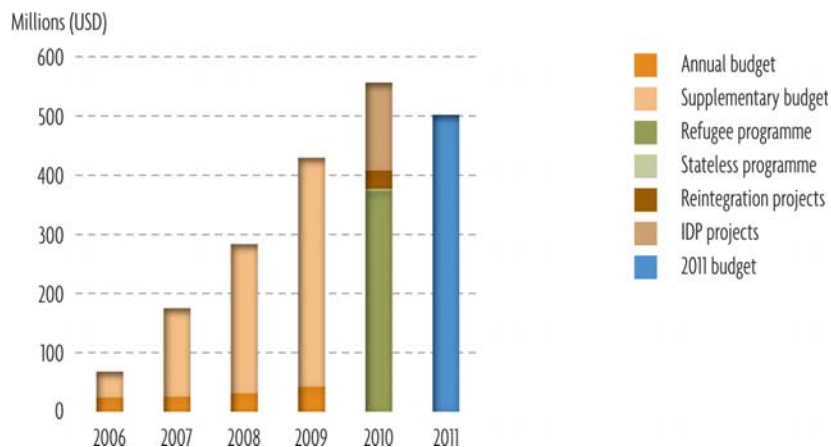
The movement of people between Iraq and its neighbouring countries has become relatively stable. No major displacements are occurring and the number of people approaching the Office for assisted return is small.

Although some people return to Iraq spontaneously, the majority of Iraqis show no intention of returning in the near future. In this context, and as long as the conditions in Iraq are not yet considered conducive to safe and dignified return, UNHCR's focus in 2010 will remain on the phase between asylum and return.

UNHCR's strategy for displaced Iraqis is two-fold: it seeks to ensure that the protection space in the neighbouring countries is maintained or improved, and that the conditions for return are developed in Iraq. In the neighbouring countries, the Office's focus is on interventions and advocacy to improve the protection environment, providing targeted assistance to most vulnerable Iraqi refugees. It also encourages resettlement as a durable solution and provides individual assistance for Iraqis who wish to return. In Iraq, UNHCR seeks to encourage the creation of conducive conditions for durable return and to ensure the provision of life-sustaining assistance and protection, while seeking durable solutions for refugees.

UNHCR works closely with governments, local authorities, UN agencies and international and local NGOs. In 2010, it will further strengthen its strategic cooperation by leading a Consolidated Humanitarian Action Plan in the region, and advocating for refugee and displacement issues to be taken into account in the CCA/UNDAF processes.

### UNHCR's budget in Middle East 2006 - 2011



### UNHCR budget for the Middle East (USD)

COUNTRY	2009 REVISED BUDGET <sup>1</sup>	2010					2011
		REFUGEE PROGRAMME PILLAR 1	STATELESS PROGRAMME PILLAR 2	REINTEGRATION PROJECTS PILLAR 3	IDP PROJECTS PILLAR 4	TOTAL	
Egypt	10,528,259	13,778,847	295,041	0	0	14,073,888	14,083,900
Iraq <sup>2</sup>	167,815,492	87,704,282	1,033,161	31,088,775	144,459,007	264,285,225	265,251,200
Israel	2,356,531	3,067,763	0	0	0	3,067,763	3,067,800
Jordan	47,053,784	63,459,834	0	0	0	63,459,834	64,456,000
Lebanon	9,790,296	13,433,142	232,382	0	0	13,665,524	11,957,700
Saudi Arabia	2,743,392	2,675,048	511,327	0	0	3,186,375	3,186,400
Syrian Arab Republic	129,839,745	166,203,239	552,969	0	0	166,756,208	110,909,200
United Arab Emirates <sup>3</sup>	817,907	1,654,253	98,149	0	0	1,752,402	1,752,400
Yemen	41,020,854	22,813,582	0	0	5,365,031	28,178,613	28,325,400
Regional activities	18,365,886	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>430,332,146</b>	<b>374,789,990</b>	<b>2,723,029</b>	<b>31,088,775</b>	<b>149,824,038</b>	<b>558,425,832</b>	<b>502,990,000</b>

<sup>1</sup> Includes supplementary programme requirements of USD 387,114,174.

<sup>2</sup> Includes regional activities in 2010 and 2011.

<sup>3</sup> Excludes support services in Dubai that have are included under the newly created Division of Emergency, Security and Supply under Global Programmes.