

Estimating the Immediate Needs of Iraqi Refugees in the Middle East

February 2008

Purpose

The purpose of this note is to draw attention to the estimated total needs of the most vulnerable within the Iraqi refugee population. Unfortunately due to a lack of substantial international support regional asylum states will continue to have to bear the burden¹ of an increasingly vulnerable Iraqi refugee population, which has exhausted its assets, and increasingly, it's welcome in the region.

While the reported level of violence in Iraq is down, UNHCR surveys indicate that returns appear to have been triggered as much by the exhaustion of refugees (and their savings) as by the introduction of stringent visa and residency restrictions in neighbouring countries. Given the lack of resettlement opportunities and limited opportunities for local integration, the only truly durable solution for the majority of Iraq's refugees will eventually be their voluntary repatriation to a safe and stable Iraq. But in the absence of significant political progress there, this will remain a long-term objective for the bulk of Iraq's displaced. It should also be noted that there are tens if not hundreds of thousands of Iraqis who have cut their ties with Iraq and who will never return, even should conditions improve. The international community needs to put in place strategies and allocate resources not only to address the immediate and medium term needs but acknowledge that for a significant proportion of the displaced Iraqi population, they will never be returning home.

Figures

While figures are notoriously unreliable for estimating the number of displaced Iraqis, the Government of Syria estimates that there are some 1.5 million Iraqis on its territory². Jordan believes that it is hosting 450,000 to 500,000³. Another 20,000 to 40,000 are believed to reside in Lebanon, with up to 70,000 in Egypt. Some 200,000 more are believed to be residing in the Gulf States. Syria, Lebanon and Jordan are not parties to the 1951 Convention and there is no structured protection regime for the protection of and assistance to the majority of Iraqi refugees in the region.

Both Syria and Jordan have stated that the total annual cost of accommodating Iraqi refugees is up to USD 1 billion respectively⁴.

UNHCR has registered over 245,000 Iraqis and will aim to register some 500,000 by the end of 2008. Registration is a key tool in identifying the most vulnerable refugees and ensuring that assistance and protection activities are effectively targeting those most in need.

	<i>Est. Iraqi Pop'n</i>	<i>Total Registered</i>	<i>Cases</i>	<i>Average Case size</i>
Syria	1.0 – 1.5 mil ⁵	165,000	39,096	3.5
Jordan	450 – 500,000	51,559	24,232	2
Lebanon	50,000	9,950	5,418	1.9
Egypt	20 – 40,000	10,633	4,129	2.5
Turkey	5 – 10,000	5,128	2,531	2

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² The Syrian Foreign Minister Walid Al-Moualem stated at the UN General Assembly 01 October that Syria was hosting 1.6 million Iraqi refugees, he said the country is "bearing enormous financial burdens to satisfy their economic needs and provide them with services." The international community, he added, had "failed to discharge its responsibility toward the Iraqi refugees."

³ Mukhaimer Abu Jamous, secretary-general of Jordan's Interior Ministry, said in April 2007, 750,000 Iraqi refugees were costing his government \$1 billion a year, stretching to the limit the resources of a country of just 5.6 million. A subsequent joint Jordan/FAFO study indicated that the refugee population is probably between 450,000 to 500,000. www.fao.no/ais/mideast/jordan/iraqis_in_Jordan.htm - 8k

⁴ Both Jordan and Syria have estimated the costs of hosting Iraqi refugees at up to USD 1 billion per year. On 12 February AFP reported that "Hosting our Iraqi brothers depletes the infrastructure and has cost the government more than 1.6 billion dinars (2.2 billion dollars) during the past three years," Planning Minister Suheir al-Ali told visiting UN High Commissioner for Refugees Antonio Guterres. According to Syria's Prime Minister the influx of 1.5 million Iraqis equals the burden of 300,000 Syrian families who consume one billion dollars in diesel, electricity, water and sanitation, and household gas a year. Source: Xinhua 27 August 2007

⁵ Iraqi Embassy in Syria estimates that the total number is between 800,000 to 1,000,000. The Syrian Foreign Minister announced to the UN Security Council in October 2007 that there were 1.6 million Iraqis in the country. <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=24099&Cr=general&Cr1=debate>

<i>Iran</i>	57,000 +	3,673		
<i>GCC*</i>	200,000 +	1816	767	2.5

*Gulf Cooperation Council (Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and UAE).

Returns to Iraq

Consistently there is a real concern among the returnees about longer-term security in Iraq, and many say they are only returning to areas where they feel secure because of the local security arrangements in place. According to a report released on 22 November 2007,⁶ UNHCR found that only 14% of respondents said they were returning to Iraq from Syria because they believed the security situation had improved, as opposed to 70% who cited financial and visa reasons. A similar review in Egypt, where refugees have to deregister with UNHCR prior to returning to Iraq, found that many are stating they had no future in Egypt without access to employment and/or education for their children. In Lebanon, the situation is similar: a survey of 41 refugees who asked that their files be closed so that they could be repatriated revealed that their decision to return is largely related to the cost of living in Lebanon (61%) and fear of arrest due to their illegal status (56%).⁷ Less than 30% attributed their main decision to return to improved security in Iraq.

Characteristics

According to information obtained from UNHCR's registration system⁸ and from data gathered by sister agencies the characteristics of the Iraqi refugee population includes:

- The number of vulnerable Iraqis identified and in need of urgent humanitarian assistance will increase as their respective coping mechanisms incrementally fail, their savings are exhausted, assets are sold and the generosity of host communities reaches its limit. UNHCR also believes that the increasing desperation and more effective outreach and assistance programmes will allow it assist hundreds of thousands more Iraqis⁹.
- The implementation of restrictive visa regimes will result in the Iraqi refugee population being relatively stable, with outflows equaling inflows;
- 80% of those registered have been in the country of asylum for less than a year¹⁰;
- Just less than half the Iraqi population is female, with 20% of cases where females were the principle applicant¹¹;
- The population is relatively well educated, with half of the heads of household having completed tertiary, undergraduate or postgraduate education.
- 75 to 90 percent of Iraqis reside in the capitals making this the world's largest urban refugee population;
- Over 33% of those registered have special needs, including chronic illnesses/injuries, survivors of torture and trauma, children or adolescents at risk, women at risk, disabled and older persons;
- The MoH in Syria has confirmed increased stunting and wasting of children under 5¹²
- Some 25 to 28 percent of those registered are of school going age;
- 96% rent a house, with 62% paying between USD 100 and USD 300 (over 51% are paying in excess of USD 220);
- As Iraqis are not allowed to work, 86% are reliant on remittances from relatives and or friends in Syria, Iraq or abroad. Over half had no regular income.

It is inevitable that as the coping mechanisms of refugees incrementally fail with the depletion of savings, the sale of their last assets (wedding rings, houses & cars in Iraq) that some families will be forced to work in prostitution or to encourage their daughters to work in this field – something offensive to the customs of both Syrians and Iraqis. Harsh living conditions have will also lead to the spread of child labour and increased drop-out rates from schools. The impoverished and disenfranchised without any other options may be drawn to return to Iraq or link up with fringe or extremist groups.

⁶ <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/home/openssl.pdf?tbl=SUBSITES&id=4795f96f2>

⁷ Multiple answers were possible.

⁸ UNHCR registration has collected baseline information for some 250,000 Iraqis in the region – or over 10% of the estimated population – including 165,000 in Syria and 55,000 in Jordan.

⁹ October 2007 Joint Assessment Mission to Syria (UNHCR, WFP, UNICEF, Syrian Red Crescent) predict that number of vulnerable Iraqis in Syria will increase from 114,000 in April 2008 to 269,000 by March 2010, with an average of 191,500 for planning purposes.

¹⁰ UNHCR/IPSOS survey of 733 Iraqis registering in Damascus May-June 2007.

¹¹ Out of 37,332 cases in Syria, 7,844 a female was the principle applicant.

¹² MoH Field Work done in July 2007. Report Sept 2007. Interagency Health Appeal.

Cash Assistance (Domestic Needs and Household Support)

As the coping mechanisms continue to decline more and more Iraqis will be pushed into poverty, prostitution and anti-social behavior. Others will return to Iraq, where they risk secondary displacement and further hardship. To address the most urgent needs, with the least bureaucratic impediments, UNHCR is providing the most vulnerable families in Syria with ATM cards. Refugees have appreciated the fact that they can have access to monthly subsistence from UNHCR without suffering the indignity of having to crowd or wait long hours outside of UNHCR offices. In Syria, UNHCR will aim to provide support to at least 40,000¹³ families @ USD 200 per month¹⁴, the bulk of which will be required to cover rental costs¹⁵. In Jordan and Lebanon where the cost of renting an apartment is relatively high the monthly allowance will be USD 300. These amounts would only be sufficient when combined with suitable food, education and health support. Under this sector non-food items, including blankets, mattresses, kitchen sets, sanitary napkins, stoves will also be allocated to 46,000 families (3.5 persons per family average in Syria) at a total cost per annum of USD 250¹⁶.

Syria 40,000 families x USD 200 x 12 months = USD 96,000,000

Jordan 5,000 families x USD 300 x 12 months = USD 18,000,000

Lebanon & Egypt 1,000 families x USD 300 x 12 months = USD 3,600,000

Cash Assistance for 46,000 families in Syria and Jordan USD 117,600,000

Cost of Non-Food Items USD 11,500,000¹⁷

Food Assistance

The joint UNHCR – WFP food distribution for February will be targeting 155,000 persons, compared to only 50,000 in November 2007. By the end of 2008, and subject to funding WFP some 362,000 of the 400,000 Iraqis expected to be registered in Syria will require food assistance. In Jordan, it is also expected that tens of thousands of Iraqis would benefit from food assistance if authorisation from the Government and the appropriate mechanisms were put in place. Although no general food distribution is currently being undertaken in Jordan, the costs would be expected to be substantially higher than in Syria, where many of the commodities are heavily subsidised. For the purpose of calculation we have added 30% to cost of the Syrian food package (USD 28.73) and estimated that 90,000 Iraqi refugees or 20% of the lowest estimate (450,000) of Iraqi refugees would be in need of food assistance.

Recent reports from Iraq, which have indicated that the Iraqi Public Distribution System will be discontinued during 2008, increase the importance of putting in place an effective food distribution system for Iraqi refugees in the region¹⁸. An added complication is Syria and Jordan's decision to cut subsidies for fuel and food commodities. This is likely to have a negative impact on the already precarious nature of Iraqi refugees.

Syria: The cost of WFP food ration is \$12.39/person/month (rice, oil, lentils) while the cost for UNHCR Complementary Food is \$9.71/person/month (sugar, cheese, canned meat, spaghetti, beans, cracked wheat, tea, jam, tomato paste, tuna & fish/sardine)

Syria: 362,000 x USD 22.10 x 12 = **USD 96,002,400**

¹³ Unfortunately a lack of funding against the 2008 appeal has limited implementation of the programme to only 4,000 families as of February. UNHCR is seriously concerned that unless substantial additional funding is received then even the existing beneficiaries may have to be cut.

¹⁴ UNHCR currently provides each family with USD 100 per month, plus USD 10 per child. This amount is believed to be far too small to cover basic accommodation and heating needs (the Middle East was reported to have had the worst winter in living memory with many Iraqi families not being able to afford to heat their apartments).

¹⁵ UNHCR staff in Syria report that a single room flat in the poorest section of Damascus costs at least 800 – 1,000 Syrian Pounds (USD 160 – 200), however given the increased demand for accommodation, the rental prices are expected to increase.

¹⁶ Through competitive bidding process in Syria, UNHCR can procure stoves at USD 33.02, Diapers (packs) USD 2.80, bedsheets and pillow case USD 10.29, mattresses USD 24.73, sanitary napkins (pack) USD 1.92, Soap (pack) USD 0.34, blankets USD 10 etc.

¹⁷ This figure does not take into account contingency planning stocks for 100,000 beneficiaries (outside of Iraq) which is calculated into UNHCR USD 261 million appeal budget.

¹⁸ The discontinuation of the PDS, despite its deficiencies, is likely to add to the hardship being faced by Iraqis, including those who may have planned to return. Azzaman reported 30 January that the government will end the rationing food program by June. The decision, the government said, was in line with the obligations it has made to the World Bank. But Finance Ministry officials, refusing to be named, said they opposed the move and feared it could lead to unexpected hikes in food prices. In addition Reuters also reported 1 February that Iraq may face its worst wheat shortages in years this year, aggravated by a delay in purchasing that clouds deliveries for the rest of the year. Food experts, millers, traders and even senior grain officials privately warn a crisis looms even though Iraq is about to return to the international market after a nearly four-month halt in new purchases.

Jordan: 90,000 x USD 28.73 x 12 = **USD 31,028,400**

Food requirement for Syria and Jordan USD 127,030,800

Education

In July 2007, UNHCR and UNICEF launched an Education Appeal¹⁹ for 2007 and 2008 for **USD 129 million**. The appeal estimated that some 500,000 Iraqi refugees were of school age. According to February 2008 UNHCR registration figures for Syria, 29% of those registered (split evenly between boys and girls) are of school going age, in Jordan it is 23%. If this is extrapolated only against a minimum estimate of 1 million Iraqis in Syria this would equate to 290,000 school age children. Due to an overcrowding of schools, lack of financial resources to cover the costs of school uniforms, the need to send children to work to support the family, the unsettled nature of life (including missing a year or more of school), the psychological trauma and emotional stress of Iraqi children, lack of school documentation and a fear that their illegal status will lead to arrest has resulted in only 47,000 children in Syria and 25,000 in Jordan being registered for school.

To address this chronic problem UNHCR and UNICEF embarked on an ambitious “Back to School Campaign” to boost the numbers of Iraqi, particularly girl, students. The programme includes the following activities;

UNHCR and UNICEF will work with the ministries of education and other partners in each country to support expansion of the absorption capacity of public schools; to reintegrate those who have dropped out of school - particularly girls and adolescents; to provide outreach and direct support to some 12,000 poor and vulnerable families; and to inform Iraqi families of the opportunity to get their children back in school.

Specific activities will include providing pre-fabricated classrooms and buildings as soon as possible; identifying existing buildings that can be used as temporary schools; upgrading water and sanitation in schools; building new schools and/or additional classrooms; and rehabilitating existing schools. Double-shifting in existing schools will be an option. Buses will be rented or purchased to transport children to school. The appeal estimates that more than 4,000 new teachers will be required. The UNICEF - UNHCR programme will cover salaries, other entitlements and training costs for the additional teachers.

Many children have already missed up to three years of schooling and special remedial programmes and psycho-social support will be established for them and their families in hopes of reintegrating them back into the school system. Special training will be provided to school counsellors and teachers in dealing with the special needs of Iraqi children, many of whom faced traumatic experiences.

Total education sector USD = 129 million (based on inter-agency education appeal and initial low enrolments)²⁰

Health Assistance

In September 2007, an inter-agency appeal (WHO, UNICEF, WFP, UNFPA and UNHCR) requested **USD 84,833,647** to support national efforts aimed at improving access to health care for Iraqi refugees in Syria, Jordan and Egypt. The focus of the appeal was to address the three following priorities:

- primary health care including both preventive and curative services; reproductive health and child health services; and improved sanitation
- emergency medical care
- essential drugs and medical supplies including those required for treatment of chronic diseases

In relation to specific activities being supported by UNHCR, in the first twelve months of 2007, some 210,000 medical interventions were made via some 70 different Syrian Arab Red Crescent and UNHCR supported medical clinics²¹.

¹⁹ The full appeal document is available online at www.unhcr.org and www.unicef.org

²⁰ This included activities under 2007 programme as well as 2008. UNHCR's budget under the education appeal for 2008 is approximately USD 65 million.

²¹ According to the 2008 Syrian budget there are 476 public and private hospitals in Syria, in addition to 1710 health centres with 90,000 workers. This would equate to one health centre for 10,000 - 15,000 persons. In relation to addressing the health needs of some 1 million Iraqis this would translate to an additional requirement for at least 66 clinics.

Another 43,000 medical interventions were made in Jordan. UNHCR also put in place arrangements for cancer and heart treatment for several thousand Iraqis. It should be noted that many Iraqis who have crossed into Syria, and to a lesser extent Jordan, have chronic medical problems and include survivors of trauma and torture (20% of those registered with UNHCR are survivors of torture and trauma). 30% of those who visited a health centre were subsequently referred to hospital with 15% of this figure requiring specialist treatment.

Total health USD 84,852,332²² (based on inter-agency appeal)

Protection Monitoring/Registration/Outreach Activities by UNHCR and partners

UNHCR registration activities throughout the region will be enhanced, particularly in Syria, with the addition of mobile registration and community outreach teams who be deployed to identify the most vulnerable within their communities. A total of UNHCR 350 national and international staff (not including the 70 working on issues within Iraq) will be deployed throughout the region (Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey, and Egypt) to implement the programme, including the processing of resettlement referrals and the operation of several safe houses for women and children (a 120 bed hostel for women at risk is due to open near Damascus in March). UNHCR is also planning to establish community centres, with implementing partners, in areas of high refugee concentrations, particularly in Damascus. In Amman, Government caution over UNHCR registration and assistance activities limits the possibility to be more proactive in identifying vulnerable groups who are known to be in need.

USD 25,000,000 (including office rental, equipment and staffing costs)

Current Appeal (activities outside Iraq) against estimated total needs

Sector	Estimated Immediate Needs	UNHCR 2008 Appeal
Cash Ass./Domestic Needs & Household Support	117,600,000	
Food	127,030,800	
Education	129,935,000 ²³	
Health & Nutrition	84,852,332 ²⁴	
Non-Food Items	11,500,000	
Protection Monitoring incl. Registration/Outreach	25,000,000	
Transport & Logistics	2,616,474	
Programme Support & Administration @ 10%		
	498,534,606	216,558,863²⁵

In July 2007 the country's Health Minister Maher Hosami told a World Health Organisation conference that the health care cost for Iraqi refugees in Syria has reached \$60 million (€43.3 million).

²³ The Joint Education Appeal of USD 129,935,000 was split USD 98,975,000 to UNHCR and USD 30,960,000 to UNICEF

²⁴ The Inter-Agency Health Appeal of USD 84,833,647 was split USD 49,223,391 to UNHCR, USD 18,454,249 to WHO, USD 11,355,910 to UNICEF, and USD 5,818,782 for UNFPA.

²⁵ UNHCR's total 2008 Appeal, including activities inside Iraq, for IDPs and non-Iraqi Refugees is USD 261 million.