

Special Focus on displaced Iraqis

Services provided by the International Catholic Migration Commission

Organization with a Mission

ICMC is, deeply concerned with the situation of the displaced and is bringing support in various ways. ICMC's approach has always been based on respect for the uprooted, as individuals and as members of society, as human beings whose dignity must be respected. It is even more urgent when the individual finds himself in vulnerable and marginalized situations; precisely the type of situation in which millions of Iraqi refugees find themselves right this moment.

At the request of the Catholic Bishops' Conferences worldwide, who are ICMC's members, the Commission has been engaged since 1951 both in advocacy and direct operational programming to "fill gaps" identified by the national Churches. In this context, given the imperative need for assistance to Iraqi refugees, regardless of faith or ethnicity, ICMC is currently working with some 20-30,000 refugees in Lebanon, Jordan, Syria and Turkey. Over the years ICMC has served refugees from many parts of the world including Vietnam and Cambodia in the 70's, Thailand, the Philippines and Indonesia in the 80's and 90's, and more recently, those displaced from the former Yugoslavia and Afghanistan. Concrete assistance comes through resettlement, cultural orientation and reintegration programmes as well as through other areas of core programming.

In the specific case of Iraqi refugees, ICMC targets extremely vulnerable persons among this uprooted population, offering medical, humanitarian and educational services.

This briefing identifies the needs of this displaced population and describes ICMC's response to those in need in Jordan, Syria and Lebanon. Parallel to the assistance given to refugees in these three neighbouring countries, ICMC operates a U.S. government Overseas Processing Entity (OPE) which prepares cases for resettlement. This process has yielded a high acceptance rate of resettlement to the US, offering refugees protection and, given the present impossibility of returning to Iraq, allowing them to start a new life in another country.

Present Situation of Displaced Iraqis

It is estimated that over 1.8 million Iraqi refugees are currently spread throughout the Middle East, with the largest concentrations in Syria (1,4 million) and Jordan (450,000)¹ and sizeable populations in Lebanon (40,000), Egypt (100,000) and Iran (54,000)². Due to the continuing violence and insecurity, Iraqis are not able to return home. Thus, the numbers of displaced Iraqis in the region is not expected to decrease until reliable signs of security and stability are seen in Iraq. UN estimates indicate that there are 1.9 million Iraqis displaced internally, a number which is increasing at a rate of 50,000 each month.

The uprooted now comprise roughly 13% of Iraq's total population and although most of the countries neighbouring Iraq have imposed stringent entry restrictions at the borders, the exodus continues. The mass movements have put an enormous burden on the host countries who are already strained by the 1.5 million Palestinians residing in these countries. The slow response of the international community to the Iraqi refugee crisis is causing growing discontent among the host country governments.

¹ Fafo report estimates, November 2007. http://www.fafo.no/ais/middeast/jordan/Iraqis_in_Jordan.htm

² UNHCR estimates 2007.

Most refugees and asylum seekers live on the margins of society, both socially and economically. Refugees are considered “guests” with uncertain legal status, few options for employment (all of them illegal due to the lack of status), and limited access to unaffordable medical services and inappropriate education for their children. The extremely vulnerable among the refugees and asylum seekers live in what can only be described as squalor, and are unable to meet their most basic needs for shelter, health, sanitation, and education for their children. The majority of refugees are experiencing mounting psychological pressure due to their inability to work and provide for their families, the insecurity of their legal situation, the fear of detention and deportation and/or separation from their families. Feelings of insecurity are further exacerbated by recent experiences of war, violence and death in Iraq.

**In Iraq today it seems “easier to die than to live,”
given the increasing violence and daily atrocities that are destroying
innumerable lives and the hopes of many...³**

Although some positive steps have been taken in increasing educational opportunities for Iraqi children, many cannot avail themselves of these opportunities due to the fact that children are often the breadwinner for the family. The availability, adequacy and affordability of medical services for Iraqi refugees in the host countries has not yet been properly addressed and Iraqi refugees still rely primarily on insufficient services provided by the NGOs and the UN. The lack of legal status deprives refugees of opportunities to provide for their families. This forces women and children into the workforce that exposes them on a daily basis to the risk of exploitation and abuse and deprives the children of their right to education.

ICMC’s Response

In conjunction with its partners, ICMC has been operational in the Middle East since 2002, implementing humanitarian assistance programs in support of Iraqi refugees in Lebanon, Jordan and Syria, with particular emphasis on the most vulnerable segment of this population. EVIs are persons exposed to exceptional risk or suffering because of a physical or mental disability, a chronic or severe illness or severe torture or trauma. Women at risk, ethnic and religious minorities, single heads of households, unaccompanied and frail elderly and unaccompanied minors are also considered to be EVIs. All programs are implemented jointly with local partners to whom ICMC provides technical and organizational support.

Currently, ICMC and its partners (Caritas Jordan, Caritas Syria and Terre des Hommes Syria) are implementing programs in Jordan and Syria providing access to health services, education and humanitarian assistance to Iraqi refugees. These programs are supported by the US Bureau for Population, Refugees and Migration (BPRM), European Commission’s Humanitarian Office (ECHO) and United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)⁴.

³ H.E. Archbishop S. Tomasi, Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the UN, at International Conference on Addressing the Humanitarian Needs of the Refugees and Internally Displaced persons inside Iraq and in Neighbouring Countries, Geneva, April 2007.

⁴ In Jordan only

Similar programs were conducted in Lebanon until mid 2007, after which point funding was no longer available. However, the needs of the Iraqi refugees in Lebanon are great and ICMC will continue to seek funding to respond to these needs.

ICMC collaborates with the Caritas Lebanon Migrants' Centre in support of domestic workers victims of trafficking and abuse. ICMC's work is funded by the U.S. State Department's Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons (G/TIP).

ICMC is processing Iraqi refugees referred for resettlement by UNHCR through its Refugee Processing Offices in Beirut and Istanbul.

Programme for Extremely Vulnerable Individuals

Since October 2002, ICMC and its partners have implemented a program addressing the needs of the EVIs within the Iraqi refugee population in Lebanon and Jordan. The program was extended to Syria in 2006. The program is implemented in conjunction with the ICMC's local partner-organizations Caritas and Terre des Hommes. The program in Lebanon was ended in August 2007.

The EVI program serves people from the displaced Iraqi community who are living under very difficult circumstances (extremely low or lack of income) or are living in a less favourable family condition (single women headed households, the elderly, disabled, severely traumatized). From its offices in Amman and Damascus, CMC's EVI Program offers a wide variety of services to an ever-increasing number of people. ICMC caseworkers are well-known in the communities where they work, seeking out the most vulnerable amongst the refugee population and providing them with access to health, education and humanitarian assistance.

Every day of the week, EVI caseworkers interview Iraqis who seek assistance at Caritas/Terre des Hommes. Often, these people come to the EVI project having virtually no money or possessions. For many, this is their first and last chance to receive assistance as there are few other supportive services available. This contact with a case worker is a rare opportunity to speak about their problems and to express their fears and concerns to a person outside their immediate family circle. Although overburdened with new cases, caseworkers make time for periodic follow-up home visits to see how the beneficiaries are doing, to listen to them and provide some companionship.

When ICMC envisaged the EVI Program, the plan was to support 5,000 people and their families in the first year. At the end of 12 months, ICMC had assisted nearly 6,000 cases. The following years have shown ever increasing demands for services. For the period August 2006 – August 2007, approximately 10,000 individuals (2,500 families) have been supported through the programme.

Although there are more services available to Iraqi refugees as more organizations become operational in the countries of first asylum, ICMC continues to serve an increasing number of Iraqis. This is due to the fact that the ICMC program was, for a long period of time, the only large scale program offering health and education support to Iraqis. Thus, the program is well known and has gained the trust of the beneficiaries by providing timely and quality services. In

fact a recent study has shown that Caritas/ICMC is known by 81% of the Iraqis in Amman.⁵ This makes it the most popular human service organization in Jordan.

The increase in the numbers is also due to the rapidly deteriorating economic situation of the Iraqi refugees. The depletion of savings and the lack of employment opportunities combine to create dire economic situations for Iraqi families.

Those Iraqis who have been fortunate to find employment, work with no health benefits or legal protection and earn a below average wage. "White collar" workers, on the other hand, cannot find employment as easily because their professions are usually more regulated. Such conditions force an increasing number of people who were previously self-sufficient, into the Extremely Vulnerable Individual (EVI) category.

Medical Assistance

ICMC has been able to provide a high level of medical support to individuals. In a number of cases, this has been life-saving. One such case involved open-heart surgery on a child. Without this intervention, the child would have died within six months. A number of other urgent operations have been funded.

This medical support for the displaced Iraqi population is vital. Most of the people seen by the staff in ICMC partner's offices are abjectly poor and have one or more dependant children. Many of these families are female-headed households, which are increasing amongst the refugee population. These families, often with small children, are particularly vulnerable and lack the means to access even basic resources or expensive health care. Isolated mothers cannot consider going out to work or leaving the house for even a short time. For these mothers and their children, humanitarian assistance and medical support has made a major difference in their lives.

Humanitarian Assistance

One of the most needed services that can be provided is humanitarian assistance. This includes supplying basic items such as food, blankets, heaters, stoves, cleaning materials and toiletries. Assessments made by caseworkers give a clear picture of the real needs of families, where often a small contribution goes a long way. A team composed of one male and one female caseworker visits each home and assesses the situation of every family. Support is made available for individual families based on a clear understanding of their needs.

Educational Assistance

Through the EVI Program, ICMC also provides support allowing refugee children to gain access to formal and informal education. As for any parent, the future of their children is very important, yet few Iraqi refugee parents are in a position to provide the funds necessary to keep their children in school. ICMC's EVI program provides financial support to offset the cost of school fees, uniforms and books.

For children not able to attend formal schooling, informal educational opportunities are provided. In this program, Iraqi or host country volunteer teachers instruct students in English, Arabic, mathematics, science and computers, thus allowing these children to continue their education.

⁵ East Amman Survey of Iraqis, CDC-Mercy Corps, September 2007

Expansion of outreach, identification and referral of Iraqis in Jordan

The UNHCR has been heavily burdened with the task of registering, protecting and providing assistance to Iraqi refugees. ICMC has recently signed an agreement with UNHCR to conduct a community outreach project to assist them with their efforts. This project will identify fragile Iraqi families who are not registered with UNHCR and refer them for protection, humanitarian and legal assistance. ICMC efforts will complement those of UNHCR's registration teams. Initially the project will be conducted in Amman, identifying the most vulnerable refugees and referring them to UNHCR or other service providers for further assistance.

Capacity building

All ICMC programs are implemented in partnership with local organizations. ICMC representatives in Jordan and Syria provide extensive technical support to its local partners by providing on-the-job training in project implementation techniques and methodologies, acquainting the partners with donor requirements and project implementation standards, as well as with best practices and international standards in project implementation. ICMC also assists the local organizations in strengthening their accountability by introducing accounting software, purchasing and procurement policy and procedures and best practices in human resource management. Strategic planning, fundraising, proposal and report writing are other areas in which ICMC builds the capacity of its local partners.

ICMC's Future plans

ICMC intends to continue and expand its operations to vulnerable Iraqis in the Middle East, aiming to reach out to an increasing number of beneficiaries. In order to achieve this goal, ICMC will continue to seek additional resources and partnerships. Our future plans, subject to available funding, include expansion of the existing activities as well as expanding the assistance already provided to strategically fill the gaps where services are needed. Particular emphasis will be placed on protection, psychosocial assistance, vocational and skill training. Certain training programmes could be offered to direct service providers to enhance their professional capacity, particularly in the psychosocial arena.

In order to expand its services into areas of greatest need, ICMC conducted a three week mission to Jordan in November 2007 in partnership with the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Migration and Refugee Services (USCCB-MRS) and funded by the US government. The mission examined the protection needs and the gaps in services of the Iraqi refugees in Jordan and Syria. The mission discovered four areas in need of development.

1. **Unaccompanied and separated children** in Jordan need specially designed programs and well-trained staff to identify them, assess their needs and provide them with protection and care. Best interest determinations are needed to identify durable solutions for these children.
2. **Comprehensive case management** is needed to insure seamless service delivery for complex and multiple problems that face fragile Iraqi families. Mobile, community center or clinic-based case managers are needed to assist families in accessing all of the needed services and information.
3. **Community formation** has not occurred for a variety of reasons, yet this is essential to a healthy and fully functioning individual, family and neighborhood. Value-

added community centers with case management, mobile outreach teams and media centers can help restore community bonds.

4. Psychosocial capacity building and staff support is needed as there are not enough specialized mental health services. Intensive psychosocial training programs must be delivered to increase the skill levels of the present psychosocial workers and prevent premature burnout and staff turnover.

A second protection assessment mission to Syria will be carried out in February 2008. At the completion of this mission the findings from both Jordan and Syria will be compiled to develop a comprehensive strategy for meeting the protection needs of Iraqis in Jordan and Syria.

ICMC and Resettlement

In addition to the work in Jordan and Syria on behalf of Iraqi refugees, ICMC operates the U.S. government's **Overseas Processing Entity (OPE)** in Turkey which prepares refugee cases for interview by officers from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS). ICMC has been processing refugees for resettlement since 1993.

Forty-six percent of the Iraqi cases that entered the US in 2007 were processed through the ICMC OPE offices in Istanbul and Beirut.⁶ ICMC Turkey received a total of 2,845 Iraqis from UNHCR in fiscal year 2007, of whom 1858 persons have thus far been presented to DHS. Seventy-six percent of these persons have been approved for resettlement.

In addition to the OPE, ICMC Turkey operates the Social Services Programme, which provides refugees and asylum seekers with social, legal, financial and mental health counselling, material assistance, home visit monitoring, health services, registrations and assistance in seeking durable solutions. As of December 2006, ICMC was actively working with 2,227 refugees and asylum seekers and that an increasing number of these came from Iraq. ICMC caseworkers strive to provide a human face for refugees and guide them, with care, dedication and empathy, through the resettlement process.

Preparation of Resettlement Cases in Turkey

ICMC Turkey coordinates schedules with the UNHCR and DHS, in preparation for DHS visits for adjudication of refugee cases. To prepare refugees for adjudication, ICMC workers interview refugees and prepare resettlement files. The office also undertakes "out-processing" responsibilities which include the preparation of medical examinations, security clearances and travel documents.

The process for Iraqis in Turkey is shorter than the regular processing. According to the UNHCR directions of January 2007, Iraqi refugees who are fleeing from southern or central Iraq are to be given *prima facie* refugee status in the countries of first asylum. It is important to highlight, that in accordance with the UNHCR Strategy Document on Resettlement of Refugees from Iraq there is no refugee status determination interview conducted, but only an enhanced registration procedure. After this process is reviewed by a Senior Officer in UNHCR, and there is no trigger for excludability, the refugee is issued a refugee certificate.

⁶ As reported by ICMC's Programme Director in Turkey

In FY 2007, under this new program ICMC Turkey pre-screened 1997 Iraqi cases, presented 1358 to DHS, and 665 individuals have departed. A further 600 are pending DHS interview. This is in addition to the continuing processing of the regular non-Iraqi ICMC caseload, which combined with the Iraqis, was 5140 individuals registered with ICMC in FY2007 and 3270 individuals submitted to DHS, with 2677 approved and 2076 individuals departing for the US by the end of the fiscal year.

Cultural Orientation

A crucial step in preparing an individual for relocating to a different country and culture is the provision of cultural orientation training. Once a refugee has been tentatively approved by the U.S. Refugee Program, they are given a 3-day cultural orientation program. This is an important part of ICMC's expertise in resettlement. The objective of this pre-departure preparation is to lessen the stress of the transition process and to encourage realistic expectations about the new environment. In addition, cultural orientation training allows trainees to identify their skills and practice problem-solving as well as learning coping strategies prior to their departure. It recognizes the dignity of each individual and fosters a positive perspective towards starting a new life in an environment free from fear, persecution and conflict. Refugees are introduced to the responsibilities and expectations they are likely to encounter in their new country of residence.

Currently ICMC offers a 3-day programme of cultural orientation to primarily Middle-Eastern and North African refugee populations, serving 1600 to 2000 refugees per year. For 2007, ICMC provided cultural orientation to 2092 individuals, including young people eligible for ICMC's Children and Youth Cultural Orientation. In Lebanon, Nepal, the UAE and in Turkey prior to July 1, 2007, ICMC provided 3-day training to 187 Iraqi adults, and to 8 Iraqi children. In order to expedite the processing of the Iraqi population in Turkey, during July, August and September 2007, an additional 592 Iraqi individuals received a shortened 10-hour course and 98 children and youth participated in the ICMC Children and Youth Cultural Orientation. In order to do this, medical appointments had to be organized 3 days a week at the hospital.

Resettlement Deployment Activities

In January of 2007, UNHCR announced a "fast track" system to conduct refugee status determination and to assess potential cases for resettlement. Deployees were engaged to expedite the large number of individuals anticipated due to the fact that *prima facie* status had been declared for the majority of Iraqis (except in certain areas in Northern Iraq). Deployees work as part of a larger interview and assessment team devoted exclusively to facilitating Iraqi cases for resettlement.

Since January 2007, the Resettlement Deployment Scheme has placed between six and ten deployees in the Mid-East region at any given time, working exclusively with Iraqi refugees. Currently there are a total of ten deployees located in the UNHCR Damascus, Amman, Beirut and Cairo offices. By comparison, in December 2006, there were a total of two deployments in the above countries because Iraqi cases were not being prioritized for resettlement at that time. In 2006, deployees in the field reported approximately 60 Iraqi refugees as having been referred for resettlement. In the first six months of 2007, deployees referred over 2,000 Iraqi individuals for resettlement. This does not include an additional 1,300 individuals pending further review.

Deployees have been instrumental in assisting UNHCR to produce over 20,000 Iraqi resettlement referrals for 2007. UNHCR has indicated that similar deployment levels will be maintained into early 2008. They estimate that the resettlement needs for Iraqi refugees in 2008 will be between 80,000 and 100,000. Of this number 70,000 to 80,000 are in Syria.

The approval/rejection rates vary from country to country. In Jordan there is a 95% approval rate, while in Syria it is 68% and in Lebanon it is 55%. The refugee population in Lebanon is composed mostly of single males while the population in Jordan is predominantly family units.

The UNHCR-ICMC Resettlement Deployment Scheme is a practical application to coordinate the co-operation between UNHCR, governments of resettlement countries, and NGOs whereby qualified personnel from NGOs are identified to reinforce and enhance the capacity of UNHCR's operations in the field and resettlement activities. A resettlement **deployee** is a person with good interviewing skills and with knowledge of refugee protection who assists refugees in the resettlement procedure.

Resettlement deployees typically undertake a range of duties including:

- Case identification
- Case prioritization
- Reconfirmation of RSD
- Case interviews
- Resettlement assessment
- Liaising with consular offices, local partners and missions
- Collaboration with UNHCR in identification of vulnerable individuals

During the Iraqi refugee crisis however, deployees have been tasked with interviewing and assessing the large numbers of individuals registering with UNHCR offices. All of the Mid- East deployment requests from UNHCR in 2007 have been for Resettlement Generalists;* there have been no specific requests for Child Welfare or Refugee Women specialists.

Additional Documents

1. ICMC's Statement of Policy Regarding Iraqis and Others Displaced in and outside Iraq. (Geneva, 17-18 April 2007) <http://www.icmc.net/e/information/statement.htm>
2. Escaping Mayhem and Murder: Iraqi Refugees in the Middle East. A report from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) following a mission visit to the region, and to ICMC programmes, July 2007. http://www.icmc.net/pdf/usccb_iraqi_refugees_middle_east_report_09_2007.pdf
3. UNHCR's paper presented at the International Conference on Addressing the Humanitarian needs of Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons inside Iraq and in Neighbouring Countries. Geneva, April 2007. www.unhcr.org .

Expected February 2008

4. Iraqis in Jordan: A Report of the ICMC-USCCB Mission to Assess the Protection Needs of Iraqis in Jordan, December 2007.
