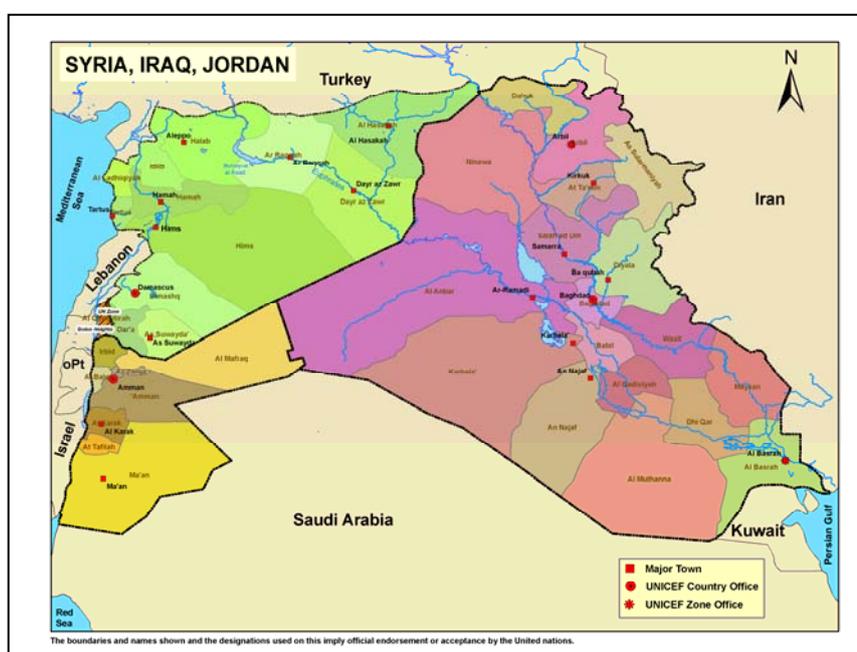


For every child
Health, Education, Equality, Protection
ADVANCE HUMANITY



UNICEF HUMANITARIAN ACTION SYRIAN ARAB REPUBLIC DISPLACED IRAQIS IN 2008



CORE COUNTRY DATA

Population under 18 (thousands)	8342
U5 mortality rate (2006)	14
Infant mortality rate (2006)	12
Maternal mortality ratio (2000-2006, reported)	65
Primary school enrolment ratio (2000-2006, net, male/female)	97/92
% U1 fully immunized (DPT3)	99
% population using improved drinking water sources (rural/urban)	87/98
% U5 suffering moderate and severe underweight/stunting	10/22

Source: *The State of the World's Children 2008*

Due to increasing violence in Iraq over the past few years, 1.5 million Iraqis – half of whom are children – have fled to Syria. The Iraqi refugees now make up about 10 per cent of Syria's population, placing a considerable strain on the country's infrastructure. UNICEF's challenge for 2008 is to ensure that Iraqi refugees in Syria have access to appropriate care and social services without placing undue pressure upon the country's public services to the detriment of both the Iraqi and Syrian populations.

Summary of UNICEF financial needs for 2008

Sector	US\$
Health and nutrition	7,400,000
Education	24,000,000
Child protection	4,000,000
Total*	35,400,000

*The total includes a maximum recovery rate of 7 per cent. The actual recovery rate on contributions will be calculated in accordance with UNICEF Executive Board Decision 2006/7 dated 9 June 2006.

1. CRITICAL ISSUES FOR CHILDREN

Deteriorating security and increasing violence inside Iraq has prompted an unprecedented exodus of Iraqis. Some 2 million have now fled to neighbouring countries. The Syrian Arab Republic, who is hosting 1.5 million Iraqis, is the country most affected by this migration. The Government of Syria (GoS) has generously accepted these refugees as guests, steadily keeping its borders open to Iraqi refugees as well as granting them some access to its social service infrastructure. Despite this generosity, Iraqis face numerous challenges in Syria, and the international community has been slow to assist Syria with this situation. On 1 October 2007, however, the GoS placed visa restrictions upon all Iraqis wishing to enter Syria, except for certain business, academic, and scientific categories. Although these restrictions were imposed to ease the strain on Syria's overburdened infrastructure, they have also cut off the last route of escape from Iraq for threatened or displaced families.

Since the mass arrival of Iraqi refugees, the majority of whom came in 2007, UNICEF has undertaken several assessments of their situation in order to better address their needs. Several joint assessments – covering the health and education sectors – have provided crucial data. A rapid health assessment was completed in July 2007 and a joint assessment on the socio-economic status of Iraqi refugees is planned for 2007/08. Additionally, since the beginning of the new school year in August 2007, UNICEF has been engaged in surveying the increase in the number of Iraqi students enrolled in schools and the capacity of the Syrian school system to handle this influx.

These assessments have revealed several of the challenges that Iraqis face in Syria. Lack of awareness of services is an overarching issue which affects access to education, health, and child protection services. Though many basic services are in place for Iraqis, recent surveys reveal that Iraqis are largely unaware of their existence or ignore the avenues which would allow them to utilize these services. A second sweeping issue is the rapid depletion of resources that Iraqis are facing due to unemployment. Displaced Iraqis can only work informally in Syria, if at all. Most, therefore, are living off of savings, uncertain remittances from relatives in Iraq, or money gained from selling their assets.

It is estimated that there are at least 300,000 Iraqi school-aged children in Syria.¹ While Syrian public schools are accessible to all Arab nationals and primary education is free and compulsory, only about 10 per cent of Iraqi children were enrolled in Syrian schools during the 2006/7 school year.² According to the Ministry of Education (MoE), only 34,000 Iraqi children were enrolled in both public and private schools in 2006/7, but so far the number has grown to 52,200 for the 2007/8 school year. Syrian resources and education infrastructure are under pressure with overcrowded schools, particularly in the areas where there is a high concentration of Iraqi refugees. Lack of space, lack of documentation, financial constraints and integration difficulties are some of the reasons for limited school enrolment and high drop-out rates among Iraqi children. Addressing these children's lost education opportunities will help prevent lifelong repercussions related to an emerging uneducated and alienated generation of Iraqis. Girls, working children and children with special needs are particularly vulnerable to missing out on education. UNICEF, recognizing the potential repercussions of this immense educational gap, has started implementing an education strategy to improve Iraqi children's access to schools and to support the expansion of the education infrastructure.

Many displaced Iraqis were exposed to experiences of terror and violence, which drove them out of Iraq. The entire family, and particularly children, may have been affected by the tragic and violent loss of one or more family members. This situation is further aggravated by refugees' increasing financial difficulties, unfamiliar environment, and gloomy or unsure future, which often lead to psychological fragility, distress and, in some cases, to post-traumatic stress disorder. Therefore Iraqi children are in need of psychosocial/psychiatric support, especially since parents and caregivers, themselves affected by stress and violence, are less able to deliver protection mechanisms for their children.

Finally, access to health care and awareness of health-care services is limited among Iraqis. The Syrian Ministry of Health (MoH) is currently providing primary health-care services to Iraqi children and families through its health centres. These services include immunization, maternal health, health education and treatment of emergency cases, but they do not provide essential medicines for certain chronic illnesses. The demand on the Syrian health-care system has therefore increased, particularly in areas with a high

¹ Syrian Ministry of Education, July 2007.

² Ibid.

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concentration of Iraqi refugees. Key concerns that need urgent response include indications of malnutrition, acute communicable diseases and limited use of public maternal health-care facilities. In addition, poor access to safe drinking water, crowded living quarters and limited financial resources are aggravating the health and nutritional status of Iraqi families. UNICEF, WHO, UNFPA, and UNHCR, in cooperation with the MoH, have launched a joint appeal to meet the health needs of displaced Iraqis in neighbouring countries. The purpose of this appeal is to provide improved access to and quality of primary health-care and emergency services, and to strengthen nutritional surveillance.

2. KEY ACTIONS AND ACHIEVEMENTS IN 2007

In the summer of 2007 UNICEF set up a Humanitarian Support Programme to respond to the needs of the displaced Iraqi population. This programme has developed an area-based approach, working to provide quality health care, quality education, and a protective environment for Iraqi children and women. UNICEF's support to Iraqi refugees is complementary to the existing Country Programme and focuses on the enhancement of the Government's capacity to serve all children living in Syria. Some of UNICEF's key actions to benefit Iraqi children and women in Syria included:

Education strategy. A multi-phase strategy to providing education for Iraqis is under way. During phase 1 UNICEF conducted field trips to 30 schools in Rural Damascus (with a total goal of 140) in order to gather information on the reality of Iraqi schooling, identify needs and develop a plan for the provision of equipment to schools with 50 or more Iraqi children. Ongoing field visits and coordination meetings are being held with the Ministry of Education on supply issues, such as teaching aids, maths and science teaching kits, classroom equipment, school libraries as well as recreational kits to cover the needs of 100 teachers per school. Classroom equipment includes: tables, chairs, desks, whiteboards, and heating and cooling to serve 143,000 students.

Phase 2 of the strategy will involve further provisions of school equipment, library enhancement, rehabilitation of water and sanitation facilities, and distribution of teaching materials. Phase 3 will improve the quality of education through trainings on the child-friendly initiative, school-based management, protective environment and inclusive education, as well as provide key advocacy and training materials.

Water, sanitation and hygiene. The rehabilitation of latrines and water and sanitation facilities in 140 selected schools contributed to the improvement of school functioning capacity. UNICEF also procured water purification tablets in response to the lack of safe drinking water in Iraqi communities, and promoted educational activities on hygiene and environmental health.

Immunization. UNICEF supported the Ministry of Health to raise immunization coverage in high-risk areas through routine immunizations, National Immunization Days, training of workers and supply of cold-chain equipment and vaccination cards. UNICEF and the Ministry of Health carried out a polio mopping-up operation as part of these efforts, reaching 20 per cent of under-five children (both Syrian and Iraqi) in Syria.

Control of malnutrition. UNICEF supported the Ministry of Health to promote exclusive breastfeeding and to expand the 'Baby-Friendly Hospital' initiative to all maternity hospitals in the main concentration areas. UNICEF, in coordination with partners, set up a nutritional surveillance system for children.

Training and medical supplies for primary health centres. UNICEF trained 400 health workers in 20 primary health centres to improve the quality of attention and communication skills regarding preventive care, breastfeeding, maternal health and good nutrition practices. UNICEF provided communication materials and medical supplies to these 20 primary health centres.

Health and hygiene supplies: In 2007 UNICEF doubled its prepositioned health supplies to respond to the needs of 40,000 refugees for one month.

Child-friendly spaces. In cooperation with the Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC), UNICEF developed a child-friendly space (CFS) model and established CFSs at Douma refugee registration centre and in community and cultural centres in Iraqi neighbourhoods. CFSs are safe and secure places for Iraqi children and offer recreational activities, projects, arts, crafts, as well as psychosocial counselling. The aim is to stimulate the normal development of refugee children and help them overcome the stress related to their situation.

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Training of SARC volunteers. Sixty SARC volunteers were trained to provide basic psychosocial support in CFSs (the target is to train 80 volunteers).

Assistance to vulnerable Iraqi girls. UNICEF commissioned a report on the situation of vulnerable Iraqi adolescent girls, and is now taking action to follow up on its recommendations, including identification of partners to implement life skills training, educational support, and vocational training for Iraqi girls.

3. PLANNED HUMANITARIAN ACTION FOR 2008

Coordination and partnership

UNICEF's Humanitarian Support Programme reinforces the capacity of the Government to serve all children in Syria by partnering with the Syrian Arab Red Cross (SARC) and coordinating with the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Health, and the Ministry of Culture. In order to ensure quality education, UNICEF holds regular meetings with other UN agencies and NGOs. Together with other UN agencies UNICEF carried out a health assessment, a joint assessment mission, and several appeals for support.

Regular programme

UNICEF Syria is in the first year of its Humanitarian Support Programme for Iraqi refugees. This programme is linked to the emergency preparedness component of the Country Programme, and the support provided by the *Humanitarian Action Report* reinforces the existing regular programme.

Health and nutrition (US\$ 7,400,000)

After conducting a rapid health assessment in July 2007, supporting immunization campaigns, training health workers and distributing health supplies, there are still several gaps in UNICEF's response to the health and nutrition needs of Iraqi refugees. To address these gaps, activities planned for 2008 include:

- Undertake large-scale social mobilization and awareness-raising to mobilize Iraqi refugees' community leaders, conduct community-based education for women/families on basic child and maternal health care and nutrition, and improve health care-seeking behaviour throughout Iraqi communities;
- Establish a monitoring and evaluation task force to assess the services provided in primary health centres and ensure quality and effective delivery;
- Establish a monitoring system to ensure that all prepositioned supplies are up-to-date and in the correct location;
- Strengthen the coordination mechanism with other agencies that provide health care to Iraqis in Syria. This will ensure effective services and supply operations, and prevent overlap in health-care services;
- Develop an advocacy strategy to ensure access to, and the quality of, health-care services.

Education (US\$ 24,000,000)

UNICEF is committed to providing children in emergency situations with quality education. By pushing for access to education, providing necessary supplies, addressing the barriers to education that girls are facing, and training on protective environment and child-friendly methods, UNICEF is working to ensure quality learning for Iraqis in Syria. Initially, UNICEF and UNHCR targeted the return to school of 100,000 Iraqi children in the 2007/8 school year. Iraqi enrolment numbers have reached 52,200 children, just over half of the initial target. Support to these children needs to be maintained throughout 2008. In addition, at least 48,000 more children will be supported in gaining access to education in Syria. In 2007 UNICEF completed phase 1 of its multi-phased support strategy to help the enrolment of Iraqi children into school. In 2008, UNICEF will implement phase 2 and phase 3. Activities will include:

- Continue providing equipment to schools (classroom items and school items);
- Enhance school libraries;
- Provide teaching material to improve learning environment;
- Undertake minor rehabilitation and maintenance of sanitation facilities;
- Lead a forum on the 'child-friendly school' initiative targeting school heads, inspectors, and directors;

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- Organize 18 training of trainers workshops for school heads and inspectors on school-based management and school-based child protection;
- Lead a seminar on the evaluation of school projects;
- Provide extracurricular supplies (reading kits, informatics kits, music kits, drawing and painting kits, and sports kits);
- Provide recreational and psychosocial supplies related to the planned activities.

Child protection (US\$ 4,000,000)

UNICEF is working to rebuild a protective environment for vulnerable Iraqi refugee children and women in Syria. Among the displaced children and adolescents, UNICEF puts special emphasis on the needs of girls who are particularly vulnerable to breeches in protection. Additionally, in recognition of the role of adolescents as both voices of the future and key players in today's world, UNICEF is working to provide life skills training for Iraqi youth. UNICEF established its first child-friendly space (CFS) for Iraqi children in Douma refugee registration centre during 2007. As this component of the protection programme grew, a CFS model – as well as plans for 'adolescent spaces' and 'meet-a-mother groups' – was developed. The following protection action is under way, and will be ongoing throughout 2008:

- Expand the existing CFS model in SARC/UNHCR community centres in Seyda Zaynab, Masaken Barzeh, Jaramana, and Qudsaya. The model will also be extended to cultural centres in Zabadani, Yarmouk, and Qudsaya. Additionally, the CFS in Douma will be expanded and an adolescent component added. Planning is under way for this project;
- Develop adolescent spaces – with life skills training, prevention of HIV/AIDS and empowerment components – in cultural centres and youth union centres;
- Establish 'meet-a-mother' groups in community and cultural centres in Iraqi areas;
- Continue to train SARC volunteers for CFSs, adolescent spaces, and 'meet-a-mother' groups;
- Establish a mechanism for identifying and referring the most vulnerable cases from CFSs to psychological/psychiatric counselling;
- Develop primary health centres and psychosocial support centres to provide psychosocial help to refugees in Seyda Zaynab;
- Establish a shelter for victims of trafficking, mainly women and girls, which will include psychosocial activities and offer protection.