



Iraqis Taking Refuge in Lebanon – A Persisting Humanitarian Challenge

**Estimating the Size and Geographical
Distribution of Iraqis in Lebanon
From a Service Need Perspective**

A KEY INFORMANT SURVEY

December 2009

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This study was commissioned in order to provide much requested clarity regarding the numbers of vulnerable and potentially vulnerable Iraqis in Lebanon.

Our 2007 Iraqi Population in Lebanon report provided two population estimates, 50,000, based on Lebanese Government immigration data, and 26,000, based on consolidated statistics and estimates provided by other stakeholders, primarily UNHCR and local NGOs working with Iraqi refugees. When adopting the larger total population figure, DRC did not differentiate between those Iraqis seeking sanctuary in Lebanon and those here for other reasons (business, tourism, etc.), nor on the basis of relative vulnerability (those requiring or not requiring assistance).

The present report focuses on those Iraqis in Lebanon who either have sought assistance from UNHCR and other service providers or are deemed potentially vulnerable and may require support in the short or medium term. Data and expert opinion come primarily from UNHCR and other service providers.

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DRC invites readers' comments regarding this report along with suggestions for future research. Digital copies of the report can be found on the Lebanon-Support.org website and at DRC's website below.

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List of Acronyms

| | |
|-------|---|
| CLMC | Caritas Lebanon Migrant Center |
| DRC | Danish Refugee Council |
| GSO | General Security Office (Ministry of Interior) |
| SDC | Social & Development Centers affiliated to the Lebanese Ministry of Social Affairs. |
| UNHCR | United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees |

Acknowledgment

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Background

The most recent survey on Iraqis in Lebanon, conducted by DRC in 2007, presented two population estimates: a figure of 26 thousand Iraqis which was based on indirect estimation using UNHCR figures and relating them to the proportion registered in UNHCR derived from survey results. The second figure which was adopted by consensus was 50 thousand and it was derived from the GSO data. The first figure reflected the perspective of service needs while the second estimate reflected the general population of Iraqis in Lebanon¹.

The central locations of residence of Iraqis in Lebanon were relatively stable between 2005 and 2007. Findings from both surveys indicated a majority who resided in the Beirut metropolitan area in the eastern and the southern suburbs. The 2007 survey unraveled a clustering in Nabatieh city. Smaller population densities were found in villages surrounding Nabatieh, Tyre, and in areas in Mount Lebanon other than the greater Beirut including Chouf in the south and Keserwan in the northern part of Mount Lebanon. Small clustering was found in the North, in the Beqaa in Baalbeck and Hermel areas, with verbal accounts referring to Iraqis in Western Beqaa.

Both surveys pointed to a demographic pattern particular to the Christian population. The first survey found that the Christian influx was on the increase. The 2007 survey found that one quarter of the population interviewed were Christians².

Comparing the 2005 and 2007 surveys, an increasing trend of persons staying legally in the country is observed. Sizeable proportions were residing illegally in the country: only one among the 1,334 family members included in the survey reported staying legally in Lebanon in 2005 survey³. The 2007 survey found a ratio of one individual with legal status to two individuals with illegal status⁴. Moreover, both surveys showed patterns on religious/ethnic divide: the 2005 survey reported an increase in migration to Lebanon among Christian Iraqis⁵.

Thus from the perspective of humanitarian service provision, the major conclusion from reading the findings of the 2005 and 2007 surveys is that the 2005 survey figure of 20 thousand individuals and the 2007 survey figure of 26 thousand individuals, which was based on UNHCR data and percent

¹ Another feature of the 2005 and 2007 DRC surveys relates to the definition of the study population both refer to an objective of estimating Iraqi population in Lebanon – however the focus was on the population of recipients and prospective recipients of humanitarian services. The 2007 survey estimates reflect two realities: the first is the totality of the Iraqi population in Lebanon, and the second is that of the target population for relief and resettlement services. Following the 2007 survey when interventions were made, the population i.e. the volume of beneficiaries was found to be much smaller than the consensus figure. However, it is closer to one of the estimates presented.

² DRC 2007, table 1.9 p.29

³ DRC UNHCR, 2005, op.cit p.30

⁴ DRC Iraqi Population Survey in Lebanon November 2007p.25

⁵ DRC UNHCR, 2005 op.cit p. 6

registered in UNHCR, reflect the size of prospective beneficiaries of relief and resettlement services since the first figure was arrived at by consensus with UNHCR and major service providers at the community level at the time while the second figure was based on UNHCR data which reflect service needs as well as findings from field visits with vulnerable Iraqis.

Objectives

The main objectives of this key informant survey are the following:

- ❖ Estimation of current size of beneficiaries and prospective beneficiaries of relief and resettlement services among Iraqis in Lebanon
- ❖ Estimation of geographical distribution of beneficiaries and prospective beneficiaries of relief and resettlement services among Iraqis in Lebanon.
- ❖ Reflections on short term population dynamics among Iraqis in Lebanon from the perspective of humanitarian service provision.

Method

In accordance with the objectives of the survey, quantitative data are the desired data types. However, since the data that are collected are not primary data, i.e. new data generated by the survey itself but provided by key informants, qualitative information in the form of opinions and insights are sought to substantiate the statistical data, to identify patterns, and to assist in interpreting such patterns.

Sources of data

Key informants are defined for purposes of this survey as persons (including Iraqis) who are knowledgeable about Iraqis in Lebanon in view of their occupation which allows them to interface with the communities. They may be representative of agencies (governmental, non-governmental – local and international) that interface with Iraqis in Lebanon from a particular perspective. All were interviewed (see list of interviewees in appendix). Forty individuals and agencies provided information⁶.

Data collection and analysis

Data were collected by means of in-depth interviews with individual and institutional key informants. Statistical information was processed in the locator tools⁷. Field work was done soon after a one-week preparatory phase and extended throughout the two-month duration of the project in view of the qualitative research approach adopted.

The approach consisted of identifying key informants and building on information obtained from them including leads about other prospective key

⁶ See list in annex.

⁷ Data collection tool used in the phase one of 2007 survey was used to collect statistics from various sources.

informants, i.e. the snowball technique. It involved field visits and meeting informally with the community. The locator tool and indirect methods of demographic estimation are used to organize and analyze the data. In the case of data from the Chaldean Church, frequency distributions were conducted to arrive at an approximation of regional distribution. Triangulation including cross-checking of sources is used to evaluate the validity and reliability of data collected for qualitative as well as statistical data collected. The approach is context oriented⁸, which relates to utilizing informational resources available in the case of this survey; statistics from churches and UNHCR were used to estimate population size while statistics of service organizations operating at the community level were used to estimate regional distribution.

Patterns of population dynamics

A consensus of several key informants is that the population is on the decline. However, this general pattern does not appear to be uniform across population groups. There was a consensus among key informants of two general patterns of population movement across the Muslim-Christian divide. Most Christians migrate in families with few single men and women whereas among Muslims there is significant proportion of single men⁹. That was the pattern observed in the 2007 survey.

Despite the resettlement flow away from Lebanon, a significant influx of newcomers among Christians is reported by NGOs and churches in areas where the majority is Christian, such as Sadd Bouchreih in the northeastern suburb of Beirut. This influx is attributed to a lack of security due to gang activity and to religious “extremists” as well as to limited job opportunities in the safe havens of northern Iraq. One young Iraqi woman in a vocational training center in Sin el Fil in the Eastern suburb of Beirut run by NRC sadly states that the area she came from – town or village – is “empty”. Such perception of emptiness which implies the loss of an entire social environment due to extensive outmigration is note-worthy.¹⁰

For the Muslim population, there are also some variations among Sunni and Shia population groups. For the Shia population group, which constitutes the majority, opinions vary among key informants: some Iraqi key informants as well as SDCs in peripheral areas of Lebanon and some areas of the southern suburbs of Beirut speak of a decline in the population due to resettlement and to return to Iraq based on observations from Husainiyat and the number of beneficiaries of those SDCs. These statements are supported by statistics from Iraqi Airways indicating that 604 individuals left Lebanon from January to November 2009 through the Iraqi embassy¹¹. These sources are consistent

⁸ Reed 2002

⁹ Based on conversation with church leaders and activists for the Christian population and Iraqi key informants for the Muslim population.

¹⁰ Informal discussion group with Iraqi beneficiaries during a field visit to an NRC vocational training center in Sin el Fil in the Eastern suburb of Beirut.

¹¹ See table 4 in annex.

with accounts from Iraqi embassy sources who state that almost all persons with illegal residence are back to Iraq or resettled¹². On the other hand, an Iraqi key informant who is a long term resident in Hay el Sullum speaks of a relatively stable population. Insights from IMC professionals in mental health speak of disenchantment among families in the southern suburbs of Beirut from the length of time of the process of resettlement. This was substantiated by reports of mental health specialists that speak of depression among the population. This is echoed by report of assaults against women by their Iraqi spouses who have been waiting for resettlement for a long time¹³.

However, there are indications of influx. A key informant who lives in Amrousieh, which is south of Hay Sullum of the southern suburbs of Beirut, speaks of an influx of families. Amrousieh is reported, by that key informant, to be the point of entry for the underprivileged Iraqis to the southern suburbs of Beirut given the low rents which are less than a 100 USD per month for a room.

As for the Sunni population group, information is meager. A few seek help from the Sunduk Zakat¹⁴ but the rest seem to be integrated with the other segments of the Iraqi population. Figures from CLMC Mreijeh center refer to 139 Sunni families or 548 individual beneficiaries. Beirut, Tripoli, Jounieh, Aley, western Beqaa are regions where Sunnis who need services reside¹⁵.

The pace of population movement between the eastern suburbs where mostly Christian Iraqis reside appears to be higher than that of residents of the southern suburbs. Heart of Lebanon, an NGO working in distribution of food items in Sadd Bouchrieh area, had to reduce the food rations in order to cope with the influx of new beneficiaries. The study team was a witness of one family complaining of the reduction of their ration to the social worker.

The above difference among the two suburbs may be real or it may relate to the publicized movement of population. For purposes of the study, persons who are seeking humanitarian assistance are more prone to publicize rather than be discreet about their entry simply because of their needs for services.

Estimating the total population

Two methods were used:

- ❖ Addition of regional estimates – the population estimate is **14** thousand. This is based on estimates from some key informants in the regions combined with organizational statistics at the regional level¹⁶.

¹² GSO was not accessible during the survey because of logistical reasons.

¹³ Meeting at SDC of Hay el Sullum including Iraqi and Lebanese key informants.

¹⁴ Based on a conversation with Sunduk Zakat key informant.

¹⁵ This is based on information from SDCs.

¹⁶ See table 2 in annex for more detailed figures. See also subsequent section on regional distribution in this report.

- ❖ Estimation from parish data from Chaldean and Syriac Orthodox Churches and the proportion in the UNHCR active and inactive files; the population estimate is **21** thousand.

Lists of registered Iraqi parishioners in the Chaldean and Syriac Orthodox churches were provided to the study team. Those were essentially the basis for the figure for Christians given the fact that the Chaldeans constitute the majority of Christians. The remaining Christian sects were estimated based on their proportion in the 2007 survey. Those and the relative distribution of Christian sects provided the basis of the estimate. The figure is consistent with that of UNHCR (active and non- active files ¹⁷) with no proof of resettlement or movement out of Lebanon) though slightly higher. In view of the lack of substantive new information on numbers of Moslims from a national resource, UNHCR data were adopted as estimates of persons in need of services. Field observations show that most Iraqis from all sects register at UNHCR. The population estimate shows that the ratio of Christians to the total estimated population is consistent with that found in the 2007 DRC survey.

Table 1. Distribution of estimated Iraqi population in Lebanon from a service need perspective by religion & sects.

| <i>Population Groups by religion and sects</i> | <i># individuals</i> | <i>Source(s) of information</i> |
|---|-----------------------------|--|
| Christians | 5380 | Multiple sources* |
| Sunni | 2231 | UNHCR** |
| Shia | 5534 | UNHCR** |
| Other (Muslims) | 8164 | UNHCR** |
| Total | 21309 | |

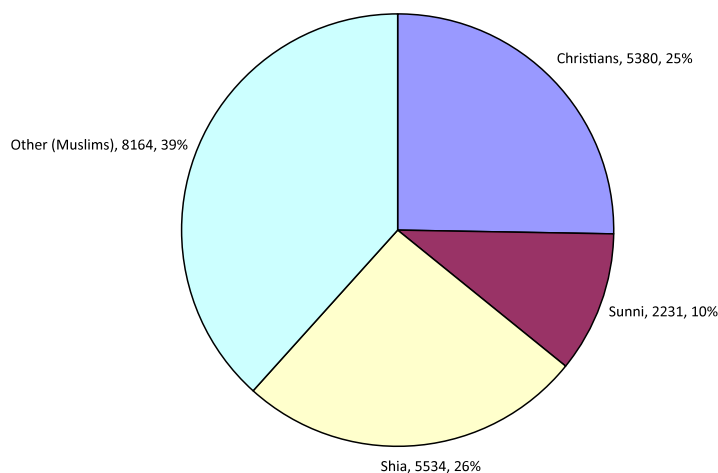
* Multiple sources include lists of individuals registered in Chaldean and Syriac Orthodox Church files. Proportion of other sects (Assyrian, and Syriac Catholics) was calculated from findings of the 2007 survey.

**UNHCR sources include active & closed files (not resettled, with no proof of return to Iraq or leaving Lebanon to other countries).

¹⁷ Refer to annexes for more explanation by UNHCR.

Figure 1. Estimated Iraqi population in Lebanon who need services

Estimated Iraqi Population in Lebanon who need services based on UNHCR and Church Data ,
Iraqi Key Informant Survey 2009



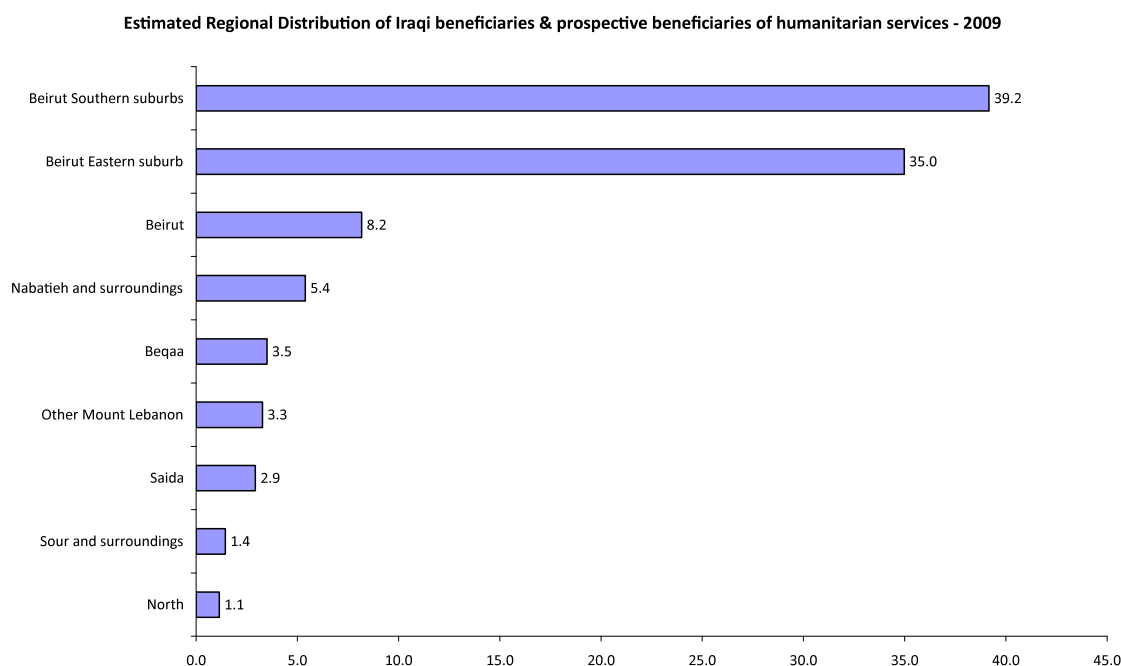
The estimate consisting of summation of regional data may not capture individuals who keep their files active but may not use services offered by various organizations and does not include individuals whose files are inactive and consequently do not have access to services.

Thus the estimate adopted for purposes of this report is the one based on Parish data and UNHCR data since it captures a wider spectrum of the population taking refuge – the non active files. Including closed files with no proof of leaving Lebanon allows for inclusion of individuals who may reactivate their file some time in the future and thus access services.

Estimating regional distribution

Data from different informants were compared for the same region – UNHCR registration and service providers as well as SDCs and local Iraqi resource people. The patterns are similar to those of 2005 and 2007 surveys with the bulk, or 70 percent, located in Beirut suburbs – the economic hubs of the capital. As in the previous survey, Nabatieh is the second hub for Iraqis in Lebanon from a need for service perspective after Beirut metropolitan area (which includes the city of Beirut and the surrounding suburbs). It is noteworthy that the proportion of residents of Eastern suburbs (predominantly Christians) is higher than that found in the 2007 survey (compare 39.2 and 35 percent in Southern and Eastern suburbs respectively with 41 percent in Southern suburbs and 18.2 for Eastern suburbs in 2007 survey). This may reflect a decline in the population in the southern suburbs in Beirut consistent with the key informant accounts mentioned in earlier sections in this report.

Figure 2. Regional distribution of Iraqi beneficiaries & prospective beneficiaries of humanitarian services - 2009



Short-term expectation of population movement

The influx pattern among Christians is expected to continue in the short term, based on opinions of Churches and an escalating rate of increase in 2009 observed by NGOs engaged in working with these communities¹⁸. Reasons given for the exodus of many Christians from Iraq include the feeling of lack of safety, being targeted by gangs who kidnap and ask for ransom, and by what an Iraqi Christian refers to as extremists who try to force them to change their religious beliefs and ways of life (women are especially targeted with regard to wearing the veil). Evidence of such a prospect (continued influx) was obtained from statements of key Church figures and activists, as well as from field visits to newly arriving families. (See annex entitled '**On the situation of Christian Iraqis**' for more details).

Influx of other population groups leaving Iraq for political reasons is being reported¹⁹.

A third group of Iraqis is expected to continue coming to Lebanon seeking medical treatment for major illnesses such as cancer; many fall behind financially due to the cost of medical care in Lebanon. This category was mentioned by the Sistani Foundation social section.

¹⁸ Sources: HE the Bishop of the Chaldean Church in Lebanon that constitutes the bulk of the Christian Iraqi community in Lebanon, and Heart for Lebanon.

¹⁹ This information is obtained from two key informants: one who alluded to it directly and the other who was part of the Sadri movement and who is now settled in Lebanon.

There is insufficient information to predict a shift in population size in the short term since the information on the pattern of resettlement is dependent on decisions of prospective host countries, and the size of influxes depends on the political situation in Iraq.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the number of Iraqis who are beneficiaries and prospective beneficiaries of humanitarian services is estimated to be in the order of 20 thousand individuals. Regional distribution is relatively stable and similar to findings from prior surveys. Most reside in the Eastern and Southern suburbs of Beirut that constitute the economic hub of Lebanon. Furthermore, a substantial proportion resides in the Nabatieh area. A smaller proportion resides elsewhere in the country, mainly in South governorate, Beqaa and the North. The influx of Iraqis is expected to continue mainly for two groups, Christians and political dissidents, for reasons related to perceived lack of safety in Iraq.

Comparing population estimates from the perspective of humanitarian service provision between the 26 thousand figure based on UNHCR data, which was arrived at as one option in the 2007 survey, and the current estimate, there appears to be a decrease in the population. Such apparent decrease is consistent with the informal discourse among several key informants (excluding those serving the Christian population). Using current estimates and trends, the survey estimates a population number that is presently steady and in the order of 20 thousand individuals. The aggregate statistics of UNHCR appear to be a useful indicator of the population needing service. Also, church statistics are useful to trace the population dynamics of Christian Iraqis in Lebanon. Service provider organizations as well as individual key informant statistics were useful in estimating regional distribution in the periphery. In short, given the current estimate, Iraqis taking refuge in Lebanon appear to pose a persisting challenge for humanitarian organizations.

References

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Reed, Holly, 2002 National Research Council Staff; Committee on Population. Demographic Assessment Techniques in Complex Humanitarian Emergencies: Summary of a Workshop. Washington, DC, USA: National Academies Press, 2002.

<http://site.ebrary.com/lib/knowledgenet2/Doc?id=10038669&ppg=20>
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Annexes

Table 2. Regional Distribution - Numbers and sources

| <i>Region</i> | <i>Number</i> | <i>Percent</i> | <i>Source(s)</i> |
|---------------------------|---------------|----------------|--|
| Beirut Eastern suburb | 4850 | 35.0 | L1,L9 |
| Beirut Southern suburbs | 5430 | 39.2 | L12 |
| Beirut | 1134 | 8.2 | L8 |
| Other Mount Lebanon | 455 | 3.3 | Chouf 40,L7, Aley 190 L7, Kesserwan 225, L7 |
| Nabatieh and surroundings | 748 | 5.4 | L6 |
| Saida | 405 | 2.9 | L7 |
| Sour and surroundings | 200 | 1.4 | L14 |
| Beqaa | 485 | 3.5 | L8 |
| North | 159 | 1.1 | L8 |
| Total | 13866 | 100.0 | |

L1 – Syriac Orthodox Church records.

L9 – Chaldean Church records.

L12 – CLMC – Mreijeh center

L8 – UNHCR – active records

L7 – DRC data

L6 – Iraqi Key informant - Nabatieh

L14 - Iraqi Key informant – Bazourieh Tyre district.

Table 3. Number of Departure tickets issued by National Carrier to Iraqi Embassy from January to Nov 10 2009

| Month | Number of tickets issued |
|-----------|--------------------------|
| Jan | 77 |
| Feb | 97 |
| Mar | 83 |
| Apr | 56 |
| May | 56 |
| June | 35 |
| July | 44 |
| Aug/Sep | 55 |
| Oct/Nov10 | 101 |
| Total | 604 |

(50 percent embassy, 50 percent ministry of transportation)

Table 4. List of contacts – persons and agencies

| |
|---|
| <i>Iraqi Embassy</i> |
| UN Agencies - UNHCR, UNICEF |
| CLMC – Caritas Lebanon Migrant Center |
| MECC – Middle East Council of Churches |
| Ministry of Social Affairs – Social Development Centers (SDCs): Baalbeck, Hermel, Burj Barajneh, Chiah, Hay Sullum, Jounieh, Talia, Shmistar. |
| Ministry of Labor |
| INGOs - Danish Refugee Council (DRC), European Institute for Cooperation and Development (IECD), International Medical Corp (IMC), International Relief and Development (IRD), Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) |
| Churches - Chaldean Archdiocese - Hazmieh, Assyrian Church - Zahle, Beirut, Syriac Orthodox Archdiocese - Beirut, Syriac Catholic Archdiocese - Zahle |
| Islamic philanthropies - Sistani Foundation, Zakat Fund |
| Local NGOs - Amel Association, Assyrian League, Frontiers, Heart for Lebanon, Insaan, Kafa. |
| Iraqi community key informants (7 resource persons) - Beirut southern suburbs (3 resource persons), Beqaa, Nabatieh, Tyre, Tripoli (one resource person in each area). |
| Resource persons on Iraqi Christians - General Michel Kasdano, Rev. Dr. Riad Jarjour |

On the situation of Christian Iraqis

Following are four factors, identified by an unidentified Iraqi Christian, that negatively affect the situation of Christians in Iraq. The text was provided courtesy of Rev. Dr. Riad Jarjour of the Arab Group for Christian-Muslim dialogue. According to this document, "the number of Iraqi Christians has been dwindling drastically since the year 2003. Many people believe that almost 50 % of Christians have left since the American invasion."

- "1. The appearance of sectarian tension between Sunni and Shiites and the appearance of extremists from each side had a negative impact on the Christians...
2. The Christians in Iraq suffer as they are now considered second class citizen as far as their treatment in the government where it is very difficult for them to be employed because they do not belong to sectarian parties which fact leads to their suffering from unemployment and this of course affects their living conditions.
3. Some Christian families in certain regions are forced to migrate because they are considered infidels by the extremists which leads them to leave their houses and seek to live at their relatives in other regions (i.e. Christian Families moving from south and central parts to the North mainly the Kurdistan region) All of this causes great distress and psychological pressure.
4. Efforts to force wearing the veil in some schools, universities and government offices on the Christian women by harassment in talk and writing on the walls by which they consider the unveiled woman as infidel and threaten to send her away from the university or work."

Explanation from UNHCR regarding active and inactive files

A quote of the response of UNHCR to two questions regarding active and inactive files and related matters

Electronic correspondence with UNHCR, December 21, 2009

When does an active file become inactive?

“There are two scenarios: loss of contact and "regularisation" with sponsors [legal employers].... In terms of "regularisation", when a refugee regularises his status with sponsors, the file is inactivated. GSO will regularise his/her file only after the file is inactivated. It can be re-activated when the refugee has a problem with his legal status, including detention.”

In case of loss of contact after what period does the active file become inactive?

“In principle, if a refugee fails to come forward for scheduled interviews, he/she is given three months to come forward. The office also puts up a note calling the refugees concerned to contact the office. If he fails to come within three months, the file is inactivated. This is in theory and works fine for non-Iraqis with frequent interviews and RSD. However, for Iraqis, we don't track "dormant cases" strictly. In this regard, we are now having an end-year cleaning up of the registration number. We are looking at the number of refugees who have failed to approach the office since the beginning of 2008. In other words, we are checking the number of people who have, in theory, failed to come to the office to renew their refugee certificates twice. (Refugee certificates are valid for one year.) The number stands at 2,513 and we will inactivate these people at the end of this year.”