



**STRATEGIC PROGRAMME
DOCUMENT**

DRC – SYRIA

1. SUMMARY

DRC was one of the 1st INGOs to receive in 2007 accreditation from the Syrian government to provide assistance to Iraqi refugees. DRC started operations in Syria in May 2008 by taking over and managing 8 community centres in Damascus in co-operation with the Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC) and UNHCR. DRC engaged then in the Education sector and rehabilitated 7 primary and secondary schools in Damascus with the support of the Ministry of Education (MoE) and UNHCR.

The Syria programme has developed since then and DRC is now active in the sectors of Community Services and Education in and outside Damascus. Livelihood support to refugees has been launched in mid-2009 and is foreseen as the 3rd main area of DRC intervention. 2009 activities are divided as follows:

- **Community Services:** Developing the 5 community centres located in Damascus and establishing 2 new centres in Homs and Daraa, which provide information and social / recreational support to refugees,
- **Education:** Capacity building of the MoE through school rehabilitation, extension, equipping, staff's training, and direct educational support to children via non formal education activities,
- **Livelihood support:** Providing support to specific groups at risk (adolescents and women) through vocational training, social counselling and any supplementary assistance.

2. SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS

The US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the subsequent civil conflict have caused the displacement of about 4,5 million Iraqi civilians: 2,5 million have fled in other regions of Iraq and 2 millions have travelled abroad being more or less welcomed in neighbouring countries, mainly Syria, Jordan, Lebanon and Egypt. The Iraqi displacement in Syria (officially representing 8% of the Syrian population) has become a strong burden for the country overstraining infrastructures and destabilising economy and employment. The international community has been providing support to the Syrian government and sharing the load in a way which is seen insufficient by many.

2.1 Root causes of conflict and displacement

The continued humanitarian strain in Syria resulting from the extensive influx of Iraqi refugees is a consequence of the worsened security situation in Iraq. Following the intervention of international forces in March 2003, the international community had expected a large flow of refugees fleeing Iraq to neighbouring countries but the initial

stages of the war saw mainly internal displacement. The number of refugees fleeing, particularly from central Iraq, increased rapidly when the security situation during March 2004 deteriorated. The large number of refugees seeking safety in Syria followed the increase in violence resulting from the Samarra shrines bombing in February 2006.

With an estimated 750,000 to 1.5 million Iraqi refugees in Syria, 750,000 in Jordan and about 350,000 in other neighbouring countries in the region, the response to the Iraqi displacement should to an increasing extent be at a regional level. These numbers make the Iraqi displacement the largest population movement in the Middle East since Palestinians were displaced following the creation of the State of Israel in 1948 and has been characterised by UNHCR as a humanitarian catastrophe.

2.2 Situation of refugees, IDPs and other affected groups

Unlike other Arab countries, Syria has maintained an open-border policy since the outbreak of the war in 2003. The influx to Syria, exacerbated by the closure of the Jordanian borders to Iraqis, consisted of much poorer segments with limited resources to find proper shelter and meet the minimum requirements of their children and themselves. The Syrian government estimates that around 80 percent of the Iraqi refugees live in Damascus. In and around Damascus, the areas of large Iraqi concentration are Jaramana, Sayeda Zeinab, Masaken Barze, Qudsaya and Yarmouk. Concentrations outside Damascus include Aleppo, Homs, Hama, Lataqia, Tartus, Hassake, Qamishli and Deir Ezzor.

The regional displacement pattern is still very dependent on the volatile security situation in Iraq. Movements between Syria and Iraq are frequent but as Iraq has experienced improvements in 2008, the influx has decreased. Following governmental restrictions it is unlikely that Syria would accept another massive influx of Iraqis should the situation in Iraq deteriorate once again.

Though Syria has maintained an open-border policy, it is clear that the presence of the large number of vulnerable Iraqis is regarded as temporary. Attempts to raise integration on the agenda have been met with opposition and this position is not likely to change. Many of the Iraqis in Syria wish and expect to be resettled to 3rd countries and see this as the best durable solution for themselves. This is especially the case for the Christian community (but not only) who does not regard their return to Iraq as a possibility. Though the demand for resettlement is very high, only a small fraction of the population will be selected for resettlement. Returning to Iraq may be the wish of most Iraqis but most realise that currently the 3 main safety conditions (physical, legal and material) are not satisfied. Though the security generally does not permit return, a small number of families have approached UNHCR to get their support for repatriation. The humanitarian community remains cautious about returns

and does not advise mass-scale returns until the security situation has improved as a certainty.

According to UNHCR November 2008 figures, about 221,000 Iraqis have been registered in Syria. The Syrian government estimates that 1.5 million Iraqis are now refugees in Syria, but no agency has been authorised to assess this number.

2.3 Actual and potential capacity and willingness of duty-bearers

The Syrian authorities have always maintained an open policy and welcoming message to Iraqi displaced. The education and health systems have been easily and almost freely accessible to Iraqis, even though already congested and often obsolete. Despite the fact that work is not allowed to Iraqis, the government has been so far very tolerant, ignoring those working illegally.

Support is provided by several ministries (Education, Health, Higher Education...) in terms of coordination and cooperation but the direct humanitarian assistance to Iraqis is provided by and relies on the usual humanitarian actors (UN agencies, INGOs and local charities) accompanied by the Syrian Arab Red Crescent.

The willingness and positive attitude of the authorities is conditioned by and limited to the following factors. Integration of refugees has always been clearly stated as unforeseeable by the authorities, which has a direct impact on their right to work. Then, the support provided by the international community was not deemed sufficient and proportionate to the burden caused and could jeopardise the national efforts accepted so far. Relationships with the Iraqi government affect as well significantly the government's willingness. Finally, should security and political stability be put at risk by the Iraqi presence, then obviously tougher policy would be applied.

2.4 Humanitarian activities by other assistance actors

By January 2007, UNHCR released the Supplementary Appeal for Iraq focusing on the protection and assistance to Iraqi refugees in neighbouring States and to IDPs in Iraq. The Geneva conference held on the 17th and 18th of April 2007 drew the attention of the international community who, for the 1st time, considered the Iraq crisis at the regional level. Focus was given to Syria but the implementation capacity had been very much limited by the fact that INGOs were not authorised to operate until spring 2008. Since then, a few operational INGOs (including DRC) have complemented the assistance provided by UN agencies and local associations although the level of assistance remains insufficient.

In general, the burden placed on Syria by the Iraqi refugee influx continues to warrant attention. The international community has until now focused mainly on

emergency aid. An increasing number of refugees have difficulties coping with the prolonged displacement situation and their self-reliance has been reduced drastically. While awaiting durable solutions initiatives are required to address the immediate needs, access to basic services as well as promoting dignified livelihood. Parallel to the direct efforts, it is relevant to advocate in order to improve flexibility and tolerance with respect to the Iraqi refugees and for the right to pursue temporary employment opportunities.

DRC, like other INGOs, was involved in the 2009 Consolidated Appeal Process to be launched in early December 2008. The actors intervening in Syria (including UN agencies, INGOs and local partners) met regularly since July 2008 and drafted a document outlining the needs, the priorities, the objectives and various projects designed for assisting Iraqi refugees in Syria. DRC was very much active in providing field inputs, lobbying for an inclusive approach and improved coordination of activities.

The main assistance actors in Syria are the Syrian Arab Red Crescent, the ministries of Education and Health, the international organisations (UNHCR, WFP, UNICEF and 14 accredited INGOs) and local charities.

2.5 Summary of constraints to durable solutions and resulting opportunities for DRC

- Security in Iraq,
- Policy of the Syrian authorities,
- Support provided by the international community,

The three elements above directly affect but to different extents return to Iraq, resettlement and stay in Syria. For those Iraqis whose return is not an option anymore, resettlement remains the last solution and mainly relies on the international community's generosity.

DRC does mainly foresee its intervention in the 2 other options: stay and return. A segment of the Iraqi refugee population cannot return, will not be resettled and have to remain in Syria where livelihood support should be developed.

Return might take place soon or later once Iraq can guarantee physical, legal and material safety. DRC has been positioning itself in Syria to help returnees' preparation through information/skills development and in Iraq via an extended presence in the central region, area of origin of 70% of Iraqi displaced in Syria.

3. DRC'S VISION AND PROGRAMME IN THE AREA

DRC's overall development objective is the **Protection and Promotion of durable solutions** for the displacement affected population in Syria.

The overall development objective focuses on the Iraqi refugees but recognises that their host communities are as well affected by displacement and other groups like Palestinians need support. The objective emphasises that durable solutions for all groups need to be promoted but also that it is important to preserve / protect social systems already institutionalised. .

3.1 Vision and exit criteria

DRC has designed a multi-level intervention. The humanitarian principle orients DRC to prioritise support to emergency cases when identified/accessible. However, DRC analyses that the "temporary" asylum sought by refugees in Syria will last and therefore stronger support is required to enable Iraqis to access basic services. At the same time, no settlement being foreseen in Syria, other durable solutions like resettlement or return to Iraq must be looked at carefully. Preparing for those options, DRC intends to help refugees socialise and improve their self-reliance.

In the coming two to three years, DRC does not foresee an improvement of the humanitarian situation for the Iraq refugees to an extent where the development objective described below is achieved. The security situation in Iraq is not likely to improve to an extent whereas a large number of people will return. Some may choose to return to areas experiencing improvement but as most Iraqis in Syria originate from Baghdad, a large wave of returning refugees seems unrealistic. Therefore, a considerable number will still remain in need of humanitarian assistance and protection in line with the objective outlined.

Nevertheless, it is a permanent concern for DRC to define clearly exit strategies in each of its programme's components. Therefore, the local capacity development is a cross-cutting objective and goes through duty bearers' capacity building or individuals' empowerment.

3.2 Objectives

The aim for the next three years is to help refugees cope with displacement issues and prepare return to Iraq. Simultaneously, DRC will keep strengthen the capacity of duty-bearers and national stakeholders. Such two-fold aim is translated into the following programme objectives:

1. Enable the refugee population to cope with displacement issues and promote their co-existence with the hosting communities,

2. Promote access to formal education for the refugees and support a safe and positive learning environment,
3. Strengthen the capacity of authorities and local stakeholders to address and protect fundamental rights of displacement affected groups.

DRC intends to intervene in three main sectors of Community Services, Education, and Livelihood support where the above objectives are interlinked.

Community services were and will remain the core activity of DRC program in Syria as a unique entry point to the refugee population.

The DRC involvement in the Education sector has grown from emergency school rehabilitation/extension accommodating Iraqi children to more sustainable activities (like remedial education and training) which both open DRC portfolio to development-oriented projects and allow DRC to envisage a long-term capacity building component with the Ministry of Education.

The deteriorating economical capacity of the Iraqi refugees has convinced DRC to start intervening and pilot livelihood support projects in 2008. Since then, the need has become more acute and confirmed DRC engagement. Livelihood support is foreseen by DRC as one of the major issues to be tackled by the humanitarian actors in the coming years in Syria both to improve self-reliance of the Iraqi refugees who remain in the country and to help those of them who will travel abroad (to Iraq or a 3rd country) get prepared for a durable solution.

3.3 Application of operational principles

All DRC activities are guided by the following operational principles:

- *Community-based approach and inclusiveness.* The communities subject to DRC interventions are affected by the Iraqi displacement but remain mixed. The various components of each community do share similar needs and constraints. Focusing on one segment in spite of the others would only increase tensions. DRC has adopted an inclusive approach which could benefit both the refugee and hosting communities. Therefore, DRC has opened the Iraqi centres to other segments of the communities: non Iraqi refugees (Somalis, Afghans, Sudanese, Palestinians...) or vulnerable Syrian families, and education projects take the whole school population into account regardless of nationality. It helps Iraqis not be seen only as a burden but also as an opportunity for the locals to improve their infrastructures and living conditions.
- *Building on local resources.* In order to ensure sustainability in the assistance provided, DRC has been implementing the project in close co-ordination with SARC and the MoE and continues to build upon local resources when available. Therefore, the capacity and ability of national stakeholders is strengthened so they themselves can address displacement problems and meet the needs of the population.

- *Participation.* In order to generate optimal ownership of the community centre and ensure that the services / activities offered correspond with the wishes of the user, DRC has been handing over as much management of the centres as possible while making sure that the requested level of quality and professionalism is observed. Extensive user-involvement is key to ensure the trust of the vulnerable population.
- *Transparency and accountability.* DRC is an independent organisation operating in a transparent manner to donors, authorities and beneficiaries. DRC is committed to accountability towards beneficiaries in terms of the assistance that we provide which is why the beneficiary population is involved in the development and implementation of all activities. DRC is certified under the Humanitarian Accountability Partnership (HAP) standards.
- *Complimentarily.* In order to maximise impact, DRC is coordinating closely with both public and private initiatives to avoid overlap in activities and assistance. For this reason, DRC commits to information sharing and co-ordination with stakeholders within all the sectors where it intervenes.
- *Co-ordination.* The programme is being implemented in close co-ordination with SARC and the Ministry of Education who have been involved in the assessment, planning, implementation and monitoring phases. Similarly, the 2009 programme has been defined with the same 2 main local counterparts. Their priorities have been considered and their contributions to DRC operations will be increased in the coming programme. Simultaneously, DRC has maintained close co-operation with its direct partners mainly UNHCR and the Danish embassy as well as with the rest of the international community (UNICEF, UNDP, UNRWA, embassies and other INGOs). Information sharing, reporting and meeting frequency complies with the relevant agreements and when relevant.
- *Gender equality.* It is a key priority to provide opportunities and safe environments especially for females. In its own employee and volunteer staff and in the beneficiary target population, DRC is committed to ensuring gender balanced and improving male/female dynamics.

Monitoring & Evaluation

DRC activities are monitored in close cooperation with the local partners. A joint monitoring process has been agreed on with the MoE before starting the schools' rehabilitation works. The roles have been clearly defined in terms of relations with the contractors/with the schools' management. Specific monitoring and reporting tools have been designed and pre-approved by the MoE to control the quality of materials, the quantities, the process and the time schedule. UNICEF is consulted and expertise is shared between the engineering and monitoring teams.

Monitoring of the community services is mainly done by DRC staff. The services available are chosen and implemented by the community members themselves. The

main monitors of activities are the beneficiaries who have full ability to complaint should they deem the service inadequate, low quality or missing.

The same applies to the quality education project's beneficiaries which have been designed with the MoE. The latter has assigned an in-house specialist to launch activities, link with schools and monitor the quality of services provided to the school population, in a joint effort with the DRC national team daily present during implementation. A complaint mechanism is made as well accessible to all actors in the schools.

Regular monitoring visits are conducted from HQ, and the DRC Syria programme in complying with internal and donor reporting requirements.

4.2 Stakeholders, partners and coordination

Since its establishment in Syria, DRC relies on its 2 local partners' capacity (SARC and MoE) to ensure sustainability of its various projects. Both partnerships are to be developed further in the coming years in order to ensure a proper takeover of projects when DRC has to phase out.

By principle, DRC is always working in very close co-operation with other humanitarian actors (UN agencies and other INGOs). UNHCR, UNICEF and SARC are leading the sector co-ordination meetings that DRC attends on regular basis. DRC has participated actively in the 2009 and 2010 Consolidated Appeal Process related to the Iraqi crisis which, among other benefits, allows an exhaustive mapping of the needs and contributes to improve the coordination between the humanitarian actors.

DRC has started looking for implementing partnerships with UNRWA (for the technical training), UNDP/ILO (for the livelihood component and link with the Syrian/Iraqi Ministry of Social Affairs) and intends to partner, when authorisation is given, some well-intended local NGO/foundations/institutions/charity associations.

4.3 DRC's capacity

4.3.1 Organisation and staffing

DRC Syria has been building its own national staff capacity to implement activities planned since March 2008. In 2009, DRC has organised a solid structure of 4 experienced expatriates supervising and mentoring 23 national staff and 110 Iraqi refugee volunteers. The national staff members have all received a training in 2008 and will be further trained in the coming 3 years on technical aspects (finance, administration, procurement, psycho-social...) and cross-cutting elements (like communication, managerial skills, conflict resolution, project cycle management...). DRC has structured its team in Syria in a way that reflects the 3 priority sectors of

focus: community services, school construction/rehabilitation and education/livelihood.

4.3.2 Funding

With the increased international focus on the Iraqi displacement, the funding situation was positive up to late 2008 but has started worsening in 2009 partly due to the global financial crisis and the long-lasting displacement. A dangerous tendency would be that donors focus on support to return and promote repatriation operations which would be premature. Finally, even though it has improved with a higher number of accepted INGOs, the implementation capacity will remain limited especially in the health, protection and livelihood sectors.

DRC Syria intends to broaden its donor range so far composed by UNHCR, DANIDA, and UNICEF.