



Danish Refugee Council

Quarterly Report

(SYRIA)

PERIOD COVERED = APRIL – JUNE 2009

DRC SYRIA

BACKGROUND AND CONFLICT

Description of conflict

The US led invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the subsequent civil conflict have caused the displacement of about 4,5 million of Iraqi civilians: 2,5 million have fled in other regions of Iraq and 2 million have travelled abroad being more or less welcomed in neighbouring countries, mainly Syria (1.5 million), Jordan (0.5 million), Lebanon and Egypt.

Displacement situation

Syria has been for a while a country of asylum for Iraqis with the 1st flow of Shias fleeing the Saddam's persecution in the 90s. After having closed the border with Iraq in the 90s, Syria has been facing since 2003 its most serious influx of refugees. The Iraqi flow was divided into several phases with a 1st wave of wealthy Iraqis followed by the arrival of Sunnis after Falluja siege (2004). The Samarra bombing in February 2006 has initiated a wide sectarian violence in Iraq which has been pushing on the roads to Syria most of the Iraqi communities and sects' members (Shias, Christians, Yazidis...). Since October 2007, Syria has changed its policy regarding Iraqis and imposed visas restrictions only allowing entrance to business men and placing lots of its "Iraqi guests" in an illegal status.

Since early 2008, the mixed Iraqi refugee population of Syria (estimated at 1.5 million people) has been facing illegality and lack of resources (due to the long displacement) which put at risk its ability to live decently and with dignity in a country already affected by unemployment, and poverty. The Iraqi crisis has put an additional stress on inflation and the job market. Criminality has emerged. Prostitution of young Iraqi women in need of cash support has become as one of the reasons explaining the resentment of locals against Iraqis.

DRC'S PRESENCE

DRC history

Given the humanitarian crisis, DRC has decided to carry out a pre-assessment mission in March 2007 when a team came, and took the 1st contacts with the relevant Syrian authorities (mainly the Syrian Arab Red Crescent) and other stakeholders.

Since July 2007, DRC is effectively present in Damascus and has been looking for authorisations to operate. Since summer 2007, DRC (like 7 other INGOs) has received accreditation from the Prime Minister office, as a preliminary step before operating.

Donors were contacted and submitted proposals. A Memorandum of Understanding between the SARC and INGOs was drafted in September 2007.

	<p>After a protracting negotiation period, DRC only signed its MoU with the SARC on the 7th of March 2008. During the 8 months of 2008 operations, DRC implemented a program consisting of Community services, school rehabilitation and livelihood support.</p>
<p>Brief narrative description of current DRC programme</p>	<p>DRC 2009 programme has been designed to consolidate its 2008 intervention focusing on the 3 following sectors: <u>community services</u> (legal/social counselling, recreational/ social activities, literacy courses, after-school program, skills development...) delivered via 5 community centres ; <u>education</u> (school construction / rehabilitation, remedial classes and awareness-raising activities) ; <u>livelihood support</u> (combining training, tool kits, cash support...). In 2009, DRC has planned to expand geographically and target as well the Iraqi refugee population located outside Damascus (Homs, Quneitra and Deir Ezzor are potential areas).</p>
<p>Strategic objective of programme</p>	<p>Protection and promotion of durable solutions for the Iraqi refugees and population affected by the displacement of Iraqis in Syria.</p>
<p>Immediate objectives of programme</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that immediate subsistence needs are met among the Iraqi refugees and other vulnerable population, • Enable the refugee population to cope with displacement issues and promote their co-existence with the hosting communities, • Promote access to formal education for the refugees and support a safe and positive learning environment, • Strengthen the capacity of authorities and local stakeholders to address and protect fundamental rights of displacement affected groups.
<p>Target group(s)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Centres: 40,000 individual beneficiaries (mainly Iraqis), • School rehabilitation/expansion: 15,000 children (Syrian and Iraqis), • Livelihood support: 300 individuals,
<p>Main sector(s) /type(s) of intervention</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community services: information / counselling, social / recreational / educational activities, skills development... • Education: school rehabilitation/expansion, quality education, • Livelihood support: training and tool kits

List of donors	<p>3 donors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ DANIDA (Danish Government), ○ UNHCR, ○ UNICEF <p>and potentially SIDA (Swedish agency), SDC (Swiss agency), ECHO...</p>
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MAIN DEVELOPMENTS DURING THE PAST QUARTER

Main external developments and challenges faced during the past quarter – in terms of politics, displacement situation and security	<p>The positive political climate developed in 2008 by Syria with its neighbours and the westerners has been jeopardized by the Gaza armed conflict which ended up in January 2009. The war has been seen in Syria as an aggression of Palestinian territory and civilians and provoked a huge emotion within the Syrian population where the Palestinian cause has always been well defended. The peace negotiations with Israel have been put on hold until further notice. Nevertheless, the 2nd quarter has confirmed the warming diplomatic relationships between Lebanon and Syria, where embassies have been established for the first time in the past 30 decades.</p> <p>Regarding the Iraqi displacement, figures are as vague as before and official estimates unchanged: 1.5 million Iraqi refugees according to the Syrian government, 0.5 million according to the Iraqi embassy in Syria. Deportations of refugees arrested due to criminal and illegal works are now more frequently reported by UNHCR and make refugees more vulnerable. In late June 2009, UNHCR has officially registered about 210,000 Iraqi refugees among which 19,000 in 2009.</p> <p>The situation of the Palestinian refugees (coming from Iraq) is still very precarious. Among the 2,700 individuals gathered in the 3 camps located in the No man's land between Iraq and Syria, resettlement has started in Chile and Sweden. This has led other Palestinian residing in Syria to join the camp of Al-Tanf with the hope to being resettled. UNHCR is embarrassed by that situation and intends to close the camps by the end of 2009.</p> <p>In terms of return to Iraq, the number of UNHCR assisted Iraqi returnee families is not significant. About 980 individuals only were supported since October 2008. However, the return trend seems to become much more significant even though quantifying it is still very challenging. From its relations with the Iraqi community, DRC has noticed that Iraqis are going back and forth between Syria and Iraq.</p> <p>A few months ago, the international community was expecting a significant return to Iraq which has not happened yet due to resurging violence in Iraq. The donors have now realised that the Iraqi displacement in Syria will not be solved in the short-term and agree that support to Iraqis in Syria should be maintained for the coming 1 to 2 years.</p>
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Main internal	The second 2009 quarter has been dedicated to implementation of activities agreed earlier with donors.
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achievements and challenges during the past quarter

The community services unit kept facilitating the access to information for refugees in the 5 Damascus centres and the provision of social/recreational activities to an average beneficiary population of about 2,000 people a month. DRC took over and expanded successfully the legal counselling provided previously by UNHCR and defined its 2009 psycho-social support strategy mainly focusing on staff/volunteers' capacity building.

Adjustments of DRC human resources took more time than expected and have delayed the establishment of the community center in Homs.

The education activities were expanded as well and subject to several adjustments. The school construction project, put on hold upon UNHCR request in March 2009, was definitely cancelled a month later. The funds covering the construction were reallocated to school expansion and a soft education component including remedial classes for enrolled children and vocational training program for adolescents. The engineering has finalised schools and works' assessment and selected 4 contractors after an open local tender. In Sayeda Zeinab, Quneitra and Homs, works have started in last June just upon the last school's exams.

In parallel, a quality education proposal was finalised with UNICEF and should start in July with remedial classes and extra-curricular activities, and will then be followed by training of teachers/social counsellors and other awareness campaigns. The education survey initiated in February has finally been postponed up to September 2009 due to protracted discussions on the questionnaire and methodologies with the Syrian Red Crescent and the Ministry of Education.

Finally, discussions about the DRC livelihood projects went on in the past quarter with potential donors (UNHCR, SIDA, SDS and the Canadian embassy) and our main implementing partner, UNRWA.

Main funding developments during the past quarter

In addition to the early 2009 agreements signed with UNHCR and DANIDA, DRC managed to finalise discussions with UNICEF and a quality education proposal was agreed on in April 2009 for about 0.5 million USD, consisting of remedial classes, extra-curricular activities, training of teachers/social counsellors, and awareness campaign.

Meanwhile, a project proposal was submitted to 2 donors who looked very interested: the Swedish and the Swiss agencies for Development and Cooperation. The project consists of livelihood support through vocational training and should be worth 400,000 USD a year.

The Canadian embassy expressed a strong interest as well for the livelihood strategy shared by DRC during fundraising activities launched in late 2008. Several meetings were organised and partnership if confirmed should start in late 2009/early 2010.