



Danish Refugee Council

Quarterly Report

(SYRIA)

PERIOD COVERED = JANUARY – MARCH 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 ECHO, SIDA, Swiss Development Agency...</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.</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 frequently reported by UNHCR and make refugees more vulnerable.</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 700 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. The latest enrolment figure of Iraqi children in the Syrian schools provided by the MoE (33,800 children in 2008/2009 vs. 49,000 children in 2007/2008) has led the international community to question the relevance of the support provided to the education authorities, even though the context since the CAP 2008 has not significantly evolved.</p>
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Main internal achievements and challenges during the past quarter	<p>The first 2009 quarter has initially been dedicated to liquidate 2008 programme: the tools kits were all and fully delivered to the skills development / livelihood beneficiaries, the schools’ rehabilitation/equipping was completed by the 22nd of January 2009, and the school handover ceremony organised on the 20th of February 2009 brought strong visibility to DRC program with the presence of the Minister for Education, the Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs and the Danish ambassador. Simultaneously, impact/satisfaction surveys were</p>
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carried out in the 3 sectors and resulted in lessons learnt and recommendations helping adjust the 2009 programme.

Most of January was spent in finalising the UNHCR and DANIDA agreements which were all signed by the end of the month.

After many meetings, the DRC community services (CS) team managed to convince the actors (SARC, UNHCR and UNICEF) involved in the community centres about a new management concept/structure which optimises the activities and resources made available. The CS team succeeded to negotiate as well with the SARC the locations for the 2 DANIDA-funded community centres (Homs and Deir Ezzor). Needs assessment was carried out in Homs during March.

The school team officially selected the schools, assessed the rehabilitation needs (in Sayeda Zeinab, Homs and Quneitra) and defined work plans and methodologies, whereas the school construction unit cleared the land for construction, and finalised the design of the school with the support of the new international engineer recruited by DRC. Unfortunately, the construction project was put on hold in early March 2009 upon UNHCR request who decided to review its whole strategy based on Iraqi children enrolment figures reported by the Ministry of Education.

A partnership with UNICEF was concluded on the education survey in late February 2009. 3 DRC delegations visited the Syrian program and DRC jointly organised the UNHCR Roster seminar in Damascus.

Main funding developments during the past quarter

DRC Syria signed 2 sub-agreements with UNHCR for 2009 in late January 2009: one for the community services program and another one for school construction/rehabilitation for a total value of about 3.5 million USD. DANIDA signed in January an agreement with DRC for a 2009 program worth 8 million DKK.

On the 26th of February 2009, DRC signed the education survey agreement with UNICEF for 50,000 USD and will be submitting a concept paper for quality education in April 2009.

A 2 years ME concept paper including Syria was submitted to SIDA in late February which focused on livelihood support.

On the 26th of March, a meeting was held with the ECHO representative who suggested DRC to submit a concept paper in April on EVIs and livelihood support.

In close cooperation with UNDP/ILO, DRC has met several embassies and presented the Livelihood CAP 2009. Some of them have expressed a positive opinion about DRC livelihood approach among which the Danish, the Swiss and the Canadians.

Finally, a DANIDA delegation visited Syria in early March for the 2nd time in 4 months and held both meetings and field visits with DRC. A 3-year concept note was submitted during March 2009 and 80% approved lately (all activities except livelihood component).