



Iraqi Refugees in Syria

A Report of the ICMC-USCCB Mission to Assess the Protection Needs of Iraqi Refugees in Syria

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Executive Summary

This protection assessment mission to Syria is a joint effort of the International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC) and the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Migration and Refugee Services (USCCB-MRS). The mission was funded by the United States Department of State, Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration (BPRM). The main objective of the mission was to provide an in-depth evaluation and analysis of the protection needs of vulnerable Iraqi individuals and families residing in Syria, to assess the existing system of response to these needs, and to make recommendations of the best approaches to address their protection needs.

Brief summary of the present situation of Iraqi refugees in Syria:

- In February 2008 this mission found the Iraqi population in Syria to be living a fragile, isolated existence with limited services and depleting resources.
- Most of the Iraqi refugees in Syria have experienced extremely distressing events in the last few years and appear to be struggling to manage the effects of these events.¹
- To this date UNHCR in Syria has registered 161,613 Iraqi Refugees.²
- Estimates of the total number of Iraqi refugees in Syria are disputed and vary from 300,000 - 1.5 million with the vast majority residing in Greater Damascus.
- Regardless of numbers, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees has stated that there are not enough funds and services to address the assistance needs of Iraqi refugees in Syria.³
- The Syrian Government has good relationships with United Nations agencies and societies of the Red Cross and Red Crescent. International non-Government organizations are presently not operational in Syria.
- Recognizing the need for a joint effort in response to the Iraqi refugee situation, the Syrian government has currently given approval to 14 international non-Government organizations to work with the Iraqi refugees. They are in the process of being registered so as to become operational.
- Due to the lengthy process of registration of international non-Government organizations UNHCR has very few implementing partners and those that it has are stretched in capacity.⁴ In many instances UNHCR is implementing its own programs.

¹ Second IPSOS report, November 2007

² UNHCR Syria Update on Iraqi Refugees, February, 2008

³ <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/txis/vtx/iraq?page=news&id=47b46c3f2> accessed February 22nd 2008

⁴ The Syrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs has given approval to 14 INGOs to work in Syria. All but 2 are now waiting to sign a MOU with the Syrian Arabic Red Crescent Society (SARC) which is mandated by the Syrian Government to coordinate relief efforts with the Iraqi population.

- The Iraqi refugee population that has registered with UNHCR has access to basic services such as essential non-food items, health clinics and food. Iraqi children can attend Syrian schools.
- The unregistered Iraqis have limited access to the same basic services, mostly through local Church organizations.
- There are insufficient resettlement places for those Iraqi who cannot return to Iraq.
- Iraqis arriving in Syria are now required to have a visa issued from the Syrian Embassy in Baghdad. Many, who arrived earlier, are now residing in Syria with lapsed visas and some are fearful of deportation.
- In February 2008 the President of Syria gave assurances to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees that Syria was not going to deport Iraqi refugees.

In the light of the above situation the ICMC & USCBB/MRS has identified the following overarching protection needs and gaps for the Iraqi refugee population in Syria in February 2008.

Protection needs and gaps

1. Limited outreach to the Iraqi population has prevented a comprehensive understanding of the Iraqi refugee population in Syria, its numbers and its protection and humanitarian needs.
2. While recognized as a pressing need by the Syrian Government and relevant UN bodies, the mental health and psychosocial needs of the Iraqi refugee population have not been adequately addressed.
3. Only limited numbers of the extremely vulnerable amongst the Iraqi refugee population have been identified. Those identified have access to few resources. Many families are fragile with multiple and profound protection needs.
4. There are Iraqi women and children partaking in prostitution. Some have been trafficked to Syria and beyond.
5. The capacity of local staff to implement programs, particularly community and humanitarian, is limited due to inexperience and insufficient mentoring.
6. There is a need for the programming to move from an emergency response to a planned response of at least 2-3 years.
7. Few initiatives identify the Iraqi population as resourceful and empower and involve the Iraqi refugee population as active decision makers and implementers of services.
8. There are insufficient resettlement places for those Iraqi who cannot return to Iraq.
9. Iraqi refugees are fearful of being returned to Iraq and are very concerned about Syria's visa requirements.
10. Additional services are needed by the Iraqi refugee population in Syria such as psychosocial services, programs for adolescent and non-formal education for children who are not enrolled in school.
11. There is a need to expand services to Iraqi refugees living outside of Damascus.
12. There is limited information sharing between Church and other humanitarian organizations, UNHCR and other relevant UN organizations.

What follows below is a summary of the situation for Iraqi refugees in Syria, an elaboration of the protection needs and gaps identified in this mission and recommendations of practical responses that could be taken towards addressing them.

Introduction

The present situation of Iraqis in Syria

In 2007 it has been estimated that at least 1.2 million to 1.5 million Iraqi have in the past 4 years fled Iraq and sought refuge in the neighboring country of Syria as a result of the US invasion.⁵ Iraqis have come to Syria because of geographic proximity, the simple entry requirements (no visa required), access to services and the presence of an Iraqi community. The largest group of the Iraqi displaced population resides in Damascus in specific, generally poor neighborhoods.⁶ The Iraqi refugees in Syria primarily live in rented accommodation and increasingly Iraqi families are sharing accommodation with other families in order to manage the high rental and living costs. In the wake of the war in Iraq in March, 2003, Temporary Protection Regime, (TPR) has been applied for all Iraqi nationals arriving in Syria upon the Syrian authorities' consent.⁷ Refugees in Syria do not enjoy the right to work though some have found informal employment. This has meant that the population is largely dependent on their savings and money that they receive from family members abroad and in Iraq. Over time these savings have depleted and the Iraqi population has become more dependent on humanitarian assistance. Iraqi children are able to attend Syrian schools and they can access Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC) health clinics free of charge or for a very small fee.

The Syrian Government has been very generous in providing assistance to the Iraqi displaced population through government services and the Syrian Arab Red Crescent. In addition to these services, mosques and Christian churches also provide assistance as well as many local Syrian professionals.

Prior to October 2007 the Iraqi population could enter the country without meeting visa requirements. However, in October 2007 the Syrian Government legislated that any Iraqi wishing to enter Syria was required to obtain a visa from the Syrian Embassy in Baghdad. In 2008, to obtain a visa for Syria an Iraqi needs to be a doctor, engineer or a merchant with a commercial license. Iraqis without visas are no longer permitted to enter Syria.

Those Iraqis already residing in Syria continue to live in Syria even after their residency permits have expired. Those with residency can seek permission for their immediate family to visit Syria from Iraq. Iraqis with appropriate medical documentation are also eligible to seek a visa to come to Syria for medical treatment. Iraqi families that register their children in a Syrian school automatically obtain one year's residency though this is only renewed on a monthly basis. While the Syrian Government has given assurances that the Iraqi refugees will not be deported, many Iraqi are very concerned that they have lapsed visas and fear deportation.

In late 2007, partly as a consequence of the new visa requirements, the numbers of Iraqi crossing into Syria dropped dramatically.⁸ There has also been an increase in numbers of Iraqi returning spontaneously to Iraq, although precise information on reasons and numbers does not exist. Some are reported to be crossing back because of financial

⁵ Brookings Institute & University of Bern, 2007. Iraqi Refugees in the Syrian Arab Republic: A Field-Based Snapshot. June, 2007. The Brookings Institution: Washington, DC. In February 2008 these numbers were being disputed by different donors with estimates varying from as low as 300,000-1.5 million.

⁶ Ibid, pg. 2

⁷ UNHCR, 2006. Country Operations Plan : Syrian Arab Republic.

⁸ UNHCR Syria Update on Iraqi Refugees, February 2008

problems in Syria and others for business. Anecdotally it has been reported that some of these Iraqi have returned to Syria.⁹ While UNHCR does not continuously monitor the border, they did observe a surge in returns in October-November 2007 and a gradual drop after that. They are currently reporting more Iraqi refugees coming to Syria than numbers leaving.¹⁰

Services to Iraqi refugees in Syria

The Syrian Government has mandated the Syrian Arab Red Crescent Society (SARC) responsible for humanitarian activities in Syria and legislated that SARC is the only co-ordinating body for relief support to Iraqi refugees. In February 2007 SARC, supported by the Netherlands Red Cross, conducted a rapid emergency needs assessment for Iraqi displaced in Syria. This comprehensive assessment interviewed 2,870 randomly selected Iraqi households. At the time of the interviews, it was estimated by SARC that approximately 20,000-30,000 Iraqis were entering Syria each month.¹¹ The assessment reported that the general situation of the Iraqi displaced was deteriorating rapidly into a crisis. The report noted the severe impact of the needs of the Iraqi population on the Syrian public services as well as the Syrian public and recommended the provision of additional access to services and resources for the Iraqi population and a strengthening of the existing capacity of both public and private service providers. Significantly, the assessment estimated that only 11% of the displaced Iraqi population were receiving humanitarian assistance and stated that 30-40% of the Iraqi vulnerable groups needed assistance in health, food, shelter items, water and education supplies.¹²

In February 2008, SARC is currently completing a second assessment with the findings of this assessment due for release in March 2008. In the meantime it would appear that the response to the first assessment has been two-fold:

1. Church and non-Church organisations, UN agencies and SARC have concentrated their efforts on delivering food and non-food items, health assistance and education classes and supplies to the Iraqi population.
2. A significant number of international non-Government organisations have sought approval from the Syrian Ministry of Foreign affairs to become operational in Syria in order to further address the needs of the Iraqi population.¹³ At present, other than UNHCR and SARC, only the Church and a few small Syrian non government organisations are assisting the Iraqi population.

Syria - Jordan Comparison

The ICMC/USCCB missions to Jordan and Syria have identified some similarities and differences in the situation of Iraqis in the two countries as well as in the response of the UN agencies and governments. An appendix to this document spells out in more detail the comparisons.

⁹ UNHCR Analysis of the Situation of Returns to Iraq, February 2008

¹⁰ Ibid, pg.1

¹¹ Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC), 2007. Rapid Emergency Assessment for Iraqi Displaced in Syria, March, 2007. SARC: Damascus

¹² Ibid, pg. 4

¹³ At the time of the writing of this report, over 60 international non Government organisations have applied to be operational in Syria. Fourteen of these have gained approval but only two have signed the necessary memorandum of understanding with SARC.

The key issues noted:

- The Iraqi population in both countries is similar in the trauma experienced and the reasons for leaving Iraq. While Jordan has a population of wealthy Iraqis, most of the Iraqi population in both countries is financially distressed and isolated from sources of help and fearful of contacts outside the home. While UNHCR notes that the majority of Iraqis are fleeing generalized violence, the families we met in both countries were largely fleeing specific persecution.
- Both countries have responded to a destabilizing influx with both generosity and an effort to maintain control and to prevent political instability from affecting their countries.
- Both countries, as well as the international community, have not recognized the need for assistance until recently and have taken a short term approach in current response affecting service availability.
- In Jordan, the government has been comfortable with international NGOs and less so with the United Nations. Therefore, the local and international NGO sector has been fairly strong and assistance through this sector is beginning to work well. The UN agencies have not been as strong and have only recently increased staff leading to weakness in coordination and response. The church and other religious sectors have been slow to recognize the need for assistance in a systematic way.
- In Syria, the government has been comfortable with the United Nations, which is better organized, but is cautious with international NGOs. Local response from churches has been robust, but the need is great and the necessity for a more systematic approach remains unmet.

At the time of this mission there were a number of significant delegations visiting Syria: International Rescue Committee, Migration Policy Institute, Washington and the Refugee Council, USA. Reports from these delegations could be used to elaborate the situation in Syria for Iraqi refugees in February 2008.

The joint International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC) and United States Conference of Catholic Bishops Mission took place over 3 weeks in length in February 2008. It followed a similar mission to Jordan in October 2007.¹⁴ Tasked to identify protection needs and gaps and making practical recommendations, the mission has reached the following conclusions:

Protection needs and gaps for Iraqi refugees in Syria in February 2008

1. Outreach

Limited outreach to the Iraqi population has prevented a comprehensive understanding of the Iraqi refugee population in Syria, its numbers and its protection and humanitarian needs.

Registration and protection needs identification

The Iraqi refugee population in Syria, for many reasons, is not yet fully known. In 2007 large numbers of Iraqi refugees were crossing into Syria and UNHCR, due to lack of

¹⁴ <http://www.icmc.net/e/index.htm>. Accessed 26th February, 2008

resources and capacity, was limited in how quickly it could register this population. The recent increased effort of UNHCR has meant that the registration process is shorter in time and more accessible to the population. Registration is, however, only occurring in Damascus and is not available for families outside of Damascus. UNHCR is organizing mobile registration centers that, while reduced in capacity, will, as a minimum, assist the international community to better know the numbers of Iraqi in Syria. However, many refugees have not yet sought an appointment for registration. Iraqi refugees appear to have limited understanding of the role of UNHCR and the benefits that flow from registration, including information on services available. A disadvantage of the increased speed in registration is that the relatively in-experienced registration staff may fail to recognize individuals and families with particular protection needs. To address this problem, UNHCR has put in place a Protection hotline number. Refugees ringing this phone number have access to counseling and an early appointment with UNHCR. Questions remain as to how well known this service is and to how accessible and/or effective it is. It is reported that this hotline, staffed by 2 UNHCR staff, receives over 200 calls a day and is operational only during office hours. The topics covered in these calls are frequently about service requests rather than protection issues. With such a volume of calls, the hotline is sometimes unavailable. In areas outside of Greater Damascus, where registration is conducted by mobile units, there is a need for appropriate agencies to be informed of and to promote the Protection hotline and other information services.

Neither UNHCR nor other organizations working with the Iraqi refugees have active outreach programs. It is necessary for the Iraqi refugees to come to designated centers for services. This is particularly problematic for individuals and families with complex needs due to poor health, mental illness, low levels of education and limited income.

Resettlement

Linked to the protection needs of the Iraqi refugee population is the identification of Iraqi for whom the only durable solution is resettlement. At present either at Registration or in subsequent interventions with UNHCR, individuals and families are put forward for resettlement. Church agencies providing services to women who are victims of violence and separated and unaccompanied children also have the opportunity to inform UNHCR of the protection needs of particularly vulnerable people for whom resettlement might be the only option. This mission expresses concern that the resettlement option is not yet accessible to all extremely vulnerable populations due to lack of identification or insufficient capacity to access and manage the resettlement process.

Access to services

Many of the services to Iraqi refugees require the population to make an appointment for an interview at a service delivery center in Damascus. Depending on the service requested, some of these interviews are followed up with home visits to verify the situation of the family or individual. Knowledge about such services appears to be disseminated by word of mouth and some low profile campaigns. Frequently there are transport costs accessing services and, in some instance, mobility challenges beneficiaries such as the ill, female headed households, the elderly and those with disabilities. There remains concern that some of the Iraqi population are too isolated to have heard of services and also too anxious to leave home to access services. UNHCR has expressed

the hope that, when more services become available, more of the Iraqi population will seek to access them and, thereby, make their needs more readily known. The UNHCR food program does appear to have drawn more Iraqis to register with UNHCR. At present UNHCR is only conducting interagency information sharing meetings with international non-Government organizations that have been approved by the Syrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. As most of them are not yet operational and as other coordination efforts involving the local organizations providing services to Iraqis have not been undertaken, this has resulted in limited coordination and many of the Church agencies have extremely limited knowledge of the role and services of SARC and UNHCR, as well as of other Church agencies.

Recommendations arising:

1. That Church and NGO staff are briefed in an on-going manner on the role of UNHCR in Syria, so that they might actively encourage Iraqi refugees to register with UNHCR, as well as be able to identify families with protection needs that have not yet been brought to the attention of UNHCR.
2. That every effort and opportunity is taken to ensure that all Church and NGO staff has knowledge of the Protection hotline service and that this service is advertised widely in all Iraqi refugee services.
3. That further efforts are made to ensure the effectiveness and 24/7 accessibility of the Protection hotline.
4. That Church and NGOs are encouraged to develop, within their programs, outreach services involving both Syrian staff and Iraqi volunteers. These outreach services are to identify beneficiaries and needs, and to ensure that services are accessible to the population.
5. Through outreach programs, to ensure that the extremely vulnerable members of the Iraqi population are identified, assisted and, where necessary, referred to additional services and resources.
6. That a qualified lead agency assists those working with vulnerable populations to become aware of the resettlement process and resources and assist individuals and families to access this process.
7. That UN agencies, NGOs and Church organizations produce regularly updated information brochures outlining the services available to the Iraqi population and distribute such information widely.
8. That a variety of mechanisms, including further hotlines, be put in place for UN agencies, NGOs and Church organizations to gather information on the situation of Iraqi refugees in Syria and disseminate information on services available to them.
9. That special attention is given on how to best provide access to information and services to extremely vulnerable Iraqi refugee families and individuals.
10. That additional humanitarian assistance and outreach services are established outside of Damascus in areas where significant numbers of Iraqi refugees reside.

2. Mental Health and Psychosocial Services

While recognized as a pressing need by the Syrian Government and relevant UN bodies, the mental health and psychosocial needs of the Iraqi refugee population have not been adequately addressed.

Incidences of mental health and psychosocial problems

In 2007 the SARC needs assessment of the Iraqi refugees¹⁵ recommended the improvement and expansion of psycho-social services with partners with expertise and capacity. Many of the Iraqi refugees have recently fled war in Iraq and they report a high exposure to distressing and traumatic events. In Syria they are frequently isolated, fearful to mix with the Iraqi or Syrian community. There are reported high incidences of domestic violence as well as anxiety and depression.

Present psychiatric, psychological and psychosocial resources in Syria

In Syria there are limited resources to address these mental health and psychosocial needs. Syria has a number of psychiatric units administered by the Ministry of Health. At present the Ministry of Health is working in partnership with World Health Organization (WHO) to further strengthen psychiatric services in Syria. Psychologists receive their formal training in the Faculty of Education at Damascus University. Graduate psychologists have had little exposure to clinical work and receive this training when working alongside psychiatrists in hospitals in Syria. Syria does not have a school or Institute that trains social workers. A number of psychiatrists are presently providing psychiatric consultancy to patients at SARC clinics and some are volunteering at different Church centers. In late 2007, Terre des Hommes-Lausanne provided funding to local organizations for psychological assistance for families with young children. Activities include group sessions for young children. UNICEF, in partnership with SARC, is presently supporting four child friendly spaces in SARC Community Centers and is attempting to build psychosocial response capacity in SARC headquarters. These initiatives are welcomed but clearly they are insufficient.

Needs unmet

Of great concern are the additional problems created for individuals and their children when mental health and psychosocial needs, whether war and displacement related or not, are not adequately addressed. When conducting home visits, this mission witnessed a number of distressed parents who appeared not to be having their psychological needs adequately addressed. This, coupled with their uncertainty about the future and the parent's inability to adequately provide for the family, was negatively impacting on the children in the family. Social service agencies in the Church reported many significant and distressing incidences of families under enormous psychological stress.¹⁶ Medical doctors reported that many clients reporting to outpatient clinics with physical complaints displayed signs of mental health problems.¹⁷ Different informants reported the need for focused psychosocial services for adolescents, elderly and single men.

Recommendations arising:

1. That an agency experienced in psychosocial work and with knowledge of the region seeks immediate registration in Syria. This agency could take the lead in training, resource and information sharing, mentoring and program modeling.

¹⁵ Ibid, pg.17

¹⁶ Interview with Good Shepherd Sisters, Damascus, 18/2/2008

¹⁷ The medical doctor at Terre des Hommes-Syria estimated that approximately 1/6 of the outpatients he saw suffered from enuresis, depression, anxiety and trauma (P.T.S.D.)

2. That there is wide distribution of the Interagency Standing Committee (IASC) Guidelines on Mental Health and Psychosocial work in Emergencies and that these guidelines inform and shape any psychosocial interventions in Syria.
3. That adolescent and mother friendly spaces be established and, where possible, that these be located near to child friendly spaces to ensure a more holistic response for families.
4. That mental health and psychosocial training efforts be shared and coordinated amongst UN bodies, Government and non-Government agencies.
5. That Community centers direct their activities toward the psychosocial support of the Iraqi refugee population through structured activities, vocational training, information resources and social events.

3. Extremely vulnerable individuals

Only limited numbers of the extremely vulnerable amongst the Iraqi refugee population have been identified. Those identified have access to few resources. Many families are fragile with multiple and profound protection needs.

Many of the Church and UN organizations are providing humanitarian assistance to the registered and unregistered Iraqi refugees. The nature, quantity and quality of this assistance are determined by agencies with their donors. What is not evident is how, when identified, families and individuals with multiple and complex needs, such as the extremely vulnerable, are assisted in a holistic way to have their needs met. Both UNHCR and Church agencies described families and individuals who required significant and on-going financial and material assistance and access to services. These included individuals who have been trafficked or are victims of violence, families and individuals with disabilities or complex medical problems, female headed households and separated and unaccompanied children. UNHCR is currently supporting a Church agency working with some of these extremely vulnerable cases.

Accommodation needs

UNHCR is also supporting the establishment of a safe house for single women and women who head families with children under 13 years of age. Another safe house is being built for children. While this mission recognizes the need for emergency accommodation, there is concern as to how, programmatically, the beneficiaries of such houses will be assisted once they have completed their residence in the safe house. Given the potential need for more accommodation than that currently being built, and the concern not to 'institutionalize' this vulnerable population, alternative accommodation and assistance programs need to be explored as a matter of urgency for the identified caseload and for those not yet identified. Religious orders will play a significant role in the administration of these houses and they will need to be assisted to explore different models of assistance that they may not be fully familiar with.

Additional practical and financial assistance

Religious orders also seem to be responding to the needs of extremely vulnerable individuals on an ad hoc basis using private donors as well as their own resources. While acknowledging that services are reaching many of the vulnerable Iraqis in Syria, this

mission questions whether the flexibility necessary to deal with the extremely vulnerable is indeed present in many of the existing assistance programs.

Recommendations arising:

1. That a separate grant is sought for the needs of extremely vulnerable individuals who have multiple and complex needs. That this grant is administered by an experienced welfare and community oriented non-Government organization or Church agency. That the implementation guidelines for such a grant be flexible, transparent and accountable. That this grant be monitored from beginning to end to assist future initiatives that seek to address the needs of the extremely vulnerable population.
2. That, as a matter of urgency and in partnership with UNHCR Protection and Community Services, UNICEF Child Protection, SARC and experienced Church agencies, there is an exploration of alternative accommodation models for extremely vulnerable individuals. These models could include foster care, supervised accommodation by Iraqi widows, and supervised accommodation for single adolescents.

Over time, with Iraqi's unable to generate their own income, there is concern that more of the Iraqi population will move from being vulnerable to becoming extremely vulnerable.

4. Gender based violence

There are Iraqi women and children partaking in prostitution. Some have been trafficked to Syria and beyond.

Syria appears to be a country of destination for individuals seeking the services of prostitutes and wishing to frequent night clubs. In recent times, with the increased number of Iraqi refugees in Syria, it is thought that a number of Iraqi women and girls have been drawn into prostitution. There are concerns that some of these women and girls have been trafficked beyond Syria. The Churches can be resourceful in addressing this problem but there needs to be considerably more awareness-raising of the issue, its implications and how best to programmatically address this issue. It is important to engage the Syrian Government on this issue as well as appropriate UN agencies such as UNFPA and UNICEF. There is also an urgent need to engage the Iraqi refugee community with awareness-raising and counseling on this area of concern. UNHCR has recently established a Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV) team in Syria.

Recommendations arising:

1. That a lead agency experienced in SGBV works with Church and local organizations to heighten their staff's awareness of the incidence and implications of SGBV amongst the Iraqi refugee population.
2. That this lead agency strengthens the programmatic response of Church and local organizations who are responding to the needs of Iraqi women and children who have been sexually exploited.
3. That this lead agency establishes a community based program with the Iraqi population that supplements the work currently being done by UNHCR, UNICEF and focused Church and local agencies.

4. That this lead agency work closely with the Syrian Government and its organizations so as to support and strengthen the Government's response to the issue of SGBV in Syria.

5. Capacity building of Non-Government Organizations

The capacity of local staff to implement programs, particularly community and humanitarian is limited due to inexperience and insufficient mentoring.

Due to the very small number of Syrian non-Government organizations and the absence of international non-Government organizations, relatively few Syrians have experience working within non-Government organizations in the field of social welfare. This, coupled with the absence of any formal social work school in Syria, has resulted in a situation where the existing Church agencies and local UN staff working in assistance programs for the Iraqi have no previous experience in social work or humanitarian assistance. Existing staff have been given intensive on-the-job training but they have limited knowledge of the multiplicity of ways in which many of the tasks they perform can be addressed.

Mentoring and supervision

In addition to limited exposure, there is a dearth of senior local staff that can provide appropriate supervision and mentoring in humanitarian work. In the fields of case management, community outreach and psychosocial services this absence is very evident. Service providers seem to be dependent on staff that have an unrelated tertiary degree but have possibly volunteered in their community in the past.

International standards

There is next to no knowledge of international instruments of Protection, Sphere standards, IASC Guidelines or international resources on the implementation of humanitarian assistance programs.

Community work and case management

For those working in humanitarian assistance provision many of the staff only know how to fulfill the task that they have been trained in, which is primarily in the area of material assistance and distribution. When they meet different needs they do not have the knowledge or ability to expand their mandate.

Recommendations arising:

1. That a training program in community work be developed in Syria. This program should be linked to one of Syria's recognized training institutes so that participants receive due accreditation for their attendance.
2. That a training program in NGO program management be developed in Syria. This program should be linked to one of Syria's recognized training institutes so that participants receive due accreditation for their attendance.
3. That Church organizations involved in providing community assistance to the Iraqi population be encouraged to provide incentives for staff to undertake training in community services.
4. That UN, Church and non-Government organizations coordinate present training initiatives and open training opportunities to partner agencies

5. That existing Church organizations provide regular in-service training and supervision to their staff on at least a monthly basis
6. That senior management staff and program officers in existing Church organizations be provided with appropriate information and training to equip them in the tasks of developing accountable, sustainable and transparent non-Government organizations.

6. Program Planning and Implementation

There is a need for the programming to move from an emergency response to a planned response of at least 2-3 years.

In July 2007, on account of the numbers of Iraqi refugees arriving in Syria and the then limited capacity of relevant international, UN, Government and local organizations to respond, the situation of the Iraqi refugees was viewed as a crisis requiring an appropriate emergency response. Six months on, the UN has increased capacity and more church and non-Government organizations are responding with practical assistance. International non-Government organizations are planning responses in anticipation of registration. At the same time, while there has been a small number of Iraqis who have returned to Iraq¹⁸, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees has recently stated that UNHCR's global criteria for voluntary return had not been met by the situation in Iraq¹⁹. On this mission, both the Syrian Arab Red Crescent and UNHCR indicated that it is anticipated that the response to the needs of the Iraqi refugee population will be on-going and likely to extend into over at least a two-year response.

Recommendations arising:

1. That programmatic planning for Church and non-Government organizations addressing the needs of the Iraqi population use a planning time frame of a minimum of two-three years. When conditions improve in Iraq many will return, but it is anticipated that a significant number of Iraqi will continue to reside in Syria.

7. Empowerment of the Iraqi Refugee Population

Few initiatives identify the Iraqi population as resourceful and empower and involve the Iraqi refugee population as active decision makers and implementers of services

The Iraqi refugee community does not enjoy the right to work in Syria. There are reports that some of the population, including some refugee children, is working in Iraqi businesses or in the informal sector. What is significant is that there have been very limited opportunities for the Iraqi refugees to actively engage in programs designed to assist the Iraqi population. UNHCR has engaged up to 40 Iraqi refugees as outreach workers.

¹⁸ <http://www.unhcr.org/iraq.html>. Accessed 23rd February, 2008

& UNHCR-Syria Analysis of the Situation of Returns to Iraq, February, 2008

¹⁹ <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/iraq?page=news&id=47b46c3f2>. Accessed 23rd February, 2008

Recommendations arising:

1. That organizations providing assistance to the Iraqi refugees engage, where possible, the Iraqi refugee community in all phases of their programming.
2. That the opportunity to involve Iraqi professionals and artisans in humanitarian assistance programs such as education and health is explored with the Syrian government.

8. Resettlement options for Iraqi refugees

There are insufficient resettlement places for those Iraqi who cannot return to Iraq

On his recent visit to Syria, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees called on countries to make more resettlement places available for the Iraqi refugees.²⁰ In particular, he requested more resettlement places for vulnerable refugees.

In meetings with UNHCR, the mission was informed that UNHCR had identified over 8,000 individuals for resettlement. More than 20% of all cases submitted by UNHCR Jordan and Syria are women at risk²¹. The mission was also informed that there is a lag between the number submitted and the number of departures to resettlement countries, with countries often not meeting their annual quotas. Countries such as the United States, which has the largest number of submission, stated that US requirements and lengthy verification processes were slowing the process and expressed hope that the process would speed up in the future.

As noted earlier, many Iraqi refugees and organizations working with this population have very limited knowledge of UNHCR and the resettlement process. In addition, the present limited access of UNHCR to the Iraqi population has meant that concerns remain whether those cases, whose only durable solution is resettlement, have been identified and assisted to state their claim.

Recommendations arising:

1. That sustained efforts, through information campaigns, are made to inform the Iraqi refugee community and organizations working with this population (including volunteer medical doctors and psychiatrist) of the role of UNHCR and the durable solutions available for refugee populations.
2. That Church organizations and other government and non-Government organizations working with refugees be trained in the basic elements of refugee protection.
 - a. That these trained staff assist their beneficiaries to understand their situation and options for the future and know how to refer beneficiaries to UNHCR for registration and further assistance.
3. That a refugee organization, experienced in the resettlement process, take the lead in assisting organizations and individuals to understand the refugee resettlement process and, where necessary, assist families and individuals who have been identified for resettlement through the process of completion of all resettlement requirements

²⁰ Ibid

²¹ UNHCR Syria Update on Iraqi Refugees, February 2008

9. Visas and Residency Status

Following the recent entry visa requirements, Iraqis, who have stayed longer in Syria, are fearful of being returned to Iraq.

Increasingly, many Iraqi refugees have concerns about their ability to stay in Syria and fear possible return in Iraq. Agencies report that at times even in cases where the health and education criteria for stay are met, Iraqis are just being given a renewable one month extension. Other reports indicate that on occasions Iraqi passports are stamped with an 'exit stamp' requiring them to leave the country within one week. It is thought that this has resulted in some refugees leaving for Iraq of their own volition.²²

Recommendations arising:

1. That consideration is given to providing information services and legal advice to Iraqi refugees on their visa status and related implications.
2. That in collaboration with the Syrian Government there are increased international advocacy encouraging the Syrian Government to fulfill its promise not to forcibly return Iraqi refugees to Iraq.

10. Additional services for Iraqi refugees

Additional services are needed by the Iraqi refugee population in Syria.

This mission, through the interviewing of Church and non government organization staff as well as Iraqi refugees, identified a number of services for the Iraqi refugee that are not yet available or are in limited settings. It is thought that many of these services would enhance the protection of Iraqi refugees in Syria and cater better to their needs. Some of these services may be provided once more organizations become operational, however, as stated by the Mr. Lauren Jolles, UNHCR Representative to Syria, "the more services, the greater the access to the refugee population"²³, as it is expected that Iraqi refugees will be more likely to come forward and register when they see that this will facilitate their access to services. Some of the unmet or inadequately met needs are listed below. The list below is not seen as exhaustive.

- a) Adolescent psychosocial programs
- b) Psychosocial support to families of victims of torture
- c) Adolescent recreational activities
- d) Vocational training for adults and youth
- e) Non Formal education for Iraqi children who are not attending school
- f) Distance learning courses for high school graduates
- g) Awareness-raising and training on gender based violence: trafficking, prostitution and child prostitution
- h) Alternative models of emergency accommodation for extremely vulnerable
- i) Non-food items
 - Simple washing machines

²² Op. cit. UNHCR Analysis of the Situation of Returns to Iraq, February, 2008.

²³ Interview with Senior UNHCR staff in Syria, 18th of February 2008

- Diapers for the elderly and disabled (Presently only being distributed by some Church organizations)
- Assistance with electricity bills and other fuel expenses

11. Iraqi Refugees outside of Damascus

There is a need to expand services to Iraqi refugees living outside of Damascus.

Although the total number of Iraqi refugees in Syria is estimated and not confirmed, it is known that, while the vast majority of them reside in Damascus, a significant number are also living outside of Damascus. These refugees have very limited access to targeted services and assistance and until the UNHCR mobile registration units become fully operational, they frequently need to come to Damascus to register and benefit from services. There is concern that for many of these Iraqi refugees services are inaccessible and their protection needs are unknown.

Recommendations arising:

1. That organizations seeking to assist Iraqi refugees expand their services to locations and sites outside of Damascus.

12. Co-ordination and Information-sharing between organizations

There is limited information sharing between Church and other organizations involved in assistance to Iraqi refugees, UNHCR and other relevant UN organizations.

The Syrian Government has mandated the Syrian Red Crescent Society (SARC) to co-ordinate the humanitarian relief efforts for Iraqi refugees. SARC is working closely with the relevant UN organizations and will also coordinate the efforts of the international non-Government organizations that have been approved to work in Syria. Additional information sharing and coordination efforts involving SARC, UNHCR and Church or other local organizations assisting the Iraqi refugees is needed. There is also limited information and data sharing between the Church organizations currently active in provision of assistance to Iraqis.

Recommendations arising:

1. That a regular mechanism for information sharing between SARC, UNHCR, Church and other local organizations that are providing assistance to Iraqi refugees be established.
2. That Church and other local organizations providing assistance to Iraqis continue to strive to share data and information amongst themselves so that there can be a better and more systematic understanding of the needs of Iraqi refugees. This initiative should take place not only at head senior management level but also at the level of the program managers and program staff.
3. That Church and local organizations are encouraged to design compatible 'intake forms' and data bases, so that information can be shared across organizations to verify who has received assistance and who is still in need.

ORGANIZATIONS AND PEOPLE VISITED AND OTHER ACTIVITIES

External meetings

1. Terre des Hommes-Syria-Director: Dr Ghassan Finianos & Madame Bassima Assasah, Program Officer
2. Sisters of the Good Shepherd-Sr Therese & Sr Marie Claude
3. CRS-Country Director: Mr. Lee Norrgard
4. International Medical Corp (IMC)-Country Director: Mr. Hussien Ibrahim
5. Caritas Syria-Chairperson: Bishop Absi, Executive Director: Madame Solang Abu Hamad & Program Officer: Ms. Rula Shaheen
6. Terre des Hommes-Lausanne-Project Director: Madame Elizabeth
7. Syria Red Crescent Society-Director General: Mr. Marwan Abdallah & Coordinator International Relations: Mr Assem Ali
8. Syrian National Association for Women's Role Development-Board member: Ms Youmn Abou Alhosn
9. Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch & All the East-Director of Ecumenical Relations: Mr Samer Laham & Mr Majd Lahham
10. Medecins Du Monde-Country Representative: Madam Isabelle Bruand
11. Caritas Austria-Delegate: Mr Wolfgang Lindner & Project Coordinator: Ms Therese Farah
12. US Embassy-Charge d'Affaires: Mr Michael Corbin & Political Officer: Russell Comeau
13. UNHCR-Syria: Representative-Mr Laurens Jolles, Deputy Representative, Mr Phillipe Leclerc, Senior Protection Officer : Dietrun Gunter, Protection Officer: Sarah Khan, Associate Resettlement Officer: Rosa Murru, Community Services Officer: Zahra Marghani
14. UNICEF-Child Protection Specialist: Ms Theodora Tsovili & Project officer, Early Childhood Coordination: Ms Leena Rammahm
15. Danish Refugee Council-Country Director: Mr Olivier Beucher & Project Manager: Enza Di Iorio
16. Questscope-Regional Program Coordinator: Mr. Roy Moussalli
17. Ibrahim Al Khalil Monastery, Coordinator: Ms Hayat Chahin
18. Syrian Arab Red Crescent Aleppo branch-Managing Director: Mr Hail Assi,
19. Caritas Aleppo Branch-Managing Director: Bishop Anton Audo & Manager: Fr. Anton Ghazzi
20. Family Law Society-Ms Zobaida H. Jansez

Group Discussions

1. Terre des Hommes Caseworkers (ECHO funded)- Discussion of their EVI work with Iraqis and of training needs (5 persons)
2. Caritas Caseworkers (ECHO & BPRM funded)- Discussion of their EVI work with Iraqis and of training needs (3 persons)
3. Church and other agency Interagency Information sharing meeting, (10 persons)
4. Supervisor and animators of the Terre des Hommes project (5 persons)
5. Family Law Society, Homs, Board of Directors (5 persons)

Iraqi Community Visits

1. Visit to Caritas after school program
2. Four home visits with Terre des Hommes caseworkers in Sayyida Zeinab (x2)
3. Home visits with Caritas Syria caseworkers (x2)
4. Visit to Ibrahim Al Khalil Monastery
5. Interviews with Iraqi refugees at SARC, Aleppo

UNHCR-SARC Visit

1. Iraqi refugee Food Distribution Centre

COMPARISON OF IRAQI REFUGEE SITUATION IN SYRIA AND JORDAN

Julianne Duncan, Ph.D.
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops
Migration and Refugee Services

February 25, 2008

Syria and Jordan are hosting considerable numbers of Iraqis, possibly amounting to as much as 10% of each country's population. Syria, with about 18 million people, has hosted as many as 1.2 million Iraqis. Jordan, with a population of approximately of 6-7 million, has hosted as many as half a million Iraqis. For each country this is a potentially destabilizing influx and each country has reacted with both generosity and with efforts to maintain internal stability within an unstable region.

The Iraqis in each country share many underlying characteristics but are coping within countries with different strategies. This affects the survival strategies of the Iraqis and affects the international response to the crisis and longer term effort.

Iraqi population in Jordan and Syria

Syria hosts a larger number of Iraqis and has been, in general, easier for Iraqis to enter. Thus there is a variety of Iraqi population in Syria with more of the poorer population segments in evidence. In Jordan, Iraqis have a reputation for being the wealthy business and upper classes; however, this reputation is not accurate overall. Many Iraqis in Jordan are in desperate circumstances and have never been among the small group of wealthy and elite.

The perception of the relative needs of the Iraqis in Syria and Jordan has affected the response of the church, NGO's and UN agencies, possibly including the governments of the host countries. Without accurate community surveys, response can only be to perception and immediate presentation of need. The governments, UN and local population have responded as generously as they have been able within their understanding.

In both countries, Iraqis have a profound sense of isolation, which is striking compared to many other refugee situations observed over the years. Their trauma and stress is turned inward with symptoms affecting most adults and children. While UNHCR notes that the majority of Iraqis are fleeing generalized violence and social disorder, most of the families visited have experienced personal traumatic events related directly to them or a specific member of their family. These traumatic experiences continue to affect Iraqi refugees deeply in their adjustment in the countries of first asylum.

Concerns related to safety in the countries of first asylum

In both countries Iraqis, who have entered and remained after the expiration of the allowable period of stay in the country, are experiencing profound concerns and often fear based on their persecution in Iraq by multiple parties. Many fear that such persecution could continue in the country of asylum as well. Due to the lack of clarity regarding their status in the country of asylum, many are fearful of being returned back to Iraq where they would be subject to similar persecutions as the one they have escaped. The concerns of Iraqis can be summarized in the following categories:

From Iraqis

Most of the people interviewed in both countries continued to fear those who persecuted them in Iraq. In some cases they reported actually having seen some of the individuals who were harassing or hurting them or who captured them; in other cases they were convinced that members of the persecuting social group are present. This situation makes Iraqis fearful of each other and leads to the profound isolation of Iraqis, which the mission found present and striking in both countries. Following this isolation, individuals and families are turning their stress inward, with the stress and trauma symptoms emerging among both adults and children. Depression and hopelessness, nightmares, bedwetting and physical stress diseases are widespread among adults and children, even among those who appear to be relatively functional. Stress and depression affect both children's and adults' ability to seek help or effectively absorb the help offered.

The isolation affects as well the ability of the Iraqi community to provide mutual support and the ability of the international agencies and local governments to provide assistance. Creating community empowerment models for services may be difficult in such environment.

From the local population

On an individual level, both Jordanians and Syrians have showed kindness and generosity to individual Iraqis. There are many examples of Iraqis receiving food or other help from their local neighbors or from local mosques or churches. On the other hand, however, many examples of gradually increasing bullying in schools in both countries exist and children report not finding local friends or joining in neighborhood games and play.

Parents have reported of being fearful letting their children leave the home, although many are willing and happy to have their children attend school or, with some reluctance, go out to work. They have widely stated though that they want their children to return home immediately and remain in the house after school or work, citing insecurity.

In Syria, the mission noted a very robust response by Syrians through churches or other institutions with considerable donation of time or money to alleviate the plight of Iraqis in need. This is not absent in Jordan, but has been performed in a somewhat slower pace compared to the quite swift and striking degree of the voluntary response in Syria.

Iraqis appear not to fear individual Syrians or Jordanians, but generally feel that they need to keep a low profile and retreat into isolation at the first hint of bullying or other expression of discomfort from local neighbors.

From deportation

In both countries, Iraqis fear that they will be returned to Iraq against their will and will die if returned. While both governments have instituted and tightened visa requirements, the instances of actual deportations appear rare, although reports have indicated specific situations of deportations of individuals to an uncertain fate leading to the underlying sense of fear. While UNHCR and some local organizations in Jordan have mechanisms in place to assist, they have been unable to act quickly or effectively in some cases, reinforcing the Iraqi sense of a fragile safety in either Jordan or Syria.

Government response

Both the Jordanian and Syrian governments are coping with a considerable and complex population influx with both generosity and the need to maintain the fragile stability they have in their own countries in a volatile region. Thus the governments are balancing their humanitarian impulses toward their neighbor now in trouble with the necessity to keep the volatile Iraqi antagonisms from disturbing the peace in their own countries.

Governments of both Jordan and Syria have turned to the International and local Red Crescent Societies as their primary partner in managing and delivering assistance to Iraqis. However, in both countries, the magnitude of the need has been overwhelming and the Red Crescent societies are struggling to respond to all needs with limited capacity. They were previously staffed to meet their local population needs. Adding several hundred thousand beneficiaries to the roles has been and remains a challenge in each country.

Both countries as well are faced with a high unemployment rates among the local population as well as with a range of social needs of their own vulnerable population. Recent international economic shocks in the cost of fuel and food have affected both countries. Thus, both find it difficult to absorb a guest population of such magnitude and both have concerns about the impact a prolonged or regularized presence of the guests will have on the country's economy and social services.

Government control

Both governments have firm control on crime and violence, including on possible sectarian violence, which affects the local population as well as the guest population; however, Iraqis do not feel protected overall by the government in either country. Small crime is hidden in order for the Iraqis to maintain a low profile; an Iraqi family whose food was regularly stolen did not think the police would be interested and feared reporting the problem.

Needless to say, this fear of government is not only a result of either Jordan's or Syria's actual response, but is an attitude that the Iraqis bring with them. The

governments of both countries are balancing their responsibilities to their guests and to their local populations.

Government generosity

Both governments have also responded with generosity especially during the early stages of the crisis. Both perceived the influx of Iraqis initially as a self-limiting problem which would be resolved as the violence in Iraq would diminish and people would return home. Syria recently received, cared for and saw the return of several hundred thousand Lebanese during a several-months time frame. It appears that most in the region believed that the Iraqi situation would similarly be self-limiting, requiring no particular response on the part of the government other than allowing people to live in their country as guests. This hospitality was generously offered by both countries. Both have Iraqis who entered during earlier Iraqi disruptions in the 90's and their approach worked well for those Iraqis; the need to plan for a longer term influx of deeply distressed Iraqis was not obvious to either government or to international players either.

As the situation in Iraq has continued to deteriorate the need to provide humanitarian assistance and the necessity to look for longer term care and durable solutions has begun to become clear. Jordan has been generally receptive to the influx of international NGO's and has a fairly robust local quasi-governmental sector, which is activating to provide assistance. While initially the authorities were less receptive to UNHCR, they are beginning to work more effectively with the UN and international agencies now. The authorities have been receptive to the assistance and presence of U.S. funded agencies, although the pro-active coordination role still requires efforts.

Syria has had a good relationship with the UN agencies, including UNHCR, but has been slower to develop any comfort level with International NGOs. Nevertheless, the private sector in Syria, largely religious based, has responded generously and with competence. Therefore, in Syria too, coordination and communication have been difficult and still require efforts.

Thus, the three part alliance needed for effective assistance to local government for crisis response and longer term planning is hampered in both countries but with different parts missing or less developed:

- In Jordan the UNHCR and other aspects of the UN system are recently expanded and have not been able to be as effective as needed in coordination and planning; the INGO sector is welcomed and beginning to work, but is coordinating with relatively few local partners and with the religious local sector somewhat less involved.
- In Syria the local sector, especially the churches, have been involved and effective within their humanitarian mandate; local and International NGO's have been limited or absent and are still largely unable to act while negotiating with the government the parameters of cooperation, while the UNHCR and other UN agencies have a stronger more effective presence.

In both countries the need for stronger response has been recognized by both the governments and by local and international partners and agencies. In each country the barriers to a smooth and effective response remain but are being recognized and addressed.

In both countries, however, the thinking and response has remained fairly crisis oriented with less thought given to the likelihood that Iraqis will continue to need assistance and safety in each country for possibly two or three years. Developing mechanisms which will be immediately helpful but also sustainable for the next few years requires a different type of thinking than is immediately apparent in either country.

Role of religious institutions

Both countries are Moslem countries but which offer freedom of religion as a strong principle. In both there is a robust Christian sector which interacts with the governments and is deeply embedded in the culture of the country. In each country the mission has seen instances of the mosques or churches extending themselves to offer humanitarian help to those in need.

Jordan

Jordan is largely Sunni and has been reluctant to offer the Iraqi Shia population opportunity for public expression of their religion. Similarly the Sabeen religious minority is not able to celebrate their holy days in any public setting. It is widely thought this is in effort to control the possible spread of sectarian violence which they fear that Iraqis may import to Jordan. Christians, as a religion previously present in Jordan, are able to worship and organize as they wish.

Churches and other religious institutions have been somewhat responsive in Jordan with some very notable examples of humanitarian care, but wider awareness of the need among religious bodies has been slow. It is considered that the frequently stated belief that the Iraqis are all wealthy and not in need of assistance has inhibited the churches' efforts to notice and respond broadly to the need. Islamic charities and individual mosques similarly seem to be responding to individual need, as it is perceived, but have not thought there was a wider, more systematic response needed until recently.

The religious sector and the local and international NGO sector may begin usefully to work together with the government and UN system, but this is yet to be fully developed.

Syria

In Syria the majority of the population is Moslem but with a greater mixture of Shia and Sunni. Christians have a strong presence with both Catholic and Orthodox congregations present in strength. There is a smaller evangelical or Nazarene presence as well among the Christians. The government has a strong respect for religion, but is less comfortable with secular or non-religious persons or institutions. This may affect as well the government level of comfort with International NGOs seeking to assist in humanitarian work in Syria.

It appears that the Christian sector has a strong role in Syrian society in organizing humanitarian response in general and therefore to needy Iraqis. The Orthodox and Catholic churches and hierarchy, religious orders and other institutions have a

presence in Syria and are well known for distributing aid, medical care and other response for all Syrians in need regardless of religion. Voluntarism in the church and for humanitarian activities is actively promoted for all from children to adults. As the needy Iraqis began to appear in some locations, the church response, already present in the location began to minister to the need. In some cases the beneficiaries have become largely Iraqi through no deliberate decision but because they were people in need.

As the government, through Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC), the United Nations and donor governments have become active, they are frequently turning to the local religious groups as partners in assistance, but there is not necessarily a fit in approach. INGOs, governments and the UN have regulations and methods of identifying beneficiaries and accounting for budgets and results. Religious institutions similarly have a mandate to identify the needy and care for them with honor and good stewardship. Nevertheless, these systems do not always mesh with ease.

The religious sector has provided a sustained, life saving response to Iraqis. The absence of the International NGO sector to assist this response to become more systematic is a barrier to wider effectiveness. The UN and governments, both local and international, recognize and hope to assist with this wider response but similarly are hampered by the intermediary INGO role in administration and management of the wider response and fit.

While the religious response is robust in Syria, the ability to usefully work with the government and UN system remains to be fully developed.

NEEDS OF IRAQI REFUGEES LIVING OUTSIDE OF DAMASCUS

Analysis based on three day visit to Homs and Aleppo February 27-29, 2008

Julianne Duncan, Ph.D.
February 29, 2008

Iraqis are living in various places in Syria with most believed to be living in Damascus and surrounding suburbs. However, less is known about the Iraqis living farther away from the capitol.

Several locations have been mentioned as having notable Iraqi populations with concern raised by UNHCR, donors and some service providers that those populations have less access to even the limited help available in Damascus. SARC's *Rapid Emergency Needs Assessment* of March, 2007 states that more than 30% of the Iraqi population was located outside of the Damascus area with 23% in the Aleppo area.

Three locations have been identified most frequently as areas with significant Iraqi populations:

- Homs, a small city about a 2 hour drive N of Damascus
- Aleppo, a large city near the Turkish border
- Hassaque, near the Iraqi border.

In order to explore the situation of Iraqis outside of Damascus, a visit to Aleppo and Homs was arranged. Time and distance precluded a visit to Hassaque.

The protection need and gaps in services identified by the mission in Damascus are generally similar to those of the Iraqi populations in the two cities visited but with some notable exceptions.

Iraqi population

Homs

The Iraqis in Homs appear to reflect the demographic categories of the Iraqi population with a mix of wealthy and poor and a mix of Moslem and Christian. It is unclear whether there are non-Christian religious minorities in the area. As is the case with the country as a whole, the number of Iraqis is not accurately known. One agency, which has been providing volunteer help for the population has done a survey of 400 families or approximately 5,000 individuals in Homs itself. They have not been able to survey the suburbs and believe there are more in Homs too. The port city of Tartous is near Homs and several people have mentioned that there are Iraqis living there who are in need. The organizations in Homs are entirely volunteer operations and have not been able to survey that area but believe there are quite a few Iraqis in Tartous.

Aleppo

In Aleppo too the population is mixed in wealth and poverty as well as in the mix of Christian and Moslem. There is a fairly large population of Armenian Iraqis in Aleppo, possibly reflecting their comfort with the fairly notable population of Armenian Syrians in that area. Some have estimated that there is a larger percentage of Christians in Aleppo but still with the majority of Iraqis as Moslems. There are at least a few Sabians in Aleppo but it is unclear if there are many non-Christian religious minorities in the area.

Services available or planned

Syrian Arab Red Crescent

This agency, as noted earlier, has been designated by the government as the coordinator and first responder to the Iraqi refugee needs. In both Homs and Aleppo they are beginning to distribute food to those registered by UNHCR and non-food items (NFI) for both UNHCR-registered and the larger number of families registered by SARC itself. SARC also provides medical care for Iraqis expecting the family to cover 20% of the cost. They have a specialty children's clinic which they hope to expand. SARC has 20,000 registered beneficiaries in Aleppo and estimates that UNHCR may have about 8,000.

In Homs the mission was not able to meet the SARC representative. They are active in distributing food but again only to those who have registered with UNHCR. NFIs are more widely available and medical care is provided to those registered with SARC.

UNHCR

A UNHCR mobile registration team will begin work in Aleppo on March 15 and hopes to have most of the Aleppo population registered within two months. UNHCR will open an office in Aleppo soon but not for registration. Their food distribution will take place through SARC and they have not contracted with any NGOs in that area although they have expressed interest in having both international and local NGO partners in the area.

UNHCR distributes food to registered Iraqis in Homs through SARC. It appears to have been distributed one time so far. Registration is a difficult problem for Iraqis in Homs since they have to go to Damascus to get an appointment then return to Damascus on the day of the appointment. UNHCR has expressed interest in NGO partnerships in Homs as well.

Church response

In Aleppo, Caritas is active in providing help to Iraqis using funds supplied by various donors as well as donated church funds. Individuals can donate to Caritas and they will use those funds for the services which cannot be provided with donor money. They provide food, non-food-items, education assistance and medical care to the extent they are able. They serve beneficiaries of a variety of backgrounds with a small staff in an office located at the Chaldean church. Beneficiaries can stop by at any time for assistance; there is a registration process for those who receive help.

The Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch with funding from donors provides distributions of various NFIs including school kits (similar to those distributed in Damascus) in both Homs and in Aleppo.

Caritas reports that the churches in Aleppo work together through the Middle East Council of Churches to help Iraqis with education and medical care. If one of the churches received a request that they cannot fund, they request assistance from the other churches.

Individual churches and mosques assist individuals who are part of their congregation or who come to them for help. Additionally, individuals and families assist Iraqis who come to their attention or donate to the churches or mosques to offer assistance to those in need.

Protection needs and gaps:

Outreach

Outreach is cited by all organizations in both cities and the need for outreach is reflected in the home visits and interviews conducted with Iraqi families and individuals. Refugees do not know where or how to get help from SARC or UNHCR; even when they know help is available the process of qualifying is burdensome and is virtually impossible for those whose minds have been disturbed by their personal traumatic experiences. This is clearly the case in Damascus as well but the added burden of distance and expense makes it seem likely that the families most in need may be unable to navigate the process for getting help.

Basic outreach methods such as flyers and posters which are beginning to be used in Damascus need to be distributed outside of Damascus as well. Outreach teams which canvass different neighborhoods or outreach through schools are both thought by those in Homs and Aleppo to be possibly useful strategies. Those met in both areas came back again and again to this point and are very concerned that those most in need are being overlooked.

Registration and identification of protection needs, resettlement, and access to services are all limited for the populations in these areas because of their lack of knowledge and inability to manage the process even if they become aware of services available.

Basic needs

In Damascus, basic needs are increasingly being met through a combination of UNHCR and SARC distributions as well as considerable effort through the religious and voluntary sector. This appears not to be the case in Homs and Aleppo even though distributions are beginning via SARC.

While both the SARC and voluntary sector are in operation, coordination is lacking, outreach is limited and the condition that beneficiaries must be registered with UNHCR for some services makes both these areas in need of much improvement in the area of assistance for basic needs.

Mental Health and Psychosocial Services

These services are not available at all in either of these two areas although the need is recognized and is likely to be as great as for those refugees in Damascus.

One organization provides support services for troubled children in Damascus and received a request from 5 families in Homs for their services. The impracticality of the families bringing the child to Damascus 2 times a week for psychological services makes it impossible for this organization to meet those families' needs but the families are worried enough that they traveled to request the services.

In one home visit, the mission recognized the same symptoms seen widely in Damascus in which one or both adults of the family were torture victims and unable to handle the complexities of managing their family life much less the difficulties of registration and other means of getting help. The adults and children in those families are seriously in need of help both to resolve their trauma, to the extent possible and to alleviate the social problems which arise from the difficulty the family has in basic functioning.

The Caritas director in Aleppo was eloquent in his analysis of the psychosocial and mental health needs of young children, teens and youth and adults. Children are living with insecurity and have the scars of their difficult family situation. They are anxious, experience some difficulty learning and are unable to play. Teens and youth are at the stage of life when they should be completing their education and preparing to contribute to their families and society. However, they are prevented from these life roles and become depressed, some severely. The adults are insecure in their status, are unable to provide for their families and are baffled by the processes they must go through to get help. Many exhibit severe anxiety and depression. Additionally, the severe symptoms of those who were tortured are similar to the torture survivors in Damascus.

While the need is widespread, there seems to be very little capacity to meet the needs for either psychosocial or mental health help in either Homs or Aleppo. The Syrian population is remarkably kind and generous, as also noted in Damascus, but also similar to Damascus, there is little training in social work, counseling or psychology.

Extremely Vulnerable Individuals

Torture victims, single parents and women without families and children in fragile situations were identified by several respondents as extremely vulnerable. Medical problems are widespread and severe leaving the individual and family quite vulnerable especially when combined with other vulnerabilities. The Caritas director estimated that EVIs might be about 20% of his caseload. The help they need goes beyond "items."

Working children or children kept home from school to watch over small children seem widespread in both areas and service providers are concerned about the individuals as well as the long-term implications for Iraqis. As in Damascus, it takes several workers to support a family and teens are sometimes able to get work when adults cannot.

Children and teens who are either torture/kidnapping victims themselves or are the children of torture victims appear to be a category of EVI not specifically identified within the broader torture victim category.

The mission did not hear about single elderly as a noted population in either location.

Gender based violence

The mission did not hear about sexual and gender based violence on this visit. There are no Iraqi girls in the juvenile facilities in either Homs or Aleppo and no one spoke of the worries about prostitution or other SGBV which were heard of in Damascus.

Capacity of Non-Government Organizations

There are few local NGOs registered in either area who work with Iraqis. In Homs, two local NGOs are providing some assistance entirely through the efforts of volunteers. They would like some help from an organization with more experience who might be able to provide a coordinating role.

Aleppo is a larger city and the churches and religious organizations appear to be more active. They feel a lack of coordination and feel stretched in their efforts to help. SARC mentioned the lack of NGO partners to help carry the load.

In both areas there is a need to provide training and administrative help so that the generosity of the voluntary sector can become more effective in the face of a large needy population.

Program Planning and implementation

These two cities are not yet at the stage of planning a response although SARC and others mentioned the need for a longer term time frame and plan. Currently, they are scrambling to meet the immediate emergency need and trying to get food and medical care to people. There is a clear need for strategic planning and assistance for the government, UN agencies, the churches and the NGO sectors.

Empowerment of the Iraqi Refugee Population

The mission did not observe the same fear of each other among the Iraqis interviewed in Homs and Aleppo which is such a powerful force among Iraqis in Damascus. On such a short visit the mission may have missed some aspects of this type of concern but it may well be that the wide range of Iraqi players are less present in Homs and Aleppo thus allowing the refugees a greater sense of safety.

If that is the case, there may be more scope for Iraqis to begin to organize to provide mutual support. However, other than some of the Christian groups, this is not evident so far. The frequently-mentioned desire to keep a low profile in order not to be noticed and deported may also make it difficult for mutual assistance organizations to form.

Resettlement

Virtually everyone the mission spoke to, organization and individual, requested help with arranging for resettlement for Iraqis. Many of the refugees do not expect to find a place for themselves in Iraq even if peace may be achieved. This is strongly so for the Christians and other religious minorities who are a large portion of the population in Aleppo especially.

It is reported that the Moslems would prefer to wait in Syria until able to return but the conditions of existence are such that they are desperate for a safe place to wait where they can support themselves and their families. They do not imagine that the conditions in Iraq will improve for a long time. Since the conditions in Mosul had deteriorated while the mission was in Syria and many of the Iraqis in Aleppo are from the north, they were more discouraged than ever about the possibility to return home. Thus they long for resettlement as well.

A few Iraqis reportedly would like to remain in Syria if an opportunity is opened. Some of the wealthier Iraqis are in a position to maintain themselves for the foreseeable future and expect to do so or possibly settle in Syria if an opportunity is open.

Visa and Status

The recent introduction of entry visa requirements and the lack of clarity on status is a source of deep anxiety for most Iraqis in the two cities, regardless of the income level. Wealthier Iraqis are equally troubled by lack of clarity on status and the introduction of visa as poorer refugees and fear that they may be deported at any time. It is relatively new for Iraqis to need visas and visas are typically granted for 2 months at a time adding to the bureaucracy that Iraqis must navigate.

While the visa requirement is a great cause of anxiety for the Iraqis, the local church organizations or SARC do not believe that Syria will actually deport anyone unless they are criminals.

The anxiety over visas and the lack of clarity on their status, however, causes Iraqis to try to remain in hiding so that they avoid coming into conflict, as they assume they will always be blamed for anything even if it is not their fault.

Additional services for Iraqi Refugees

Other than the needs and gaps mentioned above, the mission heard several pleas for assistance for Iraqi students to attend university or in some other way continue further their education.

Iraqis may attend the local universities, however the lack of resources makes it impossible for most to actually reach the goal. Youth who complete their secondary education can do nothing and are depressed and inward turning, feeling that they are unable to carry out their proper life course. Whether they resettle or return to Iraq, they are losing years of education which will prevent them from contributing in the future as they would like to do.

Recommendations arising:

1. Improve the capacity of the organizations and volunteers in the two cities to do longer-term planning and provide more complex services but also to assist in delivering basic services.
2. Plan an outreach campaign to identify and assist those who are unaware of services as well as provide extra assistance for those Extremely Vulnerable Individuals including torture victims and their families.
3. Provide Psychosocial and Mental Health services for traumatized individuals specifically including support for the family and assistance in navigating the ‘assistance bureaucracy’ as well as the various administrative requirements related to their stay in Syria.
4. Recognize the extra burden imposed by the distance from Damascus for those trying to navigate the ‘assistance bureaucracy.’
5. Provide assistance to organizations and individuals who are trying to access the durable solution of resettlement.
6. In cooperation with the government, explore possibilities whether Syrian visas of longer than 2 months may be granted in order to assist families with their own planning and sense of security.
7. Investigate education options for those who complete secondary school or whose university education was interrupted. If local university arrangements can be made, this may be ideal but distance learning via the internet should be considered.

BACKGROUND ON CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS IN FRAGILE SITUATIONS AND SERVICE GAPS

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United States Conference of Catholic Bishops
Migration and Refugee Services

February 25, 2008

The ICMC/USCCB Syrian mission has found protection gaps and needs among Iraqi refugees in Syria to be widespread, affecting most segments of the refugee population. Men, women, adolescents, elderly - all have profound needs and service gaps. Unlike the earlier Jordan mission, however, this mission found most of the religious organizations and the UN agencies in Syria to be very aware of the special needs of the population of unaccompanied, separated, disabled children and children in fragile family situations. In most interviews with UN agencies, they raised concerns about children and adolescents. Religious orders and agencies raised concerns as well about the needs of these children and concerns about gaps in care and planning for them.

In visits with families the mission found that even the families who are managing moderately well, exhibit trauma symptoms from their experiences prior to leaving Iraq and their stress is turned inward to the family. Thus, one can see children with anxiety, nightmares, and bed-wetting even in the better functioning families. Interestingly, anti-social expressions of stress and trauma are not observed and no agency reports anti-social behaviors among children.

Therefore, while the general report includes the protection needs of children in fragile situations within the overall discussion, it was considered useful to identify information from interviews specifically discussing the protection gaps and service needs of children in fragile situations in this separate appendix. As the emergency needs for basic food, shelter and medical care begin to be addressed, the system in Syria may soon be adequately robust to begin addressing the psychosocial needs of fragile children more systematically.

Categories of fragile-child needs

UNHCR has identified 5,017 children and adolescents at risk among the registered population; this is about 4.1% of the registered population in February, 2008.

Everyone the mission spoke to identifies getting access to the resettlement system for the fragile children with or without families as a major concern. The process is slow, cumbersome and poorly understood. Single parents and elderly caretakers are sometimes overwhelmed and cannot manage the process for accessing such services as resettlement.

However, within this overall concern child, and adolescent issues can be grouped into several categories of needs while the children and families may experience several of the identified problems.

Unaccompanied and Separated Children (UASC)

- Unaccompanied children may be as much as 1% of the registered population according to the UNHCR Senior Protection Officer; these children are of many nationalities and some may have mothers in-country who are detained. UNHCR has registered 60 unaccompanied or separated children as of February, 2008.
- Iraqi children are more likely to be Separated Children living with relatives; some of these are in fragile situations in which the caregiver is elderly or stressed and needs extra support to maintain family unity. UNHCR Protection and Community services and UNICEF expressed concern about these children.
- Sisters of the Good Shepherd have assisted and continue to care for unaccompanied children and children with single parents or grandparents who need considerable assistance. The head of the order was able to discuss several cases of children in their care at the present time and requested help in accessing resettlement services.
- Sisters of the Sacred Heart are developing a shelter for unaccompanied children with assistance from the SGS and with funding from UNHCR. This will be housed in a converted school building.
- UNHCR Community Services has arranged foster care for a few unaccompanied children but would like to provide follow up and more support to the children and families and would like to provide more such care.

Custody issues for children in need of a durable solution

- UNHCR has established a Best Interest Determination (BID) process but it is only slowly getting operational and few cases have been presented or reviewed.
- The resettlement process is cumbersome and getting the fragile child cases to and through the process is difficult.
- UNHCR and UNICEF have identified legal custody issues as a huge issue for children who are without parents (either unaccompanied or separated) or who are with a single parent.
- Custody issues prevent UNHCR from identifying and offering resettlement as a durable solution. It is unclear who gives permission for a child to resettle with a caregiver or to be referred for resettlement alone as Syrian law is not clear enough on this point.
- Children held in the juvenile detention facility are sometimes released to those who originally subjected them to SGBV or other abuse.
- Some children in the detention center have no one to be released to and therefore languish there unnecessarily for lack of custodian.

Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV)

- Reports indicated that adolescent girls are involved in the sex trade or are victims of sexual and gender based violence (SGBV). According to a UNICEF Occasional Paper, *Iraqi Adolescent Girls: Voices to be Heard*, (Gimon, March, 2007) some are detained in the government juvenile system but the mechanisms for protection or after-care are not adequate. Both UNHCR and UNICEF have raised this as a major concern.

- UNHCR states that the majority of the girls held in the juvenile facility are victims of SGBV including rape and forced prostitution.
- UNHCR has formed an SGBV team which will try to address such issues with adolescents and adults but currently have no NGO partners to work with.
- UNICEF is concerned about adolescent girls who are or may become victims of the sex trade or other SGBV. They would like to see a care system which provides an exit strategy for children in a shelter or in the juvenile institution.
- The teen daughter of one of the families visited had been kidnapped while the family was visiting relatives in the vicinity of the nightclubs where prostitution is believed to occur. The mother fears that her daughter is now in the sex trade.

Single parents or single and elderly caregivers

- SARC identified 13% of the Iraqi population as female-headed households in their March, 2007 assessment.
- The Sisters of the Good Shepherd have assisted several extremely vulnerable families with single parents or ill or elderly caregivers.
- UNHCR has identified single parents and women-at-risk (many of whom are also parents) as persons of concern. 2,900 women at risk and 278 single parents with special needs have been identified as of February, 2008. This comprises 2.6% of the registered population.
- Caritas in Aleppo identifies about 10% of their caseload as single female-headed households.
- Single female Principle Applicants comprise 22.9% of the Iraqis currently registered with UNHCR.

Children with disabilities

- Disabled persons, adults and children, number 2,609 or 2.2% of the registered population, as of early February, 2008.
- SARC's March, 2007 Assessment identified 5.3% of the Iraqi population as disabled.
- The UNHCR IPSOS survey conducted between October 31, 2007 and November 25, 2007 identified 4% of the individuals as disabled.
- UNHCR Community Services officer is very concerned about disabled children who are receiving few services of any kind and need a full range of services such as prostheses, medical intervention, special education and family support.
- In visiting families the mission observed several disabled children who were receiving no or limited services and whose families were overwhelmed by their needs. The EVI services offered via both Caritas and Terre Des Hommes-Syria were inadequate to some of the families' and children's needs leading to frustration on the part of families and providers.
- Terre Des Hommes-Syria is a provider of services to disabled Syrians and preparing to offer services to disabled Iraqis with funding from UNHCR.
- Terre Des Hommes-Syria with external donor's technical assistance offers specialized support groups for children with identified behavioral problems which may include children with disabilities. They typically do not see anti-social behaviors such as fighting or disruptive behavior but more internally focused stress reactions such as anxiety, bedwetting and related reactions.

They are able to serve only about 100 children. They have recently received a request for service to 5 children in Homs.

- Catholic volunteer groups provide social support to families of disabled Syrians and are interested in extending their service to others.

Children out of school or working

- UNHCR IPSOS survey finds that 10% of school age children are working
- UNICEF is concerned about services to working children; they do not believe they are adequately reaching such children and do not yet have any partners for this effort.
- In family visits, the mission found 20% of the thirteen families visited who had at least one child work to support the family. Additionally, 10% of families kept children, especially girls, at home to allow the mother to work or to assist with younger children.
- In one family, a child was a torture victim who is too fearful to leave the house, thus did not attend school or receive any other services.

Lack of shelter

- Religious communities and agencies reported that families with a single parent or single elderly caregiver, such as a grandparent, are frequently unable to pay rent thus increasing the family instability.
- Unaccompanied children, including those unaccompanied temporarily because their mothers are in detention, have no one to provide them a home.
- Girls who have been “suspected of prostitution” sometimes languish in the juvenile detention center because UNHCR and UNICEF have no one who can provide them a place to live.
- UNHCR and UNICEF are trying to fund shelters for single women and unaccompanied children as noted above.
- The UNHCR Senior Protection Officer said they sometimes have to ask the Juvenile Institution to keep Iraqi or other refugee girls in their system after age 18 because UNHCR has no other place to take them.

Annex E– Directory of Services for Iraqis in Syria
DAMASCUS

Organization	Description of Services	Type	Contact Details
Terre des Hommes-Syria Bab Touma	Inpatient and out patient support Supplementary education programs for school attendees Non-Food items	Non-Government Agency	Dr. Ghassan Finianos Director 0933787574
Sisters of the Good Shepherd Bab Touma	Shelter for women who are victims of violence Drop in center	Non-Government Agency	Sr Therese 0932466210
Oasis (Sisters of Good Shepherd)	Psychosocial and legal advice for women who are victims of violence	Local Church Organisation	Sr Marie Claude +963 11 5424886
Caritas Syria Jaramanah	Inpatient and out patient support Supplementary education programs for school attendees Non-Food items	Non-Government Agency	Bishop Absi Chair 0933843729 Madam Solange Abu Hamad (Executive Director) 0988045279
Terre des Hommes-Lausanne Bab Touma	-Psychological and social support -Psychiatric medication -Referral for Psychotherapy -Food parcels -Psychosocial group sessions for children	Non-Government Agency	Madam Elizabeth Project Coordinator 0991887058
Syrian Red Crescent Society Douma	-Registration and Coordination of international non-government organizations -Health and medical clinics -Food distribution with UNHCR	Semi Government Organization	Mr Marwan Abdallah (Director General)

Organization	Description of Services	Type	Contact Details
Syrian National Association for Women's Role Development	-Work in conjunction with the Syrian Ministry of Social affairs at the Women's Juvenile Justice Centre -Building a Shelter for Women who are Victims of Violence	Local non-Government Organization	Youmn Abou Alhosn (Board Member) +963 11 543793
ICMC Jaramanah	-assistance to Caritas -assistance to Terre des Hommes-Syria EVI project	International Organization	Mr Osama Al Mohammad 0966030858
Catholic Relief Services	-assistance to Caritas -assistance to St. Vincent de Paul Society	International Organization	Mr Lee Norrgard 0955385991
Caritas Austria	Opening in April 2008 accommodation for single women and single women with children under 12 years of age	International Church Organization	Ms Therese Farah, Project Coordinator 0955181042
Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch & All The East in cooperation with International Orthodox Christian Charities Bab Touma	-food parcels -assistance with school items -non-food items -Summer school -Vocational training for under 26 y.o. -Education for children not attending school	International Church Organization	Mr Samer Laham, Director of Ecumenical Relations, Development and Fund Raising Program +963 11 54498720 +963 11 5424400
UNHCR	-Registration -Food assistance -Cash assistance for women heads of household -School supply kits -Supporting health clinics -Rehabilitation of schools -Building 'safe houses' for women and children -Resettlement	International Inter-governmental Agency	Mr. Laurens Jolles Representative +963 11 2139961

Organization	Description of Services	Type	Contact Details
UNICEF	<p>UNICEF/SARC project:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - psychological/ psychiatric support and speech therapy as well as home visits provided by three multidisciplinary units in three SARC clinics - 4 child friendly spaces with an identification and referral mechanism in place for the most vulnerable cases - a psychosocial programming unit in SARC HQs <p>UNICEF/Caritas project:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Empowerment of adolescent girls: vocational training, language classes, auxiliary classes, SGBV/empowerment sessions, life skills' training <p>UNICEF/TDH project:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Psychosocial support to the most vulnerable Iraqi children and their families <p>UNICEF/Palestinian Red Cross project:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Psychosocial support to the Palestinian Refugees coming from Iraq in the Al Tanf camp (adolescents' activities, women's activities, training, Child Friendly space, support by a social worker and a psychologist on a weekly basis) 	International Inter-governmental Agency	Theodora D. Tsovili 6122592-4, x 127
Ibrahim Al Khalil Convent Jaramanah, Kachkoul	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Hot food distribution -Food distribution -Clinic 	Local Church Organisation	Ms Hayat Chahin +963 11 5617970

Services outside of Damascus

HOMS

Organization	Description of Services	Type	Contact Details
Syrian Arab Red Crescent	- Distributes food to UNHCR registered Iraqis - Provides Medical care and non-food items to both HCR-registered and others in Homs area		
Child Protection Community	-Child rights -Family education -Media campaigns	Local non Government Organization	+963 31 235429
Family Law Society	-Legal advice -Child protection -Social activities -Monthly seminars	Local non Government Organization	+963 93 736068 Zobaida H. Jansez

ALLEPO

Organization	Description of Services	Type	Contact Details
SARC	- Distributes food to Iraqis registered with UNHCR - Provides non-food items and medical care to both registered and unregistered in Aleppo		Mr. Hail Assi, Managing Director info@SARC-Aleppo.org
Caritas	- Provides food, medical assistance, financial assistance, educational assistance to Iraqis	Non-Government Agency	Bishop Anton Audo is president of Caritas Tel: 021-4441-660 Father Anton Ghazzi is the Executive Director

Organization	Description of Services	Type	Contact Details
Catholic Relief Services (CRS)	- Provides NFI and medical assistance to Iraqis through an agreement with Caritas, Aleppo. - Also technical assistance and capacity building to the local staff	International NGO	
Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and Intenrational Orthodox Christian Charities	Provide NFIs including school kits using IOCC funding.		
Middle East Council of Churches	Provides educational assistance to Iraqi children in Aleppo. Also through its church members provides medical assistance to Iraqis in need.		

International Non-Government Organizations approved by the Syrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs but not yet registered or operational

Organization	Description of Services	Type	Contact Details
Premiere Urgenec, France			
Save the Children UK			
Islamic Relief UK			
Inter SOS Italy			

Organization	Description of Services	Type	Contact Details
International Medical Corp USA	(registered, February 2008)		
Danish Refugee Council			
Medecins Du Monde Greece and France			
Norwegian Refugee Council			
IECD-ICU			
International Blue Crescent			
Ricerca e Cooperzaione Italy			
JEN Japan			
Mercy Malaysia			