

**Update 4**  
**Iraqi Refugee Returns/Syrian Refugees**  
**Syria Situation**  
 24 July 2012

**1. Overview:**

All Iraqi border points are reported to be open today. Iraqis are flocking in their hundreds mainly into Al-Waleed and Al-Qa'im border points, fleeing the deadly violence in Syria. There have also been recent reports of hundreds of Syrians entering through Al-Qa'im border crossing. UNHCR today received an official letter from the Permanent Committee for Refugees of the Ministry of Interior (MoI-PC) for the establishment of camps for Syrian refugees.

The movement of buses carrying Iraqi passengers from Syria seems to be well controlled, with Iraqi security forces escorting the convoys from the point of entering the border all the way to Baghdad.

It has been reported that thousands of Iraqi families are still stuck in Syria unable to board flights or buses because of the huge numbers desperately waiting to return. High transportation fees is yet another reason, with some travel agencies charging over 50-100 USD per person for buses from Sayyida Zainab to Iraqi border and 2,500-3,000 USD for GMC cars and taxis.

**2. Meetings:**

UNHCR had a meeting today, 24 July, with the Directors-General of MoDM Migration and Branches Departments. Both sides agreed on the modality of sharing information on the new arrivals and obtaining lists of those registered with MoDM. They also discussed the modality of NFI distribution to those in need.

UNHCR expressed readiness to consider providing cash assistance to returnees who are left with no means, without discussing the details.

MoDM is to send letters instructing all branch offices in Baghdad and the governorates to cooperate with UNHCR teams and provide them with all the information requested

**3. Return Statistics**

<b>Crossing point</b>	<b>Number of returnees</b>
<b>Al-Waleed</b>	
18.07.2012	1250
19.07.2012	3800
20.07.2012	857
21.07.2012	1135
22.07.2012	613
24.07.2012	866
<b>Rabyaa</b>	0
19.07.2012	290
20.07.2012	165
21.07.2012	95
23.07.2012	
<b>Al-Qaim</b>	
24.07.2012	250
<b>Total</b>	<b>9,321</b>
<b>By air</b>	Around 2000

As at 24 July 2012, the total number of returnees is **11,321**.

#### **4. Arrival of Iraqi returnees**

Four buses arrived in Baghdad today, 24 July, each with 33 passengers on board (one bus came from Aleppo and the three others from Damascus). The final destination of the majority of Iraqi passengers has been Baghdad, according to reports from UNHCR teams at the disembarkation point. Few returnees are reported to be going back to their places of origin in the governorates. UNHCR team was informed that sixteen more buses were on the way from Syria.

#### **5. UNHCR Arrangements**

Baghdad:

One family that arrived from Syria two days ago approached UNHCR Return, Integration and Community Centre (RICC)-2 today for registration and assistance. Four other families headed for RICC-5, guided by UNHCR leaflet received at the border.

Diyala:

UNHCR team visited MODM Diyala Branch Office and Return Assistance Centre (RAC). Thirteen families have been registered with MODM.

Over the past five days, 735 individuals returned by road from Syria, mostly heading for Baqubah and Muqdadiya districts.

UNHCR field team visit Diyala Operation Command today and was informed that more than 1,500 Individuals returned from Syria to Diyala within the last 2 weeks.

UNHCR staff reported intensive security measures mainly at the main entrances to the province to check all the arrivals, especially those from Syria, for fear of some terrorists group that fled Diyala and lived in Syria.

Karbala:

One refugee family approached the Branch Office to register with MoDM. UNHCR staff met with the family to offer the necessary advice and assistance.

More returnees are expected to have arrived in the province, though not yet registered.

Najaf:

Three families of 21 individuals today requested to register as returnees with MoDM Branch office.

Five more families (28 individuals) were reported to have arrived from Syria on 22 and 23 July.

UNHCR has been informed by MoDM Branch Office in Najaf that all branch offices in the governorates have been instructed to deal with the Iraqi returnees from Syria on an equal footing with other returnees.

Babylon:

UNHCR Hilla team met with MoDM Branch Office Director and staff to discuss registration of Iraqi returnees from Syria. The team was informed that no returnees from Syria were registered up to this date.

Wassit:

MoDM Branch Office requested an official MoDM letter in order to provide UNHCR with the requested return figures on a daily basis.

Basra:

UNHCR team reported the arrival of 160 Individuals originating from Basra at the disembarkation point in Baghdad. They will proceed to their home towns in the south.

#### **6. Returnee Needs**

According to a rapid assessment conducted by UNHCR staff both at the border and at the disembarkation point, the returnees' basic needs stretch from documentation, including PDS cards, Jensiya (national ID) document, to shelter (for some), food and cash.

UNHCR field staff have started a follow-up process in Baghdad and other governorates, liaising with MoDM Branches Offices (BOs) and the relevant local authorities to assess the situation in preparation for the provision of the required assistance for the new arrivals.

## **7. Refugee Assistance**

UNHCR has embarked on the re-opening of the Al-Waleed Camp and will discuss further with MoI-PC the establishment of transit centres at Rabi'a and Al-Qa'im border points.

## **8. Interviews with new arrivals**

UNHCR teams interviewed returnees at the disembarkation point in Liqaa' Square in Mansour, Baghdad. Some families reported to be returning to Iraq temporarily, hoping to be able to go back to Syria once the security situation has become stable. Others plan to head for safer northern Iraq. Few returnees said they would travel to Jordan.

Returnees registered as refugees with UNHCR Syria have no intention to register with MoDM, afraid they might lose their resettlement opportunities. They plan to return to Syria as soon as security improves. These families said they depended on UNHCR Syria cash payments and support for living.

Of the returnees some reported sectarian calls by mosques warning Shi'as to leave or get killed, reports denied by others who said these calls were addressed to civilians asking them to leave their neighborhoods for fear of imminent fighting between Syrian Army and Free Army.

Some families said they had no place to go back to in their places of origin and planned to stay with their relatives for a while.

Complaints were heard from returnees about the long wait at the Iraqi border until the arrival of Iraqi security forces that escorted the buses back to Baghdad. There were similar complaints about the lengthy procedures at the checkpoints. In one instance at Abu Ghraib checkpoint, photocopies of all the documents of the passengers were taken.

## **8. Coordination**

UNHCR is collaborating closely with the Ministry of Migration and Displacement (MoDM), MoI-PC, and Governorate Offices. In the meantime, the Office has engaged in a coordination process with various humanitarian actors/stakeholders, including the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) consisting of agencies and NGOs, to ensure necessary support to the Iraqi Government's efforts to respond to the returnees' immediate needs.