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Unlocking protracted displacement

An Iraqi case study

A collection of papers based on a research and policy project on 'Unlocking crises of protracted displacement for refugees and internally displaced persons' that combines the complementary knowledge of the Refugee Studies Centre (RSC), the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI) and the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) / Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC). This project was generously supported by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

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Executive summary

The majority of the world's refugees and IDPs come from countries where state fragility, conflict and persecution have persisted for years. Currently, well over half the world's 10 million refugees live in protracted exile. The displaced from Iraq now constitute one of the largest refugee populations worldwide. Of the officially estimated 4.5 million displaced Iraqis, about 1.7 million are refugees (UNHCR 2010c) and 2.8 million (IDMC 2009, 2010) are internally displaced within their own country. The spatial separation of previously mixed sectarian and ethnic populations has rendered internal displacement a semi-permanent feature within Iraq, whilst those who have crossed international borders show little inclination to return except in very small numbers (Marfleet and Chatty 2009). As instability persists, the situation of Iraqi refugees in the Middle East and of IDPs in Iraq manifests the evolving conditions of 'protracted displacement'. The Iraqi displacement crisis has reached a critical stage. International interest in Iraq is declining. Yet the lack of security, continuing civil conflict and economic uncertainty makes it unlikely that a mass Iraqi return will occur. More likely, Iraqi refugees will remain in neighbouring states under increasingly difficult circumstances. As their savings diminish and their circular movements into and out of Iraq to make money become more precarious, it is likely that irregular and long-distance migrations will occur in larger numbers. Unlocking this protracted crisis of displacement requires analysis of the perceptions of solutions, durable and not-so-durable, among all stakeholders: Iraqi refugees and exiles, international humanitarian aid agencies, national NGOs and host governments. New approaches to durable solutions mean both revising failed efforts and testing those untried.

This study focuses on the local-level perceptions of practitioners, policy makers and Iraqi refugees in Lebanon, Syria and Jordan. It is based on desk research and interviews in the field in April and May 2011 and reveals the need to bridge the political with the operational in unlocking this protracted crisis. The 'refugees' of the Iraqi crisis do not fit with Western conceptualisations of the refugee regime. Their flight has been a steady outflow for more than a decade, peaking in 2006-2007. The migration is not 'one way'; it is often more circular and involves movement in and out of Iraq as well as across wider transnational networks in the Middle East and further afield. This mobility is a result of a strategy to manage life risks by dispersal of family members along pre-established social networks whenever possible. One theme that has regularly emerged in this case study is the importance of effecting an analytical shift from transitory humanitarian (emergency) assistance to fostering inclusive local assistance and accommodation to cater for the large group of Iraqi refugees who are increasingly 'stuck' in host countries of the Middle East. This significant group does not fit the Western 'Regimes of Recognition' which are characterised by a fortress mentality coupled with a 'cherry picking' of the most attractive refugee profiles (Fassin 2011). Voluntary return is unlikely in the near future because of the persistent lack of security, infrastructural recovery and opportunity in the country. Furthermore, those in this group who were associated with the former regime are unlikely to be welcomed by the current Iraqi state.

Our findings show clearly that the three classical durable solutions are largely unworkable for the majority of Iraqis in exile in Lebanon, Syria and Jordan for the following reasons:

- Voluntary return to Iraq is stalled by security concerns and lack of development;
- Formal local integration in host states is restricted by rigid legal regulations, sluggish economies and political instability; and

- Resettlement to Western states is carefully controlled by a fortress mentality and an ‘elitist’ selection procedure.

It is unlikely that a political solution to the prolonged Iraqi crisis at the international or regional level can be effected in the current climate of political unrest. Some observers have noted an increased number of Iraqi refugees leaving Syria for Iraq, but by and large, Iraqi refugees are remaining ‘invisible’ and hoping to ride out the current unrest in the country.

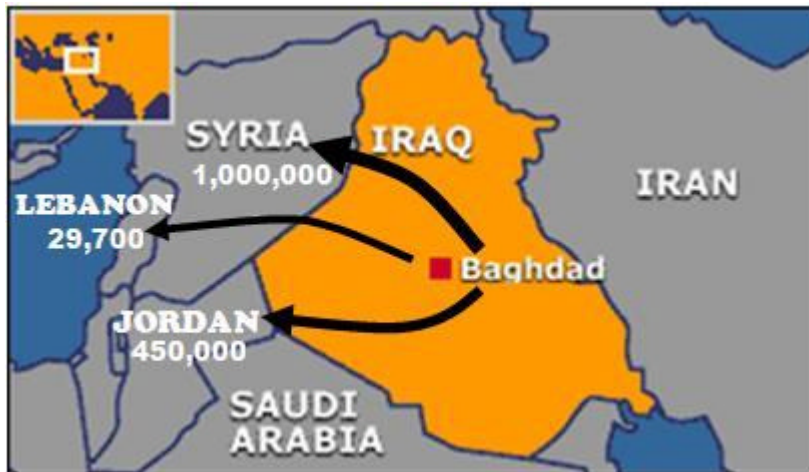
This case study also reveals that at the operational level, efforts remain largely focused on emergency humanitarian services rather than catering for the long-term requirements of those Iraqis who have little hope of third-country resettlement or return. Hence there is a need to foster an inclusive regional accommodation of these Iraqi ‘temporary guests’ in Syria and Jordan and ‘tourists’ or ‘migrant workers’ in Lebanon. A few of the NGOs operating in the region are beginning to promote activities and training that encourage local accommodation and long-term skill development. Language and literacy courses, computer training and other similar activities are widely well received by Iraqis as well as host community members and create greater opportunities for Iraqis to enter the local economy, either formally or informally.

Furthermore, although ‘integration’ as a solution is categorically rejected by all three states, some local accommodation is taking place and was reported by practitioners and refugees alike. In each of these countries, reports are emerging of Iraqis – adults and children alike – beginning to adopt local dress and local dialects in order to ‘fit in’. Although many Iraqis have fallen into national categories of ‘illegal’ as their visas and permits expire, their presence seems to be tolerated. Few Iraqis are deported as over-stayers. Some Iraqis report that they have found work in the informal sector. These developments suggest that a movement towards greater accommodation – a form of integration, but without the baggage – is taking place and needs to be encouraged and promoted. It may be that, in some cases, UNHCR and other NGOs might lobby for a reduction in the charges levied on Iraqis for residence and other permits. Alternatively, these humanitarian aid agencies might consider expanding their financial aid programme to Iraqi refugees so as to include subsidising the costs of residency and/or permits. Such measures would thus regularise the Iraqis’ presence in the host countries even if they did not end the crisis.

Finally, the mobility of Iraq’s exiles across the region also needs to be recognised. Many Iraqi extended families have members in two or three countries in the Middle East as well as others in Canada, the US or Europe. Those in the region generally have members who return to Iraq occasionally to check on the security situation, to call in on aged parents or relatives who were unable or unwilling to flee in the first place, or to conduct business to support the extended family. This mobility is part of the reality of this protracted refugee crisis. It needs to be recognised as a risk management strategy for refugees for whom the three classic durable solutions are largely inapplicable. Unfortunately, this mobility is often looked at sceptically by the humanitarian aid regime as it raises questions regarding how well Iraqis fit into the ‘category’ of refugee. It is worth exploring the possibility of a multi-directional approach to unlocking this prolonged crisis. Such an approach would include tapping into legal opportunities (work permit, residency), policy opportunities (a harmonised approach that would still recognise differences in context), and operational opportunities (recognising the significance of multiple migration pathways).

1 Introduction and statement of the problem¹

The majority of the world's refugees and IDPs come from countries where state fragility, conflict and persecution have persisted for years with the result that currently, well over half the world's 10 million refugees live in protracted exile. The displaced from Iraq now constitute one of the largest refugee populations worldwide. Of the officially estimated 4.5 million displaced Iraqis, about 1.7 million are refugees (UNHCR 2010c) and 2.8 million (IDMC 2009, 2010) are internally displaced within their own country. Iraqis are the second largest group of displaced people seeking asylum in industrialised countries (UNHCR 2009a) yet Western countries remain resistant to accepting them as refugees.



Map 1: Outflow of refugees to neighbouring countries (adapted from UNHCR 2010a)

Sectarian and ethnic violence are the dominant characteristics of this displacement. The spatial separation of previously mixed sectarian and ethnic populations has rendered internal displacement a semi-permanent feature within Iraq, whilst those who have crossed international borders show little inclination to return except in very small numbers (Marfleet and Chatty 2009). Despite a reduction in violence and conflict since a peak in 2006-2007, Iraq is far from stable and the Iraqi Government has not been able to create the conditions for successful return, neither of refugees nor IDPs. The bombing of Iraqi churches in 2010 is bound to give rise to further out-migration as Iraq's Nestorian or Assyrian Christians – nearly 500,000 – come to be increasingly targeted by insurgents. Moreover, displacement is predominantly to urban locations, constituting a new challenge to humanitarian actors seeking to unlock the conditions of protracted displacement. Furthermore, the current insecurity in Syria has given rise to some return movement. Even if this proves to be of a temporary nature, it will further challenge humanitarian assistance efforts in the region.

Most of Iraq's exiles are in the Middle East. Their refuge in the neighbouring countries of Syria, Jordan, and Lebanon is rapidly approaching the five year mark generally defined as a

¹ We would like to thank all the policy makers, practitioners and Iraqi refugees and exiles who helped us in carrying out this study. A special thanks goes to staff members of UNHCR in Syria, Lebanon and Jordan who helped us identify interviewees in all three countries. Jihad Darwaza, Arda Dergarabedian and Ilina Srour were invaluable research assistants throughout the month-long field study in April and May 2011.

‘protracted crisis’. Evidence, so far, suggests that the tolerance of their host governments will continue. This sanctuary, however, is but a temporary reprieve and will not go on indefinitely. Unwilling to return and largely unable to emigrate further west or north, Iraq’s refugees are in a perilous situation which needs to be recognised and addressed by the Western powers who created this humanitarian crisis (Marfleet and Chatty 2009). As instability persists, the situation of Iraqi refugees in the Middle East and IDPs in Iraq manifests the evolving conditions of ‘protracted displacement’.

Iraqi refugees and IDPs have confounded the West from the beginning of the crisis that culminated in the mass flight of millions of people. Their predicaments and their perceptions have been poorly understood. Their risk strategies for survival and their willingness to remain ‘unsettled’ have also perplexed humanitarian actors. In the aftermath of the invasion of Iraq in March 2003, the Western powers prepared for one million Iraqi ‘refugees’ to flee their country. Camps were duly set up to receive those who might try to escape the conflict. However, six months after the fall of the Iraqi regime, few Iraqis had actually fled their country. The international aid regime had miscalculated the Iraqi peoples’ response to the invasion; the empty emergency camps were dismantled and pre-positioned food and equipment were removed. Three years later, in 2006, the West was caught off-guard as hundreds of thousands of Iraqis fled their homes to escape the deadly sectarian violence that had escalated with the al-Askari Mosque bombing in Samarra in the February of that year. Nearly 4 million Iraqis fled their homes in 2006 and 2007 with 1-1.5 million crossing national borders into Syria and Jordan. The United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) and affiliated NGOs raced to set up reception centres and to provide emergency aid.

In April 2009, UNHCR declared that security in Iraq had improved to the extent that people displaced from most regions of the country should no longer be viewed as refugees. It also began to formally prepare for the imminent return of ‘large numbers’ to Iraq. The facts on the ground, however, were that many Iraqis kept their distance from the official agencies mandated to assist them. Despite a concerted effort over the past four years, UNHCR in Syria has registered only just over 200,000 Iraqis. The reasons these figures are so low can only be guessed. Some Iraqis claim to fear involuntary repatriation to Iraq if they formally register with the UN agency. Others fear returning to a country where the mixed ethno-religious communities and the legacy of Ottoman tolerance have been wiped away. The targeting of Christians in 2010 clearly points to the continuing ‘unmixing’ of peoples.

The Iraqi displacement crisis has reached a critical stage. International interest in Iraq is declining. Yet the lack of security, continuing civil conflict and economic uncertainty makes it unlikely that a mass Iraqi return will occur. More likely, Iraqi refugees will remain in neighbouring states under increasingly difficult circumstances. As their savings diminish and their circular movements into and out of Iraq to make money become more precarious, it is likely that irregular and long-distance migrations will occur in larger numbers. What will happen in the host countries of the Middle East once Iraqis come to be perceived by their fellow Arab hosts as outstaying their welcome as ‘temporary’ guests or visitors? How long can Western states expect this tolerant and hospitable attitude to remain, and what are the consequences of diminishing tolerance within and especially beyond the immediate region? Unlocking this protracted crisis of displacement requires analysis of the perceptions of solutions, durable and not-so-durable, among all stakeholders: Iraqi refugees and exiles,

international humanitarian aid agencies, national NGOs and host governments. New approaches to durable solutions mean both revising failed efforts and testing those untried.

2 Research aims, approaches and methods

The main aims of this case study are to address how a more strategic use of traditional durable solutions – particularly third country resettlement – might address the protracted displacement of the Iraqis; to better understand the challenges and opportunities for reintegration of potential returnees to Iraq; to address the scope for innovative local development initiatives for Iraqi refugees in host countries; to examine how closely the perceptions and interests of displaced Iraqis reflect the understandings of international and national actors; and to explore any innovative national, regional or international initiatives that might help to unlock the protracted Iraqi displacement crisis and determine whether these initiatives could be implemented by national governments and/or international actors.

Existing research emphasises ‘top-down’ governmental and institutional factors such as interstate relations (between host countries and countries of origin), state fragility, the role of international agencies and regional insecurity issues in unlocking protracted displacement with the *aim of brokering return*. A key innovation in this study is to link this level of analysis to an exploration of the ‘bottom-up’ factors. Here the focus will be on the perceptions, interests and perceived predicaments of displaced Iraqis themselves. We focus on factors such as risk and livelihood strategies; social and economic engagement, residence and protection rights; and the growing reality of alternatives to refugee/forced migration statuses. By linking a state/regional level analysis with local people-based perceptions (i.e. top-down and bottom-up), we anticipate increasing the potential to provide new ways of understanding not only the conditions of protracted displacement but also a broader scope for unlocking them.

This case study uses secondary and primary research to address these questions. It also sets out to map the changing nature of Iraqi forced migration in the Middle East and the complex nature of both the circular and irregular migration that is clearly emerging within this protracted crisis. Responses of international players and national government officials were gathered through interviews with national NGOs (e.g. Red Crescent) and international organisations working on Iraqi resettlement (UNHCR, IOM, UNRWA, CARITAS and the Canadian Mission) in Lebanon, Syria and Jordan. At the local level, interviews with Iraqi asylum seekers, refugees and temporary guests were conducted in all three countries. A total of 21 interviews were conducted during the three-week period between 18 April and 6 May 2011.

Preliminary contacts for interviews were established through the offices of UNHCR in Syria, Lebanon and Jordan. Once in country, a snowball technique was used to arrange for further policy maker and practitioner interviewing. Interviews with Iraqis were arranged purposively, with the actual selection of interviewees made by the NGO or UN Agency staff. A range of categories in terms of gender, generation and marital status was possible, but otherwise, the interviewees were not necessarily representative of the overall Iraqi community in exile.

The interviews were all anonymised, translated, and transcribed before being uploaded into a qualitative data software, NVIVO, to assist analysis. This material was then systematically coded according to the main themes of the research and the interview guides. The analysis process used a combined approach of topical and analytical coding. In the first level of analysis, the interviews were coded in five clusters according to the main research topics (the scope of the Iraqi crisis; voluntary return, local integration, third country resettlement; as well as innovative solutions). Within each cluster, the data was coded further according to several analytical categories of constraints including the legal and operational, as well as their lived experiences. This corresponds with the innovative ‘people-centred’ approach adopted by the study and enabled a thorough comparison between the narratives of policy makers, practitioners and refugees.

3 Literature review

The purpose of this literature review is to present an overview of the state of knowledge regarding the current Iraqi refugee crisis, highlighting the key themes of this study: unlocking protracted refuge crises by examining the traditional durable solutions and revealing some of the gaps in knowledge urgently needing investigation and analysis if more effective solutions are to be implemented.

Disputed numbers of displaced Iraqis

Since the invasion of Iraq in 2003 and, increasingly, since the February 2006 bombing in Samarra, it is believed that between 4 and 5 million Iraqis have been forced to leave their homes under conditions of violence and persecution in search of security elsewhere (ICG 2008, MEI 2008, Amnesty 2008a, UNHCR 2008c). Within this context, an estimated but not easily verifiable 2.8 million Iraqis have been internally displaced and another 2 million have sought refuge abroad (IOM 2008, Amnesty 2008a, ICG 2008, IRC 2008, UNHCR 2009a).² It is important to note the disputed nature of the refugee estimates. Discrepancies in numbers are explained due to various factors: the urban setting in which the Iraqis are displaced, the reluctance of Iraqis to register with authorities, a lack of institutional capacity among host countries to track arrivals/departures, differing accounting methods, and the politically charged implications of various figures (Chatelard, G., el-Abed, and Washington, 2009, Amnesty 2008b, Harper 2008, see in particular ICG 2008: 3-4).³

Overall UNHCR (2010c) figures for 2009 regarding Iraqi refugees are:

- Total number of Iraqi refugees: 1,785,121
- Returned/ Voluntarily repatriated: 38,037
- Resettled: 23,000 (out of whom from Syria: 10,400)

² These figures represent the numbers of Iraqi refugees at the peak of the displacement crisis and remain widely quoted in agency reports although it is not possible to officially verify them.

³ The figures most commonly cited in the media are those presented by the international humanitarian and human rights organisations. It is more difficult to locate official government statistics on the displaced Iraqis.

According to most agency reports, the majority of Iraqis outside the country are found in the Syrian Arab Republic, which hosts 1,050,000 according to government estimates. The figure was revised downward by 5 per cent (minus 50,000 people) based on the presumption that a number of Iraqis had left the country. The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan hosted 451,000 refugees at the year's end. This estimate was revised downwards by 50,000 to account for estimated departures from the country (UNHCR 2010c: 7).⁴ Several reports also suggest that an additional 50,000 Iraqis are living in Lebanon, around 20,000-70,000 in Egypt, 60,000 in Iran and a possible 200,000 Iraqis in the Gulf States (Harper 2008, ICG 2008, IRC 2008, Amnesty 2008a, UNHCR 2007b). In Iraq, the IDP estimate was revised downwards from 2.6 to 1.55 million people. This new figure excludes the pre-2003 IDPs in Iraq who are now considered to be integrated in their host communities. In addition, close to 168,000 Iraqi IDPs were reported to have returned to their homes during 2009 (UNHCR 2009c).

Displacement inside Iraq is more complex and more protracted than the situation of Iraqis who have fled the country since the early 1990s. Many of the IDPs of Iraq trace their original displacement to the population engineering and Arabisation policy of the Baathist era (Chatelard 2011). This displacement is highly politicised at the domestic level with much less leverage afforded international actors as IDPs are first and foremost the responsibility of the Iraqi government and not the international community. The Iraqi Ministry of Displacement and Migration (IMoDM) is the main governmental body addressing internal displacement. Only post-2006 IDPs are allowed to register with IMoDM for assistance, leaving out those who fled as a result of the 2003 change of regime. Furthermore, IDP registration at the governorate level has started and stopped in fits with the most recent wave of registration in these administrative regions (in 2010) being taken for statistical purposes rather than for any possible assistance or benefits (Neidhardt 2011).

Causes of displacement

It is widely understood that forced displacement is not a new phenomenon in Iraq (see Chatelard et al. 2009, 2008, Marfleet 2007). Decades of political persecution and devastating sanctions have pushed various groups of Iraqis to flee their homes and become internally displaced or exiled in the region and beyond. Indeed, Iraq has experienced periods of forced migration in the past and it is documented that well over one million Iraqis were already internally displaced or living in exile prior to the invasion (Chatelard 2008, MERIP 2007, HRW 2003, for detailed statistics see Romano 2005).

A mass displacement of Iraqis did not result immediately after the April 2003 invasion (Chatty 2003); instead, it was the precipitous breakdown in security in 2006-2007 that prompted the current phase of migration. According to al-Khalidi et al. (2007), the pattern of displacement was one of territorial consolidation by radical armed groups, pushing co-religionists into predominantly Sunni, Shi'a or Kurdish areas. As such, many reports concluded that the overwhelming reason for flight was as a result of 'ethno-sectarian cleansing,' evidenced by countless reports of grave human rights abuses and pervasive sectarian violence (al-Zubaidi and Wimmen 2008, Amnesty 2008a). More recently, the

⁴ The FAFO (2007) report cites divergent estimates, with their own sample estimating 161,000 Iraqi refugees, while the Jordanian immigration authority put the number at 547,000. In reconciling these discrepancies, they have estimated the Iraqi population in Jordan at around 450,000-500,000 (2007: 8).

targeting of religious minorities, particularly Assyrian and Mandaean communities, has been reported (UNHCR 2009b, USCIRF 2009, Ferris and Stoltz 2008). The general consensus is that the displaced Iraqis have fled 'as a consequence of a conflict in which they have no stake but of which they were made victims' (ICG 2008: 1). Beyond ethnic or religious identity and minority status, reports cite employment by the United States or other foreign forces, personal wealth and professional association as additional risk factors (ICG 2008, MEI 2008, al-Khalidi et al. 2007). Compounding the real and perceived threats of violence, countless publications emphasise the widespread impoverishment of people within Iraq as an important factor prompting out-migration (Amnesty 2008a, al-Khalidi et al. 2007, FMR 2007). By many accounts, the Iraqi middle class has been under excruciating pressure. Sassoon (2008) highlights the dramatic decline in the number of doctors, academics, professionals and artists who have been targeted as groups, becoming unemployed and censored, and thus choosing exile over continued suffering (MEI 2008: 41, see also al-Khalidi et al. 2007, FMR 2007, Marfleet 2007, Steele 2006).

Demographic overview of the displaced

Iraqi refugees in Syria, Jordan and Lebanon are urban-based and largely from Baghdad (FAFO 2007, al-Khalidi et al. 2007, IPSOS 2007). One report published by the head of UNHCR's Iraqi Support Unit, Andrew Harper, cites that over 80 per cent of those registered with UNCHR originate from the capital city, claiming that the urban origin of these refugees is 'hardly surprising given that much of the sectarian violence has occurred in the mixed Sunni and Shi'ite areas, which are overwhelmingly urban' (Harper 2008: 172). In Jordan, 68 per cent of the refugees are Sunni, 17 per cent Shi'a and 12 per cent Christian (FAFO 2007, IOM 2008, Harper 2008). In Syria, the IPSOS survey did not specifically ask about confessional association, though UNHCR documentation claims that among those Iraqis registered, 57 per cent are Sunni, 20 per cent Shi'a, along with 16 per cent minority Christian, and 4 per cent Sabean-Mandaean (UNHCR 2008a, Amnesty 2008a, al-Khalidi et al. 2007: 11-14). As for Iraqis in Lebanon, just over 50 per cent are Shi'a, almost 20 per cent are Chaldean Catholics and around 12 per cent are Sunni (IOM 2008, DRC 2007).

A majority of the Iraqi refugees displaced in neighbouring states are residing in the capitals cities of Amman and Damascus, while Iraqis in Lebanon are more dispersed in urban as well as rural areas (FAFO 2007, IOM 2008, DRC 2007, Harper 2008). According to UNHCR, the gender breakdown is 53 per cent male (47 per cent female), with the exception of Lebanon where there is a larger proportion of working-age Iraqi males (Harper 2008: 172, ICG 2008: 27, DRC 2007). In the past year this composition has changed and large numbers of Iraqi Christians have entered the Lebanon seeking refuge (DRC 2009). In Jordan, the average size of an Iraqi household is 4.1 persons and one in five households are headed by women (FAFO 2007: 4, Harper 2008). There is insufficient statistical data on such demographic indicators in Syria, though the IPSOS survey indicates that a large number of Iraqis are living with three or more family members (IPSOS 2007, ICG 2008: 16).

Iraqi refugees are on the whole well educated and constitute what was Iraq's professional middle class (ICG 2008, al-Khalidi et al. 2007).⁵ All of the surveys indicate that a large

⁵ It is also noted in the ICG report that some 'overt signs of refugee opulence, notably in Amman' have stirred envy and resentment among the local population (2008: Executive Summary, MERIP 2007:

proportion of the refugees are relying on personal savings and remittances from Iraq, though some Iraqis have managed to secure employment, whether formal or informal, in their host countries (Harper 2008, ICG 2008, FAFO 2007, al-Khalidi et al. 2007). The surveys also indicate that chronic diseases such as high blood pressure and diabetes are prevalent among Iraqi refugees, with 17 per cent in Syria⁶ and 11 per cent in Jordan citing these as serious health concerns (al-Khalidi et al. 2007, IOM 2008: 51, IPSOS 2007, FAFO 2007, DRC 2007). There is also data pointing to psychological trauma as a 'major problem' among the refugees, with many facing 'psychosocial threats' due to the 'displacement experience' (al-Khalidi et al. 2007, IPSOS 2007: 12, see especially IOM 2008: 19). All findings suggest the need for mental health services while recognising the cultural stigmas associated with psychosocial care (IOM 2008, al-Khalidi et al. 2007).

Legal status

A central concern among international agencies and non-governmental organisations is the issue of Iraqis' precarious legal status within their host countries (Amnesty 2008a, ICG 2008, MERIP 2007). Initially, Syria and Jordan welcomed their 'Iraqi brethren' in the tradition of Arab brotherhood, classifying them as 'guests' or 'temporary visitors' and thus affording them temporary protection (ICG 2008, Chatelard 2008, Fagen 2007, FMR 2007). Syria, Jordan and Lebanon are not signatories to the 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and lack the domestic legal procedures for dealing with 'refugees' or granting asylum (Chatelard et al. 2008, HRW 2007, 2006, Amnesty 2008a). In January 2007, UNHCR opted to grant *prima facie* refugee status to all Iraqi nationals from central and southern Iraq, a designation accepted by the Syrian government but not the Jordanian state (Harper 2008, Fagen 2007: 5-6, al-Zubaidi and Wimmen 2008). Nevertheless, the generosity shown by Syria and Jordan to the Iraqi refugees is widely recognised, standing in stark contrast to the negligence of donor countries and Iraq itself (Harper 2008, ICG 2008, Amnesty 2008a, HRW 2006).

Between 2008 and 2010, both Syria and Jordan began to restrict the entrance of fleeing Iraqis, imposing more stringent visa requirements and excluding certain segments of the Iraqi population from protection (for a detailed discussion of the changing visa restrictions, see Amnesty 2008a, ICG 2008, Fagen 2007). According to Amnesty International (2008a: 9), it is the growing size of the Iraqi refugee population, the lack of international support and the request of Iraqi Prime Minister al-Maliki that have prompted Syria to impose such stringent visa requirements. This policy was reversed in 2010 with a loosening of visa restrictions. In 2011, Iraqis were permitted to apply for one-month entry visas at the border which could then be renewed in the country. In Jordan, the situation remains constrained,⁷ and various reports cite the barring of young men at the Iraqi-Jordanian border (Amnesty 2008a, Fagen 2007). Within this increasingly restrictive environment, refugee advocates fear violations of the principle of *non-refoulement*, or the forced return of rejected asylum seekers to Northern Iraq, despite assertions from Syrian and Jordanian officials that this will not take place (Amnesty 2008a, Harper 2008, ICG 2008: 10, Fagen 2007). To date, only a handful Iraqis have been

22), though this is hardly represents the majority of Iraqis. Al-Khalidi et al. also mention the perception among Syrians that Iraqis are rich (2007: 35).

⁶ The ICG report states that 57 per cent of Iraqis in Syria have sought treatment for chronic medical conditions, including tuberculosis (2008: 5).

⁷ The 9 November 2005 bombing of three Amman hotels by Iraqis associated with al-Zarqawi's al-Qaeda in Iraq prompted a dramatic shift to more stringent border controls (ICG 2008: 10).

‘refouled’ – largely from Lebanon for convictions of irregular residence status (HRW 2010).

Impact on host countries

Many of the reports have assessed the increasingly burdensome impact of Iraqi refugees on their host countries and drawn analogies to the protracted Palestinian displacement of the 1950s (ICG 2008: 11, Fagen 2007: 6, al-Khalidi et al. 2007: 40, FMR 2007). Across the board, reports indicate that local media and citizens blame the Iraqi refugees for their own deteriorating quality of life (rise in real estate prices, traffic jams, price rises and utilities shortages) and perceive a far larger number of refugees than is actually present (OCHA 2009, Kurtzer 2009, Evans Barnes 2009, ICG 2008: 15, O’Donnell and Newland 2008, Fagen 2007, al-Khalidi et al. 2007: 40). Resentment among host communities is growing as housing, food and fuel costs soar and overburdened public services and infrastructure impinge on people’s day to day lives (O’Donnell and Newland 2008, MERIP 2007). The governments of Syria and Jordan cite massive expenditures on Iraqi refugees, with Syrian officials claiming costs of over USD 1.5 billion per year and Jordanians quoting USD 1 billion: there is little doubt that the Iraqis have induced tangible economic pressures. That said, the actual picture is more nuanced as excessive blame is placed on Iraqis for issues that existed beforehand and alongside economic pressures has also come economic growth and investment (ICG 2008: 13, Fagen 2008, Seeley 2008). Furthermore, skilled and educated Iraqis with proper work permits substantially contribute to the regional economy (IRC 2008: 7). However, the negative perceptions cannot be ignored, nor can the actual costs incurred by the Syrian and Jordanian governments be dismissed—hostility towards Iraqis based on their perceived or actual burden on society is on the rise (Evans Barnes 2009, Leenders 2008, Lischer 2008, ICG 2008, MERIP 2007, Fagen 2007: 19, al-Khalidi et al. 2007).

More recently, the impact of such large numbers of Iraqi refugees in neighbouring host countries is being framed not just as an economic burden but as a burgeoning security threat (ICG 2008: 2, Leenders 2008, Hodson 2007, Ferris 2007). In particular, the 2005 hotel bombings in Amman by Syrian, Jordanian and Iraqi affiliates of al-Qaeda in Iraq raised fears dramatically and prompted substantial closures along the Jordan-Iraq border (Ferris 2007, Hodson 2007). Antipathy towards Shi’a refugees is salient, with King Abdullah of Jordan warning of an emergent ‘Shi’ite Crescent’ (Ferris 2007: 13, Hodson 2007, MERIP 2007: 24). In Syria, local hostilities are growing due to increased crime and prostitution associated with the Iraqi refugees, and there is concern that ‘tensions between host and refugee populations’ could be easily exacerbated (ICG 2008: 2, Ferris 2007: 14). While the security paradigm did gain some currency among those discussing the Iraqi refugee crisis, it is acknowledged that to date, the Iraqi refugees have *not* brought sectarian rivalries with them and are ‘not a group which is ripe for radicalization’ (Lischer 2008, Ferris 2007: 17, ICG 2008: 7, Leenders 2008).

Possibilities of voluntary return and long-term implications

The prospect of refugee return to Iraq has garnered significant attention recently as improved security within Iraq has received global media coverage (Ferris and Stoltz 2008, Heinrich Böll Stiftung 2009, UNHCR 2009b, Amnesty 2008a, ICG 2008). However, the most recently published reports by Amnesty International, the Middle East Institute and the International Crisis Group are extremely wary of claims by the Iraqi government and international community that it is safe for refugees to return. In fact, the overwhelming sentiment is that:

There is no indication that large numbers of refugees have returned because of positive reassessment of security conditions. Far more than improved conditions at home, it is unbearable conditions in exile that appear to have been the determining factor in most returns (ICG 2008: ii).

One small survey that canvassed the opinions of refugees in Jordan, Lebanon and Syria demonstrated that none of the 95 Iraqis interviewed believed that Iraq would stabilise in their own lifetime (Riller 2009).

The government of Iraq has introduced financial incentives to encourage Iraqis to return, including one-off payments, free airline tickets and compensation for damaged property (IRIN 2008). Furthermore, Iraqi Prime Minister al-Maliki encouraged the European Union to drop calls for taking in refugees, claiming that such a move would be counterproductive to Iraqi efforts aimed at convincing Iraqis to come back and rebuild their country (Reuters 2009). Yet despite these vocal political initiatives, humanitarian and human rights advocates are extremely sceptical, pointing to a recently perilous security situation and asserting that it would be 'reckless' to encourage return before there were genuine and sustained improvements in security and the service provisions of the state (UNHCR 2009b, ICG 2008: ii, Amnesty 2008a). As well, those that have returned to Iraq, for whatever reason, are encountering homes destroyed or occupied by others and are thus being forced into internal displacement without sufficient humanitarian assistance (MEI 2008: 34). At present, the sentiment is that 'Iraq's own government should start tending to the displaced population it has, rather than making political gestures on the subject – and at the expense – of refugees' (Chatelard et al. 2009).

Local integration (assistance and accommodation)

Understanding and addressing the protection needs of Iraqi refugees in their host countries is another key issue of concern for humanitarian organisations and advocates. As the reports indicate, the ambiguous nature of Iraqis' status as 'guests' prohibits them from gainful employment, pushing them into the exploitative informal sector or in some cases, 'partnerships' with locals (see al-Khalidi et al. 2007: 35, IOM 2008, ICG 2008, Fagen 2007). Even those with legal status (residence permits or temporary visas) struggle to obtain work permits (Chatelard et al. 2008). There is widespread unemployment with some Iraqis risking brief and dangerous visits to Iraq to keep their businesses operating, collect pensions and food rations and other activities for raising income (IRC 2008: 6, Amnesty 2008b: 7). There has emerged a 'climate of anxiety and fear of deportations among Iraqis' in some states (Chatelard et al. 2008: 11). It is the lack of employment opportunities that is cited as one of the main factors imperilling Iraqis' livelihoods, curtailing their ability to afford suitable housing, health care and education services (Amnesty 2008a, IOM 2008: 49, ICG 2008, MERIP 2007, UNHCR 2007a).

Obstacles to providing comprehensive and coordinated assistance to Iraqi refugees remain, as all reports cite, due to the difficulties of delivering aid in an urban environment where refugees are reluctant to be made 'visible' through UNHCR registration (Amnesty 2008a). Additionally, Syrian and Jordanian governments have stipulated that 'parallel systems' should not be created and the services must be available for poor citizens as well (ICG 2008: 14, UNHCR 2008c). Despite the presence of numerous national and international NGOs as well as UNHCR operations in Jordan and Syria, 'the number of beneficiaries of the various existing programmes remains strikingly low,' with a mere 250,000 Iraqis registered with UNHCR in Syria by May 2008 (UNHCR 2008a, O'Donnell and Newland 2008, Chatelard et al. 2008: 34,

IRC 2008). It is suggested Iraqis' tenuous legal status has meant that 'distrust and marginality' have become strategies of survival. Keeping a low profile and avoiding contact with official bodies is prioritised over accessing services (Chatelard et al. 2009; HRW 2010). As long as this 'fear factor' remains unchanged, relief agencies have had to focus on providing *accessible* services (Chatelard et al. 2008: 34, Harper 2008, UNHCR 2008b, UNHCR 2009b). Whilst the refugees' reservations are real, the pressure of an increasingly dire economic situation is pushing more Iraqis to seek services or even third-country resettlement through UNCHR registration (Amnesty 2008b: 6). Furthermore, the reluctance of the current Iraqi government state to assist citizens in exile continues to create obstacles to protection (al-Zubaidi and Wimmen 2008).

Third country resettlement

Even though UNHCR has called upon the international community to do nothing that will compel the refugees to return to Iraq prematurely (UNHCR 2009b), there is very little material that investigates the views and willingness of Iraqis to be resettled (Riller 2009). That said, it has been found that one in five Iraqis in Jordan had concrete plans to resettle in a third country, while 80 per cent of the refugee population in Jordan (and Lebanon) do not intend to integrate into the host community, instead perceiving their stay as temporary (Riller 2009). Many refugees, particularly amongst the well educated, stated that their motivation to resettle in a third country was to be able to construct a stable and safe environment for their children, in which they would be free to practice their religion and be able to gain a travel document. Another significant factor in preferring third-country resettlement was family reunification. However, if resettlement meant splitting up their family, then the option would be discarded (Riller 2009). Family reunification was also found to be a decisive factor when Iraqi families choose to flee from Iraq to neighbouring countries (Chatelard et al. 2009). The motivations of the younger and less educated were more related to receiving benefits rather than exercising their own agency. For example, it was found that there were expectations of being given a home, employment, education on resettlement (Riller 2009).

UNHCR has said that at least 33,000 refugees need to be resettled to third countries in 2011 (UNHCR 2010a). At the same time, there is a lack of coherence between UNCHR's criteria for resettlement and the criteria of resettlement countries. The former focuses on vulnerabilities whereas the latter are fixed on the criteria established in the 1951 Refugee Convention. The result of this, and the unwillingness of many refugees to relocate to the USA, means that UNHCR is finding it increasingly difficult to resettle refugees according to the selective criteria of the host country (UNHCR 2010a). At current rates, the pace of resettlement is so slow that it would take between 17-22 years to resettle all those that need to be assisted in this way (Leenders 2008). As of February 2011 UNHCR had registered a total of 320,000 Iraqis and referred 70,000 for resettlement—including the 33,000 mentioned above (UNHCR 2010a).

Humanitarian and relief agencies, academics, advocacy and policy institutions have sought to elucidate the obstacles that exist to the provision of aid, assistance and protection, repatriation, and the possibilities of third-country resettlement. Yet few studies have paid attention to the motivations of Iraq's exiles for return, resettlement or extended temporary residence in exile.

4 Perceptions at the local level: Policy makers, practitioners and Iraqi exiles

The following discussion is based on 21 interviews conducted with policy makers, practitioners and Iraqi exiles. The interviews followed a five-fold aide memoire: the size of the Iraqi exile community, resettlement as a durable solution, return as a durable solution, local 'integration' and other potential solutions. The responses are discussed below with policy maker and practitioner inputs set alongside Iraqi refugee responses. This juxtaposition offers important insight into the complexity of the debates regarding durable solutions at the grass-roots level and provides important considerations in the context of 'unlocking' protracted humanitarian crises.

Numbers, legal status, and vulnerability

Demographics as an indication of the scope of the crisis

Despite recent efforts in the West to view Iraq's security situation as significantly improved and thus a safe country for return (and also for deportation), findings in this study suggest otherwise and that the scope of the Iraqi refugee crisis remains significant. Although the official numbers of Iraqi refugees in all three countries remain contested, UNHCR predicts a stable number of registered refugees in the three countries over the next two years. Resettled refugees are being generally replaced by new incoming Iraqis fleeing their country. For example, the projections of UNHCR Syria are set to decrease from 126,000 in 2011 to 120,000 in 2012 and 100,000 in 2013. These figures are explained as reflecting a steady replacement rate between newly registered refugees, resettled refugees, and returnees. As one policymaker explained, '[the] numbers [of Iraqi refugees] are significant because they have additional resource implications, not only in terms of funding, but also in terms of staffing as well, [and] in terms of outreach into the different areas' (PMLEB2).

While the profiles of Iraqi refugees in Syria and Jordan consistently included families, Lebanon has witnessed a shift from largely young single men and unaccompanied minors looking for jobs or a toe-hold to onward migration into Europe to families seeking third-country resettlement. In the past two years, UNHCR Lebanon has witnessed a surge in the registration of Iraqi families with many Christians fleeing the wave of violence directed at the Iraqi Christian community in 2010. This has had significant implications for UN and NGO operations in terms of the demand for health services and schooling.

Policy makers also reported variations in the refugees' motivations for selecting host countries despite a general drive for resettlement. They reported that those with links to the previous Iraqi regime and thus with slim chances for resettlement tended to opt to go to Syria or Jordan for long-term residence. This was generally confirmed in our interviews with Iraqis. Lebanon appeared to be sought as a short-term destination, mainly by Christian refugees seeking resettlement.

Precarious legal status

None of the three host states are signatories of the Geneva Convention: they have each adopted different policies for hosting Iraqi refugees. All the interviewed policy makers pointed directly to these differences as emerging from the long-term concerns regarding *Tawtiin*

[integration or naturalisation] and the forced migration of Palestinians in the region. It was felt generally that the policies of the Syrian state were largely accommodating of Iraqi refugees – with a relaxed visa regime, open access to health and education and easy entry into the informal economy. Jordan has been less accommodating and recently tightened its policies regarding movement across its borders due to security claims. Comparatively, Lebanon has adopted the strictest policies in order to counter any claims for naturalisation by Iraqis.

In their official discourses, both Syria and Jordan consider Iraqis as temporary guests (*duyuf*) and are reluctant to use the term ‘refugees’, while Lebanon uses neither term. Policy makers in Syria and Jordan largely subscribe to this discourse, stressing the fact that both states adopted a relatively open policy and provided access (with some restrictions in Jordan) to services, while the substantial amount of foreign assistance is generally understated. As described by one policymaker, ‘regarding the government, we don’t consider Iraqis as refugees but we call them our Iraqi brothers in Jordan. The king has provided a lot of support to the refugees’ (PMJOD4, 3 May 2011). Iraqis themselves do not regard themselves as ‘refugees’ and do not apply the term to describe their conditions.

Beyond the rhetoric, each of the three states imposed a different set of legal measures regulating Iraqis’ residence, mainly summed up by an initial tourist visa and long-term residence permit. The conditions for short-term tourist visas vary in each of the three countries. Since 1 February 2011, Iraqis can get a Syrian visa at the border, while they need to secure one before arrival in Jordan and Lebanon. Once in the host countries, Iraqis can renew these tourist visas for up to a year in most cases. The process is fairly straightforward but can become discretionary when implemented by the border officials. One Iraqi woman and her two daughters explained how they tried to enter Jordan in February 2011:

So we came by land, we sold our furniture and we brought some stuff with us [...]. When we arrived to the Jordanian borders, we finished inspection and were waiting for our passports, the officer called my mum’s name. My mum stood and went to see the officer... (REFJOD3).

He welcomed us and asked me: “Hajjeh, why did you come to Jordan?”, I told him that I came as your guest, he said that its written in your visa that you came for medical reasons, I told him, I forgot, but he said you have to go back to Iraq, I told him, my son, I can’t, it’s hard and difficult for me. I have my daughters with me, he said, “you have to go back” (REFJOD1).

We begged them from 11 am until 4 pm to let us pass, we told them that my mum is old and forgot to tell you that we are coming for medical reasons, but they refused. We left the borders at 5 pm and arrived to Baghdad at midnight, the road was scary (REFJOD2).

It was so difficult for us to return as we sold the furniture and kept some things that we might need over here, that is why we took a car. So we went back to Iraq and took a flight to Amman last March [2011], it did cost a lot, we left most of our belongings in Iraq - you can’t take more than 20 kilograms on board (REFJOD1).

(Interview with Iraqi family, 3 May 2011)

Conversely, the residence type of visa is harder to secure. Syrian regulations are the most lenient and grant refugees a three-month, renewable, residence permit. However, the procedures can become complicated. For example, refugees are required to submit official

proof of residence through tenancy agreements. In some cases, landlords are reluctant to issue this document because they operate within an informal letting market. As a policy maker in Syria explained:

The difficulty that we see most is the residency statement. The refugee needs to have from the landlord what we call the residency statement signed by the Mokhtar, and thus accommodation needs to be registered. But many refugees tend to go in areas where there are illegal buildings or they can be with owners who have not paid their taxes and who would need to go to the Ministry of Finance. So there is a problem with this 'sanad iqama' as we call it (PMSYR2, 18 April 2011).

As a result, some Iraqis do not manage to secure residence permits. Lebanon, and recently Jordan, operate tight regulations and grant two types of residence permits. Iraqis can apply as investors by providing proof of substantial funds, for example, JD 25,000 (around USD 35,000) in Jordan. Alternatively, Iraqis can secure work residence permits. This option is hard to obtain as it incurs high costs and requires a national employer as a guarantor. Most importantly, the work permits are exclusively restricted to certain less skilled and non-professional employment categories.

Within these restrictive legal frameworks, a large number of these Iraqi exiles are undocumented or have had their visa status lapse. Beyond a small portion of wealthy Iraqi families who settled mainly in Jordan, there is a large proportion of middle-class professionals who have become increasingly impoverished due to the protractedness of the crisis. A university student, who fled to Syria with her accountant father, explains their deteriorating financial situation:

We came with only our clothes on, and with some money to keep us going. [...]. We stayed here thinking that our displacement would be for a short period, one or two months, or a year, then we go back. Many families thought the same. Our money ran out. Our assets there are gone. Our work is gone (REFSYR2, 18 April 2011).

Iraqis are increasingly turning to UNHCR and registering as refugees as their savings dry up. However, a sizable proportion of Iraqis prefer not to be identified because they had political links with the former regime. They have little trust in UNHCR's confidentiality standards and fear that their details would be passed on to the Iraqi or US governments (policy makers in Syria, Jordan). Both the IGOs and NGOs in Syria and Jordan turn a blind eye to this group.

In Lebanon, Iraqis are considered work migrants. While that might come across as a progressive policy, it is highly restrictive as it is accompanied by tight enforcement measures. The Lebanese Directorate of General Security has been actively persecuting and detaining over-stayers. As explained by one policy maker in Lebanon, there are around 100 detainees – arrested while working without the correct papers – among registered refugees at any one time in Lebanon. These tight measures disadvantage Iraqis who do not have the means to finance their stay or find a guarantor employer. As a result, Iraqis in Lebanon are forced to take up informal jobs and are often exploited by employers. For example, a 45-year-old Iraqi arts teacher chose to reside with his family in the southern suburb of Beirut because police forces have limited access to the area. He explains the constraints of his and his family's movement resulting from overstaying their tourist visa:

Even in the UN, when they gave us the [refugee] paper, I told her, is this paper recognised? She told me some people do and some people don't, but you try to avoid the police. Avoiding the police means that I cannot go on the street. Why did I choose this area? I stayed in this area because it is an area, emm, how do I explain it to you? It is a calm area. It doesn't have problems. How do I explain it? It's a Shi'a

area that is taking in the [Iraqi] Shi'a. And most of the Iraqis in Lebanon, ask any Iraqi in Lebanon where do you live? He tells you in the Southern suburb. He cannot live in the northern areas, he can't because those areas, how do I tell you, they have the law, more law. The police check your passport, you have exceeded your stay, and you go to prison. [...] We are careful, we don't go out. We don't go beyond 500 meters away from our building. We go for groceries they are close by. Just these things and we go back. And if the UN calls us for an interview, we take a car [taxi] (REFLEB3, 5 May 2011).

Voluntary return

In all three countries, policy makers stated that prospects for voluntary return do not seem promising; very few Iraqis have accepted the voluntary repatriation packages that have been offered. UNHCR recently adopted a de-registration system in an attempt to assess numbers of returnees or onward migrants. The Syria and Jordan offices deactivate files if the refugees do not show up for assistance over a period of six months or a year, respectively. UNHCR Jordan saw the numbers of 'active' registered refugees drop in the past two years from 60,000 to 32,000 while the numbers in Syria have remained relatively stable, as explained earlier. UNHCR Lebanon assumed that voluntary return figures in Lebanon would be very low; a Lebanon-based NGO's internal assessment of the movement of 2,000 Iraqi beneficiary families in 2010, however, showed that 400 families informally returned to Iraq either temporarily or permanently. However, the scope and dynamics of this informal movement remain unclear.

Host states policies vary in terms of promoting or encouraging return. Jordan, for example, discourages return or back and forth migration by imposing a strict five-year ban on refugees who leave Jordan. Lebanon does the same for those who overstay their residence permits. In addition, the state also pressures Iraqi detainees to sign repatriation agreements as a way to exit from detention. Syria maintains practically an open-door policy with many Iraqis moving back and forth regularly.

UNHCR does not promote voluntary return and only offers minimal return packages of USD 100-200 in addition to transportation costs. In Syria, fewer than 200 individuals used them in 2010. In Jordan, 200 families used them in the past three years, and in Lebanon, 42 individuals used them in 2010. NGOs operating similar schemes have also faced little interest in return. Caritas Jordan, for instance, had two families approach them for assisted return in 2010. One of the families spent a few months in Iraq and then moved back to Jordan shortly thereafter. As a result of this low demand, Caritas discontinued the voluntary return schemes.

All Iraqi refugees – and most of the policy makers and practitioners we interviewed – regarded the precarious security situation in Iraq as the major reason for the low demand for assisted return schemes. At the same time, the Iraqi government's lukewarm approach to services and assistance post-return was widely known. Refugees who had returned reported that they did not recognise their neighbourhoods any longer as many have been segregated along sectarian lines. Policy makers recognised the dramatic changes to these localities. These included ethnic cleansing, including confiscation of property, and changes in the demographics and social fabric of the neighbourhood. One refugee in Syria expressed her connection to her neighbourhood in terms of the vibrant social fabric:

After we received the threat, my brother told me that we needed to leave because there was no one left from our family there. You know, I don't have any family in Baghdad, but I was crying a lot. The scent of my country. My land. My friends. My neighbours. My neighbours are Muslim, and I am Christian,

they were crying like I was their daughter, not a neighbour. A life-long company ('ishrit `omr). We were raised together. I was there for 30 years. I was born in 1979 in this house, with my neighbours, in my neighbourhood. I was crying and telling my husband how would I not see my neighbours tomorrow? (REFSYR1, 18 April 2011).

Many of the refugees we spoke with reported that targeted persecution – the main driver of their flight from Iraq – remained a concern and prevented them from seeking return. In such cases, the physical aspect of the neighbourhood might remain the same, but individual incidents of violence and security threats reduced the feeling of safety that residents associate with their 'home'. The interviews with refugees revealed that this category of refugee is diverse and includes not only Christian and other religious minorities, but also individuals from Sunni and Shi'a backgrounds who were persecuted or received death threats either because of their affiliation with the former regime, their involvement with the coalition forces, or the mixed marriages they contracted. Sometimes these factors were combined:

My father was in military production (tasni"askari) in the time of Saddam and he retired in the time of Saddam. My brother also worked there [...]. So they used to consider them as belonging to the previous regime. [...]. Then I said I have to travel again? I thought I'd try to solve it with a security deal (safaqa amniyya), so I joined the police forces. I stayed with them for about a year without a salary. [...]. They didn't give us any salary. Every month, they would tell us you will get paid next month, every month the same story. I was terrified, all the sake of what? To protect myself through them? It became worse after I joined the police. On one hand, I was considered a traitor, aligned with the Americans because I was working for them, and on the other, they told me I was from this certain sect [implying an affiliation with the previous regime], I do not want to say what it is. The pressures became worse. And the other thing, there was no salary; they were not giving us any. I decided to travel and come here (REFLEB2, 5 MAY 2011).

One policy maker in Lebanon reported that even long-term Iraqi detainees refuse to go back to Iraq despite the hardship they face in Lebanese prisons. Iraqis we spoke with also expressed their unwillingness to return to Iraq because of the inadequate social services and infrastructure in that country. Refugees reported a breakdown in basic services such as lack of adequate education and health facilities. As an Iraqi refugee in Syria explained:

Services [in Iraq] are bad, below zero. This was the case since we were there, before we left [in 2007]. The least we expect is water and electricity. We are not asking for luxury. Nothing is being provided. It is all gone (REFSYR1, 18 April 2011).

This was confirmed in the statements of policy makers and practitioners, particularly in Syria, where increasing numbers of Iraqis are reported to be entering the country seeking medical services. Another related factor was the lack of job opportunities and economic prospects in Iraq. Some refugees reported that they do not have access to reliable information about job and livelihood opportunities in Iraq. A policymaker in Syria mentioned that some single Iraqi men would probably be interested in return but they need more information about conditions in Iraq. The role of the Iraqi government in promoting return was criticised by a number of policy makers we interviewed. They felt that the Iraqi Ministry of Displacement and Migration had promised generous packages for the voluntary return scheme, but reportedly did not implement them upon return.



Map 2: One Iraqi migration pathway between Iraq and host countries

Overall, the reduction in reported violence in Iraq in the past couple of years has not translated into a reduction of targeted violence. Hence, it challenges the classical definition of a ‘refugee’ being completely removed from their home country. The circularity of migration among Iraqis in the Middle East challenges these ideas and definitional assumptions. According to one policy maker in Jordan, the relative reduction in violence increased the movement of Iraqis who returned home for specific reasons such as to check on their relatives, sell their assets, collect their pensions, and assess the security situation first hand. These visits do not imply that Iraqi refugees feel safe to return. He explained further that ‘as far as we can tell they go in, do their task and come out, and if you ask them about the situation, they have taken a risk, it’s a calculated risk. For some people the risk hasn’t paid off, they got killed’ (PMJOD1, 2 May 2011). These observations are supported by interviews with refugees. For example, one Iraqi refugee in Lebanon had left Iraq for Jordan and then decided to go back and try and live there. He then fled to Lebanon a year later and does not intend to go back because he considers that ‘Iraq changed; it changed for the worse, not for the better. [...] I am trying to forget that Iraq is my country so that I don’t ever go back. This is how I’m thinking. Because honestly, I cannot live there anymore’ (REFLEB2, 5 May 2011). As a result, many Iraqis return – temporarily – to Iraq without informing the organisations involved. For example, some male heads of households go on their own to assess the situation, and later relocate their families accordingly.

Local accommodation and assistance

Our interviews indicate that the boundaries between long-term humanitarian assistance in protracted refugee situations and the prospects of 'local integration' are blurred. The sensitivity to the protracted Palestinian refugee crisis has meant that the term 'integration' is generally rejected by policy makers, practitioners and Iraqis alike. However, the case of Iraq's exiles and refugees suggests that a continuous process of assistance and accommodation is taking place locally, with serious implications in terms of the relations between host and refugee communities.

UNHCR has adapted a variety of forms of humanitarian assistance in each country to respond to the scope of the refugee crisis as well as the legal-political national policy framework. Iraqi refugees rely on food and cash distribution in Syria, cash distribution in Jordan and food coupons in Lebanon. These different models focus on subsidies for food, shelter, health and education to the most vulnerable refugees. In Jordan, for example, UNHCR provides cash assistance to almost half of the active registered refugees (13,500) while some service providers, such as Caritas, reported steady numbers of Iraqi beneficiaries at around 8,000.

Policy makers and practitioners are concerned with the restrictions on employment facing these Iraqis. Many recognise the national policies banning employment but continue to organise programmes and activities aimed at optimising economic opportunities for refugees either in the host location or for future resettlement. In the three countries, NGOs provide skills and language training to men and women. Training for men includes technical skills such as computer maintenance while training for women is focused on conventional skills such as hairdressing and sewing. In Lebanon, several NGOs provide legal services for detainees and assistance in securing work permits.

Despite the restrictive legal frameworks and the rejection of 'local integration' as a durable solution, on-going accommodation of Iraqis is occurring in the three countries. This process is the outcome of new patterns of inter- and intra-social relations between host and refugee communities and within Iraqi communities. In the three countries, most refugees mix with other minority communities. They reside and work informally in diverse low-income areas along with other disadvantaged groups, including non-Iraqi refugees. Similarly, in the three countries, policy makers reported a high incidence of inter-marriage between locals and Iraqis. In Lebanon, in particular, the accommodation of Iraqi refugees followed the local sectarian socio-geographic distribution, as Christian Iraqi refugees settled in Beirut's northern suburb and Muslim refugees settled in southern suburbs.

This on-going accommodation is not problem-free, as tensions between local and refugee communities are reported. While refugees complain about meagre entitlements, locals are threatened by competition over job opportunities, social provision, the rise in cost of living, and security. One policy maker explained these tensions in the context of Jordan:

The first wave of Iraqis who started coming to Jordan were rich. Apartments which used to be for, let's say, JD 50,000 [USD 70,000] doubled in price. If you went to shops you would have found Iraqi women buying a lot without taking notice of the price, while when Jordanian women went shopping, they did not get any attention from the shopkeepers. It was the same in restaurants; everybody was paying attention to Iraqi customers as some were paying very generous tips. Many Iraqi restaurants opened in Amman. All this created in Jordanians some kind of grudge, or envy, because the prices have risen while salaries remained the same. Many Jordanians couldn't afford to buy houses anymore,

while Iraqis were buying them without caring for the price. They paid cash, which appealed to many real estate owners who prefer to sell them apartments and houses. These feelings were transferred to schools. Children heard stories and gossip at home about Iraqis, so they started hating Iraqi children and directed their hate towards them at school. As of three years ago these feelings decreased. Iraqis got integrated with Jordanians, many Iraqis married Jordanians, and many Jordanians married Iraqis. I feel these feelings have decreased a lot, because now the Iraqis who are living here are suffering like the Jordanians (PMJOD4, 3 May 2011).

The relationship between religious organisations and Iraqi refugees appeared to vary across the political and social context. Local churches seemed to maintain close links with Christian Iraqis and provide a point of reference for NGOs working with refugees. In contrast, the links between Muslim refugees and local Muslim religious organisations did not appear to be institutionalised. In Lebanon, several Iraqi religious organisations affiliated to Iraqi political parties have established links with some refugees. As one policy maker explained:

There was a shaykh who came from Iraq and he wanted to help the Iraqis who were here. There were also big organisations for Iraqis like ... Al Hakemi who ran for [Iraqi general] elections earlier. There are also several factions (tayyarat) ... you have the faction of Al Hakemi. There is also another faction that has opened here, Al Khiyam (PMLEB5, 28 April 2011).

Refugees had mixed response to these organisations. A refugee in Lebanon recounted his experience with the same organisation:

There are many religious organisations here, many. I got a prescription for my son; he had a rash on his face. The medicine was expensive; it was LL 100,000 [USD 63]. Caritas did not process it because they considered it a cosmetic matter. It was not cosmetic, he needed treatment, but they didn't process it. Some people told me there are the Sistani office and the Hakemi office and such. I went to the office; he saw it and he asked me did you ask the UN? I told him yes. He asked me how much it was, I said LL 100,000. He took the prescription, photocopied it and stamped and I don't know what, and wrote LL 40,000 [USD 27] on it. They have a pharmacy; he helped me with 40,000LL from the whole amount. Shi'a organisations are supposed to help the needy through 'Khoms' [tithing], but here they don't do it (REFLEB3, 5 May 2011).

These links are less visible in Jordan and Syria where political parties are restrained and civil society space is depoliticised.

The strength of intra-community relations among Iraqis was disputed. Some NGOs considered that levels of trust among Iraqis were low because they belong to various ideological and sectarian currents. However, many accounts by Iraqi refugees focused on the narrative of unity and tolerance towards each other, especially in relation to the recurring violence. A refugee in Syria gave an example of this solidarity:

After the explosion of Samara, the explosion of Imam Askari, I was getting food distribution in the office in Duma. I was a volunteer but nobody knew it, I was standing in the queue like everybody else. We were a group of women from all parts of Iraq. We all were revolted by the explosion. I said to myself, 'Thank God, where is this sectarianism that the news keeps talking about?' (REFSYR1, 18 April 2011).

In particular, UNHCR's programme of outreach volunteers has proven very successful. The same refugee described the impact of the counselling project on furthering relations between Iraqis:

The project showed us that we have much energy that is untapped or we did not have the chance to work with it. We did it here – refugees and volunteers – and we the volunteers are also refugees. There

is so much trust. Sometimes a refugee's family members do not know about his problems. I make him feel safe, and he feels safe with me. Some refugees say 'Thank God, the world is still a good place'. We also accompany some refugees to UNHCR for their papers, to organisations that do activities etc. Last month each group of volunteers held a mothers' day event. [...]. We took the mothers by shuttle bus to the venue. In the bus, a woman looked at me and told me 'you know it's been months since I have been out of the house. Now I am breathing the fresh air' (REFSYR1).

Third-country resettlement

Effective programming of third-country resettlement of Iraqis has faced many challenges in terms of burden sharing and refugees' expectations. From the start of the crisis, Western countries' responses have been unpredictable and varied. Their roles and responsibilities with regard to the war in Iraq do not seem to have played a part in determining national resettlement quotas for Iraqi refugees. In the past few years, quotas for resettlement have dropped dramatically, mainly due to the withdrawal of European countries from the programme. As one policy maker in Syria explained, 'Iraq is the black spot that people want to sweep under the carpet and forget about. But the reality for Iraqi refugees is quite crisp' (PMSYR3, 20 April 2011).

The US, presently the main donor of the humanitarian operation in the three countries, tops the list of destination countries. Canada ranked second overall including having one of the highest per capita intakes of refugees. A dramatic shift was noted in Scandinavian countries and especially Sweden, whose number of accepted refugees fell from 6,083 in 2008 to 1,978 in 2010 (UNHCR 2010b, 2011). This case underscores the dark politics of resettlement. European countries, in particular, have adopted an increasingly restrictive approach to resettlement, asylum entitlements and protection, and a 'fortress mentality' is being manifested by immigration restrictions and selective burden sharing.

From the perspective of the Iraqi refugees we interviewed, the Western states have obligations to fulfil as an outcome of their roles in the war on Iraq. The majority of Iraqi refugees are reportedly interested in third-country resettlement. Whether due to general insecurity in Iraq or targeted persecution, Iraqi refugees are creating transnational social networks as a way of ensuring their safety and reducing the risks they and their families face in exile. Dispersion along a vast transnational network including the US and Canada is increasingly common (Monsutti 2008). The case of one refugee in Lebanon illustrates this point. He is one of four siblings who are all dispersed in various countries at various periods during the past 15 years. He is based in Lebanon, with one brother in Jordan, another in Malta, and a sister in the US (REFLEB2, 5 May 2011).

Policy makers we interviewed clearly associated third-country resettlement with the national economic, social, and political interests of the Western states. As one senior diplomat explained:

Resettlement is not asylum. No country has an obligation to resettle a refugee from a third country. So it is not about providing protection in the legal sense. [...] And every country that I am aware of, including Canada has criteria based on whether or not you need protection as a refugee, but there are also some criteria that represent other national policy objectives. [...] Some of these criteria involve protecting the safety and security of Canadians. [...] (SENDIP1, 18 April 2011).

Resettlement policies include selective criteria that disqualify various categories of Iraqi refugees. For example, several states exclude nationals associated with the former regime. This is a particularly problematic exclusion as many of the middle class professional Iraqi exiles were required to belong to the Baath party in order to work under the former regime. One refugee in Jordan explained how the police detained him for 17 days in 1998 in harsh conditions in order to force him to collaborate:

They took me in a van [...] to a place in Sadr Alkanah in the suburbs of Baghdad [...]. All the prisoners were young men in their twenties, and mid-thirties. I knew most of them, they were my friends. They brought everybody to this place without giving any of us a reason [...]. I spent 17 days in that horrible place; the toilets were very tiny, with very little water and without windows. There were also tiny rooms for individual imprisonment, like cupboards, where one could hardly move; nobody can imagine how much we suffered in prison. Usually during the night, an officer would come for inspection; he would insult us and even hit us. The majority of prisoners were well-educated and holders of Masters Degrees. There had been orders to bring back all graduates who completed their military service, in order to hire them again in military production. We spent 17 days in prison. We learned that there were many radiation experiments in that place; I was allowed to leave only when I signed a contract agreeing to work in military production. At that moment I knew that I had to leave Iraq (REFJOD4, 3 May 2011).

In some cases, Western resettlement criteria are set according to sectarian affiliation. Germany and France were reported to be interested in resettling Christian refugees only, an issue opposed by UNHCR (PMSYR3, 20 April 2011).



Map 3: One family, multiple destinations: Migrations for four Iraqi siblings

The resettlement selection process also disadvantages the widespread Middle Eastern preference for extended families and households. Most resettlement missions are directed at nuclear families. As part of the procedures, diplomatic missions have files for nuclear families with children under 18 years of age. This excludes adult children who usually live with their parents and elder relatives such as grandparents. These criteria add to the pressure on Iraqis who face leaving their family members behind and increase the burden of the vulnerable population in the countries of exit.

Policy makers pointed out that although refugees do not get to choose their third-country destination, they believed them to be knowledgeable about the criteria for resettlement of

various countries. Interviews with refugees, however, contradicted these assumptions. We found that refugees constructed knowledge of the conditions and criteria of resettlement schemes based on conflicting information circulated in their social networks. Refugees get caught up a cycle of trial and error and often resort to informal channels, leading them to use irregular routes of migration to Western countries and seek asylum there (PMSYR2, 18 April 2011). Furthermore, refugees indicated that they did not receive regular updates about the status of their applications. In Lebanon for instance, waiting times can last over a year without notification. One refugee in Lebanon referred to the long periods taken to process his resettlement:

There was a woman who interviewed us. After the interview, she said: 'You go to the American embassy, but keep in mind that you must wait for a phone call from us which might take one to six months or a year. You will get a call to be resettled'. I asked her: 'During this year of waiting what shall we do?' She said: 'That's the way it is'. It is a tiring routine, very tiring. We went to the interview; she gave us an interview after eight months. [...]. We knew two guys, one of them went to the Embassy and they gave him an OK and he got on a course for the American system and took a blood test. They told him to wait for the call to get a flight to the US. He has been waiting for two years for this phone call. These lengthy procedures, I don't know... (REFLEB3, 5 May 2011).

This issue was particularly distressing for refugees who were left hanging for extended periods of time. One policy maker in Lebanon recounted the distress of these long waiting periods:

UNHCR and the embassies and all the fund countries, they need to work much faster on resettlement issues. Instead of taking a year for a case, for a family to leave... Why a year? It has to be done quicker. [...]. I discussed this with UNHCR. Refugees have no idea what happened to their files. They say 'I applied three years ago and I'm still waiting for an answer; I go back and I don't get an answer' ... that's not right. They need to tell them 'you are rejected; there is no way you are going to be resettled, choose to go back to Iraq or stay here'. They have to be given a choice and they have to be told exactly what their status is. I think this will solve a lot of problems, but nobody wants to do it. UNHCR doesn't want to tell anybody 'you are never going to be resettled; you have to decide what to do'. [...]. We told [UNHCR] 'they keep coming to you and they are asking these questions, can't somebody just tell them straight that you will never be accepted'. Somebody should tell them, this is reality. They are still here, years on, hoping that they're still going to go somewhere when in fact they're not going to go anywhere (PMLEB4, 5 May 2011).

Policymakers also pointed out that the conditions of resettlement at the country of destination also included challenges in terms of expectations of self-reliance, adaptation, and support. As 70 per cent of registered refugees were university graduates, they found it hard to settle for menial or less qualified jobs in their resettlement country (PMJOD4, 3 May 2011). Refugees were also subjected to anxiety and stress in certain contexts as support packages varied from country to country. For example, the US offered resettled refugees a support package for six months, after which time they are expected to work and repay it as their 'loan'. As a result, many resettled Iraqis, especially the older generation and some vulnerable women, are giving up and returning to the host countries (PMJOD5, 4 May 2011).

Innovative solutions

We asked all our interviewees to explore both constraints and solutions to this protracted crisis. Their responses fell into three broad areas:

Reconceptualising refugees: towards a liberalised view of Iraqi refugee movement

Policy makers, practitioners and Iraqis we interviewed all regarded security in Iraq as the major constraint hindering Iraqis return to the country. Policy makers regarded as very

important the political solution of improving security and services in Iraq. They also recognised that the fluid movement of Iraqis back and forth to Iraq was an important mechanism for improving life opportunities and reducing family risk. Relaxing regulations on border crossing across the three countries was considered to be useful for the long-term solution to the crisis as it allowed members of refugee households to return temporarily and get a sense of the situation in Iraq. This suggestion is resisted, on one hand, by Western resettlement countries as it flies in the face of the classic definition of a 'refugee' and, on the other hand, by host states who regard this movement as a threat to local and national security.

Burden sharing: Clarifying asylum and resettlement criteria

Policy makers, in particular, recognised the need to share information related to the criteria of resettlement. Several policy makers mentioned that the lengthy and unclear procedures of third-country resettlement keep 'refugees hanging' (PMLEB4, 5 May 2011). One suggestion was to create a user-friendly manual of the requirements and criteria for resettlement for use across all three countries (PMSYR3, 20 April 2011).

Integration (local accommodation): legal status and work permits

Policy makers recognised the heavy constraints under which they were operating in relation to local integration—a term and a concept widely rejected by the host states. They all recognised that there was a growing category of Iraqis who were becoming 'stuck' in host countries. For various reasons, these individuals were poor candidates for third-country resettlement and at the same time, they could not go back to Iraq. This group included some of the most vulnerable categories, such as the elderly left behind after nuclear family resettlement or less skilled young adults. For this group – especially the young – policy makers were concerned that work permits or a relaxation of labour laws should be considered by the host states to lessen Iraqi refugees' dependency on humanitarian aid. One policy maker in Syria recognised that:

The right to work would be very big and would end a lot of abuse. Because many people work under the table and there is a lot of abuse and exploitation of Iraqis; and at the same time it would put them on an equal footing with Syrians. So it would remove some arguments that Syrians have about Iraqis taking out their jobs. If both have equal rights to take up jobs there would be less of that (PMSYR3, 20 April 2011).

Other development initiatives were suggested to promote greater independence of the Iraqis along the line of increasing employability and promoting self reliance. The category of Iraqis that are unlikely to get third-country resettlement and are unwilling to return to Iraq face long-term, chronic financial challenges, restricted movement and on-going requirements for basic health and education services. Policy makers expressed concern that the anticipated drop in funding for current programmes will impact badly on this large group of Iraqis. A humanitarian assistance drive to provide market-driven training and skills to these Iraqis as well as facilitation of residence and work permits was suggested as one step in the right direction of unlocking this protracted refugee crisis.

5 Conclusion: Constraints, innovations and accommodations

Unlocking the Iraqi protracted crisis will require first and foremost a bridging of the political with the operational. The ‘refugees’ of the Iraqi crisis do not fit with Western conceptualisations of refugee law. Their flight has been a steady outflow for more than a decade, peaking in 2006-2007. The migration is not ‘one way’; it is often more circular in shape and involves movement in and out of Iraq as well as across wider transnational networks in the Middle East and further afield. This mobility is a result of the protractedness of their situations and includes a strategy of managing life risks by dispersing family members along pre-established social networks whenever possible. One theme that has regularly emerged in this case study is the importance of effecting an analytical shift from transitory humanitarian (emergency) assistance to fostering inclusive local assistance and accommodation to cater for the large group of Iraqi refugees who are increasingly ‘stuck’ in host countries of the Middle East. This significant group does not fit the Western ‘Regimes of Recognition’ which are characterised by a fortress mentality coupled with a ‘cherry picking’ of the most attractive refugee profiles (Fassin 2011), and will never succeed in gaining third-country resettlement. Voluntary return is unlikely in the near future because of the persistent lack of security, infrastructural recovery and opportunity in the country. Furthermore, those in this group who were associated with the former regime are unlikely to be welcomed by the current Iraqi state.

At the political level, the three classical durable solutions are largely unworkable for the majority of Iraqis in exile in Lebanon, Syria and Jordan for the following reasons:

- Voluntary return to Iraq is stalled by security concerns and lack of development;
- Formal local integration in host states is restricted by rigid legal regulations, sluggish economies and political instability; and
- Resettlement to Western states is carefully controlled by a fortress mentality and an ‘elitist’ selection procedure.

It is unlikely that a political solution to the prolonged Iraqi crisis at the international or regional level can be effected in the current climate of political unrest (the Arab Spring) across the region. Attention is focusing on the extraordinary events of 2011 that are creating dramatic and unexpected forced migration flows of recognised refugees, as well as economic migrants, throughout the region. Some observers have noted an increased number of Iraqi refugees leaving Syria for Iraq, but largely, Iraqi refugees are remaining ‘invisible’ and hoping to ride out the current unrest in the country.

At the operational level, efforts remain largely focused on emergency humanitarian services rather than catering for the long-term requirements of those Iraqis who have little hope of third-country resettlement or return. Hence there is a need to shift from transitory approaches to the fostering of an inclusive regional accommodation of these Iraqi ‘temporary guests’ in Syria and Jordan and ‘tourists’ or ‘migrant workers’ in Lebanon. A few of the NGOs operating in the region are beginning to foster activities and training promoting local accommodation and long-term skill development. Language and literacy courses, computer training and other similar activities are widely well received by Iraqis as well as host

community members and create greater opportunities for Iraqis to enter the local economy either formally or informally.

Although all three states categorically reject ‘integration’ as a solution, some local accommodation is taking place and was reported by practitioners and refugees alike. In each of these countries, visible signifiers of differentiation are insignificant. Reports of Iraqis – adults and children alike – beginning to adopt local dress and local dialects in order to ‘fit in’ are emerging. Although many Iraqis have fallen into national categories of ‘illegal’ as their visas expire and they are unable to pay for residence permits, their presence seems to be tolerated. Few Iraqis are deported as over-stayers. Some Iraqis report that they have found work in the informal sector in Syria and Jordan; in Lebanon, the possibility of buying official work permits is present. These developments suggest that a movement towards greater accommodation – a form of integration, but without the baggage – is taking place and needs to be encouraged and promoted. It may be that in some cases, UNHCR and other NGOs might lobby for a reduction in the charges levied on Iraqis for residence and other permits. Or, alternatively, these humanitarian aid agencies might consider expanding their financial aid programme to Iraqi refugees so as to include subsidising the costs of residency and /or permits. Such measures would thus regularise the Iraqis’ presence in the host countries even if they did not end the crisis.

The mobility of Iraq’s exiles across the region also needs to be recognised. Many Iraqi extended families have members in two or three countries in the Middle East as well as others in Canada, the US or Europe. Those in the region generally have members who return to Iraq occasionally to check on the security situation, to call in on aged parents or relatives who were unable or unwilling to flee in the first place, or to conduct business to support the extended family. This mobility is part of the reality of this protracted refugee crisis. It needs to be recognised as a risk management strategy for refugees for whom the three classic durable solutions are largely inapplicable. Unfortunately, this mobility is often looked at sceptically by humanitarian aid regime as it raises questions regarding how well Iraqis fit into the ‘category’ of refugee.

It may be worth exploring the possibility of a multi-directional approach to unlocking this prolonged crisis. This three-pronged approach would include tapping into legal opportunities (work permit, residency), policy opportunities (harmonised approach that still recognises differences in context), and operational opportunities (recognising the significance of multiple migration pathways).

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- Interview with policy maker (PMLEB4), Beirut, Lebanon 5 May 2011

المحلي. وعلى الرغم من تصنيف الدول المجاورة المضيضة للعديد من اللاجئين العراقيين في خانة المقيمين "غير الشرعيين" عند إنتهاء صلاحية تأشيرات عملهم أو اقامتهم ؛ إلا أنه يتم التغاضي عن تواجدهم في البلدان المضيضة بحيث انه لم يتم حتى الآن ترحيل إلا القليل منهم على اساس تجاوزهم للمدة القانونية لإقامتهم.

هذا ويفيد بعض العراقيين بأنهم تمكنوا من ايجاد فرص عمل في القطاع غير الرسمي. فتوحي هذه التطورات، بحدوث نوع من التكيف المحلي الذي يكون مماثل لشكل من اشكال الاندماج، ولكن من دون تحمّل الأعباء المرافقة له. ويحتاج هذا التوجه إلى المزيد من التشجيع والترويج له. ومن الممكن أن تقوم المفوضية العليا لشؤون اللاجئين والمنظمات غير الحكومية الأخرى، في بعض الأحيان، بالضغط باتجاه تخفيض الرسوم المفروضة على العراقيين للحصول على تأشيرات الإقامة والعمل وغيرها. كما يمكن أن تقوم المنظمات الانسانية بتوسيع برامج اعاناتها المالية الخاصة باللاجئين العراقيين، لتشمل تغطية جزء من تكاليف الاستحصال على اذونات الإقامة و/أو العمل. وبذلك، يسهل هذا النوع من الاجراءات عملية تنظيم الوضع القانوني لتواجد العراقيين في البلدان المضيضة، حتى ولو لم تؤدي الى انتهاء الأزمة.

أخيراً، يتوجب الاعتراف بوجود حركة تنقل للمنفيين العراقيين ضمن المنطقة. فلدى الكثير من العائلات العراقية عدد من الأفراد المنتشرين في إثنين أو ثلاث بلدان في الشرق الأوسط، بالإضافة إلى آخرين في كندا، والولايات المتحدة وأوروبا. وغالباً ما يقوم بعض أفراد العائلات المتواجدة في المنطقة، بالعودة إلى العراق من حين إلى آخر، اما لمعاينة الأوضاع الأمنية أو للاطمئنان على أهلهم المسنين، أو اقاربهم الذين لم يلجؤوا اساساً الى الهجرة سواء لأسباب طوعية او قسرية، أو للقيام ببعض الأعمال الاقتصادية التي تمكنهم من تقديم العون لعوائلهم الممتدة. إن هذه الحركة هي جزء من واقع الأزمة الطويلة الأمد للاجئين، والتي ينبغي الاعتراف بوجودها من أجل وضع استراتيجية لإدارة المخاطر المحدقة بشريحة من اللاجئين الذين لا يمكنهم الاستفادة من الحلول الكلاسيكية المستدامة الثلاث. ولكن للأسف، ينظر إلى هذه الحركة بنوع من الريبة من قبل نظام اغاثة اللاجئين ، كونه يشكك بمدى امكانية تصنيف العراقيين ضمن "فئة" اللاجئين. على العكس، فمن المهم استحداث مقاربة متعددة الاتجاهات لحل هذه الأزمة المتنامية. وتشتمل مقاربة كهذه على خلق فرص قانونية (بحيث تسهل الاستحصال على اذونات العمل والإقامة)، و فرص صناعة سياسات بديلة (بحيث تكون مقاربة منسقة وقادرة في الوقت عينه على التماس خصوصية كل بلد)، الى جانب الفرص العملياتية (بحيث تلحظ أهمية المسارات المتعددة للهجرة).

ومن اكثر المواضيع بروزا في دراسة الحالة، هو أهمية إحداث نقلة نوعية في قراءة الحلول الطويلة الأمد تتم من الانتقال من تقديم المساعدة الانسانية (الاغاثة) حصرياً، إلى تعزيز المساعدة المحلية وعملية التكيف الشاملة بشكل يتماشى مع احتياجات عدد كبير من اللاجئين العراقيين "العالقين" على نحو متزايد في البلدان المضيفة في الشرق الأوسط.

إن هذه الشريحة الكبيرة لا تنضوي تحت "أنظمة الاعتراف" الغربية للاجئين التي تتميز بعقلية "الحصن المنيع" والمبنية على اساس "الانتقاء النخبوي" لملفات اللاجئين الذين يستوفون الشروط التابعة لبلدان اعادة التوطين (فاسين 2001). كما انه في ظلّ الغياب المستمر للأمن وعدم تعافي البنية التحتية وانعدام الفرص في العراق، تبدو العودة الطوعية غير واردة في المستقبل القريب. أضف إلى ذلك أن عدد كبير من المهجرين "العالقين" كان على علاقة وطيدة بالنظام السابق، و بالتالي فإنه من المستبعد أن يكون مرحباً بهم في الدولة العراقية الحالية.

تظهر نتائجنا بوضوح عدم فعالية الحلول الكلاسيكية المستدامة الثلاث بالنسبة لغالبية العراقيين في المنفى وتحديداً في لبنان، سوريا و الأردن، للأسباب التالية:

- جمود العودة الطوعية إلى العراق بسبب المخاوف الأمنية والافتقار إلى التنمية.
- تقيّد عملية الاندماج المحلي الرسمي في الدول المضيفة بإجراءات قانونية تضييقية، الى جانب الركود الاقتصادي وعدم الاستقرار السياسي.
- التشدد في عملية إعادة التوطين في الدول الأوروبية، وخضوعها الى مراقبة دقيقة بسبب عقلية "الحصن المنيع" للدول الغربية ومعايير "الانتقاء النخبوي".

كما انه من المستبعد في الوضع الراهن تطبيق الحلول السياسية لأزمة العراق في ظل المناخ الحالي من الاضطرابات السياسية على المستوى الإقليمي والعالمي. فقد لاحظ بعض المراقبين مغادرة عدداً متزايداً من اللاجئين العراقيين لسوريا وعودتهم إلى العراق، غير انه ما زال معظمهم قابع في سوريا بعيداً عن الأنظار على أمل تجاوز الاضطرابات الحالية في البلاد.

أما على المستوى العملياتي تشير دراسة الحالة أيضاً الى تركيز الجهود على خدمات الأغاثة الطارئة، أكثر منها على تأمين المتطلبات الطويلة الأمد للاجئين الذين لديهم أمل ضئيل بإعادة توطينهم في بلد ثالث أو بعودتهم إلى العراق. من جهة أخرى، ينبغي تعزيز عملية إقليمية شاملة للتكيف المحلي للاجئين الذين يتم تصنيفهم بمثابة "ضيوف مؤقتين" في سوريا والأردن، أو "سائحين" أو "عمال مهاجرين" في لبنان. وفي هذا السياق، بدأ عدد قليل من المنظمات غير الحكومية العاملة في المنطقة بالترويج لنشاطات ولدورات تدريبية تشجع على التكيف المحلي والتطوير الطويل الأمد للمهارات. فقد لاقت برامج تنمية عديدة، كدروس اللغة، ومحو الأمية، والتدريب على استخدام الكمبيوتر، وغيرها استحسان العراقيين وأفراد المجتمعات المضيفة، وأتاحت فرصاً أكبر للاجئين لدخول الاقتصاد المحلي، سواء بشكل رسمي أو غير رسمي.

من ناحية أخرى، على الرغم من رفض كل من لبنان، سوريا والأردن، رفضاً قاطعاً لحلول "الاندماج المحلي"، فقد أفاد الممارسون الميدانيون واللاجئون على حد سواء الى حدوث بعض أنواع من التكيف المحلي. وتفيد التقارير في البلدان الثلاث بقيام بعض العراقيين، كباراً وصغاراً، باعتماد الأزياء واللهجات المحلية في محاولة لزيادة فرص تقبلهم من قبل المجتمع

الملخص التنفيذي

يُعدُّ معظم اللاجئين والنازحين داخلياً في العالم من بلدان تتصف بهشاشة الدولة والاضطهاد والنزاعات المستمرة لسنوات طويلة. وفي الوقت الراهن، يعيش أكثر من نصف لاجئي العالم، الذين يقدر عددهم بعشرة ملايين لاجيء، في منفىً طويل الأمد. وتُعد نسبة مهجري العراق من الأكبر بين شعوب العالم، إذ، وبحسب المفوضية العليا لشؤون اللاجئين التابعة للأمم المتحدة (UNHCR 2008a) فإن ثمة مليوني لاجئ عراقي، من أصل 5 ملايين مهجر عراقي، إضافة إلى 2.8 مليون نازح داخلي، وذلك وفق "مركز رصد النزوح الداخلي" (IDMC 2010a, 2010b).

ولقد تنامي الفصل الجغرافي بين جماعات سكانية عرفت بتداخلها الطائفي والاثني في السابق، لحد اعتبار النزوح الداخلي كوضع "شبه دائم" داخل العراق؛ وأظهرت جماعات اللاجئين التي عبرت الحدود الدولية ميلاً ضعيفاً للعودة، باستثناء عدد قليل منهم (مارفلييت وتشاتي 2009). مع استمرار حالة عدم الاستقرار، يتحول واقع اللاجئين العراقيين في الشرق الأوسط والنازحين داخلياً في العراق، إلى حالة من "التهجير الطويل الأمد". ففي حين بلغت أزمة المهجرين العراقيين مرحلة حرجة، نلاحظ تراجعاً للاهتمام العالمي بالعراق. وفي ظلّ إنعدام الأمن واستمرار النزاعات الأهلية وغياب الإستقرار الاقتصادي داخلياً، ما من مؤشرات توحى بإمكانية عودة جماعية للاجئين العراقيين إلى وطنهم الأم في المستقبل القريب. ويرجح بقاء اللاجئين العراقيين في الدول المجاورة ضمن ظروف معيشية متزايدة الصعوبة. فمع تقلص مدخراتهم المالية، وازدياد صعوبة حركتهم "الدائرية" من وإلى العراق لكسب المال، يرجح حدوث هجرات غير منتظمة وإلى أماكن بعيدة، وعلى نطاق واسع.

وعليه، فدهب تبديد أزمة التهجير الطويلة الأمد، بجي قراءة تصورات الحلول المستدامة أو غيرها والمقترحة من قبل جميع الأطراف المعنية، كاللاجئين والمنفيين العراقيين، ومنظمات الإغاثة الدولية، والجمعيات الوطنية غير الحكومية، وحكومات الدول المضيفة. وتتضمن هذه المقاربات الجديدة لتبديد هذه الأزمة مراجعة المساعي التي باءت بالفشل واختبار تلك التي لم يتم تجريبها بعد.

تركز هذه الدراسة على التصورات المتداولة على المستوى المحلي للممارسين الميدانيين وصانعي السياسات واللاجئين العراقيين في لبنان، سوريا والأردن. وتستند هذه الدراسة على بحث مكتبي ومقابلات ميدانية أجريت في نيسان/أبريل وأيار/مايو 2011. وتشير الدراسة إلى ضرورة الربط بين الناحيتان السياسية والعملية بغية إيجاد حل لهذه الأزمة المزمنة. لا سيما أن "اللاجئي" الأزمة العراقية لا ينضوون تحت معايير المفاهيم الغربية لـ"نظام اللاجئين". فقد استمر تدفقهم خارج العراق لأكثر من عقد من الزمن، حيث بلغ ذروته بين عامي 2006 و2007. كما تُبين أن هذه الهجرة لا تحدث في اتجاه واحد فقط؛ بل غالباً ما تكون دائرية، وتتضمن حركة تنقل من وإلى العراق، وعبر شبكات موسعة عابرة لحدود بلدان الشرق الأوسط وخارجها. وتنتج هذه الحركة عن استراتيجية المهجرين لإدارة مخاطر حياتهم من خلال الانتشار الجغرافي لأفراد العائلة قدر الامكان عبر شبكات اجتماعية قائمة في الشتات.