



# World Vision

## **TRAPPED!**

# THE DISAPPEARING HOPES OF IRAQI REFUGEE CHILDREN

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# foreward

This report hopes to opens a window into the lives of the Iraqi refugee children living in Jordan – trapped in exile – desperately seeking hope for the future.

The Middle East is facing a refugee crisis of epic proportions – fleeing Iraqis comprise the single largest regional displacement of persons in the last half century. Two million Iraqis have flooded into neighboring countries, with Jordan and Syria bearing the brunt of this crisis. Another 2 million are internally displaced within Iraqi borders. Totaled, now more than 4 million Iraqis are trapped in internal or external exile. The crisis continues as massive numbers continue to flee monthly – this crisis is not going away.

The Iraqi children refugees are perhaps the most vulnerable of all among this drastically war-affected population. The children and their families are escaping infamously brutal violence involving wholesale devastation of the Iraq social fabric. During our interviews, Iraqi families exiled in Jordan told stories of suicide bombs, home invasions accompanied by beatings, and kidnappings for ransom. They described receipt of “night letters” deposited at doors threatening murder of entire families, forcing flight from ancestral homes within one or two days time.

Iraqis families are hiding without legal status in foreign countries strained beyond service limits in education, health, employment and housing. Given the difficulties, Iraqi children commonly exhibit signs of severe psychological damage as they sit in cramped apartments mostly unable to attend school. In short, a generation of psychologically scarred, under-educated, and disenchanting Iraqi youth are growing up in exile.

Solutions are desperately needed for this brutalised population trapped in an international legal limbo. They cannot go back and they cannot go forward. There is no end in sight to the violence suffered in Iraq, and no immediate prospect of return for this brutalised population scattered throughout the Middle East.

The international community of nations must provide dramatically increased assistance to bring badly-needed education, health care, expansion of resettlement opportunities and expedited refugee processing, for the Iraqi refugee children and their families. The international community must stop ignoring this growing crisis. We must find tangible solutions for this abandoned and desperate population of Iraqi refugee children and their families.

## **David A. Robinson**

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*World Vision International is implementing through partners an emergency response for Iraqi refugees in Jordan providing assistance in informal education, food distribution, health care, and psychosocial support.*



# executive summary

As World Vision previously reported in “Trapped! Unlocking the Future of Iraqi Refugee Children”, hundreds of thousands of Iraqi children are hiding in fear throughout the Middle East. They are trapped in small, ghetto apartments in cities like Amman and Damascus, hiding from the police, in fear of deportation, and thus hiding from the view of the world.

Estimates put the number of refugees at more than two million today<sup>i</sup> half of whom are children. The numbers are growing daily with up to 50,000, at times<sup>ii</sup>, fleeing across Iraq’s borders each month.

The international community has taken steps in recent months to address what has been described as the world’s fastest-growing displacement crisis<sup>iii</sup>. But funding and support still fall well short of what is needed to adequately serve this overwhelming and desperate population living in exile.

Denied legal status and forbidden to work, Iraqi refugees are selling their assets to buy food and pay rent. “The Iraqi refugees are rapidly plunging deeper into poverty and despair,” says the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

“The pressures are building inexorably across the board.”<sup>iv</sup>

Jordan, with a population of fewer than six million people, cannot care for the estimated 750,000 Iraqi refugees living within its borders without dramatically increased international support. Its infrastructure and services are straining under the immense pressure of this massive influx of people.

With Jordanian schools already overcrowded, most of the 200,000<sup>v</sup> Iraqi refugee children of school age living there are being denied an education. Many of these children have seen and lived through the horrors of wars, sanctions, and sectarian violence, and bear heavy psychological scars. Some are beginning to turn to illegal work, both to avoid the tedium of being trapped in cramped apartments and to provide needed financial support for their families, albeit meagre.

Combined with the millions of Palestinians displaced across the region, the Middle East has turned into the largest refugee-hosting region in the world. Without immediate, substantial, and long-lasting support from the

international community, this refugee crisis threatens to compound the region's already substantial problems. The economies of the Middle East, its societies, religions and regional security are in jeopardy if this crisis remains unaddressed.

The aim of this report is to provide more detail, understanding and stories of the disappearing hopes – for an education, good health and protection – of Iraqi refugee children.

This report strengthens our call, and resolve, to enable Iraqi refugee children to fulfil their potential and hopes. Hopes that all children long for and which families and communities strive for; hopes, World Vision believes, bring fullness of life.

### **World Vision calls upon the international community to undertake the following commitments:**

#### **Provide Iraqi children with education:**

- Commit to immediately providing funds to support education solutions for Iraqi refugee children across the region.
- Provide financial and technical support to host governments to alleviate the burden of this refugee population on the education system.
- Commit to sustained funding to support education solutions over many years.

#### **Provide Iraqi children with proper healthcare, for both their physical and psychological needs:**

- Fund clinics addressing the special health needs of children while easing the burden of host countries.
- Ensure Iraqi children are able to access schooling to help address some of the mental health needs for stability and socialisation.
- Provide financial and technical support for mental health professionals to work with Iraqi children, families, and communities.

#### **Provide protection for the refugee communities:**

- Provide expanded admissions to other countries, particularly for vulnerable persons, including children who have lost parents, and ethnic and religious minorities
- Process asylum claims expeditiously so that applicants are not left in limbo for years to come.

### **Recognising that the government of Jordan cannot support Iraqi refugees without substantial and lasting support from the international community, World Vision has the following hopes:**

- Certification procedures will be established for these refugees that provide them with a form of recognised legal status.
- The government of Jordan will continue to work with the international community to offer education and access to adequate healthcare to Iraqi refugee children.
- The principle of non-refoulement will be upheld.
- Overstay fees will be waived for Iraqi refugees.



# the hope of education

**More than half a million children of school age have been forced to flee incessant violence and deteriorating conditions in Iraq<sup>vi</sup>; 200,000 of them have sought sanctuary in Jordan. Tragically, only a small percentage of these children is actually attending school today.**

United Nations estimates place the number of children regularly attending school at between 14,000<sup>vii</sup> and 20,000<sup>viii</sup>. The rest are left to hide in their homes or seek illegal employment in the shops and workplaces of Amman.

## **Out of the classroom**

Myriad obstacles keep these refugee children out of the classroom, but a simple reality is that the education system in Jordan is already stretched to capacity. There are too few places in the public school system to comfortably accommodate even Jordanian children with up to 50 students packed into some classrooms. Iraqis are the first to be turned away.

Few education options are available for Iraqi refugees. Double-shifting, in which teachers take two sets of students each day, was occurring in the schools of Amman prior to the arrival of the refugees. This is taxing on teachers who are forced to work long hours, resulting in an inevitable deterioration of education standards.

Students also suffer through double-shifting. They have fewer hours at school in which to learn, and some are forced to study until late in the night. With 200,000 school-aged Iraqi refugee children in Jordan, this is not a realistic solution to the education problem.

One solution for a select few families lies in private schooling. However, in most cases the cost is prohibitive for Iraqi refugees who struggle financially to meet their basic needs in Amman. With little or no reliable income, private education is out of reach of the vast majority. Less than 10,000 Iraqi refugee children are estimated to be enrolled in private schools in Jordan.

The significant cost of a private education can force parents to choose which children stay at home and which attend school. And in some cases, children are selected to stay home to look after siblings or are sent out to earn income for the family<sup>ix</sup>.

Given the violence that many Iraqi refugee children have witnessed and the horrors they have lived through, many suffer from severe emotional difficulties. Most schools are not equipped to effectively deal with such students, and teachers lack the training and capacity to satisfactorily address these issues.

While the government of Jordan has publicly recognised the need for all children to attend school<sup>x</sup>, this has

not yet materialised. Laws are not in place to force schools to accept Iraqi students. Residence permits are usually required for successful enrolment –which all but the wealthiest Iraqis have little hope of attaining. Even children successfully enrolled in public schools are not protected; they can be turned away at any time at a school's discretion. However, World Vision is optimistic that recent developments within the Ministry of Education indicate a willingness to look for solutions for some Iraqi refugees.

The registration process for public schools is complex and convoluted, and many Iraqis struggle to have their children admitted. In many cases, legal and political ambiguities lead to individual schools making the decision on whether or not to accept Iraqi refugees<sup>xi</sup>. In all too many cases, the decision is to refuse them.

For Iraqi refugees who have fled violence, often at a moment's notice, it can be impossible to provide the education certificates required for enrolment. Some children arrive after the commencement of the school year, and are told to wait for the following year before they can resume their studies. Others have been unable to attend school in Iraq for a number of months due to insecurity, persecution or violence. UNICEF estimates that school attendance inside Iraq has fallen from 75 per cent two years ago to 30 per cent today<sup>xii</sup>. These gaps in their education compound their struggle to access the classroom.

Starting school in a new country can pose daunting problems for any child, even when not fleeing violence and turmoil. For Iraqis fortunate enough to overcome these obstacles and manage to attend school they still face significant educational, cultural, and linguistic difficulties when placed among their Jordanian peers.

## Education's added value

Education is essential for children to grow and fulfil their potential. But sadly for the vast majority of these young Iraqi refugees, this opportunity is being denied.

For Iraqi refugee children, education has an additional crucial role to play – the re-establishment of routine and a sense of normality for shattered lives. Many young refugees who fled Iraq left behind lives filled with violence and terror. Children tell of the horrors they experienced; kidnappings and ransoms, home invasions, beatings, suicide bombings, death threats, and the murder of loved ones.

For these children, returning to the normality of a classroom can provide emotional stability and offer the social interaction they desperately need to begin to address their psychological burdens. In contrast, without school they languish at home, afraid to venture outside for fear of being deported, with little social interaction beyond the family.

Many children see little to hope for in their futures. They see their parents forced to remain at home in poverty rather than earning a living. Moreover, refugee children recognise the implications of not receiving an education – over 30 per cent of children surveyed by World Vision said they had no hope for the future<sup>xiii</sup>.



The living conditions of these Iraqi refugees provide an ideal environment for luring children into work. With little to no possibility of receiving an education, many see work as preferable to remaining in the home. The inaccessibility of schooling is pushing some young refugees into potentially hazardous working conditions.

Refugees who fled during the first Gulf War or experienced the subsequent sanctions in Iraq have faced these conditions for up to 15 years or more. There are growing numbers of children who spent their school-age years in Jordan and who have never set foot inside a classroom.

### **The way forward: Back to school**

In May 2007, Queen Rania of Jordan, UNICEF's first Eminent Advocate for Children, launched an appeal with the agency to address the needs of Iraqi children, inside and outside Iraq. UNICEF hopes to enrol approximately 40,000 Iraqi children in schools in Jordan within the next six months (20,000 in addition to the 20,000 children already estimated to be in Jordanian schools). This number, however, is woefully inadequate given the estimated 200,000 Iraqi children in Jordan.

It is essential for the international community to work with the government of Jordan to improve



*Photo: John Schenk, World Vision.*

already existing services and bring in more teachers. If Iraqi children are to be admitted in time for the beginning of the school year in mid-August, this should be done immediately.

There are also short-term solutions that can be implemented immediately to support the refugee children.

Limited vocational training and life-skills programmes are being conducted through international agencies and local NGOs, as well as IT training and language classes. While such activities can prove extremely beneficial to those involved, only a limited number of children are currently able to access these services. Ultimately, however, it is necessary for Iraqi refugee children to receive formal schooling, meaning such programmes should not be relied upon to offer anything more than a short-term solution.

Realising that formal enrolment may be some way off, a small number of refugee children have been permitted to audit classes in Jordanian schools. They cannot use school materials, do not sit for exams, and receive no formal recognition for their studies. Yet when they can finally return to school, these children will be better prepared.

In preparation for a return to school, remedial education that helps children reach a similar level to their peers should be considered. With education gaps ranging from several months to many years, refugee children may be unable to resume their studies without such programmes.

While Jordanian students are on holiday through July and August, summer school programmes can be used to bring Iraqi children up to the level of their peers, through remedial classes. Steps are already in place for



Photo: Ashley Clements, World Vision.

such programmes, with the support of the Ministry of Education. International donors should fund UNICEF immediately so these activities can take place next month.

Some NGOs are supporting families with the prohibitive cost of private education by paying school fees in full or in part. Unfortunately, this is not sustainable, given the high costs involved combined with the inability of the private school system to absorb large numbers of children.

### **Waiting for school**

Fawaz, nine years of age, is anxious to go to school. He keeps his school bag packed, ready for the day when he will be allowed to return. But sadly for Fawaz, like many in his position, he is forbidden to attend school.

Every child has the right to an education. But Fawaz, perhaps more than most, needs the sanctuary and

rehabilitation that the routine and structure of school can provide. Three years ago, while living in Iraq, Fawaz was kidnapped on his way to school. It took his family 21 days to scrape together the US\$13,500 demanded by his kidnapers. During this time, Fawaz was tormented and told he would never see his family again.

Now living in a poor neighbourhood of Amman, Fawaz and his family are safe. But he can't forget his 21 days of captivity. A psychiatrist's report diagnoses him with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and describes some of his symptoms; Fawaz has developed an intense attachment to his parents, but has become aggressive towards them and throws violent tantrums. He shows little interest in activities he used to enjoy, and has returned to sucking his thumb.



# the hope of health

**Refugees arriving in Iraq's neighbouring countries may have left the violence behind, but psychological scars and health problems accompany them.**

An international study team conducted an assessment of the conditions in Iraq in January 2003, prior to the outbreak of war. The report<sup>xiv</sup> – presented to the United Nations Secretary General, the Government of Iraq, and the international community – found that 12 years of economic sanctions had badly traumatised Iraqi children; 40 per cent were found to think that life was not worth living, and the team warned, “war would have a devastating effect on Iraqi children”.

The assessment team observed that the economy, healthcare system and food supply were in tatters after multiple wars and years of sanctions. Most children were unable to remember a time when their country was not at war or suffering under the burden of international sanctions. The team warned that another war would place further psychological strain and compound the health problems of Iraq's children, potentially triggering chronic depression.

The report concludes: “A new war in Iraq would be catastrophic...Iraqi children are at grave risk of starvation, disease, death and psychological trauma.” Unfortunately, the findings of the international study team

eventuated. Years of violence have placed Iraq's children in even greater danger.

## **Carrying the scars of war**

The International Red Cross reports that many children in Iraq pass dead bodies daily as they walk to school, while many others have seen relatives killed or injured in front of them<sup>xv</sup>. A survey conducted by the Iraqi Ministry of Health found that 70 per cent of primary school students in one Baghdad neighbourhood suffered symptoms of trauma-related stress disorder<sup>xvi</sup>. Many families who successfully fled Iraq have not been able to cope with the psychological effects of their experiences.

The Iraqi refugee children of Jordan exhibit many of these same signs of severe psychological distress as a result of their experiences in Iraq.

A new World Vision survey found that 43 per cent of children witnessed violence in Iraq, and 39 per cent lost someone close to them through violence in Iraq. But tragically, in both Iraq and its neighbouring countries, very few refugee children are receiving the kind of support they need to deal with their psychological burdens.

## **Living in fear**

The flight to Jordan may have left the immediate physical dangers of Iraq

behind, but fear is still widespread in the refugee community. A number of factors promote this climate of fear among Iraqi refugees, including the fear of forced deportation back to their homeland and a continued uncertainty about the future.

Though relatively small in numbers, each deportation is noticed within the Iraqi community. With every new Iraqi unwillingly returned to their homeland, the fear within the refugee community grows. World Vision research showed that 25 per cent of Iraqi refugee children surveyed felt unsafe at home.

As a result of this fear of deportation, many Iraqis spend little time outside their homes. Children are cooped up in dark, cramped apartments with little opportunity for social interaction outside the immediate family. They are often discouraged from playing in public for fear of drawing unwanted attention and jeopardising the rest of the family<sup>xvii</sup>.

Economic uncertainty also fuels this climate of fear. Iraqis are prohibited from working in Jordan, whether registered with the UN or not. A World Vision-supported assessment found that 64 per cent of Iraqi refugee families surveyed were surviving by selling off their assets; 52 per cent relied in part on support from NGOs; 40 per cent from support by mosques or churches; 32 per cent were

receiving remittances from outside Jordan; and only 29 per cent of families received an income from some form of employment<sup>xviii</sup>.

With close to two-thirds of respondents selling off assets to survive, the economic status of the majority of refugees will decline as they sell off what little they have. UNHCR estimates that Iraqis who have fled within the past year are poorer than their predecessors<sup>xix</sup>. The combination of these two elements suggests that the Iraqi refugee population of Jordan is growing poorer. Uncertain or unpredictable income sources have direct implications on the ability of children to access education and health services, and are compounding the heavy psychological burdens these children already carry.

### **Psychological burdens**

Children are particularly vulnerable to stress, conflict, violence, and displacement. For many of the Iraqi refugee children in Jordan, parents or caregivers are unable to provide adequate support since they also suffer from the horrors of Iraq<sup>xx</sup>. UNHCR estimates that as many as two out of five Iraqi adults are traumatised<sup>xxi</sup>.

Many of the children interviewed by World Vision suffer from chronic bed-wetting, sleeplessness or regular nightmares. Others express a fear of being separated from their family, suffer regular panic attacks, or are having

difficulty concentrating. They talk about their experiences in Iraq; of being kidnapped and beaten, of seeing family members killed in front of them, or of being constantly afraid.

During interviews, World Vision has come across children who have been diagnosed (both in Iraq and in Jordan) by psychologists as having Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). But sadly, none of these children were receiving specialised care or even going to school.

Some children whose experiences have proved particularly disturbing suffer from eating disorders and stunted growth.

### **Unmet health needs**

Psychological burdens are not the only problems to flow across Iraq's borders with the refugees. It is estimated that as little as 35 per cent of children in Iraq are immunised, and a fifth are severely or moderately stunted<sup>xxii</sup>. War with Iran, the Gulf War of 1991, and years of sanctions have caused Iraq's children to become highly vulnerable.

Following the 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq, infant mortality has increased by at least 37 per cent<sup>xxiii</sup>. The sectarian violence that has wracked the country since early 2005 has further devastated the country's already strained healthcare system. There is a lack of documentation and data on infant mortality and morbidity, therefore the scale of the crisis facing Iraq's children

is unknown. But some of the health implications are becoming apparent in Iraq's neighbouring countries as more and more flee the country.

Iraqi refugees then continue to suffer due to poor living conditions within Jordan. Many children have respiratory problems and recurrent influenza as a result of living in dark, damp apartments.

The growing economic difficulties of these refugees are now having an impact on the diet of the young. For many, fruits have become too expensive for daily purchase. Milk can also be too expensive, forcing parents to water-down yoghurt for their children – cheaper, but less nutritious. A World Vision-supported assessment found that most families had decreased their number of meals per day and they are eating more bread and rice, and less fruit and other items.

Medical practitioners working with the refugees are seeing increasingly high rates of diabetes (mainly type-2) and anaemia as a result of poor diets among refugees. Doctors regularly see refugee children suffering from stunted growth and some describe a “failure to thrive” among infants.

For many of Iraq's children, the implications of decades of violence and suffering are yet to be fully seen, and the scale of the psychological damage faced by young Iraqi refugees is largely unknown.



Photo: Stephen Matthews, World Vision.

### **The way forward: Healthy lives**

To date, there has been no adequate assessment of healthcare needs of the Iraqi refugees in Jordan. However, UNICEF, with the support of the World Health Organisation and UNHCR, is now working to address this information gap.

The government of Jordan is to be commended for providing free immunisation to every child in Jordan, regardless of nationality or legal status. Pre and post-natal care is also available at minimal cost. Most refugees, however, are not aware of these services. Awareness-raising campaigns can inform refugees of how to access medical care, but until Iraqi refugees in Jordan cease to be afraid of deportation, access to these services will remain problematic. Access to

medication and treatment for chronic illnesses remains out of the reach of most refugees.

One cannot underestimate the role that structured activities and formal education can play in supporting children suffering the psychological damage World Vision has witnessed among the Iraqi refugee populations in Jordan.

However, specialised professional carers – child psychologists and medical professionals – are a much-needed support base, but one that is virtually non-existent in Jordan today. Funding should be made available for culturally sensitive psychologists.



Photo: Ashley Clements, World Vision.

### The little red car

Gabriel takes his little red car with him everywhere. It is the same colour as his father's car. At only six years old, Gabriel saw his father die behind the wheel of his red car. He sat and watched helplessly as the driver of the car that deliberately smashed into theirs pulled the gold wedding band off his father's finger.

Three years later, Gabriel lives with his mother Miriam, now a widow in her early 40s. His two sisters and older brother share the little basement flat with them, in a poor suburb of Amman.

The troubled young boy has been diagnosed with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) by an NGO professional working in Jordan. An excerpt from the psychologist's report reads:

*Ever since the accident Gabriel experiences a constant remembrance of the accident, which is illustrated through his drawings of a car with a dead person in it. He also talks about the death so often and believes that people die if they grow up. He is not a sociable child at school (there is a report attached from the school teacher to the report) and cries a lot and feels insecure. His teacher says that he is often 'driven away' with his thoughts from outside this world. He is suffering from severe PTSD, manifested in the above mentioned symptoms. What Gabriel is going through could affect his personality and development as it will remain imprinted in his memory.*

The report concludes that Gabriel urgently needs a stable environment where he can feel secure, and should attend regular therapy sessions for a long while. But sadly for Gabriel, no such services are available. He has few friends and no prospects for the future.

# The hope of protection

**Iraq's refugee children and their families have fled to neighbouring countries like Jordan and Syria, seeking safety and a better future. Although the threat of bombs and guns is no longer present, domestic violence, sexual abuse, and the dangers of child labour are placing these children at risk.**

## **The threat of abuse**

There is a growing resentment of Iraqi refugees among Jordanian society. They are blamed for rising housing prices, deterioration of moral behaviour, and terrorist threats<sup>xxiv</sup>. Children are frequently the target of verbal abuse and aggression, which occasionally turns violent.

Discrimination is a growing problem for Iraqi refugee children in Jordan. This comes in the form of ethnic or religious discrimination. As many as 40 per cent of Iraqi refugees are from religious minorities<sup>xxv</sup>; they are Christians (mostly Assyrian and Chaldean), Sabians (also known as Mandaens), Yazidis, Jews, or Baha'is. A smaller, unknown number are Shia Muslims, many of whom hide their identity for fear of persecution.

World Vision interviews with refugee families have revealed a small number of cases of predatory sexual behaviour by Jordanian males towards young

Iraqi boys. Most families have no legal recourse to such crimes, and the children are highly vulnerable.

Many young refugees express a loneliness and feeling of isolation. They are frequently forced to stay in their homes, do not interact with the local population, and have few friends or few opportunities to socialise. There is a growing sense of frustration and anger regarding their situation. While still taboo, some families openly talked to World Vision of increasing violence within the home and of domestic abuse – sometimes carried out by troubled teenagers.

## **Children at work**

Not all children remain cooped up in their homes. Growing numbers of Iraqi refugee children risk deportation by finding illegal work in the shops and work places of Amman. World Vision research suggests that child labour is not yet widespread among refugee communities in Jordan, yet the conditions are in place for thousands of additional children to turn to illegal work if immediate steps are not taken to remedy the situation.

UNHCR acknowledges: "Little qualitative information exists about the prevalence of child labour, as it is illegal. Assessments, however, confirm that an ever-increasing number of children are working outside the home."<sup>xxvi</sup>



World Vision interviews reveal that Iraqi children, sometimes 14 years of age and younger, are working long hours in Jordan. Six-day weeks and 12-hour working days are not uncommon, with some children working even longer.

These children are working in a range of jobs; some as shop assistants, some as cleaners, some sell items on the streets. They usually earn very little, World Vision has been told, perhaps as little as one Jordanian Dinar (less than US\$ 1.50) a day.

The Iraqi refugees in Jordan experience many conditions conducive to child labour. Most families live in growing poverty, struggling to provide adequate food. Shelter is basic, with whole families crammed into one or two-room apartments.

Males, 18 years and older, are the most vulnerable to being picked up by police for illegal work. Iraqi refugee women sometimes find more discreet work, such as domestic servants and cleaners. But children often find employment easier to come by than their parents. For survival, families sometimes resort to sending their young children out to earn a living.

One father told World Vision: "My children work because they have to work. We can't live otherwise."<sup>xxvii</sup>

The inability of children to access education further encourages them to seek work. Rather than remain trapped in their homes, many would rather find a job and support the family. Children interviewed by World Vision said they had previously been in school, but once this opportunity was closed to them, they began to look for work instead.

Jordanian law says a child out of school for three years or longer cannot return. Some Iraqi refugee children have been without education for years, and realise that without remedial education programmes, will be unable to resume their studies. They see no alternative other than to begin to work.

As poverty grows among refugees, more children will be forced to turn to work. And as the gaps in education grow and the possibility of returning to the classroom and the hope of ever receiving an education dwindles, more and more young refugees will seek illegal employment.

### **Legal status**

Iraqis who have fled and continue to flee violence in their country are still refused formal legal status in Jordan. World Vision has been told stories of refugees being sent back to Iraq. Without refugee status, Iraqis are not permitted to work or legally obtain adequate subsidised services such as healthcare, housing and education.

## The way forward: Protecting the young

The dubious legal status of Iraqi refugees is a major contributor to the intense climate of fear that surrounds the refugee communities. Host governments should advance paths to formalise temporary status and should end forced deportations. The generosity of these governments to accommodate such huge numbers of refugees must be applauded, but the international community should encourage these governments to take the next step by offering legal protection as well.

Tensions with host communities are also growing as refugees are blamed for many social and economic problems in Jordan. Initiatives to bring the Jordanian and Iraqi communities together should be pursued to help alleviate further tensions.

To prevent increased child labour, one immediate solution is to provide school opportunities for Iraqi refugee children. With school to keep them occupied and healthy social interaction to keep them busy, children will be less inclined to seek illegal work on the streets of Amman.

For some youth, return to school may not be the answer. For older teenagers who have missed too many years of school, alternatives must be considered. Vocational training programmes may



*Photo: Brian Jonson, World Vision.*



be a more appropriate route for some young refugees.

Recognising that many children are far behind on their studies after having been out of school for many months or even years, remedial education programmes are essential. Such programmes, when combined with the chance of returning to school, can provide an alternative for children who are currently working.

Solutions within host countries should be sought where possible, but for some of the most vulnerable children and families, resettlement in a third country may be the best way forward. Countries with the financial ability to do so, should commit to taking significant numbers of these vulnerable refugees for resettlement. Procedures



should be expedited, so that the burden can be lifted from countries already hosting Iraqis, and so that these refugees are not waiting needlessly.

The United States is making slow progress on its target of accepting 7,000 referrals for resettlement by the end of fiscal year 2007. At the end of April 2007, 68 Iraqis had been accepted into the US during 2007<sup>xxviii</sup>. Furthermore, 7,000 referrals accounts for less than 1 per cent of Iraqi refugees.

Sweden estimates that it will review more than 20,000 applications from Iraqi refugees during 2007. The Swedish Government has called upon the European Union to share the geographical distribution of refugees but this proposal has been rejected<sup>xxix</sup>.

Unfortunately for many of Iraq's religious and ethnic minorities, returning to Iraq is not an option in the foreseeable future and therefore admissions for them must be increased. Though resettlement is not a viable option for the vast majority of Iraqis, it must be considered for the most vulnerable, including children who have lost parents and religious and ethnic minorities.



Photo: Brian Janson, World Vision.

# Conclusion

The crisis facing Iraqi refugees today is placing a generation of children at risk – the education, and mental and physical health of these children are in jeopardy. If this situation continues to go unaddressed, the international community risks jeopardising the long-term economic and social fabric of the Middle East.

In April 2007, the international community, including 60 governments, met in Geneva to discuss the ongoing Iraqi displacement crisis. Though the international community acknowledged there was much to be done to assist the internally and externally displaced, little assistance has materialised to date.

There is no end in sight to the violence and turmoil within Iraq. The international community must acknowledge that the crisis facing the displaced children will endure for years to come and provide solutions accordingly. Funding and support must be both long term and immediate to meet the immense needs facing young Iraqi refugees today.



*Photo: Stephen Matthews, World Vizion.*

## FOOTNOTES

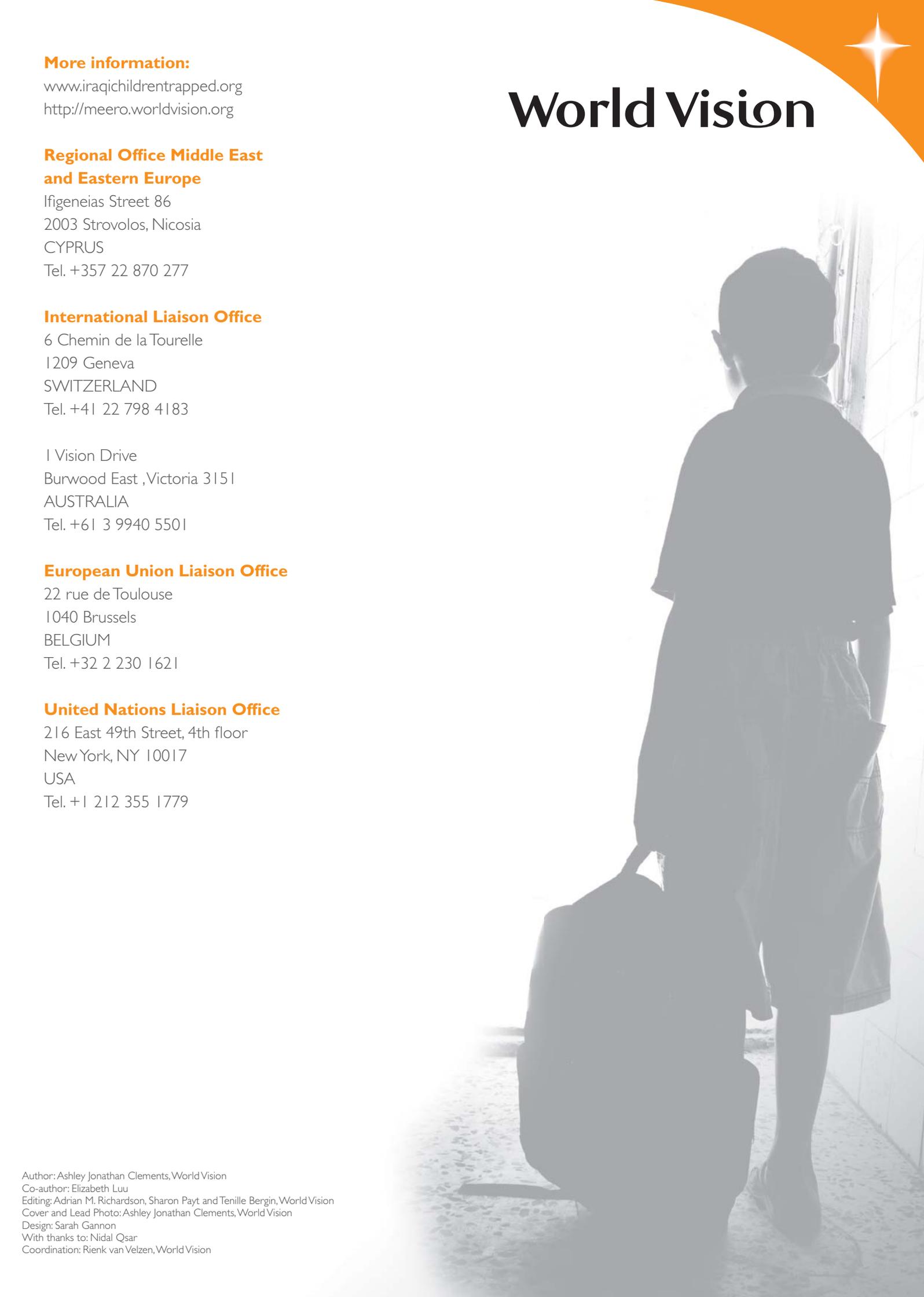
- <sup>i</sup> UNHCR, Number of Iraqi Displaced Tops 4.2 million; Shanty Towns Mushroom, June 5, 2007
- <sup>ii</sup> New York Times, European Union Split on Solution to African and Iraqi Refugee Influx, June 13, 2007
- <sup>iii</sup> UNHCR, "Iraq Bleeds; Millions Displaced by Conflict, Persecution and Violence," *Refugees*, 146 (2), 2007, p.2
- <sup>iv</sup> UNHCR, "Iraq Bleeds; Millions Displaced by Conflict, Persecution and Violence," *Refugees*, 146 (2), 2007, p.2
- <sup>v</sup> New York Times, The Flight from Iraq, May 13, 2007
- <sup>vi</sup> Save the Children, Help Us Educate Thousands of Displaced Iraqi Children, June 7, 2007
- <sup>vii</sup> New York Times, The Flight from Iraq, May 13, 2007
- <sup>viii</sup> UNICEF, Immediate Needs for Iraqi Children in Iraq and Neighbouring Countries, May 17, 2007
- <sup>ix</sup> UNHCR, Iraq's Displaced Children, 2007
- <sup>x</sup> Speech made by the Jordanian delegation at the UNHCR-hosted International Conference on Addressing the Humanitarian Needs of Refugees Internally Displaced Persons Inside Iraq and in Neighbouring Countries, April 17-18, 2007
- <sup>xi</sup> UNHCR, Iraq's Displaced Children, 2007
- <sup>xii</sup> Daniel Toole, Acting Deputy Executive Director and Director of Emergency Programmes for UNICEF, speaking at a press conference on children in Iraq, available at <http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/RWB.NSF/db900SID/DHRV-73H4XJ?OpenDocument>
- <sup>xiii</sup> World Vision conducted a small survey with 2 of its partners in Jordan. These partners work with approximately 600 child beneficiaries. Sixty-one children, ages 6-16, responded to the survey. The questionnaire, written in Arabic, was presented to 3 groups of children. Some children chose not to participate. Those who did participate were assisted by Arabic speakers if they needed any clarifications about the questions being asked of them. The questionnaires were then translated into English.
- <sup>xiv</sup> International Study Team, *Our Common Responsibility; The Impact of a New War on Iraqi Children*, January, 2003
- <sup>xv</sup> Aaron Glantz, *Iraqis' Mental Health Suffering*, *Say Doctors*, OneWorld.net, May 12, 2007, available at: <http://us.oneworld.net/article/view/149163/1/>
- <sup>xvi</sup> Aaron Glantz, *Iraqis' Mental Health Suffering*, *Say Doctors*, OneWorld.net, May 12, 2007, available at: <http://us.oneworld.net/article/view/149163/1/>
- <sup>xvii</sup> UNHCR, Iraq's Displaced Children, 2007
- <sup>xviii</sup> The assessment was carried out by local NGOs with technical support from World Vision International, in March and April 2007. Over one hundred families, from a variety of ethnic and religious backgrounds, participated in the assessment. Additionally, five per cent of respondents received support in the form of remittances from inside Jordan, and four per cent from Iraqi pensions. No means of earning an income beyond those stated above was mentioned.
- <sup>xix</sup> UNHCR, Iraq's Displaced Children, 2007
- <sup>xx</sup> UNHCR, Iraq's Displaced Children, 2007
- <sup>xxi</sup> UNHCR, "Iraq Bleeds; Millions Displaced by Conflict, Persecution and Violence," *Refugees*, 146 (2), 2007, p.2
- <sup>xxii</sup> Save the Children, *State of the World's Mothers 2007*, May, 2007
- <sup>xxiii</sup> Save the Children, *State of the World's Mothers 2007*, May, 2007
- <sup>xxiv</sup> UNHCR, Iraq's Displaced Children, 2007
- <sup>xxv</sup> UNHCR, as reported on United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, available at [http://www.uscirf.gov/mediaroom/op-eds/opeds\\_archive/12222006IraqOpEd.html](http://www.uscirf.gov/mediaroom/op-eds/opeds_archive/12222006IraqOpEd.html)
- <sup>xxvi</sup> UNHCR, Iraq's Displaced Children, 2007
- <sup>xxvii</sup> World Vision interview, June 11, 2007
- <sup>xxviii</sup> Wall Street Journal, *Iraqi Refugees' Plight Grows as U.S. Dawdles*, Jun 11, 2007
- <sup>xxix</sup> International Herald Tribune, *EU nations refuse to split up refugee burden*, June 12, 2007

**More information:**

[www.iraqichildrentrapped.org](http://www.iraqichildrentrapped.org)

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