



Highlights of [GAO-09-120](#), a report to congressional committees.

Why GAO Did This Study

Iraqi refugees are one of the largest urban populations the UN has been called on to assist. The UN reports government estimates of up to 4.8 million Iraqis displaced within the last 5 years, with 2 million fleeing, primarily to Syria and Jordan.

GAO examined challenges in (1) measuring and monitoring progress in achieving U.S. goals for assisting Iraqi refugees, (2) providing humanitarian assistance to Iraqi refugees, (3) offering solutions for Iraqi refugees, and (4) developing an international strategic plan to address the Iraqi refugee situation.

GAO analyzed reports and data; met with officials from the U.S. government, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), international organizations, and NGOs; and did fieldwork in Jordan and Syria.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that the Secretary of State, with relevant others, (1) develop performance measures to assess and report progress in achieving overall U.S. goals and objectives for Iraqi refugees; (2) track and report funding apportioned, obligated, and expended for Iraqi refugee programs in each host country; (3) assess the number and needs of Iraqi refugees and the related needs of countries hosting them; and (4) develop a comprehensive international strategy for assistance and solutions for Iraqi refugees. The Department of State generally concurred with our recommendations.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on [GAO-09-120](#). For more information, contact Joseph A. Christoff at (202) 512-8979 or christoffj@gao.gov.

IRAQI REFUGEE ASSISTANCE

Improvements Needed in Measuring Progress, Assessing Needs, Tracking Funds, and Developing an International Strategic Plan

What GAO Found

To implement its 2008 goal and objectives for Iraqi refugees, State primarily funded and monitored the efforts of its implementing partners, which include international organizations and nongovernmental organizations (NGO). These activities provided Iraqi refugees and host country populations with education, vocational training, health care, food, and financial support. However, State did not clearly link program achievements to its stated goal and objectives for Iraqi refugees. As a result, State has limited information to assess and report its progress in reaching its goal and objectives and improve program effectiveness. Insufficient numbers of staff to monitor projects, difficulties gaining access to projects and refugees, and the lack of reliable data have challenged State's efforts to ensure that projects help the intended beneficiaries.

U.S. and international efforts to provide humanitarian assistance to Iraqi refugees in neighboring countries are impeded by the lack of reliable estimates on the needs of Iraqi refugees and data on the funding targeted at Iraqi refugee programs. Iraqi refugees live interspersed among the local urban populations and are not easily identified. Official government estimates on the number of Iraqi refugees in each country may be overstated. It is also difficult to determine the amount of funding provided for Iraqi refugee programs because the U.S. government and UNHCR, the largest bilateral and multilateral funding sources, do not report funding for Iraqi refugee programs separately from that provided for all Iraq-related humanitarian assistance.

The U.S. government and UNHCR face challenges in offering solutions for Iraqi refugees. According to UNHCR, voluntary repatriation is the preferred solution, but conditions in Iraq are not yet suitable for Iraqis to return. According to the International Organization for Migration, the Iraqi government has cited improvements in security and offered financial incentives to returning refugee families. Although another solution is integration and settlement in host countries, Syria and Jordan consider Iraqi refugees "guests" who should return to Iraq once the security situation improves. The U.S. government has made progress in resettling Iraqi refugees under its U.S. Refugee Admissions Program, with 15,431 refugees resettled in the United States in fiscal years 2007 and 2008.

According to U.S., UN, foreign government, and NGO officials, the international community lacks a comprehensive international strategy to address the Iraqi refugee situation. Although the 2009 UN Consolidated Appeal showed progress in strategic planning, the UN and international community continue to lack a longer-term approach. First, the international community lacks a comprehensive independent assessment of the needs of vulnerable Iraqi refugees and the populations that host them. Second, State, UNHCR, and NGOs do not have a strategy that addresses factors that may affect assistance efforts. Third, the international community has lacked a coordination mechanism that involves all stakeholders.