Separated and unaccompanied children in the Middle East

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Syria and Iraqi refugees

- In August 2008, 219,010 Iraqi refugees were registered out of an estimate as high as 1.2 million.
- Urban setting
- Very few registered non-Government agencies, therefore few implementing partners
- No social work system in Syria: Syrian staff of Red Crescent and Faith-based organisations have many varied backgrounds
- UNHCR report .05% of the registered population of Iraqi refugees in Syria are unaccompanied
Setting

- Rapid recent displacement
- Large numbers
- Slow response: UN and Government
- Unknown population in a urban setting
- Culture
- Confessional background
- Collectivist society
Iraqi refugee school children

- Disputed number of Iraqi refugees in Syria
- In 2007/8 there has been a significant increase in the number of children attending Syrian schools (49,132)
- MOE, UNHCR, UNICEF and other partners have a target of getting another 25,000 enrolled
- Problems because of access, lack of documentation, finance difficulties, child labor and the Syrian curriculum
UNHCR outreach in Syria

- In August 2008: increasing numbers of juvenile domestic workers (young girls) and street workers (boys) who support the family income

- There are 10 Iraqi girls in the Juvenile and Rehabilitation Centre (Damascus). The majority are survivors of SGBV including rape and forced prostitution
UNICEF Syria

- Reports of separated children registering at ‘child friendly spaces’ for refugees June 07-June 08
- 4-5%
During a recent bilateral meeting between UNHCR protection unit/community services and UNICEF child protection this issue again came up. There are doubts on whether the UNHCR registration clerks and SARC volunteers working with UNICEF who register the children in the Child Friendly spaces understand the terminology of unaccompanied/separated children (although several training sessions on these issues have taken place from UNHCR and UNICEF).
Present Response

- UNHCR is supporting several safe houses in Damascus
- Syria does not have a ‘social work tradition’
- Catholic church workers with welfare experience are managing some of these safe houses
Facts

- What is clear is we do not have the data
- There are relatively few humanitarian agencies with a welfare or child protection background
- There are cultural issues
- The challenges of a dense urban setting
- Outreach problems
- ‘Black holes’
- Individual vs Ecosystemic needs
Resources

- IASC Interagency Guiding Principles for working with Separated and Unaccompanied Children
- IASC Guidelines on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Settings
- Assessment tools including Heightened Risk Identification Tool (Jordan)
Next steps

- Greater clarity is needed on the situation of children and families in the Middle East including terminology.
- Accommodation options for separated and unaccompanied children need to be built on good, consistent social work principles.
- Para social workers need to be trained for outreach and to monitor short-term accommodation services.
- For children identified rapid assessment and ‘exit plans’ need to be developed as soon as possible.
- Great need for working with and reinforcing existing welfare systems.
Durable solutions

- Relatively few Iraqi refugees are being resettled (2007-2008 UNHCR made 20,000 resettlement submissions)
- Iraq is still not a safe place to return to
- Those that do return to Iraq frequently do not return to their former home
- Ongoing support in asylum countries
4 protective processes  Rutter 2006

- Reducing negative outcomes by altering the child’s exposure to risk
- Reducing negative chain reactions following risk exposure
- Establishing and maintaining self-esteem and self efficacy
- Opening up opportunities
Separated Children

- Are those separated from both parents, or from their previous legal or customary primary care-giver, but not necessarily from other relatives. These may, therefore, include children accompanied by other adult family members.
Unaccompanied children

- Are children who have been separated from both parents and other relatives and are not cared for by an adult who, by law or custom, is responsible for doing so
Orphans

- Are children, both of whose parents are known to be dead. In some countries, however a child who has lost one parent is called an orphan.
Vulnerability and Resilience

- Each child is born with certain vulnerabilities.
- Each child is also born with some protective factors.
- These vulnerabilities and protective factors then interact with the child’s environment so that the environment can have quite different effects.