

Iraq

September 2023 to January 2024

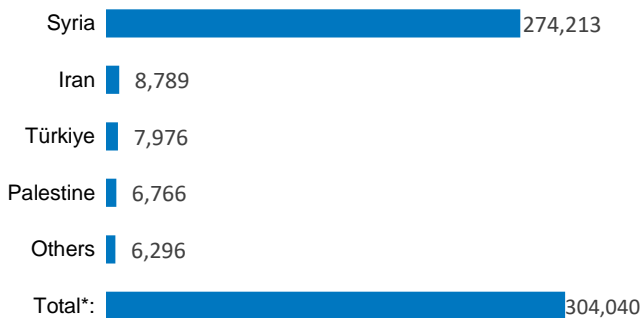
Iraq hosts more than **300,000 refugees and asylum-seekers**, about 90% of whom are from the Syrian Arab Republic. Over **1 million Iraqis** are internally displaced.

UNHCR focuses on strengthening national capacity to **include refugees** into **social and protection services**, and to **enhance their economic opportunities**.

For IDPs, UNHCR supports their access to **civil documentation** and supports the Iraqi authorities to find **solutions for IDPs in camps**.

POPULATION OF REFUGEES & ASYLUM-SEEKERS (AS OF 31 JANUARY 2024)

Country of origin

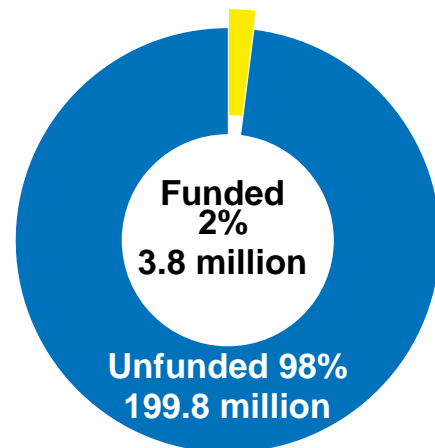


* Source : UNHCR

FUNDING (AS OF JANUARY 2024)

USD 203.6 million

requested for Iraq in 2024



UNHCR PRESENCE

Staff:

345 National Staff
76 International Staff

Offices:

1 Country Office in Baghdad/Erbil
5 Field Offices in Baghdad, Erbil, Kirkuk, Mosul and Sulaymaniyah
1 Sub-Office in Duhok

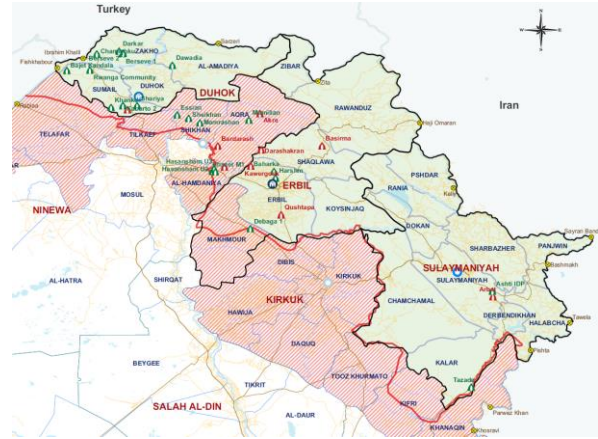


"Being able to work as a teacher has been a substantial opportunity in my life here," says Parveen, one of 400 qualified Syrian refugee teachers who have been recruited by the Kurdistan Regional Government's (KRG) Ministry of Education to teach in public schools under the Refugee Education Integration Policy (REIP).

Through the REIP, Iraq is reimagining education for refugee children and teachers. The policy allows for refugee children to study in public schools, side-by-side with Iraqi students. It also ensures that qualified refugee teachers are hired in public schools and included in the KRG's payroll system, receiving the same salary as Iraqi teachers and creating an opportunity for them to give back to the communities hosting them.

Operational context

The overall situation in Iraq has improved significantly since the conclusion of large-scale military operations against Da'esh in 2017. However, the security situation remains volatile and the economic situation fragile. The country generously hosts some 300,000 refugees and asylum-seekers, mostly Kurdish Syrians (over 270,000), the majority of whom live in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KR-I). The refugees have limited prospects for return in the immediate future, particularly given the deteriorating security and humanitarian situation in North-East Syria from where most originate. In the 2023 return intention survey conducted by UNHCR, 94% of Syrian refugees in Iraq indicated that they did not intend to return in the next 12 months. When asked about their reasons, the majority noted concerns about the lack of safety and security, and the lack of livelihood opportunities in Syria. Other important concerns included inadequate basic services, the lack of suitable housing and risk of conscription.



Iraq also has over 1 million internally displaced persons (IDPs), of whom some 160,000 live in 23 IDP camps in the KR-I. IDPs report insecurity, limited access to public services, such as education, health or even water and electricity, lack of livelihood opportunities and financial resources, combined with damaged housing in areas of origin and, for some of them, Sunni Arabs in particular, perceived affiliation with extremist groups as the main barriers to return. The remaining needs of forcibly displaced populations in Iraq are largely driven by socio-economic factors, human rights deficits and the absence of the rule of law – and not anymore by their displacement status – which are addressed more effectively through sustainable development approaches. In view of this, UNHCR and partners transitioned in 2023 from a humanitarian response to a development-focused approach. This entails strengthening national ownership and capacity for public service providers to deliver protection and other services, advocating for increased access of refugees and IDPs to public services, and promoting refugee inclusion in social protection programmes and improving refugees' access to labour markets and livelihood opportunities.

Highlights

Iraq makes pledges at the Global Refugee Forum

At the second Global Refugee Forum (GRF), which took place in Geneva, Switzerland, from 13 to 15 December 2023, the Government of Iraq (GoI) made [three commitments](#) to: (i) enact a new refugee law that aligns with international standards; (ii) ensure continued access to basic public services for refugees; and (iii) expand the Refugee Education Integration Policy (REIP) from grade five to 12 by 2030. This is the first time that Iraq makes any pledges at the GRF and comes after months of advocacy and mobilization of key stakeholders by UNHCR. In another first, the GoI delegation at the GRF was led by the Minister of Interior of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) accompanied by other prominent KRG officials, including the Minister of Education who are expected to play an instrumental role in the fulfilment of these commitments in the coming years. UNHCR also facilitated the participation of six representatives from refugee communities and civil society organizations in Iraq that made pledges which will support the implementation of the Government pledges in enacting a new refugee law and ensuring refugees and asylum-seekers have access to basic public services.



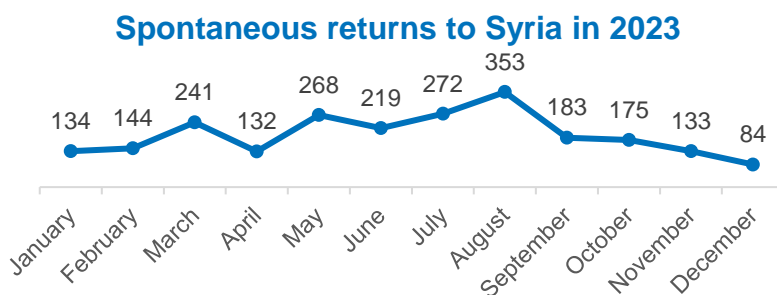
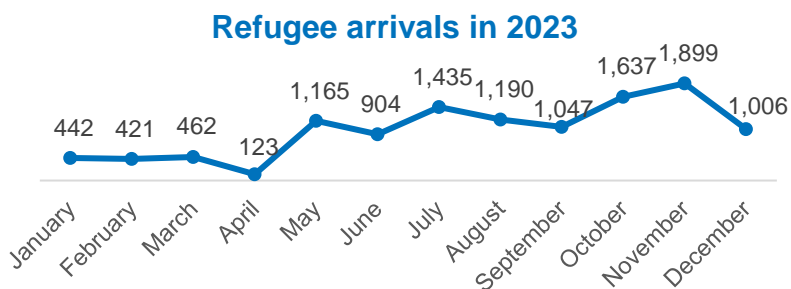
KRG Minister of Interior, H.E. Reber Ahmed (right), and Minister of Education, H.E. Alan Hama Saeed (left), at the 2023 GRF, photo: KRG

The UN Country Team in Iraq also made six pledges to support the GoI with: (i) including refugees in the Social Safety Net; (ii) providing quality public services both inside and outside refugee camps; (iii) conducting needs assessment related to refugee and stateless populations; (iv) enhancing refugee economic inclusion; (v) expanding the REIP; and, (vi) preventing and reducing statelessness.

Population trends

In 2023, UNHCR registered a total of **11,731 people** who newly arrived in Iraq, of whom 87% are Syrians. This represents an **increase of over 12%** in the total number compared to the previous year (10,397). The newly arrived Syrians indicated to UNHCR that they fled due to prevailing insecurity, dire living conditions and limited access to or availability of basic services, particularly in North-East Syria.

At the same time, UNHCR recorded a total of **2,338 spontaneous returns to Syria** through various borders (including the Peshkhabour border crossing point) in 2023. UNHCR monitoring indicates that 57% of the returnees moved to the Al Hassakeh region, 37% to the Aleppo region and 6% to other regions. The main reasons reported for returns to Syria are family unification (53.1%), followed by a lack of employment or job prospects in the KR-I (23.4%), and need for medical treatment (7.1%).



Main Activities

Protection



Access to legal aid and documentation

- Refugees:** UNHCR conducts **legal awareness sessions** for refugees and asylum-seekers on their rights and the processes required to apply for residency permits in Iraq and provides them with **free individual legal aid services**. In 2023, about **12,000 refugees and asylum-seekers** received legal aid services, including counselling and representation before legal and administrative bodies, supporting them to resolve **legal entry and stay** issues, obtain **documentation** and **register key life events** such as a new birth. This is crucial for them to access public services (e.g. education and healthcare) and secure employment, and reduces the risk of being arrested or deported. UNHCR and partners also provided legal assistance to over **1,800 refugees and asylum-seekers in detention**, most of whom had been arrested for immigration-related offences and were at risk of deportation/refoulement.

■ **IDPs, IDP returnees and vulnerable Iraqis:** UNHCR and partners support IDPs, IDP returnees and vulnerable Iraqis, such as illiterate persons, individuals with perceived affiliation to extremist groups and those at risk of statelessness, to **obtain or renew their civil documentation**. This is critical for them to access public services, including education, healthcare and social security benefits, and to exercise their basic rights, such as freedom of movement and civic participation. In 2023, UNHCR and partners – Harikar, Heartland Alliance International, International Rescue Committee, INTERSOS, Legal Clinics Network and Terre des Hommes Italy – coordinated with the Ministry of Interior/Civil Affairs Department on **50 mobile missions across the country**, including missions of Civil Affairs Directorates, court missions and ad hoc committee missions to IDP camps and urban areas with large IDP/returnee populations to process civil document applications. In tandem, **more than 50,000 IDPs, IDP returnees and vulnerable Iraqis received legal aid**, including counselling and representation on a diverse range of matters, including civil lawsuits (such as proof of lineage, custody, guardianship/custodianship, proof of birth and kinship), and on the **process of applying for civil documents**. As a result of these combined efforts, over **38,000 civil documents**, such as the National Unified ID and the Iraqi nationality certificate, **were issued while more than 44,000 were processed** and are pending physical issuance.



After 10 years in displacement, Allawi and his family obtained identity documents allowing them to access vital public services like healthcare.

■ **Iraqi returnees from North-East Syria:** UNHCR also leads civil documentation efforts in Jeddah 1 centre in Ninewa governorate which hosts Iraqis who return from al-Hol camp in North-East Syria as part of organized repatriation led by the GoI. The legal assessments of this group, which are conducted by UNHCR's partner, INTERSOS, consistently indicate that all returnees are missing at least one core civil document. In 2023, a total of **1,383 civil documents were issued for Jeddah 1 residents** with UNHCR's support, including 603 National Unified IDs and 780 nationality certificates.

Advocacy and legal reform

■ UNHCR advocates with the GoI to develop legislative and policy frameworks aligned with international law, protection standards and best practices. UNHCR also intervenes in cases with risk of refoulement and advocates on behalf of individuals seeking asylum in Iraq. In 2023, through UNHCR's advocacy, the refoulement of **430 individuals was prevented**. As a result, the **number of refoulements in 2023 decreased by nearly 60%** (from 131 in 2022 to 56 in 2023). Also, UNHCR collaborated extensively with the Committee that was established by the federal Ministry of Interior and tasked with **drafting a new refugee law**, providing it with **technical advice** and **commentaries to a series of drafts** to ensure that the bill **aligns with international standards**, as per its international refugee law supervisory mandate. In tandem, UNHCR worked with Federal and KRG authorities to **develop Administrative Instructions** (yet to be officially adopted) related to the processing of asylum claims in federal Iraq and codifying of the procedures for issuing residency permits to refugees of all nationalities in the KR-I. UNHCR will continue its advocacy with and support to Iraqi authorities in 2024 regarding these legal reforms which are expected to strengthen Iraq's national capacity and leadership in the protection of refugees and asylum-seekers on its territory.

Cash-based interventions

■ For refugees and asylum-seekers who are assessed to be socio-economically vulnerable, UNHCR provides **cash assistance to enable them to pay rent, buy food and other essentials**, helping to prevent them from falling into dire poverty and to decrease the risk of harmful coping strategies such as reducing food intake and accumulating debt. In 2023, UNHCR provided **multipurpose cash assistance** to over **58,400 socio-economically vulnerable refugees (some 11,400 families)**. In the post-distribution monitoring exercise, the refugees indicated that this assistance had helped reduce their stress about meeting basic needs and improved their living conditions. In addition, between 15 and 18% reported that the cash assistance had

helped them secure livelihoods and productive assets. UNHCR is also providing a total of **114 refugee students with a monthly allowance of 400,000 IQD (approximately \$300)** for the 2023-2024 academic year, as part of the Albert Einstein German Academic Refugee Initiative (also known as DAFI) scholarship programme.

- In line with the broader transition from a humanitarian response to development-oriented approaches in Iraq, UNHCR **advocates with the KRG to promote the inclusion of refugees and asylum-seekers in the current initiatives to resume the Social Safety Net programme in the KR-I.** This will ultimately help provide vulnerable refugees and asylum-seekers with more predictable support and facilitate their graduation from dependency on humanitarian assistance.



Education

- UNHCR supports the Ministry of Education of the KRG in **implementing the REIP** which seeks to **include Syrian refugee children and teachers** into the **public education system** in the KR-I. In 2023, UNHCR constructed **two new schools**, added **25 classrooms** to existing schools and renovated **eight schools**, including upgrading their WASH facilities in **Dohuk, Erbil and Sulaymaniyah** governorates. For the 2023-2024 academic school year, UNHCR plans to construct an additional **four schools** (a total of 48 classrooms), add a **further 34 classrooms** to existing schools, and renovate **six schools**, including their WASH facilities.



Solutions

- Given the **protracted nature of displacement for refugees and asylum-seekers** in Iraq as well as some groups of IDPs, UNHCR is working to promote more **sustainable solutions** for these populations. The solutions UNHCR pursues for refugees is to further **advance their inclusion in public services** (such as health and education), enhance their **access to livelihoods** and **advocate for social protection schemes** in the KR-I and the **inclusion of refugees therein** on par with nationals. Meanwhile, for refugees with heightened protection risks, **UNHCR pursues resettlement to third countries.** In 2023, UNHCR submitted cases of **over 2,800 most vulnerable refugees for resettlement**, of whom **more than 1,200** departed to resettlement countries. At the same time, UNHCR works to expand complementary pathways such as **scholarships** and **labour mobility opportunities** abroad. In this regard, UNHCR assisted over **1,000 refugees** to access complementary pathways in 2023, of whom **more than 160** departed to **seven different countries.**
- Regarding the IDPs, **UNHCR supports the government in finding and implementing dignified solutions for the approximately 160,000 IDPs who reside in the 23 remaining camps in the KR-I.** UNHCR supports the closure of camps as a general practice when all three recognized solutions are offered including (1) **safe and voluntary return of IDPs to their areas of origin**, (2) their **relocation to other communities within the country**, or (3) **local integration of IDPs in their areas of displacement**, including through the transformation of camps into formal settlements fully serviced by public institutions and with upgraded shelter conditions or through integration in (urban) communities nearby existing camps or another area of the IDPs choosing. IDPs should be able to make an informed and voluntary decision on what solution is right for them and be supported once they have made a choice so that their solutions be not only dignified but also sustainable in the long term. At the end of 2023, UNHCR supported the GoI and KRG in the closures of camps in Sulaymaniyah Governorate and Garmian Administration with many IDPs able to return to Diyala and Salah-Al-Din.



Special thanks to donors

UNHCR thanks its major donors of unearmarked and broadly earmarked funds, as well as those who contributed directly to the Iraq operation in 2023.

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LINKS

UNHCR Iraq website: <https://www.unhcr.org/iq/>

UNHCR Iraq operational data portal

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