

FACTSHEET

PROSPECTS PARTNERSHIP IN IRAQ

A record 117.3 million people worldwide have been forcibly displaced from their homes, with the majority enduring prolonged uncertainty. Responding to the scale, complexity and protracted nature of forced displacement requires a comprehensive approach that addresses the needs of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs), while also supporting host communities.

To transform how host governments and humanitarian, development and private-sector actors respond to situations of forced displacement, the Government of the Kingdom of the Netherlands spearheaded and funded the [Partnership for improving prospects for forcibly displaced persons and host communities](#), known as PROSPECTS. This unique multi-annual global partnership is implemented by the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR), the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), the International Labour Organisation (ILO), the World Bank and the International Finance Corporation (IFC) across eight countries: Egypt, Ethiopia, Iraq, Jordan, Kenya, Lebanon, Sudan and Uganda.

PROSPECTS seeks to operationalise the humanitarian-development nexus by encouraging partners to leverage comparative advantages to enhance policy and programmatic coordination, resulting in more efficient and effective programmes and activities benefitting refugees and host communities – as envisioned in the 2016 New Way of Working and 2018 Global Compact on Refugees.

BACKGROUND

As of December 2024, Iraq hosted over 338,000 refugees and asylum-seekers, 90 per cent of whom are Syrians residing primarily in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KR-I). Over 70 per cent live in urban areas alongside the host community while the remaining are in nine camps in the KR-I.

The protection environment in Iraq has remained relatively favourable, particularly in the KR-I where refugees and asylum-seekers in possession of government-issued residency documents can access public services such as healthcare and education, and pursue livelihood opportunities, albeit mainly in the informal sector. Nonetheless, Iraq continues to lack a comprehensive legal framework governing the status and protection of refugees in line with international standards.

Iraq also has over 1 million IDPs. While the majority live in private accommodations in urban settings or informal settlements, some 110,000 live in 20 IDP camps in the KR-I. Overall, the protracted displacement of IDPs is no longer linked with the presence of Da'esh but rather to factors unique to each displaced person's profile and the situation in areas of origin. IDPs continue to flag concerns about security, limited access to public services, lack of livelihood opportunities and damaged housing in their areas of origin as the main barriers to return. Such challenges have deterred IDPs from returning. Considering this, UNHCR continues to advocate for safe and voluntary returns, and for other durable solutions such as integration into local communities in areas of displacement or relocation to other communities within the country. Additionally, UNHCR supports IDPs, IDP returnees and non-displaced vulnerable Iraqis to obtain civil documentation, so they can access public services and participate in the political and civic affairs of their country like any other citizen.

PROSPECTS PHASE I (2019-2023)

The first phase of PROSPECTS in Iraq was implemented amid a transition of the international community, including the United Nations Country Team, from a largely humanitarian response to a development-focused approach, in a context of reducing humanitarian needs and Iraq's improved stability and economic situation. Across three main pillars, UNHCR prioritized supporting the capacity of national authorities to enable the inclusion of refugees in public systems and providing legal assistance to refugees and IDPs.

UNHCR received USD 7.6 million over four years, while all five PROSPECTS partners in Iraq received a collective USD 34.7 million. This enabled UNHCR to make significant improvements during Phase I in the lives of refugees and IDPs, particularly in the KR-I, where most refugees and camp-based IDPs reside.

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS IN PHASE I

PILLAR 1: EDUCATION AND LEARNING



"Now we can read, write and teach effectively in the Kurdish Sorani dialect. I feel confident in delivering lessons to students."

Maqlooba, a Syrian refugee in Sulaymaniyah, Iraq, attends language classes provided by UNHCR, helping refugee teachers improve their knowledge of Kurdish Sorani, the official language of instruction in public schools. Language courses are also available for refugee students to aid their comprehension of the new learning language, as well as for refugee parents to enable them to support their children's academic progress.

Maqlooba was hired by the Kurdistan Regional Government as part of their efforts to include refugee students and qualified teachers into the national system. She now feels equipped to effectively teach refugee and host community children.

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The launch of the Refugee Education Integration Policy (REIP) by the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in 2022 was a key factor in contributing to the success of PROSPECTS partners in delivering inclusive, quality education for forcibly displaced persons in Phase I. The REIP marked a significant step towards integrating refugee children and qualified teachers in the KR-I public education system.

- Over 5,000 Syrian refugee children—over half of whom are girls—were supported to enrol in formal secondary education in Dohuk through initiatives implemented by UNHCR and its partner, the Norwegian Refugee Council. These efforts included supporting parent-teacher associations and adolescent clubs to address challenges faced by refugee children, particularly girls, and organizing recreational activities for out-of-school children.
- More than 11,500 refugee children completed their formal and non-formal education at primary and secondary levels in Dohuk, thanks to remedial, literacy and numeracy classes provided by UNHCR and its partners, which addressed learning gaps in formal schools. These efforts also facilitated the re-integration of students at risk of dropping out of school into formal education in both camp and urban settings.
- In close cooperation with regional and governorate authorities, UNHCR renovated and expanded seven primary and secondary schools across the Dohuk governorate, benefiting an estimated 4,000 students, 50 per cent of whom are refugees.

PILLAR 2: EMPLOYMENT WITH DIGNITY

UNHCR Iraq does not directly implement livelihoods initiatives but works closely with PROSPECTS partners, especially the ILO, to enable inclusion of refugees in livelihoods-related programmes to enhance their access to employment and financial services.

- For the first time in Iraq, 130 refugee entrepreneurs received business loans and financial literacy training through Al-Thiqa, a national microfinance institution, to support the launch and growth of their micro-businesses.
- In partnership with the Iraqi Federation of Industries and Chambers of Commerce, 255 refugees benefited from skills development and vocational training opportunities. Additionally, 120 refugees participated in work-based learning programmes such as internships, apprenticeships and other on-the-job trainings.
- Refugees were included in the Employment-Intensive Investment Programme in Dohuk governorate, part of a Green Works initiative focused on enhancing local infrastructure for climate change adaptation and mitigation while creating decent jobs. As a result, 25 per cent of the project's workforce consisted of refugees from Domiz and Gawilan camps.



Omar, a local farmer, harvests rice in Hizarjot village in Dohuk, Iraq. This year's yield has increased thanks to joint efforts of local farmers and refugees living in the host community. As part of the Green Works initiative, refugees from the Gawilan camp were employed to rehabilitate and maintain irrigation systems, including the construction of water channels, which boosted harvests.

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PILLAR 3: PROTECTION AND INCLUSION



“Without documents, you can’t access your rights,” says Kawe, an internally displaced person in Khanke camp in Dohuk, Iraq, who lost all her belongings while fleeing Sinjar. UNHCR’s assistance enabled Kawe to overcome legal and administrative barriers and obtain core civil documents.

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For IDPs, IDP returnees and vulnerable non-displaced Iraqis, possessing civil documents such as national ID cards is critical, as it enables access to public services such as education, healthcare, restitution and reconstruction programmes, and social protection schemes like the Social Safety Net. Moreover, access to civil documentation improves freedom of movement and reduces the risk of arrest and detention. UNHCR provided IDPs, IDP returnees and non-displaced vulnerable Iraqis with legal information, counselling and representation, to raise their awareness and help them navigate the lengthy and complex national legal procedures across many ministries and governorates to obtain or renew various types of civil documents.

- Over 175,000 IDPs in Ninewa participated in awareness-raising sessions on legal affairs pertaining to acquiring civil documentation, and received legal assistance.
- Over 57,600 IDPs, IDP returnees and non-displaced vulnerable Iraqis (over half female) were able to secure their civil documents.

PROSPECTS PHASE II (2024-2027)

Programming in Phase I of PROSPECTS laid the foundation for a more comprehensive and sustainable response to the needs of those impacted by forced displacement, which will be built upon through Phase II. Launched in 2024 with a total budget of USD 48 million for four years across the five partners, of which USD 10 million was allocated to UNHCR, phase II will focus on further strengthening national ownership and capacity to provide protection, education and livelihood opportunities for refugees in Iraq.

PRIORITIES IN PHASE II

PROTECTION AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

- Provide technical support to the Government of Iraq to develop and adopt a new Refugee Law aligned with international standards, in line with pledges made at the 2023 Global Refugee Forum, and to standardize asylum procedures across the country to improve access to international protection and prevent risks of arrest, detention and refoulement.
- Provide legal assistance to refugees and asylum-seekers, including those in detention, to facilitate access to asylum procedures.
- Provide IDPs, particularly individuals with complex cases, with legal information, assistance and representation to obtain core civil documents.
- Strengthen national social protection schemes, particularly in the KR-I, and the capacity of public systems to absorb refugees.

EDUCATION AND LEARNING

- Support the expansion of the REIP to include an additional 30,000 refugee students in grades six and above in the KR-I public education system by constructing classrooms in existing schools and expanding the capacity of existing school-based education structures, to enhance the national system’s capacity to absorb the additional number of refugees while also benefiting the host community children.
- Rehabilitate damaged school infrastructure, including water and sanitation facilities in schools, to promote a safe learning environment for all.

EMPLOYMENT WITH DINGITY

- Work with the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MoLSA), development and private sector actors to increase access of refugees to livelihoods and training opportunities.

CRITICAL INFRASTRUCTURE

- Support authorities in incorporating refugee camps in local development plans and budgets to pave the way for the possibility of transforming camps into neighbourhoods entirely served by public services.
- Continue advocacy with authorities to find dignified and lasting solutions for IDPs still living in camps.

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