

# Sulaymaniyah Field Office

## Overview – December 2024

UNHCR's **Sulaymaniyah Field Office** covers the Sulaymaniyah governorate, which hosts over **41,000 refugees**. The majority are from Syria, followed by Iran, Turkey, and Palestine. Of these, 23% live in Arbat camp, and 77% reside in urban areas.<sup>1</sup>

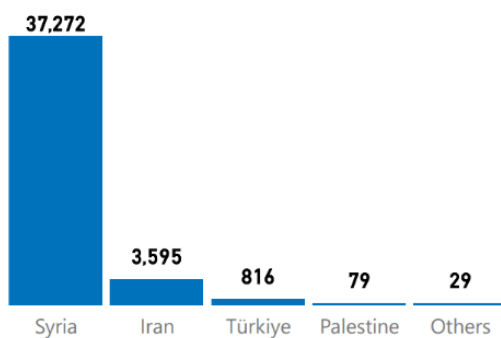
In 2024, the last two IDP camps in Sulaymaniyah (Tazade and Ashti camps) were closed. In collaboration with local authorities, UNHCR supported 95% of the 9,400 IDPs to return to their areas of origin, while 5% integrated into towns in the governorate.<sup>2</sup> Most of these IDPs originated from Balad, Dujail and Yathrib in **Salah al-Din Governorate**, as well as Sinjar and Ba'aj in **Ninewa Governorate**.

In Sulaymaniyah, UNHCR works in partnership with governmental entities as well as international and national NGOs to deliver its protection and assistance programmes to refugees and asylum-seekers in accordance with the **UNHCR Iraq's Multi-Year Strategy 2025-2029**.

### ASYLUM SEEKERS AND REFUGEES

**41,791 refugees and asylum-seekers** are registered with UNHCR who live in Sulaymaniyah governorate<sup>3</sup>.

#### Countries of Origin



**68% are women and children**

**40% are Under 18**



Education is an essential part of child protection. After Nourhan, a Syrian refugee in Iraq, dropped out of school, UNHCR and partners supported her to return to the classroom. Read her [story](#).



#### UNHCR STAFF

02 International Staff

17 National Staff

<sup>1</sup> UNHCR data as of end of December 2024

<sup>2</sup> Previously Sulaymaniyah had been host to 77,676 IDPs living in and out of camps.

<sup>3</sup> UNHCR data as of end of December 2024

## Main Activities

### Protection

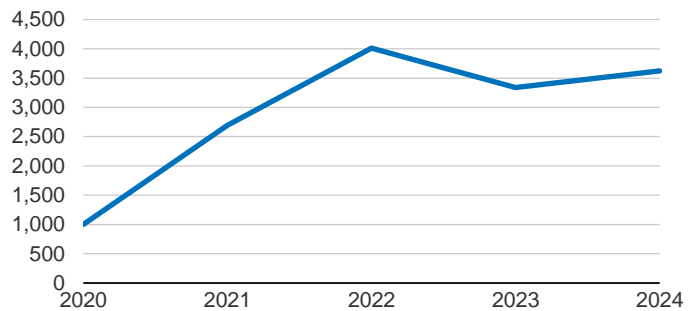
In Sulaymaniyah Governorate, UNHCR provides refugees and asylum-seekers with a range of protection services, including registration and documentation, legal assistance and services to respond and prevent gender-based violence, support vulnerable children, and provide Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS).

### Registration and civil documentation

In Sulaymaniyah, UNHCR operates an urban registration centre in the city centre to register refugees and asylum seekers and to renew documentation for those living outside of camps. In addition, UNHCR's registration team conducts weekly registration missions to Arbat refugee camp to conduct registration and documentation activities for the population living there.

As of 31 December 2024, 41,791 refugees and asylum-seekers, are registered with UNHCR in the Sulaymaniyah governorate. 68% of them are women and children. This includes over 3,600 refugees and asylum-seekers registered in 2024, comprising of over 1,300 new arrivals, over 1,300 in-situ registrations (individuals who have been in Iraq for more than 12 months but only recently approached UNHCR for registration) and 1,000 new births. On average, UNHCR registers 300 asylum-seekers and renews 1,800 individual certificates per month through its team of eight registration staff. In parallel, UNHCR works closely with authorities on to improve their knowledge on asylum processes, and advocates for fair, efficient and non-discriminatory processes and systems.

**New Registrations of Refugees and Asylum Seekers | Sulaymaniyah Governorate**



UNHCR's registration process in Sulaymaniyah, as in the rest of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, is an important mechanism in realizing the implementation of Administrative Instructions (AI) for regulating the affairs of asylum-seekers. Once refugees and asylum seekers receive their UNHCR registration certificate, they are able to approach the Residency Directorate to issue their residency documents, namely the Personal Identification Card (PIC) for the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. With this documentation, refugees and asylum seekers have freedom of movement and access to national services.

### Legal assistance

In Sulaymaniyah governorate, UNHCR and partners provide legal assistance to refugees, asylum-seekers and IDPs. This includes legal counselling and representation, assistance with administrative and legal procedures, and legal awareness sessions. Over the course of 2024, UNHCR provided 765 refugees and asylum-seekers in Sulaymaniyah with legal awareness sessions. In addition, over 1,400 refugees received legal aid services, including counselling and representation before judicial and administrative bodies, supporting them to resolve legal issues.

For refugees and asylum seekers in detention, UNHCR and partners also provide targeted legal assistance. As of December, 103 refugees and asylum-seekers in detention in Sulaymaniyah governorate have been supported, most of whom had been arrested on migration-related charges.

### Community-based protection

In Sulaymaniyah governorate, UNHCR and partners work to [support survivors of gender-based violence](#) by providing counselling, psychological help, and legal assistance. As of end December 2024, [UNHCR and partners has helped over 460 survivors and people at risk of gender-based violence with specialized care and support](#). [UNHCR and partners also connected more than 100 individuals to other services](#), including legal aid, mental health and psychosocial support, and job programmes, to help them feel more empowered and rebuild their lives. Moreover, throughout the year, UNHCR and partners delivered [trainings on preventing and responding to gender-based violence for 35 government staff and service providers](#) in Sulaymaniyah governorate.

Together with partners, UNHCR also provides [child protection services](#), including counselling, recreational and educational activities for children at risk through community centres located in Arbat camp, Barika, Chamchamal, Sulaymaniyah and Ranya. UNHCR and partners also work with [48 Community Outreach Volunteers](#), who are located across different municipalities in Sulaymaniyah Governorate to support refugees, asylum-seekers and IDPs providing information on the available protection services.

UNHCR and partners carry out [protection assessments](#) identifying refugees and IDPs with protection needs and subsequently connect them with appropriate services available in the governorate. Additionally, UNHCR and partners also organize [awareness raising sessions](#) on various important topics such as child protection, gender-based violence, and ways the community can share feedback and suggestions on services.

Throughout 2024, [over 16,700 individuals participated in awareness raising sessions](#) organized by UNHCR partners at the community centres in Sulaymaniyah. These sessions were complemented by dedicated capacity building efforts and in some cases carried out in collaboration with relevant government counterparts.

### Cash-based assistance

UNHCR provides [Multipurpose Cash Assistance \(MPCA\)](#) to enable socio-economically vulnerable refugees and asylum-seekers residing in Iraq, including Sulaymaniyah governorate, to cover their basic needs, preventing them from falling into dire poverty and decreasing risks of harmful coping mechanisms such as reducing food intake and accumulating debt. During 2024, [UNHCR provided over 8,000 refugees and asylum seekers who live in Sulaymaniyah governorate with MPCA](#).<sup>4</sup>

In addition, in 2024, UNHCR also provided one-time [Emergency Cash Assistance \(ECA\)](#) and [Medical Cash Assistance \(MCA\)](#) to the most vulnerable refugees. As of December 2024, [six refugee families \(a total of 26 individuals\) received ECA and two refugees received MCA in Sulaymaniyah governorate](#).

## Towards the inclusion of refugees in national systems

In Iraq, refugees and asylum-seekers have access to [public services such as healthcare and education](#), and they can pursue [livelihood opportunities](#), primarily in the informal sector.

In line with the [UNHCR Iraq's Multi-Year Strategy 2025-2029](#), UNHCR seeks to build on this inclusion over the coming years, working closely with government and local authorities to expand other public services to also be available to refugees and asylum seekers.

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<sup>4</sup> Figures as of December 2024

In addition, UNHCR is embarking on a pilot to transform some refugee camps into neighbourhoods, served by the local municipality rather than relying on parallel humanitarian services. The Arbat refugee camp in Sulaymaniyah has been selected for this initiative due to the existing high levels of cooperation and service provision by the local municipality (such as provision of water, electricity and garbage collection).

UNHCR is also engaging with the Chamber of Commerce, mobilizing corporate partners, such as construction companies, green house owners, cleaning companies and hotel owners, to provide increased employment opportunities for refugees.

## Education

To foster the inclusion of refugees and asylum-seekers inclusion in the national education system, UNHCR has committed to construct and renovate public schools. In 2024, UNHCR expanded six schools across the Sulaymaniyah governorate in line with the Refugee Education Integration Policy (REIP). Looking ahead to 2025, UNHCR plans to finalize the construction of three new schools, each with 18 classrooms, and expand three more existing schools in the governorate.

In addition to school construction, UNHCR has provided trainings for Directorate of Education staff so they can support the skills development of teachers and administrators. Strengthening the local government's capacity allows education institutions to provide direct support to teachers, giving them the knowledge and skills which will help accommodate diverse student populations (including refugees), and improve the quality of education for all children enrolled in public schools. In December, UNHCR in coordination with the General Directorate of Education and the General Directorate of Health organized two training sessions on first aid and the mental health and well-being of children for 54 teachers.

## Health

Regarding healthcare, UNHCR collaborates closely with the Directorate of Health in Sulaymaniyah governorate to identify and address gaps in healthcare services accessed by both refugees and their host communities. Projects undertaken so far include the construction of new primary health centres, the expansion of storage spaces and laboratories, and other renovations to clinics. In 2024, UNHCR supplied and installed equipment for Arbat Primary Healthcare Centre, expanded the Central Blood Lab unit of the public hospital in Chamchamal District and provided medical equipment to Said Sadiq public hospital to enhance health services for both the refugee and host communities in these areas. In 2024-2025, UNHCR plans to improve paediatric and surgical care in two public hospitals in the governorate.

## Partnerships

In Sulaymaniyah governorate, UNHCR works with a range of implementing partners to deliver services and assistance to refugees and asylum seekers. These include:

- **Intersos** for general protection, legal and education
- **Directorate of Migration and Crisis Response (DMCR)** for camp management
- **Democracy and Human Rights Development (DHRD)** for community-based protection and gender-based violence prevention and response
- **Kurdistan Save the Children (KSC)** for child protection
- **WCHAN** for mental health and psychosocial support.

At institutional level, UNHCR supports the **Ministry of Interior** on the issuance of personal identification cards (PICs) for refugees and asylum-seekers, protecting them from the risk of arbitrary

arrest and deportation. Also, UNHCR collaborates with **the Ministry of Migration and Displacement (MoMD), and the Ministry of Higher Education, the Ministry of Planning, and the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs**. Furthermore, UNHCR works closely with other **UN/humanitarian organisations** to support the government's responses to refugees and IDPs, exchange information and coordinate advocacy.

**UNHCR thanks its major donors of unearmarked funds, as well as those who contribute to directly to the Iraq operation and to the regional response for Syrian refugees:**

Belgium | Canada | Denmark | European Union | Finland | France | Germany | Iceland | Ireland | Japan | Grand Duchy of Luxembourg | Netherlands | Norway | Republic of Korea | Russian Federation | Sweden | Switzerland | United Kingdom | United States of America | Private Donors



*Before fleeing her homeland in 2015 to seek refuge in the KR-I, Dalia was working as a teacher in her hometown of Qamishli in Syria, a role she excelled in and held with great pride. After successfully completing three months of Sorani language courses provided by UNHCR and partners, Dalia returned to teaching with renewed confidence, eager to help both refugee and local children build a sustainable future. Read her [story](#).*