

Iraq

December 2024

Iraq hosts more than **338,000 refugees and asylum-seekers**, 90% of whom are from the Syrian Arab Republic. About 28% live in nine refugee camps across the Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

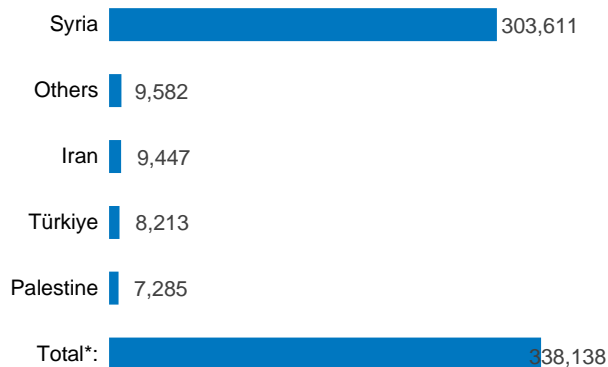
UNHCR focuses on strengthening national capacity to **include refugees into public services**, and to **increased access to self-reliance opportunities**.

Over **1 million Iraqis** are internally displaced, with some 109,000 live in 21 IDP camps in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. UNHCR supports their access to **civil documentation** and works with the Iraqi authorities to find durable **solutions for IDPs in camps**.

POPULATION OF REFUGEES & ASYLUM-SEEKERS

(AS OF 31 DECEMBER 2024)

Country of origin

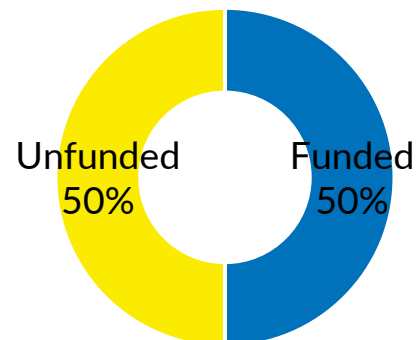


FUNDING

(AS OF 31 DECEMBER 2024)

USD 203.6 million

requested for Iraq in 2024



UNHCR PRESENCE

Staff:

184 National Staff
60 International Staff

Offices:

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



For Aya, Nihad, and Taha, education is more than a personal endeavour – it's a way to give back to their communities. As refugees in Iraq, they have all faced significant challenges to get to where they are today, but with the support of the DAFI Tertiary Scholarship Programme, implemented by UNHCR, they are confident they can progress even further. Read their [story](#).

Operational context

Iraq is currently at a turning point, leaving behind the effects of three decades of political turmoil and armed conflicts that deeply impacted its people. Since the end of large-scale military operations in 2017, Iraq has been experiencing relative stability and is advancing towards sustainable development. These developments notwithstanding, there remain protracted humanitarian and development needs and areas with a fragile security situation.

Iraq generously hosts over 338,000 refugees and asylum-seekers, 90% of whom are Syrians and live in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. While some 73% of the refugees live in urban areas, 27% live in 9 refugee camps in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. 65% of refugees are women and children under 18.

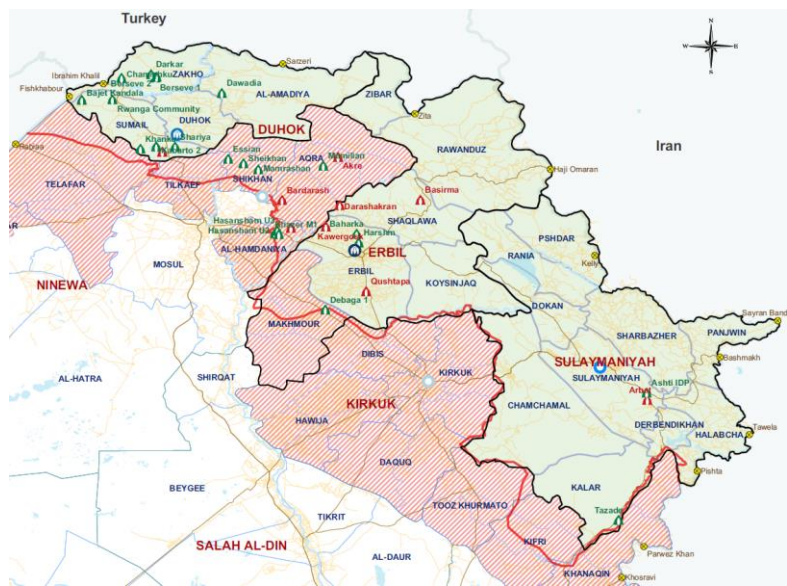


Figure 1 Map of the refugee and IDP camps in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. Source: UNHCR Iraq

With the evolving situation in Syria, refugees and asylum-seekers in Iraq are closely following developments. [UNHCR continues to monitor movements of Syrians, including registered refugees across border points.](#) Between 8 December and 31 December, close to 2,000 Syrians returned from Iraq through both the Peshkhabour border crossing, located between Syria and the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, and the Al-Qaim border crossing. [Overall, the number of returns from Iraq to Syria remains low and Syrians continue to express concerns about the ongoing insecurity in North-East Syria \(where most refugees in Iraq originate from\).](#)

In line with government policy, UNHCR supports the inclusion of refugees and asylum-seekers in public services in Iraq, including education, healthcare, protection-related services and social protection schemes, as well as increased access to self-reliance opportunities. In coordination with development actors, UNHCR also supports the strengthening of public systems, and provides technical support in the implementation of Administrative Instructions regulating asylum-matters as well as in the development of a new refugee law, aligned with international standards and good practices.

[Iraq also has over 1 million internally displaced persons \(IDPs\).](#) While the majority live in urban settings or informal settlements across the country, as of end December 2024, some 109,000 live in 21 IDP camps in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. In early 2024, the Government of Iraq announced its intent to close the remaining IDPs camps in the KR-I. While many IDPs hope to return to their homes at some point, many may be unable or unwilling to do so because of their specific profiles or the situation in their areas of origin. [UNHCR supports the efforts of pursuing durable solutions for IDPs, including the closure of camps, as solutions, including voluntary return, local integration and relocation are available to IDPs, enabling them to make decisions on a voluntary and well-informed basis.](#)

In the evolving context in Iraq, [UNHCR has transitioned from a purely humanitarian response to a response that supports development approaches.](#) UNHCR's multi-year strategy 2025-2029, therefore envisions that forcibly displaced populations and stateless persons in Iraq have improved access to legal protection as well as full and inclusive access to quality basic and protection services in national systems as well as economic opportunities.

Highlights of 2024

UNHCR advocacy and technical advice contributed to the adoption of new Administrative Instructions to regulate the management of asylum affairs in Iraq.

In 2024, both the Kurdistan Region of Iraq and the Federal Government of Iraq adopted new Administrative Instructions to regulate the management of asylum affairs: On 10 July, the Minister of Interior of the Kurdistan Regional Government signed the Administrative Instructions for regulating the affairs of asylum-seekers in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq which came into effect in September. The Administrative Instructions are a landmark achievement that establish a legal and procedural framework to standardize asylum procedures across the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, in line with international law and standards.



The Minister of Interior of the Kurdistan Regional Government signs the Administrative Instructions for regulating the affairs of asylum-seekers in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. © Kurdistan 24 Media Agency

In December 2024, the Iraqi Government adopted new Administrative Instructions for enhancing the implementation of the Political Refugee Law No. 51 of 1971. The new Administrative Instructions repeal instructions issued in 1972 and aim to regularize the management of asylum affairs under the current national legal framework. Key improvements in the new Administrative Instructions include a stronger recognition of the non-refoulement principle and enhanced guarantees of procedural and fundamental rights of refugees. In addition, the new Administrative Instructions clarify the role of the Permanent Committee of the Federal Ministry of Interior in managing refugee affairs and asylum procedures.

The new Administrative Instructions come after years of UNHCR advocacy and technical support to Iraqi authorities to bring them in greater alignment with international standards. UNHCR will continue to collaborate with and support government counterparts across Iraq in the implementation of these Administrative Instructions.

UNHCR continued the registration and documentation of asylum-seekers and refugees in Iraq.

In 2024, UNHCR continued its individual biometric registration for persons seeking international protection in Iraq, with a view to enable them to obtain government-issued documentation. During the year, UNHCR registered approximately 44,000 refugees and asylum-seekers, including new arrivals, bringing the total number of refugees and asylum-seekers in Iraq to some 338,000 individuals. UNHCR also continued to renew certificates for those already registered by UNHCR in Iraq. The UNHCR certificate provided through the registration process remains the means for refugees and asylum-seekers to obtain or renew government-issued residency documents, such as the card issued by the Permanent Committee on Asylum Affairs (PC-MOI Card) and the Personal Identification Card issued in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq.



Omar, 21 years-old, is a Syrian refugee from Deir ez-Zor who sought refuge in Basra, south Iraq. Thanks to UNHCR support, in 2024 Omar has been provided with the PC-MOI card.

In 2024, UNHCR recorded a total of 2,749 spontaneous returns of registered refugees to Syria through the Peshkhabour border crossing point, inactivating their registration with UNHCR in Iraq. Returnees indicated that they were returning to Al Hassakeh (45%), Aleppo (43%) and 12% to other regions. The main reasons Syrians cite for return are family unification (31%), followed by a lack of employment or job prospects (21%).

UNHCR provided cash assistance to vulnerable refugees and asylum-seekers and rolled out a new targeting model.

During 2024, some 56,000 refugees and asylum-seekers were assessed to be socio-economically vulnerable and received cash assistance from UNHCR, including single mothers, people with disabilities, and survivors of violence. This cash helps them pay for rent, food, and address other basic needs. Without it, they might face severe hardships like hunger, child labour, or homelessness. In the last quarter of 2024, UNHCR rolled out a new targeting approach for its cash assistance programme based on socio-economic vulnerabilities of refugees and asylum seekers. The updated targeting model integrates socio-economic factors with specific protection needs, particularly targeting persons with disabilities, female-headed households, children at risk and survivors and refugees at risk of violence. Furthermore, UNHCR changed the amount of cash assistance each family receives taking into account family size and composition.



Nidal and Mahabad are Syrian refugee parents to four children, two of them have specific protection needs. In 2024, they were recipients of UNHCR multipurpose cash assistance which helped them to cover for their basic needs, including rent, food and hygiene products.

UNHCR continued to support the inclusion of refugees in education and health care in the public system

Throughout 2024, UNHCR constructed, renovated and expanded several education and health facilities in Iraq to support the inclusion of refugees into public services and national systems.

In healthcare, UNHCR completed the construction and handover to the health authorities of two primary healthcare centres. In April 2024, UNHCR handed over a new primary healthcare centre near Domiz 1 and 2 refugee camps in Dohuk Governorate to the authorities. In December 2024, UNHCR finalized the construction of a new primary healthcare centre in Erbil Governorate, enhancing healthcare access for refugees, IDPs, and the local population. These investments in the capacity of the public health service allowed UNHCR to phase out of supporting primary health care centres in the refugee camps of Domiz 1 and 2, Darashakran, Gawilan, and Qushtapa, as refugees now have access to public healthcare through newly constructed or existing health centres in nearby host communities.



Opening ceremony of the new healthcare centre in Qushtapa, Erbil Governorate.

In education, UNHCR constructed six new schools, rehabilitated eight others, and added 37 classrooms to existing schools in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. In other governorates of Iraq, UNHCR renovated 12 classrooms, constructed a new exam hall for a primary school in Anbar Governorate and built a new 12-classroom school in Kirkuk Governorate. This has contributed to increasing the capacity of the public education system to accommodate more students from both refugee and host communities, improving the quality of education for all.

Main developments and UNHCR contributions in 2024

Refugee Response

Advocacy and legal protection

- Following years of advocacy by UNHCR, in November 2024, the Permanent Committee on Asylum Affairs started issuing 'follow-up cards', to Syrian asylum-seekers who arrived in Iraq after April 2019, after access to registration and residency had been suspended for Syrians seeking international protection. The resumption of registration and issuance of documentation by the Government for asylum seekers who arrived after April 2019 will significantly contribute to improving the protection environment in the centre and south governorates of Iraq, reducing the risk of their arrest, detention, and deportation.
- UNHCR also continued to intervene in cases at risk of refoulement. In 2024, UNHCR and partners have intervened and prevented the risk of refoulement of 1,835 refugees and asylum-seekers across Iraq.

Access to legal aid and documentation

- UNHCR provides refugees and asylum-seekers with legal support, including counselling and representation to help them secure government-issued residency permits and address other related legal challenges. In 2024, more than 7,500 refugees and asylum-seekers participated in legal awareness and information sessions and over 17,000 refugees received legal aid services, including counselling and representation before legal and administrative bodies.
- UNHCR and partners also provided legal assistance to refugees and asylum-seekers in detention. In 2024, UNHCR and partners identified 2,677 refugees and asylum-seekers in detention, most of whom had been arrested on immigration-related charges (for alleged violence of the Residency Law). Over 70% of them were released due to UNHCR and partner advocacy with authorities.
- UNHCR also registers refugees and asylum-seekers, issues asylum-seeker certificates and registers key life events (such as new birth) as a pre-requisite for refugees to regularize their stay by obtaining government documentation. Access to this documentation is crucial for refugees to access public services, including access to education and healthcare and reduces the risk of arrest or deportation. During the year, UNHCR registered approximately 44,000 refugees and asylum-seekers, including new arrivals, bringing the total number of refugees and asylum-seekers in Iraq to some 338,000 individuals. UNHCR also renewed around 175,000 individual certificates throughout the year.

Protection of women, men and children at risk and with specific needs

- UNHCR works to prevent, mitigate and respond to violence against women, men and children. As of end December 2024, UNHCR and partners provided counselling and supported over 4,500 women, men and children at risk of violence with specialized services, including approximately 700 refugees who required legal aid, specialized mental health and psychosocial support. Moreover, UNHCR and partners provided training sessions on prevention, risk mitigation and response to over 500 government staff and service providers.
- During 2024 UNHCR and partners also provide child protection services. As of end of December 2024, over 5,000 children at risk and their parents were provided with counselling, psychosocial support and parenting advice and support. Furthermore, around 950 among government staff, child protection actors and community members were trained on child protection responses, as part of UNHCR's broader effort to help strengthen the capacity of Iraq's public institutions and systems to deliver inclusive and quality protection-related services, including to refugees.



Cash-based Interventions

- UNHCR provides cash assistance to enable socio-economically vulnerable refugees and asylum-seekers to cover their basic needs, including rent, food and other essentials. Cash assistance helps to prevent vulnerable groups from falling into dire poverty and decreases the risk of people resorting to harmful coping mechanisms such as reducing food intake and accumulating debt. From January to end December 2024, UNHCR provided multipurpose cash assistance to around 56,000 refugees and asylum-seekers who are assessed to be socio-economically vulnerable.
- UNHCR continues to promote the inclusion of refugees and asylum-seekers in government services and policies and is thus advocating for the resumption of the Social Safety Net (SSN) programme in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq and the eventual inclusion of eligible refugees in the SSN. During the last quarter of 2024, UNHCR revised the targeting model for its cash assistance programme to better assist the most vulnerable refugees and align the programme with the model used by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs for the SSN (which is the main national social protection scheme).



Education

- A total of 55,000 Syrian refugee children are enrolled in public schools in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq for the 2024-2025 academic year, representing 74 per cent of the total Syrian school-aged refugee population. Of these, 85% are enrolled in primary education, while 55% are enrolled in lower secondary, with numbers dropping to 35% in upper-secondary school.
- As a result of the Back-to-Learning campaign conducted in September through door-to-door visits and awareness sessions, a total of 1,311 children newly enrolled in formal education and 327 in non-formal education.
- In 2024, some 6,500 refugees (of whom 55% were women and girls), including children, teachers and parents were provided with Kurdish language courses to help them overcome the language barrier at the public schools in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. In addition, UNHCR and partners supported 230 refugee teachers currently working in public schools, providing them with training and capacity development support in pedagogy, life skills and psychosocial support to students. Moreover, a further 300 refugee teachers were recruited for the public education system, bringing the total number of refugees working as teachers on the payroll of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq to around 700 teachers.
- For the academic year 2024-2025, UNHCR is supporting 93 refugee students in higher education through the Albert Einstein German Academic Refugee Initiative (also known as DAFI) scholarship programme. The programme covers tuition fees, study materials, food, transportation, accommodation, and other expenses. In Iraq, each student receives a monthly allowance of IQD 400,000 (approximately USD 300) for the 2024-2025 academic year to help meet their educational needs. To amplify academic achievement and skills development, UNHCR provides DAFI scholars support through academic preparatory and language classes, as well as mentoring and networking opportunities.



Healthcare

- UNHCR supports the Directorates of Health in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq to provide healthcare services for refugees as part of the approach to support their inclusion into the public healthcare system. As of end December 2024, over 177,000 medical consultations were provided in primary healthcare centres supported by UNHCR in or near refugee camps, of which 70% were for refugees and 20% for host community members.
- UNHCR and partners provide refugees residing in camps and urban areas with mental health and psychosocial support services, through group engagement for all ages, one-on-one counselling and psychiatric care for those needing higher levels of care. In 2024, over 15,000 consultations were provided to refugees and host community members through UNHCR supported mental health and psychosocial support services. Furthermore, UNHCR and partners trained 240 staff of counterparts and community outreach

volunteers on providing basic mental health services. This covered areas such as psychological first aid as well as the identification and referral of individuals in need.

 **Solutions**

- As part of the UN Country Team in Iraq, UNHCR contributed to developing the new iteration of the United Nations Sustainable Development Framework (UNSDCF) for 2025-2029, supporting its relevance to and inclusion of refugees, asylum-seekers and stateless persons. UNHCR has also aligned its multi-year strategy 2025-2029 with the UNSDCF to better support the Government of Iraq in addressing the priorities identified. As part of this strategy UNHCR will focus on contributing to the strengthening of national systems, particularly in social and legal protection, to further support the inclusion of refugees and asylum-seekers in Iraq. This work also aligns with the commitments of the Government of Iraq made at the Global Refugee Forum in 2023, namely, to enact the new Refugee Law, grant refugees access to public services, and implement the Refugee Education Integration Programme in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq for grades 5 to 12 by 2030.
- Given the protracted nature of displacement for refugees and asylum-seekers in Iraq, **UNHCR continues to promote sustainable solutions for these populations**, including by supporting access to public health care and education systems, enhancing protection services, and advocating for the inclusion of the most vulnerable refugees within social protection schemes.
- To advance solutions and self-reliance for the more than 90,000 refugees living in 9 camps across the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, UNHCR works closely with national and local authorities on strengthening the capacity of national and local services and systems for the benefit of both the refugee and local populations within sectors of education, health, water, and electricity, among others. Including refugees in existing services and systems will contribute to a higher degree of sustainability and increase the self-reliance of the refugee population.
- In order to support inclusive and sustainable solutions, socio-economic data on refugees and asylum-seekers is needed to allow for informed decision-making, support more integrated policies, and better meet the specific needs of forcibly displaced persons. In 2024, UNHCR worked closely with the Government to strengthen the availability and quality of data on refugees and asylum-seekers in Iraq. The Government of Iraq undertook a long-awaited population census, the first since 1997, across all governorates. The data collected was inclusive of refugee, asylum-seeker and IDPs, marking a significant milestone for refugee inclusion in national statistical surveys, and offering a solid data source that can be used to support refugee inclusion into local and national development plans. Furthermore, in collaboration with Federal and Kurdistan Statistics Offices, with funding from the World Bank-UNHCR Joint Data Centre on Forced Displacement, UNHCR embarked on a research project to extend the Iraq Household Socio-economic Survey IV to include a representative refugee sample.
- Access to employment and livelihood opportunities remain a focus for UNHCR. The 2023 UNHCR socio-economic survey indicated that only 49% of refugee adults residing outside camps and 38% living in camps are employed, mainly in the informal sector, including construction, hospitality and services, agriculture, wholesale, and retail trade. In line with its strategy, UNHCR continues to collaborate and strengthen partnerships with various stakeholders across Government, development actors, International Finance Institutions and the private sector to improve opportunities for refugees to find jobs, work and build their own businesses. In line with this approach, UNHCR has joined the Inclusive Employment Policy Advocacy Platform for Iraq, supported by the German development agency, GIZ, to engage in discussions focused on supporting an inclusive labour market that will strengthen and expand refugees' economic self-reliance and their access to livelihood opportunities.
- In collaboration with the International Trade Centre (ITC), UNHCR is working to promote the economic inclusion of refugees, within the agricultural and agri-food sectors. To date, the collaboration, with ITC and

the Directorate of Agriculture in Dohuk, has established a farmers alliance composed of 47 members who have received USD 20,000 worth of agricultural machinery and equipment to boost their production capacity.

- For refugees with heightened protection risks, UNHCR pursues resettlement to third countries. In 2024, UNHCR submitted 392 cases (1,512 refugees) for resettlement and 1,082 refugees departed during the year to resettlement countries.
- UNHCR also works to expand complementary pathways such as family reunification, scholarships, and labour mobility opportunities abroad. In 2024, UNHCR assisted 414 cases (1,216 individuals) access complementary pathways, and 102 cases (267 individuals) have departed to different third countries.

Advancing Protection and Solutions for IDPs

Protection

- UNHCR and partners continue supporting IDPs, IDP returnees, and vulnerable non-displaced Iraqis, including those at risk of statelessness, to obtain core civil documentation. This essential documentation enables them to access public services like education, healthcare, and social security benefits, and to exercise their rights, such as freedom of movement and civic participation.
- As of end December 2024, UNHCR and partners, have supported Iraqis in obtaining around 41,000 civil documents. Furthermore, UNHCR and its partners closely coordinated with the relevant Authorities to conduct 26 mobile missions of the Civil Affairs Directorate and courts across the country. Additionally, UNHCR and partners provided legal counselling and representation to over 37,500 people, helping them overcome administrative and legal barriers to obtain their civil documents.

Solutions

- Within the framework of cooperation of United Nations actors in Iraq, UNHCR supports the Government of Iraq in advancing on durable solutions for the more than 109,000 IDPs who reside in the 21 camps that remain open in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. While an announcement by the Government of Iraq in January 2024 stated their intention to close all IDP camps, by mid-year this decision was postponed, and the Government established a high committee to review challenges and advance on solutions. In December 2024, the Government established a further three joint committees to address the specific matters of security, reconstruction and judicial barriers that continue to impede durable solutions for many IDPs living in camps. As such, 21 IDP camps remain open and UNHCR continues to engage with the Durable Solutions Platform to advocate for the continuity of services across all camps until all IDPs have achieved a durable solution.

Iraqis returning from North-East Syria

Protection

- Contributing within the One UN Plan, UNHCR supports civil documentation efforts in Al-Amal Centre (previously known as Jeddah 1 Centre) in Ninewa governorate. Iraqis returning from al-Hol camp in North-East Syria are temporarily hosted in Al-Amal Centre as part of organized return led by the Iraqi government before they return to their areas of origin. The legal assessments, which are conducted by UNHCR's partner, consistently indicate that all returnees are missing at least one core civil document.
- In 2024, UNHCR and partners conducted legal assessments for all four return groups who arrived in April, May, July and October (14th – 17th return groups) to determine how to best help them with their civil documentation needs.

- In 2024, UNHCR and partners helped secure some 640 documents for Iraqi returnees in Al-Amal Centre. Among those secured documents, over 120 National Unified Identity Document (UID) were processed, out of a total of 678 UID applications for some 2,000 returnees in Al-Amal Centre which UNHCR and partner prepared for submission pending the deployment of mobile missions by the Federal Ministry of Interior.
- Following months of advocacy, in November 2024, the authorities conducted the first UID mobile mission of the year to Al-Amal Centre after missions were postponed due to systems updates. During this mission, the UID applications for 1,013 individuals were submitted. In December, the first batch of UIDs was issued and delivered to residents of Al-Amal Centre. UNHCR will continue to follow up on the issuance of the remaining documents in January 2025.

 **SPECIAL THANKS TO DONORS**

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:

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External Engagement

CONTACTS

Lilly Carlisle, Senior External Relations Officer, carlisle@unhcr.org

Afarin Dadkhah, Reporting Officer, dadkhaht@unhcr.org

Farha Bhoyroo, External Relations Officer, bhoyroo@unhcr.org

Viola Eleonora Bruttomesso, Associate Reporting Officer, bruttome@unhcr.org

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