UNHCR Iraq 2022 achievements

Moving toward a government-led IDP response and furthering refugee inclusion

Operational Context

Five years after the defeat of Dae'sh in 2017, Iraq has an internally displaced population of 1.2 million and five million IDP returnees. Displaced Iraqis have achieved the same level of realisation of their rights as the rest of the Iraqi population, but also face similar challenges. The country also continued to generously host 287,000 refugees and asylum seekers, mostly Kurdish Syrians living in the Kurdistan Region (over 90%), who enjoy high levels of inclusion into public services, policies and communities.

Iraq in 2022 was marked by relative stability, increased state revenues, and the election of a new government, creating the space for more government ownership. As a result, donor interest to support the humanitarian IDP response in Iraq diminished.

The UN and donors in 2022 reached a common agreement that the remaining needs of IDPs and IDP returnees in Iraq are better addressed through sustainable development approaches, now that displacement is no longer the main driver of needs. Accordingly, UNHCR's IDP response focused on responsibly scaling down individualized humanitarian assistance, while strengthening the capacities of public institutions to deliver enhanced services to all Iraqis.

UNHCR's refugee response continued to focus on enhancing refugees and asylum seekers' integration into basic public services and social protection schemes, to strengthen their social and economic inclusion.

Key achievements

Vulnerable internally displaced Iraqis to be enrolled in the Ministry of Social Affairs' social assistance programme and benefit from monthly cash payments under the poverty alleviation scheme

IDPs living in **tented camps** in Duhok governorate authorized to self-upgrade their shelters

26,000 (90%) of Syrian refugee children in grades one to four enrolled in public schools in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KR-I)

400 (70%) of qualified Syrian refugee teachers recruited in public schools in the KR-I

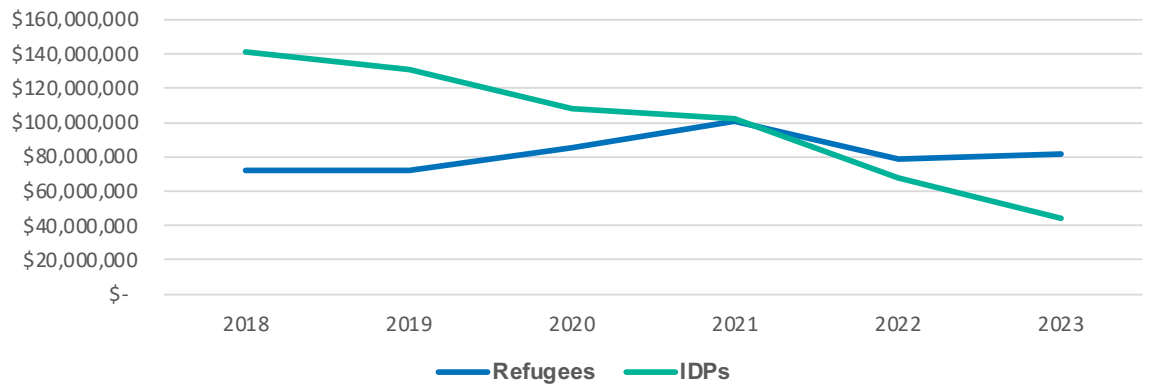
72,000 key civil documents issued for IDPs, IDP returnees and other vulnerable Iraqis

270,000 medical consultations provided to refugees inside and outside camps

4,400 refugees received mental health and psychosocial support

40,000 vulnerable refugees and asylum-seekers, and **119,000 IDPs** benefited from multi-purpose cash grants

UNHCR Iraq expenditure trends
IDPs and Refugees



Although UNHCR's IDP expenditures in Iraq decreased in line with the transition, this has not affected refugee expenditures. Refugee funding returned to 2018 levels (pre-COVID-19 and pre-Syrian mass influx which explain the peak in funding in 2020/2021) with a slight increase.

I. STRENGTHENING REFUGEE INCLUSION AND SELF-RELIANCE, WHILE PROMOTING SOCIAL COHESION

EDUCATION - THE REFUGEE EDUCATION INTEGRATION POLICY

In July 2022, the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) Ministry of Education (MoE) officially launched the implementation of the Refugee Education Integration Policy (REIP), to enhance access to inclusive and quality education for all children in the KR-I.

As of the end of 2022, 26,000 (90%) of Syrian refugee children in grades one to four enrolled in public schools in the KR-I, while some 400 (70%) qualified Syrian refugee teachers were recruited.

Ending the parallel refugee-only education system, this policy gives Syrian refugee children access to quality education, at par with local community students. It further improves refugee opportunities for economic inclusion, and reinforces social cohesion with host community members. Recruiting refugee teachers confirms that the KRG is a pioneer in recognizing the value of refugee teachers' qualifications.

UNHCR and education partners are working towards the rollout of phase two of the REIP, with the enrolment of 30,000 Syrian refugee children in grades five to nine, as of the school year 2023-24.

Two Syrian refugee children on their way to a public school in Duhok in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. Read their story here. Photo: © UNHCR/ J. Cheewasrirungruang

- **5,000 Syrian refugee children, parents and teachers** benefitted from **Kurdish language courses** to ease their shift from Arabic to Kurdish as the language of instruction.
- **4,200 Syrian refugee children** benefited from **remedial and catch-up classes**.
- **3,000 Syrian refugee children** supported with **transportation costs**.
- **100 schools** received **education teaching kits.**

PUBLIC HEALTH

Urban refugees and asylum seekers in Iraq (two thirds of the total refugee population) continued benefiting from free access to public health services in the KR-I, at par with the local population. Refugees in camps also continued benefiting from free access to primary healthcare through camp-based health centres or nearby public health facilities, supported by UNHCR and other UN agencies.

In 2022, UNHCR closed the health centres in Basirma and Kawergosk camps in Erbil governorate, redirecting its support to the local public health centres, accessible to both camp refugees and the local community. UNHCR also transferred the health centres inside camps in Akre in Duhok governorate and in Arbat in Sulaymaniyah governorate to the relevant Directorate of Health, continuing to support these public facilities with medical supplies and renovation.

UNHCR advocated with relevant authorities to integrate the five remaining health centres in Domiz1, Domiz2, Darashakran, Gawilan and Qushtapa refugee camps in Duhok and Erbil governorates into the national health system.

Furthermore, UNHCR has phased out its provision of WASH services in refugee camps, supporting their absorption by the Ministry of Municipality and Tourism and the Directorate of Sewerage and Water.

Area-Based Programming for Protection and Solutions Snapshot

Promoting sustainable inclusion and social cohesion

The Area-Based Programming for Protection and Solutions (A2PS) refers to UNHCR projects in areas with a high concentration of displaced populations – especially refugees - that benefit both displaced and local communities.

Such interventions are designed in consultation with the populations and local authorities, and implemented in coordination with other humanitarian and development actors, in support to the authorities as part of their own development plans. A2PS projects are thus a responsible way for UNHCR to support authorities while contributing to the peaceful coexistence of various communities.

In 2022, Kawergosk town in Erbil governorate saw the inauguration of a Public Primary Health Care Centre, managed by the Erbil Directorate, that provides primary health care services to all communities in Kawergosk: 8,000 Syrian refugees, 1,800 IDPs and 15,000 Iraqi locals. UNHCR also constructed a public high school in Kawergosk that will benefit 300 Syrian refugees and 300 local students, as well as a community centre that will promote improved community social interactions and entertainment opportunities for youths and women in particular.

Other A2PS initiatives country-wide include rehabilitating health centres, improving electrical and water infrastructure, and providing equipment for vocational training centres. A2PS projects support efforts towards the gradual transformation of Syrian refugee camps into neighbourhoods, administered and serviced by local municipalities.

RESETTLEMENT AND COMPLEMENTARY PATHWAYS

In 2022, over 800 vulnerable refugees whose special needs could not be addressed in Iraq departed to resettlement countries (out of 2,700 refugees submitted for resettlement). Resettlement remained a crucial protection tool for refugees facing immediate protection concerns, including refugees of diverse sexual orientations and gender identities, survivors of violence and torture, children and women and girls at heightened risk of violence. Resettlement was also a vital protection intervention for those with severe and life-threatening medical conditions, requiring treatment that is unavailable in Iraq.

Moreover, 140 refugees out of over 450 supported by UNHCR to access complementary pathways departed to 12 countries through family reunification, humanitarian visas and private sponsorship. UNHCR identified refugee candidates for scholarship and labour opportunities abroad; advocated for their consideration and prioritisation; assisted them with navigating restrictive documentation requirements; and advocated with third-country representations for flexibility with visa issuance.

UNHCR continued advocating for the swift processing and departure of submitted resettlement cases, and the expansion of complementary pathways opportunities.

UNCONDITIONAL CASH ASSISTANCE FOR THE MOST VULNERABLE

▶ Multi-purpose cash assistance for the socioeconomically vulnerable

UNHCR provided multi-purpose cash assistance (MPCA) to 8,000 refugee and asylum-seeking families (43,000 individuals); assessed as socio-economically vulnerable, or with specific protection profiles such as people living with disability and children at risk. The bi-monthly grant of IQD 740,000 ($510) for up to 12 months aimed to support them meet their basic needs, and reduce the risk of resorting to harmful coping mechanism.[1]

Moreover in 2022, UNHCR provided multipurpose cash assistance to 23,900 IDP and IDP returnee households (138,000 individuals) throughout Iraq.

[1] UNHCR only provides cash assistance to urban refugees, as those in camps benefit from WFP food assistance, and have free access to basic services such as electricity, water and sanitation, and shelter.

▶ Winterization – cash assistance for additional winter needs

UNHCR initially planned to target both refugees and IDPs for seasonal cash assistance to cope with the harsh winter. However, due to funding shortfalls, UNHCR was only able to assist a small proportion of eligible urban refugees (78,000 out of some 258,000 targeted).

The assistance, which consisted of a one-time cash grant, was reduced by half to maximize coverage; each family received IQD 240,000 ($166) instead of the initially envisaged IQD 480,000 ($330).

Findings demonstrate that MPCA and Winterization cash assistance help vulnerable refugees refrain from resorting to harmful coping mechanisms such as reducing food intake and accumulating debt. Some use the assistance to establish sustainable livelihoods, allowing them to graduate from dependency on humanitarian aid to economic self-reliance.

140 refugee families (451 individuals) benefited from emergency cash assistance to address emergency needs resulting from eviction from shelter, losing a source of income, or sensitive gender-based violence or domestic abuse cases

ADVOCACY – IMPROVING THE REFUGEE ADMINISTRATIVE AND LEGAL FRAMEWORKS

▶ The Establishment of a new Government Committee tasked with drafting a new refugee law

In December, Iraq's Ministry of Interior established a committee tasked with drafting a new refugee law in line with international standards. This welcome development followed extensive collaboration with Federal and Kurdish government counterparts to develop asylum-related Administrative Instructions (yet to be adopted) aimed at elucidating the procedural safeguards related to asylum applications in line with international law, and codifying harmonized procedures for issuing humanitarian cards to asylum seekers and refugees of all nationalities across KR-I governorates, respectively.

▶ Reopening the borders for asylum seekers

In 2022, UNHCR continued to advocate for the reopening of borders in Iraq for Syrian, Afghan and other asylum seekers. The border closure - since March 2020 due to COVID-19 – violates these individuals' right under international law to seek asylum in Iraq. This forces them to seek alternative routes through smugglers, exposing them to additional protection risks such as armed assault, theft and detention.

UNHCR continues to characterize the flight of civilians from Syria as a refugee movement, considering most Syrian asylum seekers to be in need of international protection - due to the ongoing armed conflict and human rights violations in Syria, particularly in the north-east. UNHCR also advocated for Afghan refugees in Iran not to be barred from entering Iraq/the KR-I.

Displaced Iraqis and Syrian refugees included in a World Bank social safety net pilot
UNHCR successfully advocated for the inclusion of displaced Iraqis and Syrian refugees in a Social Safety Net pilot scheme in Dohuk governorate in the KR-I, funded by the World Bank, through the Dutch PROSPECTS partnership. The Kurdish Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs will implement the project.
The pilot project is expected to trigger a decision by the Kurdish authorities to reinstate the social safety net in the KR-I – discontinued in 2015 - for all socio-economically vulnerable families, including displaced ones. Under the pilot programme, 3,200 vulnerable households, including 480 refugee and 160 internally displaced families, will receive unconditional cash transfers. This will enable a comprehensive statistical comparative analysis between refugee and local communities. The amount of cash transfers will range between 125,000 IQD and 325,000 IQD, depending on the size of the family and the gender of the household head.
This initiative aligns with the social safety net scheme devised by the Government of Iraq and supported by the World Bank for governorates outside the Kurdistan region. UNHCR ensured that the programme design and implementation integrated displacement realities and protection considerations. The pilot scheme is scheduled to commence in June 2023 and will span a duration of one year, pending a final agreement between the World Bank and the authorities in Baghdad and Erbil.

II. INTERNALLY DISPLACED IRAQIS - RESPONSIBLY TRANSITIONING OUT OF AN INDIVIDUALIZED HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE

PHASING OUT THE CLUSTER SYSTEM WHILE PURSUING DIGNIFIED AND SUSTAINABLE SOLUTIONS

By the end of 2022, the UN Humanitarian Country Team in Iraq deactivated the Clusters, following an assessment that the remaining needs of internally displaced Iraqis are better addressed through a sustainable development approach.

To ensure a responsible transition out of the **Protection Cluster**, in October 2022, UNHCR and the OHCHR co-established and now co-lead the **Protection Platform**, with the participation of UN entities, NNGO and INGO representatives. The Platform is a new forum at the strategic level created to ensure high level advocacy and engagement on protection issues in Iraq across the objectives of the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework in Iraq.

UNHCR absorbed the **Camp Coordination and Camp Management Cluster** functions, while working with the authorities to find dignified solutions for the 180,000 displaced Iraqis residing in 25 IDP camps administered by the KRG. These solutions include IDPs' safe and voluntary return and sustainable reintegration; sustainable local integration; or the transformation of camps into formal settlements serviced by public institutions.

With the deactivation of the **Shelter and Non-Food Items Cluster**, and in line with UNHCR and the KRG efforts to enhance the living conditions of IDPs living in camps, in July 2022, the KRG authorized IDPs residing in tented camps in Duhok governorate to self-upgrade their shelters, with UNHCR's technical assistance.

IDPs' ability to upgrade their shelters helps them improve the quality of their life, and reduces the risk of fire incidents that have been ravaging tented shelters, designed to be an emergency – rather than a long term - shelter solution. UNHCR continues to advocate for extending the self-upgrade authorization to tented IDP camps in other governorates, and to finding solutions to land ownership barriers.

UNHCR installed **over 500 housing units** in areas of origin for returnee families whose houses were damaged by conflict.

ACCESS TO CIVIL DOCUMENTATION AND EFFORTS TO END STATELESSNESS

UNHCR continued supporting Iraqi authorities to find dignified solutions for internally displaced Iraqis and other vulnerable individuals, including through promoting their access to civil documentation. Documentation is key to accessing basic public services such as education, healthcare and social security benefits. It can also increase freedom of movement, and contribute to the prevention of statelessness.

Internally displaced person in an IDP camp in Dohuk governorate after signing an application request to obtain a national ID. Photo: © UNHCR/ Rasheed Hussein

"It has been years and I am struggling to find a way to renew and obtain new Iraqi nationality certificates and civil ID cards for me, my wife and my six children" said Haji, a 60-year-old father from Sinjar. After violence erupted in his hometown, Haji and his family fled to Duhok but struggled to obtain core documents as he could not return to process the applications in his home districts due to the ongoing security situation. "Lacking these documents has impeded our ability to access basic services and social benefits" said Haji

In 2022, IDPs, IDP returnees and other vulnerable Iraqis secured some 72,000 civil documents. This was thanks to joint efforts from UNHCR, authorities and partners,[2] which helped IDPs and IDP returnees obtain Civil Status IDs, National Unified IDs, birth certificates, Public Distribution System cards, and Iraqi Nationality Certificates. Over 300 documents were also secured for Iraqi returnees from the al-Hol camp in north-east Syria to Jeddah 1 centre in Ninewa governorate, where UNHCR leads legal and civil documentation efforts.

Moreover, UNHCR helped 160 stateless Faili Kurds and Bidoons identified through a study on statelessness acquire Iraqi nationality. Contrary to initial estimates that a large number of these communities was at risk of statelessness, findings of the study indicated that the majority of Faili Kurds and Bidouns (97%) have a nationality. In 2022, in line with UNHCR's Global Action Plan, and the #IBelong Campaign to End Statelessness by 2024, UNHCR accelerated efforts to ensure everyone in Iraq has access to nationality.

The inclusion of displaced Iraqis in government social safety nets

In line with the UN shift in Iraq from individualized humanitarian assistance for IDPs to supporting Iraqi authorities deliver social security benefits to all vulnerable Iraqis, UNHCR has been working with the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MoLSA) in 2022 to identify eligible IDP families for government social protection schemes.

Efforts culminated in a breakthrough decision by MoLSA in January 2023 to enroll eligible IDPs across the country - in and outside camps - in the Ministry's social assistance programme. The assistance includes monthly cash payments to help vulnerable IDPs meet their basic needs.

[2] Specifically Iraq's Ministry of Interior and NGO partners Harikar, Heartland Alliance International, the International Rescue Committee, INTERSOS, Legal Clinics Network, SWEDO and Terres des Hommes Italy

SPECIAL THANKS TO DONORS

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