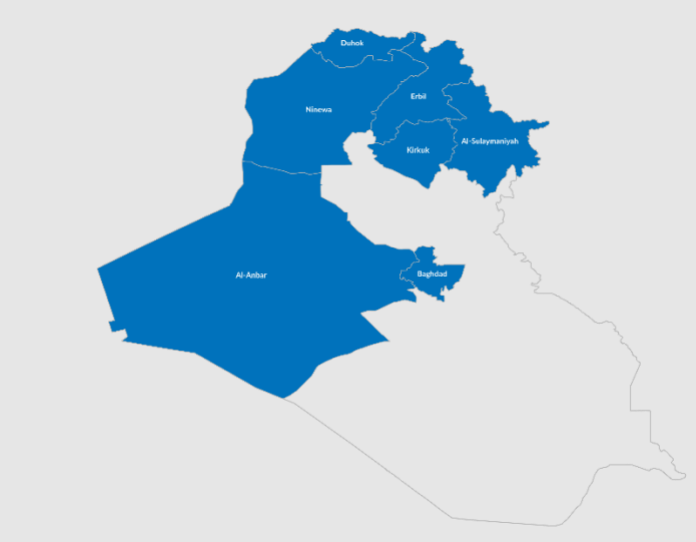
MULTI-SECTOR NEEDS ASSESSMENT (MSNA) 2024 - IRAQ

BACKGROUND

UNHCR, in partnership with REACH/ACTED, conducted a Multi-Sectoral Needs Assessment (MSNA) to gather household-level data from both refugee and host communities across Iraq through surveys carried out in 2023 and 2024.

The MSNA is designed to assess the socio-economic and legal vulnerabilities of refugees in Iraq, as well as their level of access to public services. Utilizing a structured quantitative methodology, the assessment collected data through a combination of in-person and phone interviews. It covers all areas of Iraq, spanning seven governorates: Anbar, Baghdad, Dohuk, Erbil, Kirkuk, Ninewa, and Sulaymaniyah. [1]

Overall, the assessment captured information on household demographics and key sectors, including health, education, shelter, water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), protection, economic inclusion and food security. The findings are also disaggregated by demographic characteristics. These insights are intended to inform evidence-based programming and advocacy efforts that support refugee inclusion and integration into Iraqi society.



Map 1. Governorates covered by the Multi-Sectoral Needs Assessment (MSNA) in Iraq

METHODOLOGY

Data collection for this assessment was conducted between 2023 and 2024 using a structured, multi-sectoral survey. A quantitative approach was employed to gather primary data from both Syrian refugee households and host community members. The total sample comprised 2,341 households, including:

- 1,754 Syrian refugee households (1,201 in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq and 553 in central and south governorates)
- 587 Iraqi host community households (362 in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq and 225 in central and south governorates)

Data collection methods varied by population group. For Iraqi host communities, trained enumerators conducted in-person interviews. For refugee households, data collection began with phone interviews based on UNHCR database of registered refugees and asylum-seekers in Iraq, followed by in-person interviews to validate the data and expand coverage.

1. To note that governorates in central and south Iraq were chosen based on a sufficient refugee population for statistical analysis.
2. The MSNA also surveyed non-Syrian refugees in Iraq, including Palestinians, Iranians and Turkish. Results of that survey are not presented here.

KEY FINDINGS

Protection

Gender-Based Violence

The most commonly reported barriers in accessing GBV services included a lack of awareness, lack of information on places offering services and the fact that communities didn't know how to contact services that they had heard about.

Kurdistan Region of Iraq

95% Of refugee households reported that **women and girls feel safe in their local areas.**

57% Of refugee women **do NOT know** how to access a safe space or support services in case of need. Compared to 41% in host communities.

Central and South governorates

78% Of refugee households that **women and girls feel safe in their local areas.** Compared to 91% among host communities.

31% Of refugee women **do NOT know** how to access a safe space or support services in case of need. Compared to 0% in host communities.

Child Protection

Kurdistan Region of Iraq

97% Of refugee households reported **NOT resorting to child marriage and child labour** as harmful coping mechanisms.

Central and South governorates

99% Of refugee households reported **NOT resorting to child marriage and child labour** as harmful coping mechanisms.

These percentages also align with that of the Iraqi host community where it was reported that only 1% of households are resorting to child marriage and child labour.

Civil Documentation

Kurdistan Region of Iraq

75% Of refugees hold a government-issued **residency card** that regularizes their stay in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq and allows them to access public services, such as healthcare and education.

Central and South governorates

88% Of refugees indicated having some documentation, such as visas, valid passports, valid national ID card, and UNHCR certificates.

Prior to 2024, many refugees and asylum-seekers living in central and south governorates of Iraq faced challenges in registering with the Ministry of Interior's Permanent Committee for Refugee Affairs (PC-MOI) and subsequently obtaining government-issued documentation. Following years of advocacy from UNHCR and close collaboration with the Ministry of Interior, a breakthrough was made in mid-2024 whereby PC-MOI began registering and issuing “follow-up cards” to all refugees and asylum-seekers in central and south governorates, including Syrians who arrived after April 2019. Having the "follow-up cards" regularize refugees' stay in Iraq and protect them against arrest, detention and deportation.
Moreover, the Federal Government adopted new Administrative Instructions in December 2024 aimed at strengthening the protection framework for refugees and asylum-seekers in central and south governorates of Iraq. By the end of 2024, over 5,000 refugees and asylum-seekers in the central and south governorates had been issued cards by the PC-MOI – a significant increase compared to over 1,600 refugees and asylum-seekers provided with PC-MOI cards in 2023.

Education

The higher percentage of enrollment in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq is attributed to the positive impact of the Refugee Education Integration Policy (REIP), the implementation of which began in the 2022/2023 academic year. The REIP expands refugee children's access to the public education system. In host communities, 86% of school-aged children are enrolled and attending school.

Kurdistan Region of Iraq

76% Of **refugee school-aged children** are enrolled and attend formal education.

Central and South governorates

42% Of **refugee school-aged children** reported to be enrolled and attend formal education.*

*Official data on the enrollment of refugee children in public schools in Iraq’s central and south governorates is currently unavailable. The 42% figure reported in this survey should therefore be interpreted as an indicative estimate rather than a definitive statistic.
**Families indicate that high education costs, such as for transportation and school supplies, are barriers to enrollment.

Health

Across Iraq, refugee households paid an average of IQD 50,000 for healthcare and medicines on a weekly basis.

Kurdistan Region of Iraq

90% Of refugee households **paid for healthcare services** like private consultation, treatment or medicines from private pharmacies.

Central and South governorates

70% Of refugee households **paid for healthcare services** like private consultation, treatment or medicines from private pharmacies.

Livelihoods

In the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, 85% of refugees reported being in debt, compared to just 46% in the central and south governorates. Among the host communities, the figures were 57% and 43%, respectively. Although the average value of debt reported was higher among host communities.

Overall, refugees in Iraq are more likely to be employed in the informal sector rather than the formal labour market, irrespective of their geographical location. Compared to the refugees in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, those living in central and south governorates are more likely to be employed in the formal sector.

Kurdistan Region of Iraq

45% Of the refugees reported **to be working** at the time of data collection.

39% Of refugees reported to be employed in the **informal sector**, compared to the local population (22%).

Central and South governorates

86% Of the refugees reported **to be working** at the time of data collection.

46% Of refugees reported to be employed in the **informal sector**, compared to the local population (26%).

Refugees employed in the informal sector are more likely to experience unsatisfactory work conditions, receive lower wages, and lack access to social security compared to workers in the formal sector.

For more information contact Lilly Carlisle, carlisle@unhcr.org