REFUGEE EDUCATION INTEGRATION POLICY (REIP) IN IRAQ

Assessment Impact
Key Findings

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Objectives

Assess the perceived impact of the REIP on Syrian refugee children's access to education across Kurdistan Region in Iraq (KRI).

Measure the perceived achievements of the REIP on Syrian refugee children's learning outcomes in grades one to six.

Consolidate lessons learned and good practices from the first and second phases of the REIP's implementation.

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Methodology

Data collection period

From 30 October to 24 December 2024

Geographical Coverage

Erbil, Sulaymaniyah, Dohuk governorates*

Population

- **School principals and teachers from schools** in urban areas and camps with the highest proportion of Syrian refugee students
- **Syrian refugee children**
- **Partners involved in the REIP implementation.**

Quantitative component

180 Individual Interviews

- 93 school principals
- 87 teachers

Qualitative component

18 Key Informant Interviews (KII)

- 12 school principals
- 7 UN Agencies & NGOs working on education

14 Focus Group Discussions (FGD) with Syrian refugee students aged between 7-12 years enrolled from 2nd to 5th grade of primary school.

** Dohuk (Dohuk and Zakho), Erbil, Sulaymaniyah (Sulaymaniyah, Halabja, and Raparin).*

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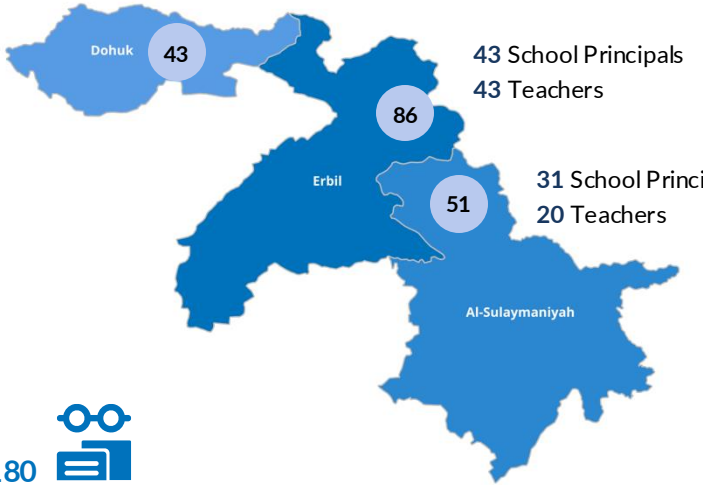
Quantitative Data Collection

19 School Principals
24 Teachers

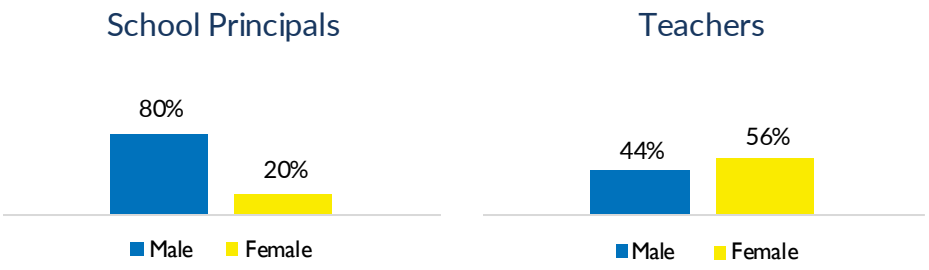


43 School Principals
43 Teachers

31 School Principals
20 Teachers

180
Surveys conducted

Demographics



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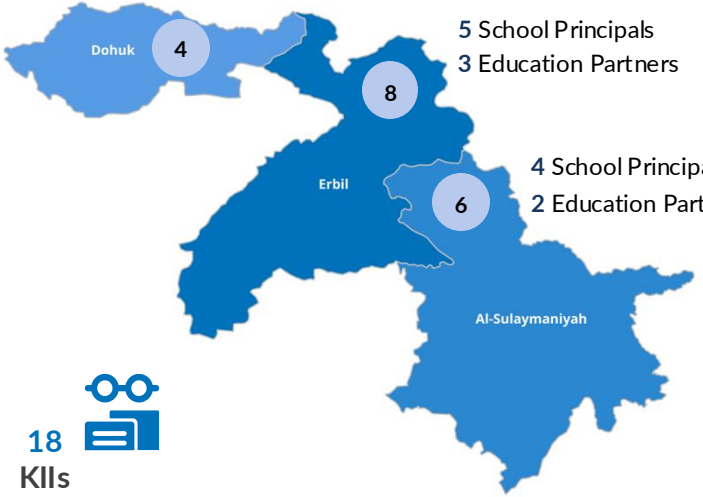
Qualitative Data Collection

3 School Principals
1 Education Partner

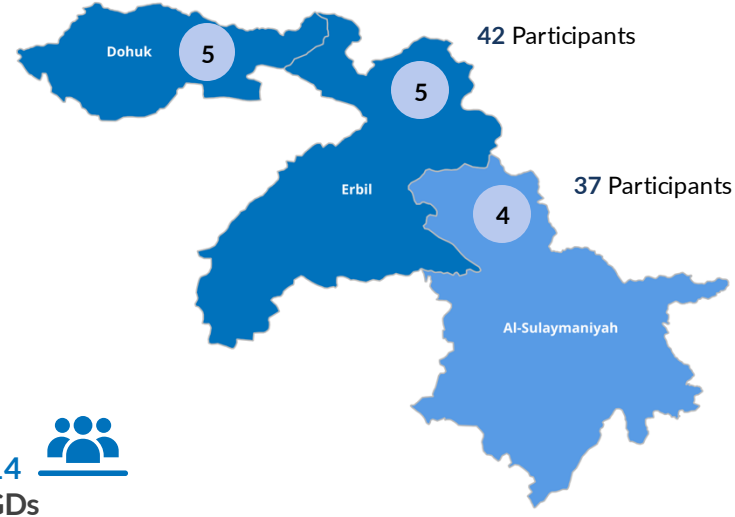


5 School Principals
3 Education Partners

4 School Principals
2 Education Partners

18
KIIs
conducted

49 Participants



42 Participants

37 Participants

14
FGDs
conducted

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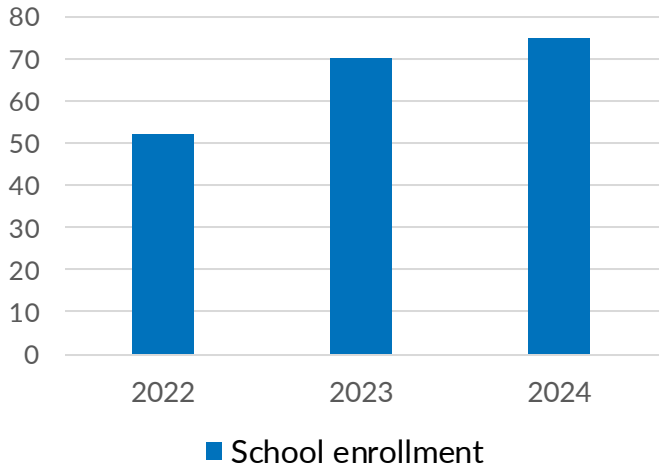
Positive impact of REIP

School enrollment increased from 52% in 2022 to 70% in 2023. In 2024, the enrollment rate reached 75%.

Percentage of Syrian Refugee Children of school-age enrolled in public schools in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq



Over 40,000 refugee children, parents, and teachers provided with Kurdish language courses

700 refugee teachers officially hired as lecturers in public schools

9 new schools constructed, corresponding to 105 classrooms

68 new classrooms in existing schools constructed

Rehabilitation to facilities in 17 schools including fixing bathrooms and painting communal areas

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Barriers to Education

Despite notable progress in Syrian children's school enrollment, persistent challenges remain, including registration and documentation issues, as well as financial constraints.

Lack of documentation and certification

A lack of documentation and certification for refugee children remains a key barrier to school enrollment and the continuity of learning, preventing some children from accessing and progressing through the education system.

28% of school principles reported their school couldn't enroll Syrian refugee children during the last academic (2024/2025) year mainly due these challenges mentioned.

Language barriers

Education partners and school principals identified the inability to speak Kurdish (Sorani dialect) as a major obstacle to education. This language barrier affects both students and their parents, limiting their ability to engage fully with the school system and access learning opportunities.

Financial constraints

Education partners and school principals identified financial hardship as a key barrier to education. High transportation and uniform costs were noted by partners, while principals also cited the expense of books, stationery, and the overall financial difficulties faced by students as reasons behind their lack of enrollment or drop-out.

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Although they are Kurdish, these students studied in Arabic while in Syria. Now, as Syrian refugees, they face an additional language barrier: they speak the Kurmanji dialect, which differs significantly from the Sorani dialect commonly spoken in areas like Sulaymaniyah and Erbil.

(Education partner's perspective on the barriers to education)

The primary challenge is transportation, as the high costs make it unaffordable for the parents of refugee students to provide regular travel for their children.

(School principal's perspective on the barriers to education)

Implementation of activities

School Principal's perspective

- **48%** of school principals reported that their schools **received training programs**.
- **44%** indicated that their schools were provided with **teaching and learning materials**.
- **33%** noted **improvements in school infrastructure**, including building or renovating classrooms, school renovations, among others.
- **29%** reported receiving **support for Kurdish language classes** for students, parents and teachers.

It is important to note that not all principals surveyed were from schools where the full range of REIP activities had been implemented. UNHCR and its partners were only able to carry out certain activities in specific locations, which is reflected in the statistics presented above. Nevertheless, the consistent need for these activities to be implemented uniformly and integrated into broader educational programming was emphasized and will be discussed with the Ministry of Education as a proposed way forward.

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Perceived impact

Teachers' perspective

Most teachers reported that REIP interventions had a positive or very positive impact across multiple outcomes, while fewer than a quarter perceived little to no benefit or a negative impact.

Reported perceived impact of REIP across different educational access and learning outcomes, by teachers and outcomes (n=87)

Perceived Impact	Test scores	Skills development	Attendance	Refugees' integration	Classroom participation
Very positive	10%	10%	13%	16%	10%
Positive	56%	59%	56%	51%	62%
No impact	26%	24%	24%	24%	22%
Negative	2%	2%	2%	3%	2%
I don't know	5%	5%	5%	6%	3%

[1] For teachers reporting a negative or lack of impact of REIP interventions, they associated the poor implementation of language programs as the reason for the negative impact of REIP, mainly in terms of them facilitating adequate skills development of Syrian students. Others identified inadequate teacher trainings as a negative.

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Perceived impact

Students' perspective

Last year [2023-2024] the classes were crowded and full, but after the expansion, the classes became more comfortable than last year.

(Syrian refugee student)

Infrastructure upgrades

Students observed various infrastructure improvements, including the addition of new learning equipment, school expansions, freshly painted walls, and enhanced water and sanitation facilities.

Improved learning

Students widely recognized the positive outcome of additional courses and a more accessible curriculum. Notably, the supplementary courses primarily focused on Kurdish language instruction.

Improved behaviour

Refugee students noted positive changes in both teacher and student behaviour compared to the previous year. This was particularly linked to school expansions, which helped alleviate overcrowding.

Challenges

"The Kurdish language is the biggest obstacle."
(Syrian refugee child)

School Principals

Lack of Coordination
School principals identified a lack of coordination between NGOs and schools as a key challenge in implementing the REIP. They noted that support often does not align with the actual needs of students and school communities.[1]

They emphasized the need to have strong coordination across all stakeholders, including a government led plan, that supports identification and delivery of key projects, including infrastructure, ensuring that needs are identified and met and that budget allocation is used efficiently and effectively.

Need for Additional Resources
Several school principals emphasized the need for increased funding and resources to effectively address the challenges associated with REIP implementation.

Language Barriers
Many principals stressed the importance of sustained Kurdish language instruction, highlighting it as essential for supporting students' academic progress and integration.

Infrastructure Challenges
A significant number of school principals reported ongoing infrastructure issues, with building maintenance cited as the most pressing concern.

Assistance should be provided based on the actual needs of the school, rather than what the organization imposes.

(School principal's perspective on the encountered challenges)

Students

Student Behavior Challenges
Students reported instances of inappropriate behavior among their peers, including noisy classrooms, physical altercations during breaks or after school, and conflicts involving both same-grade and older students. These disruptions were seen as barriers to a conducive learning environment.

Academic Difficulties
Many students identified certain subjects as particularly challenging, which they felt hindered their academic progress. The most frequently mentioned subjects were Kurdish, English, Arabic, and science. Kurdish language classes were especially difficult for Syrian students across all focus group discussions (FGDs) held in Erbil.

Limited Support at Home
Some students expressed concerns about the lack of academic support at home. This was often due to parents' limited understanding of the school subjects, particularly when instruction was in Kurdish or English—languages the parents do not speak. Additionally, older siblings who might otherwise assist were often unavailable due to time constraints.

Education Partners

Resistance from school principals and host communities in accepting Syrian students
Education Partners reported resistance from school principals and host communities to enrolling Syrian students in Kurdish schools; reluctance among Syrian parents to accept Kurdish as the language of instruction;

Limited funding
Education partners also cited as a challenge the inadequate funding to fully address the schools' operational and educational needs.

In the first year, it was very challenging to establish effective engagement between [implementing partners] and school principals. Some principals even filed multiple complaints with the Ministry of Education, expressing concerns that they were being pressured to enroll students without receiving adequate support for their integration.

(Education partner's perspective on the encountered challenges)

[1] The findings reflect principals' perceptions expressed through focus group discussions, which may be influenced by unmet expectations or delays in implementation of some activities, not necessarily the intervention's actual outcomes.

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Lessons learned and best practices

The assessment of REIP implementation underscores the significant progress made in integrating Syrian refugee children into the public education system in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. However, ongoing challenges - such as language barriers, inadequate infrastructure, and limited financial resources - must continue to be addressed to ensure the sustainability of this progress.

Collaboration & coordination

Fostering the coordination between refugee parents, local NGOs, and host communities enhances the effective implementation of REIP.

Refugee engagement

Engaging refugee parents during programme planning had positive results on the implementation of the REIP.

Social cohesion

Integrating students within the same educational environment fosters equality and mutual respect. In addition, social cohesion activities play a vital role in strengthening relationships and promoting better understanding between refugee and host communities.

Kurdish language courses

Kurdish language courses for children and their parents help Syrian students integrate into the education system, especially in Erbil and Sulaymaniyah governorates.

Resources allocation

Given the current funding shortfalls, effective financial planning and strategic resource allocation must be prioritized in the implementation of the project.

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The way forward...

The progressive decrease in funding over recent years — continuing into 2025 — poses a challenge for humanitarian organizations to continue to substantially support the REIP moving forward. In light of this and building on the progress achieved and insights gained from this survey, the role of the Ministry of Education and local organizations will be crucial in bridging the gap between unmet needs and the programme's objectives. As UNHCR phases out of direct education programming, - acknowledging achievements made and the significant inclusion of refugees within public schools - it is encouraged that national actors take forward these recommendations.

Preliminary Recommendations

- **Addressing** Language Barriers
- **Improving** Infrastructure and Resources
- **Addressing** financial and transportation constraints
- **Strengthening** Teacher Training and Capacity Building
- **Fostering** Parental Engagement
- **Promoting** Non-formal Education and Extracurricular Activities
- **Enhancing** Enrollment and Access
- **Addressing** Bullying and Social Cohesion
- **Enhancing** Monitoring and Evaluation Program Impact

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