

**> 7,800**

Vulnerable refugee families received monthly cash assistance since the start of 2023

**> 140,000**

Medical consultations delivered to Syrian refugees & asylum seekers since the start of 2023

**> 6,400**

IDPs in camps registered in the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs' Social Safety Net

**> 26,000**

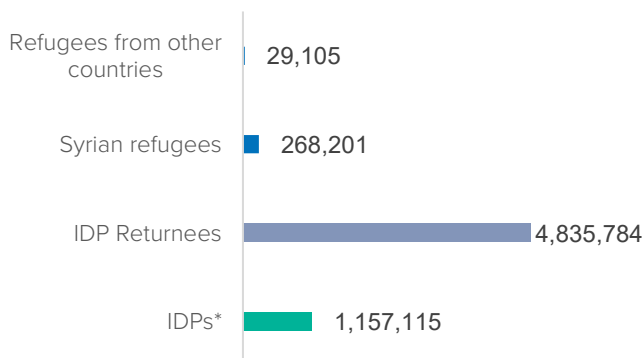
Syrian refugee children grades 1 to 4 enrolled in public schools in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KR-I)

**PEOPLE WITH AND FOR WHOM UNHCR WORKS**



**6,290,205**

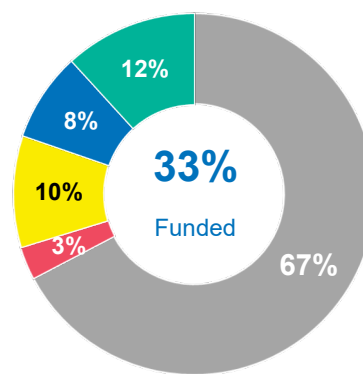
Total population



\* Internally displaced people (IDPs) since 2014. Figures as of 30 April 2023 (IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM))

**FUNDING (AS OF 31 AUGUST 2023)**

USD 78.5 million received by the Iraq operation of the USD 240 million required for 2023



■ Not funded    ■ Tightly Earmarked    ■ Earmarked  
■ Softly earmarked    ■ Unearmarked

**UNHCR PRESENCE**

**STAFF:**

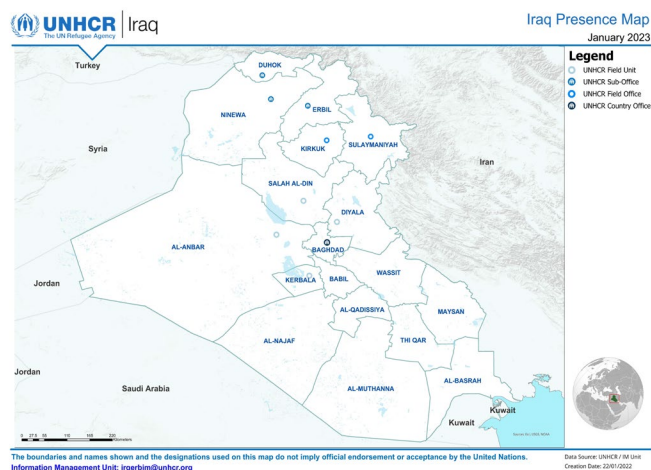
348 National Staff

82 International Staff

**OFFICES:**

Six Offices located in Baghdad, Duhok, Erbil, Kirkuk, Mosul and Sulaymaniyah

Field presence in Samarra (Salah al-Din), Ba'quba (Diyala), Ramadi and Al-Qaim (Anbar) and Karbala



**SPECIAL THANKS TO DONORS**



UNHCR thanks its major donors of un-earmarked and broadly earmarked funds, as well as those who contributed directly to the Iraq Operation in 2023.

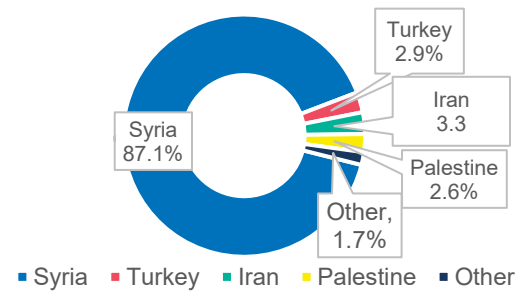
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## OPERATIONAL CONTEXT

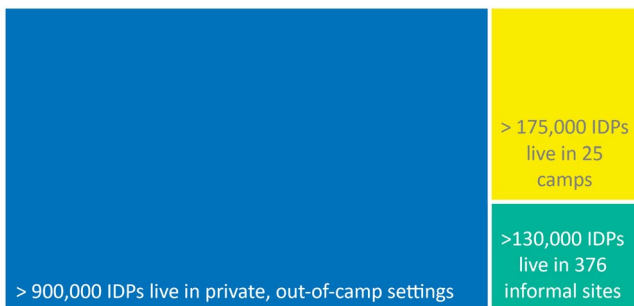
Although Iraq is experiencing relative stability and an expansion in its fiscal space, the country continues to face protracted humanitarian and development needs, a complex political environment, and a volatile security situation.

Iraq generously hosts some 300,000 refugees and asylum-seekers, mostly Kurdish Syrians (some 270,000) residing in the KR-I. They face limited immediate return prospects, particularly in view of the deteriorating security situation in north-east Syria, where most of the refugees originate from. Some 70% of Syrian refugees live in urban areas, while the rest reside in nine refugee camps and one transit facility.

## REFUGEES IN IRAQ: COUNTRY OF ORIGIN



## IDP POPULATION BY SETTING



Iraq has an internally displaced (IDP) population of 1.2 million, some of whom face significant barriers to return or to effective local integration. Most of the 5 million IDPs that have already returned exercise similar rights to the rest of the Iraqi population but also face similar challenges. IDPs report insecurity, lack of livelihood opportunities and financial resources, combined with damaged housing in areas of origin and perceived affiliation with extremist groups as the main return barriers.

Given that the remaining protection concerns affecting displaced populations in Iraq are largely driven by socio-economic factors, human rights deficits and the absence of the

rule of law, UNHCR is scaling up its efforts to empower IDPs, refugees and host communities to become more resilient and better equipped to mitigate protection risks and access solutions. Such efforts include promoting IDP and refugee inclusion into social protection systems, advocating for refugee and IDP access to public services and policies, as well as improving refugee access to the labour market and livelihood opportunities.

## MAIN ACTIVITIES

### Protection



UNHCR is the mandated agency for the protection of refugees and stateless people. UNHCR has also been the lead of the IDP protection Cluster before its deactivation at the end of 2022 as part of the transition from individualized IDP assistance to supporting authorities deliver enhanced public services to all Iraqis. Since the Cluster deactivation, UNHCR has been leading efforts with the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) to find solutions for the remaining 175,000 IDPs residing in 25 camps in the KR-I.

UNHCR and partners provide legal assistance to displaced populations to secure their civil documentation. In addition, UNHCR provides counselling and assistance for survivors of gender-based violence, including mental health and psychosocial support; and assists children in need of specialised services such as alternative care arrangements. UNHCR also strengthens the capacity of partners and authorities to respond to protection issues.

### Registration and civil documentation



Registration (refugees) and access to civil documentation (IDPs) are key protection interventions, mitigating against the risk of detention/deprivation of movements, refoulement (refugees) and enabling access to public services. In Iraq, UNHCR issues asylum seeker certificates to people seeking international protection. Further, UNHCR supports the Permanent Committee of the Ministry of Interior (PC-MoI) to register refugees and asylum seekers and facilitates their access to humanitarian residency permits issued by the KRG for refugees in the KR-I.

In January, UNHCR completed the rollout of asylum seeker certificates valid for two years (previously valid only for one year) for asylum seekers who have been living in Iraq for longer than three years, encompassing most of the asylum seeker population. Palestinians are also now entitled to three to five-year certificates. The extended validity is intended to help reduce the persistent asylum seeker registration backlog as well as registration costs. UNHCR is advocating with the KRG to extend the duration of the Humanitarian Residency Permit to two years as this would alleviate a lot of burden and costs on asylum-seekers who currently must renew their residency permits every year with the relevant KRG authorities.

Missing civil documentation impedes people's ability to access basic public services such as education, healthcare and social security benefits, and can lead to restricted freedom of movement, increased risk of arrest and detention, exclusion from restitution and/or reconstruction programmes, and an inability to participate in the country's public affairs. In view of this, UNHCR supports IDPs and IDP returnees, as well as other vulnerable populations, including illiterate persons, individuals suspected of affiliation with extremist groups, including Al-Hol returnees, and at risk of statelessness groups to obtain or renew their civil documentation. UNHCR and its partners Harikar, Heartland Alliance International, International Rescue Committee, INTERSOS, Legal Clinics Network and Terre des Hommes Italy (TDH) coordinate Mobile Court and Civil Affairs Directorates missions, as well as Ministry of Interior missions to IDP camps and urban areas with large IDP/returnee populations to process civil document applications. These include Birth Certificates, Civil IDs, Nationality Certificates, Housing Cards and Unified National ID Cards. From January to June 2023, 40 mobile civil documentation missions across the country culminated in the issuance of over 13,000 civil documents, while an additional 26,000 were processed.

UNHCR leads civil documentation efforts in Jeddah 1 (J1) centre in Ninewa governorate, which hosts Iraqi returnees from Al-Hol camp in north-east Syria. UNHCR's legal assessments of this group have consistently revealed that all J1 returnees are missing at least one core civil document. Since the start of UNHCR's civil documentation efforts in J1 in May 2021 (with the start of the repatriations), 384 Iraqi Nationality Certificates, 209 National Unified IDPs, 17 Proofs of Birth and seven Marriage Certificates were issued for J1 returnees.

UNHCR and partners also support community awareness on the importance of civil documentation, provide legal assistance, including representation in administrative or legal processes, and support the rehabilitation and establishment of Civil Affairs Directorates, Unified National Directorates and National Identification and Document Centres.

## Cash-based interventions



For refugees and asylum seekers assessed as socio-economically vulnerable, UNHCR provides cash assistance to enable them to pay rent, buy food and other essentials, thus decreasing the use of harmful coping mechanisms such as reducing food intake and accumulating debt. UNHCR provides several types of cash assistance, including multi-purpose and winterization cash assistance. From January to July, over 7,800 vulnerable refugee families received multipurpose cash assistance amounting to IQD 370,000 (\$280) per month. For targeting, UNHCR is using the Proxy Means Testing (PMT) approach, which is run every three months with updated beneficiary data to identify the most vulnerable families in need of cash assistance, with new households included while others are removed, as needed. Meanwhile, as part of the DAFI scholarship programme for refugee students for the 2022/2023 academic school year, 124 refugee scholars continued receiving a monthly allowance of 400,000 IQD (\$300) per month.

Since January 2023, UNHCR ceased its IDP cash assistance as part of the UN/UNHCR's transition from individualized IDP humanitarian assistance to promoting their inclusion in Iraq's existing public services, such as the social protection scheme (see below textbox). As a long-term strategy for refugees, UNHCR is advocating with the KRG to promote refugee inclusion in current initiatives related to re-establishing a public social safety net in the KR-I.

## Advocacy



UNHCR advocates with the government to develop legislative and policy frameworks aligned with international law, protection standards and best practices. UNHCR also advocates with humanitarian and development actors to include displaced populations in their programmes. In addition, UNHCR intervenes in cases of risks of refoulement and advocates on behalf of individuals seeking asylum in Iraq.

Iraq is not a party to the 1951 Convention or the 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees and currently lacks a comprehensive refugee legal framework that aligns with international standards. Further to the establishment of a Committee under the Ministry of Interior (MoI) in December 2022 tasked with drafting a new refugee law aligned with international standards, UNHCR has been collaborating extensively with the Federal MoI, KRG representatives and the State Council, providing technical advice and commentaries to a series of drafts, as per UNHCR's international refugee law supervisory mandate.

This welcome process 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.

## Solutions and inclusion



Given the protracted nature of displacement for refugees and some IDP groups in Iraq, UNHCR is working to promote longer-term solutions. Efforts include enhancing displaced families' long-term income, as well as promoting refugee access to livelihoods to enhance their self-reliance.

In a commendable development in July, the KRG Minister of Education decided to expand the Refugee Education Integration Policy (REIP) to grade five for the 2023-2024 academic school year. The REIP intends to gradually include Syrian refugee students in Kurdish public schools, in lieu of the parallel refugee education system. The first phase of the REIP started in the 2022-2023 academic year, with the inclusion of refugee students grades one to four and some 400 Syrian refugee teachers.

With the expansion of the REIP to grade five, over 38,000 Syrian refugee students are expected to enrol in Kurdish public schools in the 2023-2024 academic year which represents a 19% increase in the number of school-aged Syrian refugee children included in public schools compared to the previous year (26,000 enrolled out of a 30,105 target). UNHCR continues advocating for the expansion of the REIP to grades six to 12 and appealing to donors to provide financial support to the KRG and to REIP partners (UNICEF, UNHCR, and Save the Children) to ensure the success of the REIP's implementation.

For especially vulnerable refugees, UNHCR pursues resettlement to third countries. Since the start of 2023, UNHCR has submitted 1,540 of the most vulnerable refugees for resettlement, with 578 having departed to resettlement countries. UNHCR also works to expand complementary pathways such as scholarships and labour mobility opportunities abroad. So far, in 2023, some 548 refugees have been assisted to access complementary pathways and 110 individuals have departed to seven different countries.

As for IDPs, UNHCR continued leading efforts with Kurdish authorities on long-term political solutions for the 175,000 IDPs in the remaining 25 camps in the KR-I. These include IDPs' safe and voluntary return and sustainable reintegration, when possible, their relocation elsewhere in Iraq or sustainable local integration in their areas of displacement. In the meantime, UNHCR is advocating with the KRG to upgrade the services in these camps and eventually transform them into formal settlements serviced by public institutions. Progress on this front includes IDPs' ability to upgrade their shelters, their inclusion in Iraq's Social Safety Net (see textbox), and some returns to disputed territories.

### IDP inclusion in the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs' poverty alleviation programme: The Social Safety Net



*Internally displaced girl in an IDP camp in Erbil governorate in the KR-I. Given the dire situation in IDP camps, her family's enrolment in the Social Safety Net (SSN) will help her and other IDPs meet their basic needs. Read more about IDP inclusion in the SSN [here](#). © UNHCR*

In a breakthrough development in February 2023, Iraq's Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MoLSA) decided to assess the 175,000 IDPs living in 25 camps in the KR-I for enrolment in its poverty reduction programme - the Social Safety Net (SSN). The Ministry also decided to prioritize the assessment of IDPs and IDP returnees in urban areas across the country, regardless of whether they are registered in MoLSA's online registration system (online registration is a requirement for any other Iraqi national claiming to meet the SSN poverty criteria).

IDPs who meet MoLSA's vulnerability criteria will benefit from monthly cash payments that will help them meet their basic needs (an average of \$85/IQD 125,000 per person per month). Vulnerable families and individuals, including female-headed households and individuals with disabilities, will receive cash top-ups.

Since the beginning of MoLSA's enrolment campaign, as of 5 August 2023, a total of 5,490 households in the camps of Duhok and 900 households in the camps administrated by Erbil have already been registered with the SSN and many of them started receiving SSN cash grants since the beginning of July.

Prior to the MoLSA's IDP assessment campaign, only IDPs residing in Iraq's federal governorates, and who registered in the dedicated online platform were assessed for SSN eligibility. Meanwhile, IDPs residing in the KR-I did not have the possibility to self-register, as the online registration system does not have the option of recording the applicant's place of current residence in the KR-I. This effectively excluded all IDPs in camps, as all the remaining IDP camps in Iraq are in the KR-I.

Indiscriminate IDP assessment in the SSN followed UN/UNHCR advocacy with MoLSA to prioritize the assessment of all IDPs in Iraq, inside and outside camps, and regardless of whether they are registered online. This advocacy effort is part of the UN/UNHCR's transition from individualized IDP humanitarian assistance - particularly UNHCR's IDP cash assistance programme - to promote their inclusion in Iraq's existing public services, such as the social protection scheme.