

# Erbil Field Office

## Overview – December 2024

UNHCR's **Erbil Field Office** covers the Erbil governorate. The governorate hosts **over 150,000** refugees. **Eighty per cent of refugees** live in urban areas, mostly in the city of Erbil, while **20 per cent are hosted in four refugee camps across the governorate** (Basirma, Darashakran, Kawergosk, and Qushtapa).

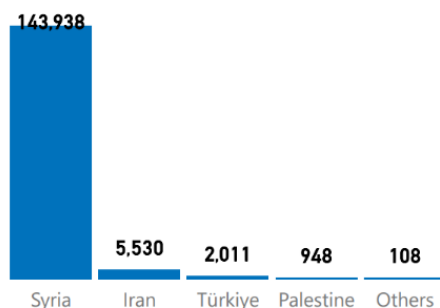
The Erbil governorate also hosts almost **230,000 IDPs**. Over 215,000 reside in urban areas<sup>1</sup> while almost 11,000 individuals live in six camps. Of these, three IDPs camps have more stable conditions (Baharka, Debaga, Harshm), while those known as East Mosul Camps (EMCs) are mired with multiple challenges, including movement restrictions due to perceived affiliation with extremist groups. The EMCs include Hassansham U2, Hassansham U3 and Khazer M1.

UNHCR in Erbil implements protection and durable solutions programmes directly and through its partners in accordance with the **UNHCR Iraq's Multi-Year Strategy 2025 - 2029** as well as in line with the **UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF)** in Iraq and the **Global Compact on Refugees**. In Erbil governorate, UNHCR works in partnership with governmental entities as well as national and international NGOs.

### ASYLUM SEEKERS AND REFUGEES

**152,535 refugees and asylum-seekers** are registered with UNHCR who live in Erbil governorate.<sup>2</sup>

#### Countries of Origin



**Around 70% are women and children**

**80% reside in urban areas**

### INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS AND RETURNEES

**228,221 IDPs** reside in Erbil governorate. This includes **5,075 IDPs (1,051 families)** residing in EMCs

**Over 6,600 IDPs departed from camps in 2024**

(data as of end of December 2024)

**448 female households reside in EMCs**

(data as of December 2024)



#### UNHCR STAFF

03 International Staff  
 40 National Staff

<sup>1</sup> Data from the Erbil Joint Crisis Coordination Centre (EJCCC), March 2024.

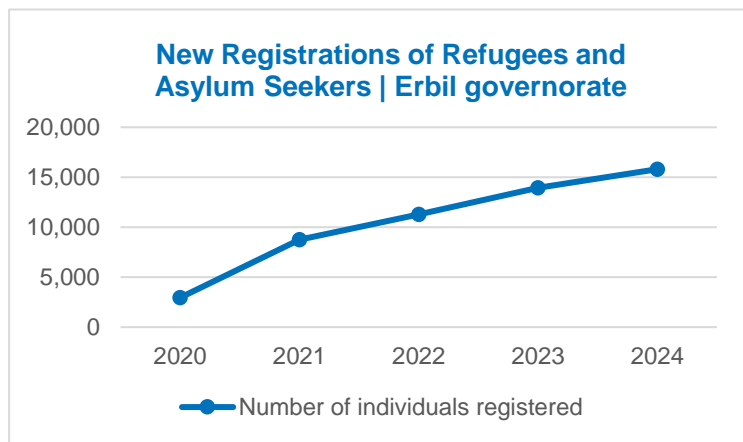
<sup>2</sup> UNHCR data as of end of December 2024

## Protection Activities

In Erbil Governorate, UNHCR provides refugees, asylum-seekers and IDPs with protection services through [the Field Office located in Erbil city](#) and at [the Baherka Registration and Protection Centre](#). At these locations, UNHCR and partners deliver a range of services including registration, legal assistance and protection services, such as supporting refugees and asylum seekers who face gender-based violence, child protection, Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) related issues.

### Registration and civil documentation

In 2024, UNHCR transitioned from providing registration activities in refugee camps to the [Baherka Registration and Protection Centre](#). This centralized approach enhances efficiency by allowing UNHCR and its partners to deliver a comprehensive range of registration and protection services in one location, rather than operating separately in multiple refugee camps. Similarly, at the Baherka Centre, UNHCR works side by side with government entities, such as the Residency Directorate and Asayish, to ensure a streamlined and effective process for refugees and asylum seekers seeking a range of documentation.



As of 31 December 2024, [152,535 refugees and asylum-seekers are registered with UNHCR in Erbil governorate, with women and children comprising 70% of the population](#). This includes over 15,800 refugees newly registered in 2024, among them more than 4,000 are new arrivals, over 8,400 *in-situ* registration (individuals who have been in Iraq for more than 12 months but only recently approached UNHCR for registration) and around 3,300 new births. On average, [UNHCR newly registers 1,310 asylum-seekers and renews 6,190 individual certificates per month through its 30 registration staff](#).

UNHCR's registration process in Erbil, as in the rest of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, [is an important mechanism in realizing the implementation of Administrative Instructions \(AI\) for regulating the affairs of asylum-seekers](#). Once refugees and asylum seekers receive their UNHCR registration certificate, they are able to approach the Residency Directorate to issue their residency documents, namely the [Personal Identification Card \(PIC\)](#) for the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. With this documentation, refugees and asylum seekers have freedom of movement and access to national services.

### Legal assistance

In Erbil governorate, UNHCR and partners provide [legal assistance](#) to refugees, asylum-seekers and IDPs. This includes legal counselling and representation, assistance with administrative and legal procedures, and legal awareness sessions. During 2024, [UNHCR provided some 2,000 refugees and asylum-seekers living in Erbil governorate with legal awareness sessions](#). In addition, [approximately 6,000 refugees received legal aid services, including counselling and representation before judicial and administrative bodies, supporting them to resolve legal issues](#).

For refugees and asylum seekers in detention, UNHCR and partners also provide targeted legal assistance. In 2024, [over 160 refugees and asylum-seekers who had been detained in Erbil on migration-related charges were released with support from UNHCR and partners.](#)

UNHCR's partner Intersos provides legal assistance, including counselling and representation, [for IDPs living in the EMCs who often have complex civil documentation cases<sup>3</sup> and face restrictions on their freedom of movement](#) due to perceived affiliation with extremist group. In 2024, UNHCR helped over 2,300 IDPs in EMCs to obtain civil documentation.

### Community-based protection

In Erbil governorate, UNHCR and partners provide comprehensive support for survivors and individuals at risk of [gender-based violence](#). This includes counselling, psychological support, and legal assistance provided through seven community centres, the Baherka Registration and Protection Centre, and in the refugee camps. UNHCR and partners also provide [child protection](#) services, including counselling, recreational and educational activities for children at risk.

UNHCR and partners also carry out [protection assessments](#), identifying the protection needs of refugees and IDPs to provide tailored assistance and refer them to relevant services. Additionally, UNHCR and partners organize [awareness raising sessions](#) on various protection topics, including child protection, prevention of gender-based violence, and feedback and complaint mechanisms.

As of end December, [some 70,800 individuals participated in awareness raising sessions organized by UNHCR partners at the community centres in refugee camps and Baherka Registration and Protection Centre.](#) In 2024, UNHCR community-based protection partner Terre des Hommes (TdH) ran the activities at community centres located in the four refugee camps and in the EMCs.

### Cash-based assistance

UNHCR provides [multipurpose cash assistance \(MPCA\)](#) to enable socio-economically vulnerable refugees and asylum-seekers residing in Erbil governorate to cover their basic needs, preventing them from falling into dire poverty and decreasing risks of harmful coping mechanisms such as reducing food intake and accumulating debt. As of December 2024, [UNHCR has provided over 34,000 refugees and asylum-seekers who live in Erbil governorate with MPCA.](#)<sup>4</sup>

In addition, UNHCR also provided one-time [emergency cash assistance \(ECA\)](#) and [medical cash assistance \(MCA\)](#) to the most vulnerable refugees. [As of December 2024, 31 families \(a total of 90 individuals\) received ECA, whereas 19 individuals received MCA in Erbil governorate.](#)

### Camp Management

UNHCR collaborates with the Joint Crisis Coordination Centre (JCCC), a directorate under the Ministry of Interior of the Kurdistan Regional Government (MOI-KRG), to manage four refugee camps and six IDP camps in Erbil governorate. The JCCC ensures coordination among partners and access to

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<sup>3</sup> Complex case is a term used for cases which cannot be processed through standard documentation procedures and require additional administrative and/or judicial steps to acquire their identify documents. These include cases where a spouse/parent is deceased, missing or incarcerated; cases where one or more parents is affiliated (real or perceived) with Da'esh or other extremist groups; cases involving unaccompanied and/or separated children; and cases where marriages and births were not registered in official channels recognized by the Government of Iraq.

<sup>4</sup> Figures as of December 2024

essential services for displaced populations in camps, fostering community participation through representative committees. In addition to this, the Erbil Joint Crisis Centre (EJCC) supports the JCCC by managing the distribution of Core Relief Items (CRI) in Erbil camps, to help refugees and IDPs meet their essential needs and mitigate risks associated with prolonged displacement.

## Towards the inclusion of refugees in national systems

In the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KR-I), refugees and asylum-seekers [have access to public services such as healthcare and education on par with nationals, and they can pursue livelihood opportunities, primarily in the informal sector.](#)

In line with the [UNHCR Iraq's Multi-Year Strategy 2025-2029](#), UNHCR seeks to build on this inclusion over the coming years, working closely with government and local authorities to expand other public services to also be available to refugees and asylum seekers.

To foster the inclusion of refugees and asylum-seekers in national systems, UNHCR aims to transform some refugee camps into neighbourhoods served by local municipalities, rather than relying on parallel humanitarian services. To reach this goal, UNHCR provides material and financial support for the construction and rehabilitation of schools and primary health centers. This initiative is crucial for enhancing the inclusion of refugees in local communities, transforming camps into settlements, and supporting local authorities, including the Directorate of Education and the Directorate of Health in Erbil.

### Education

In 2024, [UNHCR built eight new schools and renovated six education facilities across the Erbil governorate](#) as part of the Refugee Education Integration Policy (REIP), fostering the inclusion of refugees in local schools.

In addition to school construction, in 2024, UNHCR provided trainings for 216 Directorate of Education staff so they can support the skills development of teachers and administrators. [Strengthening the local government's capacity allows education institutions to provide direct support to teachers, welcoming mixed populations in classrooms and improving the quality of education for all children enrolled in public schools.](#)

### Health

Regarding healthcare, [UNHCR collaborates closely with the Directorate of Health in Erbil governorate to identify and address gaps in healthcare services for refugees and their host communities.](#) Projects undertaken so far include the construction of new primary health centres, the expansion of storage spaces and laboratories, and various renovations. Since 2017, [UNHCR constructed three new primary health centres nearby refugee camps in Erbil governorate, one in Basirma \(2017\) one in Kawergosk district \(2022\) and one in Qushtapa district \(2024\), to enhance health services for both the refugee and host communities in these areas.](#)

## Partnerships

In Erbil governorate, UNHCR works with a range of implementing partners to deliver services and assistance to refugees and asylum seekers. These include:

- **InterSOS** for legal assistance and civil documentation

- **Terre des Hommes (TdH)** for community-based protection
- **The Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC)** for education
- **Joint Crisis Cell (JCC)** for camp management
- **Kurdistan Save the Children (KSC)** for child protection
- **Al-Messalla** for gender-based violence
- **WChan** for mental health and psychosocial support
- **Sorouh for Development Foundation (SSDF)** for higher education (DAFI)

At institutional level, UNHCR supports the **Ministry of Interior** on the issuance of personal identification cards (PICs) for refugees and asylum-seekers, protecting them from the risk of arbitrary arrest and deportation. Also, UNHCR collaborates with **the Ministry of Migration and Displacement (MoMD), and the Ministry of Higher Education, the Ministry of Planning, and the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs**. Furthermore, UNHCR works closely with other **UN/humanitarian organisations** to support the government's responses to refugees and IDPs, exchange information and coordinate advocacy.

**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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*“As a family we try to make a spending plan, but the money is never enough. Products for our children are very expensive”. Nidal and Mahabad are Syrian refugee parents to four children, two of them have specific needs. Nidal works in the construction sector to provide for his family while Mahabad takes care of their children at home. 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.*