

Iraq

September 2024

Iraq hosts more than **327,000 refugees and asylum-seekers**, 90% of whom are from the Syrian Arab Republic. About 28% live in nine refugee camps across the KR-I.

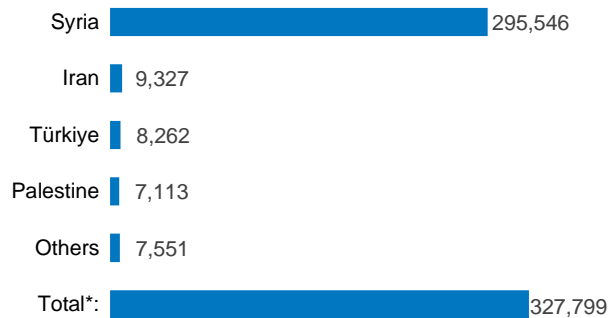
UNHCR focuses on strengthening national capacity to **include refugees** into **social and protection services**, and to **enhance their economic opportunities**.

Over **1 million Iraqis** are internally displaced, with approximately 115,000 people living in 21 camps in the KR-I. UNHCR supports their access to **civil documentation** and works with the Iraqi authorities to find durable **solutions for IDPs in camps**.

POPULATION OF REFUGEES & ASYLUM-SEEKERS

(AS OF 30 SEPTEMBER 2024)

Country of origin

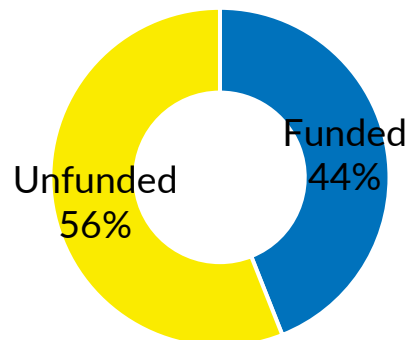


FUNDING

(AS OF 30 SEPTEMBER 2024)

USD 203.6 million

requested for Iraq in 2024



UNHCR PRESENCE

Staff:

282 National Staff

71 International Staff

Offices:

1 Country Office in Baghdad/Erbil

1 Sub-Office in Dohuk

5 Field Offices in Baghdad, Erbil, Kirkuk, Mosul and Sulaymaniyah



After years of displacement, Kawe and her family struggled to secure national identity documents. Through support from UNHCR, she now holds up her new National Certificate with pride.

In the past five years, 244,000 individuals have received legal assistance and over 233,000 core civil documents have been issued as a direct result of legal aid services provided by UNHCR and its partners. Read her [story](#).

Operational context

Since the end of large-scale military operations against Da'esh in 2017, the overall situation in Iraq has significantly improved and the country is advancing towards sustainable development. Despite this, the security situation remains volatile, and the economic situation is still fragile.

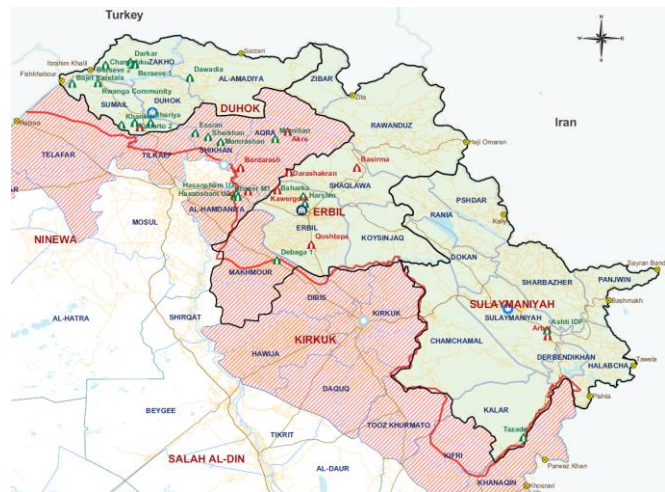
Iraq generously hosts over **327,000 refugees** and asylum-seekers, mostly Syrians (over 295,000), the majority of whom live in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KR-I). In addition, 72% of refugees live in urban areas and 41% of refugees are children under 18.

Refugees in Iraq have limited prospects for return in the immediate future given the insecurity and ongoing human rights and humanitarian law violations and abuse, including in North-East Syria where most originate from. According to UNHCR's 2024 return intention survey, about **93% of Syrian refugees in Iraq do not intend to return in the next 12 months** mainly due to the lack of safety and security (80%) and lack of livelihood opportunities (70%) in Syria¹.

In line with government-led development-oriented approaches, **UNHCR focuses on the full inclusion of refugees and asylum-seekers in public services** (such as education and healthcare), **protection-related services, social protection schemes and the local economy** on par with Iraqi nationals. In coordination with development actors, UNHCR also supports the **strengthening of public systems and institutions in Federal Iraq and the KR-I** to fully assume the delivery of quality public services to refugees and asylum-seekers, addressing protection needs and furthering their self-reliance. Furthermore, UNHCR continues its technical support to the Government for finalizing and enacting a new refugee law to make them aligned with international standards and good practices.

Iraq also has **over 1 million internally displaced persons (IDPs)**. While the majority live in private accommodation in urban settings or informal settlements across the country, as of end September 2024, **115,000 live in 21 IDP camps in the KR-I**. Overall, the protracted displacement of IDPs is linked to various factors unique to each displaced individual/family given their profile, their socio-economic status, as well as the situation in their areas of origin. IDPs express concerns about insecurity, limited access to public services, lack of livelihood opportunities, damaged housing and absence of accountability and reconciliation mechanisms in their areas of origin as barriers to return. Therefore, the needs of IDPs and IDP returnees in Iraq are largely driven by socio-economic factors, human rights deficits, and the absence of the rule of law which are addressed more effectively through sustainable development approaches.

Considering this and in line with the transition to development-oriented approaches, UNHCR in the course of 2023 progressively phased out individual assistance to IDPs and is now primarily **supporting them to obtain their civil documents to ensure that they have access to public services and government social protection schemes**. Following the decision of the Government of Iraq in January 2024 to close the remaining IDP camps in the KR-I by end July 2024 which was eventually extended, UNHCR is closely monitoring the departure process, provision of federal assistance in the camps and implementation of government policies in this regard. After the extension of **the July deadline for the closure of the camps, the Government established a High Committee** tasked with developing a comprehensive plan to solve the protracted displacement. UNHCR also **advocates with Iraqi authorities to ensure all three durable solutions are made available to the IDPs** based on a voluntary and informed decision (see more details in the solutions section below).



¹ See *Ninth Regional Survey on Syrian Refugees' Perceptions and Intentions on Return to Syria*

Highlights

July – September 2024

Kurdistan Regional Government signed the Administrative Instructions for regulating the affairs of asylum-seekers in the KR-I

On 10 July, the Minister of Interior of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), H.E. Rebar Ahmed Khalid, signed the [Administrative Instructions for regulating the affairs of asylum-seekers in the KR-I](#). The Administrative Instructions are a [landmark achievement for the KRG](#) that establish a legal and procedural framework to [standardize asylum procedures](#) across the KR-I, in line with [international law and standards](#) (see more details under the advocacy and legal reform section below). This comes after [years of advocacy and UNHCR technical support](#) to KRG authorities for the development of the Administrative Instructions and is expected to [enhance the protection of refugees and asylum-seekers](#) in the KR-I. The Administrative Instructions were published in the Gazette on 24 September and thereby entered into force. UNHCR will continue technically supporting the KRG to put in place the necessary measures for implementing the Administrative Instructions across the KR-I.



The Administrative Instructions were signed by the KRG Minister of Interior, Rebar Ahmed (in the front), at a launch ceremony which took place in Erbil on 10 July 2024. From left to right behind the podium: U.S. Ambassador to Iraq, Alina Romanowski, KRG Prime Minister, Masrour Barzani, Acting Representative of UNHCR in Iraq, Pauline Fresneau. © Kurdistan 24 Media Agency

Enhancing education opportunities for refugee children in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq

On 22 August, UNHCR, the KRG Ministry of Education and Directorate of Education in Erbil jointly [opened a new nine-classroom primary school in Basirma](#), Erbil. The new school is expected to provide education services to over [400 students from the refugee and host communities](#) in Basirma, Rizgary and Shorish neighbourhoods. It will alleviate overcrowding at the other local primary school in Zardkan while removing the need for students to travel far to go to school in the neighbouring area. The construction of this new school, which was supported by funding from the Netherlands under the PROSPECTS partnership, is part of [UNHCR's efforts to support the KRG in the implementation of the Refugee Education Integration Policy \(REIP\)](#) and further the inclusion of refugees in public schools in the KR-I.



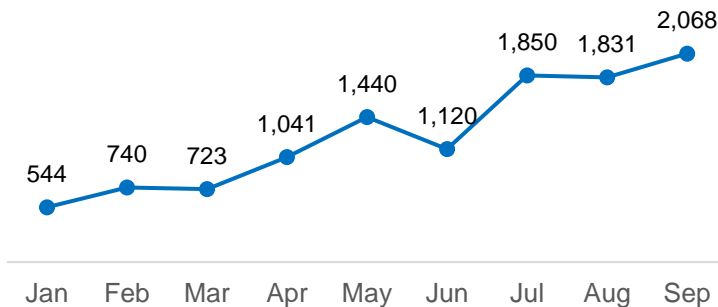
Fifth grade students at the new Basirma school during their science classes © UNHCR

Population trends

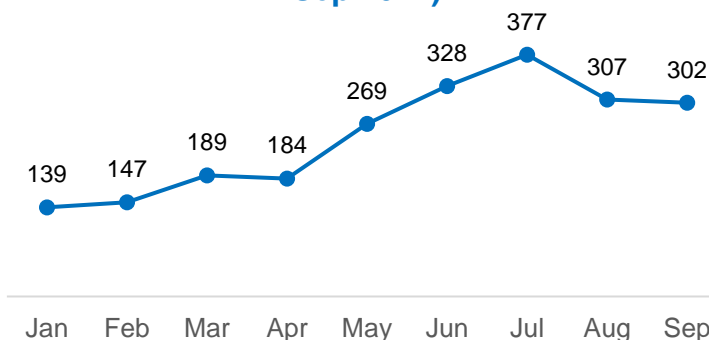
Since January 2024, UNHCR has registered a total of **11,357 people newly arrived in Iraq**, of whom **90% are Syrians**. This represents an **increase of over 30%** in the number of registered newly arrived refugees and asylum-seekers compared to the same period last year (4,376). The newly arrived Syrians indicated to UNHCR that they fled due to prevailing insecurity, dire living conditions and limited access to or availability of basic services, particularly in North-East Syria.

Meanwhile, UNHCR recorded a total of **2,233 spontaneous refugee returns** (refugees registered with UNHCR) to Syria through various borders (including the Peshkhabour border crossing point) in the same period. UNHCR monitoring indicates that 45% of the returnees moved to the Al Hassakeh region, 43% to the Aleppo region and 12% to other regions. The main reasons reported for returns to Syria are family unification (31.4%), followed by a lack of employment or job prospects in the KR-I (23%), and need for medical treatment (4.3%).

Refugee arrivals (Jan - Sep 2024)



Spontaneous returns to Syria (Jan - Sep 2024)



Main Activities

Advocacy and legal reform

- UNHCR continues to provide technical support to the Iraqi government to develop legislative and policy frameworks aligned with international law, protection standards and best practices. Following years of advocacy and UNHCR technical support, the **KRG signed the Administrative Instructions for regulating the affairs of asylum-seekers in the KR-I in July 2024**. These Administrative Instructions will **harmonize asylum procedures across the KR-I, in line with international standards, including by defining who qualifies as an asylum-seeker, emphasizing the principle of non-refoulement, and granting non-discriminatory access to asylum regardless of entry mode or nationality**. In addition, they protect the rights of asylum-seekers during their stay in the KR-I, including access to public services like healthcare and education, opportunities for employment and legal recourse, and freedom of movement within the KR-I.
- UNHCR supported the KRG to organize a workshop in September 2024 on the operationalization of the Administrative Instructions for government entities involved in asylum procedures and issuance of residency cards from across the KR-I. This helped establish a common understanding of the Administrative Instructions among different government stakeholders and a common vision for their implementation. UNHCR will continue to technically support the KRG for implementing the Administrative Instructions across the KR-I.
- UNHCR also intervenes in cases with risk of refoulement and advocates for respecting the principle of non-refoulement. An increase in the number of refugees at risk of refoulement has been observed in 2024 compared to 2023, particularly in Federal Iraq. While in 2023, UNHCR prevented the refoulement of 430 individuals for the whole year, **UNHCR and partners have so far in 2024 intervened and prevented the refoulement of 1,544 refugees and asylum-seekers from Federal Iraq and the KR-I**. UNHCR continues to advocate with Government to uphold the principle of non-refoulement in accordance with national and international legal obligations.

Protection



Access to legal aid and documentation

Refugees

- UNHCR provides refugees and asylum-seekers with legal support, including [legal awareness sessions](#), [legal counselling and representation](#) to help them secure government-issued residency permits and address legal issues. From January to end September 2024, UNHCR provided [more than 6,300 refugees and asylum-seekers with legal awareness sessions](#). In addition, over [13,500 refugees](#) received legal aid services, including counselling and representation before legal and administrative bodies, supporting them to resolve legal issues.
- For refugees and asylum seekers in detention, UNHCR and partners also provide [legal assistance](#). So far in 2024, [over 600 refugees and asylum-seekers in detention have been supported](#), most of whom had been arrested on migration-related charges. Over 70% of them have been released, and UNHCR and partners continue to advocate with relevant Iraqi authorities to secure the release of the remaining detained individuals detained on migration-related charges.
- UNHCR also [registers](#) refugees and asylum-seekers, [issues](#) asylum-seeker certificates and [registers key life events](#) (e.g. new birth) as a pre-requisite for refugees to regularize their stay by obtaining government [documentation](#) (i.e. ID card from the Permanent Committee of the Ministry of Interior (PC-MoI) in Federal Iraq and the ID card from the Residency Department in the KR-I). Access to this national documentation is crucial for refugees to access public services (e.g. education and healthcare), secure employment and reduce the risk of arrest or deportation.

IDPs

- UNHCR and partners continue supporting IDPs, IDP returnees, and vulnerable non-displaced Iraqis, including those at risk of statelessness, to obtain core civil documentation. [This essential documentation enables them to access public services like education, healthcare, and social security benefits, and to exercise their rights, such as freedom of movement and civic participation.](#)
- Since the beginning of 2024, UNHCR and partners – Harikar, Heartland Alliance International, International Rescue Committee (IRC), INTERSOS, Legal Clinics Network and Terre des Hommes Italy – have [supported Iraqis in obtaining over 31,000 civil documents](#).
- UNHCR and its partners closely coordinated with the relevant Authorities to conduct [23 Civil Affairs Directorate \(CAD\) and court mobile missions](#) across the country.
- Additionally, UNHCR and partners provided [individualized legal counselling and representation services to over 30,000 people](#), helping them overcome administrative and legal barriers to obtain their civil documents.

Iraqis returning from North-East Syria

- UNHCR also leads civil documentation efforts in Jeddah 1 Centre in Ninewa governorate which temporarily hosts Iraqis who return from al-Hol camp in North-East Syria as part of organized return led by the Iraqi government before they return to their areas of origin. The legal assessments of this group, which are conducted by UNHCR's partner, INTERSOS, [consistently indicate that all returnees are missing at least one core civil document](#).
- Since the beginning of 2024, UNHCR and INTERSOS have conducted legal assessments for [three](#) return groups who arrived in April, May and July (14th – 16th return groups).

- Over 850 applications for National Unified IDs (the only valid civil document for Iraqis since April 2024) for some 1,600 people have been prepared for issuance of National Unified IDs pending the deployment of mobile missions by the MoI which are expected in the last quarter of 2024.



Community-based Protection

- UNHCR works to prevent, mitigate and respond to gender-based violence. As of end of September 2024, UNHCR and partners supported over 4,000 survivors and individuals at risk of gender-based violence with specialized case management services and psychosocial support. UNHCR and partners also referred some 500 individuals to other service providers, including for legal aid, specialized mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) and livelihood initiatives, to ensure holistic support. Moreover, UNHCR and partner conducted capacity-building trainings on gender-based violence prevention, risk mitigation and response for over 400 government staff and service providers..
- UNHCR and partners also provide child protection services. As of end September 2024, some 4,500 children at risk have received child protection case management services. In addition, UNHCR and partners have conducted 51 trainings on child protection approaches, reaching over 700 individuals, including government staff, child protection actors and community members.
- The capacity building provided by UNHCR and its partners on gender-based violence, child protection, and other protection-related issues is part of UNHCR's broader effort to help strengthen the capacity of Iraq's public institutions and systems to deliver inclusive and quality protection-related services, including to refugees.



Cash-based Intervention

- UNHCR provides cash assistance to enable socio-economically vulnerable refugees and asylum-seekers to cover their basic needs, including rent, food and other essentials. Cash assistance helps to prevent vulnerable groups from falling into dire poverty and decreases risks of harmful coping mechanisms such as reducing food intake and accumulating debt. From January to end September 2024, UNHCR has provided IQD 300,000 (approximately USD 230) in multipurpose cash assistance per family per month to over 46,000 refugees and asylum-seekers who are assessed to be socio-economically vulnerable. On average, UNHCR provides cash assistance to over 6,500 individuals per month.
- In line with the broader transition from a humanitarian response to development-oriented approaches in Iraq, UNHCR advocates with the KRG to promote the inclusion of refugees and asylum-seekers in government services and policies and is thus advocating for the resumption of the Social Safety Net (SSN) programme in the KR-I and inclusion of eligible refugees in the SSN, gradually reducing their dependence on humanitarian assistance. In the second half of 2024, UNHCR revised the targeting approach for its cash assistance programme, to further align it with the model used by the government-led social protection scheme, the SSN. This is expected to lay the groundwork for the eventual inclusion of refugees and asylum-seekers in the SSN.



Education

- About 49,400 refugee students are enrolled in public schools in the KR-I for the 2023-2024 academic year. This represents 68% of the eligible refugee population. UNHCR supports the Ministry of Education of the KRG in implementing the Refugee Education Integration Policy (REIP) which seeks to include Syrian refugee children and teachers into the public education system in the KR-I. So far in 2024, UNHCR has constructed six new schools and rehabilitated eight others across the KR-I. A total of 34 additional new classrooms have also been built in existing schools in Erbil and Sulaymaniyah governorates. In addition, UNHCR completed the construction of a 12-classroom school in Kirkuk and rehabilitated a primary school in the Anbar governorate. Overall, this has increased the capacity of the public education system to absorb more students from refugee and host communities and improved the quality of education.

- More than **5,000 refugees** (of whom 55% are female), including children, teachers and parents have been provided with **Kurdish language courses** to help them overcome the language barrier when switching from instruction in Arabic to Kurdish at the public schools in the KR-I. In addition, UNHCR and partners **supported 230 refugee teachers** currently working in public schools in the KR-I, providing them with training and capacity building on pedagogy, life skills and psychosocial support. Furthermore, UNHCR's advocacy led to KRG's decision to recruit a further 300 refugee teachers in the public education system. In addition, as of end of September 2024, a total of nearly 700 refugees have been recruited as lecturers.
- UNHCR is supporting **114 refugee students in higher education through the Albert Einstein German Academic Refugee Initiative** (also known as DAFI) scholarship programme. The programme covers tuition fees, study materials, food, transportation, accommodation, and other expenses. In Iraq, each student receives a monthly allowance of 400,000 IQD (approximately USD 300) for the 2023-2024 academic year to help meet their educational needs. To amplify academic achievement and skills development, UNHCR provides DAFI scholars additional support through close monitoring, academic preparatory and language classes, as well as mentoring and networking opportunities.

 **Healthcare**

- UNHCR supports the **Directorates of Health (DoHs)** in the KR-I to provide **healthcare services for refugees and to fully integrate them into the public healthcare system in the KR-I**. So far in 2024, over **137,000 individuals** have received healthcare services (including MHPSS) in healthcare centres supported by UNHCR, of whom **76% were refugees** and **24% host community members**.
- From January to end September 2024, UNHCR **constructed a new Primary Health Centre (PHC)** near Domiz 1 and 2 camps in Dohuk governorate and handed it over to the DoH. The facility, which was furnished by WHO, **provides healthcare services for refugees from Domiz 1 and 2 camps, as well as those living in urban areas, IDPs, and the host community** in the surrounding areas. Furthermore, UNHCR and the DoHs in Dohuk and Erbil governorates closed the camp-based PHCs in Domiz1 and 2, Darashakran, and Gawilan camps as part of the plan to integrate refugees in the national healthcare system in the KR-I. UNHCR is currently supporting the construction of a new PHC in Qushtapa (Erbil) which will be handed over before end of 2024. Since 2020, in KR-I UNHCR has constructed two new PHCs (one in Dohuk and one in Erbil), rehabilitated PHCs and hospitals across the Duhok, Erbil and Sulaymaniyah governorates and supplied equipment to health facilities in these areas.
- UNHCR also **provided DoHs with essential medicines and medical supplies** to help strengthen the capacity of the public health system to fully take over the provision of services to refugees and asylum-seekers.

 **Solutions**

- UNHCR, as part of the UN Country Team in Iraq, has helped to shape the new iteration of the United Nations Sustainable Development Framework (UNSDCF) for 2025-2029, ensuring its relevance to and inclusion of refugees, asylum-seekers and stateless persons. In particular, UNHCR has aligned its programming to support the Government of Iraq to deliver priorities focusing on **strengthening national institutions and systems**, particularly in social and legal protection, to ensure they are **inclusive of refugees and asylum-seekers**. The work also aligns with the commitments of the Government of Iraq made at the Global Refugee Forum in 2023 to: i) enact the new Refugee Law, ii) grant refugees access to public services, and iii) implement the REIP in the KR-I for grades 5 to 12 by 2030.
- In September, the Government of Iraq launched the second phase of the PROSPECT partnership. Implemented by UNHCR, UNICEF, ILO, IFC and the World Bank, the PROSPECT programme aims to provide comprehensive critical support to refugees, IDPs, and vulnerable host communities across Iraq. Thanks to the first phase of the programme 4,000 displaced children were enrolled in secondary education, over 130 refugee entrepreneurs received support with microfinance loans, and more than 45,000 IDPs were provided with essential civil documentation.

Refugees

- Given the **protracted nature of displacement for refugees and asylum-seekers** in Iraq, UNHCR is working to promote more **sustainable solutions** for these populations. The solutions UNHCR pursues for refugees is to further **advance their inclusion in public and protection-related services and policies** (such as healthcare, education, gender-based violence and child protection services), enhance their **access to livelihoods** and **advocate for their inclusion in social protection schemes** in the KR-I on par with nationals.
- UNHCR continues to support and work closely with national and local authorities on the path towards advancing solutions for the more than **90,000 refugees hosted in nine camps across the KR-I**. This includes **strengthening the capacity of existing national services and systems for the benefit of both the refugee and local population** within sectors of education, health, water, and electricity, among others. UNHCR recently mapped the available services in the refugee camps to understand better how to support the municipalities that provide them. Including refugees in existing services and systems, rather than establishing parallel humanitarian services, will ensure a higher degree of sustainability and increase the self-reliance of the refugee population.
- UNHCR's socio-economic vulnerability assessment of some 13,000 refugees indicated that **around 50% of refugees residing outside camps and 38% of those living in camps are employed in the informal sector**, mainly in construction and related trades, including hospitality and services, agriculture, wholesale, and retail trade. In line with its development-oriented strategy, UNHCR collaborates with a range of partners to expand refugees' economic self-reliance and access to livelihood opportunities.
- UNHCR works with the International Trade Centre to create **better job opportunities and promote the economic inclusion of refugees, particularly in the agricultural sector**. Furthermore, UNHCR works with ILO to enhance refugee employability through strategic initiatives, such as **the Employment-Intensive Investment Programme (EIIP)** under the PROSPECT partnership in Gawilan camp and the surrounding host community area. The initiative has generated employment for **100 workers from both refugee and host populations** while supporting farmers by improving irrigation systems. UNHCR and ILO also advocate for the inclusion of refugees through **policy and regulatory reforms**.
- For refugees with heightened protection risks, **UNHCR pursues resettlement to third countries**. As of end September 2024, UNHCR submitted **301 cases, comprised of 1,196 refugees and asylum-seekers**, for resettlement while **814 refugees departed** to resettlement countries in 2024. UNHCR also works to expand complementary pathways such as family reunification, **scholarships** and **labour mobility opportunities** abroad. **So far in 2024**, UNHCR has assisted more than 1,100 refugees and asylum-seekers access complementary pathways, with 158 individuals having departed to fourteen different countries.

IDPs

- UNHCR also supports the Government in **finding and implementing dignified durable solutions** for the more than 115,000 IDPs who reside in the camps in the KR-I. With the official closure of Ashti IDP camp in Sulaymaniyah governorate in July 2024, following the closure of Tazade in the same Governorate earlier in the year, a total of 21 IDP camps remain in the KR-I – six in Erbil and 15 in Dohuk/ Zakho Administration. In early 2024, the Government of Iraq announced its decision to close the remaining IDP camps in the KR-I by July 2024. After the initial deadline for their closure was extended beyond the original date of 30 July 2024, the **Government established a High Committee** tasked with developing a comprehensive plan to solve the protracted displacement.
- UNHCR supports closure of camps as a general principle in line with global out of camp policy, as long as all three recognized durable solutions are made available to IDPs on a voluntary and well-informed basis. These are: (1) **return to their areas of origin**, (2) **relocation to other communities within the country**, or (3) **local integration in their areas of displacement**, including through integration in (urban) communities nearby existing camps or another area of the IDPs choosing. **IDPs should be able to make an informed and free decision on**

the most suitable durable solution, according to their personal situation and the conditions in the areas of return/displacement so that the solution they choose is not only dignified but also sustainable in the long term. In this regard, the provision of information by authorities on the type of assistance and services available to IDPs is essential.



Yahya Mustafa and his family, Syrian refugees, are among the refugee families registered by UNHCR through our community services centre (CSC) in Baghdad in September 2024. Yahya explains that after he registered via UNHCR's website for registration, he received a call from the CSC informing him of their registration appointment. "Registration is important to ensure that we as a family receive protection and other services such as school," Yahya says, recognizing the value of UNHCR's asylum seeker certificate and documentation.



Special thanks to donors

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:

Belgium | Canada | Denmark | European Union | Finland | France | Germany | Ireland | Japan | Grand Duchy of Luxembourg | Netherlands | Norway | Sweden | Switzerland | United Kingdom | United States of America | Private Donors

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LINKS

UNHCR Iraq website: <https://www.unhcr.org/iq/>

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