

Iraq

January – June 2024

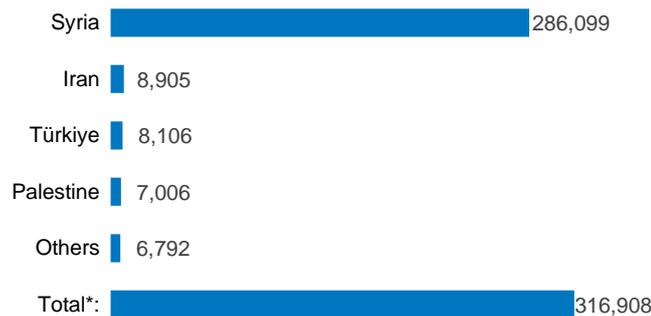
Iraq hosts more than **300,000 refugees and asylum-seekers**, 90% of whom are from the Syrian Arab Republic. Over **1 million Iraqis** are internally displaced.

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

For IDPs, UNHCR supports their access to **civil documentation** and supports the Iraqi authorities to find **solutions for IDPs in camps**.

POPULATION OF REFUGEES & ASYLUM-SEEKERS (AS OF 30 JUNE 2024)

Country of origin

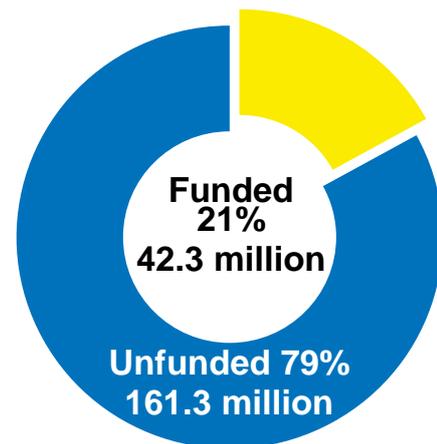


* Source : UNHCR

FUNDING (AS OF 30 JUNE 2024)

USD 203.6 million

requested for Iraq in 2024



UNHCR PRESENCE

Staff:

280 National Staff
68 International Staff

Offices:

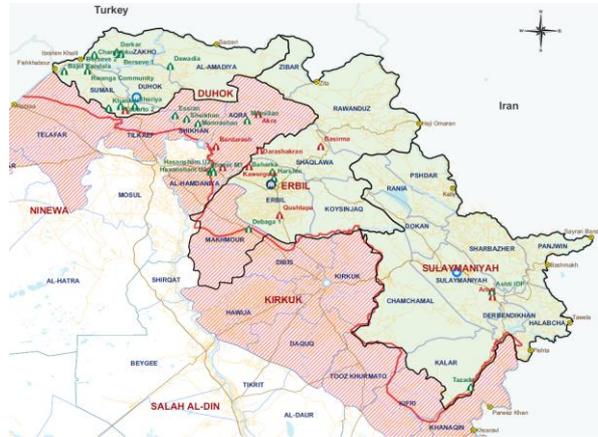
1 Country Office in Baghdad/Erbil
5 Field Offices in Baghdad, Erbil, Kirkuk, Mosul and Sulaymaniyah
1 Sub-Office in Dohuk



Hamed Karim, an IDP returnee, beams alongside his son, Qussai, following their receipt of the Iraqi unified ID card – a vital civil document that will enable his family to pursue education, access health services, and enjoy rights. UNHCR and partners support IDPs, IDP returnees, and vulnerable non-displaced Iraqis to obtain their key civil documentation. This support is crucial for them to access public services such as education, healthcare, and social security benefits, and for exercising rights, including freedom of movement and civic participation.

Operational context

The overall situation in Iraq has improved significantly since the conclusion of large-scale military operations against Da'esh in 2017. However, the security situation remains volatile and the economic situation fragile. The country generously hosts over 315,000 refugees and asylum-seekers, mostly Kurdish Syrians (over 280,000), the majority of whom live in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KR-I). The refugees 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 from where most refugees originate. In the 2024 return intention survey conducted by UNHCR, about 93% of Syrian refugees in Iraq indicated that they did not intend to return in the next 12 months. When asked about their reasons, the majority noted concerns about the lack of safety and security (80%) and lack of livelihood opportunities (70%) in Syria. Other important concerns included inadequate basic services (30%) and the risk of conscription (24%).



Iraq also has over 1 million internally displaced persons (IDPs), of whom some 143,000 live in 22 IDP camps in the KR-I as of end June 2024. IDPs report insecurity, limited access to public services, such as education, health or even water and electricity, lack of livelihood opportunities and financial resources, combined with damaged housing in areas of origin and, for some of them, Sunni Arabs in particular, perceived affiliation with extremist groups as the main barriers to return. The remaining needs of forcibly displaced populations in Iraq are largely driven by socio-economic factors, human rights deficits and the absence of the rule of law – and not anymore by their displacement status – which are addressed more effectively through sustainable development approaches. This entails strengthening national ownership and capacity for public service providers to deliver protection and other services, advocating for increased access of refugees to public services, and promoting refugee inclusion in social protection schemes and improving refugees' access to labour markets and livelihood opportunities. In view of this, UNHCR and partners transitioned from a humanitarian response to a development-focused approach.

Highlights

UNHCR launches joint initiative with the International Trade Centre to boost refugees' economic inclusion

UNHCR launched in May a joint initiative with the International Trade Centre (ITC) to promote the economic inclusion of refugees in the agrifood market system in Dohuk governorate in the KR-I. As part of this initiative, UNHCR and ITC will create agri-business alliance(s) with 100 smallholder farmers from among the refugees and local community to improve their capacity for production, business management and marketing; establish an aggregation hub to help farmers better prepare their produce for market distribution while optimizing costs, including for transportation; and facilitate skills development for 300 refugees (with a focus on youth and women) to help them gain employment and/or



Ahmed, a Syrian refugee farmer residing in Domiz 2 camp in Dohuk Governorate, proudly displays the Lollo Rosso lettuce he harvested. Ahmed was a farmer in Syria and has acquired new climate-smart farming techniques as part of a UNHCR-WFP joint project in Faida Sub District of Dohuk to support livelihoods and resilience of refugees, IDPs and members of host communities.

create their own enterprises in the agri-food sector. This initiative is expected to contribute to the [sustainable development of agri-business in Dohuk governorate](#) and, more specifically, [strengthen the inclusion of refugees in the local economy and labour market](#). In addition, it will enhance social cohesion between refugees and host community members by increasing shared economic activities, community engagement and sharing of common assets such as the aggregation hub.

The Federal Ministry of Education grants authorization for refugee children to be enrolled in public schools in Federal Iraq

Following years of advocacy by UNHCR, the Federal Ministry of Education [granted authorization for refugee children to temporarily enroll in public schools in Federal Iraq with their asylum-seeker certificate from UNHCR](#) until their legal status is determined by the Permanent Committee of the Federal Ministry of Interior (MoI), and they are issued a refugee identity card. This decision significantly improves the access of refugee children to education services in Federal Iraq particularly when it is implemented in a coherent manner across the Governorates which, in turn, will help increase their opportunities for social cohesion with Iraqi children, and [ultimately strengthens their capacity for self-reliance in the future](#).

Population trends

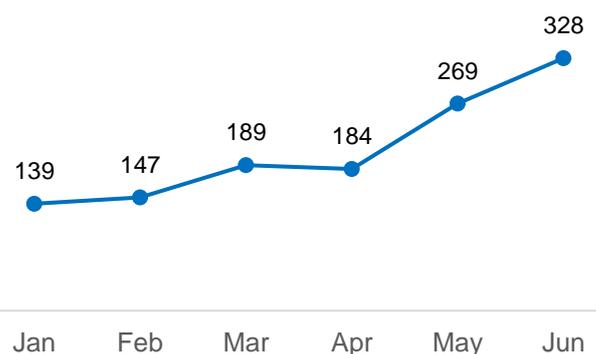
Since January 2024, UNHCR has [registered a total of 5,608 people who newly arrived in Iraq](#), of whom 92% are Syrians. This represents an [increase of almost 60%](#) in the number of registered newly arrived refugees and asylum-seekers compared to the same period last year (3,517). The newly arrived 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.

At the same time, UNHCR recorded a total of [1,256 spontaneous returns to Syria](#) through various borders (including the Peshkhabour border crossing point) in the same period. UNHCR monitoring indicates that 48% of the returnees moved to the Al Hassakeh region, 41% to the Aleppo region and 11% to other regions. The main reasons reported for returns to Syria are family unification (37.4%), followed by a lack of employment or job prospects in the KR-I (23.6%), and need for medical treatment (4.3%).

Refugee arrivals (Jan - June 2024)



Spontaneous returns to Syria (Jan - June 2024)



Main Activities

Protection

Access to legal aid and documentation

- **Refugees:** UNHCR conducts legal support including [legal awareness sessions](#) for refugees and asylum-seekers on their rights and the processes required to apply for residency permits in Iraq and provides them legal counselling and legal representation. From January to June 2024, legal awareness sessions were provided for more than [3,400 refugees and asylum-seekers](#) while over [13,000](#) received legal aid services, including counselling and representation before legal and administrative bodies, supporting them to resolve [legal entry and stay](#) issues. 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

in Iraq and obtain government [documentation](#) (i.e. ID card from the Permanent Committee of the Ministry of Interior (PC-Mol) in Federal Iraq and the ID card from the Residency Department in the KR-I). This is crucial for them to access public services (e.g. education and healthcare) and secure employment, and reduces the risk of arrest or deportation. During the same period, UNHCR and partners also provided [legal assistance to over 400 refugees and asylum-seekers in detention](#), most of whom had been arrested on migration related charges.

- [IDPs, IDP returnees and vulnerable non-displaced Iraqis](#): UNHCR and partners continued to support IDPs, IDP returnees and vulnerable non-displaced Iraqis, including those at risk of statelessness, to [obtain their core civil documentation](#). This is critical for them to access public services, including 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 NGO, Heartland Alliance International, International Rescue Committee, INTERSOS, Legal Clinics Network and Terre des Hommes Italy – [have supported Iraqis to obtain more than 14,000 civil documents](#) while another 4,500 applications have been processed and are pending issuance. This was achieved through UNHCR’s close coordination with the Federal Mol to conduct [13 Civil Affairs Directorate \(CAD\) mobile missions](#) across the country which made it possible for individuals who are unable to access their areas of origin to apply for and secure their documentation. In tandem, UNHCR and partners provided [individualized legal counselling and representation services](#) to [over 17,000 people](#) to help them overcome administrative and legal barriers and obtain their civil documents.
- [Iraqis returning from North-East Syria](#): UNHCR also leads civil documentation efforts in Jeddah 1 Centre in Ninewa governorate which accommodates Iraqis who return from al-Hol camp in North-East Syria as part of organized return led by the Iraqi government. 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, a total of [51 civil documents have been issued for Jeddah 1 residents with UNHCR support](#), including Nationality Certificates and housing cards. At the same time, over 700 applications for some 1,600 people have been prepared for issuance for documentation pending the deployment of mobile missions by the Mol which are expected in early August 2024.

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. In this regard, UNHCR works with Federal and Kurdish authorities to develop [Administrative Instructions](#) (yet to be officially adopted) in Federal Iraq and the KR-I on processing of asylum claims and codifying of the procedures for issuing residency permits to refugees. In addition, UNHCR collaborates with the drafting Committee tasked with drafting a new refugee law, providing it with [technical advice](#) and commentaries on drafts of the bill to [ensure it aligns with international standards](#), as per its international refugee law supervisory mandate. While yet to be adopted, these legal reforms are [expected to improve the protection space](#) for refugees and asylum-seekers in Iraq.
- 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, particularly in Federal Iraq. By comparison, UNHCR prevented the refoulement of 430 individuals in the whole of 2023 while in the first half of 2024 alone, [more than 1,000 refugees and asylum-seekers have been prevented from being refouled](#). This trend is likely attributed to two factors: an administrative order issued in March 2024 by the Federal Mol which authorizes all heads of residency departments across Federal Iraq to deport foreigners who enter irregularly; and, a memorandum of understanding that was signed in May 2024 between the Federal Mol and the Syrian Mol on security cooperation in various areas, including combating terrorism and drug trafficking, border control, extradition of wanted persons and combatting organized crime.



Cash-based interventions

- For refugees and asylum-seekers who are assessed to be socio-economically vulnerable, UNHCR provides cash assistance to enable them to pay rent, buy food and other essentials, helping to prevent them from falling into dire poverty, and to decrease the risk of harmful coping strategies such as reducing food intake and accumulating debt. Since the start of 2024, UNHCR has provided [multipurpose cash assistance](#) to over 32,000 [socio-economically vulnerable refugees \(some 8,000 families\)](#). The most recent post-distribution monitoring exercise indicated that families spent their cash primarily on rent, food and health services. About 10% reported that the cash assistance had helped them send their children to school or pay expenses related to primary education.
- 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 the current initiatives to resume the Social Safety Net programme in the KR-I](#). This will ultimately help provide vulnerable refugees and asylum-seekers with more predictable support and facilitate their graduation from dependency on humanitarian assistance.



Education

- 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 completed the [construction of one new primary school](#) and [renovated another four primary schools](#) in Erbil governorate. Moreover, a total of [21 additional new classrooms](#) were built in existing schools in the KR-I and [six primary schools were renovated](#) in Sulaymaniah governorate. Overall, this helps increase the [capacity of the KR-I's public education system](#) to absorb more students from refugee and host communities and [improve the quality of education](#) for the approximately 49,800 refugee students who have enrolled for the 2023-2024 academic year.
- Nearly [2,000 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 have [supported some 90 refugee teachers](#) currently working in public schools in the KR-I, providing training and capacity building on pedagogy, life skills and psychosocial support.
- UNHCR is also providing a total of [114 refugee students in higher education](#) with a monthly allowance of 400,000 IQD (approximately USD 300) for the 2023-2024 academic year, as part of the Albert Einstein German Academic Refugee Initiative (also known as DAFI) scholarship programme.



Healthcare

- UNHCR supports the Directorates of Health (DoHs) in the KR-I to provide healthcare services for refugees and to integrate the remaining camp-based primary healthcare centres (PHCs) into the public healthcare system in the KR-I. In the first half of 2024, UNHCR [completed the construction of one new PHC](#) near Domiz 1 and 2 camps in Dohuk governorate and handed it over to the DoH. The facility, which is furnished by WHO, will [provide 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 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. During the same period, nearly [90,000 medical consultations](#) were recorded in PHCs supported by UNHCR, of which [84% were refugees](#) and [16% host community members](#).

 **Solutions**

- Given the **protracted nature of displacement for refugees and asylum-seekers** in Iraq as well as IDPs, 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 services** (such as health and education, child protection services), enhance their **access to livelihoods** and **advocate for accessing social protection schemes** in the KR-I on par with nationals. Meanwhile, for refugees with heightened protection risks, UNHCR pursues **resettlement to third countries**. In the first half of 2024, UNHCR submitted about **600 cases of most vulnerable refugees** for resettlement while **300 refugees departed** to resettlement countries. At the same time, UNHCR works to expand complementary pathways such as **scholarships** and **labour mobility opportunities** abroad. In 2024, UNHCR assisted **580 refugees** to access complementary pathways, 88 of whom departed to nine different countries.
- To enhance **long-term sustainable solutions for refugees and asylum-seekers**, UNHCR is collaborating with the UN Country Team in Iraq to shape the next iteration of the UN Sustainable Development Framework (UNSDCF) in 2025. Within this framework, the United Nations and the Government of Iraq have set four Strategic Priorities for the upcoming years: 1) Inclusive Social & Human Development, 2) Sustainable Economic Development & Livelihood Opportunities 3) Environment & Climate Change Resilience, and 4) Good Governance, Rule of Law, & Human Rights. UNHCR will primarily focus on the first and fourth strategic priorities, through **targeted interventions** that will focus on **strengthening national systems**, particularly in social and legal protection, to ensure they are **inclusive of refugees and asylum-seekers**.
- Regarding the IDPs, UNHCR **supports the government in finding and implementing dignified solutions for the approximately 143,000 IDPs who reside in the 22 remaining camps in the KR-I**. UNHCR supports the closure of camps as a general principle of out of camp policy as far as all three recognized solutions are offered based on voluntariness and well informed decision of IDPs:(1) **safe and voluntary return of IDPs to their areas of origin**, (2) **relocation to other communities within the country**, or (3) **local integration of IDPs in their areas of displacement**, including through integration in (urban) communities nearby existing camps or another area of the IDPs choosing. For the time that IDPs have to remain in camps, they should be supported to self-upgrade their shelters and continue to be provided with basic services in the national system. IDPs should be able to make **an informed and free decision on what durable solution corresponds best to their personal circumstances and conditions in return/displacement areas** and be supported once they have made a choice so that their solutions be not only dignified but also sustainable in the long term.

 **Special thanks to donors**

UNHCR thanks its major donors of unearmarked funds, as well as those who contributed directly to the Iraq operation and to the regional response for Syrian Refugee so far in 2024.

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LINKS

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