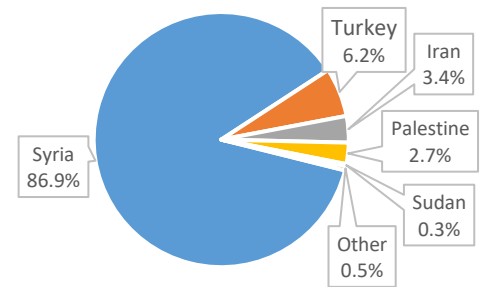


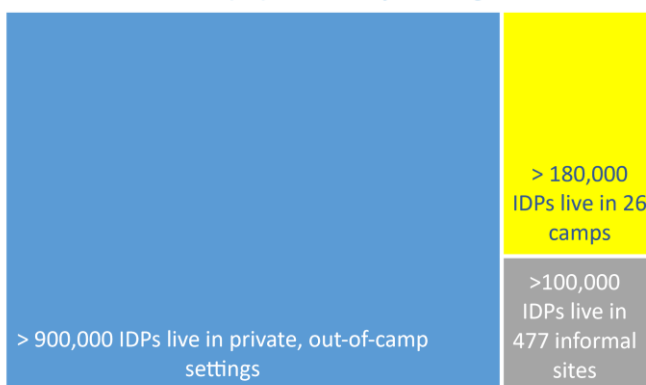
Operational context

Almost 1.2 million Iraqis continue to live in protracted situations of internal displacement and the country hosts over one-quarter of a million refugees. These displaced populations are often more vulnerable to protection risks—such as arbitrary arrest and detention, trauma and psychological stress, threat of eviction from their homes, and lack of access to essential services—than the population at large. For example, almost one-fifth of the out-of-camp IDPs report psycho-social distress, and just half have access to safe and adequate housing. Nearly one-in-five Syrian refugees rely on charity and cash assistance for food, and more than half report experiencing difficulties accessing healthcare services.

Refugees in Iraq: Country of Origin



IDP population by setting



While returns of displaced Iraqis to their home governorates consistently outnumber new displacements, many of those still in displacement are unable to go back for a range of reasons, including destroyed property, lack of livelihood opportunities, insecurity, fear and trauma, and perceived affiliation to extremist groups. As many as 90 percent have been displaced for more than three years and 70 percent for more than five years. Additionally, many Iraqis who have been able to return to their homes continue to live in substandard conditions, struggle to reintegrate, lack livelihood opportunities, and require support and assistance to access services and meet their basic needs.

While significant humanitarian support is still crucial for many, efforts in the country are gradually transitioning from humanitarian interventions and placing more focus on development interventions to support public institutions to deliver basic services and ensure their socio-economic integration. At the same time, Iraq's overall political, economic, and security environment remains unpredictable.

> 80 percent of IDPs plan to remain in their current location for the next 12 months; < 2 percent plan to go back to their place of origin.

Main activities

Protection

UNHCR is the mandated agency for the protection of refugees and stateless people and the lead of the protection cluster for IDPs in Iraq. It plays a critical role through direct interventions and by working with local, regional, and national authorities, other UN agencies, NGOs, and civil society partners to ensure that displaced people are safe and live with dignity.

Accordingly, UNHCR/partners provide legal assistance to individuals to secure their documentation; support safe spaces, counselling, and medical assistance for survivors of gender-based violence (GBV) as well as mental health and psycho-social support to help them and others cope with trauma and depression; and refer children in need of specialised services, such as alternative care arrangements.


Protection assessments, focus groups and interviews with those affected by displacement allow UNHCR and partners to better understand vulnerabilities, identify protection and assistance needs and inform activities to target the right individuals and communities with appropriate programmes. UNHCR also supports a range of ways for refugees, asylum seekers, and IDPs to directly raise their concerns, including through community representation structures, two-way communication through community-based volunteers and complaint mechanisms.

Almost one-quarter of IDP women of reproductive age report difficulties accessing specialised reproductive health services

Registration and documentation

Registration (refugees) and access to civil documentation (IDPs) are key protection interventions, mitigating against the risk of detention, refoulement and enabling access to public and humanitarian services. In Iraq, UNHCR

issues UNHCR certificates to persons seeking international protection. Further, UNHCR supports the Permanent Committee of the Ministry of the Interior to register refugees and asylum seekers across Iraq, and facilitates their access to humanitarian residency permits issued by the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KR-I) authorities for refugees in the KR-I. At the same time, UNHCR raises awareness and provides legal services to refugees for them to obtain civil status documents such as birth, marriage, and divorce certificates.

 Over 25 percent of IDPs and 16 percent of returnees lack at least one key household or individual document.

UNHCR supports IDPs and IDP returnees to obtain and renew their civil documentation including through legal advice and representation. UNHCR also supports mobile missions of Civil Affairs Directorates to IDP camps and urban areas with large IDP/returnee population groups to process civil document applications. Such documentation is essential to access public services as well as freedom of movement, compensation or inclusion in social safety nets.

Advocacy

UNHCR advocates with the government to develop legislative and policy frameworks that are in-line with international law/protection standards and good practices, as well as with humanitarian and development actors to include displaced populations in their programmes, IDPs and refugees alike.

Iraq is not party to the 1951 Refugee Convention and lacks a comprehensive refugee legal framework that aligns with international standards. UNHCR has been supporting the process of work towards adoption of a new refugee law for Iraq that would provide a sound legal framework for refugee protection and continues to advocate for adoption of the Refugee Bill. UNHCR also supports the drafting of Administrative Instructions for the Issuance of Humanitarian Residency Permits by the KR-I authorities which addresses some of the current gaps in the legal framework.

UNHCR also advocates on behalf of individuals and their families seeking asylum in Iraq to be protected from detention and possible expulsion as well as get documentation allowing them to stay and access public services.

Cash-based interventions

For individuals and families assessed as socio-economically vulnerable, UNHCR provides cash assistance for them to pay their rent, buy food and other essentials and thus, decrease the use of harmful coping mechanisms such as reducing food intake, accumulating debt, child labour or forced marriage. Cash assistance allows families to determine what they most need as well as contributes directly to the local economy. UNHCR in Iraq provides several types of cash assistance, including multi-purpose cash assistance, COVID-19, and winterization cash assistance.

In Iraq, UNHCR uses an econometric model based on its registration data to assess refugees' socio-economic and other vulnerability and identify those most in need of cash assistance. IDP families are selected for cash assistance based on the Socio-Economic Vulnerability Assessment Tool (SEVAT) and scoring methodology, which uses data collected through household visits. The methodology is currently under review to enhance the targeting to identify the most vulnerable for whom cash assistance is a lifeline.

Solutions and inclusion

Given the protracted nature of displacement in Iraq and the understanding that large-scale voluntary returns of Syrian refugees or remaining IDPs are not currently foreseen, UNHCR is working to promote longer-term solutions and enhance social and economic inclusion. This includes work to enhance access of displaced families to quality



[The Iraq Mol team processing IDP applications for civil documentations in Chamishku camp.](#) Photo credit: Harikar/Hasan

In April, with UNHCR support, the ad-hoc Committee of Iraq's Ministry of Interior conducted a civil documentation mission to Dohuk governorate. Over a week, the Committee processed 6,767 applications for core civil documents in camps and urban locations. In Dohuk governorate, over 29,000 IDPs lack two or more core civil documents.

public services, such as healthcare and education, as well as to promote access to livelihoods, through support to public service providers.

UNHCR is currently advocating for the [inclusion of refugees in employability and social protection initiatives](#) run by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs. Similarly, UNHCR aims to help development actors implement livelihood programmes to target refugees.

Through its area-based approach, UNHCR identifies locations where refugees and IDPs and IDP returnees live side by side with vulnerable host communities. In consultation with these communities and local authorities, it implements projects that benefit all, such as rehabilitating health centres, improved electrical or water infrastructure, or the provision of equipment for vocational training centres. Such projects help guarantee social cohesion and welcoming attitudes by host communities and authorities.

Such an approach seeks to hand over the responsibility to relevant public institutions at the municipal and governorate level to transform camps into formal settlements, allowing responsible disengagement of humanitarian actors and providing more institutional support to the Kurdistan Regional Government.

63 percent of Syrian refugees and over 1 million IDPs live outside of camps.

With specific reference to refugees and asylum seekers, UNHCR also pursues [resettlement to third countries for especially vulnerable individuals](#), as well as works to expand complementary pathways such as scholarships and labour mobility opportunities abroad.

Coordination and working with partners

UNHCR coordinates the response for all refugees in Iraq with the relevant authorities, UN agencies, and international and local partners. With respect to Syrian refugees, under the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (3RP), UNHCR leads the Protection, Basic Needs and Shelter sectors and co-leads the Health sector with WHO and works closely with the Ministry of Planning.

With respect to IDPs and IDP returnees, UNHCR leads the Protection, Camp Coordination and Camp Management (CCCM), and Shelter/Non-Food Items Clusters. UNHCR is engaged with the durable solutions architecture in Iraq, including through participation in the Durable Solutions Technical Working Group and Area Based Coordination bodies.

COVID-19 in Iraq

Iraq has confirmed over 2.3 million cases of COVID-19 and over 25,000 fatalities. Over, 2,900 cases have been confirmed among displaced populations (over 1,400 refugees and over 1,500 IDPs), including over 100 fatalities. The pandemic has disproportionately affected displaced populations: school closures more severely impacted children already at risk of exclusion from education due to their displacement status; displaced individuals who mainly work in the informal sector have seen their incomes reduced.

An assessment on the impact of COVID-19 on GBV in Iraq reported that 65 percent of service provision points reported an increase in one or more types of GBV, of which 94 percent reported a sharp increase in domestic violence.

According to the 2021 Multi-Sector Needs Assessment, 93 percent of Syrian refugees reported less income than pre-COVID-19, and 77 percent reported buying food on credit or with money borrowed from relatives and friends.

To ensure continued support to those in need during the pandemic, UNHCR Iraq adapted the way it delivers protection and assistance services by adopting remote approaches for its psycho-social support and protection monitoring activities, or through individual contacts or via social media for its awareness raising sessions. UNHCR and WHO successfully advocated with the Ministry to have refugees and IDPs included in the country's National Deployment and Vaccination Plan for COVID-19.

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