

Iraq

Multi-year Strategy 2025 – 2029



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1.1 Executive Summary

Iraq is on a path towards sustainable development with an expansion of its fiscal space due to increased oil revenues, despite a complex political and security environment. Iraq's current stability is expected to continue over this strategy's period although domestic politics between various sectarian groups as well as between Baghdad and Erbil, coupled with regional dynamics, often temporarily impact UNHCR's margin of manoeuvrability. The protection environment is expected to remain relatively favourable towards refugees and asylum-seekers from Syria and other countries (except for Afghans), particularly in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KR-I) where the majority reside and are able to access public services and livelihood opportunities. The international community is advocating for relevant public authorities to strengthen the quality and availability of services to their own population, including to support solutions for remaining internally displaced persons (IDPs), to further refugee inclusion as well as to enhance economic opportunities for all.

As of the end 2023, Iraq hosts over 300,000 refugees and asylum-seekers, predominantly Kurdish Syrians, and majority (over 90%) of whom live in the KR-I. In addition, over 1 million IDPs remain in Iraq, of whom over 100,000 live in 21 camps in the KR-I.

In this context, under its Multi-Year Strategy (MYS) 2025-2029, UNHCR's vision is to work towards ensuring that, by 2029, the displaced and stateless populations in Iraq are better protected and have full inclusive access to public quality basic and protection services as well as economic opportunities on par with nationals. To this end, UNHCR will seek to advance government-led development-oriented approaches, prioritizing the complete inclusion of refugees and asylum-seekers into legal and policy frameworks, as well as public services such as education, healthcare and protection services, alongside social protection schemes and economic opportunities, on par with Iraqis. UNHCR will support in coordination with development partners the strengthening of the capacity of public institutions in Federal Iraq and the KR-I to fully assume the delivery of such services of quality and capacitate refugee communities to prevent and respond to protection risks, ensuring their independence from humanitarian aid. UNHCR will in parallel continue to advocate for resettlement quotas and enhanced complementary pathways for refugees while also seeking to diversify the funding base and opportunities to include development and private donor engagement. While many IDPs hope to return to their homes at some point, many because of their specific profiles, such as Ezidis or Sunni Arabs with perceived affiliations with extremist groups, may continue being

unable or unwilling to do so. Accordingly, UNHCR will continue to advocate for alternative solutions, such as integration in their current areas of displacement or relocation to other regions in Iraq.

This strategy aligns with the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) and broader transition in Iraq from a humanitarian response to development approaches as well as the objectives of the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR), particularly on enhancing refugee self-reliance and operationalising the Government of Iraq's and the UN Country Team's commitments at the 2023 Global Refugee Forum (GRF).

UNHCR will continue to closely monitor local and regional dynamics including the situation in Syria, Türkiye and Iran and the conflicts in Gaza and Lebanon in terms of implications regarding security, economic situation and movement of forcibly displaced populations. However, UNHCR's operational footprint and programmes are not expected to be affected by these developments save in case of a change in the nature of military operations in north-east Syria that would trigger a (limited) influx to the KR-I, for which the Office maintains an active contingency plan.

1.2 Situation Analysis

Iraq is at a turning point on its path towards sustainable development, leaving behind the effects of three decades of political turmoil and armed conflicts that deeply impacted its people and public services delivery. Since the defeat of Da'esh in 2017, the situation in Iraq has been relatively stable, although it remains erratic due to in-country sporadic attacks by extremist groups and regional dynamics coupled with complex domestic politics. Since the outset of the Gaza conflict in October 2023, incidents by armed militias have surged, raising concerns of Iraq being drawn into a regional conflict.

Political relations between the Government of Iraq (GoI) and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) are complex, particularly regarding public budget and oil revenue shares, management of disputed territories, representation in Federal institutions, and the stalled Sinjar Agreement to address security and administrative issues in Sinjar District and Ezidis' return and future. Iraq's economy remains fragile, and the Government's 2023-2025 budget is heavily dependent on oil revenues, with oil exports accounting for 87% (over \$90 billion) of the total estimated national revenue, making the economy vulnerable to global oil price fluctuations. The non-oil sector has seen some growth, but structural reforms are required to foster private sector development and economic diversification. Currently, most Iraqis (some 62%) make a living through being

civil servants while a quarter of the population live in poverty finding irregular livelihood opportunities in the informal sector. At the same time, public debt is expected to double from 44% to 86% by 2029 due to a projected increase of fiscal deficit and decline in oil prices as projected by the report of the International Monetary Fund mission to Iraq in 2024

As of end 2023, Iraq hosts over 300,000 refugees and asylum-seekers, predominantly Kurdish Syrians, the majority of whom live in the KR-I (over 270,000). In addition, over 1 million IDPs remain in Iraq, of whom over 100,000 live in 21 camps in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KR-I).

Overall, the protection environment is relatively favourable for refugees and asylum-seekers in Iraq, particularly in the KR-I, where refugees and asylum-seekers access public services, such as healthcare and education on par with nationals, and pursue livelihood opportunities mainly in the informal sector. Nonetheless, Iraq continues to lack a comprehensive legal framework governing the status and protection of refugees in line with international standards and best practices. As a result, access to territory, asylum procedures and residency documentation vary depending on the country of origin, the mode and the year of entry into Iraq and place of residence in the country.

Despite UNHCR's advocacy, some asylum-seekers from certain countries such as Afghans are still barred from registering with the authorities or UNHCR, due to ad hoc policies and administrative instructions. As a result, those in need of international protection are left with no choice but to take unsafe irregular routes to enter Iraq and to reside there without being able to regularize their stay as asylum-seekers. Recent decisions issued in 2024 could lead to arrests and at times deportations of Syrians, if they are unable to regularise their stay. In this respect, in Federal Iraq, a 2019 decree by the National Security Committee categorizes Syrians arriving after April 2019 as individuals displaced from border areas rather than as refugees, undermining their protection against refoulement. The issuance of asylum/residency documents by the Permanent Committee of the Ministry of Interior (PC-MoI) in Federal Iraq is expected to be accelerated and expanded. Finally, refugees and asylum-seekers face restrictions on their freedom of movement between the KR-I and Federal Iraq in large part due to the different approaches applied by the GoI and KRG regarding legal status and residency documentation.

Syrian refugees have limited prospects for return in the immediate future given the insecurity and ongoing human rights and humanitarian law violations and abuse, particularly in north-east Syria from where most of them originate. Furthermore, while resettlement remains a critical protection tool for the most vulnerable refugees facing immediate protection risks, it has historically been a limited solution for refugees in Iraq with limited resettlement quotas, which are expected to dwindle further in the coming years.

The protracted displacement of IDPs in Iraq is no longer linked to the presence of Da'esh in their areas of origin, but to a number of different factors that are unique to each displaced individual/family given their profile (from Ezidis to Arab Sunnis originally from areas now disputed or blocked or due to perceived affiliations with extremist groups), their socio-economic status, as well as the situation in their area of origin, such as lack of access to basic public services, adequate housing and livelihood opportunities as well as the absence of accountability and reconciliation mechanisms. The remaining needs of this population are, therefore, largely driven by socio-economic factors, human rights deficits, and the absence of the rule of law – and no longer by their displacement status – which are addressed more effectively through sustainable development interventions.

Over the period from 2025 to 2029, the situation in Iraq is expected to remain relatively stable, with no major refugee influx anticipated – save a limited one from north-east Syria in case of a change of military tactics there, and from Lebanon should the conflict further escalate. Iraq will continue to extend protection to refugees and asylum-seekers from Syria and other countries, and the protection environment is expected to remain favourable in the KR-I given that the vast majority of asylum-seekers admitted to the territory are of Kurdish ethnic origin and would improve in Federal Iraq provided that the new refugee bill is adopted and fully implemented which will provide refugee protection under the Government asylum system. Furthermore, the KRG is expected to continue to provide refugees and asylum-seekers with residency documents and non-discriminatory access to public services on par with nationals, while Federal Iraq will continue to be supported to issue residency documents. At the same time, with the transition to development approaches and downward trajectory in humanitarian funding to Iraq, more humanitarian actors will gradually phase out their interventions while development actors are expected to assume a more prominent role in strengthening the capacity of public service providers to continue including refugees and strengthening refugee self-reliance both in KR-I and Federal Iraq.

Against this background, UNHCR's MYS 2025-2029 is underpinned by government-led development-oriented approaches and focuses on the full inclusion of refugees and asylum-seekers in legal and policy frameworks; public services, such as education, healthcare and protection services; social protection schemes; and the local economy on par with the rest of the population in Iraq. Accordingly, it places emphasis on strengthening the capacity of public institutions in Federal Iraq and the KR-I to fully assume the delivery of quality public protection-related and other services, such as education and health, to refugees and asylum-seekers while gradually shifting away from parallel structures run or (financially) supported by humanitarian actors. This strategy aligns with the broader transition in Iraq from a humanitarian response to development approaches as well as the objectives of the Global Compact on Refugees, particularly on enhancing refugee self-reliance, and the Iraq 2025-2029 United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework.

Moreover, Iraq's commitments at the 2023 Global Refugee Forum – to enact a refugee law in line with international standards, ensure continued access of refugees to public services and enhance their inclusion in the national education system – coupled by the UN Country Team's pledge to support these efforts provide promising opportunities to achieve fully the inclusion and self-reliance agenda.

In implementing this strategy, UNHCR will collaborate with a diverse range of stakeholders, taking on a catalytic role to further cultivate partnerships, especially in relation to expanding refugees' economic self-reliance. Given the development-oriented approach and inclusion agenda, UNHCR will continue working closely with Government partners in Federal Iraq and the KR-I, including the Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Planning, Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and other key line ministries. UNHCR will enhance collaboration with sister agencies and development actors, such as International Financial Institutions and national development agencies to include refugees in their programmes, and with private sector actors to advance refugee economic inclusion.

Furthermore, UNHCR will further advance localization by increasing engagement with national non-governmental organizations and refugee-led organizations as well as refugees themselves, supporting their meaningful participation in addressing protection risks and implementing sustainable solutions in their communities.

1.3 Vision and Strategic Orientation

UNHCR's multi-year strategy 2025-2029 is aligned with the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) 2025-2029 and Iraq National Development Plan, which is currently under development. To successfully attain UNHCR's strategic priorities, refugees are now included in the overall efforts of the UN in relation to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This approach exemplifies the commitment and joint dedication of the Government of Iraq (GoI) and the UN to include all individuals and groups of people residing on Iraqi territory in their development endeavours. While challenges should not be underestimated, Iraq is well positioned to leverage its significant natural resources and, more importantly, the potential of its young population to make the transformative changes necessary to achieve the 2030 Agenda.

To facilitate the shift from humanitarian aid and parallel refugee assistance systems towards sustainable development solutions, refugees have been identified as a vulnerable group in the 2023 United Nations Common Country Analysis (CCA) due to their specific circumstances. The development of the UNSDCF draws from the CCA and entails a collaborative effort with various stakeholders and consultations with Government authorities at national and regional levels and is overseen by the Office of

the Resident Coordinator. By aligning the UNSDCF with Federal Iraq's Vision 2030 and the Kurdistan Regional Government's plans, UNHCR has a unique opportunity to utilize this common framework to ensure sustainable support for refugees. Through strengthened government engagement, UNHCR can leverage its catalytic role to drive solutions for refugees through inclusion and continue prioritizing core protection activities for the most vulnerable populations. Specially, UNHCR will further its advocacy and provide its technical expertise in relation to the inclusion of refugees with respect to SDG goals 1 (No Poverty), 3 (Good Health and Wellbeing), 4 (Education for All), 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), and 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions).

Based on this context and related planning scenarios, UNHCR formulated its vision and strategic direction for the multi-year strategy 2025-2029.

Vision statement: " By 2029, displaced populations and stateless persons in Iraq are better protected and have full inclusive access to quality basic and protection services as well as economic opportunities on par with nationals provided by the GoI."

To this end, UNHCR's multi-year strategy is premised on the aspirations that forcibly displaced and stateless people in Iraq should have the opportunity to lead dignified lives, achieve self-sufficiency and enjoy equal access to essential services and economic opportunities on par with nationals.

The Office has identified two key strategic priorities for the strategy. The first objective is to ensure that refugees and asylum-seekers in Iraq continue to enjoy a favourable protection environment starting with safe access to territory, and residency and documentation guaranteeing their rights as asylum-seekers or refugees provided by the relevant authorities. Achieving this strategic priority will require sustained advocacy and technical support both at Federal Iraq and KR-I levels with a view to amending the current legal and policy frameworks including enacting a new refugee law to make them more closely aligned with international standards and good practices as per the pledge made by the GoI at the Global Refugee Forum.

Further efforts will also be directed at completing the inclusion of refugees into national systems including protection services and Social Safety Net (SSN) (as inclusion is almost fully achieved regarding education and health, especially in the KR-I) through a responsible shift away from parallel structures currently providing such services to refugees and asylum-seekers.

UNHCR will also focus on empowering refugee communities to realize their full potential – especially in relation to economic self-reliance and through taking on greater roles in supporting their inclusion in public services and policies as well as in the local economy. This will also enable refugees and asylum-seekers to prevent and respond to identified protection risks and ensure their independence from external aid.

The UN Environment Programme positions Iraq as the world's fifth most vulnerable country to climatic changes. The nation's environmental fabric is under strain with manifestations ranging from recurrent droughts and floods to extreme heat events. Acknowledging the magnitude of the issue, resource and specialisation required, UNHCR will focus on embedding environmental considerations in its projects.

In summary, UNHCR in Iraq will work on the below two strategic priorities for the 2025-2029 multi-year strategy.

Protect: By 2029, ensure refugees and asylum-seekers as well as vulnerable Iraqis in Iraq enjoy a favourable protection environment facilitated by the GoI (access to territory/rights to asylum, documentation/residency).

Solve: By 2029, complete the inclusion of refugees in public service systems/policies for education, health and SSN as well as protection services and support their inclusion in economic opportunities on par with local communities while implementing alternative solutions for the most vulnerable and reinforcing refugee communities' and individuals' resilience.

1.4 Fair Access and Representation

Further advancing the age, gender and diversity (AGD) approach is essential to ensure inclusive and representative protection results for all without discrimination. Therefore, UNHCR will continue to pursue all its advocacy and technical support to public authorities and United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) partners through the application of the AGD approach in line with the 2030 Agenda.

In order to understand needs, capacities and level of access to public services and decision-making processes affecting refugees' lives UNHCR will uphold its accountability to affected people (AAP) including through active and regular engagement with forcibly displaced communities of different ages, genders and diversity (including persons with disabilities, older persons and other marginalized among others). By doing so, UNHCR will be able to consistently monitor progress regarding inclusion objectives in each sector, including access to specialized protection services for persons with specific needs and diverse profiles across the AGD spectrum and identify critical gaps with the aim to ensuring inclusive responses. This will be achieved by adopting a two-pronged approach which will include: i) tailoring specific interventions to target most vulnerable to discrimination or exclusion and, ii) effectively advocating for their equitable access to public services. Regular community feedback through consultations and complaint mechanisms will provide the necessary data to analyse

progress and eventually address shortcoming in terms of accessibility, availability, affordability and quality of services.

UNHCR Iraq will continue collecting, analysing and using disaggregated data at a minimum by sex, age, and disability for evidence-based programming ultimately to ensure that different groups have their distinct needs addressed through appropriate services. Leveraging its comparative advantage, UNHCR will promote the application of AGD considerations in its own assessment and monitoring as well as advocacy and technical advice but also within the UNSDCF's monitoring and oversight frameworks. Moreover, UNHCR will play a pivotal role within the UNSDCF and in bilateral engagement with Government counterparts and relevant development actors in advocating for the centrality of AGD in sectoral interventions, particularly with regards to: i) data disaggregation and its relevance in informing/developing inclusive law and policies; ii) participation of vulnerable groups in tackling discrimination based on age, gender and diversity; iii) empowerment of communities to enhance their ability to claim their rights and, lastly, iv) the overall AGD's applicability in promoting long-term sustainable solutions through development approaches.

2. Impact Statements

Impact statement

By 2029, refugees, asylum seekers as well as vulnerable Iraqi in Iraq enjoy a safe protection environment facilitated by the government of Iraq.

Impact area: Attaining favourable protection environments

Outcome statements

Refugees and asylum-seekers enjoy non-discriminatory access to territory including quality registration and timely issuance of documentation

Outcome area: Access to territory, registration and documentation

The Government of Iraq promotes and develops inclusive legislation, policies and procedures on refugees and asylum-seekers that are in accordance with international norms and standards.

Outcome area: Protection policy and law

All citizens entitled by domestic law to Iraqi nationality have their national identification documents secured

Outcome area: Protection policy and law

Impact statement

By 2029, complete the inclusion of refugees in public service systems/policies for education, health and social safety nets as well as protection services and economic opportunities at par with local communities, while empowering refugee community structure to advocate on their own , and find alternative solutions for the most vulnerable

Impact area: Securing solutions

Outcome statements

Most vulnerable refugees have access to basic needs assistance and are included in social protection schemes.

Outcome area: Well-being and basic needs

National institutions are capacitated to provide inclusive, comprehensive, and accessible protection services for individuals with specific needs (child protection and gender-based violence)

Outcome area: Gender-based violence

Refugees and asylum-seekers have non-discriminatory access to quality and inclusive public services for education, health and mental health and psychosocial support.

Outcome area: Local integration and other local solutions

Achieve sustainable economic integration for refugees and asylum seekers through equitable access to economic opportunities.

Outcome area: Self-reliance, economic inclusion and livelihoods

The most vulnerable refugees in Iraq whose protection needs cannot be met through inclusion in national systems have access to durable solutions through resettlement to third countries or through complementary pathways.

Outcome area: Resettlement and complementary pathways

Refugee communities are able to prevent and respond to self-identified protection risks and harm and advocate on their own for inclusion into public services.

Outcome area: Community engagement and women's empowerment

3. Iraq 2025 Indicators and Targets

Country	Results Level	Result Area	Indicator	Population Type	Baseline	Target 2025
Iraq	Impact	IA1: Protect	1.1 Proportion of people	Refugees	51%	Not

			seeking international protection who are able to access asylum procedures	and Asylum-seekers		applicable
Iraq	Impact	IA1: Protect	1.2 Proportion of people who are able to move freely within the country of habitual residence	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	90%	Not applicable
Iraq	Impact	IA2: Respond	2.2 Proportion of people residing in physically safe and secure settlements with access to basic facilities	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	69%	Not applicable
Iraq	Impact	IA2: Respond	2.3 Proportion of people with access to health services	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	100%	Not applicable
Iraq	Impact	IA3: Empower	3.1 Proportion of people who have the right to decent work	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	55%	Not applicable
Iraq	Impact	IA3: Empower	3.2a Proportion of children and young people enrolled in primary education	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	77%	Not applicable
Iraq	Impact	IA3: Empower	3.2b Proportion of children and young people enrolled in secondary education	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	31%	Not applicable
Iraq	Impact	IA3: Empower	3.3 Proportion of people feeling safe walking alone in their neighbourhood after dark	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	98%	Not applicable
Iraq	Impact	IA4: Solve	4.1 Number of refugees who voluntarily return in safety and dignity to their country of origin	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	2,338	Not applicable
Iraq	Impact	IA4: Solve	4.2a Number of people who departed on resettlement	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	1,243	Not applicable
Iraq	Impact	IA4: Solve	4.2b Number of people who departed through complementary pathways	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	165	Not applicable
Iraq	Outcome	OA1: Access/Doc	1.1 Proportion of refugees and asylum seekers registered on an individual basis	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	91%	100%
Iraq	Outcome	OA1: Access/Doc	1.2 Proportion of children under 5 years of age whose births have been registered with a civil	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	83%	100%

			authority			
Iraq	Outcome	OA1: Access/Doc	1.3 Proportion of people with legally recognized identity documents or credentials	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	100%	100%
Iraq	Outcome	OA3: Policy/Law	3.1 Extent national legal framework is in line with the 1951 Convention and/or its 1967 Protocol	None	Not yet aligned: ≤69 points	To be confirmed
Iraq	Outcome	OA3: Policy/Law	3.2 Extent national legal framework is in line with the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness	None	Not yet aligned: ≤69 points	To be confirmed
Iraq	Outcome	OA4: GBV	4.1 Proportion of people who know where to access available GBV services	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	71%	75%
Iraq	Outcome	OA4: GBV	4.2 Proportion of people who do not accept violence against women	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	93%	100%
Iraq	Outcome	OA4: GBV	4.3 Proportion of survivors who are satisfied with GBV case management services	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	99%	100%
Iraq	Outcome	OA5: Children	5.1 Proportion of children at heightened risk who are supported by a Best Interests Procedure	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	20%	50%
Iraq	Outcome	OA5: Children	5.2 Proportion of children who participate in community-based child protection programmes	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	10%	50%
Iraq	Outcome	OA5: Children	5.3 Proportion of unaccompanied and separated children who are in an alternative care arrangement	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	27%	30%
Iraq	Outcome	OA7: Community	7.1 Extent participation of displaced and stateless people across programme phases is supported.	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	Extensive: ≥70 points	To be confirmed
Iraq	Outcome	OA7: Community	7.2 Proportion of people who have access to safe feedback and response mechanisms	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	100%	100%
Iraq	Outcome	OA7: Community	7.3 Proportion of women participating in	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	50%	50%

			leadership/management structures	seekers		
Iraq	Outcome	OA8: Well-being	8.1 Proportion of people that receive cash transfers and/or non-food items	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	55%	55%
Iraq	Outcome	OA8: Well-being	8.2 Proportion of people with primary reliance on clean (cooking) fuels and technology	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	99%	100%
Iraq	Outcome	OA10: Health	10.1 Proportion of children aged 9 months to five years who have received measles vaccination	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	89%	100%
Iraq	Outcome	OA10: Health	10.2. Proportion of births attended by skilled health personnel	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	99%	100%
Iraq	Outcome	OA11: Education	11.1 Proportion of young people enrolled in tertiary and higher education	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	1%	2%
Iraq	Outcome	OA11: Education	11.2 Proportion of children and young people enrolled in the national education system	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	67%	70%
Iraq	Outcome	OA13: Livelihood	13.1. Proportion of people with an account at a bank or other financial institution or with a mobile-money-service provider	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	To be confirmed	10%
Iraq	Outcome	OA13: Livelihood	13.2. Proportion of people who self-report positive changes in their income compared to previous year	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	To be confirmed	20%
Iraq	Outcome	OA13: Livelihood	13.3 Proportion of people (working age) who are unemployed	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	25%	40%
Iraq	Outcome	OA15: Resettle	15.1 Number of refugees submitted by UNHCR for resettlement	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	2,803	To be confirmed
Iraq	Outcome	OA16: Integrate	16.2 Proportion of people covered by national social protection systems	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	0%	10%