




IRAQ | UNHCR COVID-19 UPDATE XI

The COVID-19 situation in Iraq continues to evolve rapidly. The number of individuals who have contracted the virus increased sharply during the past weeks, reaching **34,502 confirmed cases** on 23 June throughout the country; double the number of cases in comparison to the last update, with an average of over 1,400 daily positive cases. More than 40 per cent of these cases have been detected in Baghdad Governorate. Likewise, the number of deaths due to the virus has significantly increased as well, with a total of 1,252 to date.

COVID-19 CASES IN IRAQ: 34,502

 Active 17,498
  Recovered 15,753
  Deaths 1,252

COVID-19 CASES AMONG PERSONS OF CONCERN: 14

 Active 11
  Recovered 2
  Deaths 1



Ongoing distribution of cash assistance to ensure access of vulnerable IDPs and refugees to sanitary items © UNHCR|R. Hussein

OPERATIONAL CONTEXT

Following the continued increase in the number of infections, the Government of Iraq (GoI) and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) have announced an extension of movement restrictions until 1 July. In central and southern governorates, the curfew is applied from 6PM to 5AM during weekdays and 24H during weekends. In the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KR-I), movements between governorates are currently forbidden, and within the governorates are strictly limited, including complete lockdown from 10PM to 5AM in Erbil. In addition, mass gatherings and most public spaces will remain closed countrywide until further notice, and the ban of commercial flights and closure of borders has also been extended until 1 July. In his latest statement, the Iraqi Minister of Health has warned that the rise in the number of infections indicates that the pandemic is entering its peak phase and that this poses a major strain on the health system. The GoI further announced that the government plans to open 400-bed hospitals in the most affected provinces as soon as possible.

COVID-19 PROTECTION RISKS AND CHALLENGES

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 outbreak in Iraq in March 2020, vulnerable displaced families have been among the most affected by the virus. The main risks and challenges identified include:

- Lack of livelihood opportunities and its socio-economic consequences;
- Closure of border crossing points preventing the arrival of refugees;
- Challenges to access camps and reach persons of concern in certain locations;
- Rise of domestic violence and Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV);
- Halt of education activities;
- Rise in the price of food and other basic items.

According to UNHCR's feedback and complaint mechanisms, and ongoing remote protection monitoring, the main concern raised by refugees, IDPs, returnees, and stateless persons across Iraq is the inability to access livelihood opportunities. Most individuals affected by displacement were living on daily wages, and the current movement restrictions have significantly affected their ability to make ends meet. This has translated into an increase in the number of individuals resorting to negative coping mechanisms. In addition, closure of borders preventing vulnerable individuals from seeking asylum and protection in Iraq is of particular concern. While the Peshkhabour Border Crossing Point (PKBCP) has been opening intermittently for individuals wishing to return to Syria, so far, no movements have been allowed from Syria to KR-I. UNHCR continues to advocate with the GoI and the KRG to explore alternative options to enable the arrival of asylum-seekers in a safe manner. Challenges to reach persons of concern in certain locations, psychological trauma, stress and anxiety, halt of education activities, the rise of domestic violence, and lack of access to health care, among others, have also been raised widely as a direct concern by those affected by displacement.

As of 22 June, **a total of 14 COVID-19 cases have been identified affecting UNHCR persons of concern**, including two recoveries and one death. UNHCR is in regular contact with authorities at the federal, regional, and governorate level and has ensured that all refugees, IDPs, returnees, and stateless persons are included in national COVID-19 prevention and response plans, particularly with regards to access to treatment and health facilities. So far, all cases have received adequate assistance from UNHCR and the respective health authorities. UNHCR is coordinating closely with the Directorates of Health (DoH) of the affected areas and is monitoring the situation closely. Contact tracing and testing have been conducted, and Camp Coordination and Camp Management COVID-19 preparedness and response plans have been activated and implemented in all affected camps, including strict movement restrictions.

ONGOING DISTRIBUTION OF COVID-19 SPECIFIC ASSISTANCE

UNHCR is supporting families' access to basic hygiene items through the distribution of cash assistance and sanitary kits, as part of its efforts to limit the spread of the virus and preserve the well-being of refugees, IDPs, and returnees across Iraq. To date, over **62,800 displaced families (over 361,000 individuals) have cashed out their assistance** (15,298 refugee families and 47,521 IDP families). Through this intervention, provided funding is available, UNHCR aims to assist over 125,000 vulnerable displaced families throughout the country. Further to the cash assistance, UNHCR has also distributed **over 36,000 dignity kits** (including hygiene and sanitary items) for women and girls of reproductive age living in IDP and refugee camps. Meet Farhad, one of the thousands of Syrian refugees living in KR-I being supported with cash assistance by UNHCR: [Farhad's story](#).

In addition to the distribution of cash assistance and sanitary kits, since the beginning of the outbreak UNHCR has been implementing a series of activities aiming to reduce the spread of the virus in Iraq and particularly among the most vulnerable populations. These activities include health awareness campaigns on COVID-19, which have been implemented in all refugee camps in Iraq as well as in most IDP camps and accessible urban areas with a high concentration of displaced individuals. As of mid-June, **32,400 brochures and 1,000 posters on COVID-19 preventive measures** have been distributed to persons of concern, camp-based Primary Health Care Centres (PHCC), camp management, and community outreach volunteers.

As part of the response to the COVID-19 outbreak in Iraq, UNHCR has also provided medical protective personnel equipment (PPE), masks with filters, disposable shoes, surgical masks, gloves, and disposable medical gowns to medical staff in camps and at borders. As of mid-June, UNHCR has procured 6,000 masks, 10,200 pairs of gloves, 10,200 disposable shoes, 4,900 disposable medical gowns, and more than 150 full-body PPE suits and 150 masks with filters to be used in camp-based PHCCs and at borders, with supply to continue over time. Furthermore, UNHCR has provided training to PHCCs staff on case definition, detection, and management of COVID-19 cases, and is in direct contact with public health authorities to support them in other areas.

UNHCR OVERALL RESPONSE

Most basic services continue to function (albeit at limited capacity) in camps and areas with a high density of displaced populations. UNHCR has adopted new distribution modalities to ensure assistance continues to be delivered, including door-to-door assistance to avoid mass gatherings and respect social distancing, mobile money and iris payment authentication for cash support, and remote protection monitoring, legal counselling, and psychosocial support, among others.

FUNDING NEEDS

UNHCR in Iraq is urgently appealing for US\$35.7 million to scale-up its activities in response to the COVID-19 outbreak. The operation is immensely grateful for the swift support of US\$ 6.5M from the [United States of America](#), US\$1.5M from [Japan](#), and US\$ 135,000 from [Badr Jafar](#), that allows to cover the most immediate health, protection, and basic needs of vulnerable displaced families in Iraq.

At this critical time, humanitarian action to save lives and alleviate the suffering of vulnerable populations remains imperative. UNHCR further appeals to donors not to deprioritize funding for regular programmes and thanks major donors of un-earmarked and broadly earmarked funds as well as donors who have contributed directly to Iraq operation in 2020 (*as of 10 June*)

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