

## IRAQ | UNHCR COVID-19 UPDATE IV

**COUNTRY SITUATION** *confirmed cases in Iraq: 1,378 | confirmed cases affecting UNHCR persons of concern: 0*

As of 14 April, 1,378 COVID-19 cases have been confirmed in Iraq, with 77 fatalities, most of which in Baghdad, followed by Basrah and Kerbala. For the time being, no cases have been identified affecting UNHCR persons of concern. Current curfews and movement restrictions across Iraq remain in place until 18 April, except for life-saving and humanitarian activities. The widespread respect to the postponement of religious gatherings where millions of pilgrims were expected to assemble has helped contain the spread of the virus and has given the country a wider margin of time to stabilize the outbreak.

### REFUGEES & IDPS CONTRIBUTE TO THE RESPONSE

Everyone counts and everyone has a role to play in fighting the virus. Refugees and IDPs in Iraq are also showing solidarity and contributing to the COVID-19 response. In Sulaymaniyah, in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, vulnerable displaced individuals are helping produce Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) through a sewing factory supported by a UNHCR Quick Impact Project. The factory is currently producing up to 2,000 pieces per day which are manufactured according to the standards of the Department of Health, and later distributed to communities, health facilities, and medical teams across the country, where they are most needed<sup>2</sup>.



Refugees & IDPs contributing to the COVID-19 response in Iraq

**In these challenging times, aid must not become a victim of COVID-19.** Humanitarian action to save lives and alleviate the suffering of vulnerable populations remains imperative. Additional resources are needed to prevent the spread of the virus in Iraq and ensure that existing humanitarian programmes, on which the lives and welfare of millions of people depend, continue.

**UNHCR in Iraq is urgently appealing for \$26 million** to scale-up its activities in response of the COVID-19 outbreak, including:

- Ensuring access to basic hygiene items through the distribution of cash assistance
- Health promotion and awareness raising
- Provision of medical equipment
- Training of health workers
- Strengthening health care services in camps
- Improving referral systems
- Ensuring access to MHPSS<sup>1</sup> services
- Support early detection of positive cases
- Enhancing disinfection activities in camps

### COVID-19 PROTECTION RISKS AND CHALLENGES

**No COVID-19 cases have been identified among UNHCR Persons of Concern (PoC)** including refugees, internally displaced persons, returnees, and stateless persons to date. UNHCR maintains daily contact with camp management teams across the country as well as with community outreach volunteers and community mobilizers to monitor the situation of PoC residing in camps and in urban, peri-urban, and rural areas. Field and protection staff continue to follow all protocols established by the government for suspected COVID-19 positive cases, which instruct to refer suspected cases to national designated centres for testing.

<sup>1</sup> Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS)

<sup>2</sup> Link to story: [Refugees and IDPs in Iraq are helping produce Personal Protective Equipment \(PPE\)](#)

While no cases have been reported among persons of concern to UNHCR, the curfew and movement restriction measures adopted to date continue to affect the implementation of some activities, and certain COVID-19 related protection risks and challenges have been reported in the past weeks, including:

- **Closure of borders preventing movement of refugees:** Iraqi borders remain closed, including to asylum-seekers. UNHCR continues to advocate with the Kurdistan Regional Government for the re-opening of border crossing points to allow movement of refugees and asylum-seekers.
- **Challenges to access camps and reach persons of concern in certain governorates:** although humanitarian activities are in principle exempted from movement restrictions, in certain governorates, UNHCR and partners keep facing difficulties to deliver assistance due to challenges in accessing camps and reaching persons of concern.
- **Lack of access to livelihood opportunities:** the main concern raised by refugees and internally displaced persons across Iraq under the current context continues to be the lack of access to livelihood opportunities. The socioeconomic toll caused by the curfew is having a heavy impact on displaced families, particularly on those in camps, as most of them are engaged in daily wage labour activities. Camp management, community outreach volunteers, and hotlines receive ongoing requests for additional assistance to make ends meet. Many families are incurring in debt and selling livelihood assets to afford basic items and there is a growing risk of families resorting to negative coping mechanisms.
- **Increase in the price of basic food items:** camp management staff are reporting an increase in food prices and a shortage of certain products in camp markets. This is occurring despite government instructions to the chambers of commerce to monitor and control prices in markets and pharmacies. The rise of prices is further hindering the access of refugee and IDP families to daily basic items.

## UNHCR RESPONSE

UNHCR continues to maintain regular contact with federal and local health authorities and has ensured the inclusion of all persons of concern in national COVID-19 preparedness and response plans. At the moment, public health facilities throughout the country continue offering services to all affected cases.

Should pressure increase for public health facilities, UNHCR has developed a contingency plan to ensure that all critical life-saving services and assistance continue to be delivered to all vulnerable displaced individuals across the country, particularly in refugee and IDP camps. The COVID-19 response and measures have been incorporated in the existing Iraq Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) and the Iraqi Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (3RP) in conjunction with instructions from the Government of Iraq and the Kurdistan Regional Government. UNHCR has well established procedures to continue providing services and maintain presence in the field in challenging situations. Under the current context, most basic services continue to function (albeit at limited capacity) in camps and in 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 and telephone modalities for cash support, legal counselling, and other activities to avoid mass gatherings and respect social distancing.



*IDPs respecting social distancing during distribution of cash*

Beyond regular activities, in its efforts to limit the spread of the virus and preserve the well-being of vulnerable displaced families in Iraq, UNHCR is currently implementing a series of measures across the country including: dissemination of guidance and fact-based information on prevention measures through health promotion and awareness activities; improvement of access to basic hygiene items through the distribution of cash assistance; provision of medical Protective Personnel Equipment (PPE) for staff at borders and in camps; disinfection of public areas in camps; and training of health workers on early case definition and detection, among others.