

IRAQ | UNHCR COVID-19 UPDATE VI

COUNTRY SITUATION *confirmed cases in Iraq: 1,928 | confirmed cases affecting UNHCR persons of concern: 1*

Over the course of the last week, the number of new confirmed COVID-19 cases in Iraq has fallen. As of 28 April, 1,928 COVID-19 cases have been confirmed across the country, with 90 fatalities, most of which in Baghdad, Basrah and Kerbala.

A 32-year-old Syrian man residing in Darashakran camp tested positive for COVID-19 on 26 April. His case was identified upon his return to the camp after working for a few days in a private company in Erbil city. As per the camp procedures anyone who leaves the camp must go for testing before re-entering the camp. He has been admitted to the Emergency Central Hospital. His family members and close neighbours were also tested; however, their tests were negative. They have, however, been placed in quarantine as a precaution. Five other Syrian refugees who reside in the camp and work in the same company have also been tested, but they were all negative. Another family with a member who worked in the same company as the refugee who has covid-19, residing in Qushtapa camp, was also tested. Their tests came back negative; however, they will remain in isolation as a precautionary measure.

UNHCR is coordinating closely with the camp management, Directorate of Health (DoH) Erbil and camp primary health care clinics in Darashakran and Qushtapa to ensure preventive measures are taken. Both camps have been put under complete lockdown for 14 days and residents have been advised to self-isolate. Darashakran camp is located in the north east of Erbil and hosts 11,000 Syrian refugees, while Qushtapa camp is located south of Erbil and hosts 7,000 Syrian refugees.

COVID-19 GOVERNMENT MEASURES

The Government of Iraq eased the stringent restrictions and curfew that was announced since 17 March. In the central and southern governorates, the curfew is only from 7 PM to 6 AM. The current measures will continue until 22 May during weekdays while complete curfew will remain in place during weekends. For the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, the government also extended the curfews and movement restrictions until 1 May with a total curfew between 6pm to midnight. From 12 midnight to 6 PM movement is allowed to purchase essential items. Some shops and businesses as well as factories will also be allowed to open until 6 PM, which will potentially bring back livelihood opportunities for some individuals. In case citizens need to travel between governorates they can submit an online request for permission to carry out necessary travel. In addition, the following measures will continue to apply country-wide: suspension of internal and external flights until 22 May; closure of schools, universities, places of worship, restaurants, cafes, playgrounds, and other locations with big affluence of people; ban of gatherings of more than three people; and in the central and south governorates compulsory use of facemask in public spaces.

Categories previously excluded from the curfew and movement restrictions will be able to continue operating as before. It is worth to note that with the new instructions, government institutions will be able to resume their activities with a reduced number of staff (maximum twenty-five per cent of the regular workforce). This will have a direct positive impact on some of UNHCR's activities such as the provision of civil documentation.

COVID-19 PROTECTION RISKS AND CHALLENGES

Protection risks mentioned in previous updates still persist **including closure of borders preventing movement of refugees, challenges to access camps and reach persons of concern in certain locations, lack of livelihood opportunities, and increased prices of basic food items, increased risk of eviction due to socioeconomic impact of movement restrictions, rise of domestic violence, and halt of education activities.**

59 per cent of calls received by the Iraq Information Centre (IIC) were about loss of employment or livelihood opportunities due to COVID-19 movement restrictions. The majority of requests and complaints received through feedback mechanisms relate to cash assistance and food support.

UNHCR ASSISTANCE REACHES DISPLACED FAMILIES IN IRAQ



Iris scan for Syrian Refugee to receive cash assistance in Bardarash camp

As part of its efforts to limit the spread of the virus and preserve the well-being of refugees, IDPs, and returnees across Iraq, UNHCR is supporting families' access to basic hygiene items through the distribution of cash assistance. The disbursement of cash has started in several refugee camps and will continue to cover all refugees and IDPs in UNHCR managed camps throughout the country as well as vulnerable refugee, IDP and returnee families living in urban, peri-urban, and rural areas. The distribution is being conducted door-to-door by UNHCR, partners, and financial service providers, to ensure respect of social distancing and avoid mass gatherings. Over 3,500 families have cashed out their assistance since the beginning of the distribution. Through this intervention, provided funding is available, UNHCR aims to assist over 125,000 vulnerable displaced families.

During the reporting period, UNHCR continued to distribute dignity kits. Over 19,000 dignity kits have been distributed to women and girls of reproductive age living in IDP and refugee camps. The kits are designed in partnership with affected communities to ensure the most appropriate items are included. The distributions have also been carried out in line with COVID-19 safety measures and will continue during the coming weeks to cover all governorates in Iraq.

UNHCR RESPONSE

UNHCR is in regular contact with national and governorate 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. UNHCR along with CCCM partners are preparing quarantine areas in several IDP camps across the country as part of the COVID-19 preparedness and response plan in case of an outbreak in any camp. 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, protection monitoring, and other activities.

UNHCR developed and shared COVID-related health and psychosocial materials in Arabic and Sorani Kurdish with Community Outreach Volunteers and related community members via WhatsApp networks and social media platforms. In parallel, capacity building and awareness-raising sessions on psychological first aid and positive coping strategies for key community members were delivered by staff expert on remote psychosocial interventions

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 Mental Health and Psychosocial Support services; support early detection of positive cases; and enhancing disinfection activities in camps. A revised appeal will be released soon.

UNHCR's COVID-19 response and measures in Iraq have been incorporated into the existing Iraq Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) and the Iraqi Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (3RP) structures at national, regional, and governorate level, and is in conjunction with guidance and instructions from the GoI, the KRG, the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) and the COVID-19 Crisis Operations Cell.