

## IRAQ | UNHCR COVID-19 UPDATE

**COUNTRY SITUATION** *confirmed cases in Iraq: 154 | confirmed cases affecting UNHCR persons of concern: 0*

As of 18 March, it is estimated that there are 154 COVID-19 cases in Iraq, including 11 fatalities, most of which in Baghdad. In the past hours, the Government of Iraq (GoI) and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) have announced the following series of measures to limit the spread of the virus in the country:

- Total curfew in Baghdad from 17 to 24 March;
- Lockdown in Erbil and Sulaymaniyah governorates at least for 72 hours;
- Suspensions of all flights from 17 to 24 March;
- Ban of non-emergency travel between governorates in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KR-I);
- Closure of Iraq-Syria border crossing points;
- Disinfection campaigns in specifically identified areas;
- Authorization for governors to declare curfews in their governorates;
- Encourage the suspension of travel between governorates;
- Sermons, mass gatherings, school, and university classes temporarily suspended;
- Entry ban or mandatory quarantine for foreigners arriving from a series of countries.

The majority of cases identified in Iraq so far originate from Iran. Despite the measures adopted by authorities, it is expected that the number of cases will continue to increase in the coming days. There is a growing concern among local health authorities about the possibility of domestic transmission of the disease, which would challenge the already vulnerable health system in the country. A high-level mission from the World Health Organization (WHO) has visited Iraq to review the GoI's overall readiness to deal with a potential increase in case reporting, prioritize the establishment of an Emergency Operation Centre, and assess the technical support required in the coming period.

### UNHCR RESPONSE

No COVID-19 cases have been identified so far affecting UNHCR people of concern in camps. However, the measures adopted by the GoI are temporarily altering some of the activities implemented by UNHCR. One of the main challenges encountered is the closure of the Iraq-Syria border crossing points, which is preventing Syrian refugees from entering KR-I, as well as from returning to Syria. Still, most basic services continue to be delivered in camps and in areas with a high density of displaced populations, and overall access to health services continues to be guaranteed. In its efforts to limit the spread of the virus and preserve the well-being of vulnerable displaced families in Iraq, UNHCR has established the following measures:



*Bardarash Refugee Camp, KR-I, © UNHCR*

- **Health awareness:** UNHCR has started health awareness on transmission and prevention of COVID-19 in refugee and IDP camps, as well as in registration centres and in some urban areas. Posters and leaflets have been printed out and distributed through camp management, camp Primary Health Centers (PHCCs), and community outreach volunteers.
- **Provision of medical Protective Personnel Equipment (PPE):** UNHCR is procuring medical PPE, masks with filters, and disposable shoes to use at borders and in refugee camps. UNHCR will further procure other protective equipment such as surgical masks, gloves, and disposable medical gowns, for daily use by medical staff at PHCCs in refugee camp.
- **Basic Hygiene Items:** UNHCR plans to provide vulnerable IDP and refugee families, mainly in camps, with cash assistance to guarantee they have the necessary means to access adequate basic hygiene items.
- **Training of PHCCs medical staff in camps:** UNHCR is supporting the Directorate of Health in Duhok and in Erbil to provide training on case definition and detection, as well as on management of suspected COVID-19 cases.
- **Ongoing distribution of assistance and registration activities:** new modalities have been established to continue ensuring the distribution of assistance, this includes door-to-door distribution to avoid mass gatherings. Registration activities continue to be implemented remotely and through limiting the number of individuals in registration centres that are still open.