

SNAPSHOT: IRAQ PROTECTION CLUSTER

DEACTIVATION PROCESS AS OF DECEMBER 2022



Iraq Administrative Map (© UNHCR)

BACKGROUND

Five years after the conclusion of large-scale military operations against Da'esh, the humanitarian needs in Iraq have decreased considerably, with the number of Iraqis requiring humanitarian assistance declining from 11 million people in 2017 to 2.5 million in 2022. In addition, the rebounding of state revenues by early 2022 enabled the Government of Iraq (GoI) and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) to be better able to deliver basic services to its own population, including displaced and returnee populations.

At the beginning of 2022, the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) in Iraq decided the Clusters should be deactivated by the end of the year as development interventions were assessed as increasingly more appropriate to address the situation for internally displaced persons (IDPs)/returnees and the wider Iraqi population. As part of the transition, the Government of Iraq (GoI) and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) need to make further efforts to ensure that the rights of all citizens, including those affected by violence from Da'esh, are fulfilled and respected.

PROTECTION CLUSTER DEACTIVATION PROGRESS AND ACHIEVEMENTS IN 2022

Summary of Key Achievements in 2022:



95% of the targeted population was reached through general protection activities (598K out of 630K) in 2022 under the Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP).



1.7 million Iraqis were reached by protection interventions in 2022 through 75 protection partners working across all Iraqi governorates, including nearly 160K persons who were provided with legal assistance. Other examples of protection interventions included case management, cash for protection, training and capacity building for protection service providers, enhancement of community-based protection mechanisms and protection monitoring, with particular attention to violence against children and women.

Coordination: In view of the deactivation of the Protection Cluster and in order to ensure the centrality of protection in the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) and create space for system-wide efforts to reduce protection risks through advocacy and technical support, the Protection Platform was created. The Protection Platform is co-led by UNHCR and OHCHR, with the participation of UN entities, INGO and NNGO representatives – and donors on a quarterly basis. The main goals of the Protection Platform are coordination for high-level advocacy at the national level and the provision of the guidance to development partners. The Protection Platform covers all populations residing in Iraq, including IDPs, IDP returnees, refugees, migrants, stateless persons and those at risk of statelessness, vulnerable and minority groups such as religious and ethnic minorities, older persons, women and children at risk, persons with specific legal and physical protection needs, and persons with disabilities.

CLUSTER TIMELINE

February 2014

The Iraq Cluster System was activated by the Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC).

2014

The international humanitarian system launched operations in support of the government's efforts to meet the humanitarian needs resulting from Da'esh and the displacement its violence provoked.

2014 - 2022

UN and its humanitarian partners provided life-saving assistance:

- Nearly seven million Iraqi citizens, across nine governorates, in dozens of IDP camps and in thousands of other locations in multiple conflict-affected governorates.
- International donors provided an estimated eight billion USD towards this emergency effort.
- The Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) acknowledged that the root cause of many ongoing needs in Iraq is due to underdevelopment issues, and development strategies are more effective in addressing these issues. The UN shifted its focus from a humanitarian-only response plan to a development-focused approach, as this will better serve the needs of all citizens in Iraq, not just those affected by the Da'esh crisis. As a result of decreasing humanitarian needs and the presence of a strong, durable solutions architecture, the international humanitarian response in Iraq is being scaled down, and a government-led approach under the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) is being implemented.

Throughout 2022:

- During Q1 and Q2 2022, a series of meetings were held with key stakeholders, including the Strategic Advisory Group (SAG), members of the National Protection Cluster (NPC), and representatives from UNHCR and OHCHR to come to a consensus on a transition plan.
- In Q3, the terms of reference for the Protection Platform were drafted and distributed for review and feedback from all relevant humanitarian and development organizations in Iraq. By the end of Q3, the terms of reference were officially endorsed by the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT).
- Finally, in Q4, the first meeting of the core members of the Protection Platform was held.

December 2022

IASC deactivated clusters in Iraq at the request of the HC and HCT.

Capacity building: The National Protection Cluster collaborated with the Global Protection Cluster's Human Rights Engagement and Advocacy Task Teams to reinforce the capacity of protection actors and government counterparts to pursue stronger engagement with human rights mechanisms and develop protection advocacy interventions focused on amplifying the voices and priorities of individuals in vulnerable situations. The overarching objective focused on developing local protection actors' ownership of human rights tools to enhance the protection of the affected population and avoid a protection gap once the cluster system is deactivated. The complementary objective was effective advocacy methods in light of the cluster's deactivation. The workshops were delivered in September in Erbil with 70 participants from Federal Iraq and KR-I, including government representatives, judiciary members, National Human Rights Institution representatives and multiple national/international NGOs, human rights groups and UN agencies.

REMAINING NEEDS AND NEXT STEPS



As of June 2022, of all six million people displaced during the Da'esh crisis, over 81 per cent have returned, while 1.2 million Iraqis remain internally displaced since 2014, including 180,000 persons hosted in 26 camps (25 in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq and one in Ninewa Governorate).

Access to civil documentation: The Protection Cluster has worked extensively on addressing barriers to accessing civil documentation for conflict-affected communities over the past years. Without access to civil documentation, access to public services and social protection schemes, as well as freedom of movement, are often a challenge for IDPs and returnees but also for vulnerable host community members, including for those with real or perceived affiliations with extremist groups, illiterate populations, those living in remote locations as well as those at risk of statelessness, such as Bidoons and Faili Kurds. The Protection Platform will continue this work and advocate for the removal of barriers to civil documentation, especially for complex cases with no proof of identity or perceived affiliation with extremist groups. It will seek to provide a common analysis of protection issues. It will also focus on the responsiveness of community-based protection mechanisms to prevent and respond mitigate harm while fostering a sense of ownership and empowerment among community members, as well as the promotion of minorities and marginalized groups' rights in order to ensure their inclusion in UNSDCF outcomes. In addition, UNHCR, as the cluster lead agency for the Protection and CCCM clusters, worked with the government to find dignified solutions for the 180,000 IDPs still living in 25 camps in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI). Beyond the deactivation of the clusters, UNHCR is exploring options including the safe and voluntary return, sustainable reintegration, and transforming camps into formal settlements serviced by public institutions.

Funding for protection activities: The Protection Cluster conducted two surveys to measure protection partners' expected funding for protection activities following Cluster deactivation (as of January 2023). The results of the **first survey**, focused on a range of general protection activities, indicated that out of the reported projects, 40% would end by December 2022, while 60%

(primarily legal assistance, followed by community-based protection and referrals) would continue in 2023. Results of the second survey, focused on post-transition case management, indicate that of such activities, mostly comprised of child protection and gender-based violence case management, 50% would end by December 2022, while another 32% would end by the first and second quarters of 2023, with all governorates in Iraq continuing to be covered by case management activities until mid-2023. Some activities will continue beyond this date but will not have country-wide coverage. Therefore, no critical gaps in case management services are expected before July 2023.

Next steps: According to **Activity Info**, 75 Protection Partners are active across Iraq as of January 2023, including 31 NGOs, five INGOs, four UN agencies and five others. In addition, The Protection Platform will pursue its focus on protection advocacy and the provision of needed guidance to a range of partners while continuing to serve as a space for shared analysis and action on pressing protection risks and human rights concerns. The main protection monitoring tool is also being further adapted and will continue under the Protection Platform's leadership. The Protection Platform and partners will continue strengthening collaboration with development partners and related coordination mechanisms, including the Durable Solutions Technical Working Group.



Manal, 17 years old, was happy to receive her nationality certificate for the first time. She is Ezidi, originally from Sinjar, but her family was displaced to Sulaymaniyah in 2014. November 2022, picture by Shaza Shekfeh. (© UNHCR)

LEARNING TO DATE



Members of the Protection Cluster who responded to a deactivation **survey** in December 2022 outlined key challenges with the deactivation process, including the capacity and readiness of Government counterparts to take over protection activities and the lack of allocated funding for some protection services by the Government. The most impactful actions taken by the Protection Cluster during the deactivation process were identified as capacity building and training of NPC members, creating core groups to ensure that NGOs and INGOs are included in the transition process and maintaining a space to raise and advocate for protection issues on an ongoing basis.