European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations

Iraq

Introduction

The 2014-2017 conflict between the Iraqi government and Islamic State (IS) group has triggered a major humanitarian crisis. After the fighting forced millions of people from their homes, 4.5 million have now returned, but reconstruction and economic recovery are slow. Approximately 1.5 million Iraqis remain displaced and 250,000 Syrian refugees live in camps. The Coronavirus emergency is placing a strain on the fragile health system of the country which, recently, has also seen major civil unrest. The EU provides humanitarian aid for hundreds of thousands of people in need, both in and out of camps.

What are the needs?

Two years after the conflict ended, needs are increasingly related to reconstruction and development. Still, more than 4 million people continue to need humanitarian assistance. The security situation remains unstable. In late 2019, mass protests were a source of serious concern.

Civilians who remain in camps need to be cared for, while outside the camps there is an urgent need to deliver essential services such as water and sanitation, healthcare and education. People without civil documentation, especially children, face obstacles receiving care or accessing formal schooling. Both in and out of camps, people still suffer from the effects of the conflict, requiring physical rehabilitation, including prosthetics as well as psycho-social help.

Individuals with perceived IS affiliation remain under strict supervision in camps where they are totally dependent on humanitarian aid. They face increased marginalisation as well as protection concerns. The capacity of the humanitarian community to assist vulnerable people is being hampered by administrative hurdles.

Iraq is prone to natural disasters, but authorities and first-line responders have limited capacity to respond to them. In March 2020, seasonal flash floods damaged camps and communities close to the Tigris river. The Coronavirus outbreak further demonstrates the need for strengthened frontline response capacity.
How are we helping?

The European Union is a leading donor of humanitarian aid in Iraq, supporting those in greatest need, in line with the humanitarian principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence.

Through its humanitarian partners, the EU continues to deliver lifesaving assistance such as healthcare, shelter, safe water, sanitation and hygiene as well as protection. In 2019, EU humanitarian aid was channelled to over 200,000 people, most of them women and children. The EU supports the resumption of basic public services including healthcare and education in conflict-affected areas, such as western Ninewa, western Anbar, and Hawija. In 2020, the EU focuses its efforts on the most vulnerable, including those in camps, informal settlements and places of detention. The EU supports those that were affected by the camp closure campaign across Iraq that started in mid-2019, particularly those who are unable to return home.

In addition, the EU continues to support activities that protect people at risk of mistreatment and abuse. It funds legal and psycho-social assistance for minors in detention centres, as well as community-based approaches for the reintegration of former child soldiers. The EU has reinforced its partnerships with aid groups specialised in protection and healthcare to help those who suffer long-lasting impacts of the conflict. This results in specialised care and services for survivors of sexual violence, improved access to potable water in overcrowded prisons, physical therapy, rehabilitation and prosthetics for victims of violence.

The EU is committed to helping families who lost essential identification papers during the recent conflict through legal assistance. In 2019, EU support helped almost 40,000 people receive documentation. The documents are essential since they allow people to move safely, obtain assistance and care, attend school and vote in elections. The international community is strongly encouraging authorities to adopt a more systematic approach in providing documents, including birth registration for all Iraqis.

Iraq is affected by the global Coronavirus pandemic. The outbreak occurred as the humanitarian community was transferring health services back to the authorities. Through its humanitarian partners, the EU is supporting the health response to protect and assist the critically vulnerable, and supports the implementation of public health measures in camps and places of detention.

Since 2015, the EU has been providing over €458 million in humanitarian aid to displaced Iraqis and Syrian refugees inside Iraq.