



The Educational Reality of Syrian Refugees in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region

The Iraq Kurdistan Region includes about 250,000 Syrian refugees. One-third of them live in three governorates and additionally, are distributed to nine camps between Erbil, Duhok, and Sulaymaniyah. Of these refugees, 70% of them are women and children, and 70% of the children are aged between 6-12 years are enrolled in basic education.

This report focuses on the education situation, highlighting the most important problems facing the Syrian students in the region.

I. Educational reality in the region:

There are 32,198 registered Syrian refugees who are students in the Iraq Kurdistan region. These students are mainly distributed in the three governorates. The largest portions of students were located in Erbil and then in Duhok, respectively.¹ The Ministry of Education in Iraq Kurdistan supervises these schools, which use a special Arab curriculum. Many of these schools operate during the evening, while some hold classes in both the morning and the evening. These schools are funded by UNICEF with temporary contracts for the teachers.

Governorate	Number of Students	Number of Schools
Erbil	16,088 Students	28 schools (including three schools in Darashakran camp)
Duhok	12,796 Students	18 schools (including seven schools in the camps)
Sulaymaniyah	3,314 Students	9 schools (including three schools in Barika camp)
Total	32,198	56

II. The most important problems facing the education sector in the region:

- **Transportation Costs:** Parents of students in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region suffer from high transportation expenses taking their children to schools. The average cost of transporting each student per month is approximately 50,000 to 100,000 Iraqi Dinars (USD \$40 - \$85). This is due to the fact that the schools that teach in Arabic are located far away from where the Syrian students reside.
- **School Dropout:** The number of students dropping out of school is linked to factors such as the poor economic situation of refugees in the region, with many struggling to find jobs that provide sufficient income. Families are forced to compel their children to work, and for example cannot afford to pay for stationery in the UNICEF schools, although the expenses for this stationery have recently declined.
- **Language:** The decision of the Iraqi Kurdistan Region to impose Kurdish language curriculum (Sourani) on the students has caused anxiety for some parents about the future for their children. The Kurdish taught in Iraqi Kurdistan differs to that used by the Syrian Kurds, which is the Kurmanji dialect. Many students begin learning this dialect in the first grade.

¹ Statistics issued by its joint crisis coordination center, the Ministry of Interior in the Kurdistan Region, in March 2019



(DJ), the Mother of one of the students at a refugee schools, says: "It was best, for us and for the children when the teaching was in the Arabic language. The Sourani dialect would be difficult for children if any change took place at the school in the following years. If it was from the beginning of the year or from the first grade that will be better, and they will adapt to the Sourani curriculum, but there are children perfect at writing and reading without knowing the meaning. My daughter is in the third grade; she is very knowledgeable but suffers from not understanding the full meaning of the words."

- Low Salaries. The low salaries that are provided by UNICEF to teachers do not cover the basic living expenses for people in the region. Each teacher receives an estimated USD \$250. Additionally, salaries have been stopped recently in some provinces, and there are other provinces preparing to stop paying teacher salaries. This uncertainty is creating a crisis for the educational sector as a whole, particularly for the teachers. This situation has created a debate in the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) about how to cover these salaries. However, they are unable to cover all salaries and are talking about laying off the Syrian teachers.

"There are difficulties in securing funding for sufficient numbers of school books or limits on the availability of books even after the beginning of the school year has long past. There also isn't sufficient financial support for schools to do scientific trips and other activities. In addition, there is a lack interest among parents in education and a lack of cooperation with the school to complete the educational process as well as ineffectiveness of organizations to support the educational process"

- Director of a school

III. Recommendations:

1. Support teaching staff and raise salaries to ensure a decent living for education workers.
2. Open schools for refugees, especially in cities, to help them more easily continue their education, and to enable students to also pursue and complete their university education.
3. Support volunteer workers in the education field.
4. All concerned parties should work to find a solution to the problem of the number of students dropping out of schools through cooperation between local authorities, refugees, and organizations: by working to increase the number of workers in education, and by supporting the educational process in general.
5. Rely on experienced teachers in the educational process.
6. Continue to teach in Arabic so that students can complete their education if they return to their native country.