



Part of WHO/UNHCR joint training activities to raise awareness of 40 refugee volunteers on identifying and controlling infectious diseases, Erbil-Iraq on Oct 2023. WHO Iraq photo

8 October 2023, Erbil, Iraq – In an effort to combat the spread of communicable diseases across Iraq, the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) conducted a training session for 40 refugee volunteers who play a pivotal role in sharing critical information within communities of refugees and internally displaced people in Erbil.

The training, done in collaboration with the Kurdistan Regional Government and its Ministry of

Health, equipped the refugees with in-depth knowledge about common infectious diseases such as cholera and haemorrhagic fever. The volunteers can now better inform and empower their communities on how to prevent, identify and control these diseases, ultimately contributing to public health and safety across Iraq.

Dr Wael Hatahit, Acting WHO Representative in Iraq, emphasized the importance of community involvement in this initiative. “The success of this training session demonstrates the commitment and dedication of our community volunteers,” he said. “By giving them the right information and resources, we not only protect individuals but also strengthen the collective resilience of these communities against communicable diseases.”

The training session is a timely response to the ongoing health challenges faced by displaced populations in Iraq and the Kurdistan region of Iraq, especially those living in camps with poor water and sanitation conditions and limited access to health care.

“Empowering refugees alongside local communities to be the first line of defence in keeping their respective communities safe from communicable diseases is paramount to keep everyone safe,” said Mr Jean-Nicolas Beuze, UNHCR Representative in Iraq.

The joint WHO–UNHCR training taught volunteers about disease identification and prevention strategies to recognize the signs and symptoms of common infectious diseases and offer information on hygiene practices, vaccination campaigns and health-promoting behaviours. WHO and UNHCR believe that by acquiring these new resources, the community outreach volunteers are empowered to serve as a critical bridge between health care providers and their patients. This disease awareness and prevention approach is essential in ensuring the well-being of displaced and other vulnerable communities.

The joint training session is a testament to both agencies’ commitment to safeguarding the health and well-being of displaced populations in Iraq and the Kurdistan region, to ensure that no one is left behind.

For more information, contact:

Ajyal Sultany

Communications Officer, WHO Iraq

Mobile: +964 77 40 89 28 78

Email: sultanya@who.int

Farha Bhoyroo

External Relations Officer, UNHCR Iraq

Mobile: +964 78 33 42 00 25

Email: bhoyroo@unhcr.org

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