



Impact Report for 2023

For over 22 years STEP has nurtured and protected the vulnerable children in Iraq in locally sustainable ways.

ARC

ARBAT REFUGEE CAMP

'Stepping into our homes, you cultivate an environment of safety and reassurance, sowing seeds that not only bring comfort to me but also elate my children, who eagerly anticipate and cherish your visits.'
(Mother)



62 women learned how to knit and sew in the Art-Hive through a total of 96 sessions.

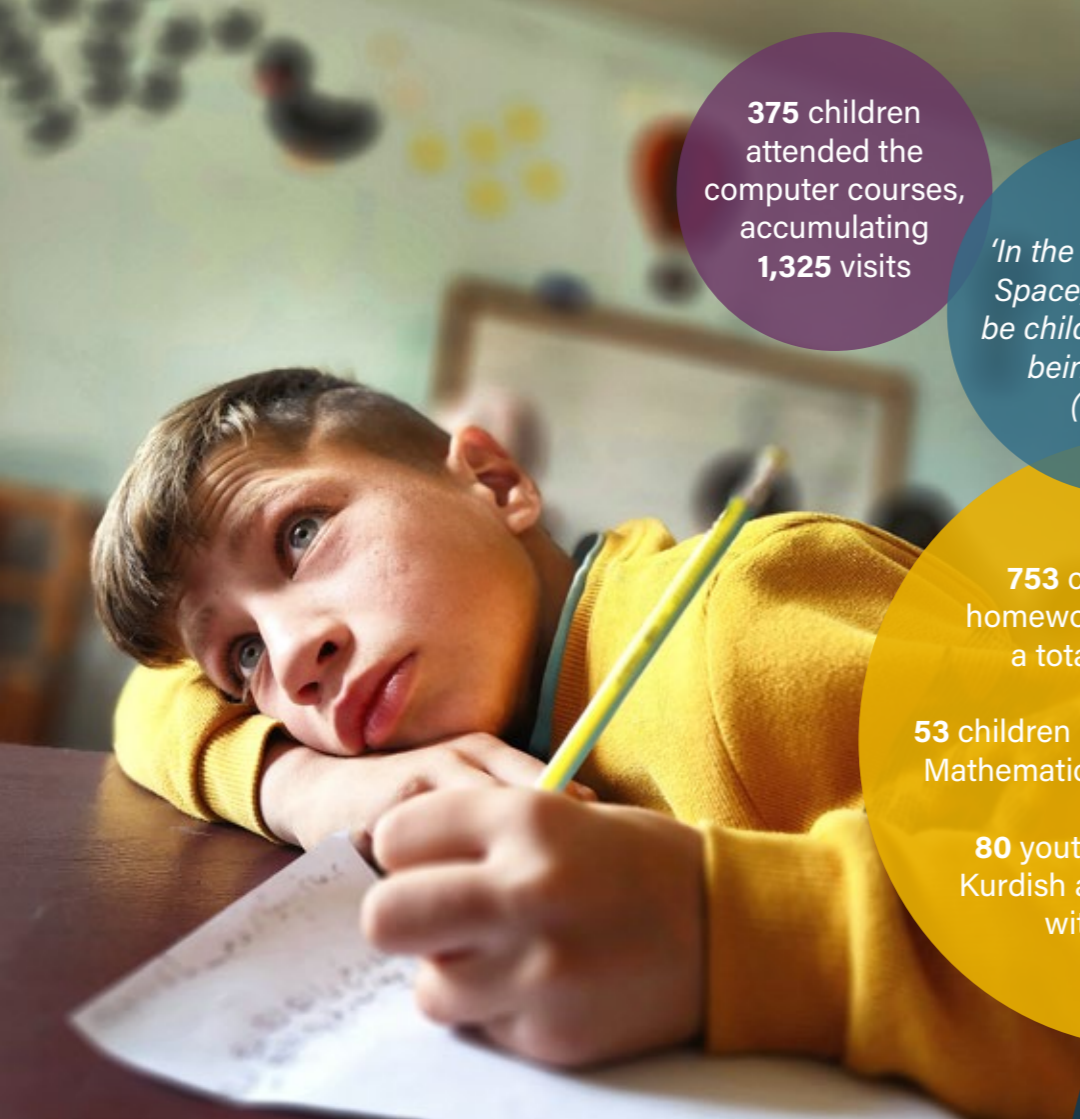
14,871 visits to the Little Friendly Space from **679** different children

11,314 visits to the Child Friendly Space from **753** different children

Our programs involve parents in daily activities and encourage their active participation in children's play. This contributes to the overall well-being of parents and children within the camp.



The Arbat refugee camp is home to over 10,000 Syrian refugees. Over half of the residents are children, who confront the challenges of displacement, an inadequate education system and a scarcity of opportunities. STEP's Child-Friendly Space is a beacon of hope, offering a nurturing environment where children can access education, play, psychosocial activities and protection. With a community-led approach, we strive to empower families, foster resilience, and restore dignity.



375 children attended the computer courses, accumulating **1,325** visits

'In the Little Friendly Space, children can be children and enjoy being children.'
(Mother)

753 children received homework support through a total of **13,195** visits

53 children benefited from English, Mathematics and Kurdish classes

80 youth accessed Maths, Kurdish and English classes, with **4,067** visits



CHILD PROTECTION UNIT

Case management for **205** children:-
69 ongoing, **54** cases closed, **82** referred

7 separated children who have been put under the care of their relatives, grandparents, or siblings were provided with psychosocial support, awareness-raising and parenting sessions for their caregivers.

9 different A5 leaflets including educational activities, crafts, and information on child protection issues were created and **700** copies were distributed.



EDUCATION

In 2023, government funding did not reach schools, teachers went on strike, and demand for our assistance increased significantly. We provided extra educational support including special classes for those facing challenges in reading and writing.

SPECIAL NEEDS UNIT

STEP is the only provider of support for children in the camp with special needs.

40 children visited the Special Needs Unit, with **1109** visits, **10** children are on our waiting list

- Children with autism, who previously preferred solitary play, now actively seek interaction with compassionate adults or engage alongside their peers.
- Children facing speech difficulties and delays gained the ability to confidentially express their thoughts.
- Children with paralysis are supported with daily muscle movement through established routines and a variety of activities.
- A sensory toy library provides play resources for families.



CLIMBING / ADVENTURE THERAPY

Climbing helps children and youth build trust, work together, and learn life skills such as teamwork and communication. They experience the importance of working in a group to achieve their goals. This is a rare opportunity for the children to get out of the camp, and participating in outdoor activities has been shown to have a significant benefit on mental health.

358 children and youth (**229** female and **129** male) climbed on **18** climbing days in the mountains around Sulaymaniyah. **550** girls and **254** boys took part in climbing training activities with **804** visits

We also took a group of women from the Iranian Refugee Camp climbing.

The sessions were facilitated by a qualified instructor with support from STEP staff.



STEP IRAQ

LOCAL N.G.O ESTABLISHED



Since 2001, STEP has worked tirelessly to address the diverse needs of communities in Iraq affected by conflict and displacement. In line with our vision of equipping local communities, we are proud to announce the establishment of a local branch of our charity, a non-governmental organisation; STEP Iraq. While maintaining our core mission and values, this local branch embodies our dedication to sustainable, community-led solutions. STEP Iraq now has oversight of the Drop-in Centre project and work in the Iranian refugee camp, supported by our expertise in fundraising and governance. STEP UK helped secure funding for education in the DIC, the Youth Empowerment project and the project in the Iranian refugee camp, whilst training opportunities are provided to support the fundraising efforts of staff in-country.

Together, with the support of our donors and partners, we look forward to advancing our shared vision of a brighter, more resilient future for vulnerable children and families in Iraq.

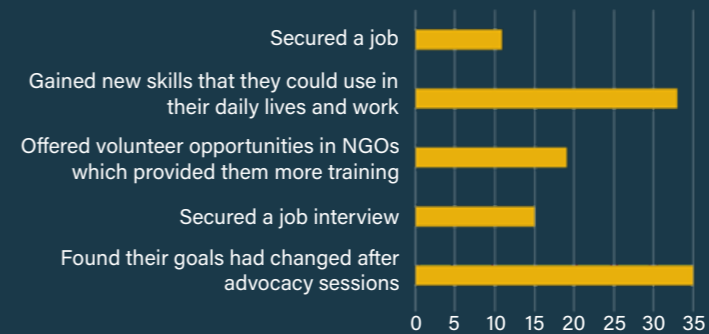
STEP staff conducted market research into the best programme to support local youth, including consulting NGOs and groups of refugee youth.

A course was developed to provide youth with problem solving skills that will help address problems in their communities, as well as improve their employability. The final project ideas included "Awareness of Drugs, Smoking, and Vaping" and "Defeating Fake News".

127 attended the course (100 from the host community, 21 refugees and 6 IDP, 62% female)

YOUTH EMPOWERMENT

Feedback from 35 participants



Youth empowerment courses include:

social cohesion and peacebuilding

teamwork, leadership, CV writing, and interview techniques

psycho-social support



DIC

THE DROP IN CENTRE



STEP is still equally committed to our most longstanding project; the Drop-in Centre, where we continue securing funds for the provision of vital education and protection services.

21 children returned to school; **21** visits were made to schools.

87 children were provided with stationery for school.

17 children were provided with school books.

312 different children attended **2843** sessions of homework help and extra lessons.

504 different children participated in literacy classes (**103** girls and **401** boys)

*"I am so sad during the weekend or holidays when I come to the center and the door is closed."
(10 Year Old Boy)*

*"I've touched a laptop here for the first time in my life, and I'm playing with some toys I've never had."
(12 Year Old Girl)*

*"Working at DIC has taught me a lot, and that knowledge has improved my personal life and how I interact with my kids."
(Social Worker)*



IRANIAN CAMP



*"What really stands out is how much more confident and happier she seems. It's made a real difference for our family".
(Husband)*

Since 2018, STEP has been working in Barika refugee camp; home to 1,900 Iranian refugees, that's over 40 families. These refugees have been moved from camp to camp within Iraq and have lived as refugees for over 12 years. Most of the women in the camp are illiterate.

In 2023, we provided **39** awareness sessions (including children's rights and breast cancer).

We helped with education:

45 women attended
80 English classes

28 women attended
57 literacy classes

6 refugees with special needs attended
73 sessions

...and gave psychosocial support:

45 women attended art activities with a total of
212 visits

30 women attended a sewing course with a total of
251 visits

48 girls attended
26 football sessions

83 women attended **135** gym and hiking sessions



FOSTER CARE

STEP continues to provide technical and practical support to the Kurdish Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs to develop a foster care system. The government Foster Care Section established in Sulimany in 2016, is now staffed by a manager, seven social workers and an administrator.

In 2023, the service was extended to two other cities in the Kurdish Region. STEP contributed to a legal consultation in August 2023 to work on greater cooperation between the Courts and the Ministry. A UK Family Court Judge and Clinical Psychologist provided lessons from the UK. STEP has also been involved in developing on-going training for foster carers.

In October 2023, STEP commissioned an external evaluation on the case management systems with UK charity SFAC (report available in 2024).

At the end of 2023:

27 foster families have been through the approval process.

There have been a total of 27 placements, with some children moving placement and others being reunified with their biological families.

4 placements have broken down and two children were returned to the Care Home.

There were 17 children placed within 16 foster families.

The foster care system needs time to develop, we are committed to evaluating the work to ensure that policies, processes and procedures keep children safe.

Awat, a reserved child, used to cry constantly.

He would only come to the centre with his mother and sisters (May and Liya). With two weeks of intensive engagement, we organised indoor and outdoor games, always keeping the door open so that he could see that his mother was waiting outside.

Despite his initial fears, Awat, a remarkably smart child, eventually started coming to kindergarten alone. Through persistent efforts, we witnessed a radiant smile as he played and shared toys with his new friends. Awat's mother expressed profound gratitude for the positive transformation in her son. She initially doubted his ability to learn but now recognizes the fruits of our dedicated efforts. She emphasized that, she chooses STEP's centre for the psychological and moral support, love, and consideration provided to all children and families. Her confidence stems from prior positive experiences with her twin children who attended the Little Friendly Space, affirming the continued success of our approach.

*She chooses
STEP's centre for
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Ismail is 9 years old and internally displaced.

When he first came to STEP's Drop in Centre, he had a stutter and was doing badly in school. After a few months, he shared with the staff that he was bullied and physically abused by his brothers and other children because he is obese and because of his stutter. He felt very sad that no other children wanted to play with him. Staff noticed that he had a short attention span and was disruptive when playing games. They discussed this with his mother. She revealed that when she was pregnant, he'd fallen on her stomach and she lost the baby. Blame was placed on Ismail, his siblings blamed him too. Building a relationship with his family over a number of home visits, staff broached the effect bullying was having on Ismail. His mother agreed to ensure his siblings stopped bullying him and staff also visited his school to discuss the bullying with his teachers. Ismail was gradually able to interact with children in the DIC without being disruptive. He participated in drawing and awareness sessions, particularly enjoying football. He shared that his relationship with his brothers has improved, he has gained confidence, and his stuttering has stopped.



**All children's names have been changed for confidentiality*



Thank You!

A special thanks to:

The St James' Place Foundation, the Stanley Thomas Johnson Foundation, the Reed Foundation, the British Foreign School Society, GCR, Caritas Germany and the many others who gave generously partnered with us to continue this work.

Thank you to those who have hosted and attended fundraising events with STEP, and to those who have knitted blankets, clothes and teddies.

Thank you so much for standing with STEP to say that these children are important. Your support has provided them with education, play, space to process their emotions and hope.

Our Annual Report is available on the Charity Commission website, or find out more at:

Website: step-uk.org

Contact: ukadmin@step-uk.org

Registered Charity Number: 1125183