

From Conflict to Peace and Stability: Lessons from UNDP's support to people-centred policing in Iraq

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Summary

After years of turmoil, the Iraqi government, its people and especially the youth, aspire to lasting peace and stability, economic growth and development in Iraq and the region. Ensuring safety and security through a trusted, accountable, and effective security sector that upholds the rule of law and protects human rights is a government priority for ensuring Iraq's transition from instability and conflict towards a more peaceful and prosperous future.

Central to these efforts is the transformation of the Iraqi Police Agency (the Police) from a militarized “fighting force” into a rights-respecting police service. The Police is a key interface between the state and society, and people's perceptions and experiences with the Police directly affect their trust in the state and its institutions to deliver on their basic needs. Recognizing the critical role of the Police in the country's recovery, the government embarked on a plan to transform the Police into a trusted, effective, accessible and accountable service capable of delivering quality justice and security for all, especially the most vulnerable.

UNDP's long-term support for this transformation process includes interlinked and mutually-reinforcing interventions across three levels—political, institutional and community—that are data-driven and evidence-informed. The delivery of long-standing technical and strategic support to national-level security sector reform (SSR), policing policies, and organisational reforms within the MOI since the defeat of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), has enabled and been continuously informed by the innovative Model Police Stations (MPS) initiative.

Through the creation of these innovative ‘one stop shops’ for police service delivery the MPS has put the government's policy commitments for more people-centred policing services into practice in Anbar, Ninewah, Basra and Baghdad. By strengthening the capacities of the Police to deliver people-centred policing, especially for women and children, and empowering communities to actively engage in local safety and security decision-making, the MPS has mobilised support across government and society for a new way of policing. As public trust in the Police grows, the government has committed to expanding the initiative across the country and seeks continued international support from UNDP and donor partners for this endeavour.

This paper presents the background to and lessons from UNDP's people-centred security approach to policing support in Iraq. It is framed around seven key insights that can inform the efforts of UNDP and other development actors globally, and especially in conflict-affected contexts, to support more effective, accountable and inclusive law enforcement to deliver people-centred justice and security for peace and sustainable development.

These insights focus on the importance of people-centred policing for immediate stabilization and long-term peace; the necessity of sustained political support and leadership for successful police transformation; the value of a learning-driven approach that strategically combines high-level policy to community action; the crucial role of women's representation and empowerment in enhancing policing effectiveness and public trust; the significance of community engagement in building trust and improving policing services; the essential use of data and evidence to tailor services and enhance accountability; and the need for sustained training and capacity building to achieve the required mindset and behavioral changes for police reform. These insights collectively underpin the multifaceted and strategic people-centred approach needed to transform the Police into a trusted, effective, and accountable service provider.

The paper concludes with recommendations for policy makers and practitioners, emphasizing the importance of a people-centred security approach to policing during and after stabilization and in hybrid security contexts for effective and sustainable outcomes; the critical role of broad networks of change champions and local ownership of reform processes for sustained transformation; and the need to complement people-centred policing with support to the broader justice and security system to ensure accountable, quality services and outcomes, particularly for the most vulnerable.

Introduction

After years of turmoil, the aspirations of the Iraqi people, especially the younger generation, are focused on the lasting security and stability necessary for economic growth and development in Iraq and the region. Ensuring safety and security for the population through a trusted, accountable and effective security sector that upholds the rule of law and protects human rights is a priority for the government. This effort is crucial for Iraq's transition from instability and conflict towards a peaceful and prosperous future.

Central to these efforts is the Police, the institution responsible for people's everyday safety and security needs.ⁱ The Police are a key interface between the state and society. People's perceptions and experiences with the Police directly affect their trust in the state and its institutions to deliver on their basic needs.ⁱⁱ However, police institutions in Iraq had a long-standing culture of militarization that contributed to a historically weak public trust in the police and created challenges for public safety and social cohesion. Recognizing the critical role of the Police in the country's recovery after the defeat of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), the government embarked on a plan to transform the Police into a trusted, effective, accessible and accountable people-centred police service that could deliver quality justice and security services for all, and especially the most vulnerable.

The MPS initiative, led by the Ministry of Interior (MOI) and supported by UNDP, is a tool and catalyst of this transformation.ⁱⁱⁱ By adopting people-centred policing in Ninewah and Anbar governorates (areas formerly held by ISIL) and in Basra and Baghdad, the initiative has helped consolidate local security, respond to people's immediate justice and security needs, build public confidence, and catalyze essential policy, systemic and operational reforms. The success of the pilot is reflected in the MOI's commitment to extend the initiative nationwide, recognizing the importance of people-centred policing for responding to the diverse justice and security needs of people and communities across Iraq.

UNDP's long-term support for transforming the Police has adopted a multi-pronged strategy that includes supporting high-level national policy commitments for people-centred reform; strengthening the MOI's capacities to oversee and guide successful reforms; piloting reforms locally through the MPS initiative; and integrating lessons learned at the operational, institutional and national levels. This support has resulted in changes in high-level policies, policing practice and management aimed at enhancing the quality, accountability

and responsiveness of police services for people and communities. However, still more needs to be done to consolidate this early success and ensure the state and the Police are able to respond to the complex security challenges facing the country today.^{iv}

This paper presents lessons of UNDP's people-centred security approach to policing support in Iraq. It is framed around seven key insights designed to inform the efforts of UNDP and other development actors elsewhere to support effective, accountable and inclusive law enforcement institutions that can deliver people-centred justice and security for peace and sustainable development.

Background

The policing context

Following the regime change in 2003, the Iraqi Police officially remained operational, although almost half of its personnel deserted or were dismissed. A rapid recruitment drive was accompanied by an organisational restructuring and the formal establishment of the Police Agency in early 2004.^v The Police is tasked with basic law enforcement and initial incident response within communities and is distinct from the centrally-deployed Federal Police, a gendarmerie-type force designed to respond to serious incidents.^{vi} Police commanders often had military backgrounds, and training and deployment focused on counter-insurgency tasks. These internal dynamics, along with frequent outbreaks of violence from 2003 onwards, reinforced a historically militarized approach to law enforcement.

With the emergence of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) in 2014, the Police became a primary target of its attacks. The extensive destruction of police stations (and other state facilities) was part of ISIL's strategy to undermine government control and instill fear among the population. In the fight against ISIL, the Police often fought alongside the military, while some security actors such as the Iraqi Security Forces, the National Security Service, the Federal Police, the Popular Mobilisation Forces (PMF) and other tribal and ethnically oriented groups also sought to undertake policing functions.^{vii} Many thousands of police officers were killed or injured.^{viii}

In the aftermath of ISIL's defeat in 2017, the security context continued to be characterized by multiple state, non-state and hybrid security actors exercising policing functions and claiming jurisdictions. For the government, stabilizing the liberated areas and consolidating local security through civilian policing was a key priority for avoiding further conflict and moving towards peace and stability. This political commitment is commonly referred to as the shift from 'Green to Blue,' that is, moving from a situation where the military provides security, even in urban areas, to one where civilian, community-oriented police are the legitimate and trusted provider of local safety and security services for the people of Iraq. This shift required a transformation of policing practices from a militarized law enforcement approach to a people-centred approach.

UNDP's early support to policing in Iraq

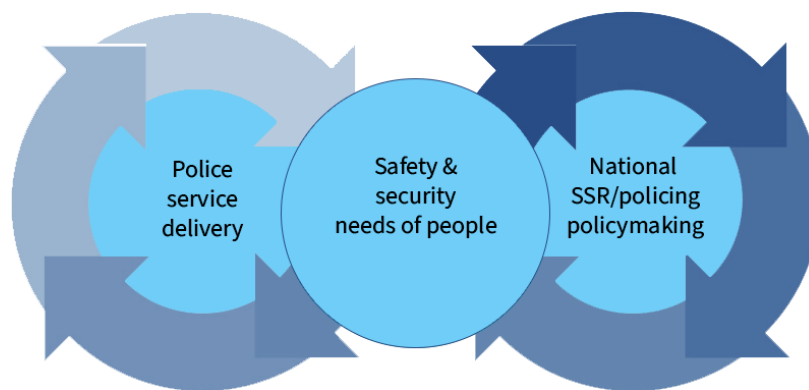
In 2015, UNDP Iraq committed to supporting a stabilization process in liberated areas of Anbar, Diyala, Kirkuk, Ninewah and Salahadin governorates. The process aimed at consolidating legitimate state control and creating the conditions for the return of massive the displaced population (the ISIL occupation had resulted in the largest wave of displacement known in Iraq's history). Through UNDP's Funding Facility for Stabilization (FFS), the rapid restoration of basic public services included the reconstruction and rehabilitation of justice facilities and police stations to enable the Police to restore stability and provide safety to communities.

Simultaneously, UNDP provided support to government partners, notably the Office of the National Security Advisor (ONSA), the Ministry of Interior (MOI), and the Prime Minister's Office (PMO), to reform national policy frameworks and establish coordination mechanisms for SSR and police reform. At the core of the government's

reform efforts was a recognition of the urgent need to transform the Police from a militarized “fighting force” into a rights-respecting police service that could maintain local safety and security, effectively respond to the justice and security needs of the population, and support government efforts towards long-term peace and development, including the realization of Agenda 2030 and its Sustainable Development Goal 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions).^{ix}

In Iraq, UNDP is supporting nationally owned and led initiatives towards strengthening the operational efficiency and professionalism of the Police, and its accessibility, responsiveness and accountability to the rights and safety and security needs of people and communities, especially the most vulnerable. This support is provided through interlinked and mutually-reinforcing interventions across three levels—political, institutional and community—that are data-driven and evidence-informed. By ensuring knowledge, data and learning from each level informs the others, UNDP supports a feedback loop that ensures the safety and security needs of people and communities drive service delivery that informs policymaking, which in turn guides service delivery towards increased responsiveness to local safety and security needs (see Diagram 1).

Diagram 1: The strategic feedback loop for advancing people-centred policing in Iraq



The lynchpin of this feedback loop has been the MOI-led, UNDP-supported MPS initiative. Commencing in 2020, the initiative aims at restoring and improving police service delivery through six police stations located in Anbar, Ninewah, Basra and Baghdad. Through the creation of these innovative ‘one stop shops’ for police service delivery, the MPS puts the government’s policy commitments for more people-centred policing services into practice through strengthening the capacities of the Police to deliver people-centred policing and empowering people and communities to actively engage in local safety and security decision-making.

Navigating the complexity of support to police transformation and SSR has required UNDP to adopt an adaptive and integrated programming approach that responds to learning and changing context dynamics, and harnesses resources and expertise across UNDP’s SSR and rule of law, social cohesion, women empowerment and stabilization programmes. The following insights have emerged from UNDP’s support to date and are valuable for informing its people-centred security and policing support in conflict and post-conflict contexts beyond Iraq.

Insights

Insight 1: People-centred security spans the humanitarian-development-peacebuilding triple nexus, supports immediate stabilization and trust-building goals, and establishes a foundation for long-term peace, safety and stability.

People-centred security focuses on the relationship between people and the state and its security institutions. Understanding the quality of that relationship is key to developing interventions that can effectively respond to people's rights and their safety and security needs. UNDP's support to the reconstruction and rehabilitation of police stations (among other infrastructure) in liberated areas helped to consolidate state authority through the return of civilian law enforcement capabilities that could restore stability, provide a sense of safety to the returning population, and mitigate against the return of ISIL.^x The government also required UNDP's support in operationalizing and maintaining the restored police stations. Over the years the Police had been institutionally weakened and highly militarized and factors such as impunity, corruption, and perceived sectarian bias had contributed to an erosion of public trust. The fall of Mosul in 2014 had exposed the weaknesses of the security sector and further contributed to a loss of public confidence in the state security architecture.

Post-conflict, as people sought to return home and communities to rebuild and recover, public demand grew for legitimate and accountable police with complete responsibility for community security that could prevent the return of ISIL and effectively and justly provide for people's daily safety and security needs.^{xi}

It was clear to the government and UNDP that while the physical rebuilding of ISIL-destroyed policing infrastructure was a necessary enabler for the return of civilian policing in support of long-term stability and prosperity, the process of rebuilding trust in the police (and by extension, the state) required understanding and responding to people's perceptions and expectations of the police in their communities. Ensuring the Police could respond to people's current and future safety and security needs meant consideration had to be given to the function (not only the form) of the police stations, i.e. the way in which police services were actually delivered to the affected communities.

The path to creating a legitimate, accountable and professional police service, capable of regaining the population's trust and confidence, was set out in the government's 2018 Police Service Road Map (the Road Map). Based on a series of assessments and consultations, and developed by a committee under the MoI Police Affairs Agency with support from UNDP, the Road Map set out the government's strategy to transition from military to civilian policing through the transformation of the Police from a militarized "fighting force" to a legitimate and *trusted* people-centred law enforcement agency.^{xii} Building on early UNDP stabilization support, the MOI-led MPS initiative identified a number of reconstructed police stations as locations for piloting the new people-

"A functional police station is not just a building. It is a symbol of safety, security, and trust in the community, this is one of the critical pillars needed to ensure transformative development."¹

centred approach to policing. Recent public perception surveys reveal the initiative has increased public confidence and trust in the Police in these areas (see Insight 6). The success of the initiative has also led to a recently announced government commitment to expanding the MPS across the country (see Insight 3).

Within the humanitarian-development-peacebuilding triple nexus, UNDP is committed to ensuring development approaches address underlying causes of humanitarian and peacebuilding needs and contribute to resolving the causes and consequences of crises.^{xiii} The Iraq experience highlights the value of adopting a people-centred security approach to policing during and after stabilization, to ensure that immediate interventions to restore stability and rebuild trust are supported by an understanding of and efforts to address the underlying factors contributing to instability, insecurity and the loss of trust between police and the community.

“Providing the rights to a [dignified] life and security are the duties of the State, because we gave them the authority, and the State should use that authority to provide the people’s rights ... without security, there are no life, services and rights, so the State should provide security first.”¹

Insight 2: Broad political support, high-level political leadership, and sustained national commitment to a long-term vision and strategy for change are prerequisites for successful police transformation efforts.

Transforming the Police is a complex process requiring sustained political leadership that can provide the necessary resources, support, and oversight to ensure its success. The government’s commitment to transforming the Police since the defeat of ISIL addresses public demand for a professional and effective police service and acknowledges the critical role of the Police in rebuilding trust between the local police, the government and its people. To ensure sustainability of these efforts within a dynamic political environment, the government, with UNDP’s support, has anchored reform strategies in high-level political processes, invested in the MOI’s organizational capacities to lead reforms, and mobilized international support through coordination mechanisms and strategic partnerships.^{xiv} These efforts have been reinforced and complemented by the MPS initiative that put the high level policy commitments into practice (see Insight 3). This has been critical for generating and sustaining government support for people-centred policing and has created a feedback loop where lessons from implementation of the MPS initiative are continuously fed back into high level SSR and policing policy developments.

Since the defeat of ISIL, there has been high-level political understanding of the need for SSR and reestablishing the Police as the primary public security provider, supported by the Office of the National Security Advisor (ONSA), the Prime Minister’s Office (PMO) and the MOI. UNDP provided support to political processes in 2015 leading to the revision of the National Security Strategy (NSS), the adoption of the SSR Strategy (later renamed the SSR Programme or SSRP) in 2017, and the 2018 Road Map for police reform.^{xv} These frameworks established the foundation for the nationally-led reforms, supported across the political divide and at all political levels. Through the provision of consistent, quality strategic and technical advice, UNDP established itself as a trusted partner to the government in long-term SSR and policing reform.

Police reform requires institutional leadership to implement changes, navigate resistance, and make evidence-based decisions.^{xvi} Realizing high-level political commitments to police reform hinged on the institutional capacity of the MOI, as the responsible ministry for policing, to oversee, guide and ensure implementation. UNDP’s support to the MOI emphasized building institutional capacities for organizational change, strategic planning, leadership, and mobilizing a broad network of mid- and high-level change champions across the MOI’s directorates to support people-centred policing. Increased strategic planning capacities enabled the MOI to address gaps in earlier strategies (for example, the Road Map was critiqued by some as being too broad and lacking in consultation) and to ensure police reform strategies respond to realities on the ground (see text box below). For example, learning from the MOI-led MPS initiative informed the recent MOI Strategy (2024-2026) and prompted policy actions to address identified structural and systemic challenges to transformation. This included, for example, the recent development of an action plan for women’s empowerment across the MOI, and directives for professionalizing the police and systematizing community engagement (see Insight 5). This policy-practice feedback loop has been a critical enabler for sustained high-level political support, including within the PMO and MOI, for police transformation.

UNDP's support to the MOI Strategy (2024-2026)

In 2023, UNDP supported the MOI to strengthen its strategic planning and evidence-based policy-making capacities and develop the new MOI Strategy (2024-2026) aligned to the National Security Strategy and SSR strategy. The process was led by the MOI's Planning Directorate, accompanied by UNDP advisors, and involved approximately 300 MOI staff. This 360-degree approach aimed to institutionalize strategic planning and policymaking processes, and mobilize internal buy-in for the new plan. Inclusive consultations were also held with government ministries, civil society, youth and women networks, unions and others. Prioritizing public participation reinforced and put into action the MOI's commitment to more people-centred policing. Recognizing the value of participation, MOI and senior government officials subsequently incorporated the approach in the design of the new National SSR Strategy (2024-2032). The MOI strategic planning process focused on achievable objectives, performance indicators, and a robust monitoring framework, marking an organizational shift from activity-oriented planning towards accountability for results. The final strategy highlighted commitments to increased institutional efficiency and effectiveness through digitalization and modernization, enhanced transparency and public engagement.

Collective advocacy and support from the international community have been crucial in sustaining the political will and capacities of the Iraqi government to lead people-centered police reforms. Post-ISIL, efforts to reform the state security architecture faced challenges due to a crowded donor and international partner context, the complexities of strategic SSR efforts, and limited government capacities. UNDP, in its recognized convening role, established strong cooperation and coordination with international organizations and development partners, including the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), IOM, NATO, and the European Union Advisory Mission in Iraq (EUAM Iraq). UNDP continues to provide support to security sector coordination mechanisms, recognizing the critical need for sustained international advocacy and support to consolidate and scale people-centred policing gains (see Insight 7).

Insight 3: A learning-driven approach to police transformation that connects high-level policy to community action can address immediate justice and security needs and catalyze operational, structural, and systemic change.

The successful 'Green to Blue' transition hinges on the transformation of local police units into effective, accountable, community-oriented, people-centred service providers. This transformation requires a fundamental mindset, behaviour and organizational culture change within the MOI and the Local Police that puts people and their needs at the centre of institutional reforms. The MPS initiative was designed to facilitate this change.

Led by the MOI, who contributed the MPS buildings and vehicles and covered all related operations and maintenance costs, the MPS initiative was rolled out in Anbar and Ninewah governates, with another MPS in each of Basra and Baghdad. to respond to people's immediate justice and security needs. A key innovation of the MPS was transforming the target police stations into "one-stop shops" that deliver streamlined, unified policing services. Initial assessments had revealed that specialized units for family protection, juvenile police, and community policing had separate lines of command and control and were mostly located outside of the police station compound. This situation hampered the ability of the local police to effectively respond to urgent incidents such as family or domestic violence cases, and some victims were required to travel long distances to obtain specialized support. An MOI directive ordered the incorporation of these specialized units within the MPS premises and placed them under the purview of the station commander, enabling people to have access to more timely, efficient and responsive police services.

Through robust context analysis, community surveys to determine perceptions and expectations of policing, and joint assessments of infrastructure, operational procedures, human resources and training needs, the MOI, Local Police and UNDP co-created a blueprint for transforming the target police stations. This blueprint included building renovations to address specific community needs, capacity building of station personnel, community engagement efforts, delivery of services for women and children, empowerment of women police, and collaboration with other justice and security institutions (see Diagram 2).

In Anbar and Ninewah, the MOI and UNDP assessed and agreed on additional renovations of FFS-supported police stations to address the unique accessibility needs of women and other vulnerable groups. Construction of a private entrance for women victims of violence offers greater security, privacy and confidentiality given the sensitivities of such cases within the community. Ramps, elevators, and other amenities ensure easier access for persons with disabilities. Refurbished dedicated investigation rooms offer a safe and comfortable environment for victims and witnesses to interact with police personnel.

Diagram 2: The multidimensional approach to MPS organisational transformation

A multidimensional approach to the MPS pilot
 The MPS initiative adopts a multidimensional approach aimed at aligning operations within police stations to the objectives of the Road Map and international standards and best practices, and ensuring the delivery of quality, accessible and accountable policing services tailored to the specific needs of communities. Specific attention is given to increasing accessibility to quality justice and security services for women and children, including through the empowerment of women police personnel to better respond to their needs (see Insight 5).



Lessons from the initiative helped the MOI to identify and respond to operational, structural and systemic challenges to more people-centred policing. The MPS approach not only improved the accessibility and quality of policing services for people in the short term, but catalyzed broader operational reforms. For example, UNDP’s support to the development and adoption of the MOI’s Unified Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) on Complex Criminal Investigations, which moves from traditional confessions-based to more effective rights-based investigations, was accompanied by the delivery of investigations training for MOI police trainers and almost 2500 police officers by UNDP with the MOI’s Training and Qualifications Directorate, and the mentoring of MPS criminal investigators in carrying out their day-to-day work. These interventions combined to create a policy-practice feedback loop that strengthened the technical proficiencies of police trainers and supported investigating officers to undertake investigations in accordance with the new SOP.

The MPS initiative's impact extends beyond the Police. The Road Map explicitly recognizes the importance of partnerships across the criminal justice system for more accountable, rights-respecting and effective policing.^{xvii} The increased reporting to the MPS of complaints, including sensitive cases, reflects growing public trust in the Police while also placing increased demands on the work of the judiciary. The installation of recording equipment for police interviews with victims, witnesses and suspects has helped better safeguard human rights by promoting transparency and accountability in police conduct, and has been welcomed by the judiciary. The recordings allow for more effective judicial oversight of police questioning and interrogation practices, ensuring adherence to human rights standards. It also supports improved cooperation between the Police and investigating judges that is essential for greater access to justice.



Insight 4: Increasing representation and empowering women police is essential for policing effectiveness and public trust but requires a combination of policy, organizational, and community support.

Women police can significantly enhance policing effectiveness and responsiveness, particularly for women and children, thereby strengthening public confidence.^{xviii} However, security provision continues to be seen as a male role, and women face a multitude of cultural, systemic and organizational barriers to joining the Police. Less than 2% (approximately 11,000) of all MOI staff are women, mostly in civilian roles. Very few women hold senior leadership positions.

Increasing women's representation and empowerment in the Police requires a strategic, multi-sectoral and context-specific approach involving policymaking, capacity-building, and organizational changes, supported by political, organizational, and public backing for greater integration of women across all aspects of policing.

Under the MPS initiative, the MOI and UNDP conducted a study on women police and accessibility of policing services for women and girls.^{xx} It highlighted the urgent need for increased recruitment, training and deployment of women officers to police stations. An MOI directive subsequently required eight women officers be assigned to each MPS to support criminal investigations and provide information and support to women and child complainants and victims. Yet realizing this commitment has proved challenging, given the shortage of women police in the governorates, among other hurdles. Currently, the MPS have no more than three women officers and no women investigators.^{xx}

In MPS locations where there are women police, their value is recognized by the community and the police themselves. An MPS station commander in Ninewah governorate noted that the integration of the Family and Child Protection Unit and the presence of two women police within the MPS had contributed to a significant increase in reporting of family and other violence cases by women and children between 2022 and 2023. Although early days, the MPS initiative is building an evidence-base and mobilizing support for the existence of more women police, and creating a space for communities and the Police to collaborate in identifying context-specific pathways for more women to work with and alongside the police (see Insight 5).^{xxi} The continued nurturing of this process is critical for increasing women's representation and empowerment within the Police.

The courage of Iraq's women police officers

UNDP and the MOI produced a short video showcasing the role of Iraq's women police officers in serving their communities and enhancing access to justice and security. Major Qatir Alnada Salah shares her experiences in this video:



Through capacity-building interventions, UNDP is supporting women police and the MOI to address organizational barriers to women's representation and empowerment.^{xxii} The MPS training approach, for example, trains men and women together (which is rare in MOI training institutes), setting the foundation for improved joint operations within the MPS. Currently women police receive only four weeks of basic training (compared to six months for men). UNDP is working with the MOI's Training and Qualifications Directorate (see Insight 6) to identify ways of strengthening the curriculum for women police.

At the policy level, the MOI Strategy (2024-2026) commits to increasing women's representation within the Police and improving working conditions for women personnel including through changes to policies and practices across the organization. The MOI has formed a committee of senior advisors, including the head of the MOI's Women's Empowerment Department, to develop an action plan for empowering women within the MOI. These commitments reflect a broader strategic shift towards more inclusive and effective policing that meets women's safety and security needs and empowers women to play a significant role in the Police.

Insight 5: Effective community engagement improves trust and confidence in the police and better enables the delivery of policing services for all people.

Rebuilding trust between the Police and communities is a strategic priority in the Road Map, the National SSR Strategy (2024-2032) and the MOI's Strategy (2024-2026). Policy commitments must translate into tangible results for those most affected by injustice and insecurity to secure political, institutional and societal support. This is especially important in liberated areas where people's security and justice needs vary widely based on

their experiences, as well as on the specific impacts of ISIL's occupation and violence. In these locations, trustworthy and effective policing is crucial for establishing a sense of order and safety, mitigating and addressing local grievances, and can aid in reintegration of returnees and IDPs, promote reconciliation, reduce social tensions and foster cohesion. Restoring public confidence and support requires accountable actions, effective community engagement, and a demonstrated commitment by the Police to deliver professional, responsive and rights-respecting policing, especially for the most vulnerable. This is crucial for the long-term sustainability of security sector reforms and overall governance.

At the heart of building trust with communities is the Police's ability to demonstrably address people's concerns, deliver on their core function to provide security, and cultivate a perception of the Police as being trustworthy, effective, accessible and accountable. Strengthening community engagement, focusing on how the police engage and build trust with the community and public participation in policing decisions, is key to MOI and UNDP efforts. Through the MPS, police receive mandatory community engagement and communications training. A recent MOI directive has ordered this training to be institutionalized within the MOI's national annual police training curriculum. This training complements the work of the MOI's specialized community policing units that have been integrated within the MPS, and reinforces UNDP's commitment to community engagement as an institutional ethos and core element of everyday police work.

Building on the MPS experience, UNDP is adopting an integrated programming approach, leveraging stabilization programme results and combining social cohesion and SSR expertise to support the reintegration of returnees from Al Hol camp in Syria (persons generally perceived as affiliated with ISIL) and internally displaced returnees (displaced by ISIL violence). Strengthening local security and perceptions of safety and trust in state institutions is critical for successful and peaceful reintegration. The project aims to foster trust and understanding between police and communities through enhancing police capacities to engage communities and deliver services that respond to diverse safety and security needs, especially for returning women and children. Specialized training will focus on communication, mediation and trust-building and increasing understanding of the cultural, social, and psychological dimensions of reintegration.

Through the MPS initiatives, UNDP supports station commanders to host "Open House Days." These events aim to facilitate the necessary cultural shift towards more community-oriented and people-centred policing. The open house days invite community representatives, including women, youth, tribal and community leaders, teachers, local business owners, religious leaders, community-based organisations and others, to learn about the MPS "one-stop shop" services. In the liberated areas, Local Peace Committees, supported by UNDP's social cohesion programme, also attend. The open house days provide platforms for increased public participation in local security planning to ensure policing services respond to the unique needs of each community. In pilot areas, regular open house days are supporting trust building and mutual recognition of the value of working together. Surveys in MPS locations showed the number of people seeking help from the MPS more than doubled between 2022 and 2023, and level of satisfaction with police services also increased.^{xxiii}

Recently, the MOI issued a directive requiring all police stations to conduct open house days every two months. Station commanders in other areas travel to the MPS to learn how to conduct open house days. The MOI uses social media to engage and inform communities about the ongoing reforms. As awareness and opportunities for engagement grow, so does demand for more responsive policing. One MPS station commander noted that people were now travelling from outside his station's jurisdiction to seek his MPS services. Through increased awareness, civil society and the public are also being empowered to hold the Police accountable in delivering quality security services.



Insight 6: Data and evidence are crucial for tailoring policing services to meet people’s needs, building trust, and enhancing effectiveness and accountability.

Adopting a people-centred approach to security requires understanding the specific justice and security needs, expectations and experiences of people and communities. UNDP has adopted a learning and adaptive programming approach that prioritizes integrated knowledge management and consistent data exchange and joint analysis across its SSR/rule of law, social cohesion and women’s empowerment teams to inform programming. Annual perception surveys, key informant interviews and focus group discussions track changes in public perceptions of safety and security and of the Police (see text box below).^{xxiv} Data and analysis reveals the diversity of justice and security priorities across groups and communities requiring tailored responses. A proposed justice needs survey and a conflict sensitivity analysis of post-ISIL community conflict dynamics aim to enhance collaboration between UNDP’s SSR and rule of law and social cohesion teams for integrated and area-based programming (see Insight 5).

For the MOI, factors such as operational security concerns, capacity and resource limitations, and complex political and security dynamics hinder effective data management. As a long-standing trusted partner, UNDP is working with the MOI to strengthen its internal capacities to drive a data- and evidence-informed reform process towards more people-centred policing (see Insight 1). This support has practically reinforced the value of data for informing operational and policy decisions. Data and analysis from joint MOI-UNDP assessments directly informed the design, roll-out and adaptations of the MPS initiative. The delivery of the MPS’ training course for police personnel, “Improving the effectiveness of local police,” focuses on improving the skills and techniques of police for collecting, validating, analyzing and prioritizing information for effective and timely use in the police operational context.^{xxv} Public perception data regarding the quality of policing services has supported MOI strategic planning and policy making.

The MPS project public perception surveys reveal positive change in police behaviour

In collaboration with the MOI, UNDP commissioned the MPS pre-implementation survey in February and March 2022 to understand the perceptions of 6000 individuals, including 2189 women, of police services offered by the six approved MPS, and to establish a baseline for tracking change. A second survey was conducted in 2023, revealing some important trends:

- An increased sense of safety and trust in the Police evidenced by a 13% increase in the number of people who reported a criminal incident to the Police in the past 12 months.
- Increased engagement and personal interactions between respondents and police. The survey data showed a 53% increase in the number of people who were in contact with the Police up to three times in the past 12 months
- Experience of discrimination at an MPS remained consistently low.
- Significant improvement in respondents' satisfaction with their police station's performance. The survey data showed an almost 15% increase in the number of respondents who were very satisfied with the performance of the police station in their area.
- Elevated appreciation for staff courtesy, improved accessibility, and effective verbal communication from the MPS. There was an increase of 17% in the number of survey respondents who reported a very good experience of MPS personnel courtesy.

The new MOI strategy highlights the importance of data and effective data management systems as key enablers of institutional change, including through digitalization. Technology and digital tools can be powerful conduits for the improved efficiency and quality of security service delivery and accountability for human rights and the rule of law. For example, police case management systems can support crime trend analysis that informs resource allocations for more effective local security responses. Digitalization is a priority for the government and a key aspect of UNDP's support for effective, rights-based service delivery. UNDP is exploring opportunities to support the MOI, Police, and the wider justice sector in using technology for better data management and more accountable people-centered justice and security.

Insight 7: A combination of policy and institutional reforms and training at scale supports the mindset and behaviour change needed for police transformation.

Transforming the Police is a process of political, organisational, and individual mindset and behaviour change requiring sustained engagement and support to succeed. UNDP's long-term support to the government, the Police, and local communities prioritises local ownership, partnerships, and trust-building for sustained people-centred police reforms. Support to high-level policy processes helped build political buy-in and established an enabling environment for people-centred policing (see Insight 2). A focus on institutional capacity building empowered the MOI to operationalize and drive reforms (see Insights 2 and 6). The MPS pilot concretely showed politicians and government officials, police personnel and community members the value of people-centred policing (see Insights 3, 4 and 5). Lessons from the pilot directly informed high-level decision-making and have catalyzed operational reforms that are changing policing practices (such as the SOP for criminal investigations and now-mandatory open house days) and increasing police accountability. This political and organisational support has been underpinned by a comprehensive training approach focused on shifting the mindsets and

UNDP's POLICE TRAINING FIGURES:

2,290 Participants from the MOI (120 women) trained on UNDP developed people-centered policing courses

434 Iraqi MOI trainers capacitated

6,207 MOI participants reached with UNDP training in cascade trainings delivered by Iraqi MOI trainers

behaviors of police personnel towards more people-centred policing. In partnership with the MOI and its Training and Qualifications Directorate, the approach has focused on delivering training at scale through strengthening MOI internal police training capacities and institutionalizing modern training curriculums while simultaneously addressing immediate skills gaps for thousands of police personnel (see text box below).

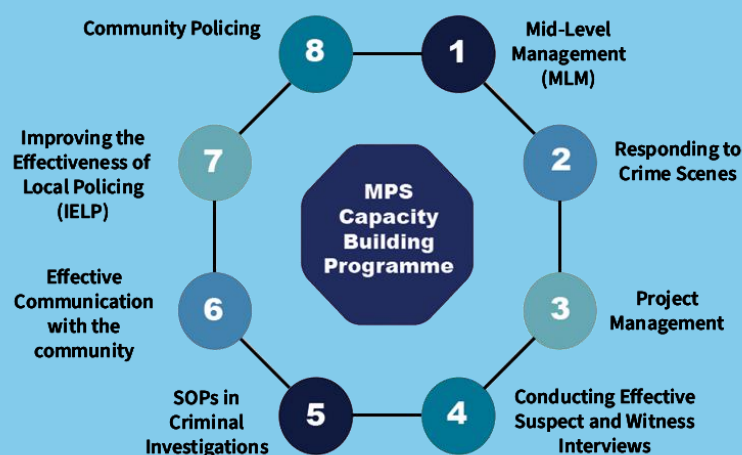
A strategic approach to police training for sustainability and scale

Re-imagining the role of the police requires rethinking the way police are trained. UNDP’s approach to police training has focused on piloting, refining and institutionalizing training courses that provide police personnel with the skills and knowledge needed to implement human rights-based people-centred policing. With the support of the MOI, and in close partnership with the Training and Qualifications Directorate, the approach has included:

- Co-designing training courses with the MOI Training and Qualifications Directorate to address skills gaps (e.g. criminal investigations) and reinforce priorities within people-centred policy frameworks (e.g. communications and community engagement training), including eight mandatory courses within the MPS initiative (see Diagram 3). Human rights and women’s access to justice are cross-cutting issues that are integrated in all the mandatory courses. UNDP trained 2,290 participants from the MoI through its tailored training courses.
- Building MOI police trainers’ capacities to deliver new courses using modern pedagogical techniques, and piloting and adapting curriculums to trainee needs. Between 2020 and July 2024, 434 police trainers and other personnel received specialist train-the-trainer’s training.
- Mentoring Iraqi police trainers to deliver the new courses (the so-called UNDP–MoI cascade training plan), creating a feedback loop that fosters a culture of continuous improvement for the delivery of quality police training across MOI training institutes. Training mid-level Police management personnel in leadership and change management skills needed to implement and drive reforms as they rise through the ranks. To date, MOI trainers have provided mid-level management training 6,207 police personnel.

From the outset, the MOI has recognized and supported the role of training for transforming the Police. An MOI directive exempted MPSP police trainees from the IPS rotation system for two years to enable the consolidation of training efforts. More recently, an MOI directive ordered the eight mandatory MPS courses to be institutionalized in the annual national training plan for the Police meaning these courses will now be delivered across all MOI training centres in Iraq (excluding the Kurdistan region). These courses are also being made available on the MOI e-learning platform accessible by police personnel across the country.

Diagram 3: Mandatory MPSP training courses



Cultivating a network of change champions is vital for enabling and sustaining transformative change. Change agents help build internal support for change, leading by example, and maintaining momentum for the organisational cultural shift needed. The MPS initiative has mobilised a network of change champions within the Police, the MOI and in communities. Police station commanders from across the country regularly visit the MPS to understand what is done differently and how, and then apply these new practices in their own stations.^{xxvi} At a reflection workshop in late 2023, MOI representatives and MPS commanders recognised the pilot initiative's positive impact in catalysing transformations in law enforcement, in fostering community trust, effectiveness, and increased accountability, and recommended the expansion of the MPS concept nationwide. Reiterating the importance of integrating specialized units within police stations, comprehensive training, media and community outreach, and increased women's representation, the participants also recommended further reforms in areas such as recruitment, continuous professional development, and women's empowerment for enhancing the operational capacity and effectiveness of the Police. The workshop recommendations were endorsed and adopted by the MOI and informed the content of the new MOI Strategy that has prioritised sustaining and scaling the new modes and methods of policing across the country.

Conclusion

Having overcome years of conflict, and aspiring towards a peaceful, stable and prosperous future, Iraq and its people continue to face a complex and interlinked set of human, national and global security challenges, ranging from everyday justice and security problems, to the persistent threat of non-state armed groups, regional insecurity, and the effects of climate change.^{xxvii} The MPS initiative revealed the potential for people-centred policing to support the police and communities in navigating these current and future threats. Recently, the government announced an intention to expand the MPS initiative nationwide, in support of its broader mission to reform the security sector to better provide security for "individuals, society and institutions."^{xxviii} Yet the government has also emphasized the importance of UNDP's sustained support to achieve this aim.

As the insights presented in this paper reveal, there is a growing political and institutional commitment and knowledge of what it takes to put people-centred policing into action from the side of the government, and a strong social demand for safety and security to be provided by a legitimate, effective and accountable Police. Within the MOI's reform efforts, issues of women's representation and empowerment, effective data management, professional development and leadership training, and strengthened cooperation across the justice and security sectors remain priorities for fully realizing an inclusive, accountable people-centred police service.

Looking ahead, and building on successes to date, UNDP's experience in Iraq highlights the importance of sustained multi-level support that strategically combines political, organizational and community interventions, continues to enable national ownership of police reform processes, and supports and strengthens trusted partnerships for change. As Iraq navigates a volatile regional and global context and decreasing international support, including the upcoming withdrawal of UNAMI, continued support to the Police to prevent and mitigate conflict and provide people with everyday safety and security will be critical for Iraq's resilience and future development.^{xxix}

Recommendations

Based on lessons from UNDP's people-centred security approach to policing support in Iraq, this paper offers the following recommendations for practitioners and policymakers at the national and international levels.

- (a) **Adopting a people-centred security approach at the outset of a post-conflict triple nexus intervention is essential** for effective and sustainable outcomes. Re-establishing a police service must prioritize the needs and participation of people and communities to strengthen trust between the population and security providers and the state. The people-centred security approach supports integrated and adaptive programming that strategically marries stabilisation and social cohesion support with longer-term reform processes aimed at ensuring quality, effective and accountable policing services for all people, and especially the most vulnerable. UNDP Iraq accompanied people-centred policing efforts throughout the stabilization phase and is extending that support to critical development issues such as climate change, through support to the environmental police.
- (b) **Translating high-level, people-centred security policy commitments into tangible results** for the Police and local communities is important for securing political, organisational and societal support for a new way of policing. The easy-to-understand MPS concept practically demonstrated the value of people-centred policing, professional integrity, accountability and adherence to human rights for effectively addressing immediate local safety and security needs, and supporting the state's longer-term efforts to restore the Police as the primary, legitimate public security provider within a complex hybrid security context.
- (c) **Building networks of change champions and ensuring processes are anchored in national reform processes and are locally-driven and owned** is necessary for the sustained transformation of the Police. A multi-faceted approach focused on training for attitude and behaviour change, high-level policy support, and organisational reforms showcased through the MPS initiative, was effective for mobilising people-centred policing supporters and champions across interest groups, within all levels of government and across society.
- (d) **The role and actions of the Police cannot be seen in isolation to the broader justice and security system.** Efforts to strengthen people-centred policing must be complemented by support to key justice actors to ensure the delivery of accountable, quality services and justice and security outcomes for people, and especially the most vulnerable. The MPS has proven to be a catalyst for enhanced cooperation and collaboration across the criminal justice system in support of increased access to justice and security.



- ⁱ See <https://www.moi.gov.iq/?page=39>.
- ⁱⁱ Jessica Watkins, 'From Green to Blue? Local Policing in Iraq Post-ISIL.' (8 July 2020) at <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/mec/2020/07/08/from-green-to-blue-local-policing-in-iraq-post-isil/>
- ⁱⁱⁱ The MPS initiative has been supported by the generous funding received from the governments of The Netherlands, Canada, Denmark and Germany.
- ^{iv} <https://www.diis.dk/en/research/security-provision-and-external-actors-in-iraq>
- ^v The Police Agency was established by virtue of Ministerial Order No. 3100 on 5 February 2004. Its organizational structure was approved by virtue of Administrative Order No. 246 on 1 February 2014 see: <https://www.moi.gov.iq/?page=39>.
- ^{vi} Notably, the Police Agency has a limited investigations mandate for criminal offences that is focused on initial inquiries only. Following initiation of criminal proceedings, responsibility for the investigation lies with the investing judge who may assign responsibilities to the police, see the Iraqi Law on Criminal Proceedings No 23 of 1971, articles 41 and 46.
- ^{vii} Jessica Watkins et al, 'Locating the local police in Iraq's security arena: community policing, the 'three Ps' and trust in Ninawa Province'. *Third World Quarterly*, 1–19. (2022) at <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2022.2118705>
- ^{viii} Republic of Iraq Ministry of Interior Police Affairs Agency, *Local Police Service Road Map*, 17.
- ^{ix} Republic of Iraq Ministry of Interior Police Affairs Agency, *Local Police Service Road Map*
- ^x See <https://www.undp.org/iraq/projects/funding-facility-stabilization>
- ^{xi} Khitam Alkhaykane, 'Justice and Security Needs in Iraq after ISIL Understanding Displaced Populations' Concerns with Returning Home, United States Institute of Peace, Special Report 389 (August 2016) at https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/SR389_Justice-and-Security-Needs-in-Iraq-after-ISIL.pdf.
- ^{xii} UNDP Iraq, 'Ministry of Interior officially inaugurates the Local Police Service Road Map'. (12 November 2018) at [https://www.undp.org/iraq/press-releases/ministry-interior-officially-inaugurates-local-police-service-road-map#:~:text=The%20Local%20Police%20Service%20Road%20Map%20therefore%2C%20provides%20a%20strategy,2\)%20Crime%20Management%2C%203](https://www.undp.org/iraq/press-releases/ministry-interior-officially-inaugurates-local-police-service-road-map#:~:text=The%20Local%20Police%20Service%20Road%20Map%20therefore%2C%20provides%20a%20strategy,2)%20Crime%20Management%2C%203).
- ^{xiii} See <https://www.undp.org/crisis/humanitarian-development-and-peace-nexus/>.
- ^{xiv} UNDP Iraq, Ministry of Interior officially inaugurates the Local Police Service Road Map (12 November 2018) at [https://www.undp.org/iraq/press-releases/ministry-interior-officially-inaugurates-local-police-service-road-map#:~:text=The%20Local%20Police%20Service%20Road%20Map%20therefore%2C%20provides%20a%20strategy,2\)%20Crime%20Management%2C%203](https://www.undp.org/iraq/press-releases/ministry-interior-officially-inaugurates-local-police-service-road-map#:~:text=The%20Local%20Police%20Service%20Road%20Map%20therefore%2C%20provides%20a%20strategy,2)%20Crime%20Management%2C%203).
- ^{xv} The SSRP outlined 15 security sector problems and a set of strategic system priorities for the government, each priority being supported by an international partner. UNDP supports the Democratic / Institutional Oversight and Accountability; Critical Infrastructure Protection; Criminal Justice and Law Enforcement; and Women and SSR priorities.
- ^{xvi} Republic of Iraq, *The National Strategy for Iraq Security Sector Reform* (2024-2032), 4.
- ^{xvii} Republic of Iraq Ministry of Interior Police Affairs Agency, *Local Police Service Road Map*, 29.
- ^{xviii} See Kurdistan 24, "UN to promote women's role in Iraq," (24 March 2023) at <https://www.kurdistan24.net/en/story/31000-UN-to-promote-women%E2%80%99s-role-in-Iraq;accessible-to-women>.
- ^{xix} See UNDP, *Policy Brief: Gender assessment in relation to Model Police Station pilot assessment* at <https://www.undp.org/iraq/publications/policy-brief-gender-assessment-relation-model-police-station-pilot-assessment>
- ^{xx} See UNDP, *Policy Brief: Gender assessment in relation to Model Police Station pilot assessment* at <https://www.undp.org/iraq/publications/policy-brief-gender-assessment-relation-model-police-station-pilot-assessment>.
- ^{xxi} Jessica Watkins et al, *Local Policing in Iraq Post-ISIL: Carving Out an Arena for Community Service?* LSE Middle East Centre Paper Series 51 (July 2021), 20. UNDP Development Future Series, *We are the first spark: The quest of women peacebuilders in Iraq for a more peaceful and equal society* (June 2023) at <https://www.undp.org/publications/dfs-we-are-the-first-spark-quest-women-peacebuilders-iraq-more-peaceful-and-equal-society>.
- ^{xxii} See for example, UNDP Iraq, "Female Iraqi police are watchful eyes for rule of law," (22 January 2023) at <https://www.undp.org/iraq/stories/female-iraqi-police-are-watchful-eyes-rule-law>; UNDP, "The courage of Iraq's female police officers" (video) at <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=527302972892671>; UNDP, "The role of women in the MOI" (video) at <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=965632798309403>; and UNDP, "Making all men and women feel safe in Iraq" (video) at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iJwEpsv1H5g>.
- ^{xxiii} UNDP Iraq, *Mini- Perception Survey to support the Model Police Station Pilot Initiative, Pre and Post Survey Data Analysis/Comparison* (July 2023).
- ^{xxiv} See for example: <https://www.undp.org/iraq/publications/policy-brief-public-perception-survey-local-safety-and-security-iraq>; https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/migration/iq/UND-P-IQ-Public-Perception-Survey_Final.pdf.
- ^{xxv} UNDP Iraq, "Improving the Effectiveness of Local Police in Iraq," (3 July 2019) at <https://www.undp.org/iraq/news/improving-effectiveness-local-police-iraq>.
- ^{xxvi} UNDP Iraq, Promoting people-centred Policing through Model Police Stations, (8 February 2024) at <https://www.undp.org/iraq/blog/promoting-people-centred-policing-through-model-police-stations>.
- ^{xxvii} Maria-Louise Clause, 'Security provision and external actors in Iraq: Insights from a recent survey' (23 June 2021) at <https://www.diis.dk/en/research/security-provision-and-external-actors-in-iraq>.
- ^{xxviii} Republic of Iraq, *The National Strategy for Iraq Security Sector Reform* (2024-2032), 3.
- ^{xxix} UNDP Development Futures Series, Putting Fragility at the Center of Iraq's Recovery from the COVID-19 Pandemic and the Oil Crisis (9 March 2021) at <https://www.undp.org/library/dfs-putting-fragility-center-iraqs-recovery-covid-19-pandemic-and-oil-crisis>, 6; UNDP, Funding Facility for Stabilization 2023 Quarter Three Report (2023), 7 at <https://www.undp.org/iraq/publications/funding-facility-stabilization-quarter-three-report-2023>.

