

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

Supporting Iraq in transforming its police service, as part of the larger Security Sector Reform efforts UNDP learned seven key lessons:

Insight 1: Police reform & synergies between humanitarian, development and peacebuilding interventions in the aftermath of conflict.

Since 2013, UNDP's stabilisation support to the reconstruction and rehabilitation of police stations in areas liberated from Daesh helped consolidate state authority, returning civilian law enforcement capabilities to restore stability, provide a sense of safety to communities, and mitigate against the return of ISIL. Rebuilding trust in the police and the state also required understanding and responding to the underlying causes of eroded trust, and the public demand for legitimate, accountable and effective policing in communities. UNDP's people-centred policing approach within the triple nexus (humanitarian- peace building – development) integrated SSR, social cohesion and stabilisation programming in support of Iraq's transition from conflict to peace and sustainable development.

Insight 2: The requirements of broad political support, high-level political leadership, and sustained national commitment to a long-term strategy for change are prerequisites for successful police transformation.

Sustained political leadership that can provide the necessary resources, support, and oversight is critical for successful transformation. To ensure the sustainability of reform efforts within a dynamic political environment, the government, with UNDP's support, anchored reform strategies in high-level political processes, invested in MOI's organizational capacities, and mobilized international support through coordination mechanisms and strategic partnerships. The Model Police Station (MPS) initiative, where reforms are put into practice has been critical in sustaining this high-level political support.

Insight 3: Translating police stations' local successes into national policy action: Connecting effective community action to high-level policy addresses immediate justice and security needs and drives systemic change.

Transforming police units into people-centred service providers requires a mindset, behaviour, and organizational culture change putting people's needs at the centre of reforms. The MPS initiative has helped facilitate this change by practically demonstrating the value of people-centred policing to politicians, the police and people. The MPS 'one-stop shop' model brought together specialized family and child protection, juvenile, and community policing units to deliver more efficient and responsive services, particularly for women and children. It has driven more accountable and rights-respecting policing investigation practices, and strengthened partnerships with the judiciary 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 officers increase policing effectiveness, thereby strengthening public confidence. The MPS initiative saw increased reporting of family violence cases where women officers were present. However, women face many cultural, systemic, and organizational barriers to joining and advancing within the Police. Increasing women's representation requires strategic, multi-sectoral, and context-specific approaches with political and public support. The MOI Strategy (2024-2026) commits to increasing women's representation and improving working conditions, for more inclusive policing.

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, through community engagement and public participation is essential for effective police reform. Through the MPS initiative, community engagement and communications training were tested and made mandatory within MOI's national annual police training curriculum. An MOI directive has made MPS "Open House Days" compulsory in all police stations, increasing public participation, increasing trust, and promoting better accountability for quality policing services.

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

People-centred policing requires understanding and responding to the specific justice and security needs, expectations and experiences of people and communities. Annual surveys have revealed a significant increase in the number of people seeking help from modal police stations, and increased satisfaction with police services. UNDP works with MOI to improve data-driven and evidence-informed reforms. The new MOI strategy emphasizes data management and digital tools to improve service delivery and accountability, in line with the government's e-governance priorities.

Insight 7: Reaching large numbers of police officers through training: A strategic combination of policy and institutional reforms and training at scale supports the mindset and behaviour change needed for police transformation.

Comprehensive training at scale has been critical to sustain political, organizational, and individual mindset changes needed for police transformation. UNDP and MOI have co-designed and institutionalized modern training courses to address skill gaps and reinforce people-centered policing priorities which were delivered by UNDP to 2,290 participants from the Mol. Investing in the capacities of over 434 police training personnel to deliver cascade MPS training across Iraq. With these cascade trainings Mol supported by UNDP reached additional 6,207 Mol participants on training for leadership and change management skills and built a network of change champions that can sustain and expand police reforms nationwide.

For more details see the full report [here](#).