

A photograph showing two men at a decorative metal gate. One man, wearing a white shirt, dark pants, and a face mask, is carrying a cardboard box. The other man, wearing a grey shirt and pants, is standing near the gate. The gate is set in a stone wall. The background shows green trees and a clear sky.

# Social Cohesion Programme during COVID-19 Update

United Nations Development Programme Iraq July 2020

## PREFACE

While stopping the spread of the coronavirus requires physical distancing, it is imperative that social connection remains strong for the health of both individuals and communities. This is true for every country in the world, but even more so in Iraq, a country that has been fragmented by two decades of recurrent conflict. COVID-19 and the response may affect underlying causes of social tension, producing new forms of vulnerability and fragility in Iraqi society. In order to promote social cohesion and solidarity during these challenging times, UNDP Iraq's Social Cohesion Programme has formed a multi-faceted approach in response to the needs of the most vulnerable facing the COVID-19 pandemic. Restriction of movement, limitations on group meetings, government closures and increased uncertainty have been considered in order to find innovative ways to perform outreach, such as use of community volunteers, youth, and communications technology to positively influence livelihood and peace processes. Resiliency, determination, and innovation have been key in ensuring successful implementation of social cohesion projects.

UNDP Iraq's Social Cohesion Programme has supported establishing and capacitating 24 local peace structures, including local peace committees and women and youth groups, in the governorates of Anbar, Ninewa, Salah al-Din, and Diyala. Local peace committees have joined and supported the formed crisis cells for COVID-19 response in their communities and conducted information awareness campaigns, distributed food and hygiene products to those who need it most and worked to sterilise public spaces. Additionally, national campaigns such as a nationwide social cohesion art contest and an initiative to discourage domestic violence were launched on both local and national platforms to reach all Iraqis.

Local Peace  
Committees

National  
Campaigns

NGO  
Partners

Women  
Groups

Youth  
Groups



## SEWING FACE MASKS AS PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT

In January 2020, UNDP Iraq, in partnership with Kurdistan Human Rights Watch, trained sixty women on sewing and tailoring in Ninewa over the course of a ten-day workshop. After successful completion, 30 women were employed to use their skills to produce face masks for a pharmaceutical company contracted by the Ninewa Department of Health. The seamstresses began creating thousands of masks daily in controlled conditions. Aseel, 45, says, “We have produced thousands of pieces and the major portion is delivered to the Ninewa Health Department. Some other organizations are also receiving face masks from us and they distribute those free of cost in communities and camps.”

## STERILIZING STREETS AND PUBLIC SPACES

Twenty-four Local Peace Committees were formed in Anbar, Ninewa, and Salah al-Din, three governorates liberated from ISIL’s occupation in Iraq, as part of a project undertaken by UNDP Iraq’s Integrated Reconciliation Programme, funded by Denmark. The committees have played a pivotal role in managing the pandemic by sterilizing public spaces, disseminating important information, and distributing food and emergency items to vulnerable families. In Anbar Governorate in June, eleven Local Peace Committees joined forces to sterilize public spaces in including markets, streets, residential areas, schools, government institutions, mosques, and Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps in major areas by trained response teams in coordination from Anbar’s Defense, Health and Municipalities directorates.



## LIFE SUPPORT PACKAGE DISTRIBUTION



## DISTRIBUTION TARGET







## SUPPORTING LOCAL WOMEN-LED INITIATIVES

Formed by UNDP Iraq with support from the Government of Denmark, members of the Salah al-Din Women's Peace Group are setting up first aid clinics, producing and distributing Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), developing and distributing informational fliers and collecting and providing essential food, clothing, and sanitary items to people who need them most. Raffala, who is featured in the linked article below, and her team, also work with Local Peace Committees to distribute food baskets, clothes and sterilization equipment in Samarra, Balad, Tikrit, Tuz Khurmato and Sharqat, and in Internally Displaced Persons camps in Shahama and Dayum. The group also sews and distributes masks to police officers and other community members at a higher risk of contracting the virus.

## FOOD DISTRIBUTION CAMPAIGN

"Ahalna" means "our people" in Arabic. It's also the name of the distribution campaign started in late April by Local Peace Committee members supported by UNDP in partnership with Kurdistan Human Rights Watch and with generous contributions from the governments of Denmark and Germany. To date, 8,250 people have been reached, with a target of 25,000 people. The support provided responds to emergency needs, such as life-support packages containing food items, provision of hygiene products, and awareness campaigns. In addition to distribution of life support packages, UNDP Iraq's Integrated Reconciliation Project is working to provide grants to local Community-Based Organizations and Non-Governmental Organizations in select areas to raise awareness about coronavirus and sterilize public spaces.



When food distribution in Ramadi, Anbar Governorate, occurred in early July, residents of the area were surveyed and asked about messages they would like to share with others in Iraq during this difficult time. Responses were a reminder of the power of hope, the importance of health, and proof that above all, the people of Iraq desire peace.

*"Please follow health instructions during these difficult circumstance in order to maintain public safety. I ask all members of society to join hands and help each other to overcome this crisis and establish peace in all of Iraq."*

Akram, 50 years old, is a laborer who lost his job due to the curfew.



## TRAINING SOCIAL WORKERS TO PROVIDE PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT

UNDP Iraq's Integrated Reconciliation Project supports victims of violence and women affected by conflict, aligning with the UN Secretary General's recent call to put women and girls at the center of efforts during the COVID-19 pandemic response. Movement restrictions and government-mandated social distancing have confined family members to their homes, limiting their connection with others. Supported by the Government of Denmark, 75 social workers from NGOs across 15 governorates were trained online on providing psychosocial support for victims of violence in conflict settings in April. After the training, each social worker contacted ten women a day by phone, reaching 7,500 women after ten days. The target is to reach 18,000 women through 250 trained social workers.



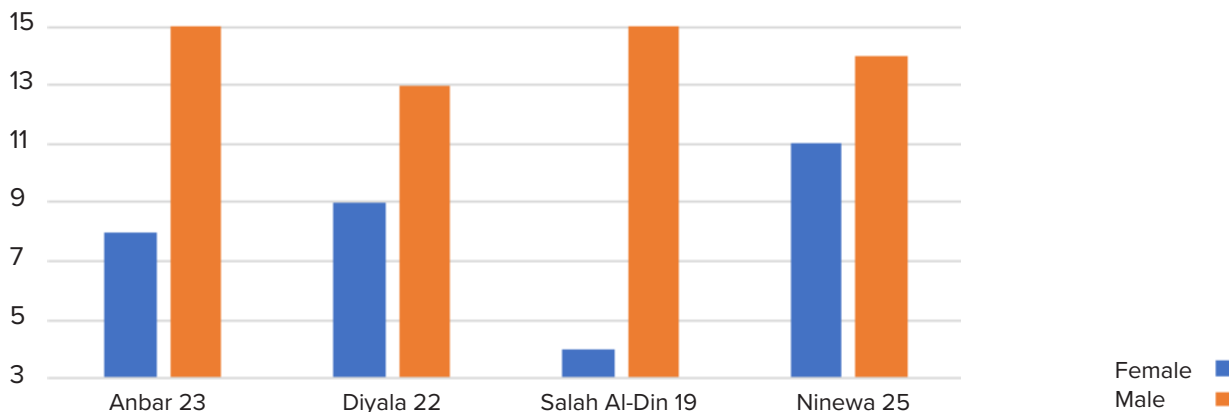
## YOUTH CAMPAIGN DISCOURAGING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

The Social Cohesion Programme has formed youth groups for peace in Anbar, Ninewa, Salah al-Din and Diyala, and facilitation and support for social cohesion initiatives is currently ongoing. Accordingly, UNDP Iraq supported a youth group in Diyala to develop messaging on the increase in violence against women and girls during the pandemic, and the importance of combatting violence. The #tolerance\_insteadof\_violence campaign, launched on 04 May, was shared by over sixty social media platforms in Iraq, including local news agencies, government officials, social media influencers, and non-governmental organizations.



## YOUTH GROUP MEMBERS

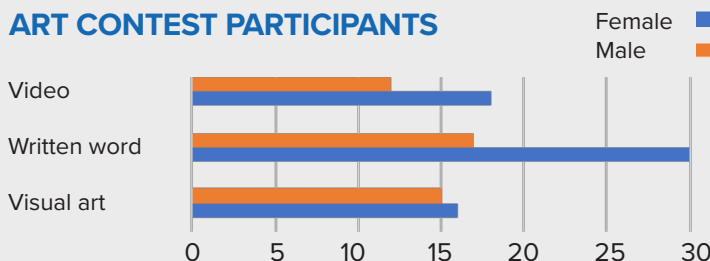
The Social Cohesion Programme's four youth groups for peace are invested in working to address key topics that affect the social fabric of Iraq, including domestic violence, poverty, education, health, and unemployment.



## PROMOTING SOCIAL COHESION THROUGH ART

From 26 March to 19 April, UNDP Iraq's Social Cohesion Programme held a nation-wide art contest. The contest requested submissions in the form of visual art, written word, and video that express what social cohesion in Iraq means. Over 100 submissions were received from the public and judged by a panel that included a prominent Iraqi media influencer, musician, and journalist, as well as UNDP staff. Submissions will be published on all UNDP Iraq social media platforms.

### ART CONTEST PARTICIPANTS



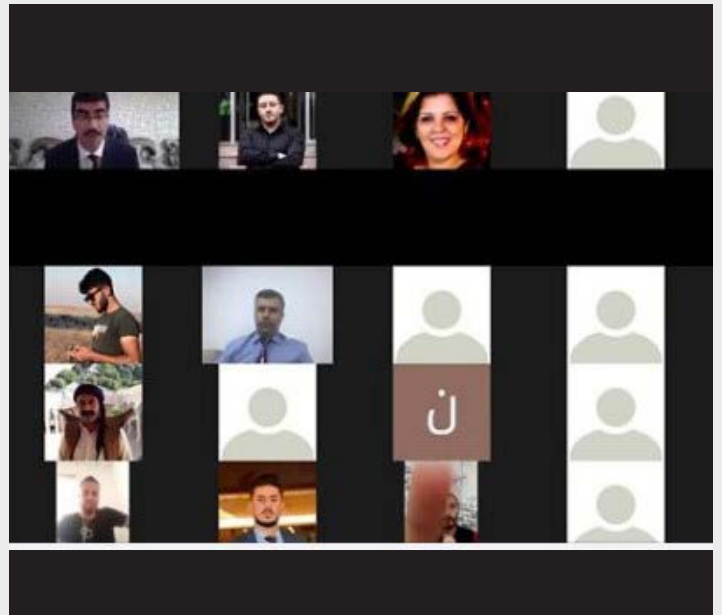
## CAPACITY BUILDING AND INTER-FAITH COOPERATION

UNDP Iraq and local NGO Al Tahreer Association for Development, with support from the Government of Japan and Germany's Ministry for Economic Cooperation through KfW, have trained more than 280 religious leaders from across the Ninewa Plains (including Christian, Yazidi, Sunni and Shia Muslim leaders), in peer education, social cohesion and recovery pathways and strategies. In June, 25 religious leaders from across the Ninewa Plains joined forces to deliver essential food and hygiene products to the most vulnerable families of Tel Kaif, Bashiqa, Hamam Al leel, Al Qayara and Hamdaniya. In addition to religious leaders, 25 youth activists and 15 women activists also participated in food basket distribution during the month of June. The religious leaders and activists participated in a day-long online training focused on planning, implementation, tools, and distribution of humanitarian aid.

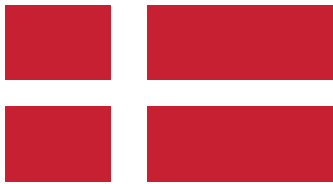


## VIRTUAL PEACE CONFERENCE

The spread of COVID-19 and reliance on physical distancing for safety has led to alternative ways of working, including use of technology in place of in-person meetings. On June 27, UNDP Iraq and local NGO Al Tahreer Association for Development held an online peace conference on strengthening local capacities to prevent violence and decrease deep-rooted tensions in Ninewa with 52 attendees including religious leaders, government representatives, and youth.



**THANK YOU TO OUR PARTNERS. WITHOUT YOUR CONTINUOUS SUPPORT, THESE PROGRAMMES WOULD NOT BE POSSIBLE.**



The Government of Denmark:  
Integrated Reconciliation Project



The Government of Germany:  
Funding Facility for Stabilization and  
Iraq Crisis Response and Resilience Programme

UNDP is the leading United Nations organization fighting to end the injustice of poverty, inequality, and climate change. Working with our broad network of experts and partners in 170 countries, we help nations to build integrated, lasting solutions for people and planet.



Learn more at [undp.org](https://undp.org) or follow at [@UNDP](https://twitter.com/UNDP).

For more information on UNDP Iraq's Social Cohesion Programme, please contact  
[Nadia.Alawamleh@undp.org](mailto:Nadia.Alawamleh@undp.org) or [Abdelmoneim.Mustafa@undp.org](mailto:Abdelmoneim.Mustafa@undp.org).