

Civil Peace Service (CPS) - Iraq

Dealing with the past and peacebuilding in Northern Iraq

Background

Massive experiences of violence have led to collective trauma and deep-seated mistrust. The dictatorship of Saddam Hussein, the three Gulf Wars and the subsequent civil wars and genocides have hit all population groups in Iraq hard. The advance of the terrorist group Islamic State (ISIS) has dramatically worsened the situation in Iraq since the summer of 2014. ISIS murdered thousands of Yazidis, Christians, and members of other religious minority groups. More than 3,000 Yazidi women were abducted and sexually enslaved by ISIS. Over three million people fled their ancestral territories in Iraq, many of them to the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. Since 2017, ISIS has been considered largely defeated militarily in Iraq, but it continues to carry out attacks. Most refugees and internally displaced people have no confidence in the ability of the Iraqi government to provide security in the process of re-construction, and do not dare to return to their homes. Survivors and families of missing persons are still seeking recognition, justice and accountability for the crimes committed against them.

CPS approach

The Civil Peace Service (CPS) is a global program for the prevention of violence and peacebuilding in crisis and conflict regions. In Iraq, it strengthens the capacities of civil society organisations and governmental institutions in dealing with the past since 2017. Different approaches of transitional justice, psychosocial support mechanisms and dialogue processes are synergized and aim at a peaceful coexistence in Iraq.

The project cooperates with identified partner organisations that have conducted serious investigations into the crimes of ISIS and provide care for traumatized survivors and family members. Members of minorities and specifically Yazidis who were subjected to ISIS crimes receive legal advice and psychosocial support.

CPS experts are seconded to and work closely over several years with these partner organisations. They support their efforts through training measures, technical advice, and networking with other national and international actors. Promoting the safe return of internally displaced persons and peaceful coexistence is another important aspect of the CPS program in Iraq. Together with civil society and governmental partners, the CPS initiates activities for dialogue and enhances the participation of young people and women.

Furthermore, CPS aims to overcome stereotypes and increase trust and relationship building among young people from diverse backgrounds and therefore encourages exchange and cooperation. Tour guides were trained in sustainable tourism and supported to promote their common cultural heritage.

Project name	Dealing with the past and peacebuilding in Northern Iraq
Commissioned by	Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)
Project region	Nineveh and the Kurdistan Region of Iraq
Lead executing agencies	University of Duhok, Commission for Investigation and Gathering Evidence, Jiyan Foundation for Human Rights, Women for Better Healthy Life, and other non-governmental organisations
Duration	05/2017 – 12/2025

CPS impact and partner organisations

Dealing with the past

The Commission for Investigation and Gathering Evidence (CIGE) was established 2014 by the Kurdish regional government with the mandate to investigate human rights violations committed by ISIS against ethnic and religious minorities. In cooperation with CPS CIGE's Victims' Support Unit reaches out to members of families of missing persons in camps and offers psychosocial and legal support.



Photo left: Survivors participating in a conference in Duhok
Photo right: A Yazidi temple in Sinjar in northern Nineveh



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*Photo left: Participants of a guided tour in Erbil
 Photo right: Participants of a guided tour to the natural springs in Bartella*

The Commission conducts consultations with female survivors on the question of reparations. The results were summed up in a policy paper to increase the awareness and the necessity of promoting justice and were shared by various actors. CIGE has collected one of the biggest repositories of testimonial evidence and blood samples to date in Iraq: Information on geodata or specific telecommunication data as well as evidence provided by individuals is transferred upon request to UNITAD.

Besides CIGE as a governmental institution, civil society organisations like Yazda are also supported by CPS in their efforts to document crimes committed by ISIS. Through interviews, investigations in crime scenes and consulting with a group of survivors, Yazda builds up evidence for cases and strategic outreach to courts and crime units in Europe. Data is then shared with courts in mainly Germany who tried former ISIS members for crimes committed in Syria and Iraq. Survivors who decided to give testimony in court received legal and psychological support.

Advocacy and networking of NGOs dedicated to various minorities is strengthened and coordinated by the Jiyan Foundation for Human Rights. The Coalition for Just Reparations (C4JR), created in 2019, strengthens the awareness on survivors' needs and their aim for accountability in Iraq. The network strongly and successfully advocated for the creation of an inclusive law on reparations for survivors. In March 2021, the so-called Yazidi survivors' law (YSL), which includes other minorities as well, was passed by the Iraqi parliament. Until today 1,541 applications were successfully processed, and the beneficiaries receive a monthly lump sum.

Mental Health and Psychosocial Support

The CPS program supports the Institute of Psychotherapy and Psychotraumatology (IPP) at the University of Duhok, a unique institution in the region, that provides a 3-year MA program in psychotherapy and psychotraumatology. Since the start of the MA program in 2017 four student cohorts (of altogether 95 students) have been enrolled, of which three student cohorts have already graduated. The international CPS advisors, depending on their background and qualifications, have supported the IPP so far by teaching different MA modules to the students, providing clinical supervision to the local psychotherapists at the IPP outpatient clinic and mentoring students and local co-lecturers.

Moreover, the CPS has supported the biannual international IPP conferences, which have brought together mental health practitioners, researchers and community members affected by collective violence, and helped initiate conversations around the still heavily stigmatized topic of mental health. In addition, strengthening the local network of mental health practitioners and establishing the IPP as a hub for training courses is another area of CPS' engagement.

Peacebuilding and participation

After focusing on the Kurdistan Region and having provided trainings to young entrepreneurs from cities like Sulaymaniyah, Alqosh and Erbil, a second round of trainings addressed young aspiring tour guides from mainly the Nineveh plains in 2023. The groups learned and discussed how tourism can be used to promote the diversity of the Iraqi cultural heritage, and therefore contribute to more knowledge and understanding about others in the community. At the end of 2023 some of the tourist guides were further trained in a three-day workshop on conflict management skills.

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