

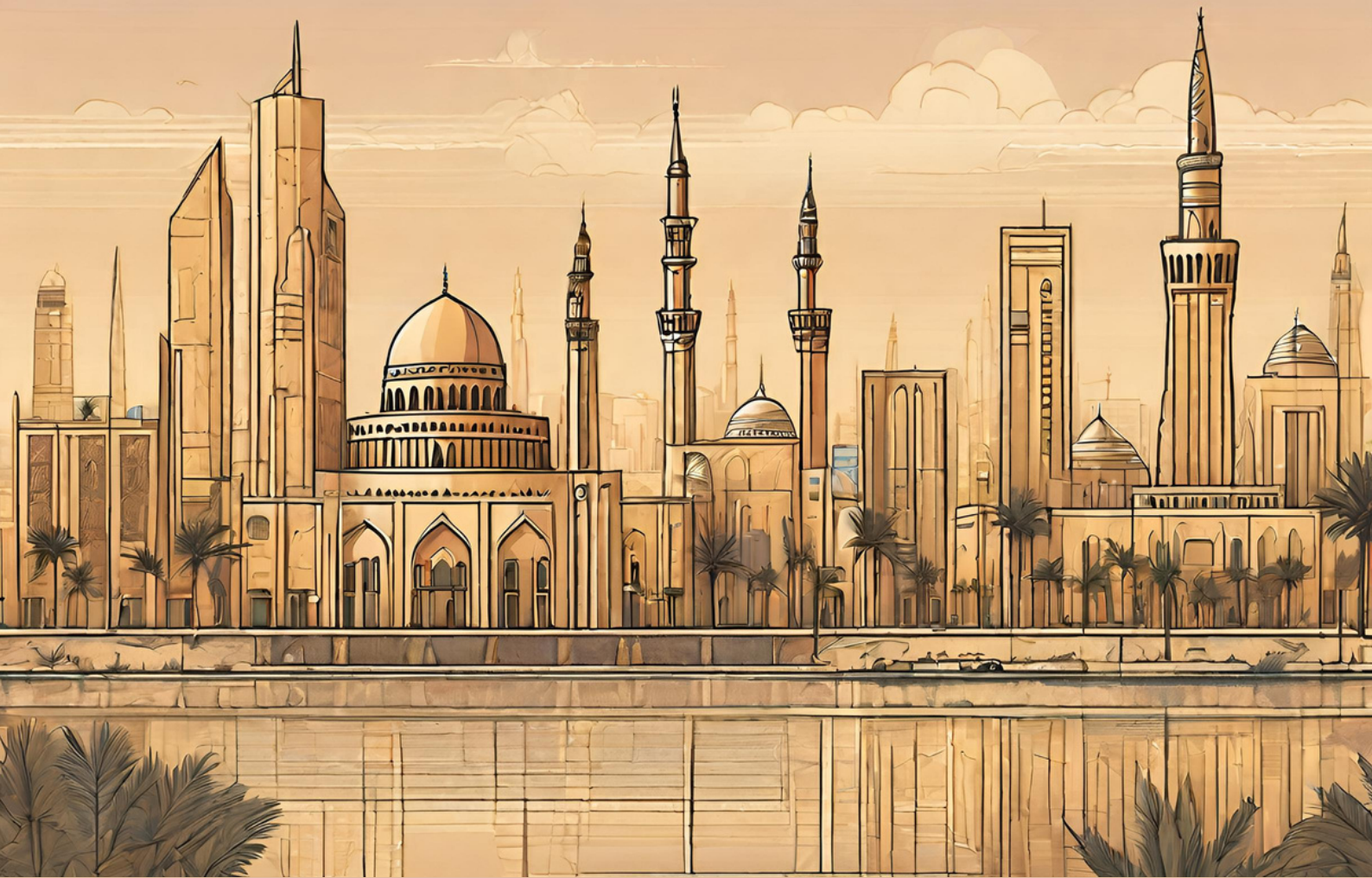


UNODC

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

Regional Office for the
MIDDLE EAST AND
NORTH AFRICA

UNODC in Iraq 2023 Snapshot



In 2023, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) focused on supporting Iraq in areas such as trafficking in persons and the smuggling of migrants, drug trafficking, countering terrorism, countering corruption, and financial crimes, amongst other subjects.

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Empowering Justice: UNODC's Strategic Initiatives under the Global Action against Trafficking in Persons and the Smuggling of Migrants (GLO.ACT) Project



Under the GLO.ACT project, UNODC undertook various initiatives to strengthen anti-trafficking and anti-smuggling efforts in collaboration with criminal justice actors from Federal Iraq and the Kurdistan Region.

A significant initiative involved the development of a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for the investigation of trafficking in persons and smuggling of migrants. UNODC formed a technical working group comprised of criminal justice actors from Federal Iraq and the Kurdistan Region to elaborate this SOP for frontline officers and specialist investigators. Several workshops were held, and a completed draft has been produced.

Simultaneously, UNODC assisted authorities in Baghdad and Erbil in the drafting of laws to criminalize migrant smuggling, aligning with Iraq's commitment to the U.N. Protocol Against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea, and Air. The drafting stages for both laws are complete, awaiting passage through the respective Parliaments. Multiple events were organized throughout the year to support the development of these laws.

To enhance intelligence capabilities, UNODC provided capacity building for police in Federal Iraq and Kurdistan, along with Assaiyish^[1] Officers in Kurdistan. This focused on harnessing Open-Source Intelligence (OSINT) in the investigation of trafficking in persons, including social media. Continuing its coaching efforts, UNODC provided support for high-performing police investigators in both Federal Iraq and the Kurdistan Region. The coaching sessions are designed to allow participants to set the agenda and focus on areas where they are experiencing difficulty.

Additionally, UNODC addressed the issue of trafficking for organ removal through a workshop involving investigators, judges, academics, and medical professionals from Federal Iraq and the Kurdistan Region. The workshop concluded with clear recommendations for Iraqi authorities to consider.

UNODC also collaborated closely with Assaiyish operational officers and commanders in Kurdistan, conducting multiple training events to enhance investigative capacity to counter the smuggling of migrants. This effort included facilitating a two-day mock investigation involving Assaiyish officers not only to build knowledge but also to foster increased cooperation between different Assaiyish offices.

In the realm of improving international criminal justice cooperation in the trafficking of persons and smuggling of migrants investigations, UNODC orchestrated a study visit for investigators and judges from Federal Iraq and the Kurdistan Region to Europol and Eurojust in the Hague. This visit provided valuable insights into organizational functions and laid out concrete steps for future cooperation.

^[1]Assaiyish is the Kurdish security organization and the primary intelligence agency operating in the Kurdistan region in Iraq.

Looking ahead to 2024, the GLO.ACT project will continue to implement EU-funded activity against trafficking in persons and smuggling of migrants, notably by building capacity for judges through a training of trainers, by supporting the passage of the SOM laws in Baghdad and Erbil through Parliament, and by publishing and providing training on the SOP developed in 2023.

GLO.ACT will also provide specialist training to trafficking investigators on the use of covert investigative techniques and will provide training to newly recruited female investigators on trafficking in-person investigations.

Additionally, with funding from the United Kingdom, GLO.ACT will implement an ambitious work plan to enhance the Assaiyish's capacity to investigate migrant smuggling using intelligence-led techniques and fostering enhanced international cooperation. The project will also collaborate with non-traditional partners to raise public awareness about the risks of smuggled migration in Kurdistan.

In conversation with Judge Mohammed Salman Mohammed, Criminal Court of Al-Karkh, Bagdad, Iraq



In Iraq, investigating judges are pivotal to criminal investigations, overseeing various tasks, from issuing warrants and weighing the evidence to passing sentences. However, collecting evidence, especially in human trafficking cases can be challenging due to the complex nature of such crimes and linkages with other crimes. Furthermore, cultural attitudes that view victims as perpetrators rather than as people who need support and protection complicate law enforcement efforts and stress the need for a victim-centered approach. Hence, this may require additional training and support for law enforcement officers to understand the unique challenges and guide the investigation effectively.

Recognizing these challenges, the Global Action against Trafficking in Persons and the Smuggling of Migrants – Asia and the Middle East (GLO.ACT-Asia and the Middle East) steps in as a four-year joint initiative by the European Union (EU) and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), in partnership with the International Organization for Migration (IOM). With direct assistance to victims of human trafficking and vulnerable migrants, the project aims to assist governmental authorities and civil society organizations through targeted interventions, including strategy development, legislative review, and capacity building.

“UNODC GLO.ACT project has had a significant impact on the judicial system in my country, providing information and training that has helped to improve the understanding and application of the 2012 TIP law. It is encouraging that law enforcement and judges are now more aware of how to apply this law and are taking steps to do so,” says Judge Mohammed Salman Mohammed, Criminal Court of Al-Karkh, Bagdad.

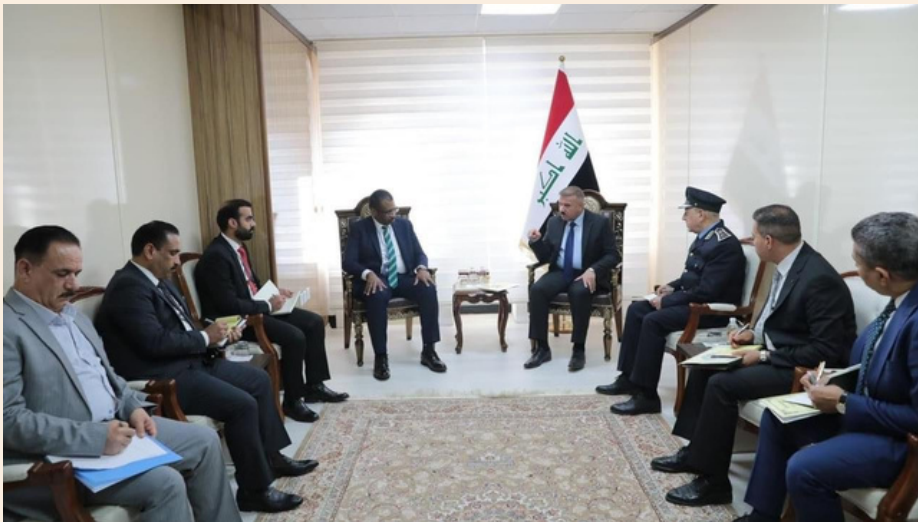
The impact of GLO.ACT reverberates throughout Iraq's judicial system. Judges and law enforcement officers are now better equipped to confront trafficking cases with confidence and precision. This newfound knowledge has led to improved investigations and paved the way for legislative advancements in anti-trafficking measures.

The amendment to the law that has been proposed is also very promising, as it is in line with international standards and is, I believe, one of the best amendments to trafficking in persons legislation in Arab countries. While there may be challenges in implementing the amendment, it is important to continue working towards ensuring that the laws related to trafficking in persons are in line with international standards and protect the rights of victims and survivors,” Judge Mohammed remarks.

Looking ahead, Judge Mohammed reflected on the imperative for continued capacity building and training to address trafficking in persons effectively, as evidenced by the significant success of trafficking investigations following training sessions. Initiatives such as “training of trainers” (ToT) programmes, can be instrumental in ensuring the effectiveness and sustainability of efforts to address trafficking in persons and smuggling of migrants over time.

“Having specialist TIP and SOM judges in every governate and specialist law enforcement officers could also improve the judicial system's capacity and effectiveness. It is vital to continue working towards these goals to improve the judicial system's ability to combat trafficking in persons and the smuggling of migrants.” Judge Mohammed adds.

Reshaping Iraq's Battle Against Drug Trafficking: Strengthening the Capacities of Iraqi Law Enforcement and Criminal Investigation Services



In 2023, UNODC played a vital role in Iraq's fight against drug trafficking under the project “Strengthening the Capacities of Iraqi Law Enforcement and Criminal Investigation Services.” The initiative, funded by the U.S. Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL), aimed to support Iraq's National Strategy on Countering Narcotics. Iraq's vast borders, neighboring several nations, and post-the ISIS vacuum intensified

the illegal narcotics trade and usage. The surge in narcotics seizures, notably Crystal Meth, Amphetamine pills, and Captagon emphasized the need for urgent and effective counternarcotics strategies.

Following a solicitation from Iraqi authorities, UNODC engaged in Controlled Delivery research to assist law enforcement in countering narcotics. Collaborating with the Iraqi Anti-Narcotic General Authority and key parliamentary committees, the focus was on the controlled delivery approach.

Controlled delivery is the technique of letting illicit or suspicious shipments move in or out of one or more states, under the strict surveillance of competent authorities, to track and identify the trafficking network leaders. However, its success relies on regional cooperation and legal frameworks, emphasizing the importance of international partnerships and legislative reforms in Iraq.

The 2023-2025 Iraqi Anti-Narcotic Strategy outlined priorities, including establishing overseas anti-narcotic offices, adopting controlled delivery, and addressing both drug demand and supply. Within this framework, the Anti-Narcotic Directorate played a crucial role despite facing capacity and resource challenges.

Throughout 2023, UNODC collaborated extensively with Iraqi counterparts and engaged in collaborative meetings, roundtables, and consultations to review existing legislation, penalties, prevention, and rehabilitation strategies. These consultations were crucial for crafting contextually relevant and sustainable solutions. UNODC's partnership with parliamentary committees emphasized further the need for legislative support in building a robust anti-narcotics framework.

UNODC's 2023 comprehensive report to the Ministry of Interior provided a roadmap to enhance Iraq's narcotics control. It called for legislative reforms to facilitate the use of Special Investigative Techniques, strengthening regional legal frameworks for controlled deliveries, and improving investigative tools such as financial and forensic analysis. The report also emphasized the importance of international cooperation in intelligence sharing and joint operations against narcotics trafficking.

Moving forward, UNODC will focus on implementing these recommendations, with a key emphasis on building the Ministry of Interior's capabilities through targeted capacity-building. This aligns with the broader goal of enhancing Iraq's internal capabilities to effectively combat narcotics, promising a more resilient Iraq in the face of narcotic challenges.

Enhancing Counter-Terrorism Initiatives in Iraq

causes of terrorism, governmental agencies can develop or enhance tools and measures to respond to its consequences. By understanding the impact of trauma on survivors and supporting victim-centric approaches in criminal justice responses, authorities can help safeguard victims' rights in all stages of the judicial proceedings.

“Supporting victims of terrorism within the criminal justice framework, including through psychological support” is a novel and unique project, funded by the Kingdom of the Netherlands, launched by UNODC in February 2021 to support these objectives. Implemented in partnership with AVT-L (Association des Victimes du Terrorisme), the initiative sought to address the needs of the most vulnerable victims of terrorism (VoTs) in Iraq, who have been subject to systematic human rights violations at the hands of ISIS fighters since 2014.

The project aimed specifically at enhancing national capacities to guarantee victims' rights before, during, and after criminal proceedings. The initiative also promoted the rehabilitation process and empowerment of VoTs within their communities through psychological support. Victims who experienced heinous violence were provided with counseling and psychological support by a team of AVT-L psychologists, art therapists, and social workers.



The project also included training for community leaders on youth and women empowerment, as well as on preventing violent extremism, to support reconciliation across the community spectrum, including between victims and suspects' families. Workshops also served as a safe space for civil society actors and government officials to exchange and discuss challenges related to supporting victims of terrorism in Iraq, and to promote civil society engagement in national counter-terrorism efforts.

From February 2021 to June 2023, a total of 18 workshops, events, and meetings were implemented, reaching a total of 182 Iraqi law enforcement and criminal justice practitioners (including 35 female), as well as 98 (76 female) victims of terrorism. Furthermore, 37 (3 female) judges received support in reviewing cases involving victims of terrorism.

As a result of the action taken, participating law enforcement and criminal justice officials have increased their knowledge of the recognition of victims of terrorism and thus are better equipped to support victims of terrorism and to handle highly sensitive cases with care. Participating victims of terrorism have benefitted greatly from the cooperative nature of the workshops and have gained important tools to defend their rights in criminal proceedings and to vocalize their traumatic experiences in this safe setting.

The programme also helped identify legislative and procedural gaps and challenges concerning the protection and treatment of victims of terrorism before, during, and after criminal proceedings and showcased the importance of a strong and efficient judicial system in providing access to justice for victims. Participating judges have also gained awareness of the crucial role emotional well-being and cognitive abilities play in their professional performance, particularly when dealing with victims of terrorism.



[“Victim’s Voices, Silencing Terrorism”
campaign documentary](#)



To mark the project’s achievements and to raise awareness of the importance of the rights of victims of terrorism, UNODC, with support from AVT-L and the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), launched the “Victims’ Voices, Silencing Terrorism” Campaign. The Campaign was conducted in June 2023 through a combination of social media outreach and on-the-ground presence in Baghdad, Iraq.

The campaign reached 23 million people in Iraq and the Middle East and North Africa region and focused on providing an alternative narrative to that of terrorist groups by raising awareness of the resilience of victims of terrorism and the importance of having their voices heard. The messages and stories they tell have the power to silence the harmful fear-oriented messages spread by terrorist groups. The campaign featured several victims of terrorism supported by the project, as they used their voices to tell their own stories of resilience and overcoming and spoke of how more victims should be encouraged to do the same. The campaign also highlighted the importance of understanding who is a victim of terrorism, what are victims’ needs, the role of the community, and the achievements of the project.

Victims Voices, Silencing Terrorism: Rasha Karim

“I am a victim of ISIS terrorism. ISIS took away my brother and father from me” says Rasha Karim, a 39-year-old lawyer from Iraq. She grew up in a loving family with her brother who worked as an officer. As her brother was on a mission working on dismantling explosive devices planted by ISIS in residential areas, a grenade detonated and led to his passing. ISIS refused to give Rasha’s family burial rights by handing over his body. This was a fact her father did not accept.

“After my brother's death, my father went to the same place where my brother was martyred to look for his body to bury him. Almost twenty days after his death, ISIS placed an explosive device targeting my father in the same place where my brother died; thus, he was martyred as well,” Rasha told UNODC.

After the passing of her father, Rasha was overwhelmed by grief and found it difficult to start over and integrate into society. Rasha is one of many survivors of terrorism who took part in the UNODC psychosocial support programme within the project “Supporting victims of terrorism within the criminal justice framework, including psychological support” in Iraq, which was implemented by UNODC in partnership with the Lebanese Association for Victims of Terrorism (AVT-L) and funded by the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

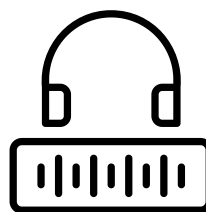
“I joined the UNODC psychosocial support programme, and I benefited a lot, and I was able to express and talk about my condition. This support helped me connect with the community and my family, especially my son.”

When asked what her outlook for the future is, Rasha said that as “the psychological support sessions were a big help to me, I wish that the programme would reach out to more people and include mothers who have lost a child and are in need of this kind of support...” she also added, “I hope that procedures are made more accessible and efficient for victims of ISIS terrorism so that they can receive the justice and compensation they deserve in a timely manner.”

*Disclaimer: This story contains graphic references due to the telling of victims' experiences. Readers' discretion is advised.



Rasha creating clay sculptures as part of a psychosocial activity which entails the use of art as part of a rehabilitation process within the UNODC programme.



[Click here to listen to Rasha's voice as she tells her story](#)

UNODC's Successful Implementation of the Returning Foreign Terrorist Fighters in Detention Programme in Iraq



Prison systems worldwide grapple with formidable challenges stemming from punitive criminal policies and a lack of community-based social protection services. Consequently, the global prison population continues to surge, now exceeding 11 million individuals. Amidst this complex landscape, one pressing issue that demands attention is the reintegration of returning foreign terrorist fighters (RFTFs). To tackle this multifaceted challenge, UNODC has effectively completed the Returning Foreign Terrorist Fighters (RFTF) Detention Programme (2019-2023), generously funded by the Bureau of Counterterrorism, U.S. Department of State.

UNODC's implementation of this programme has yielded invaluable insights into the challenges, requirements, and priorities faced by the Iraqi Correctional Service (ICS). The programme has empowered the ICS by equipping them with the necessary tools and policies to address existing threats and adapt to evolving circumstances. Additionally, it has encouraged the involvement of civil society organizations in rehabilitation and post-release support, facilitating the reintegration of violent extremist prisoners into society. Furthermore, the programme has bolstered coordination among various authorities within Iraq.

The programme's foundation lies in the belief that sustainable change can be achieved by activating and strengthening institutional capacities, awareness, and ownership. By imparting essential skills, knowledge, and resources to individuals and organizations, the programme has enabled partner countries to manage violent extremism more effectively and RFTF prisoners and prevent terrorist threats. Furthermore, capacity-building initiatives have instilled a sense of ownership among programme partners, enabling them to identify and implement solutions to ongoing challenges. Civil society engagement has ensured that the project aligns with the needs and priorities of the communities it serves while promoting transparency and accountability.

This positions Iraq favorably to confront the challenges posed by RFTFs in the future while adhering to the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (the Nelson Mandela Rules). Nevertheless, continued support remains crucial. In several countries, sustained efforts are needed to consolidate and extend the progress achieved during the program, ultimately leading to safer prisons and communities within their borders and beyond.

Thanks to the collaborative partnership between UNODC and Iraq, the programme's work will persist. The overarching goal is to ensure that accomplishments are maintained, lessons are learned, and successes are replicated. Through the strengthening of this robust partnership and the sharing of expertise, this joint endeavor aims to bolster regional security and enhance societies' resilience against violent extremism.

[READ MORE >](#)

The Returning Foreign Terrorist Fighters Detention Programme – Achievements Report 2019 – 2023

Empowering Futures: STRIVE Juvenile's Journey in Safeguarding Children from Extremism in Iraq

STRIVE Juvenile is a five-year project supported by the European Union that aims to address child association with terrorist and violent extremist groups and its consequences for the lives of children and society at large. In 2023, STRIVE Juvenile in Iraq marked significant progress in safeguarding children from terrorist and violent extremism through partnerships with the Ministry of Justice (MOJ), the Higher Judicial Council (HJC), and the National Security Advisory (NSA).

Recognizing the crucial role of criminal justice professionals, UNODC conducted training for over 130 professionals, including social workers, guards, police officers, judicial investigators, and lawyers working within "Rehabilitation schools" and "observation houses." These professionals received specialized training on the treatment and detention conditions of children deprived of their liberty for alleged association with terrorist and violent extremist groups. With regards to these capacity-building workshops; particular focus was placed on professionals dealing with child returnees from Syria who are accused/sentenced for terrorism offences.

The workshops focused on age-appropriate communication, compliance with international standards, prioritizing children's health, and well-being, addressing special needs, recognizing the unique requirements of girls in detention, and addressing the needs of children with disabilities. Beyond skills development, these sessions served as a constructive platform for exchanging experiences, identifying challenges, and collaboratively exploring both short-term and long-term solutions. The insights gained have significantly informed UNODC's interventions throughout the year and will shape future initiatives.

Furthermore, with the objective of facilitating the rehabilitation and reintegration of these children, UNODC improved the living conditions and services provided within five rehabilitation schools/observation houses through the provision of goods and materials related to education, health, leisure, sports, and vocational skills.

Looking ahead to 2024, UNODC plans on continuing its efforts when it comes to capacity building to professionals working with these children, including those returning from Syria, as well as expanding the refurbishment work in several rehabilitation schools for an enhanced provision of essential services.

Countering Corruption and Financial Crimes in Iraq



UNODC is actively involved in strategic initiatives to combat corruption and financial crimes in Iraq. Initiatives include the Siemens Integrity Initiative-funded project, "Strengthening Private Sector Capacity", aimed at enhancing business integrity. UNODC also leads the regional effort "Strengthening National Capacities to Counter the Financing of Terrorism in Iraq and Jordan," funded by Germany, facilitating discussions on asset recovery and mutual legal assistance.

To foster dialogue and partnerships between public and private sectors, UNODC held the high-level Basra Conference, organized in cooperation with the Commission of Integrity of Iraq.

Approximately 170 distinguished participants, including senior officials from various ministries and national authorities, gathered to discuss integrity enhancement, combating corruption, and the private sector's role. The conference laid a foundation for implementing recommendations, strengthening the private sector's anti-corruption role.

As part of its ongoing partnership with Iraq on the subject, UNODC further conducted workshops on "Enhancing the Effectiveness of Mechanisms for Asset Recovery and Mutual Legal Assistance (MLA) in Criminal Matters,"

fostering international cooperation. Co-funded by GIZ Iraq, the workshops facilitated the exchange of best practices and established direct communication channels between central authorities in Iraq, Egypt, Spain, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America. The workshops equipped Iraqi officials with practical knowledge to expedite MLA requests.

In a parallel vein, as Iraq undergoes the MENAFATF AML/CFT Mutual Evaluation (ME), UNODC engaged directly with Iraqi authorities and stakeholders to support compliance assessments with the Forty Recommendations on Combating Money Laundering and Financing of Terrorism and Proliferation. This engagement involved technical meetings that equipped the Iraqi counterparts with the knowledge necessary to develop and implement effective nationwide policies for ML/TF risk mitigation.

Based on the criminal investigation principle of “follow the money,” UNODC provided technical and legal assistance to Iraqi authorities to enhance capabilities in conducting effective parallel financial investigations. In 2023, UNODC conducted two national workshops for Iraqi investigative judges, emphasizing the importance of financial investigations in ML/TF crimes. Additionally, Iraqi officials participated in a regional workshop with a focus on elevating knowledge and skills, aligning with FATF recommendations. The sessions covered legal and operational aspects, evidence development, and international cooperation, addressing the MENAFATF AML/CFT Mutual Evaluation Process. Furthermore, the workshops addressed the tracing of illicit financial flows, and the seizure and confiscation of assets, and included hands-on exercises with practical cases that allowed participants to apply acquired skills.



Concurrently, UNODC developed a guidance document outlining strategies for a robust framework to achieve a high level of effectiveness in AML/CFT systems, consisting of 11 frameworks corresponding to the FATF's 11 Immediate Outcomes. Moreover, to further prepare Iraqi authorities, UNODC organized mock sessions focusing on Iraq's AML/CFT/CPF framework. With 137 participants, these sessions deepened understanding of the FATF's 11 Immediate Outcomes, crucial for active engagement in the ME process.

UNODC also reviewed a study prepared by Iraqi authorities on the misuse of non-profit organizations (NPOs), advising on risk classification of the NPO sector into high, medium, and low-risk categories, and conducting a sectoral risk assessment during the on-site visit.

The cumulative effect of these interventions increased the understanding and preparedness of key Iraqi authorities, both in the private and public sectors. Sessions enhanced participants' familiarity with the FATF assessment procedure, improving their ability to assess AML/CFT/NPF measures as well as facilitating policy formulation for effective frameworks. Overall, these interventions are designed to have a lasting impact on Iraq's efforts in countering financial crimes, terrorism financing, and weapons of mass destruction proliferation. The support, coupled with capacity building, has firmly entrenched UNODC's role in these crucial areas.

In preparation for 2024, UNODC will continue its support for Iraq in enhancing compliance with the FATF Recommendations and the effectiveness of its AML/CFT systems, systems through addressing the deficiencies identified in the Mutual Evaluation Report.

Strengthening trade supply chain security in Iraq at Baghdad International Airport



Following the continuous capacity-building delivered by the UNODC Passenger and Cargo Border Team (PCBT), on 10 September 2023, Iraq took an additional step in bolstering its air cargo security. With the support UNODC and the World Customs Organization (WCO), and under the framework of the PCBT, an Air Cargo Control Unit (ACCU) was officially inaugurated at Baghdad International Airport.

Through the establishment of this ACCU, the PCBT will empower Iraq in its fight against illicit trafficking at border crossings. The ACCU is composed of officers from several agencies operating within the cargo area of Baghdad International Airport, who have been trained by the PCBT on risk analysis, profiling, targeting, and inspection of suspicious cargo. The Unit is already proving successful, conducting regular profiling leading to various seizures. Officers will continue to receive ongoing training and support. Moreover, in adherence to global best practices, Liaison Officers from all relevant law enforcement agencies involved in cargo control at the airport may be incorporated into the ACCU at a later stage.

The opening was attended by key Iraqi representatives, demonstrating their unwavering support for the programme, such as the National Security Advisor, the Chairman of the Border Ports Commission, the Director General of Iraqi Customs, and senior representatives of the Civil Aviation Authority, the Ministry of Interior, the Iraqi National Intelligence Service, and Iraqi Airways. Also in attendance were the United States Ambassador—main donor for PCBT in Iraq—the Australian Ambassador, and senior representatives of Canada, Germany, and the United Nations.

PCBT will continue supporting the Iraqi authorities by ensuring that the existing unit is operating at its maximum capacity, and providing capacity-building training to new officers, with a view to creating sustainable practices and potentially expanding to new areas of operation.

Bolstering Regional Airport Security

Through the PCBT Airport Communications Programme (AIRCOP), UNODC collaborates with the UN Office on Counter-Terrorism, the World Customs Organization, and INTERPOL to enhance MENA region airport security. Through the Countering Terrorism Travel Programme (CTTP) partner organizations, UNODC delivered tailored technical and legislative assistance to improve Advance Passenger Information (API) and Passenger Name Record (PNR) systems in Iraq under the "All-of-UN" CTTP. National counterparts increased their awareness of the roles and advantages of Passenger Information Unit(s) that process passengers' data (API/PNR) for the advanced identification and targeting of high-risk/suspicious passengers traveling by air.



AIRCOP built upon this achieved awareness by facilitating the setting up and provision of IT equipment for establishing PIU in Baghdad International Airport. This effort has been coupled by enhancing the national capabilities of front-line officials and passenger information analysts via behavioral detection, risk analysis, and exposing Iraqis to international efficient passenger data systems, in means for better countering different organized crimes pertaining to airport security such as terrorism.

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This publication has not been formally edited.

