

UNHCR Protection Brief:

Security Screening of IDPs (3 November 2016)

This Protection Brief intends to provide an overview of the security-screening measures in the context of the military offensives along the Mosul Corridor and District.

The below information is based upon protection monitoring and information by stakeholders.

Security screening is in principle a reasonable and justifiable measure to ensure safety and security of populations including those displaced. However the management of the security screening process in an often *ad hoc* manner poses a range of protection concerns and risks to IDPs which includes disappearances, family separations, lengthy detentions and exploitation and abuse.

The security screening sites run by armed groups (PMF) compound the protection risks. Also pertinent is the reality that in the Mosul context, security screening is also being undertaken much closer to the frontlines at **mustering points**. *These areas are beyond the reach of humanitarian actors and little information is available on the processes adopted including what happens to those who are denied access to relatively safe areas of displacement.*

Security screening is undertaken in all areas of displacement and return for men and boys (over 13/14 years old). Screening for women and girls is limited to body/weapons searches but this is not always done. Bio-data for newly displaced persons is also collected.

There is no clear government policy/ written instructions on how the security- screening sites are to be set up or operate, but in practice security screening is undertaken by multiple security entities in areas of displacement. While in the KRI, the Assayish take the lead, in Centre and South multiple security entities are involved and 5-7 separate databases are used. For example, the following entities are involved:-

*Iraqi National Intelligence Agency
Military Intelligence and Counter-Terrorism Forces.
District Council and Local Council Data.
Local ISF Operation Command.*

*Counter-Crime of the Province.
Military Intelligence of the Division holding the territory.
PMF entity active in the Area.
Security and Intelligence of the Area.*

Main protection concerns/ issues with the security screenings

- 1. The lack of or limited humanitarian access and monitoring in screening sites** – while there is limited access to some screening sites including in areas hosting women and children, there is no access to the facilities where actual screening of men and boys takes place (screening facilities in Erbil, other than the screening interviews, are more accessible than facilities elsewhere). The lack of or limited access is compounded by lack of information sharing by the authorities. The expeditious screenings in Qayarra, Nargizlia, Mandan and other sites raises concern that the actual screening is taking place in the frontlines/mustering points, beyond the reach of the humanitarian actors.
- 2. Co-location of Reception Centres and Camps with Screening Centres/sites** raises concern about ensuring the civilian character of reception centres/camps and blurred terminology (screening site / “reception” site). It is important to ensure that there is no free entry of armed elements into reception centres and camps other than for legitimate police duties of maintaining law and order. Currently in Qayarra and Hasansham, screening is taking place in camps and while justifications can be cited for this (e.g screening facilities not completed yet), it undermines the humanitarian character of camps/reception centres.
- 3. Risk of proliferation of screening sites** – It is difficult to monitor and provide basic life-saving humanitarian assistance if screening sites are too many. UNHCR/PC have advocated for a manageable number of screening sites – ideally 12-15, in safe locations. However based on the speed of screenings in Hasansham and Qayarra, it appears that the ‘real’ screening could be taking place in the frontline/mustering areas.

4. Shortages of basic services coupled with desperate needs in screening sites creates an environment of exploitation and abuse (GBV).
5. Involvement of militia that fall outside the formal chain of military command with no oversight or judicial scrutiny in the screening process and with no humanitarian access. This is a major concern in Salahaddin, Southern and Western Ninewa, with concerns about existence of secret/undisclosed detention centres and disappearances of young males as seen previously (e.g Saqlawiyeh/Falluja).
6. Humanitarian actors expected to support “security screening sites” – compromising principles of independence, non-political humanitarian presence and assistance, and neutrality. It is nonetheless important that the security screening process is transparent and speedy and adequate information sharing is enabled by the authorities for/to families and those being screened.
7. Prolonged screening procedures for men and boys causing family separation and also detention in inadequate conditions – lack of adequate facilities and services. This is made worse by the lack of regular updates to those detained and their family members which causes additional anguish/anxiety to already vulnerable persons. The Protection Cluster has urged for special consideration in screening of minors including the application of the Juvenile Welfare Law No. 76 of 1983.
8. Risk to unaccompanied boys due to men and boys being held in the same facility during screening (while at the same time boys should not be separated from their fathers).
9. Women and children in Reception Centres near Screening Centres face a high risk of GBV-related concerns [especially when these facilities are controlled by non-ISF/KSF armed actors]

Specific protection concerns are noted in detail below:

1. Number of men and boys separated from their families and currently held for security screenings

- Owing to the opaque nature of the screening process and the lack of humanitarian access/information sharing by the authorities, the exact number of men and boys currently held for security screening is currently unknown.
- In **Debaga camp**, it is estimated that between **200 and 300 males** are currently undergoing screening in the reception area. Upon arrival women and children remain in the school (Debaga 1 camp) until a tent is available. Males remain in the reception center (Debaga 1 camp) until they are cleared after screening. Males and females sleep in separate areas but are allowed contact with one another.
- In **Hasansham camp**, the reception center is not yet operational, and therefore new arrival families are allocated tents upon arrival and screening is conducted in the camp. Screening process in Hasansham has been fast likely due to the fact that new arrivals are mainly of Kurdish/Shabak ethnicity.
- **In Kirkuk**, there are three screening facilities in Debis, Maktab Khalid and Daquq in the south. There is no humanitarian access to these sites where men and boys between the ages of 13-60 are held for days or weeks. Protection actors in Kirkuk estimate that over 1473 were detained in the Debis sites from August to October. Of those, 100 are still detained while over 500 are unaccounted for – presumably formally arrested and charged. Reports of men and boys whose whereabouts are unknown have also been reported in Maktab Khalid (52) and Daquq sites (95).
- **In Salahaddin**, there are at least 4 significant screenings sites at Silo Hazzaj Ali (the main one in Salahaddin), Education Building in Shirqat, Hayakel/Jameela area and Fertiliser Plant screening site. The issues are similar but in Salahaddin and southern Ninewa, the major additional concern is the heavy involvement of PMF groups in the screening process. The Fertiliser site is entirely run by the PMF and is inaccessible to humanitarian actors.
- **In Qayarra**, which is hosting most of the Mosul IDPs, security screenings have been conducted in makeshift facilities (schools, mosque etc) until proper facilities are established. Reportedly, screening is concluded within 30 minutes which raises the concern that more thorough screening is taking place at frontlines/mustering points, beyond the reach of humanitarian

actors. Indeed IDPs in Qayarra have described being first screened (ID checks) at the front-line and then further screening when they entered areas under the control of the Kurdish security forces and then the final screening at a mosque.

2. Duration of the screening process

- The screening process can take anywhere from a few hours to weeks and months. In **Nargizlia** and **Mandan** screenings sites near **Zelikan Camp** in the Ninewa Plains, screening is reported to be very fast (taking less than 30 minutes) raising concerns that the real screening is taking place elsewhere (frontlines/mustering points). Similar periods in **Qayarra** for Mosul IDPs also and also at **Al Hajjaj Silo**, the main screening facility in Salahaddin where screenings can take a few hours to days and weeks.
- In **Debaga**, the Standard Operating Procedures established together with the authorities call for a maximum of 72 hours unless Assayish needs more time for in-depth interviews. A guidance prepared by the Protection Cluster also contain similar timelines. However in practice, screenings can take weeks and months and due to the lack of access and information, it's a challenge to systematically follow up such cases.
- The screening clearance depends on the profile of the individual as well as the number of negative allegations that may have been made against a person/family. The use of masked informants, which is especially prevalent in Salahaddin, and reliance on lists of questionable origin in screening processes, lead to risk of abuse and pursuit of personal vendettas. In Kirkuk and the KRI, Assayish have indeed stated that individuals may remain in the screening centres for long periods of time because authorities received negative allegations against an individual/family and it takes time to investigate each individual claim.

3. Formal arrests after security screenings

- Data on the number of men and boys arrested after screenings is not readily available as official statistics are not shared and may not be systematically maintained by the authorities. In Debaga, out of the total 477 detention cases identified by protection partners, 80% (380) were detained in 2016. 54 cases were released after investigation. Arrests also occur in frontline areas such as Makhmour and Gwer (20%) – ie prior to screening. Most of those arrested are charged with terrorism-related offences. The screenings and arrests undertaken in frontline areas (mustering points) are a big concern as these cases are beyond the reach of the humanitarian community.
- **Arrested children:** UNHCR and protection partners (including UNICEF) have identified and followed up on cases of children detained after security screenings. The exact number of detained children is unknown but in the KRI alone, it is over 100 and growing fast. The authorities are cooperative in trying to find solutions for these children who are in juvenile detention.

Key actions ongoing:

- 1) In Debaga and other camps in KRI, efforts are being made to **move unaccompanied male minors** to the youth center as soon as possible; UNHCR and its child protection partner work with Assayish and camp management to expedite the screening of the boys in order to move them to the youth center. However, the choice to move to the youth center remains voluntary.
- 2) **Regular protection monitoring and rapid protection assessments (RPAs)** in accessible areas – usually where family members are waiting for their male relatives to undergo security screenings. Interviews with family members, and men/boys after completion of their screening or relocation to camps provides useful information on the screening process (detention periods, numbers etc) and sometimes is the only source of information.
- 3) UNHCR and the Protection Cluster have advocated distance and **clear separation** between security screening sites and camps even when they are close to each other as a way of maintaining the **civilian and humanitarian character of IDP sites/ camps**.

- 4) The Protection Cluster has developed draft **guidance note/SOPs** to be shared with the authorities conducting security clearance activities as called for in the *Humanitarian Concept of Operations* (ConOps).
- 5) **Communication with communities** – UNHCR and protection partners continue to inform newly displaced persons of the screening process. In Debaga information brochures (attached) on the screening process, are handed out by camp management at the time of registration. Protection partners also distribute copies of brochures to new arrivals. The plan is to undertake similar activities at all screening sites.

Recommendations:

- 1) *All key member states* engaged in regular dialogue with GOI/KRG are requested to use their influence to urge GOI/KRG to adopt a clear policy on security screenings setting out screening procedures that respect humanitarian principles on safety and dignity, non-discrimination, prioritisation of vulnerable individuals, special considerations for children, protection from sexual exploitation and abuse, family unity and provision of information about the screening process to IDPs and access for independent monitoring of screening sites.
- 2) *Maintain high level and active advocacy* with GOI/KRG authorities for screening sites/reception centres to be established away from frontlines in safe and accessible areas (other than weapons checks which of necessity must happen in the frontlines/mustering areas).
- 3) *Seek access* for humanitarian actors to monitor security screening sites and regular sharing of information by the entities running the screening centres with the humanitarian actors.
- 4) *Underscore* the civilian nature of camps and note that the safety and overall protection of IDPs must be ensured including during transit right from the mustering points to their arrival at camps.
- 5) Urge the authorities to expedite security screenings noting that the detention of men and boys for extended periods awaiting security clearance unnecessarily separates families and leads to many female headed households increasing vulnerability to exploitation and abuse. Unless formally charged and afforded full rights to due process, persons detained for security screening should be released with the minimum delay possible, and in any event as soon as the circumstances justifying the arrest, detention or internment have ceased to exist. ICRC should be notified of individuals detained.
- 6) Continued advocacy for special consideration in screening of minors including the application of the Juvenile Welfare Law No. 76 of 1983.