

Protection to guarantee girls' education

How NP's patrols enabled safe access to education in Ba'aj, Iraq



"NP plays an effective role in protecting female students through their protective presence that is leading to a sense of safety for the girls in their coming and going back from school" – the director of Al-Ba'aj High School for Girls during a parents-teachers meeting (October, 2022)

The district of Al-Ba'aj, located in the Ninewa Governorate, is one of the areas in Iraq that was occupied by ISIS in 2014. During the liberation operations, the destruction of infrastructure and spread of firearms was rampant. The conflict had significant negative consequences in the region, including mass displacement, the collapse of the security system, and the dissemination of revenge killings and kidnappings. Violence in various forms was widespread, including sexual harassment.

During NP's community engagement activities in Ba'aj, staff members noticed that over half of the parents the staff spoke with did not allow their daughters to conclude middle or high school. Among other factors, families feared the girls would be sexually harassed by young men on the way to school, as there were numerous reports of this protection concern in Ba'aj.

To address the issue of harassment, thereby increasing the safety of girls and facilitating their access to education, NP started to provide protective presence and conduct regular patrols around schools. From NP's previous experience in Iraq and in other locations, conducting patrols is an effective strategy to deter perpetrators of violence and provide protective presence in open spaces such as school surroundings and roads students use to access schools on foot.

"Were it not for the presence of NP near the school, most of the female students would not have been able to complete their studies." - a teacher at Al Badia School for Girls in Ba'aj, referring to NP's patrols (August 11, 2022).



NP National Protection Officers speaking with community members in Ba'aj during a patrol. (May, 2022)

"When I get out of school and see your team on patrol near the school, I feel safe. And when I face any harassment or any kind of challenges while on my way, I'll contact you right away." – a student from Al Badia School for Girls in Ba'aj (July 19, 2022)

NP's male and female staff patrolled school grounds as students arrived for class and when they left. On several occasions, NP also provided protective accompaniments to groups of students on part of their way home. During these activities, NP staff engaged not only with the students, but also with their family members and school staff, building trust and gaining deeper insight into the protection issues affecting children in Ba'aj. NP

also used this opportunity of engagement to raise awareness among the girls of the importance of finishing their education and also took the opportunity to advocate to parents to send their daughters to school. NP also spoke with young men around the schools and discussed the harmful consequences of harassment. Additionally, NP held awareness-raising sessions on GBV with a special focus on sexual harassment prevention and offered training for teachers on child protection. These conversations, sessions and training increase the community's awareness as well as their ability to protect themselves and others in the future.

The impact of the patrols was noticed by different segments of the community, including families, teachers, school directors, duty bearers and, most importantly, by the students themselves. These actors were all united in expressing how the situation improved and rates of sexual harassment decreased. The students began to express their trust in NP and how much safer they felt because of NP's patrols. NP staff noticed many of the female students started coming to school unaccompanied by a family member, differently than what NP had seen before starting the patrols. Importantly, with NP's presence around the schools, parents also felt more confident in allowing their daughters to continue their education.

By preventing harassment, NP's protective presence has made schools in Ba'aj safer for girls and enabled access to education so they can overcome social barriers. . NP will continue to carry out patrols around schools in Ba'aj and, to ensure the sustainability of the reduction in harassment, NP will continue to train and engage key groups – particularly young men and women - in the area to build on their capacities and enhance their knowledge about preventing different forms of violence. The participants in these trainings, in turn, will then be able to continue carrying out preventive activities, using and disseminating the knowledge they acquired on Unarmed Civilian Protection, including nonviolent conflict resolution. They can even form Community Protection Teams and begin organizing other activities autonomously. NP will continue to support these groups through these processes and transitions.

“Previously, we received many complaints about sexual harassment near schools, but since NP started conducting patrols around schools, which have been constant, we have not received any complaints regarding that matter” - Deputy Police Chief in Ba'aj (February 22, 2022).