



AMPLIFYING VOICES FOR THE PROTECTION OF CIVILIANS

PAX POC PROGRAM ANNUAL REPORT

2023 & Q1 2024



AMPLIFYING VOICES FOR THE PROTECTION OF CIVILIANS

PAX's Protection of Civilians (PoC) program seeks to increase the effectiveness of PoC interventions by facilitating that civilians can hold local and international security actors to account, and by enabling and motivating security actors to design and implement protection strategies that are civilian-centered.

PAX works together with committed citizens and partners to protect civilians against acts of war, to end armed violence, and to build a just peace.

For more information about this program please visit www.protectionofcivilians.org. If you have any additional comments or questions, you are also welcome to contact Hans Rouw, PoC Program Team Lead (rouw@paxforpeace.nl) or Carrie Huisman, PoC Partnership Coordinator (huisman@paxforpeace.nl).

This program is supported by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) as part of its foreign development policy.

Period of Implementation: 1 September 2019 – 31 March 2024

Total Budget: €11.999.897

Funding Partner: Department for Stabilization & Humanitarian Aid (DSH)

MFA Reference Code: DSH-4000002936

PAX

PAX means peace. PAX works with people in conflict areas and concerned citizens worldwide to build just and peaceful societies. PAX brings together people who dare to stand for peace. Everyone who believes in peace can contribute. We believe that all these steps, whether small or large, inevitably lead to the greater sum of peace.

P.O. Box 19318
3501 DH Utrecht, the Netherlands
PoC@paxforpeace.nl
info@paxforpeace.nl
www.paxforpeace.nl
www.protectionofcivilians.org



TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|---------------------------------|-----------|
| PROGRAM LEVEL | 3 |
| Summary | 3 |
| Key Results in Reporting Period | 3 |
| Contextual Analysis | 4 |
| Learning and Adaptation | 5 |
| Results Dashboard | 8 |
| IRAQ | 9 |
| Summary | 9 |
| Key Results in Reporting Period | 10 |
| Contextual Analysis | 11 |
| Learning and Adaptation | 12 |
| Featured Story | 13 |
| Results Dashboard | 14 |
| SOUTH SUDAN | 15 |
| Summary | 15 |
| Key Results in Reporting Period | 16 |
| Contextual Analysis | 16 |
| Learning and Adaptation | 18 |
| Featured Story | 18 |
| Results Dashboard | 20 |
| INTERNATIONAL LEVEL | 21 |
| Summary | 21 |
| Key Results in Reporting Period | 22 |
| Contextual Analysis | 25 |
| Learning and Adaptation | 25 |
| Featured Story | 26 |
| Results Dashboard | 27 |
| ANNEX | 28 |
| Results Framework | 28 |

PROGRAM LEVEL

Summary

Over the past 4.5 years, the Protection of Civilians (PoC) program has enabled PAX to become one of the most well-known and most sought-after organizations working on PoC and related topics. Our unique mix of nuanced primary research, our in-country partners' knowledge of civilian security needs and priorities, our ability to provide civilian-centered policy advice, and our capacity to provide targeted technical assistance and training to security actors has proven to be very effective. This unique combination of competencies allows us to remain critical but constructive, as well as deeply engaged from the grassroots to international levels in processes leading to meaningful change.

The focus for PAX and its partners in the final year of the overarching PoC program was to create and leverage opportunities for collaboration across the component projects, and to consolidate lessons learned from throughout the lifetime of the grant to inform future program design and strategy. In applying lessons through our implementation, the PoC team sought to especially focus on transcending geographic and project siloes. This culminated in a number of shared key efforts and results, including the creation and adoption of an Iraqi National PoC Policy, highlighting diverse civilian perspectives in UN policy debates, and engaging in a participatory final evaluation process to inform a new theory of change, among many others.

Key Results in Reporting Period

Evaluation and Learning: In the final year of the program, PAX supported a number of valuable learning initiatives between and among its staff and partners, both at the project level and through our Annual Partner Meeting in June 2023. Throughout the year, we also engaged eagerly in various dialogues and learning processes with peer organizations via PARTOS, PAX's Strengthening Civic Courage (SCC) consortium, and the Dutch MFA. The most impactful themes for our program were around practical dynamics related to localization and shifting power, as well lessons learned from the Policy and Operations Evaluation Department's (IOB) [evaluation](#) on Dutch contributions to stability, security, and rule of law programming from 2015-2022.

Another significant effort related to the program's final evaluation, which we sought to leverage to facilitate reflections on the past and present to inform our approaches in the future. Thus, rather than focusing on a more traditional end-of-program evaluation to consolidate evidence of results achieved to date, we chose to orient the process towards what we called "reflective design." Working closely with a team of expert evaluators coming themselves from the military, diplomatic, and practitioner worlds, PAX and its partners reflected together on how to practically apply our many lessons learned going forward. The process involved a series of individual interviews (with stakeholders from both inside and outside of the program), a multi-day in-person event with representatives of all of our partner organizations, and a detailed utilization workshop. The process resulted in a written report with key findings and recommendations, but most usefully, also in a new draft Theory of Change (ToC) that better reflects the types of outcomes we seek to influence, and our unique approaches and value added. The process also enabled us to reflect on a series of "strategic arcs" meant to highlight dilemmas or decisions that we need to make going forward with regards to our core concepts, donor base, size and structure, means of access

and influence, and approach to local partnerships. The “reflective design” report is available for external audiences upon request.

Convening: In the final grant period, PAX organized its annual PoC-themed event in The Hague, this year reflecting on lessons learned from the past and present, and how these will affect the future of protection of civilians. In attendance were 87 experts from across the security, diplomatic, research, and practitioner worlds to discuss a rich range of topics. Following an expert panel discussion that featured General Kees Matthijssen (ret.), Sarah Petrin (Atlantic Council), and Marja Esveld (Netherlands MFA), there was an interactive “marketplace of ideas” where attendees could pitch key developments in the field and solicit input from the broader network. The main themes focused around national PoC policy development, conflict and the environment, people-centered approaches to protection; and means for evaluating states’ PoC performance. Back in June 2023 and as part of the program for our Annual Partner Meeting, PAX also hosted an “open floor” networking event in The Hague to build connections between our in-country partners and a broader network of policymakers, researchers, and practitioners working on themes related to, but distinct from PoC.

Contextual Analysis

In 2023, we witnessed a further deterioration of security in the regions where PAX works. The relentless attacks on Ukraine by Russia, coups d’état in the Sahel region, shrinking civic space in Iraq, intercommunal conflict in South Sudan, the nature and scale of violence against civilians in the war between Hamas and Israel—these examples all highlight how fragile security is and how deeply relevant PoC capacities are today is for those actors that want to invest in alternatives to violence. The trend, unfortunately, seems to indicate further destabilization in 2024 and beyond, paired with a growing wariness among traditional supporters of PoC agendas to continue to contribute to more robust protection capacities. With these broader conditions in mind, there were 2 key trends affecting the policy environment in the Netherlands and internationally, as well as practical realities that had implications for our programming in the final grant period.

War in Gaza: The war that started in Gaza in October 2023 began with a brutal attack by Hamas fighters on Israeli civilians and triggered extraordinary retaliation by Israeli forces on Palestinian civilians. This war still shows no signs of abating at the time of writing, and in fact may continue to spill over disastrously in the Occupied Palestinian Territories and across borders into Lebanon and elsewhere. Hamas’ attack on Israeli civilians was inexcusable and the planners and perpetrators deserve to face justice for their actions. However, the events of 7 October do not justify violence perpetuated by the Israeli state since then. The Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) continue to systematically obstruct the provision of basic needs and services; destroy critical civilian infrastructure, private property, and cultural heritage; perpetuate forced displacement and ethnic cleansing in both Gaza and the West Bank; and erode faith in the international legal system. Ongoing provocations between Israel and Hezbollah also risk significant escalation in the conflict to involve new fronts and proxies, which would have devastating effects for civilians across the region. In terms of implications for our own work—beyond the very real risks faced by PAX partners in affected areas—PAX fears that this war will critically damage progress we as an international community have made in the recent years towards building new shared norms on restraint, civilian harm mitigation, transparency about protection failures, and attention for the reverberating effects of use of force on civilians. The PoC Program has and will continue to raise awareness of these implications with powerholders in the Netherlands and the United States, as well as multilateral fora.

Funding insecurity: PAX observed with interest the Dutch MFA's efforts to develop a new Theory of Change and Results Framework, as well as a subsequent new Financial Framework with which to support future programming in the security and rule of law space. PAX contributed to these various processes with enthusiasm when provided the opportunity to do so. Given the complexity of the undertaking—particularly in a shifting domestic political context—the process of delivering the new financial framework and corresponding call for proposals took longer than originally anticipated. While PAX was grateful to DSH for providing additional funding to enable us to continue our programming an extra quarter into Q1 2024, the final months of the grant period were characterized with significant questions about the future of our programming and commitments we wanted to be able to deliver to our many partners around the world.

Learning and Adaptation

In reflecting on the final year of the program, PAX took the opportunity reflect back on its core Learning Questions to identify both tangible lessons that influenced how we implemented the program, as well as what we discovered over the lifetime of the grant that more fundamentally relates to assumptions in our theory of change or broader approaches.

Learning Q1: What does meaningful accountability to civilians in conflict really look like in practice?

A key aspect of accountability for our work involves securing a seat at the table for civil society in national and international policy spaces. Throughout our program, building trust with and between various stakeholders has proven to be of tremendous importance. It is only through trust that PAX staff and partners gained and maintained unique access to security actors in Iraq, the Netherlands, and the US, as well as within the UN and NATO. Critically, once we have access we can leverage it to channel more civilian-centric perspectives—informed by years of grassroots level engagement with local communities—into policymaking and policy implementation processes that are all too often divorced from the everyday realities experienced by civilians.

We and our partners have cultivated trust in a number of key ways: (1) contributing unique evidence, perspectives, or technical knowledge that help fill gaps or complement competencies within targeted institutions; (2) consolidating and translating lessons learned and best practices, either by helping to contextualize them to specific contexts, or generalize them for broader application; (3) pursuing persistent and sustained (in person) engagement, even through moments of waning political will or momentum; and (4) remaining constructive and ready to collaborate, even when we are also being critical of examples we may consider as failures to protect civilians.

As a more specific answer to this question, PAX explored the concept of accountability last year by pursuing [research on civilians' perspectives on civilian harm response](#). This resulted interesting findings on the types of response actions that civilians are most likely to classify as just, meaningful, and effective (including an combination of acknowledgment, explanation, and apology, as well as redress through individual financial payments and legal action, where warranted). The research also identified a series of factors associated with ineffective response, such as community-level investments, claim registration systems that are unclear or have unrealistically high evidentiary requirements, and actions that are not visibly taken by the responsible security actor itself. In examining existing literature on this topic we identified that there is too little effort to collect the expectations, wishes, and needs directly from survivors of harm or their relatives. Therefore, additional context-based research is necessary in order to

support the development of more civilian-centered military policy and practice as it pertains to civilian harm response.

Learning Q2: What does constructive community engagement by CSOs, NGOs, the UN, local and national security actors, and international institutions look like, both currently and ideally?

Our experience in Iraq provides valuable lessons regarding this question, particularly as it relates to engagements between CSOs and formal authorities. When looking back at when we began working together with our partners in Diyala governorate, representatives from WAHO said that they could never have imagined being able to explicitly work on sensitive security dynamics. In 2023, those same partners were able to leverage their influence and access to broker a peace agreement between conflicting clans. During a project learning meeting, the Director of WAHO shared, “The mindset of these actors has also changed—they used to call us [CSOs] ‘foreign agents,’ and now they are eager to work with us.” At the outset of the program, the approach involved PAX serving as a convenor and connector between civil society and authorities at the national and sub-national levels, but this role has been largely taken over by partners in Iraq who now have these relationships themselves. Our partners in Basra, Kirkuk, and Salahaddin have all found creative and constructive ways of engaging meaningfully with security authorities in recent years, even in a challenging context of shrinking civic space.

The realities of threats against civil society were very apparent in light of an anti-gender backlash campaign launched in the country in 2023, as well as political sensitivities related to the war in Gaza. (For more details, see the Iraq chapter.) Even in this challenging context, PAX and Al Amal were able to maintain constructive working relationships at the highest levels of the Iraqi government. In fact, despite allegations against both PAX and Al Amal, we were still invited to work closely with the office of the Prime Minister (PM) on the PoC policy; attended senior-level meetings with the President’s office, advisors to the PM, as well as with the various ministries; and received support from the Office of the National Security Advisor in securing visas.

Learning Q3: Are data and evidence enough? How do we go beyond generating interesting information towards fostering ownership for taking action rooted in local priorities?

In looking specifically at our country-based work in Iraq and South Sudan, we believe that we have contributed to filling what were once very significant knowledge gaps about civilian experiences and perceptions of security. We have generated a huge volume of data and increased visibility for our research efforts since the early days of the program. We also significantly ramped up the rate at which we published analytical reports and infographics in recent years, including adding new reports like trend analyses and special thematic outputs on linkages between conflict and the environment. While generating more and better data was always an ambition, it was never the primary purpose we had in mind when building the HSS methodology. This is why both in Iraq and South Sudan, PAX and its partners have decided that there needs to be a greater focus going forward on the meaningful application and use of our data at different levels going forward. It is nice to generate an elegant report and for it to reach the desk of a key authority. But for those to translate into actual behavior change, PAX and its partners need to invest more effort in following up on community-driven advocacy aims and holding leaders accountable for making and fulfilling their promises. In practice, this means that PAX will pursue lighter touch approaches to the research-based components of the HSS methodology (through, for instance, less frequent data collection in South Sudan and a shift towards more reliance on an Expert Panel Survey in Iraq), as saturating our audiences with more data will have diminishing returns. One of the most important

outcomes of our investment in the HSS methodology is the improved credibility that PAX and its partners enjoy when engaging especially with local and national authorities. We are now at a stage where we require less new data in order to maintain that legitimacy, and more time for constructive engagement with both communities and authorities about putting knowledge into practice.

At the level of our (inter)national policy influencing work and in continued engagements with security institutions, we recognize the value of collecting and sharing information on good practices regarding PoC and CHM. However, where we have seen our added value strongest is in the translation of these lessons so that they can be applied in other contexts (both literally, as well as culturally and institutionally). For instance, in Iraq, there was an enormous appetite for NATO, US, and Netherlands-developed materials regarding PoC and CHM at the outset of the process to build more Iraqi capacity on these themes. These materials only became really useful once they were (jointly) adapted to the Iraqi context and tailored to be more fit for purpose for the present moment. Another example of this is through the work of PAX and other expert partners to bring the Netherlands and the US together first engage in joint learning, and then to spearhead international efforts to set shared protection standards through the International Contact Group on CHM. PAX intends to incorporate this lesson into its future work, focusing even more on collecting and analyzing evidence of existing state policy and practice regarding the provision of people-centered security—including from non-Western countries with leadership to share—with an eye towards creating a more robust and accessible repository of knowledge.

PAX Protection of Civilians Program

Program Level Summary - 2023 & Q1 2024

Below is a summary of key metrics regarding the impact and visibility of the PoC Program in the final grant year, as well as an overview of budget utilization to date.



| DSH Standard Indicators | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 + Q1 | Trend | Total |
|---|------|------|------|------|-----------|-------|-------|
| # of formal/informal institutions strengthened in the field of human security | 6 | 10 | 23 | 25 | 47 | | 111 |
| # of people trained in the field of human security | 0 | 97 | 187 | 504 | 549 | | 1337 |

Key Advocacy & Policy Outcomes

LTO 1: Civilians in conflict improve their human security situation through constructive engagement with (inter)national security actors

| | | |
|--|--|---|
| Continued coordination between PAX and key stakeholders in the Lakes-Unity border region helped prevent violent cattle raids between Dinka and Nuer armed youth as a result of the ongoing maintenance of the 2018 local peace agreement | PAX and Al Amal supported the Iraqi Ministry of Interior (MoI) to draft and finalize a Code of Conduct (CoC) and training manual. A training program is underway to operationalize the CoC across the MoI. This success is opening doors for similar efforts with the Department of Justice (MoJ). | PAX facilitated meaningful civilian representation at the Peacekeeping Ministerial Preparatory Conference in Rwanda through its Civil Society Engagement Facility, evidencing an opportunity for best practice in community engagement. |
|--|--|---|

LTO 2: Targeted security actors increasingly articulate and implement inclusive protection of civilians policies and practices

| | | |
|--|---|---|
| The US Department of Defense released an formal Instruction to operationalize its Civilian Harm Mitigation and Response Action Plan and established a Center of Excellence on CHM with significant input from civil society experts. | The government of Iraq finalized a unique National PoC Policy that is applicable both in times of conflict and peace, and which reflects significant constructive engagement from civil society. The Prime Minister proudly referred to the Policy in his remarks at the 78th session of the UN General Assembly. | Civil society experts from across the Sahel region convened in Ougadougou to share lessons learned and strategic priorities for engagement with international policymakers that were communicated during a subsequent advocacy mission to the EU. |
|--|---|---|

Program Visibility

| Publications & Events | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 + Q1 | Trend | Total |
|---|------|------|------|------|-----------|-------|-------|
| # of presentations or events by program staff on general PoC or human security themes | 0 | 3 | 8 | 11 | 6 | | 28 |
| # of attendees at annual PoC Conference | 54 | 418 | 323 | 52 | 87 | | 934 |

Social Media & Podcast (2022)

| | | | |
|-------------------------------------|-------|--|------|
| # of followers of HSS Facebook page | 1000+ | # of followers of PoC LinkedIn page | 3718 |
| # of followers of PoC Twitter | 1396 | # of Civilian Protection Podcast listeners | 6980 |

IRAQ

The most significant national-level results stemming from our programming in Iraq over the past 4.5 years include:

- Completed **12** survey rounds with **8,990** respondents (including **48%** women), working closely with local partner organizations.
- Supported the drafting and approval of **an Iraqi National PoC policy** and **Handbook** on the Protection of Civilians During Military, Security, and Law Enforcement Operations.
- Engaged constructively with **89** Iraqi government or security institutions through advocacy meetings and community engagement activities around civilian-centered protection issues
- Facilitated a unified curriculum on Peace & Conflict Studies at **13** universities across Federal Iraq providing instruction in foundational theories and concepts, research methodologies, and applicable skills.
- Finalized a revised **gender-sensitive Code of Conduct** (CoC) for the Iraqi Ministry of Interior (MoI), as well as a corresponding training manual.

Summary

The focus for the final year of the Human Security Survey (HSS) project in Iraq was to make meaningful use of the data collected and analyzed over the last five years. In particular, PAX and its partners¹ worked to cultivate better relationships between civilians and security providers and engaged closely with the Iraqi government to pursue more civilian-centered policymaking around peace and security. This sets an important foundation upon which PAX in future programming can explore how the new Iraqi National PoC policy and ongoing training efforts translate into changes in civilian experiences with and perceptions of security actors in targeted governorates.

PAX and its partners also continued adding to our rich evidence base. In addition to completing five rounds of data collection between January 2023 and March 2024, PAX published comprehensive trend analyses for each of the surveyed governorates. A new effort involved a unique analysis of the relationship between environmental change and conflict in 3 governorates: Diyala, Kirkuk, and Salahaddin. Further, the project piloted an Expert Panel methodology to determine whether future iterations of this project should include extensive periodic data collection, or if a lighter-touch approach could provide similar value going forward.

Progress Score: HSS Iraq



¹ In Iraq, PAX works closely with key civil society partners, including the **Iraqi Al Amal Association** in Kirkuk, Salahaddin, and at the Baghdad level; the **Iraqi Al Firdaws Society in Basra**; and **Wand Al Khair Human Organization** in Diyala.

In reflecting upon the overall HSS theory of change, we were able to meaningfully touch upon all elements: from civilian perceptions research, to using the evidence to support a culture of meaningful dialogue between civilians and security providers, to leveraging our thought leadership and partnerships to inform policy at the national level, and to inform training efforts internationally.

Key Results in Reporting Period

Research and community engagement: In the final grant period, PAX and its partners conducted 5 full rounds of data collection.² Additionally, we were also able to pilot Expert Panel Surveys in 3 locations (Diyala, Kirkuk, and Salahaddin) in complement to the regular survey. To leverage the HSS data, our partners conducted 32 local dialogues and Community Champions continued their peace initiatives in all targeted governorates, organizing 40 unique events. These efforts also included dedicated engagements with security providers. For instance, in Kirkuk, the HSS results were discussed with new cadets in the police training college—including with female cadets—and in Diyala, partners facilitated a focused training on International Humanitarian Law (IHL), International Human Rights Law (IHRL), and linkages to Iraqi law for local police as well. These are positive indications of our project getting traction with security providers and facilitating constructive dialogues with such actors on civilians' needs and perceptions with regards to protection. Similarly, the results were also shared with the Planning and Follow-Up Directorate (PFUD) of the MoI, facilitated by the EU Advisory Mission in Iraq (EUAM), as a tool which they can use to triangulate their own data on crime reporting in Iraq.

Advocacy and technical advice: One of the most significant outcomes of the PoC Program in Iraq is the development of Iraq's National PoC Policy. The policy and subsequent handbook are unique because they encompass all security institutions in Iraq and because they are intended to serve during both times of peace and of conflict. The process also provides valuable lessons learned about how to involve both implementers³ and policymakers effectively in such a process, as well as how to position both international and local civil society to play important advocacy, convening, and advisory roles.

That a conflict-affected state like Iraq is now one of the only countries in the world with a dedicated PoC Policy reflects a opportunity for new (and non-Western) leadership on this theme regionally and internationally. While the government of Iraq was able to rely heavily on existing doctrine, guidance, and lessons learned from the process to develop a PoC Policy at NATO, the end result was deeply contextualized to the Iraqi context. Similarly, the role of PAX and Al Amal evolved over time. At the beginning of the process, PAX convened and led the policy drafting process. In the final stages the Iraqi institutions were leading, with PAX and Al Amal providing subject matter expertise. The writing of the final drafts were taken over by the Prime Minister's office, reflecting a critical shift towards genuine local ownership and championship of the process. The Prime Minister even made reference to the effort to

² Basra, Diyala, Kirkuk, and Salahaddin governorates were all surveyed in 2023, and a final round of data collection occurred in Diyala in Q1 of 2024.

³ "Implementers" in this case refer to both civilian authorities and members of security services representing a wide variety of Iraqi institutions, including: the Office of the National Security Advisor (ONSA), the Ministry of Defense (MoD), the Ministries of Interior (MoI) of both Federal Iraq and the Kurdish Regional Government, Federal Police, Counter Terrorism Service (CTS), Iraqi National Intelligence Service (INIS), and National Security Service (NSS).

enact a PoC Policy during his address to the UN General Assembly in 2023. The policy was formally approved by the Prime Minister of Iraq on the final day of the PoC Program, on 31 March 2024.

Another achievement was the drafting and finalization of the training manual for a Code of Conduct (CoC) for the Iraqi Mol. Consultations started in July 2023, and once the manual was approved, a training of trainers was conducted in March 2024 that will facilitate a roll out to all employees of the Mol. Relatedly, in January 2024, a session on the CoC was also conducted with the Iraqi Reform Department, the objective of which was to enhance accountability and justice for law enforcement personnel as per UNSCR 1325, and for law enforcement personnel to be sensitive in dealing with cases on sexual harassment and women's issues. During this session, working groups were created for them to develop definitions, reform objectives, and commitments, as well as discuss how to appropriately embed the themes of women's rights, transitional justice, anti-corruption, transparency, and prisoners' rights in their CoC. An unintended positive outcome of this effort was that the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) subsequently reached out for assistance to also work on their own CoC.

Contextual Analysis

There were 4 key trends affecting the operating environment in Iraq in 2023 and early 2024:

Gender backlash: PAX, its partners, and many other Iraqi and international civil society organizations (CSOs) working on gender issues experienced significant backlash by political, religious, and cultural authorities. Starting in August, civil society faced claims of “proliferating homosexuality,” “promoting transgender identities,” contributing to “moral decay,” and “violating religious and national values” in Iraq. A directive issued by the Iraqi Communications and Media Commission at the time also banned using the term “gender” in all public communications and further recommended replacing the word “homosexuality” with “sexual deviance.” As a result, many social media posts targeted academia and civil society, including PAX and its partners (specifically Al Amal and Al Firdaws). A number of CSOs, including Al Amal, were asked to sign a declaration with the DNGO stating that they will not partner with entities which support LGBTQIA+ initiatives, which apart from having moral and ethical implications, meant that these organizations could not continue engaging with EU representation in Iraq.

Shrinking civic space: In November, the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE) issued a memo asking universities to stop collaborations with a number of Iraqi and international organizations, including Al Amal. This was later revoked. In Mosul, NGO personnel were also asked by the intelligence services to sign declarations that they do not work with any foreign agents. Furthermore, the Iraqi government formally requested to close the UN Advisory Mission in Iraq (UNAMI) before the end of 2025,⁴ ostensibly as a signal of Iraq's progress towards stability since the mission was established more than 20 years ago, but also in an effort to push out “foreign” elements. Many Iraqi minorities, including Kurds and Sunni Muslims, worry about the implications of these developments.

Political instability: The 2022 Parliamentary elections fragmented the Shi'a population along pro-Iranian and nationalist lines and many believe that the current government is not expected to last for more than another year. The Federal Supreme Court's termination of the Speaker of the Council of Representatives,

⁴ The UN Security Council issued the formal resolution to end the UNAMI mandate in May 2024 (and therefore outside of the period under review in this report; however, the government had already signaled that it would withdraw consent for the mission's ongoing presence in Iraq in the preceding months.

Mohammed Al Halbousi—Iraq’s most powerful Sunni politician—also led to concerns among the Sunni population. Influential Shi’a leader Muqtada Al-Sadr asked for his followers to not vote for the upcoming provincial elections and to prevent their family members from voting, even if requiring physical force. This is reportedly leading to a rise in domestic and communal violence.

Spillover from regional and global conflicts: The war in Gaza has resulted in an increase in attacks on foreign troops, notably in Erbil, Baghdad, and Anbar. Further, there have been reports of young males being mobilized in the name of “jihad” to go and fight in Gaza; although, this mobilization appears to be contributing to increased extremism in Iraq itself. From October 2023 until February 2024, a number of attacks targeted airbases next to Baghdad and Erbil airports, as well as in Anbar. Iran-backed militias claimed responsibility for most of these attacks. During this same period, PAX was indirectly alluded to as a Zionist organization in a Facebook post, which caused security issues for staff based out of Iraq. Such acts point toward increased polarization and higher risks of violent extremism. For example, protestors burned down the Swedish embassy in Baghdad as a result of the desecration of the Quran in Stockholm. Swedish diplomatic staff were subsequently expelled, as well as Swedish companies and NGOs. Finally, Iraq is also experiencing increased drone strikes by Turkey against the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) in northern Iraq. Given the importance of trade routes with Turkey, an escalation may have severe consequences on the Iraqi economy. Moreover, there are reports of a possible IS resurgence in the country, particularly in Anbar, Ninewa, and Salahaddin.

Learning and Adaptation

As a result of the gender backlash described above, PAX as a whole, especially our gender programming (not financed under this grant), had to maintain a low profile, omitting logos, renaming projects for external audiences, and removing the names of Iraq-based partners from its website.⁵ The PoC Team was shielded somewhat from this controversy and was able to continue operating relatively unimpeded. Despite the public allegations against PAX, we were still invited to work with the Prime Minister’s office on the PoC Policy, and were also engaged in high level meetings with the President’s office and other key advisors, as well as with the Mol.

Unfortunately, the implications of the gender backlash were much more significant for Iraqi civil society actors, including a number of our partners. Many key partners—specifically Al Amal and Al Firdaws—were forced to change the way they speak about and even implement their programs. Both organizations refrained temporarily from using any branding at any public events and sharing any posts on social media, particularly on any topics that may be considered controversial. When Al Amal refused to sign the declaration by DNGO, they were threatened with suspension. Moreover, Al Amal’s founder, Hana Edwar, was labelled a foreign agent who “set the groundwork for planting homosexuality and moral depravity” in the country in various social media posts. As a result, she has stepped down from the Board of Al Amal and has relocated to Erbil from Baghdad. Al Amal also receives a significant amount of funding through the US Department of State’s Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor (DRL), which can potentially mean another red flag for them in country. To preempt any further negative consequences, they are

⁵ This precautionary action was taken to preempt potential threats against partners because a number of Iraqi CSOs were targeted after being named as partners by another Dutch NGO that has significant programming on LGBTQIA+ issues in the region, although not in Iraq.

working to register a small sister organization in the Netherlands, which can then attain funding from American or other sources on their behalf.

These trends also pose potential risks for solidarity and coherence across broader Iraqi civil society. For example, other CSOs and academics have reportedly been afraid to attend events where representatives from Al Amal were present at the risk of being declared guilty by association. While PAX reached out to their partner organizations and asked them if they had any concerns partnering with us—including security concerns or personal attacks—none of the partners under this program said that they felt threatened as a result of their partnership with us.

Economic conditions in Iraq have also forced PAX and its partners to adapt, particularly now that access to US dollars are restricted. Al Amal maintains their account in a Lebanese bank, enabling them to withdraw dollars by paying a 2% premium, while the other partners are unable to withdraw USD altogether. As a result, both WAHO and Al Firdaws have functionally lost significant proportions of their project budgets, as withdrawing funds in Iraqi dinars according to the official exchange rate is usually 13-20% lower than the black market exchange rate. While most commercial vendors peg against black market rates, most costs have still functionally increased. Bank transfers to Iraq are also becoming increasingly difficult, with the payments PAX makes to its partners often bouncing back once or twice. Finally, PAX staff traveling to Iraq increasingly have to rely on cash, rather than credit cards, in hotels or event venues, to avoid being charged official exchange rates and exorbitant additional fees, which has potential logistical and security implications.

Partner Testimonial

A key success of the PoC Program's work in Iraq has been how Iraqi civil society now sees the utility in—and also has the confidence to—engage with security providers. As a representative from our partner WAHO stated during one of the project learning meetings: *“We never thought that we would be in a place to work directly with [formal] security actors. The mindset of these actors has also changed; they used to call us [NGOs] ‘foreign agents,’ and now they are eager to work with us.”*

PAX Protection of Civilians Program

Human Security Survey - Iraq 2023 & Q1 2024

Below is a summary of key results achieved by the HSS in Iraq in the final grant year, as well as trends over the lifetime of the project.



Impact Indicators

| | Basra (2022) | Basra (2023) | Diyala (2022) | Diyala (2023) | Kirkuk (2023) | Salahaddin (2023) | Trend | Average |
|---|--------------|--------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|-------------------|-------|---------|
| % of HSS respondents in Iraq reporting that their security situation has improved over the previous 12 months | 41% | 25% | 62% | 54% | 55% | 53% | ▼ | 47% |
| % of HSS respondents in Iraq reporting a favorable perception of police in their area | 81% | 88% | 96% | 98% | 88% | 89% | ▲ | 91% |

*Note that no 2022 comparison data is available for Salahaddin and Kirkuk due to security conditions at the time.

Key Results Over Time

| | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 + Q1 | Trend | Total |
|---|------|------|------|------|-----------|-------|-------|
| # of HSS data collection rounds completed | 0 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 5 | | 12 |
| # of community dialogues with local civilians and relevant authorities to validate data | 0 | 0 | 15 | 19 | 32 | | 66 |
| # of HSS enumerators trained | 0 | 46 | 60 | 32 | 82 | | 220 |
| # of HSS respondents | 0 | 2295 | 1478 | 1534 | 3683 | | 8990 |

Additional Results in 2023 + Q1 2024

| | | Trend |
|--|----|-------|
| # of events at which HSS data is presented to international institutions or stakeholders interested in protection issues | 8 | ▲ |
| # of local project partners or experts consulted in annual HSS methodology review | 7 | ▼ |
| # of community engagement activities implemented by community committees or champions | 40 | ▲ |
| # of Iraqi government or security institutions constructively engaged through advocacy meetings about protection issues | 55 | ▲ |

Selected Publications

- [Basra Data Summary \(2023\)](#)
- [Diyala Data Summary \(2024\)](#)
- [Kirkuk Data Summary \(2023\)](#)
- [Basra Trend Analysis \(2018-2023\)](#)
- [Diyala Data Summary \(2023\)](#)
- [Salahaddin Data Summary \(2023\)](#)
- [Summary Report: Iraq Environmental Module \(2023\)](#)
- [Civilian Protection Podcast episode: Conflict, Climate and the Environment \(2023\)](#)

*Note that Arabic language translations of HSS Iraq publications can be found on www.protectionofcivilians.org

SOUTH SUDAN

The most significant national-level results stemming from our programming in South Sudan over the past 4.5 years include:

- Completed **13** survey rounds with **5,818** respondents (including **65%** women).
- Sustained **5** Community Security Committees across South Sudan to facilitate the design and implementation of locally-led initiatives to address protection issues explored through the HSS and related dialogue processes.
- Supported **63** community engagement activities on a wide range of themes, from addressing land conflicts with internally displaced people and host communities, to dedicated mediations to resolve inter-clan revenge killings, to radio talk shows to discuss HSS findings, among many others.
- Supported the maintenance of a local peace process between neighboring communities in Yirol and Payinjar—now in its 6th year—through pursuing ongoing monitoring and facilitating concrete mediation efforts.

Summary

The focus for the final year of the Human Security Survey project in South Sudan was to continue making effective use of PAX’s proven methodology to facilitate constructive dialogue and cooperation between civilians and authorities. In looking back at the entire grant period, the HSS approach has succeeded in building and sustaining credibility among local government officials, local security actors, customary authorities, and conflict-affected communities across the various survey locations. PAX and its partners⁶ have normalized security exchanges and dialogues between local authorities, security actors (police, armed forces, national security, armed youth) and civil society on grassroots level and managed to get easier access to appointed officials at state and county levels, police chiefs, etc. for easier engagements and validation of incidents, however more advocacy needs to be done have more impact

On the practical side, this means that administrative obstruction of our operations was completely absent in the final year of programming, which enabled smooth delivery of planned activities. More significantly, it also enabled PAX and its partners to contribute meaningfully to community-driven solutions to security and protection issues throughout the final year of the program. For instance, the HSS project supported a wide variety of community engagement activities organized by our Community Security Committees

Progress Score: HSS South Sudan



⁶ In South Sudan, PAX works with the **Catholic Diocese of Torit – Justice and Peace Commission (CDoT)**, **Assistance Mission for Africa (AMA)**, and a series of **trusted local consultants** in Eastern Equatoria, Lakes, Jonglei, Unity, and Central Equatoria states. Please see the Learning and Adaptation section for necessary reflections on the partnership with AMA in particular.

(COMSECCOMs), and continued monitoring the successful grassroots peace agreement between Yirol (Dinka) and Payinjiar (Nuer) communities.

Key Results in Reporting Period

Short-term outcome 1.1: Protection policies and practices are increasingly informed by HSS findings

Research: In the final year of the program, PAX and its local data collection teams conducted rounds of data collection in Jonglei, Unity (Payinjiar, Leer), and Eastern Equatoria (Torit, Magwi), in total interviewing 996 civilians. The project conducted a series of engagements with different South Sudanese authorities and audiences for the research, including Ministries of Interior, Justice, and Defense; members of Parliament in the National Assembly, and various academic institutions and think tanks. PAX staff also took the opportunity of the Knowledge Platform on Security and Rule of Law's annual conference in Nairobi to present about our research methodology to a diverse set of peer organizations.

Short-term outcome 1.2: Community engagement activities inform more relevant protection of civilians strategies in target areas

Dialogue and community engagement: Between January 2023 and March 2024, PAX and partners facilitated 5 data validation and feedback sessions with communities contributing to the HSS from all states. As in years past, these dialogue events typically took place over the course of two days and involved a mix of political, security, and customary authorities, as well as representatives from civil society. However, PAX also sought to increase awareness of community security perceptions through disseminating survey data in new and interesting ways during the final year. For instance, the local COMSECCOM in Jonglei experimented with lighter-touch facilitated presentations and validations to inform a wider range of community members of the survey data and insights through more accessible community meetings at the payam (village) level.

COMSECCOMs also conducted radio talk shows on the topic of forced marriage in Bor South County (Jonglei) with the opportunity for community members to express their views. Similar radio programs in Torit County (Eastern Equatoria) engaged the mayor of Torit, the Deputy Police Chief, and a youth leader in a conversation to raise people's awareness about the rule of law and to improve relations between communities and police. Listeners could also call in, give their opinions, and ask questions to the presenters.

Community-driven solutions: In addition, PAX continued monitoring the Yirol-Payinjiar peace agreement, which remains an important mechanism for preventing intercommunal violence. For example, this agreement contributed to interrupting a potential cycle of violent cattle raids in the Lakes-Unity border in the last year through effective coordination between local government and security officials, civil society stakeholders, and COMSECCOM members. (See featured story below.)

Contextual Analysis

There were 3 key trends affecting the operating environment in South Sudan since early 2023:

Persistent communal violence and spillover from Sudan: The UN Mission in South Sudan's (UNMISS) Human Rights Division reported in its annual brief on violence against civilians for 2023 that 86% of civilian casualties in South Sudan involved community-based militias and/or civil defense groups, and just 12%

of victims could be attributed to the parties to the conflict.⁷ This highlights the distinctly sub-national character of conflict in South Sudan, even though political and administrative elites at higher levels continue to contribute to worsening security dynamics as well. In some areas, such as Warrap and Jonglei states, intercommunal violence continued to reach high levels throughout 2023. According to our own HSS research, over 44% of households surveyed in Jonglei experienced at least one security threat in the [2023 report](#), and nearly ¼ of those incidents involved a death. While there was a slight decrease in the volume of reported incidents in the region since the [2022 survey](#), most respondents (60%) indicated that their security situation had not meaningfully changed over the previous year. These dynamics also had implications for program implementation. Notably, the rising insecurity in Jonglei resulted in Duk County being excluded from the survey in May 2023 due to spiking insecurity targeting civilians, as it was not safe enough for our enumerators to travel and conduct surveys. Instead, the trained enumerators visited other areas in Bor South and Twic East counties to conduct interviews, recognizing that it means some of the areas in the state most affected by conflict are now underrepresented in the research.

The ongoing war in Sudan places further strain on security conditions in the country. Between April 2023 and 2024, more than 650,000 people—including both returnees and refugees—fled the fighting into South Sudan, and the numbers continue to rise. Many of these new arrivals have experienced significant trauma and have limited access to necessary humanitarian assistance. Further strain on scarce resources between those displaced and host communities could spell further conflict.

Concerns over election preparedness: The last year saw further political stagnation around the implementation of the peace agreement and preparations for elections, which are scheduled for December 2024. Both domestic and international stakeholders agree that the necessary conditions and structures are not in place to guarantee a credible electoral process, including key prerequisites like a full census, national constitution, and unification of security forces. This creates insecurity and tensions as it is unclear whether the election deadline can be met, if not whether a new extension period will be granted by the international community and how the institutions and regulations necessary for a free and transparent election can be guaranteed. The upcoming elections therefore continue to create confusion and tensions between various political factions, and between national government officials and the international community, as well as among the general population.

Economic insecurity: In February 2024, the main pipeline carrying South Sudan's crude oil through Sudan was seriously damaged and is very unlikely to be repaired soon due to ongoing conflict in Sudan. According to the International Crisis Group, "economic meltdown and collapse of President Kiir's patronage system could follow if production is not restored, and the government is unable to find a lender to bail it out."⁸ Oil production is not the only factor contributing to declining economic conditions, as rampant inflation and unemployment make daily life increasingly difficult for civilians already negatively impacted by conflict, displacement, and climate change. According to the UN, 9 million people—approximately 73% of the country's population—will require humanitarian assistance in South Sudan in 2024.⁹

⁷ See [UNMISS HRD annual brief on violence affecting civilians in 2023](#).

⁸ See [Crisis Watch report on South Sudan from March 2024](#).

⁹ See [UN OCHA Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan from November 2023](#).

Learning and Adaptation

In the course of 2022, PAX and its partners realized that the initial focus on UNMISS as the main target audience for the collected data and community engagement insights, was in need of reconsideration. This is both because the mission, with its own data streams and internal dynamics, can be somewhat impenetrable from the outside, but also in light of an anticipated draw down of UNMISS in the future. As a result, we began shifting our focus in 2023 towards engaging more directly with Juba-based national security institutions. These will have a continued presence and need to be equipped to take on further protection responsibilities going forward.

Another key lesson learned with applications in the future has to do with the frequency of HSS research cycles. Throughout 2023, we realized that the project might be too ambitious in attempting to collect data annually in all locations, especially if the result is that many details and insights remain underutilized, even after data validation and reporting. Our current pace of research puts pressure on all the evidence collection components and limits the time and opportunity for local partners and community members to make proper use of that evidence. We wish to help shift the focus towards the application of this community-based research into agreed action plans and published reports to engage in follow-up opportunities, raise awareness, and advocate for changes among authorities. In addition, we recognize the need for further investment into building advocacy skills and strategies in order to strengthen local engagement and “claim making capacities.” In the future, while both data collection and community engagement will remain the backbone of the project methodology going forward, the HSS project will but create more time and space for data use, particularly within and among local communities and through national-level advocacy.

A final, critical source of learning in the last year had to do with our relationship with one of PAX’s main partners in South Sudan under this program. We encountered operational challenges with the Assistance Mission for Africa (AMA), with whom we work in two survey locations and have maintained an organizational partnership since 2016. In August 2023, we received reports from AMA field staff that they had not been paid for 10 months at that time, and that necessary office expenses had also not provided by AMA headquarters in Juba for a considerable time. We suspended operations and financial transfers with AMA while awaiting their formal response and we coordinated our approach with colleagues within PAX. Unfortunately, we failed to communicate this in a timely manner to the Ministry despite our intentions to do so. Ultimately, a number of AMA field staff were discharged or resigned due to not being paid, which led in turn to interruptions in project implementation in these two locations. With the investigation ongoing, PAX sought to provide continuity by working directly with these former partner staff with critical technical skills and community access on a consultancy basis. PAX is in the process of compiling a more detailed overview of the timeline of events, scale of financial implications, and proposed remediation efforts (include critically examining our own internal processes), which will be provided to the MFA in parallel to this annual report.

Featured Story

Continued coordination with key stakeholders in the Lakes-Unity border region contributed to the prevention of violent cattle raids in the area between Dinka and Nuer armed youth in 2023. This involved effective coordination between local government and security officials, key members of civil society and COMSECCOMs, and direct contributions by the Governor.

Many cattle keepers from the Dinka communities in Yirol had travelled to the 'salty bar' areas in the border area between Lakes and Unity, which not just constitutes the border between two neighboring states, but is also the boundary between Dinka- and Nuer-majority areas. Further, during the civil war, this was also the border between government- and opposition-controlled territory. The salt in the ground is believed to be healthy and beneficial to the growth of cows, so cattle keepers are eager to bring their herds. This was impossible during the times of intercommunal conflict (2013-2018), and accessing these areas has now become a peace dividend of the community-based agreement that PAX helped to facilitate between these communities in 2018 and has monitored ever since.

One of the key success factors of the agreement is how it seeks to prevent and resolve cattle raids through improved cooperation between authorities on both sides of the border. Violent cattle raids, which were more frequent during periods of heavy conflict, are still committed by groups of armed youth or criminals for mostly economic reasons, and these actions threaten to damage intercommunal relations and derail the local peace agreement. An example of this occurred during Q1 2024 when large numbers of Dinka cattle keepers from Yirol East and Rumbek North counties were in the salty bar area with their herds. Our Senior Project Officer received a call from the former head of security of Payinjiar County in Unity (currently village administrator in the border area) warning that youth from his area was on their way to the border area with the intent to raid cattle. After informing the Governor, the County Commissioners on the Dinka side were then notified of the developing situation. They then instructed the armed youth and cattle keepers to vacate the border area and return home. Through this early-warning coordination, a potential deadly cattle raid was averted and the Dinka-Nuer peace agreement proved its value in keeping both communities safer.

PAX Protection of Civilians Program

Human Security Survey - South Sudan 2023 & Q1 2024

Below is a summary of key results achieved by the HSS in South Sudan in the final grant year, as well as trends over the lifetime of the project.



Impact Indicators

| | E. Equatoria (2022) | E. Equatoria (2023) | Jonglei (2022) | Jonglei (2023) | Unity (2022) | Unity (2023) | Trend | Average |
|--|---------------------|---------------------|----------------|----------------|--------------|--------------|-------|---------|
| % of HSS respondents in South Sudan reporting that their security situation has improved over the previous 12 months | 30% | 67% | 6% | 21% | 83% | 83% | ▲ | 48% |
| % of HSS respondents in South Sudan reporting a favorable perception of police in their area | 67% | 61% | 65% | 72% | 95% | 87% | ▲▼ | 75% |

Key Results Over Time

| | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 + Q1 | Trend | Total |
|---|------|------|------|------|-----------|-------|-------|
| # of HSS data collection rounds completed | 0 | 3 | 2 | 5 | 3 | | 13 |
| # of community dialogues with local civilians and relevant authorities to validate data | 0 | 0 | 5 | 2 | 5 | | 12 |
| # of HSS enumerators trained | 0 | 28 | 22 | 70 | 30 | | 150 |
| # of HSS respondents | 0 | 1325 | 852 | 2675 | 966 | | 5818 |

Additional Results in 2023 + Q1 2024

| | | Trend |
|--|----|-------|
| # of senior authorities making concrete commitments to respond to civilians' protection concerns as a result of community engagement activities or dialogues | 3 | ▲ |
| # of local project partners and experts consulted for annual HSS methodology review | 10 | ▼ |
| # of community engagement activities implemented by community security committees | 5 | ▼ |
| # of partner staff or Community Security Committee members with improved skills in peacebuilding & mediation or advocacy | 17 | ▼ |
| # of local civil society or authorities interviewed | 55 | ▲ |

Selected Publications

[Jonglei Data Summary \(2023\)](#)

[Eastern Equatoria Data Summary \(2023\)](#)

[Lakes Expert Panel Monitor \(O1-2 2023\)](#)

[Jonglei Annual Summary Report \(2023\)](#)

[Unity Data Summary \(2023\)](#)

[Jonglei Expert Panel Monitor \(O1-2 2023\)](#)

*Note that additional publications can be found on www.protectionofcivilians.org

INTERNATIONAL LEVEL

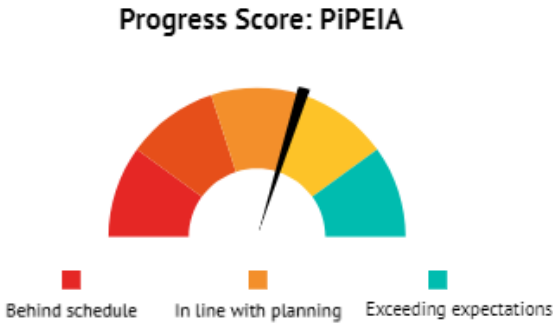
The most significant international-level results stemming from our programming over the past 4.5 years include:

- Facilitated sustained and constructive civil society engagement with the Dutch Ministry of Defense through the Roadmap Process, leading to significant improvements in official policy and practice regarding civilian harm mitigation and response, including: an [updated process](#) for informing Parliament in case of (potential) Dutch involvement in a civilian harm event (2020), a set of concrete [policy changes](#) (2022), the announcement of the first ever institutionalized civilian harm [reporting mechanism](#) (2023); and a new prioritization in the MoD, including the establishment of a PoC unit.
- Supported the Iraqi government and security apparatus to co-develop a reference curriculum on PoC, as well as a national PoC Policy and PoC Handbook.
- Contributed to the development and review of relevant PoC policies, guidance documents, action plans, trainings, and exercises for various NATO entities, reinforcing our role as a trusted partner.
- Participated actively in policy development and review processes at the UN, including during annual C-34 meetings,¹⁰ through the Action for Peacekeeping (A4P) initiative, and annual PoC Week, as well as by helping to shape UN DPO’s approach to civilian harm mitigation.
- Instructed over **800** individuals in PAX-led or supported military exercises or trainings on PoC topics.
- Organized at least **18** expert events at the headquarters level within the UN, EU, or NATO on civilian-centered security themes.

Summary

The focus for the final year of the combined Protection in Practice (PiP) and Engaging International Actors on PoC (EIA) project was to capitalize on the thought leadership that the PoC Program has developed in recent years in technical areas of PoC practice to support tangible policy outcomes especially in Iraq, the United States, the Netherlands, and at the United Nations.

The project has continued to leverage the access it has to a number of security actors to constructively advise and support them in working towards significant policy developments, overhauls, or implementation. Our support towards those actors and institutions



¹⁰ C-34 refers to the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations, a multilateral body that meets annually to put forth proposals, recommendations, and conclusions on a wide range of peacekeeping issues. These particularly center around the Secretary-General’s priority areas under the A4P initiative, namely: conduct; partnerships; peacebuilding and sustaining peace; performance and accountability; politics; protection; safety and security; and women, peace and security.

has focused on providing a civilian perspective and needs-based framework to ongoing discussions about PoC- and civilian harm mitigation (CHM)-related policies in each of the aforementioned contexts, with an eye towards ensuring that the resulting policy outcomes adequately meet the needs and expectations of civilian populations in conflict-affected areas.

In parallel, research efforts within PiPEIA have focused on further enhancing our understanding of what civilian-centered accountability would look like in a variety of contexts by looking into civilian perceptions regarding meaningful and effective response to harm. This resulted in a [recommendations brief](#) and a [literature review](#), which have been used to inform efforts to influence security actors' policy and behavior. PAX also presented briefing notes on CHM and community engagement to delegates ahead of annual substantive debates at the UN's Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations (C-34) in February-March 2023 and at the PoC and Strategic Communications Preparatory Conference in Rwanda in October, as well as helped to facilitate civil society participation in the discussions leading up to the Ministerial pledging conference.

Key Results in Reporting Period

Short-term outcome 2.1: Targeted security actors meaningfully improve PoC policies, mandates, or general narratives around civilian-centered security.

In 2023, our team contributed to the development or review of PoC-related policies in Iraq, the Netherlands, the United States, at the United Nations, and at NATO.

Iraq: Together with our partners from the Iraqi Al Amal Association, PAX engaged extensively with a range of political and security institutions in Iraq in pursuit of one of the most significant outcomes of our program to date: an [Iraqi national Protection of Civilians Policy](#). This result builds upon years of work conducting research into civilian-focused security dynamics and constructive dialogue with authorities through the HSS project, but also reflects PAX's ability to translate best practices and lessons learned into tangible policy guidance across different geographic and institutional contexts.

One key milestone in operationalizing the new process was the creation of an Iraqi PoC Handbook. This process started in 2022 when PAX translated the NATO PoC Handbook into Arabic as a tool to support military and law enforcement training. Upon the request of the Iraqi National Security Advisor, we subsequently co-hosted extensive workshops to adapt the handbook for use in Iraq, which included adding contextually relevant examples throughout. In 2023, we co-hosted 2 multi-day workshops to harvest input and expertise from a wide range of military and civilian experts that we translated into a comprehensive first draft of the national PoC policy, which our Iraqi counterparts then took full ownership for finalizing and ushering through the necessary political channels. The resulting policy proposal is groundbreaking in the sense that it applies PoC concepts to all Iraqi military and law enforcement entities in all situations—including in peacetime—and that it come into being with significant involvement of Iraqi and international civil society.

The Netherlands: PAX is proud to have contributed to the Netherlands demonstrating further policy improvements and visible leadership in its approach to addressing instances of civilian harm. In December 2023, the [Ministry of Defense announced](#) that it will set up a reporting portal specifically for civilians and civil society organizations to report information on civilian harm potentially caused by Dutch arms deployment. This is a significant step forward in creating more channels of accountability and means

through which military and civilians can meaningfully engage with one another. The MoD has further established an internal PoC unit, which with PAX is in regular and substantive communication.

United States: In the United States, significant policy developments include the establishment of the Civilian Protection Center of Excellence (CoE), and in the release of the [Department of Defense Instruction on Civilian Harm Mitigation and Response](#) (DoDI), through which the US commits itself to implementing better protection standards, providing tailored responses to civilian harm, and enhancing its capacity to better understand the civilian environment. The DoDI also fosters significant investments in the building of capacity to monitor, learn from, train, and respond to failures to protect civilians. PAX played a pivotal role in the development of both the CoE and the Instruction as part of the US PoC Working Group, which consistently engaged with the US DoD and other policymakers to shape the narrative on PoC and CHM.

PAX also played a key role in connecting US, Dutch, and other policymakers and experts to start a process of international cooperation among likeminded states around these core themes. This resulted in the establishment of the so-called International Contact Group in 2023, which continues to meet on a periodic basis. Following advocacy by PAX and other peer organizations, some of these meetings have included limited civil society participation in order to ensure that the perspectives of civilians and external experts are reflected in these discussions.

United Nations: In the UN, we continued to provide direct advice to policy makers and diplomats on PoC-related topics, including integrating themes on the use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas (EWIPA) and the impacts of the interplay between Conflict and Environment as elements in the wider PoC and CHM agenda. We also shared our research findings on the protection tasks and responsibilities of [UN Special Political Missions](#), and recommendations on the importance of inclusive, safe, and meaningful community engagement in peace operations.

We also continued to share research and facilitate discussions within the UN on the conceptual utility of CHM for monitoring and learning and the important role of community engagement and civilian-centered approaches to PoC in UN peace operations. In the last year, we produced various publications, including a detailed [summary report](#), [policy recommendations](#), a [literature review](#), and a [primer](#). PAX also engaged actively in key policy debates at the UN, co-hosting workshops and sharing reports and policy briefs during PoC week (including with the Netherlands and other partners on CHM in UN Peacekeeping), C-34, and the PoC Preparatory Conference (PrepCon) to the 2023 Peacekeeping Ministerial. Notably, the Netherlands pledged at the 2023 Peacekeeping Ministerial in Ghana to support a DPO project focusing on advancing CHM in UN peacekeeping in 2024. PAX looks forward to continuing its support to these efforts in the future.

NATO: We continued to provide direct advice to policy makers at the NATO International Staff and Military Staff, SHAPE, ACT, and relevant Centers of Excellence on challenges with the application of PoC policy and guidance in current and future conflict. With the Stimson Center, we concluded several rounds of conversations in Brussels and elsewhere and published 2 policy papers. Over the years, PAX staff have contributed to dozens of table top exercises, experiments, consultations, courses, and workshops led by NATO entities. Along the way we developed a significant portfolio of course modules, exercise scenarios, and vignettes that we can easily make fit for purpose in a wide range of settings.

Short-term outcome 2.2: Targeted security actors demonstrate improved capacities and more civilian-centric behavior in the delivery of protection in practice.

In 2023, we continued to support national and international security actors in their quest to improve their capacity to protect civilians. These efforts included, among others:

- In South Sudan, we continued conversations with national institutions and government stakeholders, as well as with INGOs and the UN on the future of PoC in the country. These engagements are helping build new work streams focusing on law enforcement and protection, which will feature in future programming.
- In Iraq, we concluded the PoC Training of Trainers course we started earlier in the program. In 2023, it resulted in evaluation sessions and proposals for future iterations of this and other courses to be developed by PAX and partners.
- At NATO, we contributed to a number of workshops, courses, and exercises that explore PoC in specific contexts, notably in Large Scale Combat Operations (LSCO), Article V scenarios, and near-peer conflict. Next to that, we continued our contributions to specialist PoC training, including the LandCom PoC courses and the PoC Focal Point Training, as well as the FINCENT-led UN/NATO Comprehensive Protection of Civilians course.
- We continued to support the EU Peace Operations Training Center in Slovenia in delivering their PoC course.
- In the Netherlands, the MoD took an important step towards providing more civilian-centric protection by announcing it will facilitate civilian reporting about harm potentially caused by Dutch arms deployment. We await further implementation of this reporting mechanism in 2024 and stand ready to offer targeted advice where needed.

Short-term outcome 2.3: Civilian-centered PoC features more on the agenda of international security institutions

In 2023, PAX was involved in an innovative project led by the Whiteflag Foundation, Save the Children, and Capgemini called the [White Flag Protocol](#). The project's intent is to provide a safe and transparent communication channel in conflict-affected settings through blockchain technology, which can help identify protected zones and other points of interest in real time, and so improve protection outcomes at a field level. The technology is still in the development phase, though a Minimal Viable Product (MVP) was developed and tested in South Sudan, involving advice from PAX. In a potential second phase, the focus is on securing more funds and buy-in from stakeholders like the ICRC to take the development to its next step.

We further continued our work with CIVIC on the Civilian Protection Podcast, a series through which we seek to bring the experiences of civilians living in conflict to the fore. In 2023, our key focus has been on providing the civilian perspective on conflicts that were frequently in the news, such as the conflicts in Sudan and over Nagorno-Karabakh.

Short-term outcome 2.4: Civil society from conflict contexts are equipped to more meaningfully engage with relevant security actors and policymakers at national and international levels

In December, PAX convened a 3-day workshop in Ouagadougou bringing together civil society representatives from Niger, Togo, Ivory Coast, Mali, Benin, and Burkina Faso. The exchange focused on whether and how international actors can work effectively with civil society in the Sahel region. While

group discussions were mainly about challenges to the interaction between domestic CSOs and international institutions like the European Union, all participants made it very clear that they are interested in engaging with the EU and other international actors.

As a follow-up to this workshop, an advocacy mission from Burkina Faso and Niger was organized in Brussels in March 2024. The civil society partners in this advocacy trip engaged throughout the week bilaterally with EU policy makers, the Dutch and Belgian EU missions, and civil society, as well as through a round table organized by Search for Common Ground.

Finally, in support of this outcome area, PAX was able to facilitate the participation of civil society representatives in the peacekeeping PrepCon organized in Rwanda in 2023, which provided valuable civilian perspectives and additional nuance to the policy discussions. South Sudanese conference participant Bakhita Steven's participation was so impactful that she [was featured prominently in UN DPO's summary reporting](#) about the event afterwards. "*Protection of civilians that relies on peacekeeping or our own government creates a dependency syndrome where you think you will be vulnerable forever. But that is wrong. We are strong. What we need is the capacity to protect ourselves and to build sustainable peace and development rather than dependency activities that keep us hostage,*" she is quoted as saying.

Contextual Analysis

In addition to the trends already addressed elsewhere in this report, there was one particularly key factor affecting the operational and policy environment in the final year of implementation:

Policy successes confronted in practice: In the international arena, there was and remains notable inconsistency between very positive policy developments on one side, and glaring lack of adherence to international humanitarian law principles on the other, including in conflicts involving the explicit interests of Permanent Members of the UN Security Council. Even those states and institutions that have championed PoC and CHM policies have been hesitant to tout policy changes in the midst of highly visible protection failures in ongoing conflicts. Furthermore, in such a politically charged environment, policymaking in key arenas has come to a standstill due to valid concerns of the risk of backsliding on achieved policy gains and the repeated use of vetoes and/or tit-for-tat voting. This creates huge challenges for urgently needed international action.

Learning and Adaptation

As described elsewhere in this report, PAX faced threats to our partners and our staff in Iraq in the last year linked to a consorted campaign against individuals and organizations demonstrating (either real or perceived) support for gender equality and LGBTQI+ rights programs. The threat of violence against our partners and staff was significant in 2023, and then intensified in Q4 when some Iranian-backed factions in Iraq tried to spin a story that PAX is working with or for Israel. As a result, we refrained from highlighting on our website or on social media examples of our activities in Iraq. In some cases, we were forced to delay or relocate workshops to safer areas, although in the end, we were able to implement all activities as planned.

Similarly, we changed tactics for some of our international advocacy work, shifting away from public-facing events towards more direct engagement behind the scenes with policymakers from key states and

international institutions; for example, switching from events or publications to holding more bilateral meetings and distributing unpublished recommendations. Also, we have called for more mainstreaming and operationalization of PoC activities rather than calling for new policies to be developed during this time. We pursued these adaptations in response to sensitive political dynamics, but also based on our own practical lessons learned about how to maintain access, credibility, and influence when our core focus themes are not publicly on the agenda. As a result, we have been able to maintain influence with our contacts in policymaking arenas regardless of these challenges, albeit more discreetly.

PAX also experienced a number of challenges to our implementation capacity in 2023. Our Project Lead on civil society engagement, Selma van Oostwaard, and our EU Advocacy Advisor in Brussels, Wael Abdulshafi, both left PAX in 2023 to pursue other opportunities, as well as one of our Military Advisors, Marc Garlasco, who left to accept a senior position with the US CoE. Our other Military Advisor, Marco Grandi, decided to reduce his work hours to 0.5 FTE on average after accepting a position at the World Food Programme. Further, our Project Lead on PiPEIA, Wilbert van der Zeijden was less available than anticipated due to bereavement leave. The anticipation that our current grant would end on 31 December (later extended to 31 March 2024) made it difficult to invest in long-term solutions for the diminished capacity, although we were able to patch many of the most immediate capacity gaps with redistributing responsibilities and some short-term consultancies. In general, concluding the current programming meant that throughout 2023 we were often unable to commit to new initiatives, partnerships, or invest in new staff, and instead needed to focus on wrapping up ongoing projects and investing in program design for 2024 and beyond.

Featured Story

A result of our multi-year involvement in the development of CHM policies and practices in the US, the Netherlands, Iraq, NATO, and the UN, in 2023 our team advocated for and contributed to the development of the *International Contact Group on CHM*. PAX directly facilitated contact between the Dutch MoD and US DoD, which led to initial bilateral conversations focused on learning from each other's experiences. Once this learning exchange proved valuable, the interest grew to expand the effort. This subsequently resulted in three meetings hosted by the Netherlands and one hosted by the UK that brought together a growing number of likeminded states to share challenges, lessons learned, and emerging best practices. Our staff contributed directly as subject matter experts to two of those meetings.

Bob van Dijk, Policy Coordinator on PoC and Policy Team Lead at the Netherlands Ministry of Defense said the following about the most recent ICG meeting in a public post on [LinkedIn](#):

“These meetings are becoming increasingly valuable. Many of the challenges we face as armed forces are recognizable to all of us, making the solutions often broadly applicable. In addition to challenges, we also discuss the opportunities that improvements in this area provide to better equip our armed forces for future missions and operations, both in terms of military effectiveness and transparency and accountability. And what can we do to enhance this within our joint military operations?”

PAX Protection of Civilians Program

Protection in Practice & Engaging International Actors on PoC (PiPEIA) - 2023 & Q1 2024

Below is a summary of key results achieved by the combined PiPEIA initiatives in the final grant year, as well as trends over the lifetime of the project.



Key Results Over Time

| | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 + Q1 | Trend | Total |
|---|------|------|------|------|-----------|-------|-------|
| # of expert events organized at the HQ level with the UN, EU, or NATO on civilian-centered security | 0 | 4 | 5 | 7 | 2 | | 18 |
| # of publications produced related to civilian harm tracking, reporting, mitigation, or response | 1 | 5 | 2 | 6 | 6 | | 20 |
| # of trainings or military exercises designed, implemented, and/or contributed to on PoC topics | 0 | 2 | 4 | 14 | 15 | | 35 |
| # of advocacy meetings or strategic engagements with targeted security actors or institutions | 6 | 6 | 21 | 29 | 23 | | 85 |
| # of participants in military exercises or trainings in general or specialized PoC topics | 0 | 13 | 29 | 333 | 438 | | 813 |

Additional Results in 2023 + Q1 2024

| | | Trend |
|--|----|-------|
| # of episodes of the Civilian Protection Podcast published | 7 | ▲ |
| # of strategic engagements with targeted security actors in training curriculum development | 1 | ▼ |
| # of formal strategic engagements or informal meetings with targeted security actors to translate PoC policy into practice | 23 | ▲ |
| # of civil society representatives from across the Sahel region participating in an expert roundtable on CSO-EU engagement | 18 | ▲ |
| # of participants in events to publicize or discuss publications on civilian harm topics | 55 | ▼ |

Selected Publications

- [Recommendations to improve PoC in Dutch military operations](#)
- [2024 statement by NGO Working Group on PoC](#)
- [Advancing civilian harm mitigation in UN peacekeeping](#)
- [Civilian Protection Podcast \(2021-2024\)](#)

- [10 common misconceptions about civilian harm mitigation](#)
- [Recommendations paper on civilian harm response](#)
- [Civilian perspectives on meaningful civilian harm response](#)
- [Civilian harm mitigation: a primer](#)

*Note that additional publications can be found on www.protectionofcivilians.org

ANNEX: RESULTS FRAMEWORK

