

[Lord Chancellor letter to the Chair of the SSRB: April 2021](#)

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[RAF clears Daesh stronghold in Iraq in support of an Iraqi Security Force operation](#)

In an operation lasting 10 days in March this year, the Iraqi Security Forces ground troops cleared Daesh terrorists from the Makhmur Mountain region, south-west from Erbil, while RAF and other coalition aircraft carried out a major air offensive.

The operation concluded on 22 March when Daesh extremists were confirmed to be based in a network of caves in the Makhmur mountains. Three Typhoon FGR4s were tasked to conduct an attack using Storm Shadow missiles, the remote area having first been checked to ensure that no civilians would be placed at risk.

The strike on the Daesh targets was assessed by subsequent surveillance to have been a success.

The Secretary of State for Defence said:

“The British Armed Forces, alongside our Iraqi and Coalition partners, continue to root out Daesh terrorists from where they hide.

“The UK is committed to defeating Daesh. This operation will prevent the terrorist group and its toxic ideology from regaining a foothold in Iraq and reduce its capability to coordinate attacks around the world.”

Throughout the 10 day operation, the RAF used Paveway IV bombs and Storm Shadow cruise missiles. This was the first operational use of the Storm Shadow cruise missile from a Typhoon FGR4 aircraft.

In a separate operation carried on Sunday 4 April, an RAF Reaper, armed with Hellfire missiles, identified a small group of Daesh terrorists in northern Syria, some fifty miles west of Al Hasakah. Having checked that there were no civilians nearby, the Reaper's crew attacked the terrorists, striking the target successfully.

From 2019 – 2020, the Ministry of Defence estimates 67 Enemies Killed in Action and four Enemies Wounded in Action in Iraq and Syria under Operation Shader – the UK's contribution to the Global Coalition against Daesh.

The operation carried out in March 2021 builds on the success of targeted air strikes to defeat Daesh in recent years and represents a significant increase in activity from previous months.

Air Commodore Simon Strasdin, Air Officer Commander of 83 Expeditionary Air Group and the UK Air Component Commander in the Middle East, said:

“The Royal Air Force and wider Coalition have supported an operation led by a highly capable unit from the Iraqi Security Forces. Together, we are working towards defeating the remnants of Daesh and ensuring its will is depleted.

“The commitment and dedication from the personnel deployed on operations across the Middle East is simply outstanding. It is even more impressive that the Royal Air Force can adapt and continue to deliver air power against the enemy during a global pandemic.”

Though Daesh has been territorially defeated, it is estimated there are approximately 10,000 Daesh terrorists still at large across Syria and Iraq. The UK, together with 81 partner nations of the Global

Coalition, therefore remains committed to working with Iraq to not only defeat Daesh but to also enhance security in the region.

In addition to air strikes the RAF is also delivering across a wide spectrum of air power including; Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance; Air to Air Refuelling and Air Transport; and the use of air assets such as Reaper, Voyager, C130 and A400Ms aircraft.

[Independent survey shows In-depth assessments well received by providers](#)

Press release

RSH commissioned external research to assess the effectiveness of its In-

depth assessment process and identify areas for improvement



The Regulator of Social Housing has today (8 April 2021) published the results of an independent survey of registered providers about the In-Depth Assessment (IDA) process.

The survey shows that providers consider IDAs to be an important element of regulating the economic standards and praised the professionalism and conduct of RSH's IDA teams. Providers also indicated in the survey that they made changes as a result of the IDA process, most commonly in the areas of stress testing and mitigation planning, risk management and board reporting.

The [findings](#) provide helpful feedback to RSH about providers' experience of the IDA process, and in response to these and its own internal reviews, RSH will continue to evolve and adapt its approach to IDAs.

Maxine Loftus, Director of Regulatory Operations, said:

We welcome the results of this survey of providers which shows that providers value the IDA process and the way in which it is carried out. We are grateful to those who took part in the survey and we will take into account their feedback, as well as our own internal reviews, as we continue to develop our approach.

Further information

For press office contact details, see our [Media enquiries page](#). For general queries, please email enquiries@rsh.gov.uk or call 0300 124 5225.

Notes to editors

- The IDA was introduced in 2015 and the completion of the first full cycle of IDAs for all RPs with over 1,000 social housing units marked an appropriate point at which to evaluate its effectiveness.
- In Autumn 2020 RSH commissioned an IDA evaluation to assess the effectiveness of the IDA process and identify areas for improvement in the IDA model and its delivery. The results of the research are

published on Gov.uk

- The research, which was conducted by IFF's specialist housing research team, involved a six week online survey distributed to the Chief Executives of all 218 large registered providers who are subject to IDAs. This was followed up with twelve depth interviews with Chief Executives of RPs who had an IDA in the past 24 months.
- RSH promotes a viable, efficient and well-governed social housing sector able to deliver homes that meet a range of needs. It does this by undertaking robust economic regulation focusing on governance, financial viability and value for money that maintains lender confidence and protects the taxpayer. It also sets consumer standards and may take action if these standards are breached and there is a significant risk of serious detriment to tenants or potential tenants.

Published 8 April 2021

[Findings from the latest COVID-19 REACT-1 study published](#)

- Over 140,000 volunteers were tested in England between 11 to 30 March 2021 as part of one of the most significant COVID-19 studies in the world
- Findings from Imperial College London and Ipsos MORI show infections fell by approximately 60% from the last REACT study in February, with only 1 in 500 people infected
- Data suggests infections have led to fewer deaths since December, which coincides with the vaccination rollout and 'Stay at Home' rules during this period
- Prevalence of infections has now plateaued, showing it is critical everyone continues to follow the guidance and rules to help control the epidemic

Over 140,000 volunteers were tested with PCR tests in England between 11 to 30 March to examine the levels of infection in the general population. The latest data shows infections in England have fallen by around 60% since the last REACT report (covering the period between 4 to 23 February), published on 4 March. When compared to the findings from February, the sharpest drops in prevalence were seen in London and the South East.

The study observed that the speed of this decline started to plateau from mid-March, reinforcing the need for everyone to continue to follow the rules

as we progress down the roadmap, remembering to follow the hands, face, space and fresh air guidance.

The study also found that the correlation between prevalence of infections and deaths is now diverging, suggesting that infections may have led to fewer deaths since the start of widespread vaccination through the Government's vaccination programme.

The main findings from the tenth round of the REACT study show:

- during the latest round in March, the study estimates an R number of 1 in England
- between February and March, national prevalence has dropped by around 60% from 0.49% in February to 0.20% in March
- there were substantial falls in regional prevalence from February to March: in South East from 0.36% in February to 0.07% in March; London from 0.60% to 0.16%; East of England from 0.47% to 0.15%; East Midlands from 0.59% to 0.19%; and North West from 0.69% to 0.31%
- areas of higher prevalence remain in parts of the North West, and Yorkshire and The Humber
- the highest prevalence in March was in those aged 5 to 12 years at 0.41%, compared with the lowest in those aged 65 to 74 and 75 and over at 0.09%
- infections may have produced fewer hospitalisations and deaths since the start of widespread vaccination

The vaccine programme continues to expand to protect as many people as possible, and over 37 million doses have been administered across the country so far. The vaccination programme is already having a significant impact on hospitalisations and deaths, with prevalence now lowest in those aged 75 and over.

Professor Paul Elliott, director of the REACT programme from Imperial's School of Public Health, said:

We have seen a gratifying fall in infections since our last survey in February, with infections dropping by around 60% overall. This is hugely encouraging and shows we're headed in the right direction.

However, in our most recent data there has been a flattening off in the infection rate with an R number now around one. This shows that we need to continue to approach the situation with caution and keep sticking to the rules.

Kelly Beaver, Managing Director, Public Affairs at Ipsos MORI said:

Over 1.5 million people in England have now participated in the REACT study and the data from this round is very encouraging, with a 60% reduction in prevalence since the last round in March.

But as we progress through the roadmap out of lockdown, we must remain vigilant. The R number being at 1 means we need to remain cautious in our approach over the coming weeks and months.

Infection rates are expected to rise as we cautiously ease restrictions, and we have been clear that moving too fast, too soon through the roadmap risks putting unsustainable pressure on the NHS.

The roadmap is dependent on four tests: the vaccination programme continuing successfully, evidence that vaccines are effective in reducing hospitalisations and deaths, that infection rates do not risk a surge in hospitalisations and pressure on the NHS, and that new variants of concern do not significantly impact on risk assessments. As we continue with our successful vaccination programme, testing, and the cautious easing of restrictions led by data and not dates, we expect there to be less pressure on the NHS, fewer deaths and hospitalisations.

As part of the first stage of the roadmap, schools reopened on 8 March which is crucial to children's education and wellbeing. Earlier this week, the government announced the second stage of the roadmap will continue as planned on 12 April with outdoor hospitality, non-essential retail and hairdressers reopening.

The government also announced that everyone in England will now have access to two rapid lateral flow tests a week, as part of its universal testing rollout. This will help to catch asymptomatic cases and stop people from unknowingly passing on the virus, potentially saving lives as restrictions start to be eased.

This report is the latest from the REACT study which was commissioned by the Department of Health and Social Care and carried out by a world-class team of scientists, clinicians and researchers at Imperial College London, Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust and Ipsos MORI.

Robust population surveillance studies are essential to understanding the rate of COVID-19 infection, how the virus is spreading across the country and the impact of measures taken to contain the virus to inform current and future actions.

The pre-print report is [available to download](#) using the password REACT10.

View more information on the [Real-time Assessment of Community Transmission \(REACT\)](#) programme of work.

This study falls under Pillar 4 of the COVID-19 National Testing Programme, which focuses on mass surveillance in the general population.

More detail on [rapid testing](#).

Call for bids: supporting Women, Peace and Security in Iraq

Background

CSSF Iraq

The Conflict, Stability and Security Fund (CSSF) is a cross government fund that supports and delivers activity to tackle instability, prevent conflicts and respond to fragility. The CSSF operates in 70 countries, including Iraq.

The CSSF Iraq programme delivers against 3 outcomes:

1. The threat posed by terrorist actors is reduced by a coordinated state led security and governance apparatus.
2. The state is more accountable, evidence-based and responsive with sufficient institutional capacity to deliver essential services; and
3. Active citizens are able to access and engage with the state to increase representation and influence the ways in which their needs are met.

CSSF Iraq has made a commitment to Women, Peace and Security (WPS) programming under its 'Building Stability Programme' (2021 to 2024). It is important it does so, for a number of reasons, not least, because Iraq is a focus country of the UK National Action Plan (NAP) on WPS (18 to 22) and the Preventing Sexual Violence Initiative (PSVI).

The Global WPS Agenda and the UK National Action Plan (NAP)

The UN Security Council adopted the WPS Resolution 1325, in 2000. The objective of the resolution is to promote and fulfil women's human rights and achieve gender equality, as part of efforts to build more peaceful and stable societies for all. The WPS agenda is founded on an understanding that people experience violent conflict differently according to their gender, with women and girls being particularly affected.

The UK National Action Plan (NAP) on WPS sets out how the UK Government will integrate gender perspectives to build security and stability, protect human rights of women and girls and promote their meaningful participation in conflict prevention and resolution. The strategic outcomes of the UK NAP on WPS are:

- women's decision making
- peace keeping
- preventing and responding to gender-based violence
- humanitarian response
- security and justice
- preventing and countering violent extremism and
- strengthening UK capabilities

CSSF Iraq Women, Peace and Security project: details

Despite the essential role of women's rights organisations (WROs) in the safeguarding of women and girls' rights and security through service provision, policy, and advocacy, there remains a significant gap in international donor support to WROs in Iraq. Lack of funding to WROs working on WPS in Iraq and the Kurdish Region of Iraq (KRI) was a key finding of Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) commissioned research by GAPS in 2019 (The 10 Steps: Turning Women, Peace and Security Commitments to Implementation) and its recommendation that funding for women-led Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) should be a priority. This concurs with findings and recommendations from a scoping exercise conducted in 2020 to inform the development of WPS programming under the CSSF-Iraq portfolio.

With this call, CSSF Iraq want to scale up support (technical and financial) to WROs in Iraq and the KRI working on the WPS agenda via a grant-stream approach, managed by an experienced not-for-profit organisation with proven expertise working with WROs/CSOs in Iraq and the Middle East North Africa Region.

Objectives of the Scope of Work

The CSSF Iraq programme team is seeking bids for projects that can support and strengthen grassroots and women-led CSOs in Iraq and KRI working across multiple themes relating to WPS through the issuance and management of a grant scheme, to be delivered alongside capacity building, network and alliance building.

The grant scheme would be open to CSOs in Iraq and the KRI, with grants managed by the successful applicant. It is envisaged that grants would range in size and scope, to be determined by the successful applicant.

The key facets of the grant scheme would be to provide:

- flexible, multi-year funding focused on enabling the CSOs to define their own priorities under the WPS agenda that meet the identified needs of women and girls in the communities they serve
- tailored capacity building and technical support to CSOs
- strengthened coordination and networking across CSOs

We would like to receive bids which deliver or contribute to the following desired objectives:

- empower women's organisations in Iraq and KRI to advance a localised WPS agenda and sustain progress towards gender equality
- strengthen women's meaningful participation in Civil Society

Project budget and duration

CSSF Iraq is looking for proposals to deliver up to a 3-year grant agreement valued at up to £2.7 million, allocated accordingly: FY21/22: £0.7 million; FY22/23: £1 million; FY23/24: £1 million. Once the project is established there is potential for an increase in funding.

Assessment

We would welcome bids from not-for-profit women's rights organisations.

The successful applicant will have previous experience working in Iraq and/or KRI, with deep, relevant thematic experience on Women, Peace and Security, and an understanding of the necessity of supporting local WROs to implement self-defined WPS priorities. It will have the technical and organisational capacity to manage a grant-scheme with different funding streams and to provide tailored capacity and technical support to CSOs of differing organisational strengths and capabilities.

Bids will be assessed against the following criteria and weighting:

- strategic fit: Alignment with the stated objectives, underpinned by organisational alignment to feminist values and approaches, and demonstrated experience, expertise and reach to take forward activity on Women, Peace and Security (25%)
- project design and viability: based on a good contextual analysis and understanding of the women-led CSO operating space in Iraq and KRI (and required project responses therein); a realistic description of activities including methodology and capacity to adapt to the security context and to restrictions and other impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic (25%)
- project monitoring, evaluation and learning: framed against considered, achievable outcomes and outputs and a grounded Theory of Change (ToC) and M&E strategy (15%)
- partnerships and donor engagement: capacity to build meaningful, collaborative partnerships, based on mutual respect, shared endeavour, and supportive, open communication with sub-grantees and CSSF Iraq/the British Embassy Iraq (10%)
- value for money: financial soundness of the proposed activity, demonstration of economy and efficiency of costs (10%)
- sustainability: clear consideration of how to sustain project benefit(s) after project completion (5%)
- risk management, gender and conflict sensitivity: A clear understanding and approach to risk management and to gender and conflict sensitivity (10%)

Requirements

- the FCDO requires applicants to have the necessary legal licenses to operate in time for the start of the grant award, at the local level within Federal Iraq and/or in the Kurdistan Region

- applicants should have sufficient financial resilience and a proven track record of transparently and effectively managing donor funded projects of similar scale. Specifically, Bidders should have previously received a direct fund of at least \$500,000 for a one year spend
- CSSF will conduct a due diligence assessment on the successful potential partner including reviewing safeguarding measures
- the project will be delivered through a Grant Agreement and therefore the organisation cannot profit from the received grant funding. See [further information/guidance](#) on what that agreement might look like
- additional project documentation will be completed by the successful bidder/s, following the award

Bidding process

- complete the project bid in the [Project proposal form](#) (ODT, 44KB) and [CSSF FY21-22: finance reporting template – ABB](#) (ODS, 28.6KB) in English
- proposals that do not meet the criteria and are not completed using the required forms will not be accepted
- completed forms should be sent in standard format with the subject title “CSSF Iraq WPS Project: [XXX – name of the implementer]”, to BaghdadCSSF.CallForBids@fco.gov.uk
- please also familiarise yourself at an early stage with the standard ‘Grant Agreement Template’ and ‘Guidance for Bidding Organisations’ documents

Please contact BaghdadCSSF.CallForBids@fco.gov.uk with any questions or queries.

Initiative timeline:

Dates	Activity
07/04/2021	Announce request for submission of Bids
16/05/2021	Deadline for bidders to submit Bids
05/2021	Post announcement on outcome of Bids
05/2021	Due Diligence Assessment, Grant Agreement and financial arrangements completed