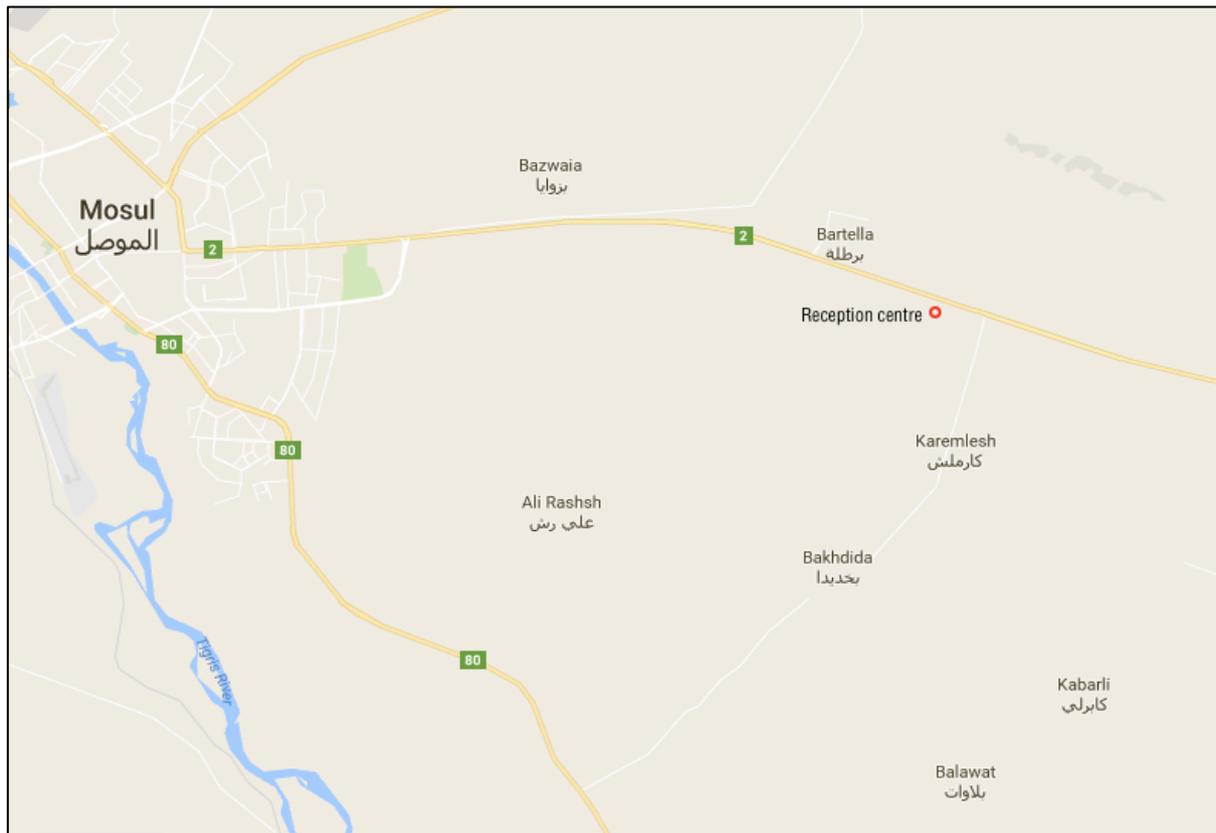


Hamdaniyah Junction Reception Centre, 6 January

This reception centre is situated on the south side of the Mosul-Erbil road (Highway 2), around 1 km west of the junction that leads to Al Hamdaniyah (also known as Qaraqosh and Bakhdida) to the south. There is an ISOF (Iraqi Special Operations Forces) checkpoint very close by, and ISOF, Iraqi Army and Federal Police personnel can all be seen in and around the centre. The centre is enclosed by a wide berm of earth to protect from any explosions near the perimeter, and there is a single entrance on the east side. The IDPs are kept in a large area within the enclosure, bounded by a single line of barbed wire.



Coming to the reception centre

The reception centre usually receives between 500 and 1,000 individuals per day, but sometimes many more arrive depending on the level of military activity in Mosul city. Most IDPs in the centre have come from districts within Mosul – usually those where the fighting is ongoing or very recent, although we also recorded some IDPs coming from districts on the west bank of the Tigris. Some families in the reception centre have not come directly from Mosul but are transferring from one camp or area to another. For example, we met a family originally from a village near Khazir who had been taken to Mosul by ISIS. From Mosul they had fled south to Salamiyah where they had stayed for a short time. They were now en route to Khazir camp to be closer to their village.

The reception centre is closed at 3pm each day and no new arrivals are accepted from then until the following morning. In Mosul, people often escape their houses on foot and are taken by the security forces to a mustering point in a safe part of the city or a village just outside. They are given food and a safe place, like a mosque, to sleep. In the morning they are transported to the reception centre. One complaint was made that families are separated during transportation, although they are reunited upon arrival at the reception centre. Some families arrive independently by taxi from Mosul.



Trucks used to transport IDPs to the reception centre.

When a street or district is retaken, the security forces may offer to transport people out of the area – particularly if there is still severe danger or if a family’s house has been destroyed. We received no reports of families being forced to leave their homes.

At the reception centre

Upon arrival at the reception centre, each family is given an MOMD food box containing juice concentrate, water, jam, tins of beans, condensed milk and biscuits. An NGO has established a kitchen in a house at one end of the site. They serve at least one hot meal consisting of rice, beans and meat, per day to each IDP. On 5 January they served 2,300 meals, and on 6 January they were expecting to serve around 1,500. The NGO has been running this service for about a week. This house also has toilet facilities that can be used by the IDPs.



Two of several pots containing rice, beans and meat stew.



Men sitting outside one of the rubhall tents.

Most families stay a matter of hours in the reception centre and are then transported onwards. When there is an especially large influx of new arrivals and the screening process cannot be completed in one day, some families have to stay in the reception centre overnight. Two large rubhall tents were recently erected by MOMD to accommodate people in bad weather and overnight. One is for men and the other for women although people are free to move between them. When the reception centre is full a number of people would still have to remain outside.

The screening process

The primary function of the reception centre is security screening. Men and women are lined up in separate queues and their IDs are checked against a database. This is often the second or third time that people have had their IDs checked, although no one we spoke to expressed any complaint or irritation concerning the system.

Family separation is often a problem and we were told that it was common for ISIS members to attach themselves to families missing a leading male in order to hide their true identity. In this scenario the family is often too afraid to tell the security forces that there is a stranger among them. As part of the screening process, security officials quiz men with questions relating to their family (e.g. the number and ages of their children) to make sure they are who they say they are. They also rely on informants to identify strangers within a family, and sometimes the family itself will have the courage to come forward. We were told that in these cases families are not punished for travelling with an ISIS member. It is reportedly very unusual for ISIS members to go to the reception centre with their own families. In such a case we were told that the family would not be arrested, although it's likely that further investigation would take place. It was reported that between 10-20 ISIS suspects are usually identified and arrested at the centre each day. It was not possible to determine exactly where these suspects are then taken.



IDPs in the reception centre awaiting screening.

Going from the reception centre

After families have been cleared by security, they are given a choice of where they would like to go. Some decide to return immediately to their home in Mosul if they have heard that their district has become safe. Some choose to go to the Hasansham or Khazir camps, particularly if they already have family members there. Likewise for Jadaa camp in the Qayyarah sub-district. Because the camps are mostly full, people are encouraged to stay with relatives where possible. Many people choosing to go to Qayyarah have plans to travel farther on to Baghdad or other cities where they know people. In Nimrud, for example, the security forces have appealed to villagers to take in IDPs – even strangers – from Mosul. IDPs can be collected from the reception centre by relatives or they can travel on coaches to Nimrud or Qayyarah.



Coaches waiting to transport IDPs on to Qayyarah and other places.

Returns to Mosul

As mentioned above, overcrowding in camps is recognised as a major issue. Large numbers have begun returning to retaken districts of Mosul to make way for IDPs from areas that remain unsafe or under ISIS control. It is very possible that some returns are involuntary (although we have not come across specific cases of involuntary returns). Generally speaking, the logic subscribed to by the security forces is that the needs of some families is greater than others. We were told that many families in Khazir and Hasansham are eager to return home but that the process for return is more complex in KRG areas than in areas administered by the Iraqi government.

Outside of the reception centre we met a family that had come from Erbil West Hospital. They had been injured by shrapnel, some severely. They had been taken to hospital in Erbil where their wounds had been dressed, but they were only allowed to stay one night. They felt they had been discharged prematurely and were displeased with their treatment. Their house had been destroyed but they were en route back to Mosul where they had arranged to stay with an uncle.



There is a WHO mobile health clinic stationed in the reception centre.

General impressions

When asked whether they were happy with the screening process and if they felt they were being treated fairly, all the IDPs we spoke to said they were. People seemed grateful that they were given a choice about where they were to go and were appreciative of the way they had been treated by the security forces. Most were eager to return home as soon as it was safe enough to do so.

We asked IDPs, security forces and humanitarians within the reception centre whether further support was needed. They all replied that for the time being the needs of IDPs were being met and that no further support was necessary.